

Review

Nutrition and hypothalamic neuropeptides in sheep: Histochemical studies

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Summary. The identification and role of neuropeptides in the control of food intake and energy balance have been extensively studied in rodents, and for more than ten years, similar studies have been performed in sheep. As a photoperiodic ruminant, sheep are an interesting alternative animal model to rodents. In this review, we summarize the results obtained in sheep concerning the distribution of peptide-containing neurones in the hypothalamus and their central role in the control of food intake and energy balance, and compared them with relevant data from rodents. Even if the general organization and the role of hypothalamic neuropeptides are similar in sheep and rodents, numerous differences have been observed between these two species. In sheep, the magnocellular neurones of the paraventricular and supraoptic nuclei are characterized by the low density and the lack of galanin- and neuropeptide-Y-containing neurones, respectively. The sheep pituitary stalk presents neurones containing neuropeptides such as neuropeptide-Y or beta-endorphin, which are also found in the deep part of the infundibular nucleus. In this structure, several neuronal populations, including galanin, agouti-gene related peptide, somatostatin, are sensitive to energy balance variations, undernutrition or overfeeding, which may specifically modify neuropeptide levels in discrete neuronal subgroups. This feature is well illustrated by the number of neuropeptide-Y labelled neurones, that increases in the lateral part of the infundibular nucleus of undernourished ewes and decreases in the ventral part of overfed ewes. Conversely, after 24 hours of food deprivation, the number of neuropeptide-Y-immunolabelled neurones is unchanged in the sheep infundibular nucleus, whereas increased levels of this neuropeptide are described, in rats, by radioimmuno-assay. In conclusion, our review shows that peptide-containing neurone systems, involved in the regulation of food intake and energy balance in

sheep, are generally similar to those observed in other species, but they present specific differences according to the physiological characteristics of the animal model.

Key words: Ruminant, Central nervous system, Regulatory hormones

Introduction

During the last thirty years, the central and peripheral regulations of feeding behaviour have been studied in an attempt to prevent inappropriate food intake. In the central nervous system numerous neuropeptide-containing neurones play an important role in the control of food intake and energy balance. Therefore, the regulation of food intake has been evaluated by acute or chronic central injections of peptides, agonists, and antagonists, or antiserum of the peptide. Because the nutritional status of animals is able to modify neuronal activity, the involvement of hypothalamic neuropeptides in food intake regulation has also been evaluated by measuring peptide levels, mRNA expression, or peptide-containing neurone distribution in animals submitted to different nutritional status (Smith, 1999). Most of the studies have been carried out in rodents, using wild type or selected genetic strains (for example Ob/Ob mouse, Fa/Fa rats).

Numerous neuropeptides have been studied about their potential role in the relationship between nutrition and reproduction or growth. These studies aimed to prevent obesity in humans but also to reduce the problems of reproduction and growth in farm animals. Sheep have an unusual gastric system, associated with a long period of digestion, food may be present in the rumen up to 60 hours after ingestion. This species displays seasonal variation in numerous physiological processes including reproduction, and therefore is an interesting alternative model to rodents and primates. In sheep, the use of neuroanatomical methods (immunohistochemistry or *in situ* hybridization) is a

valuable tool to further our understanding of the central nervous system that differs from that of the common model, such as rodent (Tillet, 1995). These methods allow acute identification of specific neurones among phenotypically heterogeneous neuronal populations.

The immunohistochemical detection of neuropeptides is sometimes difficult because the low intra-neuronal level of these substances (mainly in rodents) necessitates treatment with colchicine. However, it appears that some peptides, like corticotropin-releasing hormone, may be detected in sheep without such a pharmacological treatment (Chaillou et al., 2002b), and modifications of nutritional status increase peptide immunoreactivity, as observed for galanin in the dorsomedial hypothalamic nucleus for example (Chaillou et al., 2003). These observations support that sheep would be an interesting model to study the distribution of neuropeptides and their role in the control of nutrition.

In this review, we assess the role, in sheep, of hypothalamic neuropeptides known to be involved in

nutritional regulation in rodents (Table 1). For each neuropeptide, we describe its distribution in the hypothalamus, its central effect on food intake, and its sensitivity to nutrition. We initially focus on the peptides that stimulate food intake, and then consider food intake inhibitory peptides, and the hormonal regulatory system.

Stimulating peptides

Neuropeptide Y

High densities of neuropeptide Y (NPY)-immunoreactive (-ir) cell bodies and fibres are observed in the ovine hypothalamus (Antonopoulos et al., 1989a; Chaillou et al., 2002a). In colchicine-treated ewes, the highest density of NPY-ir perikarya is found in the infundibular nucleus, in which two subpopulations are distinguished; some positive immunoreactive neurones are present in the median eminence and in the pituitary stalk (Fig. 1, Chaillou et al., 2002a), whereas NPY-ir neurones seem to be homogeneously distributed in the

Table 1. Summary of the studies that describe the hypothalamic distribution of the neuropeptides, their central effects on food intake and their sensitivity to nutrition in sheep.

PEPTIDE	DISTRIBUTION	FOOD INTAKE	NUTRITIONAL SENSITIVITY
AGRP	Henry et al., 2001a; Adam et al., 2002; Sorensen et al., 2002	? (in rat, +)	Henry et al., 2001a; Adam et al., 2002
Alpha-MSH	No published data	? (in rat, -)	No published data
Beta-End	Antonopoulos et al., 1989b; Whisnant et al., 1992	? (in rat, +)	Baile et al., 1987; Prasad et al., 1993
CART	Henry et al., 2001a; Adam et al., 2002	? (in rat, -)	Henry et al., 2001a; Adam et al., 2002
CCK	Antonopoulos et al., 1987; Marson et al., 1987	-, Della Fera and Baile, 1979	Scallet et al., 1985, Holmberg and Malven, 1997
CGRP	Herbison et al., 1993	0/+, Bueno et al., 1986 (in rat, -)	No published data
CRH	Paull et al., 1982; Kolodziejczyk et al., 1983; Palkovits et al., 1983	-, Ruckebush and Malbert, 1986; Sunagawa et al., 2000; Weisinger et al., 2000	Chaillou et al., 2000, 2002b
Dynorphin/ Enkephalin	Marson et al., 1987; Matthews et al., 1992	+, Baile et al., 1987	Scallet et al., 1985; Henry et al., 2000; Iqbal et al., 2003
Galanin	Chaillou et al., 1998, 1999	? (in rat, +)	Barker-Gibb and Clarke, 1996; Chaillou et al., 2003
MCH	Tillet et al., 1996	+, Whitlock et al., 2005	Henry et al., 2000; Chaillou et al., 2003
Neurotensin	Antonopoulos et al., 1989b	? (in rat, -)	No published data
NPY	Antonopoulos et al., 1989a; Chaillou et al., 2002a	+, Miner et al., 1989; Sunagawa et al., 2001	Ober and Malven, 1992; McShane et al., 1993; Barker-Gibb and Clarke, 1996; Adam et al., 1997; Polkowska and Gladysz, 2001; Chaillou et al., 2002a
Orexin	Archer et al., 2002; Iqbal et al., 2001a	+ Sartin et al., 2001	Archer et al., 2002; Iqbal et al., 2003
SRIF	Papadopoulos et al., 1986; Bruneau and Tillet, 1998; Willoughby et al., 1995	-, Spencer and Fadlalla, 1989	Thomas et al., 1991; Henry et al., 2001b
TRH	McDonald et al., 1993	-, Ruckebush and Malbert, 1986	No published data
Urocortin	Cepoi et al., 1999	-, Sunagawa et al., 2000; Weisinger et al., 2000; Holmberg et al., 2001	No published data

When the effects on food intake have not been described in sheep or differ from those found in rat, they are specified: ?, no data; -, inhibition; +, stimulation, 0, no effect. (adapted from Smith, 1999).

arcuate nucleus of rodents (Chronwall et al., 1985; Nakagawa et al., 1985). NPY-ir cell bodies are also found in the bed nucleus of the stria terminalis, the medial preoptic area, the anterior hypothalamic area, the rostral part of the paraventricular nucleus, the dorsomedian nucleus, and the tuberomammillary nucleus (Chaillou et al., 2002a). In adult ovariectomized (ovx) ewes, NPY-ir fibres are localised in numerous hypothalamic structures, the highest densities being seen in the paraventricular and infundibular nuclei, and in the median eminence (Chaillou et al., 2002a).

An intracerebroventricular (icv) injection of NPY stimulates cumulative food intake in satiated growing prepuberal sheep (Miner et al., 1989) and ovx ewes fed on alfalfa chaff (Sunagawa et al., 2001), and blocks the effects of satiety factors, like ruminal distension or intraruminal infusion of propionate, in prepuberal sheep (Miner et al., 1990).

The number of NPY-ir neurones in the infundibular nucleus is similar between *ad libitum* fed and 24-hour food-deprived adult ovx ewes (Chaillou et al., 2002a). In rats, the stimulatory effect of deprivation was described by radioimmuno-assay (RIA) on push-pull samples (Kalra et al., 1991), or on micro-dissected samples (Sahu et al., 1988; Beck et al., 1990).

In sheep, there have been numerous studies concerning the sensitivity of the NPY hypothalamic system to nutrition. All these studies showed an increase of NPY after food restriction or undernutrition. In growth retarded ovx sheep, Ober and Malven (1992) found an increase of NPY level throughout the hypothalamus, measured by RIA on micro-dissected samples. In a study using densitometry on immunolabelled sections, Polkowska and Gladysz (2001) observed more NPY-ir in the paraventricular nucleus of lambs fed restricted protein concentration than in those

fed elevated protein concentration. Furthermore, Barker-Gibb and Clarke (1996) observed an increase of NPY-ir in the median eminence-arcuate nucleus, preoptic area and paraventricular nucleus of adult undernourished ovx ewes. The number of NPY-ir cell bodies is enhanced by undernutrition in the infundibular nucleus of adult ovx ewes (Barker-Gibb and Clarke, 1996), this effect being specific to the lateral part of the nucleus (Fig. 2, Chaillou et al., 2002a). The effect of nutrition on the NPY neuronal system was also evaluated by measuring mRNA expression after *in situ* hybridization. An enhancement of NPY mRNA was found in the infundibular nucleus of undernourished ovx lambs (McShane et al., 1993) and undernourished castrated male sheep with or without protein supplement (Adam et al., 1997). Moreover, the level of NPY mRNA increased in the arcuate nucleus of adult male castrated sheep after 4-days of fasting (i.e acute negative energy balance), compared to *ad libitum* fed animals (Adam et al., 2002).

Ad libitum refeeding of adult ovx ewes that had previously been undernourished or fed at maintenance rates, led to a decreased number of NPY-ir neurones in the infundibular nucleus, specifically in its ventral part (Fig. 2, Chaillou et al., 2002a).

Opioids

Beta-endorphin and proopiomelanocortin

In the ovine hypothalamus, beta-endorphin (beta-End)-containing perikarya are located in the infundibular nucleus (Fig. 3, Antonopoulos et al., 1989b), the paraventricular nucleus and around the mammillary recess (Whisnant et al., 1992). Beta-End-ir fibres are present in the same areas as the perikarya and in the ventromedial nucleus (Whisnant et al., 1992).

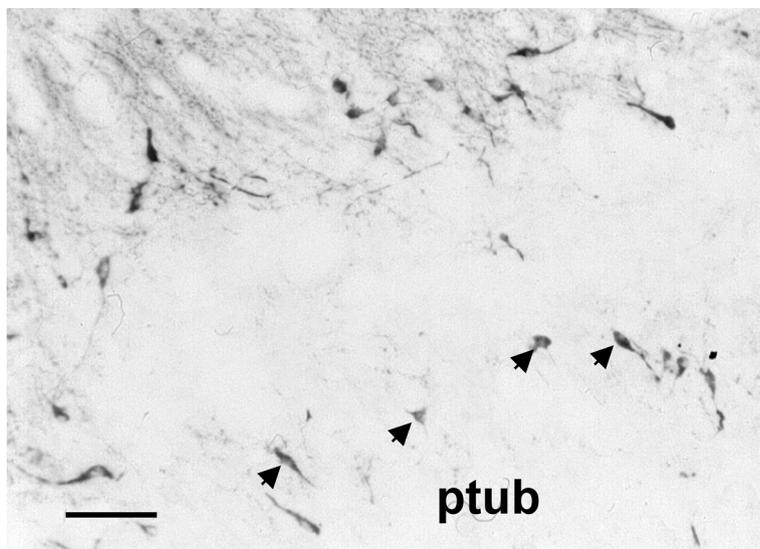


Fig. 1. Distribution of the NPY-immunoreactive neurones in the profound infundibular nucleus. Note the presence of labelled neurones (arrows) in the median eminence and pituitary stalk (ptub, pars tuberalis). Scale bar: 100 μ m.

In rats, beta-End produces a dose- and time-dependent increase in food intake after ventricular injection (Silva et al., 2001). In sheep, the role of beta-end in the regulation of food intake is not known, but the impact of nutrition on the peptide or its precursor, proopiomelanocortin (POMC), has been studied.

The concentrations of beta-End measured in micro-punched dorsomedial hypothalamus and posterior hypothalamus of fed sheep are lower than fasted (4-hours) sheep (Baile et al., 1987). In feed-restricted lambs (208 days at 20% of National Research Council Requirements), the concentration of beta-End secreted by the posterior-lateral median eminence is lower than in fully fed controls (Prasad et al., 1993).

In sheep, the POMC mRNA are located in the arcuate nucleus (McShane et al., 1993), where the peptides, beta-End and alpha-MSH, are also found (Fig. 3). The expression of POMC (mRNA density evaluated on *in situ* hybridized sections) is lower in the arcuate nucleus of fed restricted ewe lambs than in those of fed control (McShane et al., 1993). This down-regulation of POMC mRNA expression, by feeding restriction, is neither observed in adult male castrated sheep after 4-days of fasting (Adam et al., 2002), nor in adult thin ovx ewes (animals fed about 400g of lucerne hay for 8 months, Henry et al., 2000) compared with their respective controls.

Enkephalin and Dynorphin

Enkephalin-ir cell bodies are present in the parvocellular part of the paraventricular nucleus, in the dorsomedial, ventromedial, lateral and anterior hypothalamic areas (Marson et al., 1987). With *in situ* hybridization, the highest density of preproenkephalin mRNA is found in the paraventricular and supra-chiasmatic nuclei of the hypothalamus (Matthews et al., 1992). In the hypothalamus of ovx ewes, prodynorphin mRNA-containing cells are mainly observed in the supraoptic nucleus and the retrochiasmatic subdivisions of the supraoptic, paraventricular, periventricular and ventromedial nuclei. Low numbers of labelled cells are seen in the preoptic, anterior, dorsomedial and posterior hypothalamic areas, and the zona incerta (Iqbal et al., 2003). Dynorphin-A is found in perikarya located in the supraoptic nucleus (Marson et al., 1987).

These two neuropeptides, and their analogues, stimulate food intake after an icv injection in satiated sheep (Baile et al., 1987).

The level of met-enkephalin radioimmuno-assayed in the mediobasal hypothalamus is higher in 4- or 24-hours fasted adult male sheep than in fed controls (Scallet et al., 1985). It is important to distinguish the different neuropeptide-containing areas, since the nutritional sensitivity of enkephalin depends on the hypothalamic nucleus. In thin ovx ewes, the number of enkephalin mRNA-containing cell bodies is lower in the periventricular nucleus, whereas it is higher in the paraventricular nucleus and the ventromedial hypothalamic area than in those of fat ovx control (Henry et al., 2000). The expression of prodynorphin mRNA is not affected by food restriction or food supplementation in the periventricular, paraventricular and ventromedial hypothalamic nuclei of ovx ewes

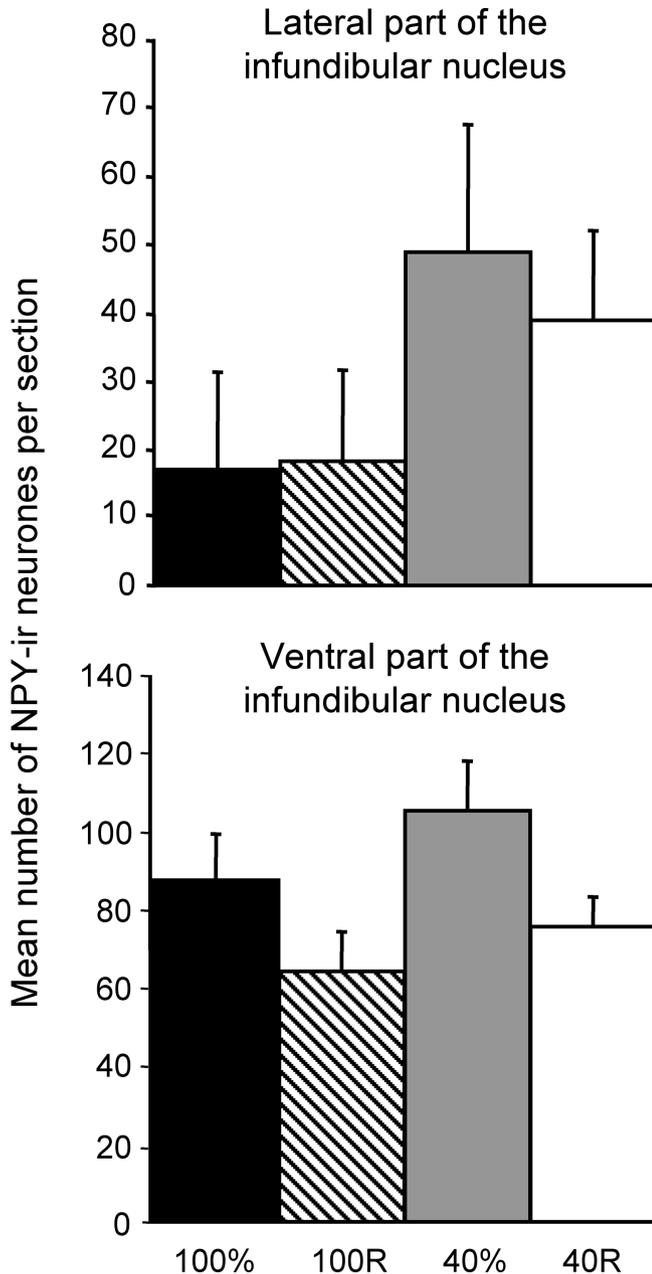


Fig. 2. Effect of undernutrition (40% of the nutritional requirements) and *ad libitum* refeeding on the number of NPY-immunoreactive neurones counted in the lateral (top) and ventral (bottom) parts of the infundibular nucleus. Note that undernutrition and *ad libitum* refeeding act specifically on the lateral ($p=0.0001$) and ventral ($p=0.02$) parts of the infundibular nucleus, respectively (adapted from Chaillou et al., 2002a).

(Iqbal et al., 2003).

Galanin

In adult ovx ewes, galanin-ir perikarya are localised in the medial preoptic area and in the caudal part of the infundibular nucleus, galanin-ir fibres are observed in the external layer of the median eminence, the mediobasal hypothalamus, and the periphery of the supraoptic and paraventricular nuclei (Chaillou et al.,

1999). In adult ewes treated with colchicine, galanin-ir cell bodies are present in higher densities in the medial preoptic area and in the rostral and caudal parts of the infundibular nucleus. The presence of these subpopulations is confirmed by the co-localization of galanin and tyrosine hydroxylase only in neurones of the caudal part of the infundibular nucleus (Chaillou et al., 1998). After colchicine treatment, labelled neurones are also seen in the supraoptic and paraventricular nuclei and in the dorsomedial hypothalamus (Chaillou et al.,

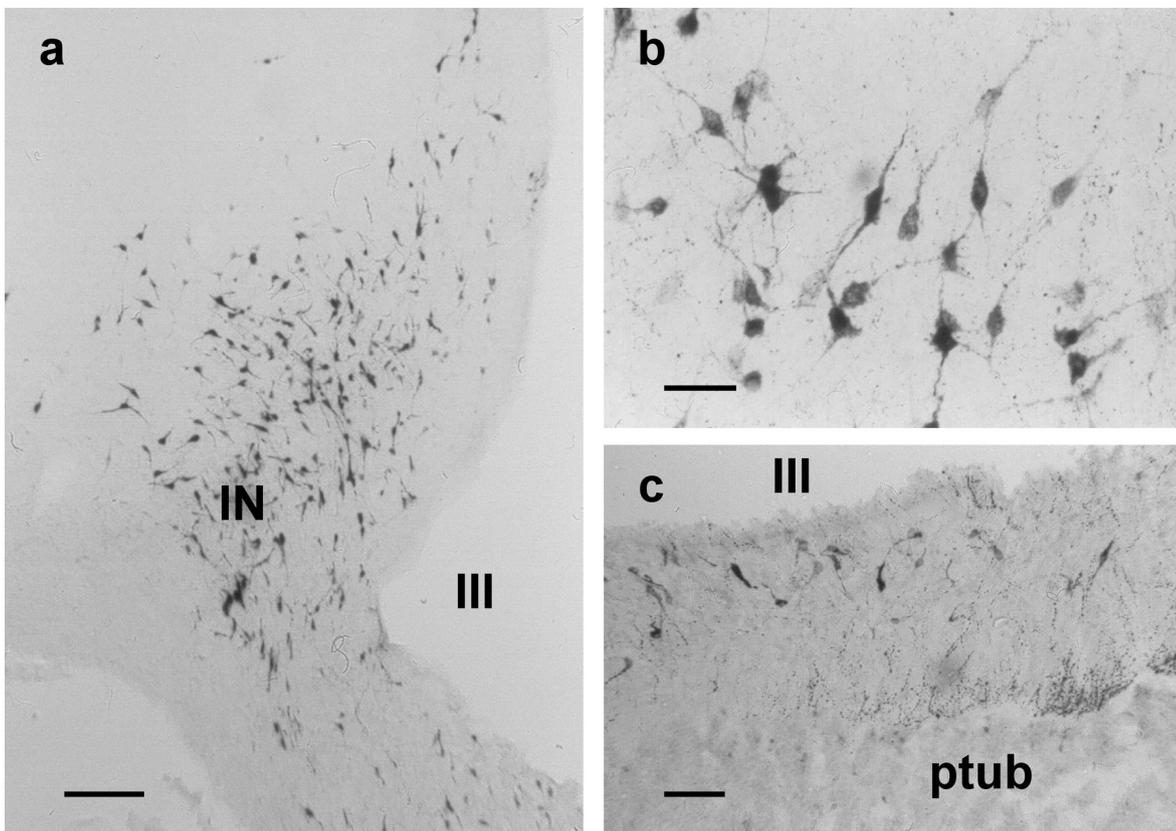


Fig. 3. Beta-End-immunoreactive neurones observed in the infundibular nucleus of colchicine-treated ewe (a, b). The labelled neurones are distributed throughout the nucleus, and especially in its medio-ventral part (c), like its precursor POMC peptide. (III, third ventricle; IN, infundibular nucleus; ptub, pars tuberalis). Scale bar: a, 200 μ m; b, 50 μ m; c, 100 μ m.

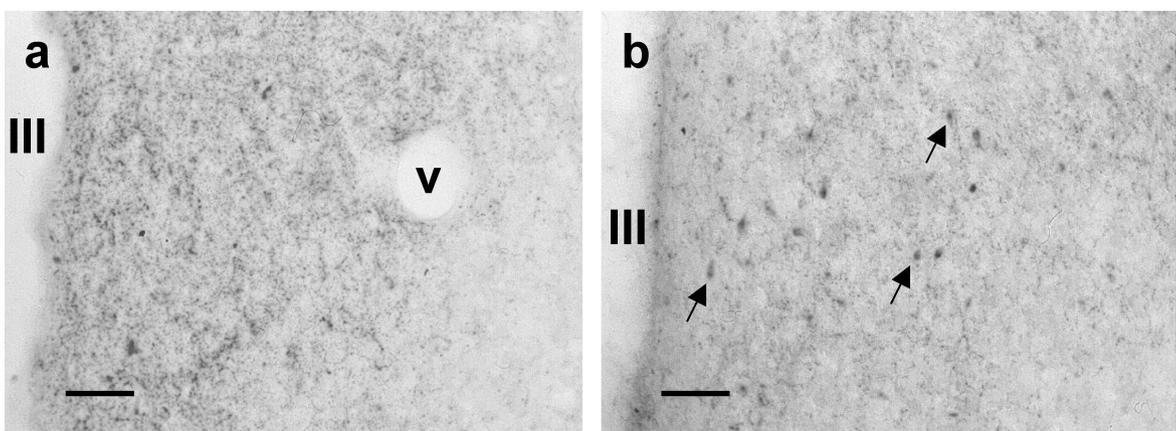


Fig. 4. Galanin-immunoreactive neurones observed in the dorsomedial hypothalamic nucleus of *ad libitum* refed OVX ewes after a long period of (a) feeding at maintenance rate or (b) undernutrition. Note the difference of density of neurones (arrows) between the two diets. (III, third ventricle; v, blood vessel). Scale bar: 100 μ m.

1999).

The implication of galanin in the regulation of feeding behaviour has not been demonstrated in sheep. In rodents, this neuropeptide has a stimulating effect on food intake (Tempel et al., 1988; Edwards et al., 1999). However, the fasting effect was studied in adult ovx ewes, 24-hours of food deprivation has no effect on the number of galanin-ir cells compared to *ad libitum* fed controls, neither in the preoptic area nor the infundibular nucleus (Chaillou et al., 2003).

The involvement of this hypothalamic neuropeptide has been partially demonstrated in studies that evaluate the effect of undernutrition on the peptide level. Galanin-ir, quantified by optic density, was greater in the mediobasal hypothalamus of adult ovx ewes that were undernourished for 17 months than in *ad libitum* fed

controls, but the number of galanin-immunostained cells was unchanged (Barker-Gibb and Clarke, 1996). In adult ovx ewes, long-term undernutrition leads to an increased number of galanin-ir cells in the infundibular nucleus and the dorsal hypothalamic area (Chaillou et al., 2003). The same effect is also found in *ad libitum* re-fed adult ovx ewes, after a long period of undernutrition or feeding at maintenance rate, in the preoptic area, the infundibular nucleus and the dorsal hypothalamic area (Fig. 4, Chaillou et al., 2003).

Melanin-concentrating hormone

In the sheep hypothalamus, melanin-concentrating hormone (MCH)-ir perikarya (Tillet et al., 1996) as well as MCH mRNA-containing neurones (Henry et al., 2000) are found in the lateral hypothalamic area, around the fornix and under the mammillothalamic tract.

An icv injection of MCH leads to an increase in plasma osmolality and plasma glucose in ovariectomized ewes (Parkes, 1996) and enhances cumulative feed intake in castrated male sheep (Whitlock et al., 2005).

The observed effects of undernutrition on MCH-containing neurones depend upon the histochemistry methods (Fig. 5). In ovx adult thin undernourished ewes, only the number of silver grains per cell, not the number of MCH mRNA-containing cells, is increased in the lateral hypothalamic area, compared to *ad libitum* fed fat ewes (Henry et al., 2000). However, the number of MCH-ir neurones is not affected by long-term undernutrition in adult ovx ewes (Chaillou et al., 2003). Moreover, the number of MCH-ir neurones is not modified by over-feeding or by 24-hours of food deprivation, in the same animal model (Chaillou et al., 2003).

Agouti-gene related peptide

Agouti-gene related peptide (AGRP) mRNA is localized in the arcuate nucleus of adult ovx (Henry et al., 2001a), intact ewes (Sorensen et al., 2002), and adult male castrated sheep (Adam et al., 2002).

This neuropeptide is known to stimulate food intake in rodents (Table 1) but no data are available in ovine species.

In the arcuate nucleus, the expression of AGRP mRNA is up-regulated in thin adult ovx ewes compared to *ad libitum* fed animals, in which the expression is not detectable (Henry et al., 2001a). In adult male castrated sheep, the effects of acute negative energy balance were studied after 4-days of fasting. In this case, the expression of AGRP mRNA was increased (Adam et al., 2002).

Orexin

Orexin positive-ir cells are observed in the lateral hypothalamic area, perifornical nucleus and zona incerta. The highest density is seen in the dorsomedial

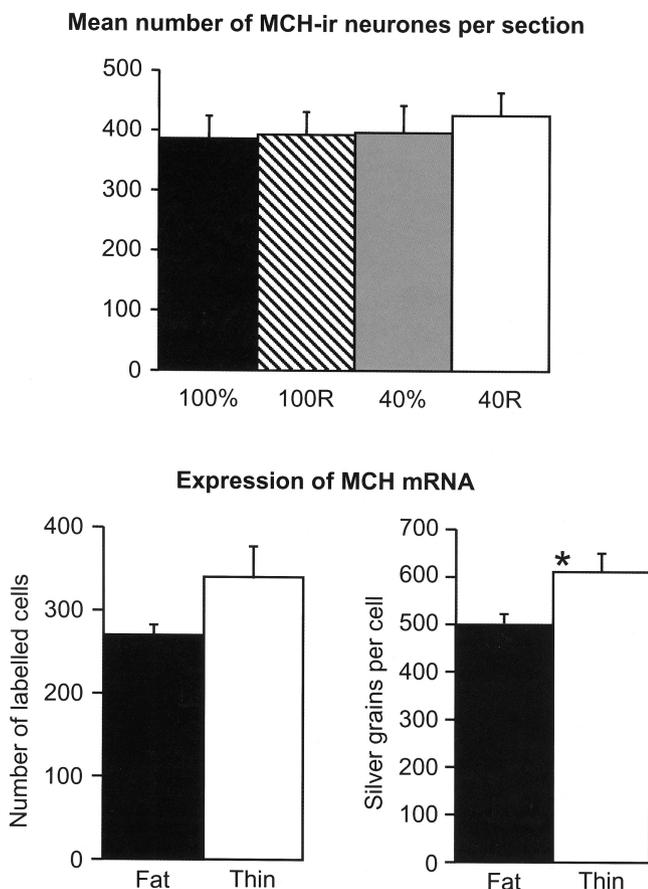
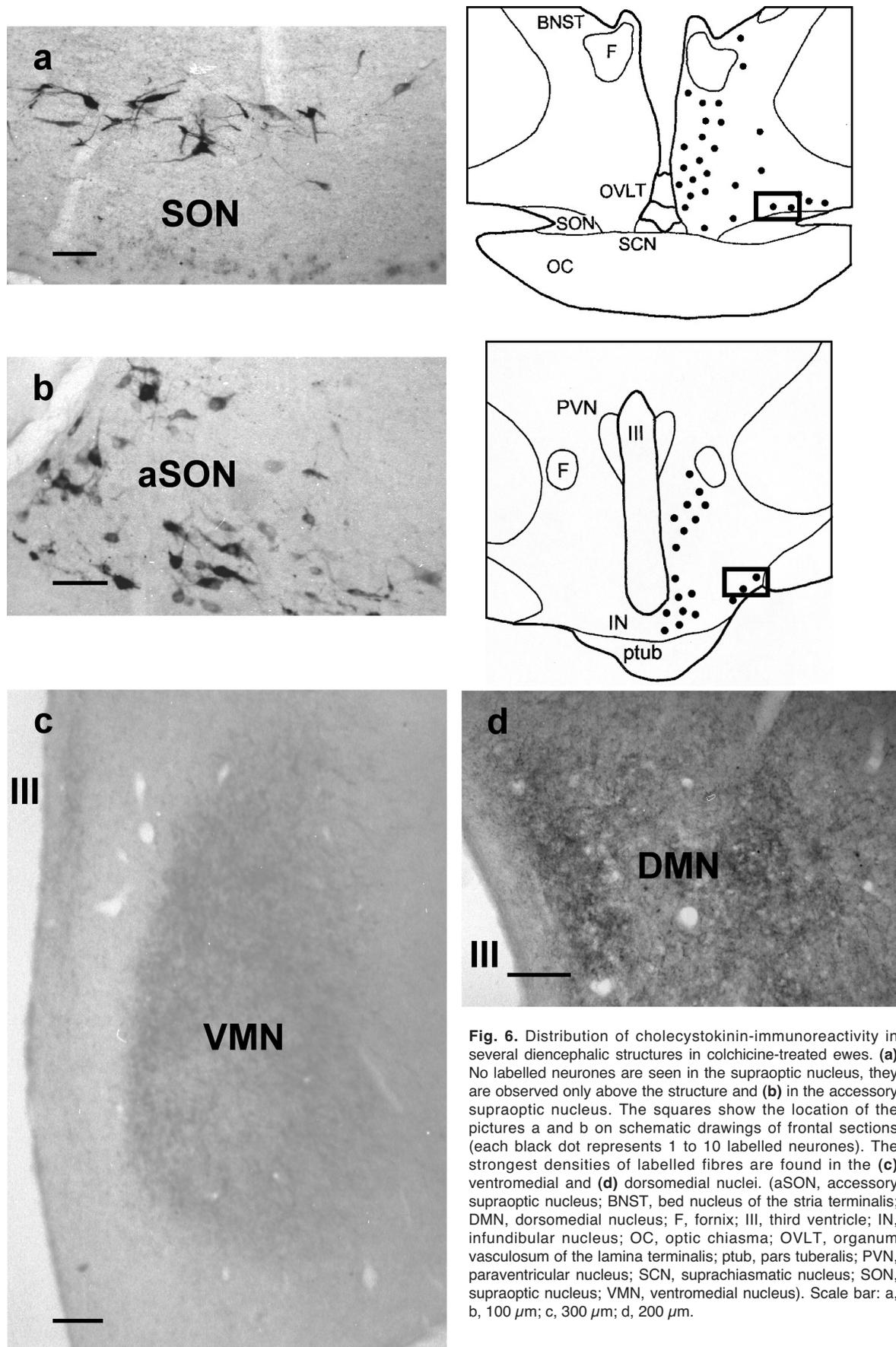


Fig. 5. Nutritional effects on the number of MCH-immunoreactive neurones and MCH mRNA expression, in the lateral hypothalamic area. Note that the number of MCH-ir neurones is unchanged, either by undernutrition (comparison of 100% and 100R, with 40% and 40R), or *ad libitum* refeeding (comparison of 100% and 40%, with 100R and 40R) (adapted from Chaillou et al., 2003). The sensitivity of MCH neuronal system to nutrition is only observed when mRNA expression is evaluated by the number of silver grains per cell. This latter increases in thin animals (*, $p < 0.05$) adapted from Henry et al. (2000).

Nutrition and hypothalamic neuropeptides



hypothalamic nucleus, whereas a few scattered cells are found in the anterior hypothalamic area (Iqbal et al., 2001a). Preproorexin mRNA, localised by *in situ* hybridization, is observed in the lateral hypothalamic area, zona incerta (Archer et al., 2002), dorsomedial hypothalamic, perifornical and posterior hypothalamic areas (Iqbal et al., 2003). An icv injection of orexin-B increases food intake in castrated male sheep (Sartin et al., 2001), but the expression of preproorexin is not influenced by nutrition in adult Soay castrated male sheep (Archer et al., 2002) or ovx ewes (Iqbal et al., 2003).

Inhibitory peptides

Cholecystokinin

In sheep diencephalon, cholecystokinin (CCK)-ir neurones are observed in the medial preoptic and anterior hypothalamic areas, periventricular and suprachiasmatic nuclei, and dorsocaudal hypothalamic area (Antonopoulos et al., 1987; Marson et al., 1987). Contrary to rodents (Vanderhaegen, 1985), no labelled cell bodies are seen in the hypothalamic magnocellular nuclei in colchicine treated ewes (Fig. 6a), except in the accessory supraoptic nucleus (Fig. 6b). In adult ovx ewes, the highest densities of CCK-ir fibres are observed in the medial preoptic area, anterior hypothalamic area, and in the ventromedial (Fig. 6c), dorsomedial (Fig. 6d) and dorsocaudal nuclei of the hypothalamus. Rare labelled fibres are present in the infundibular nucleus of adult ovx ewes, whereas this structure contains very high densities of labelled fibres in rats (Vanderhaegen, 1985).

Icv perfusion of CCK for 3 hours in 2-, 4-, 8- or 24-hours fasted sheep inhibits food intake, without affecting water intake (Della-Fera and Baile, 1979). The role of this peptide was confirmed by icv injection of CCK antibody, which stimulates food intake in satiated

castrated male sheep (Della-Fera and Baile, 1981).

In the anterior hypothalamic area, the level of CCK/gastrin-like immunoreactivity, measured by RIA, is higher in satiated sheep than in 2-, 4-, or 24-hours fasted sheep (Scallet et al., 1985). In the hypothalamus of growth-retarded castrated male lambs, the expression of CCK mRNA, evaluated on northern blot samples, is unchanged compared to non-growth-retarded animals (Holmberg and Malven, 1997).

Corticotropin-releasing hormone and urocortin

In the ovine hypothalamus, corticotropin-releasing hormone (CRH)-ir neurones are only observed in the paraventricular nucleus (Paull et al., 1982). Labelled fibres are mostly observed in the external median eminence (Paull et al., 1982; Kolodziejczyk et al., 1983) where the highest density of CRH-ir in micro-punched samples of hypothalamic regions is found (Palkovits et al., 1983). An icv injection of CRH leads to decreased food and water intake in hay fed sheep (Ruckebush and Malbert, 1986), and in ovx ewes after a continuous infusion for 4 (Weisinger et al., 2000) and 5 days (Sunagawa et al., 2000). In castrated male sheep, the expression of CRH mRNA in the paraventricular nucleus, is not modified during insulin-induced hypoglycemia (Adam and Findlay, 1998), while the concentration of CRH in the hypophysial-portal circulation is enhanced in similar sheep models (Engler et al., 1989). In adult ovx ewes, the number of CRH-ir neurones in the paraventricular nucleus is the same between *ad libitum* fed and 24-hours food-deprived animals (Chaillou et al., 2000). Conversely, in this same structure, a long-term undernutrition period results in an increased number of CRH-ir neurones (Fig. 7), without modifying plasma cortisol concentration (Chaillou et al., 2002b).

The distribution of urocortin mRNA was described

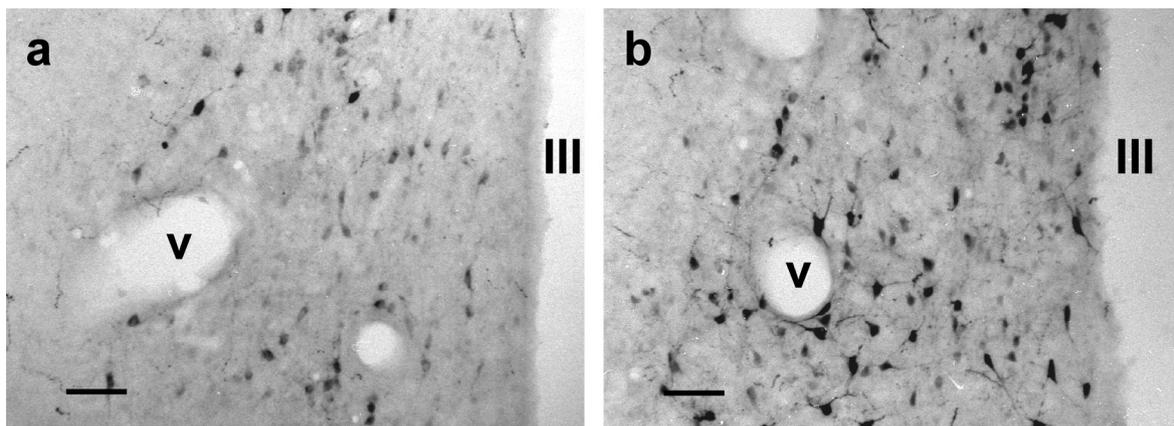


Fig. 7. CRH-immunoreactive neurones located in the paraventricular nucleus of *ad libitum* refed OVX ewes after a long period of (a) feeding at maintenance rate or (b) undernutrition. Note the difference of density of neurones between the two diets. (v, blood vessel; III, third ventricle). Scale bar: 100 μ m.

by *in situ* hybridization in sheep, with the strongest signal found in the Edinger-Westphal nucleus extending to the posterior hypothalamic area (Cepoi et al., 1999).

In ovx ewes, food intake is decreased by icv urocortin continuously infused for 4 days (Sunagawa et al., 2000; Weisinger et al., 2000) or infused in a linearly increasing manner (Holmberg et al., 2001). There are no data concerning nutritional sensitivity of the urocortin neuronal system in sheep.

Somatostatin

In the hypothalamus of adult ewes treated with colchicine, somatostatin (SRIF)-ir perikarya are observed in the anterior hypothalamic area, in the suprachiasmatic, supraoptic, paraventricular, infundibular, and around the ventromedial nuclei (Papadopoulos et al., 1986). The mRNA coding for the prepro-SRIF are observed in the same nuclei of adult ovx ewes (Bruneau and Tillet, 1998). SRIF-ir fibres are found in the dorsal ventromedial nucleus, arcuate nucleus and the median eminence (Willoughby et al., 1995).

An icv injection of anti-SRIF serum increases food intake in sheep, suggesting an inhibitory effect of SRIF on feeding behaviour (Spencer and Fadlalla, 1989).

In sheep fed a restricted diet for 20 weeks, the hypophysial portal concentration of SRIF is lower than in fed control sheep (Thomas et al., 1991). This decrease seems to be associated with decreased SRIF expression, since in ovx ewes fed a restricted diet for 7 months, the level of SRIF mRNA, measured by *in situ* hybridization, is lower in the rostral periventricular and the ventromedial hypothalamic nuclei, compared to that measured in *ad libitum* fed controls (Henry et al., 2001b).

Cocaine- and amphetamine-regulated transcript

The expression of cocaine- and amphetamine-regulated transcript (CART) mRNA is abundant throughout the ovine hypothalamus. CART mRNA-containing cells are observed in the retrochiasmatic, periventricular, paraventricular, and dorsomedial nuclei, and in the lateral and posterior hypothalamic areas of adult ovx ewes (Henry et al., 2001a). In adult castrated male sheep, expression of CART mRNA is found in the arcuate, paraventricular, and ventromedial hypothalamic nuclei, and in the median eminence (Adam et al., 2002).

Whereas the inhibitory effect of CART found in rodents after an icv injection (Table 1) has not been described in sheep, the effect of nutrition on its mRNA expression has been studied.

In adult castrated male sheep, 4-days of fasting tends to down-regulate the expression of CART mRNA in the arcuate nucleus, but has no effect on the amount of CART mRNA in the paraventricular nucleus (Adam et al., 2002). These data differ from those in adult ovx ewes, in which food restriction leads to a decreased number of CART mRNA-containing cells in the retrochiasmatic, paraventricular and dorsomedial nuclei, and in the lateral hypothalamic area, whereas CART mRNA is not detected in the arcuate nucleus (Henry et al., 2001a). Concomitantly, the number of CART silver grains per cell decreases in the retrochiasmatic and paraventricular nuclei, and increases in the posterior hypothalamic area after food restriction (Henry et al., 2001a) (Fig. 8). The inconsistent results reported by Henry et al. (2001a) and Adam et al. (2002) could be

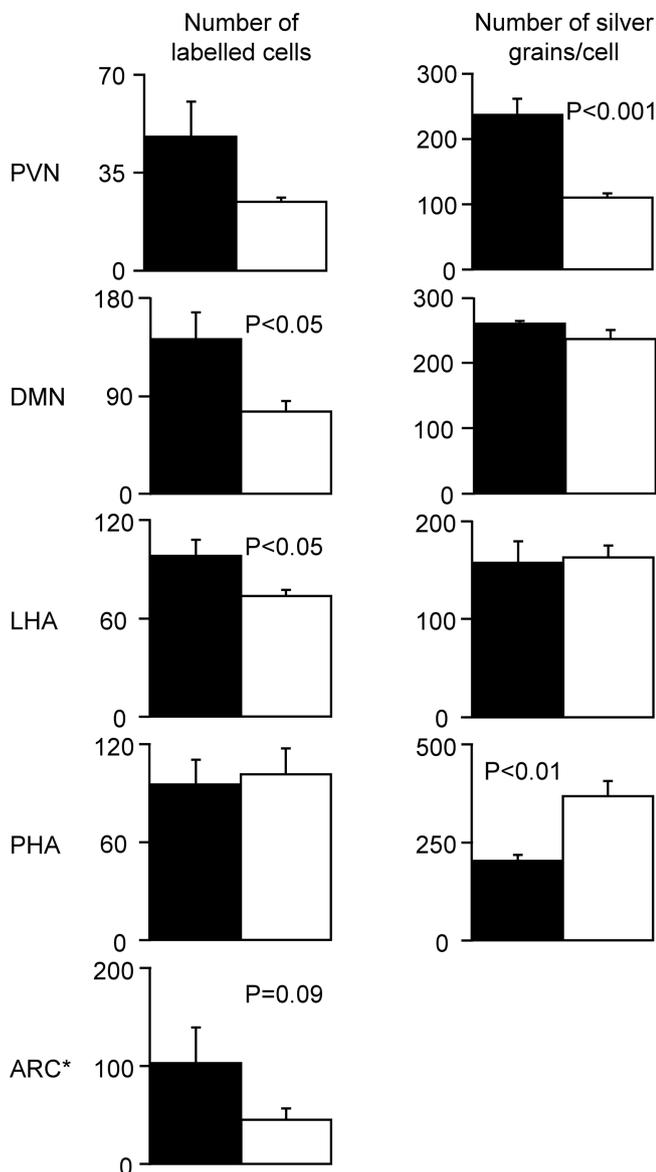


Fig. 8. Nutritional sensitivity of the CART neuronal system observed on the mRNA expression. Note that the effects have been observed according to the measure (number of labelled cells or the number of silver grains per cell). Adapted from Adam et al. (2002) and Henry et al. (2001a).

explained by the methodological differences (*i.e.* sex, diet and probes).

Calcitonin gene-related peptide

In short-term (10 days) ovx ewes, the calcitonin gene-related peptide (CGRP) is localised in hypothalamic magnocellular neurones, in the ventral paraventricular and supraoptic nuclei. Fewer CGRP-ir cell bodies are present in the preoptic area, and the anterior and basal hypothalamus (Herbison et al., 1993). In colchicine treated ewes, CGRP-ir neurones are observed in the same areas as previously described (personal observations, Fig. 9). No studies have been conducted concerning the role of CGRP in the regulation of nutrition. However, one study suggests a potential role in feeding behaviour. An icv injection of CGRP did not affect the first three-hour period of food intake, while a significant increase in daily food intake was observed (Bueno et al., 1986).

Alpha-melanocyte-stimulating hormone

The distribution of alpha-melanocyte-stimulating hormone (alpha-MSH) is similar to that of beta-End (Fig. 3, see above). High densities of alpha-MSH-ir neurones are found in the infundibular nucleus (Fig. 10a, b), the ventrolateral (Fig. 10c) and dorsolateral (Fig.

10d) hypothalamic area of sheep as well as other species (rat: Watson and Akil, 1979; Kachaturian et al., 1985; cat: Covenas et al., 1996).

In rodents, icv injection of alpha-MSH inhibits food intake (Table 1), whereas its central effect on food intake has not been determined in sheep.

The involvement of this peptide in nutrition is also indicated by the distribution of its receptors. The melanocortin receptor-3 (MC3-R) and -4 mRNA are observed in the anterior hypothalamus, in the paraventricular, dorsomedial, and ventromedial hypothalamic nuclei, and in the lateral hypothalamic area of intact adult ewes. In the arcuate nucleus only MC3-R mRNA are present (Iqbal et al., 2001b). These expressions are not modified by the long-term alteration of body weight in ovx ewes (Iqbal et al., 2001b).

In rodents, neurotensin (*NT*), glucagon-like peptide-1 (*GLP-1*) and thyrotropin-releasing hormone (*TRH*) are known to decrease food intake after icv administration. The organization of the *NT*- and *GLP-1* neuronal systems has been described in the diencephalon (Antonopoulos et al., 1989a) and brainstem (Mercer et al., 1998), respectively, of adult sheep, but their roles on food intake are still unknown in sheep. In the diencephalon of foetal sheep, the highest densities of *TRH*-ir cells were observed in the organum vasculosum of the lamina terminalis and in the paraventricular

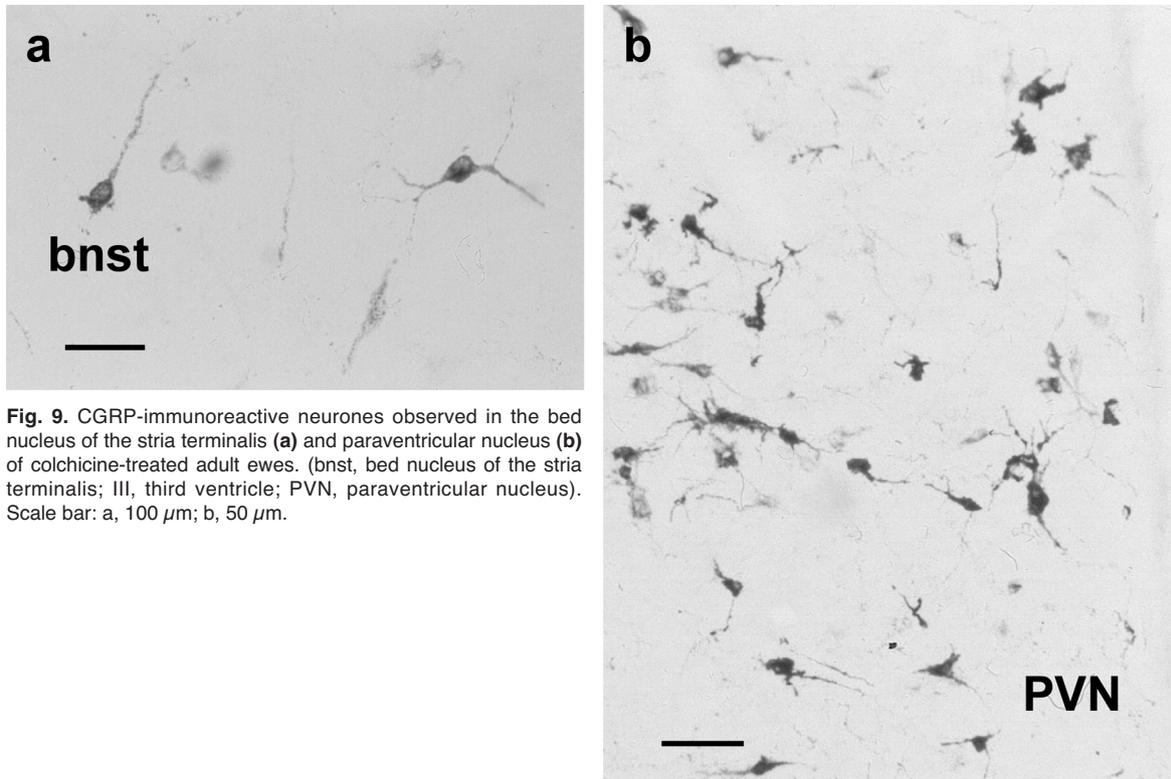


Fig. 9. CGRP-immunoreactive neurones observed in the bed nucleus of the stria terminalis (**a**) and paraventricular nucleus (**b**) of colchicine-treated adult ewes. (bnst, bed nucleus of the stria terminalis; III, third ventricle; PVN, paraventricular nucleus). Scale bar: a, 100 μ m; b, 50 μ m.

nucleus of the hypothalamus (McDonald et al., 1993). This latter structure contains the highest density of TRH-labelled neurones in adult colchicine-treated ewes (Fig. 11). Inhibitory effects on food intake in ovine have been described only for TRH (Ruckebush and Malbert, 1986).

Hormonal regulatory systems implicated in nutritional regulation of hypothalamic neuropeptides

In addition to the role of hypothalamic neuropeptides in nutrition, we must consider their hormonal regulatory systems. The involvement of insulin, leptin and ghrelin, in feeding and nutrition regulations have been abundantly described in numerous species. These actions may be partly mediated by

neuropeptides neuronal systems that present binding-site or receptors of these three hormones. In this section, we compare the major relevant data from rodents and sheep.

Insulin

In rodents, insulin receptor mRNA are localized in the arcuate nucleus (Marks et al., 1990), and insulin binding sites are observed in the supraoptic and periventricular nuclei (Schulingkamp et al., 2000). In sheep, the distribution of insulin-binding sites in the brain has never been described.

Interactions between insulin and hypothalamic neuropeptides have been suggested in several studies. In rats, an icv injection of insulin reduces both galanin and

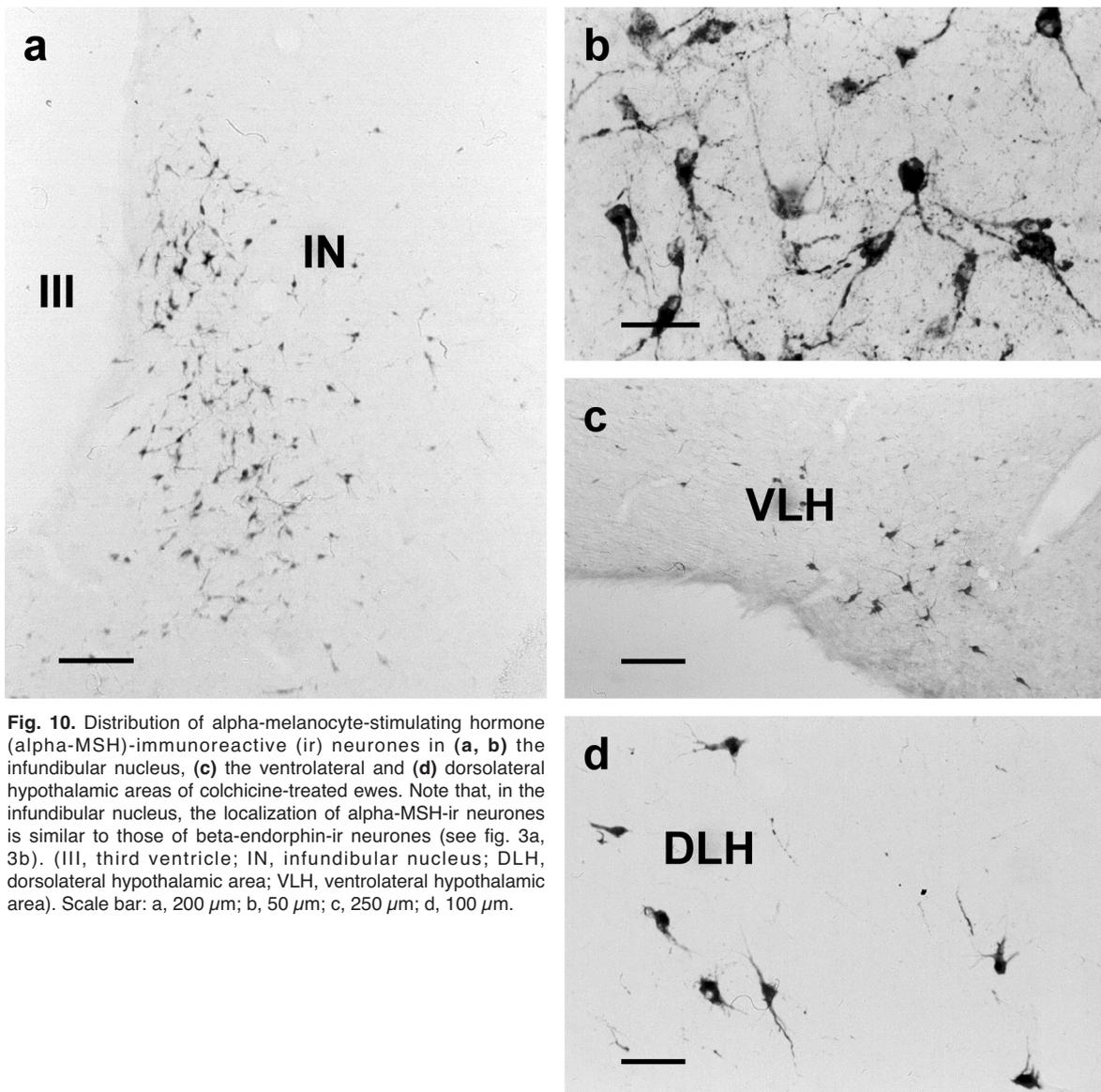


Fig. 10. Distribution of alpha-melanocyte-stimulating hormone (alpha-MSH)-immunoreactive (ir) neurones in (a, b) the infundibular nucleus, (c) the ventrolateral and (d) dorsolateral hypothalamic areas of colchicine-treated ewes. Note that, in the infundibular nucleus, the localization of alpha-MSH-ir neurones is similar to those of beta-endorphin-ir neurones (see fig. 3a, 3b). (III, third ventricle; IN, infundibular nucleus; DLH, dorsolateral hypothalamic area; VLH, ventrolateral hypothalamic area). Scale bar: a, 200 μ m; b, 50 μ m; c, 250 μ m; d, 100 μ m.

NPY gene expression and peptide immunoreactivity in several hypothalamic areas like arcuate and paraventricular nuclei (Wang and Leibowitz, 1997). Insulin injection leads to increased levels of MCH mRNA and MCH-ir staining in the lateral hypothalamus of rats (Bahjaoui-Bouhaddi et al., 1994). The level of orexin mRNA in the lateral hypothalamic area and the perifornical area of adult male rats, is increased after an intraperitoneal injection of insulin (Griffond et al., 1999). In rats, hypothalamic neurones co-express insulin receptor and POMC, and icv injections of insulin increase the expression of POMC mRNA in fasted animals (Benoit et al., 2002).

In sheep, no direct effect of insulin on neuropeptide expression has been described, but such an effect could be hypothesized since insulin level is sensitive to nutrition, and insulin injection modifies food intake. A high protein and energy diet causes an increased insulin level in plasma and cerebrospinal fluid of rams (Miller et al., 1998). A similar effect is observed in plasma of overfed ovx adult ewes that present modifications of

neuropeptide immunoreactivity (Chaillou et al., 2002a,b, 2003).

Leptin

The distribution of the leptin receptor (Ob-R) has been described in sheep (Williams et al., 1999), with the highest density found in the hypothalamus. As in rodents (Håkansson et al., 1998), numerous neuropeptide-containing neurones are potential targets of leptin in the sheep hypothalamus (Table 2).

In rodents, Ob-R are localized on neuropeptide-containing neurones (Håkansson et al., 1998); leptin injection modifies some neuropeptide expression and interacts with their action on feeding behaviour. For example, icv injections of leptin, for 5-days, decreases the expression of galanin, MCH, POMC and NPY mRNA, and increases the expression of NT mRNA in male rats (Sahu, 1998a). In the same animal model, an icv injection of leptin decreases the stimulating central effect of MCH, galanin, or NPY on food intake (Sahu,

Table 2. Summary of the co-localizations of leptin-receptor and different neuropeptides in the sheep hypothalamus.

NEUROPEPTIDE	LOCALIZATION	PROPORTION	ANIMAL MODEL	REFERENCES
CRH	Paraventricular nucleus	30%	Adult castrated male	Iqbal et al., 2001a
Galanin	Arcuate nucleus	60%	Adult castrated male	Iqbal et al., 2001a
MCH	Lateral hypothalamic area	100%	Adult castrated male	Iqbal et al., 2001a
NPY	Arcuate nucleus	100%	Adult ewes	Williams et al., 1999
		60%	Adult castrated male	Iqbal et al., 2001a
Orexin	Lateral hypothalamic area	100%	Adult castrated male	Iqbal et al., 2001a
POMC	Arcuate nucleus	90%	Adult castrated male	Iqbal et al., 2001a
SRIF	Arcuate nucleus	100%	Adult castrated male	Iqbal et al., 2000
	Dorsomedial and ventromedial parts of the hypothalamus	100%	Adult castrated male	Iqbal et al., 2000
	Periventricular area (periventricular nucleus, anterior hypothalamic area and parvocellular part of the paraventricular nucleus)	50%	Adult castrated male	Iqbal et al., 2000

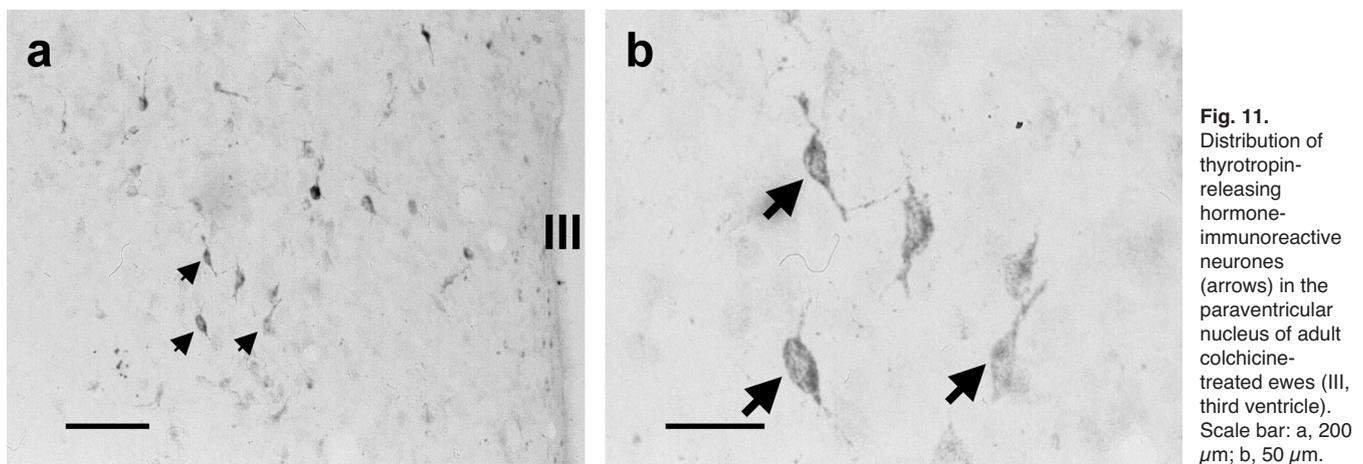


Fig. 11. Distribution of thyrotropin-releasing hormone-immunoreactive neurones (arrows) in the paraventricular nucleus of adult colchicine-treated ewes (III, third ventricle). Scale bar: a, 200 μ m; b, 50 μ m.

1998b). In mice, subcutaneous perfusion of leptin for 7-days causes an increase of MCH mRNA and MCH peptide levels in the hypothalamus/thalamus (Huang et al., 1999). In rats, the inhibitory effect of icv administration of leptin on food intake is substantially abolished by pre-treating animals with antibodies against CRH, but not urocortin (Okamoto et al., 2001).

All these data suggest that the variations in plasma levels of leptin that are related to nutrition, act on hypothalamic neuropeptides to regulate feeding behaviour and/or pituitary hormonal secretions.

No direct interacting effects of leptin and hypothalamic neuropeptides have been described for sheep nutritional regulations. Major differences exist between sheep and rodents, even if leptin and its receptor are sensitive to nutrition. The expression of Ob-R mRNA is higher in the ventromedial and arcuate nuclei of fed-restricted ovx ewes than in those of well-fed controls (Dyer et al., 1997). The same up-regulation is observed in the arcuate nucleus of adult male castrated sheep that have been fasted for 4-days (Adam et al., 2002). In some cases, increased Ob-R expression is associated with a decrease in leptin plasma level and an increase of NPY mRNA, or AGRP mRNA expression (Adam et al., 2002, Sorensen et al., 2002). However, in adult undernourished ovx ewes, modifications in the number of NPY-ir, galanin-ir, or CRH-ir neurones have been observed, with no effect on leptin plasma level (Chaillou et al., 2002a,b, 2003). Moreover, the central effects of leptin on food intake are variable and depend on criteria such as injection route, period of injection, sex, steroids, season or body score (Henry et al., 1999, 2001c; Blache et al., 2000; Clarke et al., 2000; Morrison et al., 2001, 2002). In ovines, the role of leptin as a key regulator in the nutritional modulation of hypothalamic neuropeptides remains to be demonstrated.

Ghrelin

Ghrelin is an endogenous ligand for growth hormone secretagogue receptor, originally isolated from the stomach. This peptide has a central stimulatory effect on food intake in rats (Nakazato et al., 2001). The growth hormone secretagogue receptors are distributed throughout the brain, especially in the hypothalamus (supraoptic, ventromedial, arcuate, paraventricular, and tuberomammillary nuclei) (Guan et al., 1997), and their co-localization with several hypothalamic neuropeptides could mediate the actions of ghrelin on them (Tables 3a,b).

In the sheep abomasum, the ruminant secretor stomach, the presence of ghrelin has been demonstrated by immunohistochemistry in cells from the neck to the base of the oxyntic glands (Hayashida et al., 2001). In rams, plasma ghrelin levels increase just before feeding, tend to increase in pseudo-fed animals and decrease during feeding (Sugino et al., 2002a). These secretion profiles depend on the frequency of meal distribution (Sugino et al., 2002b).

In sheep, no data have been published on potential interactions between ghrelin secretions and hypothalamic neuropeptides as regards nutrition.

Conclusion

This review considers most of the data concerning the hypothalamic neuropeptides and their implication in nutritional regulation in sheep. Compared to rodent, there have been fewer studies of neuropeptides such as AGRP, CART, CGRP, MCH, galanin, but the use of histochemistry allows description of their partial distribution and also their potential sensitivity to different nutritional conditions.

Table 3. Summary of (a) the co-localizations of growth hormone secretagogue-receptor mRNA and NPY, SRIF and POMC mRNA, and (b) the central ghrelin effects on NPY, AgRP, POMC and SRIF mRNA expression, in rats.

Table 3a			
NEUROPEPTIDE	LOCALIZATION	PROPORTION	REFERENCE
NPY	Arcuate nucleus	90%	Willesen et al., 1999
SRIF	Arcuate nucleus	30%	Willesen et al., 1999
POMC	Arcuate nucleus	8%	Willesen et al., 1999

Table 3b			
NEUROPEPTIDE	LOCALIZATION	EFFECT	INJECTION MODALITIES
NPY mRNA	Hypothalamus	+	Acute icv injection (Shintani et al., 2001)
	Arcuate nucleus	+	Acute (Nakazato et al., 2001) or chronic (Kamegai et al., 2001a) icv injection
AGRP mRNA	Arcuate nucleus	+	Acute (Kamegai et al., 2001b) or chronic (Kamegai et al., 2001a) icv injection
POMC mRNA	Arcuate nucleus	=	Acute (Kamegai et al., 2001b) or chronic (Kamegai et al., 2001a) icv injection
SRIF mRNA	Arcuate nucleus	=	Acute (Kamegai et al., 2001b) or chronic (Kamegai et al., 2001a) icv injection
	Periventricular nucleus	=	Acute (Kamegai et al., 2001b) or chronic (Kamegai et al., 2001a) icv injection

In rodents, different complementary methods have been used to study the role of hypothalamic neuropeptides in nutrition. The major methods include neuropeptide central injections, peptide and mRNA assays from microdissected samples, and functional neuroanatomy.

It is clear from our review that the results may differ according to the investigation methods and experimental protocols. Neuropeptide central injection is a good method to demonstrate an effect on feeding behaviour, but adequate knowledge of the neuronal system is necessary to choose a relevant injection site. For instance, the first studies on met-enkephalin were done with peptide assays of microdissected samples from the mediobasal hypothalamus, and the authors observed an increasing effect after starvation. The use of *in situ* hybridization demonstrated differential regulation by undernutrition between periventricular, paraventricular and ventromedial nuclei, all found in the mediobasal hypothalamic area. Among the different neuronal systems reviewed, only NPY neurones have sufficient variability to be observed with different methods. However, in the arcuate nucleus, the lateral and ventral subpopulations specifically sensitive to undernutrition and refeeding, respectively, have been identified only by immunohistochemistry. Neuroanatomical tools are necessary to identify accurately variations in, sometimes small, neuronal population in a heterogeneous structure like the brain.

The development of image analysis systems permits easy quantification of the signal obtained by *in situ* hybridization. With these tools the number of mRNA-containing neurones and silver grains per cell can be measured. The first component specifies the number of recruited cells, and the second gives information about the level of expression in each cell. With these two parameters, the sensitivity of neuropeptide-neuronal systems to undernutrition can be demonstrated. For instance, only the level of mRNA MCH expression is modified by undernutrition; the number of mRNA-containing neurones and MCH-ir neurones are unchanged. In the case of the CART neuronal system, undernutrition has distinct effects on the hypothalamic nucleus. Moreover, these effects concern only the number of recruited cells (dorsomedial nucleus, lateral hypothalamic area), mRNA expression in each cell (posterior hypothalamic area) or both (paraventricular nucleus).

The majority of the studies cited above used histochemistry to describe neuronal systems and demonstrate sensitivity to nutritional conditions. Immunohistochemistry and *in situ* hybridization provide complementary data concerning peptide accumulation and mRNA expression. They constitute the best methods to obtain good anatomical descriptions of an unknown neuronal system and to compare it across different experimental animal groups.

The experiments in sheep show that the peptidergic neurone systems involved in the regulation of nutrition

are generally similar to those observed in other species, but they present specific differences. In addition, their regulation may also be different, as illustrated by sensitivity to leptin; this point is closely related to characteristics of the animal model. Overall, these studies provide new insights into the involvement of peptidergic neurones in the control of nutrition and energy balance in mammals.

Acknowledgements. The authors thank Dr Richard Porter for English review of the manuscript.

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