



Effects of leptin treatment and Western diet on wheel running in selectively bred high runner mice

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ABSTRACT

The role of leptin in regulating physical activity is varied. The behavioral effects of leptin signaling depend on the type of activity and the animal's physiological state. We used mice from lines selectively bred for high voluntary wheel running to further study how leptin regulates volitional exercise. Mice from four replicate high runner (HR) lines typically run ~3-fold more revolutions per day than those from four non-selected control (C) lines. HR mice have altered dopamine function and differences from C in brain regions known to be important in leptin-mediated behavior. Furthermore, male HR mice have been found to dramatically increase running when administered Western diet, an effect possibly mediated through leptin signaling. Male mice from generation 61 (representing three HR lines and one C line) were allowed wheel access at 24 days of age and given either Western diet (high in fat and with added sucrose) or standard chow. After four weeks, Western diet significantly increased circulating leptin, insulin, C-peptide, gastric inhibitory polypeptide, and inflammatory hormone resistin concentrations in HR mice (C mice not measured). Western diet increased running in HR mice, but did not significantly affect running in C mice. During the fifth week, all mice received two days of intra-peritoneal sham injections (physiological saline) followed by three days of murine recombinant leptin injections, and then another six days of sham injections. Leptin treatment significantly decreased caloric intake (adjusted for body mass) and body mass in all groups. Wheel running significantly increased with leptin injections in HR mice (fed Western or standard diet), but was unaffected in C mice. Whether Western diet and leptin treatment stimulate wheel running in HR mice through the same physiological pathways awaits future study. These results have implications for understanding the neural and endocrine systems that control locomotor activity, food consumption, and body weight, and how they may vary with genetic background.

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1. Introduction

Behaviors such as eating and engaging in volitional activity are regulated by a myriad of physiological and neurobiological interactions [1]. Eating and voluntary exercise also interact through their effects on homeostasis and by various direct mechanisms. In rodents, wheel access has been shown many times to increase food consumption, e.g. [2–5] although the effect does not always occur [6,7]. Severe underfeeding or food deprivation can result in substantial increases in locomotor activity, postulated to represent an increase in motivation for foraging behavior in mice and rats [8,9].

Different diets can have diverse effects on locomotor activity in rodents. However, determining to what extent variable effects are caused by different macronutrient compositions, the amount of energy ingested, differences among strains of rodents, changes in body

mass or composition, or the type of locomotor activity measured has been challenging [3,10–13].

The role of leptin as an endocrine signaling molecule in both the periphery and central nervous system has become well-appreciated [14–16]. Many studies have focused on leptin's role in food consumption, thermoregulation, metabolic rate, and corresponding changes in body mass. Fewer studies have examined leptin's effect on physical activity, particularly voluntary exercise [17,18]. Both spontaneous physical activity (also known as non-exercise activity thermogenesis [NEAT]) and voluntary exercise can have large impacts on energy expenditure and consequently energy balance and body fat [19–21]. As both of these forms of activity can function as electively modifiable components of total energy expenditure, they may serve as major options for the treatment of obesity and many metabolic diseases.

To shed light on the role leptin may play in regulating levels of voluntary exercise, we studied mice from lines that have been selectively bred for high voluntary wheel running. Mice from the four replicate high runner (HR) lines typically run ~3-fold more revolutions per day than those from four non-selected control lines, and have evolved lower body size and lower body fat [22,23]. Circulating leptin

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concentrations are also lower in some studies of HR mice [24] (see also [25,26]) and, interestingly, leptin is lower than predicted based on fat mass, at least in young adult females [24]. As a corollary, HR mice also have elevated food consumption [5], but still remain leaner than controls [27]. It is unknown whether depressed leptin concentrations play a part in the motivation for increased wheel running, are a result of high activity, or are a correlated response to selection that is unrelated to activity levels per se.

The heightened wheel running of HR mice involves neurochemical changes affecting motivation and reward. Dopamine transporter blockers (Ritalin, cocaine, GBR 12909), which increase function of dopamine, reverse hyperactivity on wheels in HR mice, with an increase or no change in C lines. This suggests reduced functionality of the dopamine receptors in HR mice. Specifically, HR mice are more sensitive to blocking D1-like receptors rather than blocking D2-like receptors [28–30]. When wheel access is denied, the caudate–putamen complex, prefrontal cortex, nucleus accumbens, and lateral hypothalamus have differential activity in HR as compared with control mice (measured immunohistochemically using *c-Fos*) [31]. Not only are these brain regions involved in voluntary locomotion and/or motivation, but the latter two, along with the mesolimbic dopaminergic system, are known to be important in leptin-mediated behavior [14,32].

None of a number of previously-tested pharmacological agents increased running in HR mice [30,33], but administration of a Western diet increased daily wheel running in HR mice up to 75%, with no change in control mice [27]. In that study, both control and HR mice gained substantial fat mass when fed Western diet, and presumably circulating leptin concentrations rose as well. Given that HR mice have changes in brain regions involved in leptin signaling, differences in baseline circulating leptin concentrations, and respond uniquely to Western diet, we investigated leptin's role in modulating wheel running, and determined if leptin's effects were consistent between different diets.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Experimental animals

Mice from generation 61 of an ongoing selection experiment for high voluntary wheel running were used. The original progenitors of the colony were outbred, genetically variable Harlan Sprague Dawley mice: Institute for Cancer Research strain (Indianapolis, Indiana, USA). Eight closed lines were formed, four selected for high voluntary wheel running (based on days 5 and 6 of a 6-day test) and four bred without regard to running [34].

58 male mice from generation 61 were weaned at 21 days of age and housed with access to Harlan Teklad Laboratory Rodent Diet [W]-8604 until they reached 24 days of age. One control line and three of the four selected HR lines were represented in this study as our focus was on elucidating the HR phenotype. The excluded HR line (lab designation #6) was polymorphic for the mini-muscle phenotype (see below). Room temperature was maintained at ~73 °F and photoperiod was 12:12, with lights on at 0700 Pacific Time.

2.2. Experimental groups

At 24 days of age, all mice were singly housed with Wahman-type wheels (1.12 m circumference, 35.7 cm diameter, 10 cm-wide running surface) attached to standard cages (27 × 17 × 12.5 cm) (Fig. 1). Wheel running was recorded for 23 h each day with the final hour (1200–1300) used to reset the computers, check for any wheel malfunctions, and check the health of the animals. Half the mice received standard diet (SD) (Harlan Teklad Rodent Diet [W] 8604, 14% kJ from fat) and the other half received Western diet (WD) with similar concentrations of vitamin D (Harlan Teklad TD.88137 Western Diet, 42% kJ from fat with added sucrose; see [27] for details of diet composition).

Every six days mice were weighed, body length (tip of snout to base of tail) was taken, while the mouse was held behind the neck, and apparent food consumption measured. Food consumption was determined as the difference in hopper mass between two time points, after accounting for any obvious wastage. Our standard chow food consumption values are in agreement with a previous study using these lines that, in the absence of bedding, sorted, dried, and weighed all uneaten food to account for wastage [35]. Because the diets differ in mass-specific energy content, we converted food consumption from grams to caloric intake, using total kJ of metabolizable energy of 12.98 and 19.01 per gram of wet mass for SD and WD, respectively [27].

In some cases, a pair-fed group would provide clearer evidence as to the effects of caloric intake on the phenotype of interest. However, with regard to wheel running, we chose not to have a pair-fed group because limiting food intake in rodents can have profound effects to increase wheel running a response that is believed to represent foraging behavior [8,9]. If so, then the effect would be distinctly different from that of Western diet, and could have a more confounding than clarifying effect.

2.3. Blood sample

A 130 µl blood sample was taken after mice had been in experimental groups for two weeks (42 days of age). Blood was acquired through the orbital sinus under isoflurane anesthesia. Blood was collected in non-heparinized microcapillary tubes. 1.1 µl of dipeptidyl peptidase IV inhibitor (EC 3.4.14.5, Millipore MO, USA), 2.5 µl of 0.05 M phenylmethanesulfonylfluoride dissolved in methanol, and 10 µl of Roche mini Complete serine protease inhibitor cocktail (Roche Diagnostics Mannheim, Germany) were added to whole blood and mixed thoroughly. Serum was collected after blood was centrifuged (Sorvall Legend Micro 17R) at 13,000 rpm for 10 min at 4 °C.

Hormones were assayed using a Milliplex Mouse Metabolic Magnetic Bead Panel MMHMAG-44K-14 (Millipore MO, USA) in a Luminescence 200. Standards were plotted and concentrations determined using Milliplex Analyst software version 3.5.5. Due to the limited number of wells, and to ensure adequate sample sizes in HR lines, only the three HR lines had blood assayed (blood samples from control mice were not assayed).

2.4. Injections

Starting at 24 days of age, mice were given 3 weeks of uninterrupted wheel access to allow daily wheel running to plateau before injections began. Recombinant mouse leptin (R&D Systems, Inc.) was prepared by dissolving in physiological saline immediately prior to use. Mice were given 2 µg/g body mass 2 h before lights off via intraperitoneal (i.p.) injections. Each mouse received two consecutive days of sham (physiological saline) followed by three consecutive days of leptin treatment and six more days of sham injections (Fig. 1). The mass used to adjust injection volume was measured during the initial two days of sham injection. Accordingly, even though leptin treatment changed body mass, injection volumes of leptin did not change over the course of the experiment. Injection volumes ranged from 0.12 ml to 0.17 ml.

2.5. Dissections

Mice were dissected one day after the final sham injection (26 days after the blood sample). Body mass, body length, and food consumption were recorded. The mouse was skinned and its pelt weighed. The ventricles, liver, and triceps surae were then dissected and weighed. Different fat pad masses were also dissected and weighed, including the subscapular brown fat with the sub-scapular adipose tissue, epididymal fat, and retroperitoneal fat [36]. For analyses, “total fat” refers to the sum of all fat pad masses.

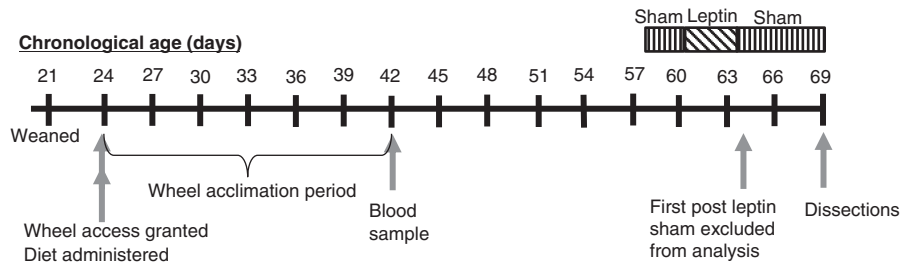


Fig. 1. Timeline of experimental design. Wheel access was granted to all mice from both linetypes (represented by three selectively bred HR lines and one non-selected control line) shortly after weaning, and half of each of the four lines received Western diet at this time. Every six days mice were weighed, body length was recorded, and food consumption measured. Wheel running was allowed to plateau before the blood sample was taken. All mice had blood drawn, but only HR animals had hormones assayed. After recovery, all mice received 2 days of sham (physiological saline), 3 days of leptin, then 6 days of sham injections intraperitoneally. Pretreatment running is reported for days 57–58. Experimental running is reported from days 59 to 69, excluding day 64 to allow for any possible carry-over effects of leptin treatment to diminish once final sham injections began.

2.6. Statistical analyses

Analyses were performed using the Mixed Procedure in SAS 9.1.3 (SAS Institute, Cary, NC, USA) to apply analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) models with Type III tests of fixed effects. Line and diet were main effects. Covariates depended on the trait analyzed and included body length, body mass, fat mass, wheel freeness, and/or total wheel running (revolutions). To compare values for food consumption, body mass, and wheel running, during the initial sham (2 days), leptin (3 days), and final sham injections (5 days), we analyzed the average values for each of these segments. A priori contrasts comparing sham with leptin values were used in SAS Procedure Mixed for a repeated-measures ANCOVA with covariates of body mass or wheel freeness and AR(1) rather than compound symmetry was used for covariate structure.

The three HR lines were averaged from the analysis with line as a main affect and, therefore, do not have S.E. bars. Baseline differences for body weight and caloric intake existed among the three HR lines, but their responses to experimental intervention were similar, so only the average value of all three lines is reported.

One of the three HR lines studied here (lab designation #3) is fixed for a Mendelian recessive allele that causes a small-muscle phenotype, with an approximately 50% reduction in triceps surae, as well as whole-hindlimb muscle mass [37,38]. Pleiotropic effects of this allele include alterations in muscle fiber type composition (especially reduced type IIB fibers) [39], contractile properties favoring stamina at the expense of speed [40], and a doubling of mass-specific aerobic capacity and hexokinase activity [38]. Mini-muscle animals showed similar increases in wheel running compared to normal muscle HR mice when given Western diet, so they are not distinguished in the results.

3. Results

3.1. Blood samples

As expected, plasma leptin concentrations were higher in mice fed Western diet (Table 1, Fig. 2). When total fat mass was included in the analysis as a covariate, it was highly significant and diet lost its significance. A similar pattern was observed for insulin. WD also increased C-peptide, which remained significantly elevated when fat mass was included in the model as a covariate. Resistin and gastric inhibitory polypeptide (GIP) were both higher in WD-fed mice, but monocyte chemoattractant protein-1 (MCP-1) was not (Table 1, Fig. 2). The significant line effect for several hormones reveals baseline differences among the high runner lines. Despite these differences, their responses to Western diet are similar, as there is no significant diet \times line interaction for any hormone (Table 1). When body fat is included as a covariate, the effect of line remains or becomes non-significant for all the hormones except GIP. Thus, the differences observed among HR lines may be attributable to differences in body fat.

3.2. Caloric intake

In the repeated-measures analysis (see Fig. 3) (with body mass as a covariate), leptin treatment decreased caloric intake (a priori contrast of initial sham vs. leptin injection period, $P < 0.0001$). Once leptin injections stopped, caloric intake increased but did not quite reach baseline levels (a priori contrast of initial sham vs. final sham, $P = 0.0104$). Both diet groups responded similarly to leptin injections (diet \times time block interaction $P = 0.1488$). The lines were different from each other ($P = 0.0084$), with the control line eating less overall, and no statistical interactions with the line effect.

3.3. Body mass

Repeated-measures analysis showed that leptin treatment decreased body mass ($P < 0.0001$, see Fig. 4). After leptin injections stopped, body mass increased to levels statistically indistinguishable from baseline values ($P = 0.8786$). Western diet increased body mass ($P = 0.0370$) of all lines (no line \times diet interaction). Both diet groups responded to leptin injections in a similar way (no time \times diet interaction). Lines differed significantly in body mass ($P = 0.0146$), with all three HR lines weighing less than the one control line (results not shown; averaged values shown in Fig. 4). The response to leptin was similar among lines ($P = 0.2316$ for the time \times line interaction).

3.4. Wheel running

The two days before the start of sham injections, mice from HR lines were running ~ 3.3 times further per day relative to control mice. On this day, HR mice ran 20% more on Western diet ($P = 0.0470$), which is comparable to the differential observed in our previous study when mice were this age [27]. Running of mice in the C line was not statistically affected by Western diet over these two days ($P = 0.1117$).

In a repeated-measures analysis of the three HR lines, wheel running varied significantly across time blocks (Fig. 5, $P < 0.0001$) and the effect of diet was not significant (and no interactions between diet and other factors). A priori contrasts showed that leptin increased running ($P = 0.0035$ [+8%], $P < 0.0001$ [+17%] compared to pre-leptin sham and post-leptin sham, respectively), and that mice ran less during the post-leptin sham than during the pre-leptin sham ($P = 0.0388$ [−7%]). The time \times line interaction was significant ($P = 0.0308$), thus indicating somewhat different responses among the three HR lines (Fig. 5 panel B). However, inspection of the Least Squares Means from SAS showed that all three HR lines followed the same general pattern of increasing wheel running during leptin injections, followed by a decrease in running after injections stopped (Fig. 5 panel B). It is unclear why the different HR lines responded to hyperleptinemia to a varying extent. It could involve innate baseline differences in leptin levels, which can be accounted for by the slight differences in fat mass (Table 1). When the analysis is run with the

Table 1

P values from ANOVA and ANCOVA for plasma hormones in HR lines of mice.

	Leptin (n = 33)		Insulin (n = 38)		C-peptide (n = 38)		Resistin (n = 38)		GIP (n = 38)		MCP-1 (n = 21)	
	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	
Diet	0.0031^a	0.5448 ^a	0.0002^a	0.0726 ^a	<0.0001^a	0.0010^a	<0.0001^a	<0.0006^a	0.0012^a	0.0015^a	0.7025 ^a	0.2492 ^{aa}
Line	0.0466	0.2266	0.0267	0.3436	0.0368	0.2935	0.0386	0.0890	0.0456	0.0352	0.9291	0.4810
Diet × line	0.0620	0.9981	0.1797	0.8325	0.3588	0.1851	0.2106	0.2571	0.3309	0.1993	0.5885	0.7477
Fat mass		<0.0001^a		0.0002^a		0.0010^a		−0.8284		−0.2796		−0.1111

Statistical significance results (P values only) from separate ANOVA's and ANCOVA's for circulating hormone levels. Mean hormone concentrations for each diet group are reported in Fig. 2. Categorical factors of diet (Western vs. standard) or line (3 separate HR lines), and covariate of total body fat (see Materials and methods) measured in grams at the end of the experiment were included. Monocyte chemoattractant protein-1 (MCP-1), Gastric inhibitory polypeptide (GIP). All P values are 2-tailed. Significant main effect values (P < 0.05) are in bold. Fat mass had a positive and statistically significant effect for the first 3 hormones, but a negative and non-significant effect for the latter 3.

^a Indicates direction Western diet > standard diet.

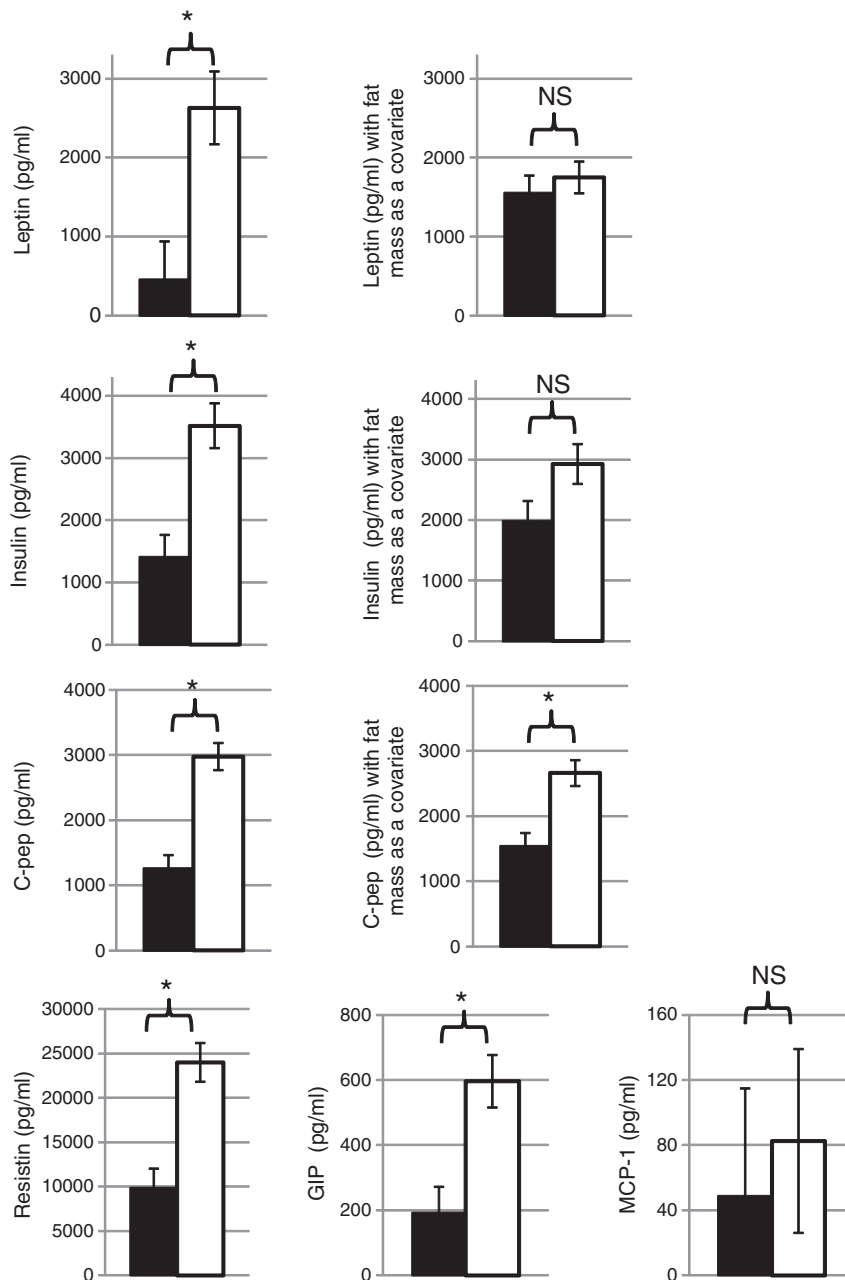


Fig. 2. Least Squares Means \pm S.E. for circulating hormone concentrations (pg/ml). Solid bars represent mice fed standard diet and open bars represent mice fed Western diet. Blood samples for the control line were not run, so all data are averages of the three HR lines. Figures with fat mass as a covariate for resistin, monocyte chemoattractant protein-1 (MCP-1), and gastric inhibitory polypeptide (GIP) are omitted because the covariate is non-significant. * indicates P < 0.05. See Table 1 for additional statistical results.

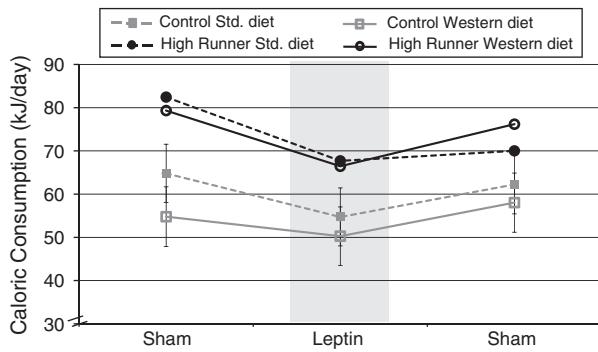


Fig. 3. Least Squares Means for food consumption from repeated-measures analysis of covariance in SAS, using all four lines of mice. Body mass was used as a covariate. Pre-leptin “sham” indicates the average food consumption for the two days of sham injections preceding leptin treatment. “Leptin” is the average food consumption for the three leptin injection days, and post-leptin “sham” is the average food consumption for the final five days of sham injections. The three HR lines were averaged from the analysis with line as a main effect and, therefore, do not have S.E. bars (see [Materials and methods](#)).

addition of caloric intake as a covariate, the time \times line interaction becomes non-significant ($P=0.0856$). In a separate analysis of the control line, wheel running was not statistically affected by either leptin treatment or diet, nor their interaction ($P=0.1896, 0.0671, 0.1434$, respectively).

4. Discussion

Evidence concerning leptin's effect on physical activity has been varied. Leptin injections (I.P.) in mice lacking a functional leptin gene (*ob/ob* mice) can lead to increases in locomotor activity in a novel cage over 15 min [41] and in voluntary wheel running over a 24-hour period [18]. Intracerebroventricular leptin-injected rats increase spontaneous physical activity during the initial 20 h after injections [42], as well as throughout 5 days of consecutive treatment [17]. In contrast, leptin treatment (I.P. injections or subcutaneous osmotic pumps) in fed wildtype C57Bl/6 mice produced no change in activity in a new cage environment as measured by human observation over 15 min [41] or in wheel running during 4–6 days [18]. Conversely, leptin treatment via minipumps can reduce fasting-induced hyperactivity in Wistar rats and C57Bl/6 mice [18,43].

Several lines of evidence suggest a link between voluntary wheel running, leptin, and effects of a Western diet in HR mice (from lines

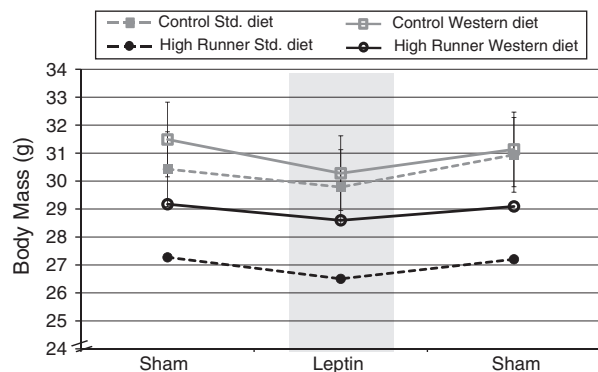


Fig. 4. Least Squares Means for body mass from repeated-measures analysis in SAS, using all four lines of mice. Pre-leptin “sham” indicates the average body mass for the two days of sham injections preceding leptin treatment. “Leptin” is the average body mass for the three leptin injection days, and post-leptin “sham” is the average body mass for the final five days of sham injections. The three HR lines were averaged from the analysis with line as a main effect and, therefore, do not have S.E. bars (see [Materials and methods](#)).

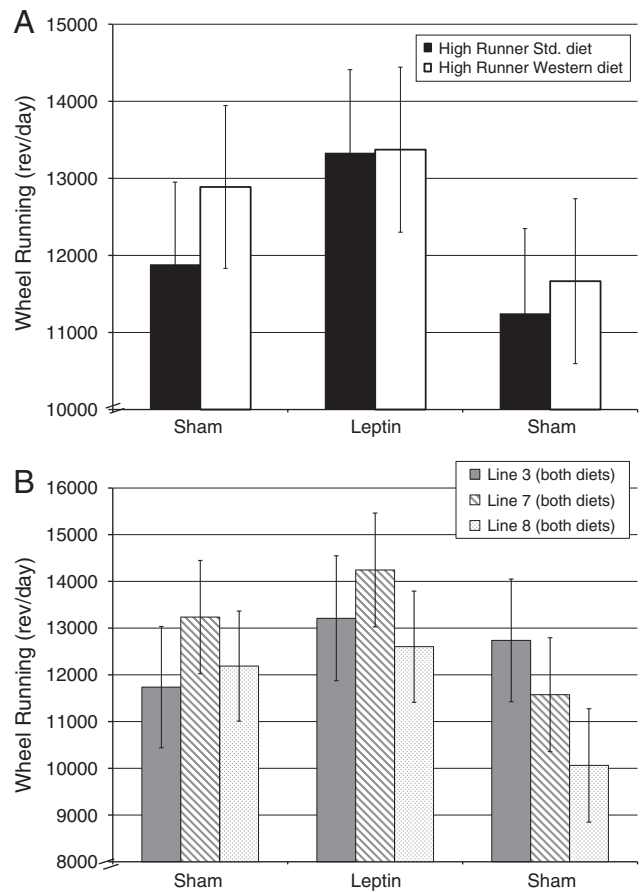


Fig. 5. Least Squares Means \pm S.E. for wheel running from repeated-measures analysis of the three HR lines. Pre-leptin “sham” indicates the average wheel running for the two days of sham injections preceding leptin treatment. “Leptin” is the average wheel running for the three leptin injection days, and post-leptin “sham” is the average wheel running for the final five days of sham injections. A: Wheel running revolutions for HR mice for each diet. Leptin treatment significantly increased running compared to either the preceding or following shams, but the effect of diet was not statistically significant (see text). B: Wheel running for HR mice from each line (pooled by diet). Leptin treatment significantly increased running compared to either the preceding or following sham injections for all three HR lines, but their response differed slightly (time \times line interaction $P=0.0308$).

selectively bred for high voluntary wheel running). Unlike all pharmacological agents tested thus far in HR mice [28–30,33,44] WD can substantially increase wheel running in males [27] (females were not studied). In the present study, WD increased leptin concentrations nearly 6-fold after only 18 days in male HR mice (Fig. 2) (control lines not assayed). Additionally, acute leptin injections increased wheel running in HR mice (Fig. 5). From these results, it is tempting to deduce that Western diet stimulates wheel running in HR lines at least partly through leptin signaling.

Consistent with this interpretation, leptin injections in HR mice on standard diet produced a larger increase in running (1447 additional revolutions per day) than in HR animals on WD (484 additional revolutions per day [Fig. 5]). However, we did not observe a statistically significant time-by-diet interaction in analysis of HR mice, so it is difficult to conclude leptin injections differentially affected wheel running in the different diet groups.

Similar to the effects observed in inbred strains of rodents on ad lib food [18], leptin injections did not increase running in our non-selected control line of mice. Although leptin was not quantified in mice from the non-selected control line in the present study, previous work has shown that circulating leptin concentrations in HR and control lines respond similarly to changes in fat mass accumulated through aging or Western diet [25,26]. WD increased body mass in

both linetypes in our study, but did not alter wheel-running distances in control mice, nor did leptin injections, so it does not appear that baseline leptin constrains wheel-running activity in wildtype animals. However, HR mice on the standard diet (and WD) significantly increased wheel running with leptin treatment. Thus, a fundamental difference may have evolved between the control and HR lines in this respect. The increased running in HRs due to leptin treatment begs the question as to why HR mice have evolved lower leptin levels in the face of continuous selective breeding for high voluntary wheel running (while they have ad lib access to food).

One reason for increased running may be that low leptin serves as a starvation signal, leading to increased motivation to forage. Fasting in rodents can result in substantial increases in wheel running [9]. During fasting, leptin drops precipitously, contributing to the increase in locomotor activity [18,43]. It seems unlikely, though, that HR mice are running more because their innately low leptin operates as a starvation signal that results in greater motivation for foraging, even though they are wheel-tested with ad lib access to food [43]. If this were the case, then Western diet's effect of increasing leptin (Fig. 2) should have led to decreased wheel running.

Several other explanations are possible for the evolution of low circulating leptin levels in HR mice, including pleiotropic gene action, gene linkage and reward substitution. Some evidence indicates pleiotropic effects of leptin on the central nervous system, which could help explain our results. A potential site for this effect may exist in the hypothalamus, specifically the arcuate nucleus, which is known to be a major regulator in the control of feeding in response to leptin signaling [45]. This region has also recently been implicated in the control of voluntary locomotion. Ambulatory activity in home cages of leptin receptor-deficient mice is normalized after unilateral restoration of leptin receptors in the ARC [45]. Furthermore, signal transducer and activator of transcription 3 (stat3) signaling in Agouti-related protein (AgRP) neurons within the ARC are known to be downstream of leptin signaling. Work with Cre-mediated recombination resulting in constitutively active stat3 signaling in AgRP neurons increased home-cage locomotor activity (as measured by transmitters in the peritoneal cavity) independently of AgRP expression and changes in food intake [46]. If higher levels of circulating leptin are involved in greater locomotor activity of HR mice through signaling in the ARC, but lower leptin is required to stimulate feeding to maintain energy balance, then high levels of voluntary exercise could be constrained by these mechanisms.

In regards to reward substitution, the low body fat (and circulating leptin) in HR mice may result from neural reward generated by high wheel running substituting for the reward that is generated by eating. Reward substitution has been observed in rats, where a preference for high fat diet (over standard chow) in sedentary conditions is eliminated when wheel access is granted [47]. A similar scenario has also been found with nicotine and food consumption in mice. Nicotine activation of pro-opiomelanocortin neurons leads to reduced food intake and subsequently reduced body mass [48]. If there is a parallel relationship in HR mice between exercise and food consumption, then the independent evolution of a smaller body size in all four HR lines could, at least in part, be a consequence of pleasure generated from running. Alternatively, it has been suggested that the reduced body size of HR mice may be related to their elevated circulating corticosterone levels [49,50]. An additional hypothesis, suggested by Plomin and colleagues [51] (pp. 261–262 and their Fig. 10.1), is that perturbations in tyrosine hydroxylase or dopa decarboxylase enzymes could affect dopamine and/or norepinephrine simultaneously and result in more wheel running and less eating.

Recent evidence supports the reward substitution hypothesis, as HR mice, when switched from tap water to a non-caloric sweet drink (Sweet 'N Low, Equal or Splenda) do not increase consumption to the same extent as controls [52]. "This alteration in incentive salience for a competing reward is characteristic of reward substitution,

where a highly valued reward (wheel running) substitutes or obscures the effect of a competing reward (sweet taste)..." [52] (p.13).

With the exception of monocyte chemoattractant protein-1 (MCP-1), involved in inflammation, WD increased all the measured hormone concentrations. Interestingly, body fat, which was measured one month after the blood samples were taken, was still positively correlated with several hormone concentrations in the ANCOVA models (Table 1). Both gastric inhibitory polypeptide (GIP) and bioactive molecule C-peptide are involved in insulin secretion and are elevated, along with insulin, in mice fed WD. These correlations suggest the development of insulin resistance. There is also evidence of greater systemic inflammation, as resistin concentrations rose 2.4-fold in the WD group (although MCP-1 did not significantly increase). Thus, when given WD for several weeks, the HR mice appear to develop many of the same metabolic abnormalities as a typical mouse would, despite their high running. Some of these changes are closely related to changes in fat mass, while others, like increases in resistin and GIP, are not.

It is well known that high leptin concentrations can cause leptin resistance [53,54]. Lin et al. [54] showed that one week of WD did not affect peripheral leptin sensitivity but eight weeks of WD in sedentary conditions was enough to induce resistance to exogenous leptin administration. In our study, animals were on Western diet for 37 days before leptin injections began. WD mice gained considerable fat mass and had corresponding high leptin. However, WD mice do not appear to have developed leptin resistance. In terms of food consumption and body mass changes, all groups responded to leptin treatment to a similar degree (Figs. 3 and 4). It is possible that not enough time elapsed for mice to develop leptin resistance. Importantly, all of the mice in our study had access to wheels, which could be helping animals maintain central leptin sensitivity [47].

Over the course of 61 generations of selective breeding for high voluntary wheel running, mice have evolved lower body size, low plasma leptin concentrations, and neurological differences related to motivation for wheel running. Despite the evolution of low circulating leptin levels, exogenous leptin treatment increases wheel running in male HR mice but not in males from a non-selected control line. However, it remains unclear if WD elevates running in HR mice through increases in leptin concentration. Understanding the physiological mechanisms underlying these effects will provide insight into the genetics and evolution of voluntary behaviors and overall energetic homeostasis.

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