Insufficiency of Janus Kinase 2-Autonomous Leptin Receptor Signals for Most Physiologic Leptin Actions

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Insufficiency of Janus Kinase 2–Autonomous Leptin Receptor Signals for Most Physiologic Leptin Actions

Scott Robertson,1 Ryoko Ishida-Takahashi,2 Isao Tawara,2 Jiang Hu,3 Christa M. Patterson,2 Justin C. Jones,2 Rohit N. Kulkarni,3 and Martin G. Myers Jr.1,2,3

OBJECTIVE—Leptin acts via its receptor (LepRb) to signal the status of body energy stores. Leptin binding to LepRb initiates signaling by activating the associated Janus kinase 2 (Jak2) tyrosine kinase, which promotes the phosphorylation of tyrosine residues on the intracellular tail of LepRb. Two previously examined LepRb phosphorylation sites mediate several, but not all, aspects of leptin action, leading us to hypothesize that Jak2 signaling might contribute to leptin action independently of LepRb phosphorylation sites. We therefore determined the potential role in leptin action for signals that are activated by Jak2 independently of LepRb phosphorylation (Jak2-autonomous signals).

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS—We inserted sequences encoding a truncated LepRb mutant (LepRbΔ355c, which activates Jak2 normally, but is devoid of other LepRb intracellular sequences) into the mouse Lepr locus. We examined the leptin-regulated physiology of the resulting ΔΔ mice relative to LepRb-deficient db/db animals.

RESULTS—The ΔΔ animals were similar to db/db animals in terms of energy homeostasis, neuroendocrine and immune function, and regulation of the hypothalamic arcuate nucleus, but demonstrated modest improvements in glucose homeostasis.

CONCLUSIONS—The ability of Jak2-autonomous LepRb signals to modulate glucose homeostasis in ΔΔ animals suggests a role for these signals in leptin action. Because Jak2-autonomous LepRb signals fail to mediate most leptin action, however, signals from other LepRb intracellular sequences predominate. Diabetes 59:782–790, 2010

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S.R. and R.I-T. contributed equally to this study.

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nonphosphorylated LepRb motifs from effects due to LepRb/Jak2 interactions specifically.

**RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS**

**Cell culture studies.** The plasmids pCDNA3-LepRbΔ65 and pCDNA3-LepRa were generated by mutagenesis of pCDNA3-LepRb (23) using the QuickChange kit (Stratagene). The absence of adventitious mutations was confirmed by DNA sequencing for all plasmids. Cell culture, transfection, lysis, and immunoblotting were conducted as reported previously using αJak2 (y1007/8) from Cell Signaling Technology and αJak2 from our own laboratory (24). Leptin was the generous gift of Amylin Pharmaceuticals (La Jolla, CA).

**Mouse model generation.** The targeting vector encoding LepRbΔ65 was generated by inserting a Stop codon (QuickChange kit) after the 65th intracellular amino acid of LepRb in the 5’ targeting arm in the pBlueScript plasmid; this modified 5’-arm was subsequently subcloned into the previously described pPNT-derived targeting vector that contained the 3’ arm (19,25,26). The resulting construct was linearized and transfected into murine embryonic stem (ES) cells with selection of clones by the University of Michigan Transgenic Animal Model Facility. Correctly targeted clones were identified and confirmed with real-time PCR and Southern blotting as performed previously (15,21,26) and were injected into embryos for the generation of chimeras and the establishment of germ-line transgenic mice (15,21,26). Indeed, RT-PCR analysis of hypothalamic LepR expression or were backcrossed onto the C57BL/6J background (The Jackson Laboratory) for six generations prior to intercrossing of hypothalamic Lepr expression or were backcrossed onto the C57BL/6J strain. Animals intended for glucose tolerance tests, and body composition were weaned at 4 weeks and group housed. Body weight and food intake were recorded weekly from 4 to 8 weeks. Whole venous blood from the tail vein was used to determine blood glucose (Ascensia Elite glucometer) and to obtain serum, which was frozen for later hormone measurement. A terminal bleed was also collected at the time of killing. Commercial ELISA kits were used to determine insulin (Crystal Chem), leptin (Crystal Chem), and C-peptide (Millipore) concentrations.

In females, vaginal lavage was used to assess estrous cycling daily from 4 to 8 weeks. Animals intended for glucose tolerance tests, insulin tolerance tests, and body composition were weaned at 4 weeks and housed individually. Body weight was recorded weekly from 4 to 8 weeks. Whole venous blood from the tail vein was used to determine blood glucose (Ascensia Elite glucometer) and to obtain serum, which was frozen for later hormone measurement. A terminal bleed was also collected at the time of killing. Commercial ELISA kits were used to determine insulin (Crystal Chem), leptin (Crystal Chem), and C-peptide (Millipore) concentrations.

**EXPERIMENTAL ANIMALS.** C57BL/6J wildtype, LepRb−/−, and LepRb+/− breeders were purchased from The Jackson Laboratory. All other animals and progeny from these purchased breeders were housed and bred in our colony and were cared for and used according to guidelines approved by the University of Michigan Committee on the Care and Use of Animals. After weaning, all mice were maintained on 5011 LabDiет chow. Mice were given ad libitum access to food and water unless otherwise noted. For body weight, food intake, glucose monitoring, and estrous monitoring, animals were weaned at 4 weeks and housed individually. Body weight and food intake were recorded weekly from 4 to 8 weeks. Whole venous blood from the tail vein was used to determine blood glucose (Ascensia Elite glucometer) and to obtain serum, which was frozen for later hormone measurement. A terminal bleed was also collected at the time of killing. Commercial ELISA kits were used to determine insulin (Crystal Chem), leptin (Crystal Chem), and C-peptide (Millipore) concentrations.

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**RESULTS**

LepRbΔ65 and gene targeting to generate LepRb−/−: To examine physiologic signals generated by LepRb-associated Jak2 in the absence of LepRb tyrosine phosphorylation sites and other LepRb motifs (Jak2-autonomous signals), we used a COOH-terminal truncation mutant of LepRb (LepRbΔ65) that contains all motifs required for Jak2 association and regulation, but which is devoid of other intracellular LepRb sequences (12). Because we previously demonstrated the function of this mutant intracellular domain in the context of an erythropoietin receptor (extracellular domain/LepRb (intracellular domain) chimera (12), we initially examined signaling by the truncated intracellular domain within the context of LepRbΔ65 in transfected 293 cells (Fig. 1A). Leptin stimulation promoted the phosphorylation of Jak2 on the activating Tyr1007/1008 sites in LepRbΔ65, and LepRb-expressing cells but not in LepRa-expressing or control cells (Fig. 1A), confirming that LepRb and LepRbΔ65, but not LepRa, contain the necessary sequences to mediate Jak2 activation in response to leptin.

To understand the potential roles for Jak2-autonomous LepRb signals in leptin action, we used homologous recombination to replace the genomic Lepr with LepRbΔ65 (henceforth referred to as the Δ allele, encoding LepRbΔ65 in mouse ES cells (Fig. 1B). Correctly targeted ES cell clones were confirmed by Southern blotting (Fig. 1C). This strategy mediates LepRbΔ65 expression from the native Lepr locus, ensuring correct patterns and levels of LepRbΔ65 expression, as previously for other homologously targeted LepRb alleles (15,21,26). Indeed, RT-PCR analysis of hypothalamic mRNA confirmed similar Lepr mRNA expression in homozygous Δ/Δ animals and wildtype animals (Fig. 1D). Prior to subsequent study, we backcrossed heterozygous Δ/+ animals to C57BL/6J mice for six generations to facilitate direct comparison with LepRbΔ65/ΔΔ (db/db) animals on this background.

**Energy homeostasis in Δ/Δ mice.** Because our previous analysis suggested some role for Tyr665/Tyr1138-independent LepRb signals in regulating energy balance, we initially examined parameters of energy homeostasis in Δ/Δ compared with db/db animals (15,19,21). We weaned and singly housed Δ/Δ, db/db, and control mice from 4 to 8 weeks of age for the longitudinal determination of body weight and food intake (Fig. 2A–D). Compared with age- and sex-matched db/db animals, Δ/Δ mice showed similar body weights and food intake over the study period.

Furthermore, age- and sex-matched Δ/Δ and db/db mice displayed similar proportions of fat and lean mass (Table 1), revealing that Δ/Δ and db/db mice are similarly obese. Core body temperature in Δ/Δ and db/db animals was also similarly reduced compared with control animals (Table 1). Thus, LepRbΔ65 fails to alter major parameters of energy homeostasis compared with entirely LepRb-deficient db/db mice, suggesting that Jak2-autonomous LepRb signals are not sufficient to modulate energy balance in mice.

**Linear growth and reproductive function in Δ/Δ mice.** In addition to modulating metabolic energy expenditure, leptin action permits the use of resources on energy-intensive neuroendocrine processes, such as growth and reproduction. Whereas db/db and ob/ob animals that are devoid of leptin action thus display decreased linear growth and infertility, animals lacking Tyr665 or Tyr1138 of LepRb display normal or enhanced linear growth and preserved reproductive function, suggesting a role for other LepRb signals in mediating these leptin actions (15,19,21). Similar to db/db mice, Δ/Δ males displayed decreased snout-anus length and femur length relative to control animals (Table 1), however, suggesting the inabil-
Insight into Jak2-autonomous LepRb signals to mediate linear growth in the absence of other LepR signals.

To determine the potential role for Jak2-autonomous LepRb signals in the regulation of reproductive function, we monitored estrous cycling from 4 to 8 weeks of age in female mice, along with their ability to deliver pups after housing with wild-type males. In addition to examining ΔΔ, db/db, and wild-type females in these assays, we included mice homozygous for Leprtm1mgmj (a.k.a., Leprtm1sgm) or s/s mice; mutant for Tyr1138 with that encoding the COOH-terminally truncated LepRb as a positive control for our ability to detect antibodies. The figures shown are typical of multiple independent experiments.

**FIG. 1.** Generation of mice expressing LepRbα55. A: HEK293 cells were transfected with plasmids encoding the indicated LepR isoforms, made quiescent overnight, incubated in the absence (−) or presence (+) of leptin (625 ng/ml) for 15 min before lysis, and immunoprecipitated with αJAK2 or αY1007/8 antibodies. B: Diagram of gene-targeting strategy to replace wild-type exon 18b with that encoding the COOH-terminally truncated LepRbα55. C: Southern blotting of control (wild-type) and correctly targeted (D/+ values, C1, C2) Leprα55 ES lines, using a Lepr-specific probe. M indicates marker lane. D: Image of gel electrophoresis of Lepr-specific RT-PCR products from hypothalamic mRNA of five wild-type and five ΔΔ animals.

**ROLE OF Jak2 IN LEPTIN ACTION**

A number of aspects of leptin action in the hypothalamus are beginning to be unraveled, including the role of leptin in regulating arcuate nucleus (ARC) LeprRb/proopiomelanocortin (POMC)-expressing neurons and their opposing LeprRb/agouti-related protein/neuropeptide Y (AgRP/NPY)-expressing neurons (2,3,31,32). Leptin promotes anorectic POMC expression, while inhibiting the expression of orexigenic AgRP and NPY and attenuating the activity of AgRP/NPY neurons. Although LeprRb Tyr1138→STAT3 signaling is required to promote POMC mRNA expression, signals independent of Tyr985 and Tyr1138 contribute to the suppression of AgRP and NPY mRNA expression, and to the inhibition of AgRP neuron activity (15,21,29). To determine the potential role for Jak2-autonomous LepRb signals in the regulation of these ARC neurons, we examined the mRNA expression of POMC, NPY, and AgRP in the hypothalamus and examined c-fos immunoreactivity (c-fos-IR) as a surrogate for activity in AgRP neurons (29) of male ΔΔ, db/db, and wild-type mice (Fig. 3). As expected based on the known role for Tyr1138 in regulating POMC, ΔΔ and db/db mice exhibited significantly diminished POMC mRNA expression compared with wild-type controls (Fig. 3A); POMC levels in ΔΔ mice were lower even than those in db/db mice. We found similarly elevated NPY and AgRP mRNA expression in ΔΔ and db/db mice compared with wild-type mice (Fig. 3B and C).

To analyze c-fos-IR in AgRP neurons, we generated +/+ values, ΔΔ, and db/db animals heterozygous for AgrpLacZ, in which β-galactosidase (β-gal) is expressed from the Agrp locus, facilitating the detection of AgRP-expressing neurons by β-gal immunofluorescence (29). Although fed wild-type animals displayed c-fos-IR in few AgRP neurons, a similarly large percentage of AgRP neurons in ΔΔ and db/db animals contained c-fos-IR, suggesting their activity (Fig. 3D and E). Thus, Jak2-autonomous LepRb signals are not sufficient to mediate either the normal regulation of ARC neuropeptide gene expression or the suppression of c-fos-IR/Activity in AgRP neurons.

**REGULATION OF T-cell function by LepRb signals.** Leptin signals the status of energy stores to the immune system, as well as to the brain systems that control energy balance and neuroendocrine function. Leptin deficiency results in thymic hypoplasia, reduced T-cell function, and consequent immune suppression (6,33). Although we previously
examined thymocyte numbers in young s/s mice deficient for LepRb Tyr1138 signaling, suggesting improved immune function in s/s compared with db/db mice (23), many other parameters of immune function in these and other models of altered LepRb signaling remain poorly understood. To better understand the signaling mechanisms by which LepRb modulates the immune system, we thus determined the numbers of total and CD4/H11001 splenocytes, as well as the ex vivo proliferative capacity of splenic CD4/H11001 cells from a panel of mouse models of altered LepRb signaling. In addition to examining wild-type, ob/ob, ΔΔ, and s/s animals, we also studied mice homozygous for Leprtm2mgmj (a.k.a., Lepr^tns or l/l) mutant for LepRb Tyr985 (15) (Fig. 4). Note that ob/ob animals were used as the control for the absence of leptin action in this study, as sufficient numbers of age-matched db/db animals were not available at the time of assay. In addition to revealing the expected decrease in total and CD4/H11001 splenocytes and their proliferation in ob/ob animals relative to wild-type controls, we found decreases in these parameters in ΔΔ animals, and normal parameters of immune function in s/s animals. Interestingly, although l/l animals exhibit increased sensitivity to the anorexic action of leptin (15), these parameters of immune function actually trended down (albeit not significantly) in l/l animals compared with wild type.

### TABLE 1
Phenotypic data for mice expressing mutant LepRb

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genotype</th>
<th>Wild type</th>
<th>db/db</th>
<th>ΔΔ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fat content (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6.0 ± 0.7 (10)</td>
<td>47.0 ± 1.1* (8)</td>
<td>47.8 ± 0.9* (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6.4 ± 0.5 (8)</td>
<td>51.0 ± 0.9* (8)</td>
<td>54.1 ± 0.7* (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lean content (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>80.0 ± 0.4 (10)</td>
<td>43.7 ± 1.1* (8)</td>
<td>42.6 ± 0.8* (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>76.0 ± 3.0 (8)</td>
<td>39.5 ± 0.7* (8)</td>
<td>37.5 ± 0.6* (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body temperature (°C)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>34.6 ± 0.2 (10)</td>
<td>33.0 ± 0.2* (9)</td>
<td>33.4 ± 0.2* (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>34.4 ± 0.3 (8)</td>
<td>33.8 ± 0.2 (9)</td>
<td>33.5 ± 0.3 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snout-anus length (mm)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>88.5 ± 0.8 (9)</td>
<td>82.6 ± 2.7* (8)</td>
<td>83.0 ± 1.0* (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Femur length (mm)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>13.9 ± 0.1 (9)</td>
<td>11.8 ± 0.1* (8)</td>
<td>12.0 ± 0.1* (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Femur mass (mg)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>42.4 ± 0.6 (9)</td>
<td>34.8 ± 0.8* (8)</td>
<td>35.3 ± 0.9* (9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fat and lean content were determined at 10 weeks and are expressed as a percentage of body weight. Body temperature was determined at 11 weeks. Snout-anus length, femur length, and femur weight were determined at 9 weeks. Data are means ± SE; *P < 0.05 compared with wild type by Student unpaired, two-tailed t test. Sample size noted in parentheses.

**FIG. 2.** Similar hyperphagia and obesity in ΔΔ and db/db mice. Wild-type (■), db/db (○), and ΔΔ (▲) mice of the indicated age (n = 8–10 per genotype) were weaned at 4 weeks and body weight (A and B) and food intake (C and D) were monitored weekly from 4 to 8 weeks of age. Food intake represents cumulative food intake over the time course. Data are plotted as means ± SEM. *P < 0.05 compared with wild type (WT) by one-way ANOVA and Tukey post-test.

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For female mice, there was no difference in serum insulin levels between db/db and Δ/Δ mice at any age. In male mice, insulin was also similar between db/db and Δ/Δ mice at 4 weeks of age, but older Δ/Δ males displayed increased circulating insulin levels compared with age-matched db/db males. To discriminate potential alterations in insulin clearance, we also examined serum C-peptide levels, which mirrored insulin concentrations (supplementary Fig. 1, available in an online appendix at http://diabetes.diabetesjournals.org/cgi/content/full/db09-1556/DC1). These data suggest that the relative euglycemia of Δ/Δ compared with db/db animals at 4 weeks of age is not due to differences in insulin secretion (because insulin and C-peptide levels are similar between genotypes, but Δ/Δ animals have decreased blood glucose at this age), but must be secondary to modest improvements in hepatic glucose output and/or insulin sensitivity. This difference is transient, however, as the increased insulin levels in older male Δ/Δ animals fail to decrease blood glucose levels relative to those observed in db/db animals. No difference in β-cell mass was detected between 12-week-old Δ/Δ and db/db mice (supplementary Fig. 2).

In addition, we performed glucose and insulin tolerance tests in the Δ/Δ and db/db animals (supplementary Fig. 3). Although 6-week-old female Δ/Δ animals displayed a diminished hyperglycemic response to the glucose tolerance test relative to db/db controls, no other differences between Δ/Δ and db/db mice were observed. This suggests that the difference in glucose homeostasis between Δ/Δ and db/db animals is small and not sufficient to reveal differences in the face of a substantial glucose load and/or the increased insulin resistance of advancing age.

### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genotype</th>
<th>Wild type</th>
<th>db/db</th>
<th>Δ/Δ</th>
<th>s/s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estrus</td>
<td>8/9</td>
<td>0/9</td>
<td>0/8</td>
<td>3/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Litters</td>
<td>9/9</td>
<td>0/7</td>
<td>0/8</td>
<td>5/8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Individually housed females were examined daily from 4 to 8 weeks of age. Cytologic examination of vaginal lavage was used to monitor estrus. Females were paired with one wild-type male and monitored daily from 4 to 8 weeks for the production of offspring.

significantly) compared with wild-type animals. Thus, these data suggest that although Tyr985 and Tyr1138 are not required for the promotion of splenic T-cell function by leptin, Jak2-autonomous LepRb signals are not sufficient to mediate these aspects of leptin action.

**Glucose homeostasis in Δ/Δ mice.** Given the role for leptin in modulating long-term glucose homeostasis (2,20,34), we examined glycemic control in Δ/Δ mice. Interestingly, we found that at 4 weeks of age, the blood glucose levels in male and female Δ/Δ mice were normal, whereas db/db mice were already significantly diabetic (Fig. 5A and B). At later time points, however, Δ/Δ animals exhibited elevated blood glucose levels similar to those of db/db mice. Similarly, male Δ/Δ mice displayed significantly lower fasting glucose levels than db/db mice at 6 weeks of age (Fig. 5C), and fasted females, although not significantly different from db/db animals, also tended to have decreased blood glucose at this early age. Fasted blood glucose in Δ/Δ animals of both sexes was elevated and not significantly different from db/db levels at older ages, however (Fig. 5D). These data suggest that Jak2-autonomous LepRb signals in Δ/Δ mice suffice to delay the onset of diabetes compared with db/db mice, but cannot reverse the later progression to diabetes.

![Figure 3](https://example.com/figure3.png)

**Fig. 3.** ARC neuropeptide expression and AgRP neuron c-fos-IR in wild-type (WT), db/db, and Δ/Δ mice. A–C: mRNA was prepared from the hypothalami of 10- to 11-week-old male mice. Quantitative PCR was used to determine (A) Pome, (B) Npy, and (C) Agrp mRNA levels (n = 14–19 per genotype). D: c-fos-IR in AgRP neurons of ad libitum–fed wild-type, db/db, and Δ/Δ animals. All mouse groups were bred onto a background expressing LacZ under the AgRP promoter, enabling the identification of AgRP neurons by staining for β-gal. Representative images showing immunofluorescent detection of c-fos (top), β-gal (middle), and merged c-fos/β-gal (bottom). E: Quantification of double-labeled c-fos/AgRP-IR neurons. Double-labeled AgRP neurons are plotted as percentage of total AgRP neurons ± SEM. A–C and E: *P < 0.05 compared with wild type; †P < 0.05 compared with db/db by one-way ANOVA with Tukey post-test. (A high-quality digital representation of this figure is available in the online issue.)
DISCUSSION

To determine the potential roles for Jak2-autonomous LepRb signals in leptin action in vivo, we generated a mouse model in which LepRb is replaced by a truncation mutant (LepRb65–722) that contains within its intracellular domain only the sequences required to associate with and activate Jak2. We found that the hyperphagia, obesity, linear growth, ARC physiology, and immune function of these ΔΔ mice closely resembled that of entirely LepRb-deficient db/db mice. ΔΔ and db/db animals did demonstrate some modest differences in glucose homeostasis; however, both male and female ΔΔ mice exhibited a delayed progression to frank hyperglycemia compared with db/db mice. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that Jak2-autonomous LepRb signals may contribute modestly to the modulation of glucose homeostasis by leptin, but emphasize the necessity of signals emanating from the COOH-terminus of LepRb (beyond the Jak2-associating Box1 and Box2 motifs) for most leptin action.

The finding that 4-week-old ΔΔ mice display similar insulin and C-peptide levels as db/db animals, but exhibit improved blood glucose levels, suggests improved glucose disposal or decreased glucose production in the ΔΔ mice independent of insulin production. This is consistent with data suggesting that central nervous system leptin action suppresses hepatic glucose production, and with our previous finding that some portion of this is mediated independently of Tyr1138→STAT3 signaling (2,20,34). The ΔΔ mice progress rapidly (by 6 weeks of age) to dramatic hyperglycemia and parameters of glucose homeostasis indistinguishable from db/db animals, however. Indeed, even at 5 weeks of age, the response to a glucose bolus is comparably poor in male ΔΔ and db/db animals and barely improved in female ΔΔ compared with db/db animals. Furthermore, the increased insulin production of ΔΔ relative to db/db males at 6 weeks of age and beyond fails to ameliorate their hyperglycemia. Thus, the improvement in glucose homeostasis mediated by Jak2-autonomous LepRb signals in ΔΔ mice is very modest, as it is easily overwhelmed by a large glucose load and/or the increasing insulin resistance and diabetes of advancing age. No difference in β-cell mass was detected between ΔΔ and db/db males. The mechanism(s) mediating the increased insulin production of ΔΔ relative to db/db males is unclear, but could represent an improvement in β-cell function due to the later time at which ΔΔ animals become diabetic or to some residual leptin action in the ΔΔ β-cell (35).

Although the overall similarity of ARC gene expression and physiology between ΔΔ and db/db mice indicates little role for Jak2-autonomous LepRb signals in ARC leptin action, the finding of decreased (worsened) Pomc mRNA expression in ΔΔ compared with db/db mice was surprising. One possible explanation for this observation is that some residual signal mediated by LepRb65–722 modestly attenuates Pomc expression and that this attenuating signal is overwhelmed under normal circumstances by the LepRb signals that enhance Pomc expression. Unfortunately, the low Pomc content of db/db and ΔΔ animals and low activity of these neurons at baseline rendered the examination of POMC c-fos uninformative.

Although the molecular mechanisms underlying Jak2-autonomous LepRb action remain unclear, several pathways could contribute. In cultured cells, the activation of Jak2 by LepRb65–722 and similar receptor mutants mediates some activation of the extracellular signal–related kinase pathway (13,36). Indeed, chemical inhibitor studies have suggested a role for extracellular signal–related kinase signaling in the regulation of autonomic nervous system function by leptin, and the autonomic nervous system underlies a major component of the leptin effect on glucose homeostasis (37). Phosphatidylinositol 3-kinase (PI 3-kinase) also plays a role in the regulation of glucose homeostasis by leptin (38–41). As we have been unable to observe the regulation of PI 3-kinase by leptin in cultured cells and the analysis of this pathway in the hypothalamus of obese, hyperleptinemic mice remains problematic, the molecular mechanism by which LepRb engages this pathway remains unclear. Although difficult to test directly, it is thus possible that Jak2-autonomous LepRb signals might modulate this pathway in vivo. We have previously demonstrated that the major regulation of hypothalamic mam-
malian target of rapamycin (mTOR), including in response to nutritional alteration, occurs indirectly, via neuronal activation (42). We examined this pathway (along with the phosphorylation of STAT3) in the hypothalamus of animals (supplementary Fig. 4), revealing the expected absence of STAT3 signaling and increased mTOR activity (secondary to the activation of orexigenic neurons) in the mediobasal hypothalamus of db/db and ΔΔ animals. Thus, the regulation of mTOR is similar in these mouse models.

A potential intermediate linking Jak2 activation to PI 3-kinase activation is SH2B1, a SH2 domain–containing protein that binds phosphorylated Tyr813 on Jak2 (43). Cell culture studies show that SH2B1 binds directly to Jak2, augments its kinase activity, and couples leptin stimulation to insulin receptor substrate activation, a well-known activator of PI 3-kinase (44). Indeed, SH2B1-null mice display hyperphagia, obesity, and diabetes (45). SH2B1 could also mediate other, unknown Jak2-autonomous LepRb signals.

Importantly, the phenotype of mice expressing LepRBΔ65 (mutated for the three tyrosine phosphorylation sites, but with an otherwise intact intracellular domain) replaces LepRb (22). Unlike ΔΔ animals, these LeprY123F mice display improved energy homeostasis and more dramatic improvements in glucose homeostasis (both of which are sustained into adulthood), compared with db/db animals. Unfortunately, the C57 genetic background strain used to study the LeprY123F mice not only differs compared with the C57BL/6J background that we used to study our ΔΔ and db/db animals, but also diverges from that of the db/db animals used as comparators for the LeprY123F mice (22). Similarly, it is also possible that minor differences between the incipient C57BL/6J backgrounds of db/db and ΔΔ mice could contribute to the modest distinctions observed between these two models. Aside from the background strain, the intriguing possibility arises that the intracellular domain of LepRb may mediate heretofore unsuspected signals independently from tyrosine phosphorylation. As it is, future studies will be needed to carefully compare the phenotype of LeprY123F, ΔΔ, and db/db animals within the same facility and on the same genetic background; should these differences remain, further work will be necessary to confirm the importance and determine the identity of the underlying signaling.

FIG. 5. Delayed onset of hyperglycemia in ΔΔ compared with db/db mice. A–D: Blood glucose was determined for ad libitum–fed (A and B) or fasted (5 h) (C and D) animals of the indicated genotype (wild type [WT], db/db, ΔΔ; and ΔΔ, *ΔΔ) and sex at the indicated ages (n = 8–12 per genotype). E and F: Serum was collected from mice of the indicated genotype and sex at the indicated ages (n = 8–10 per genotype), and insulin content was determined by ELISA. All panels: Data are plotted as means ± SEM; *P < 0.05, db/db compared with ΔΔ at the indicated time points by one-way ANOVA and Tukey post-test.
In summary, our findings reveal the insufficiency of Jak2-autonomous LepRb signals for the bulk of leptin action. These finding do not rule out the possibility that Jak2-autonomous signals may be required to support the action of LepRb phosphorylation, however. Indeed, our present findings suggest a modest role for Jak2-autonomous LepRb signals in the regulation of glucose homeostasis by leptin. Understanding collaborative roles for Jak2-autonomous signals in leptin action and deciphering the mechanisms underlying these signals and potential tyrosine phosphorylation–independent signals mediated by the COOH-terminus of LepRb will represent important directions for future research.

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