



## Thiol/Disulfide Balance in Induced Phenylketonuria Model

### İndüklenmiş Fenilketonüri Modelinde Tiyol/Disülfid Dengesi

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#### ABSTRACT

**O**bjective The rare metabolic disorder phenylketonuria (PKU) is caused by a deficiency in the phenylalanine hydroxylase enzyme. Deficiency of this enzyme causes phenylalanine accumulation in the brain and irreversible neurological damage by increasing the blood phenylalanine level. The purpose of this study was to determine how the phenylketonuria model affected the balance of thiols and disulfides in the brain.

**Method:** Brain total thiol and native thiol levels were measured by the modified elman method in rat pups (n:7) in which PKU model was generated and control group (n:7). The disulfide level was calculated according to the total thiol and native thiol levels.

**Results:** The brain total thiol level of the PKU group was statistically decreased compared to the control group (\*p=0.0369). Brain native thiol level of the PKU group was statistically decreased compared to the control group (\*\*\*p<0.001). The brain disulfide level of the PKU group did not differ statistically compared to the control group (p=0.1107).

**Conclusion:** It was concluded that oxidative stress in PKU may affect thiol/disulfide levels. The study, which was reported for the first time in the literature, showed a change in the thiol/disulfide balance in the PKU model.

#### Key Words

Phenylketonuria model, thiol/disulfide balance, oxidative stress, brain.

#### ÖZ

**A**maç: Nadir görülen bir metabolik bozukluk olan fenilketonüri (PKU), fenilalanin hidroksilaz enzimindeki bir eksiklikten kaynaklanır. Bu enzimin eksikliği beyinde fenilalanin birikimine ve kan fenilalanin düzeyini yükselterek geri dönüşü olmayan nörolojik hasara neden olur. Bu çalışmanın amacı fenilketonüri modelinin beyindeki tiyol ve disülfid dengesini nasıl etkilediğini belirlemektir.

**Yöntem:** PKU modeli oluşturulmuş sıçan yavrularında (n:7) ve kontrol grubunda beyin total tiyol ve serbest tiyol seviyesi modifiye elman yöntemi ile ölçüldü. Total tiyol ve native tiyol seviyelerine göre disülfid seviyesi hesaplandı.

**Bulgular:** PKU grubun beyin total tiyol seviyesi kontrol grubuna göre istatistiksel olarak azdır (\*p=0.0369). PKU grubun beyin serbest tiyol seviyesi kontrol grubuna göre istatistiksel olarak azdır (\*\*\*p<0.001). PKU grubun beyin disülfid seviyesi kontrol grubuna göre istatistiksel olarak değişiklik göstermemiştir (p=0.1107).

**Sonuç:** PKU'daki oksidatif stresin tiyol/disülfid seviyelerini etkileyebileceği sonucuna varıldı. Literatürde ilk kez bildirilen çalışma, PKU modelinde tiyol/disülfid dengesinde değişiklik olduğunu gösterdi.

#### Anahtar Kelimeler

Fenilketonüri modeli, tiyol/disülfid dengesi, oksidatif stres, beyin.

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## INTRODUCTION

Phenylketonuria (PKU) is a rare genetic disease caused by a deficiency of the enzyme phenylalanine hydroxylase (PAH), which metabolizes the amino acid phenylalanine (Phe). Phenylalanine tyrosine conversion cannot occur due to the deficiency of the phenylalanine hydroxylase enzyme, and the phenylalanine level increases in the plasma, while the tyrosine level decrease [1]. Phenylalanine accumulates in the blood and other tissues, crosses the blood-brain barrier and creates a toxic effect on the brain. Accumulated phenylalanine causes irreversible progressive brain damage, mental retardation, and neuroinflammation [2].

In order to assess the oxidant/antioxidant balance, various markers are used. The thiol/disulfide balance created by Erel et al. is one of the most modern of these [3]. Thiol: It balances oxidative stress by accelerating inactivation or reducing the production of reactive oxygen species. Thiol groups in the environment are oxidized by reactive oxygen species and transform into reversible disulfide bonds. The oxidant molecules in the disulfide environment oxidize them, converting them into reversible bond structures. The thiol/disulfide balance can be preserved by reducing the disulfide bond structures created back to thiol groups. In antioxidant defense, detoxification, apoptosis, regulation of enzyme activities, mechanisms of transcription, and cellular signal transduction, thiol/disulfide balance plays crucial roles [4, 5]. Serum native thiol, total thiol and disulfide levels are measured with the method developed by Erel et al. With the same method, disulfide/thiol, disulfide/total thiol and native thiol/total thiol ratios and indices are calculated. Native thiol and total thiol values are predicted to fall under oxidative stress, but disulfide/thiol, disulfide/total thiol, and native thiol/total thiol indices are predicted to rise [3]. Disruption of this balance can lead to various diseases [6, 7]. When oxidative stress is reduced, these disulfide bonds are reduced to thiol groups, which can be a proponent of oxidative stress [8].

There has been no prior study on the thiol/disulfide balance reported, but the relationship of PKU with many original oxidative stress parameters has been evaluated in the literature [9-14]. We examined how it affects the thiol/disulfide balance in PKU in our study.

## MATERIALS and METHODS

### Animals

The experiments used 14 2-day-old Sprague-Dawley rat pups weighing an average of 9 grams (Kobay Dhl A.Ş. Local Ethics Committee, Protocol Number: 560). Pregnant rats were placed in cages prior to the experiment, and their offspring were housed in cages for 2 days from birth for 12 hours at night and 12 hours during the day in a circadian rhythm at 24-26 °C room temperature and 50-60% humidity. While the offspring were fed with the breast milk, the mother was subjected to standard feeding conditions. During the experimental injection, the pups were not separated from their mothers and continued to be breastfed.

### Experimental design: PKU model

To establish a PKU model [15-17], daily injection of phenylalanine (Phe) (5.2 mmol/g body weight) was used, while the phenylalanine hydroxylase inhibitor, p-chlorophenylalanine (p-Cl-Phe) (0.9 mmol /g body weight) was administered every other day (PKU group). Saline solution (saline) was administered to the control group. All injections were started on the 2<sup>nd</sup> postpartum day and completed on the 10<sup>th</sup> postpartum day. Sacrificiation was performed on the 10<sup>th</sup> postpartum day and brain tissues were taken.

### Solution preparation;

\*p-Cl-Phenylalanine (Sigma, c8655) and Phe (Sigma, P1150000) stock solutions were prepared in 0.9% pH 7.2 saline, with concentrations of 26 µmol/ml and 152 µmol/ml, respectively [18, 19].

### Brain tissue homogenization

Each brain size was measured by weight. Tissues were homogenized in 10% (w/v) 50 mM Tris pH 7.4 buffer containing 2 mM EDTA, 0.5% Triton X-100, ultimately containing protease inhibitor cocktail, for 3 x 10 seconds by OMNI Tissue Master 125 (F12520377). All procedures were performed on ice to prevent protein degradation. All solutions used were also kept on ice. Then, homogenates were centrifuged for 10 minutes at 5000 and 10000g at +4°C. After centrifugation, the supernatant was removed and stored at -80°C until used in protein analysis.

Before measurement of total and native thiol, the brain protein level of all samples was determined using the Protein Assay Kit (Thermo Fisher Coomassie (Bradford) catalog no: 23200). (Fig 2D).

**Total and native thiol measurement principle:** For total thiol measurement, 10 µl of R1 (10 µl of R1' is used for native thiol measurement) and 10 µl of sample were mixed. Afterwards, R2 (110 µl) and R3 (10 µl) were added and the first absorbance (A1) was measured spectrophotometrically at 415 nm wavelength. The second absorbance (A2) was performed at the same wavelength at the 10th minute when the reaction plateaued. The measurement was completed by obtaining the A2-A1 absorbance difference [3]. The molar extinction coefficient of 14.100 mol/L-1 cm-1 of 5-thio-2-nitrobenzoic acid (TNB) was used to calculate total and native thiol levels. The disulfide level was calculated from the formula “(total disulfide-native disulfide)/2”. All results were reported as micromoles per liter (µmol/L) [20].

#### Statistical analysis

It was examined whether the data in the experimental groups showed normal distribution with the Kolmogorov Smirnov test. If it had a normal distribution, comparisons between groups were made with One-Way Anova, one of the parametric tests. If the p value was below 0.05, pairwise comparisons were made with the Tukey HSD test. Independent T-test was used for two group comparisons. Statistical analyzes were performed in Graphpad 9.0 program.

## RESULTS and DISCUSSION

As the total thiol level of the PKU group was  $222.6 \pm 30.76$  µmol/L, the total thiol level of the control group was  $314.1 \pm 40.27$  µmol/L. The total thiol level of the PKU group was statistically decreased compared to the control group (\*p=0.0369) (Fig. 2A).

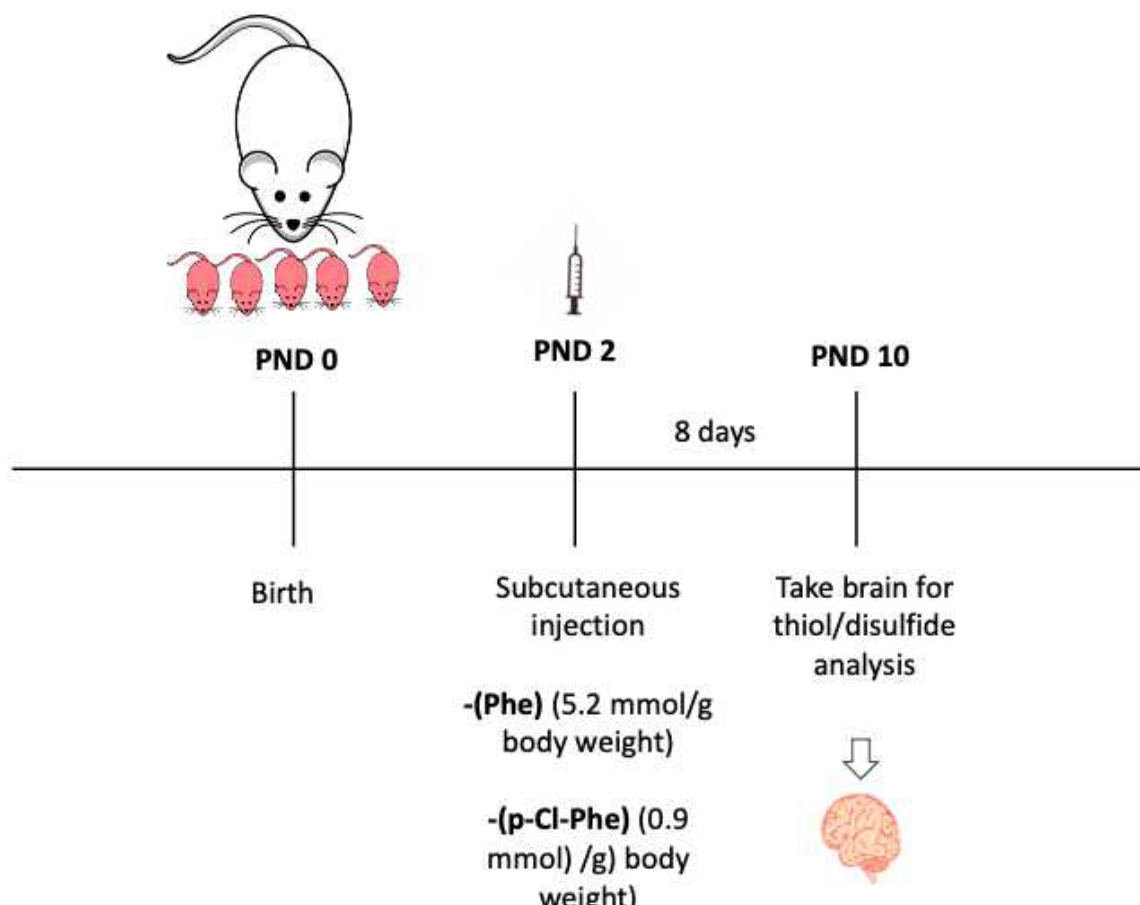
The native thiol level of the PKU group was  $150.5 \pm 11.42$  µmol/L, while the native thiol level of the control group was  $294.3.1 \pm 22.06$  µmol/L. The native thiol level of the PKU group was statistically decreased compared to the control group (\*\*\*\*p<0.001) (Fig. 2B).

As disulfite levels are compared, the disulfide level of the control group is  $36.04 \pm 5.92$  µmol/L, while the disulfide level of the PKU group is  $9.89 \pm 1.30$  µmol/L. The disulfide level of the PKU group was statistically increased compared to the control group (ns; p=0.1107) (Fig. 2C).

The lack of PAH results in PKU, a genetic disorder. Due to the fact that PAH is necessary for the conversion of Phe to Tyr, a PAH deficiency leads to an accumulation of Phe and the breakdown products of its alternative metabolic pathway. Patients with classic PKU without dietary restrictions risk developing intellectual disability if untreated. Unfortunately, although recent research has demonstrated that oxidative stress plays a role in PKU the exact biochemical mechanisms underlying brain dysfunction remain unknown [21-23]. Because brain tissue lacks a robust antioxidant defense system, it is

**Table 1.** Reagents used

R1 reagent	R1' reagent	R2 reagent	R3 reagent
NaBH <sub>4</sub> (10 mM) (Carlo Erba, CE.478953)	NaCl (10 mM) (Sigma, S9888)	Formaldehyde (6.715mM) (Carlo Erba, CE.415666)	DTNB (10 mM) (AFG, AFG.179457)
		EDTA ( 10mM) (Carlo Erba, CE.405494)	
In 1000 ml 1/1 water-methanol	In 1000 ml 1/1 water-methanol	In 1000 ml Tris buffer (100 mM, pH 8.2)	In 1000 ml of methanol



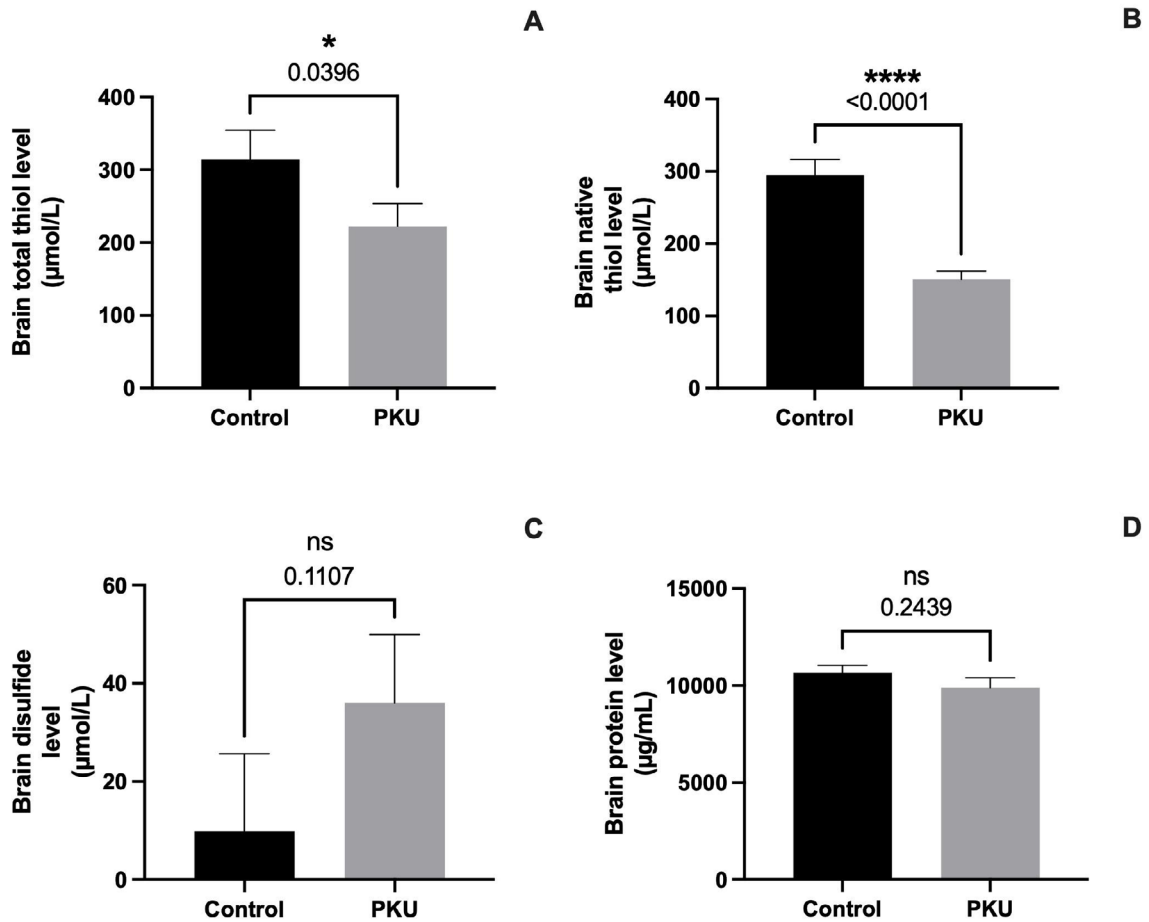
**Figure 1.** Experimental design.

well known that it is extremely susceptible to oxidative damage. Phenyl-ketone metabolites have previously been thought to be toxic to a developing brain. [24]. Oxidative stress may also increase their toxicity, but there is no evidence to suggest an association between mental retardation and oxidative stress. Oxidative stress is known to be associated with the pathogenesis of various PKU disease errors [25]

Even patients with early diagnoses who were receiving treatment had elevated serum levels of 8-hydroxy-2-deoxyguanosine, a marker of DNA oxidation, which was negatively correlated with these patients' antioxidant status. [26]. Additionally, PKU patients exhibited increased DNA damage in peripheral blood leukocytes, particularly in patients who were mismatched, indicating a connection between Phe levels and DNA damage in peripheral blood [27, 28]. Additionally, it has been no-

ted in various studies that high Phe concentrations can damage proteins and lipids in plasma and erythrocytes, as shown by an increase in malondialdehyde concentration, carbonyl formation, and sulfhydryl oxidation [26, 27, 29-32].

It was possible to examine whether the oxidative damage to macromolecules seen in patients' peripheral fluids could affect the brain using animal models of PKU. Acute and chronic administration of Phe plus a PAH inhibitor, -methyl-L-phenylalanine (aMePhe), in the brain of rats after 6 days of age stimulated lipid peroxidation, according to research by Kienzle Hagen et al. in an in vitro model [19]. Another in vitro study found that Phe and its metabolites phenylpyruvate, phenylactate, and phenylacetate also induced lipid peroxidation in the cerebral cortex, leading to oxidative damage to proteins and lipids in the cerebral cortex and hippocampus of yo-



**Figure 2.** Total thiol, native thiol, disulfide and protein levels in the brains of control and induced-PKU rats: A) Total Thiol, B) Native thiol C) Disulfide D) Protein levels. Results showed that total thiol (\* $p=0.0396$ ) and native thiol (\*\*\*\* $p<0.0001$ ) levels were decreased in PKU compared to control rats. The disulfide level and protein level were not statistically different in the PKU group compared to the control group.

ung rats. Alpha-tocopherol and melatonin are effective at preventing lipid peroxidation, so the authors inferred that Phe causes the production of peroxy and hydroxyl radicals [33]. One of our study, which is in the printing phase, is; enzymes associated with oxidative stress by gender Superoxide Dismutase (SOD), Glutathione Peroxidase (GPx), Glutathione reductase (GR); cytokines IL-1  $\beta$ , IL-6, TNF- $\alpha$ ; We analyzed monoamine oxidases [34] and Acetylcholinesterase (AChE) activity. SOD and GR activities were decreased in PKU rats compared to controls.

The difference in thiol/disulfide parameters from the control group was assessed in this study. In line with the results we obtained, the total thiol and native thiol levels of the PKU group decreased, while the disul-

fide level, which is an oxidative stress marker, was not changed compared to the control group. There aren't many studies in the literature that compare oxidative stress in metabolic diseases to thiol/disulfide balance. The impact of antioxidant therapy on thiol/disulfide parameters in patients with L-2-hydroxyglutaric aciduria was examined in the study reported by Cansever et al. There was no significant difference in the thiol/disulfide parameters between the 14 participants who received antioxidant treatment and the control group [35]. The authors suggested that antioxidant therapy prevents oxidative damage. According to Zubarioglu et al. investigated the thiol/disulfide balance in metabolically controlled MSUD patients and showed no significant difference compared to the control group [36]. In the study by Cam et al, Thiol-Disulfide Ratio was analyzed in in-

herited metabolic disease. In inherited metabolic disease, it was shown that oxidative stress status increases during metabolic attacks [37]. In the study of McGuire et al., a relationship was found between the clinical status of patients with metabolic disorders and oxidative stress parameters [38]. In our study, it was concluded that oxidative stress in PKU affects the changes in thiol/disulfide levels. In the study, which was reported for the first time in the literature, it was shown that the thiol/disulfide balance may affect the pathophysiology of PKU.

## CONCLUSION

In phenylketonuria, due to the deficiency of the phenylalanine hydroxylase enzyme, phenylalanine tyrosine conversion cannot occur and the level of phenylalanine increases in the plasma. Phenylalanine accumulates in the blood and other tissues and crosses the blood-brain barrier, creating a toxic effect on the brain. Accumulated phenylalanine causes irreversible progressive brain damage, mental retardation and neuroinflammation, while oxidative stress parameters increase. In this study, we reported that the thiol/disulfide balance was changed as an oxidative stress biomarker in PKU. The decreased thiol level in PKU may be due to the toxic effect of Phe.

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