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Research Article

Comparative and Diagnostic Utility of IGF-1 Generation and GH Stimulation Tests in Pediatric Growth Disorders

Ashraf Soliman[1]*, Fawzia Alyafei[1], Shayma Ahmed[1], Noora AlHumaidi[1], Noor Hamed[1], Ahmed Elawwa[1,2], Shaymaa Elsayed[2], Nada Alaaraj[1] and Ahmed Khalil[3]

[1]Department of Pediatric, Hamad General Hospital, Doha, Qatar

[2]Pediatric Endocrinology and Diabetology Unit, Faculty of Medicine, Alexandria, Egypt

[3]Department of Pharmacy, Hamad General Hospital, Doha, Qatar

***Corresponding Author:** Ashraf Soliman, Professor of Pediatrics and Endocrinology, Hamad Medical Centre, Doha, Qatar.

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Abstract

Introduction: Pediatric growth disorders such as Growth Hormone Deficiency (GHD), Idiopathic Short Stature (ISS), Turner Syndrome, and systemic conditions like chronic kidney disease (CKD) are evaluated using the GH-IGF-1 axis. The diagnostic utility of IGF-1 Generation and GH Stimulation Tests remains crucial yet variable across conditions. This review addresses the sensitivity and specificity of these diagnostic methods, their integration with biomarkers, and their predictive value.

Objectives: To assess the diagnostic performance of IGF-1 Generation and GH Stimulation Tests, analyze the role of biomarkers (e.g. IGFBP-3, ALS, IGF-II), and evaluate their predictive capabilities for long-term growth outcomes.

Methods: A systematic review of 68 studies involving 3,200 pediatric patients was conducted. These studies evaluated IGF-1 dynamics, GH stimulation responses, and biomarker utility across various conditions, including GHD, ISS, Turner Syndrome, SGA, and Thalassemia Major. Statistical metrics such as sensitivity, specificity, and predictive accuracy were synthesized to highlight diagnostic robustness. Methodological rigor was ensured through PRISMA guidelines.

Results: GH Stimulation Tests demonstrated high sensitivity (90-100%) for GHD, while IGF-1 Generation Tests showed moderate sensitivity for ISS (30-50%) and Turner Syndrome (40-60%). Biomarkers like IGFBP-3 enhanced diagnostic specificity, particularly in conditions with receptor insensitivity. Early IGF-1 responses correlated strongly with long-term growth outcomes, making them a reliable predictor of GH therapy success. Variability in IGF-1 responses was observed due to puberty, nutritional status, and systemic factors.

Discussion: The integration of IGF-1 Generation Tests with GH Stimulation Tests and biomarkers addresses diagnostic gaps, especially in systemic and receptor-related growth impairments. Studies by Shen., *et al*., Ranke., *et al*., and Kim., *et al*. consistently highlight the predictive value of IGF-1 responses during therapy. However, international variability in diagnostic efficacy underscores the need for tailored protocols. Advancements in precision diagnostics, including biomarker polymorphisms, promise to refine sensitivity and specificity further.

Conclusion: The IGF-1 Generation and GH Stimulation Tests are complementary tools in diagnosing pediatric growth disorders. Biomarker integration enhances diagnostic precision, while early IGF-1 responses reliably predict growth outcomes. Tailored diagnostic frameworks informed by individual and population-specific factors are recommended to optimize clinical outcomes and advance endocrine research.

Keywords: *Growth Hormone Deficiency; IGF-1 Generation Test; Biomarkers; Pediatric Growth Disorders; Diagnostic Sensitivity*

Introduction

The GH-IGF-1 axis plays a crucial role in human growth, influencing distinct stages such as infantile, childhood, and pubertal growth. These stages are characterized by varying hormonal interactions, with IGF-1 levels peaking during puberty under the stimulation of growth hormone (GH). This link underscores the significance of the GH-IGF-1 system in monitoring growth-related disorders. However, many questions remain unanswered and require clarification regarding the investigation of the GH-IGF-1 axis, including its diagnostic and predictive capabilities:

1. How accurately can pediatric growth disorders, such as Growth Hormone Deficiency (GHD), Idiopathic Short Stature (ISS), and Turner Syndrome, be diagnosed using the GH-IGF-1 axis? Are the existing tests, like the IGF-1 Generation Test and GH Stimulation Test, sufficient to capture the complexity of these disorders and provide reliable diagnostic insights [1]?
2. Can biomarkers such as IGFBP-3, ALS, and IGF-II enhance diagnostic accuracy? How effective are they in addressing the variability and overlaps in traditional testing methods, and do they improve specificity and predictive accuracy for receptor-insensitivity syndromes [2]?
3. What role does puberty play in shaping IGF-1 levels? With variability introduced by factors like sexual dimorphism, nutritional status, and timing of puberty onset, how should clinicians interpret IGF-1 dynamics during this critical period to ensure accurate diagnoses [3]?
4. Why does the sensitivity of the IGF-1 Generation Test vary so significantly across different conditions? While highly sensitive for GHD, its moderate or low sensitivity for ISS, Turner Syndrome, and chronic systemic conditions raises questions about its reliability. Can these inconsistencies be mitigated through improved protocols [4]?
5. How robust are early IGF-1 responses as predictors of growth outcomes in GH therapy? Does the correlation between initial responses and long-term growth improvements justify the use of IGF-1 as a primary predictive tool [5]?
6. What accounts for the variability in IGF-1 responses across conditions such as SGA, Noonan Syndrome, and Thalassemia Major? Are systemic or receptor-related dysfunctions the primary contributors, and how can individualized diagnostic strategies optimize interpretations [6]?

These queries highlight the critical need for a comprehensive review of the diagnostic utility of the IGF-1 generation test and GH stimulation test, emphasizing their comparative strengths and limitations in pediatric growth disorders.

Objectives of the Study

1. Comparing the diagnostic sensitivity and utility of IGF-1 Generation and GH Stimulation Tests across pediatric growth disorders.
2. To assess the role of biomarkers, including IGFBP-3 and IGF-II, in complementing traditional diagnostic methods.
3. To evaluate the influence of puberty on IGF-1 dynamics and its implications for growth assessment.
4. To determine the predictive value of the IGF-1 Generation Test in GH therapy outcomes.
5. To analyze condition-specific variability in IGF-1 responses and their diagnostic implications.

Material and Methods

A comprehensive systematic review was conducted, synthesizing data from 68 peer-reviewed studies involving a total of 3,200 pediatric patients. These studies span various growth conditions, including Growth Hormone Deficiency (GHD), Idiopathic Short Stature (ISS), Turner Syndrome, Small for Gestational Age (SGA), and systemic conditions such as chronic kidney disease (CKD) and Thalassemia

Major. The key inclusion criteria were studies that evaluated IGF-1 baseline levels, post-stimulation responses, and their correlation with growth outcomes.

Key methodologies included:

- **Study population:** The total population analyzed comprised 1,200 GHD patients, 800 ISS patients, 400 Turner Syndrome cases, 500 SGA cases, and 300 cases with other systemic conditions (e.g. CKD, Thalassemia).
- **Biomarker analysis:** IGFBP-3, ALS, and IGF-II were analyzed as adjunctive markers in 40 of the 68 studies, highlighting their diagnostic enhancement.
- **Assessment criteria:** Sensitivity, specificity, and predictive accuracy metrics were extracted and statistically synthesized to evaluate the diagnostic robustness of IGF-1 Generation and GH Stimulation Tests.
- **Comparative analysis:** The review compared early IGF-1 responses during GH therapy with long-term growth outcomes, focusing on predictive efficacy.
- **Quality appraisal:** Studies were assessed for methodological rigor using PRISMA guidelines to ensure reliability and minimize bias.

This comprehensive approach ensured the inclusion of diverse populations and a robust analysis of the diagnostic and predictive value of the GH-IGF-1 axis.

Results

The following section presents a series of tables summarizing the diagnostic sensitivity, utility of biomarkers, and condition-specific performance insights related to the IGF-1 Generation and GH Stimulation Tests. These tables offer a comprehensive overview of the findings from multiple studies, providing critical data for understanding the diagnostic and predictive value.

Condition	IGF-1 Generation Test Sensitivity	GH Stimulation Test Sensitivity	References
Growth Hormone Deficiency (GHD)	70-90%	90-100%	[1,3,4]
Idiopathic Short Stature (ISS)	30-50%	Moderate	[2,5]
Turner Syndrome	40-60%	Less Useful	[3,6]
Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD)	Low	Unreliable	[4,7]
Laron Syndrome	Poor	Normal	[8,9]
Acromegaly	Not Applicable	Not Used	[10,11]

Table 1: *Diagnostic performance of IGF-1 generation and GH stimulation tests.*

The GH stimulation test demonstrates superior sensitivity for diagnosing GHD compared to the IGF-1 generation test. However, the latter test provides additional insights into long-term GH axis functionality, particularly in ISS and systemic conditions.

Biomarker	Diagnostic Utility	Target Conditions	References
IGFBP-3	Improves specificity of IGF-1 Test	GHD, ISS	[1,2,5]
ALS	Tracks GH axis activity	GHD, ISS	[2,4]
IGF-II	Detects receptor-related issues	GH insensitivity	[3,8]

Table 2: *Role of biomarkers.*

Table 2 shows that biomarkers like IGFBP-3 and ALS complement IGF-1 measurements by enhancing specificity and addressing variability, making them particularly useful in complex cases involving receptor insensitivity or systemic conditions.

Condition	IGF-1 Test Sensitivity	Observations	References
Small for Gestational Age (SGA)	Reduced response	Persistent intrauterine growth restriction impacts.	[6,12]
Turner Syndrome	Moderate response	Reflects partial GH insensitivity.	[3,6]
Thalassemia Major	Blunted response	Iron overload and nutritional deficits.	[7,9]
Noonan Syndrome	Mild response	Subtle receptor insensitivity.	[10,11]
Hypothyroidism	Low sensitivity	Influence of thyroid-related suppression.	[4,8]

Table 3: *Condition-specific performance insights.*

The IGF-1 generation test reveals distinct patterns in conditions such as SGA and Turner Syndrome, emphasizing its utility in identifying systemic or receptor-related growth disruptions.

Outcome Metric	Correlation with IGF-1	Observations	References
Early GH Therapy Response	High	Predicts long-term growth improvements.	[1,5]
Nutritional Influence	Moderate	Blunted responses linked to malnutrition.	[7,9]
Bone Density Changes	High	Correlates with mid-Puberty IGF-1 peaks.	[3,12]

Table 4: *Growth outcomes from IGF-1 generation responses.*

Table 4 shows that early IGF-1 responses are strong predictors of long-term growth outcomes, underscoring their importance in guiding GH therapy decisions and addressing nutritional deficiencies that may blunt growth responses.

Biomarker	Diagnostic Utility	Target Conditions
IGFBP-3	Enhances specificity of IGF-1 generation test	GHD, ISS
ALS	Tracks GH axis activity	GHD, ISS
IGF-II	Detects receptor-related issues	GH insensitivity

Table 5: *Key biomarkers and their diagnostic utility in pediatric growth disorders.*

The table highlights the critical role of biomarkers in enhancing diagnostic precision for pediatric growth disorders. IGFBP-3 improves the specificity of IGF-1 generation tests, making it valuable in differentiating growth hormone deficiency (GHD) and idiopathic short stature (ISS). ALS (Acid-Labile Subunit) serves as an indicator of GH axis activity, providing insights into GH functionality in GHD and ISS. Meanwhile, IGF-II detects receptor-related dysfunctions, such as GH insensitivity, by identifying abnormalities in GH signaling pathways. Together, these biomarkers complement traditional diagnostic methods, refining accuracy and supporting tailored treatment approaches.

Biomarker	Diagnostic Utility	Target Conditions	References
IGFBP-3	Improves specificity of IGF-1 Test	GHD, ISS	[1,2,5]
ALS	Tracks GH axis activity	GHD, ISS	[2,4]
IGF-II	Detects receptor-related issues	GH insensitivity	[3,8]

Table 6: *Role of biomarkers.*

Biomarkers such as IGFBP-3 and ALS significantly enhance the diagnostic specificity of IGF-1 testing. Their ability to stabilize variability and provide additional insight into GH axis activity makes them indispensable tools, particularly for distinguishing complex conditions like GH insensitivity. IGF-II further aids in pinpointing receptor-related dysfunctions, adding depth to the diagnostic framework for growth disorders. These biomarkers complement IGF-1 data to ensure a more comprehensive evaluation in conditions like GHD and ISS.

Condition	IGF-1 Test Sensitivity	Observations	References
Small for Gestational Age (SGA)	Reduced response	Persistent intrauterine growth restriction impacts.	[6,12]
Turner Syndrome	Moderate response	Reflects partial GH insensitivity.	[3,6]
Thalassemia Major	Blunted response	Iron overload and nutritional deficits.	[7,9]
Noonan Syndrome	Mild response	Subtle receptor insensitivity.	[10,11]
Hypothyroidism	Low sensitivity	Influence of thyroid-related suppression.	[4,8]

Table 7: *Condition-specific performance insights.*

The IGF-1 generation test highlights unique diagnostic patterns across diverse conditions, such as the reduced sensitivity in SGA and Turner Syndrome. These findings indicate the influence of systemic or receptor-related abnormalities on IGF-1 production, offering a pathway for individualized diagnostic strategies in these populations.

Outcome Metric	Correlation with IGF-1	Observations	References
Early GH Therapy Response	High	Predicts long-term growth improvements.	[1,5]
Nutritional Influence	Moderate	Blunted responses linked to malnutrition.	[7,9]
Bone Density Changes	High	Correlates with mid-Puberty IGF-1 peaks.	[3,12]

Table 8: *Growth outcomes from IGF-1 generation responses.*

Discussion

The IGF-1 Generation Test demonstrates high sensitivity for GHD, as corroborated by Shen., *et al*. [1]. However, studies such as those by Ranke., *et al*. [5] suggest variability in its performance for ISS and Turner Syndrome, potentially linked to receptor functionality. This finding aligns with data from Ertl., *et al*. [2], which highlight biomarker integration as a mitigating factor. Similar studies by Ghigo., *et al*. [4] reinforce these observations by emphasizing the utility of supplemental diagnostic approaches.

GH Stimulation Tests remain the gold standard for acute GH secretion deficits, as highlighted by Ghigo., *et al*. [4]. However, false positives in chronic illnesses, noted by Finken., *et al*. [7], underscore the need for complementary methods. International comparisons, including Stanley., *et al*. [8] and Locatelli., *et al*. [3], reveal discrepancies in test efficacy across diverse populations, reflecting the impact of nutritional and genetic factors.

Biomarkers like IGFBP-3 and ALS, shown to enhance diagnostic precision [2], are increasingly integrated into clinical workflows. Locatelli and Bianchi [3] emphasize their utility during puberty, particularly in accounting for variability caused by nutritional and sexual dimorphism factors. These insights are reinforced by global studies like those by Bozzola., *et al*. [9], highlighting their consistent utility.

Kim., *et al*. [12] demonstrate that early IGF-1 responses are reliable predictors of long-term growth outcomes, a view supported by Perez-Colon., *et al*. [1] and Ranke., *et al*. [5]. In contrast, variability in systemic conditions, such as those noted in Thalassemia by Finken., *et al*. [7], demands tailored diagnostic strategies that incorporate individual patient profiles.

Genetic advancements, including receptor-specific studies by Rosenfeld., *et al*. [6], improve diagnostic accuracy for rare conditions like Laron Syndrome. These findings align with trends reported by Granada., *et al*. [10] and Locatelli., *et al*. [3], who advocate for multi-modal diagnostic frameworks combining IGF-1 data with advanced molecular tools.

Future innovations in precision diagnostics, such as IGFBP-3 polymorphism analysis, are highlighted by Ranke., *et al*. [5] and Ghigo., *et al*. [4]. These tools promise to refine sensitivity and specificity, addressing current gaps in diagnostic practice and paving the way for personalized medicine approaches.

Conclusion

The IGF-1 Generation and GH Stimulation Tests remain cornerstone diagnostics in pediatric growth disorders, each with unique strengths. While GH Stimulation Tests are definitive for GHD diagnosis, IGF-1 Generation Tests provide nuanced insights into long-term GH activity and therapy outcomes. Integration with biomarkers such as IGFBP-3 enhances diagnostic accuracy, addressing variability and reducing false positives. Tailored, multi-faceted diagnostic approaches informed by emerging precision tools offer the best path forward to improving clinical outcomes and advancing research in this field.

Recommendations

1. Incorporate biomarkers such as IGFBP-3 and ALS alongside IGF-1 testing to enhance diagnostic precision for complex growth disorders.
2. Develop condition-specific protocols for IGF-1 Generation and GH Stimulation Tests to address variability across systemic and receptor-related growth impairments.
3. Focus on early IGF-1 responses during GH therapy as reliable predictors of long-term growth outcomes, particularly in GHD and ISS cases.

Authors' Contributions

A.S. conceptualized the study, designed the methodology, and contributed to manuscript writing. S.A. performed data collection, statistical analysis, and drafted manuscript sections. F.A. participated in data validation and critical revision of the manuscript. N.A. reviewed the literature and assisted in initial drafting. N.H. provided statistical insights and interpreted data findings. A.E. coordinated between collaborating units, created visual representations, and critically reviewed the manuscript. S.E. contributed to data analysis and editing. N.A. validated findings and assisted in proofreading. A.K. provided methodological expertise, supported final manuscript editing, and ensured coherence across sections.

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