

Springer Series
in Biophysics 8

Sandor Damjanovich (Ed.)

Biophysical Aspects of Transmembrane Signaling

 Springer

S. Damjanovich (Ed.)

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With 41 Figures, 17 in Color and 5 Tables



Springer

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Nagyerdei krt.98.

Hungary

ISSN 0932-2353

ISBN-10 3-540-25064-6 Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg New York

ISBN-13 978-3-540-25064-7 Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg New York

Library of Congress Control Number: 2005921138

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Printed in Germany

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Editor: Dr. Sabine Schreck, Heidelberg

Desk Editor: Anette Lindqvist, Heidelberg

Production: ProEdit GmbH, Heidelberg

Typesetting: Satz-Druck-Service, Leimen

Cover Design: Design & Production, Heidelberg

Printed on acid-free paper

39/3152-Re

5 4 3 2 1 0

Preface

Writing or editing a book on a very topical field of science is always a great challenge, since by the time the book is published some of the newest and latest findings might be obsolete compared with results reported in the most current issues of various high-level journals.

Nevertheless, stimulating good books describe complicated systems and interrelationships and provide a broad spectrum of material for talented researchers who may find new inspiration from a joint presentation of correlated data. Of course, an editor cannot rank his own book. However, in this case, the contributing authors have high scientific standards and well-known achievements which speak for themselves.

Transmembrane signaling has many different forms and biochemical and biophysical details. However, the final outcome of transmembrane signaling at the cellular level elucidates some cellular functions, which are at the center of self-defense, alimentation, escape reactions, etc. Transmembrane signaling can be studied best in the immune system, in particular in lymphocytes, the main cellular carriers of immune defense. The different chapters are independent studies, written by well-known experts in their particular fields. Some chapters include the authors' very recent data, generalized, on the one hand, to provide understandable material for those who are interested in the field but not experts. On the other hand, the current data and novel efforts to unify biochemical and biophysical events in a physiological description provide interesting reading for experts as well.

An effort has been made to describe the broad array of methodical approaches in an understandable fashion for those wishing to apply them. For more details, the reader is referred to the References provided at the end of each chapter.

We hope that all readers will profit from this book and we would be grateful for any criticism in those cases where our efforts fall short of our aims.

Debrecen, Hungary, January 2005

Sandor Damjanovich

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The Impact of Environmental Signals on the Growth and Survival of Human T Cells

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1.1 Introduction

Circulating human T cells come into contact with a variety of non-immunological cells and molecules that are constituents of the different internal environments. These encounters may result in effective triggering of plasma membrane receptors and in the initiation of transmembrane signals that drive T cells into different biological processes (e.g., growth, division, cytokine secretion or death), depending on the differentiation state of the T cell and the nature of the signals and receptors involved. The transmembrane signals delivered by the environment may intersect and ultimately modify the biological outcome of specific signals delivered via the TcR/CD3 complex by professional antigen-presenting cells (APC). We propose that the process of T cell differentiation in the periphery is mandatory, is largely influenced by cells and molecules present in the tissue environment that T cells occupy, and is the result of an adaptive process that permits T cells to embark on a fruitful relationship with the neighboring cells. Accordingly, T cells populating or circulating through the different tissues and organs are in a privileged position to regulate the physiological processes of neighboring cells. A clearer understanding of receptor and cell signaling pathways and levels of cross talk induced by environmental cells and molecules on human T cells should provide novel insights into the phenotypic and functional changes that occur during human T cell differentiation. In this chapter we will review accumulated evidence indicating that signals delivered by red blood cells (RBC) and epithelial cells (EC) influence important aspects of the biology of T cells, such as the capacity to grow, divide, differentiate and survive. The role that IL-15 and MHC-class I molecules play in this context will also be reviewed.

1.2 Red Blood Cells: From Carriers of Respiratory Gases to Modulators of T Cell Survival

1.2.1 RBC: Carriers of O₂ and CO₂

Red blood cells (RBC), or erythrocytes, are anucleate and biconcave cells, with an average diameter of 8 μm . There are normally about 3–5 million per microliter

of blood. RBC are produced from pluripotent haemopoietic cells that reside in the bone marrow and, upon appropriate stimulation, undergo a series of maturation events that eventually produce fully functional erythrocytes. During maturation RBC lose their mitochondria, nucleus, ribosomes and many cytoplasmic enzymes. Maturation in bone marrow takes 24–48 h and the average RBC survives in circulation for 120 days. As red cells age, their membranes become rigid and inflexible, and they are removed from circulation by macrophages of the spleen and liver (Klinken 2002).

The primary function of RBC is considered to be oxygen transport from pulmonary capillaries, at high O_2 tension, to tissue capillaries, where it is exchanged for the metabolically generated CO_2 . The most abundant intraerythrocytic protein is hemoglobin (Hb), which is the carrier for O_2 and CO_2 throughout the body. Hb contains four globin subunits, normally 2α and 2β chain in adults, each surrounding a core haem-moiety (Klinken 2002). At the center of the haem is iron which is essential for gaseous transport. Although most erythrocyte iron (Fe^{2+}) is coordinately bound to the protoporphyrin moiety of heme, RBC also have some “free” cytosolic Fe^{2+} (Ferrali et al. 1992; Gabay and Ginsburg 1993).

Despite the limited biosynthetic repertoire available to mature RBC, they are resistant to oxidant-induced damage, because they have a very efficient antioxidant defense system (in the form of scavengers and detoxifying enzymes) that combats free radical-induced oxidative damage to cellular macromolecules. Catalase and glutathione-peroxidase (GSH-PX) form an important defense system to combat hydrogen peroxide (H_2O_2) produced by the superoxide dismutase reaction, and these enzyme systems are thought to be the major antioxidant systems in human RBC. Glutathione, GSH, a low molecular weight thiol, is the required substrate for GSH-PX and is important in reversible protein mixed-disulfide formation, a way to prevent irreversible oxidative damage to protein thiol groups. There are studies supporting the idea that catalase and reduced β -nicotinamide (NADPH) protect RBC against acute, high exogenous levels of H_2O_2 , whereas GSH is needed to protect against the low levels that are continuously generated endogenously (Eaton 1991; Dumaswala et al. 1999). Membrane-bound proteinases, a secondary antioxidant defense mechanism recently identified as acylpeptide hydrolases, protect RBC by preferentially degrading the oxidatively damaged proteins (Beppu et al. 1994; Fujino et al. 2000).

1.2.2

Novel Functions of RBC

Recently there has been an increasing amount of data produced concerning the role of RBC in regulating the bioactivities of other cell types, such as regulation of vascular homeostasis (Pawloski and Stamler 2002), inhibition of platelet aggregation induced by ADP or collagen (Pawloski et al. 1998; Megson et al. 2000), enhancement of platelet aggregation after collagen-induced activation (Vallés et al. 2002), inhibition of neutrophil apoptosis (Aoshiba et al. 1999) and regulation of T cell rolling and adhesion to the endothelium (Melder et al. 2000). The capacity of RBC to regulate biological processes in neighboring cells is thought to be

due to the permeability of their membranes to exogenous reactive oxygen and nitrogen species, namely nitric oxide (NO) (Halliwell and Gutteridge 1999).

The capacity of Hb to reversibly bind NO according to the changes in O₂ tension make RBC potential carriers of NO bioactivity (Pawloski et al. 2001; McMahon et al. 2002). A model proposed by Stamler and colleagues suggested that NO is transported in Hb by binding to the high conserved β -cysteine 93, forming the S-nitrosated Hb (SNO-Hb), which may serve for regulation of blood pressure and facilitates efficient delivery of oxygen to tissues (Jia et al. 1996; Stamler et al. 1997; Gow and Stamler 1998; Bonaventura et al. 1999). They also presented evidence showing that interactions of SNO-Hb with band 3 (also known as anion-exchanger AE1) on the erythrocyte membrane can facilitate NO release (Pawloski et al. 2001). Despite this hypothesis, many questions about the mechanisms by which SNO-Hb is formed and delivered by RBC in vivo remain unanswered (Hobbs et al. 2002; Cosby et al. 2003; Nagababu et al. 2003).

In addition to the role in NO vasodilatation via the formation of SNO-Hb, other RBC functions that have been generally disregarded include the modulation of T cell proliferation and survival. In fact, the capacity of RBC to modulate immunological responses in vitro has been known for more than three decades (Tarnvik 1971; Silva et al. 1981; Ebert 1985; Rugeles et al. 1987; Virela et al. 1988; Shau and Golub 1988; Kalechman et al. 1993). These studies showed that erythrocytes influence a variety of biological processes in T cells, including cell proliferation, cytokine production (IL-2, IL-3, IL-6, TNF, IFN- γ), IL-2 receptor expression, NK-mediated cytotoxicity and antibody synthesis by B cells (reviewed by Arosa et al. 2004).

Work performed in recent years has contributed to the better understanding of the effect of RBC on human T cells. Essentially, it has been established that RBC reduce oxidative stress and apoptosis of activated T cells and favor cell division, thus modulating T cell growth and survival in vitro (Fonseca et al. 2001, 2003b). The RBC effect is directly exerted on the activated T cells, primarily CD8⁺ T cells, and is not mediated by accessory cells (Fonseca et al. 2001, 2003a; Porto et al. 2001). On the other hand, it is well known that both immune activation (e. g., augmented circulating immunoglobulins and T cell activation) and immunosuppression (e. g., improved graft survival) can occur because of RBC transfusion (Tartter 1995; Claas et al. 2001). These data, together with studies by Gafter et al. providing evidence that RBC transfusions in humans may induce the appearance of suppressor CD8⁺ T cells (Gafter et al. 1992), underscore the physiological importance of RBC in the regulation of the immunological system. Consequently, it is plausible to think that when RBC come into contact with activated T cells, for instance at inflammatory sites or in the liver, they deliver "signals" that will promote survival and eventually augment T cell effector functions. However, how do RBC deliver these transmembrane signals to the activated T cells?

1.2.3

Are Transmembrane Signals Involved in the Regulation of T Cell Survival Induced by RBC?

The capacity of RBC to modulate human T cell growth and survival is well documented (Arosa et al. 2004). This capacity was thought to be due to the antioxidant capacity of RBC, to RBC membrane proteins that deliver co-stimulatory signals to T cells, such as CD58, and to heme-related products with co-stimulatory activities. In vitro studies performed over the last 5 years have concluded that the positive influence that RBC have on T cells is not the result of a mere radical scavenging activity of RBC (Fonseca et al. 2001). Moreover, our results indicate that the CD2/CD58 interaction and iron-related products “per se” play a minor role, if any, in the regulation of T cell growth and survival and point to other mechanisms (Fonseca et al. 2003a, 2003b). Yet, it must be emphasized that in order to afford optimal protection, the RBC must come into contact with the activated T cell, suggesting that transmembrane cross talk between the RBC and the activated T cell takes place (Fonseca et al. 2001).

Broadly speaking, the erythrocyte membrane is comprised of a cholesterol-rich phospholipid bilayer that is studded by a large number of transbilayer proteins, of glycosylphosphatidylinositol (GPI)-anchored proteins standing outside, and an important protein assembly, the erythrocyte or membrane skeleton, which laminates the inner surface of the bilayer. The most abundant integral membrane proteins in human RBC membranes are the sialoglycoprotein, glycophorin and the already mentioned band 3 which play a structural role in linking the bilayer with the spectrin skeletal network and are specific to red cells (Schrier 1985). Some red cell-surface proteins appear to be receptor or adhesion molecules, either from their structure or from their known functions in other cells, such as members of the immunoglobulin superfamily.

The immunoglobulin superfamily is a large collection of glycoproteins, abundant on leucocytes, but also present on some other cells. CD58, also called lymphocyte function-associated antigen-3 (LFA-3), is one of those that was reported to be present in RBC. This molecule is a GPI-anchored protein in RBC, and is widely expressed by both hematopoietic and non-hematopoietic cells, namely antigen-presenting cells (APC) (Krensky et al. 1983). The ligand for CD58 is CD2 which is expressed on virtually all T cells, thymocytes and NK cells, and this interaction provides a potent co-stimulus to T cells by means of molecular associations with intracellular kinases. Besides the fact that interaction between CD2 (on T cells) and its receptor CD58 on opposing cells is critical for cell adhesion and, consequently, for an optimal immune recognition, it is important to note that this interaction alone has no stimulating effect on T cells and that only activated T cells can bind and form rosettes with human RBC (Springer 1990). Rosetting of human T cells through the interaction of CD2 with an LFA-3 homologue on sheep erythrocytes is a classic laboratory technique that has been used since the early 1970s by immunologists to purify T lymphocytes (Froland 1972), but only in 1987 was it shown that the interaction between CD2 and CD58 was mediating this phenomenon (Makgoba et al. 1987; Plunkett et al. 1987; Selvaraj and Dustin 1987).

To ascertain the possible involvement of CD58 in the expansion of mitogen-activated T cells induced by RBC, experiments where the CD2/CD58 interaction was blocked by using anti-CD58 antibodies (clone TS2/9) were performed. This treatment did not reverse the increased T cell proliferation induced by the presence of RBC (Fonseca et al. 2003a). Besides, RBC treatment with phosphatidylinositol-specific phospholipase C, which removes GPI-linked proteins such as CD58 and CD59 from the cell surface, did not induce any relevant change in the RBC effect (Fonseca et al. 2003a). In view of these results, we examined the expression of CD58 by RBC. Surprisingly, we were not able to detect significant expression of LFA-3/CD58 on human RBC either by immunoprecipitation or by flow cytometry (Fig. 1.1).

This result disagrees with previous reports (Dustin et al. 1987; Makgoba et al. 1987; Plunkett et al. 1987) despite the fact that TS2/9 antibodies were used in all these studies. The lack of expression of LFA-3/CD58 on human RBC cannot be considered an artifact because TS2/9 antibodies labeled and immunoprecipitated LFA-3/CD58 from the cell surface of an EBV cell line (Fig. 1.1). However, the possibility that the levels of LFA-3/CD58 on the surface of human RBC are below the detection limits of these sensitive techniques cannot be ruled out. In any case, these levels of expression would be inappropriate in terms of the delivery of co-stimulatory signals to activated T cells and most likely do not play a relevant role in the RBC effect. These data, together with results indicating that the RBC effect could be observed even when RBC are added to the cultures of activated T cells 24 and 48 h after the initial stimulation, suggest a lack of involvement of co-stimulatory signals delivered by RBC during the early stages of T cell activation (Fonseca et al. 2003a).

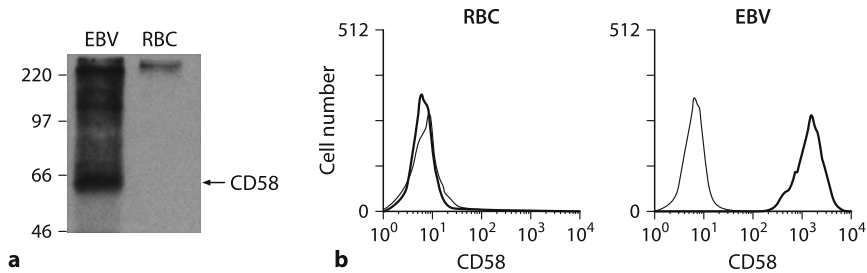


Fig. 1.1. Human RBC lack detectable expression of CD58. **a** 5×10^6 EBV cells and 250×10^6 RBC were surface biotinylated and lysed in 1% Triton X-100. After pre-clearing, the cell lysates were immunoprecipitated with anti-CD58 antibodies (TS2/9) and protein-A Sepharose beads as described (Fonseca et al. 2003b). Immunoprecipitates were resolved in a 10% SDS-PAGE under non-reducing conditions and transferred to nitrocellulose filters. Proteins were visualized after incubation with ExtrAvidin-HRP followed by ECL. The band corresponding to CD58 is indicated. **b** RBC and EBV cells were cell-surface labeled with saturating concentrations of TS2/9 followed by rabbit anti-mouse IgG conjugated with FITC, and acquired in a FACSCalibur. Results show CD58 expression (thick lines) in RBC (left histogram) and EBV cells (right histogram). Background staining with mouse IgG (thin lines) is shown

Although these data suggest that transmembrane signals via CD2 are unlikely to play a role in the immunoregulatory effect of RBC, the involvement of other RBC receptors cannot be ruled out. Indeed, the protection afforded by RBC (e.g., inhibition of apoptosis, enhancement of cell division, upregulation of cytoprotective proteins, etc.) conforms with the existence of transmembrane signals that intersect and strengthen intracellular pathways involved in the control of cell division and survival. Importantly, these signals are turned on when RBC come into contact with metabolically active, i.e., activated and/or dividing, T cells. Because RBC markedly reduce the levels of intracellular oxidative stress within the activated T cells (Fonseca et al. 2003b), it is plausible to think that RBC proteins and/or cellular components intersect with pathways regulated by oxygen and nitrogen radicals (Ginn-Pease and Whisler 1998). Furthermore, since RBC favor primarily the expansion of CD8⁺ T cells (Porto et al. 2001; Fonseca et al. 2003a), transmembrane signals delivered by RBC are also likely to modulate cell cycle-related pathways.

1.2.4

Are RBC-Derived Vesicles Carriers of the RBC Bioactivity?

Although RBC are considered inert to regulatory signals from other cells, they are equipped with the machinery required for intercellular communication (Minetti and Low 1997), and modulation of RBC has become a pharmacological tool for the treatment of certain diseases (Brugnara et al. 1993; Solerte et al. 1997). Although the responsiveness of RBC to a variety of environmental regulators and signals is becoming apparent, the mechanisms and intermediates of the response have not received much attention. One of the most common intermediates in mediating RBC responsiveness is the secretion of vesicles.

The normal shape of RBC is a biconcave disk, but under different chemical and physical conditions they may undergo shape alterations which finally result in the release of two types of vesicles: microvesicles of approximately 150 nm $\varnothing$ and nanovesicles of approximately 60 nm $\varnothing$ (Allan et al. 1980). A rise in cytosolic Ca^{2+} or ATP depletion in RBC induces biochemical and morphological changes in the RBC that are closely linked to the formation and secretion of vesicles containing cytoplasmic and membrane anchored proteins (Pascual et al. 1993; Dervillez et al. 1997; Salzer et al. 2002). Low pH also induces shape changes and vesiculation in intact human RBC (Gros et al. 1996). Upon a rise in cytosolic Ca^{2+} or ATP depletion, RBC change shape from biconcave disks to smaller echinocytic spheres (Allan and Thomas 1981). Some of the biochemical changes include exposure of phosphatidylserine and efflux of potassium on the outer leaflet of the plasma membrane (Allan and Thomas 1981; de Jong et al. 1997; Andrews et al. 2002). RBC shed vesicles *in vivo* (Dumaswala and Greenwalt 1984; Bevers et al. 1992) and anomalies in the vesiculation process have been described in bleeding disorders and hemolytic anemias (Bevers et al. 1992; Turner et al. 2003), and are thought to occur in systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) and HIV patients (Cohen et al. 1989; Dervillez et al. 1997). Although the physiological target(s) and functions of these RBC-derived vesicles remain largely unknown, recent studies have shown that

vesicles derived from B cells bind to the cell surface of follicular dendritic cells and regulate their activity (Denzer et al. 2000).

In addition to the classical antioxidant molecules superoxide dismutase, catalase and glutathione (Halliwell and Gutteridge 1999), RBC also contain another family of antioxidant molecules designated as peroxiredoxins (Prx). Prx are thiol-specific antioxidant enzymes that belong to the family of peptidyl prolyl isomerases and that exert their protective effect in cells through their peroxidase activity ($\text{ROOH} + 2\text{e}^- \rightarrow \text{ROH} + \text{H}_2\text{O}$), whereby hydrogen peroxide, peroxynitrite and a wide range of organic hydroperoxides are reduced and detoxified. Recently, a range of other cellular roles have also been ascribed to mammalian Prx family members, including the modulation of cytokine-induced hydrogen peroxide levels which have been shown to mediate signaling cascades, leading to cell proliferation, differentiation and apoptosis (Fujii and Ikeda 2002; Hofmann et al. 2002; Lee et al. 2003; Neumann et al. 2003; Wood et al. 2003).

Six subclasses of Prx are produced at high levels in mammalian cells. Notably, PrxII (also known as NKEF-B, for natural killer enhancing factor B) together with PrxI (also known as NKEF-A) are among the second or third most abundant proteins in RBC (Moore et al. 1991; Wood et al. 2003). Early studies on the effect of RBC on immune functions showed enhancement of natural killer activity (Shau and Golub, 1988). Afterwards, the same group identified the natural-killer-enhancing factor of RBC as a major antioxidant protein that turned out to be a peroxiredoxin (Shau et al. 1993; Shau and Kim 1994; Wood et al. 2003). Interestingly, a recent study has reported that recombinant NKEF-A and NKEF-B inhibited HIV-1 replication when exogenously added to acutely infected T cells (Geiben-Lynn et al. 2003). Besides Prx, other peptidyl prolyl isomerases present in RBC have been shown to play important roles in signal transduction pathways involved in the regulation of cell cycle progression (Lu et al. 1996; Galat 2003). The likelihood that the modulation of (CD8+) T cell growth and survival induced by RBC results from vesicles containing Prx and/or other peptidyl prolyl isomerases, which are secreted from the RBC upon contact or proximity with metabolically active T cells, is an open question that deserves further investigation (Fig. 1.2).

1.3

Epithelial Cells and IL-15: The Perfect Combination for CD8+ T Cell Differentiation

1.3.1

Interleukin-15: Major Features of a Multifunctional Cytokine

IL-15 is a cytokine belonging to the 4 α -helix-bundle cytokine family which exerts a pivotal role in NK and T cell development and homeostasis. IL-15 binds to a high-affinity receptor (IL-15R) consisting of three distinct membrane components – α , β and γ_c chains – the latter shared by IL-2, IL-4, IL-7, IL-9, IL-13, and IL-21. The interaction of IL-15 with its receptor is followed by a series of intracellular signaling events that have been reviewed elsewhere (Waldmann and Tagaya 1999).

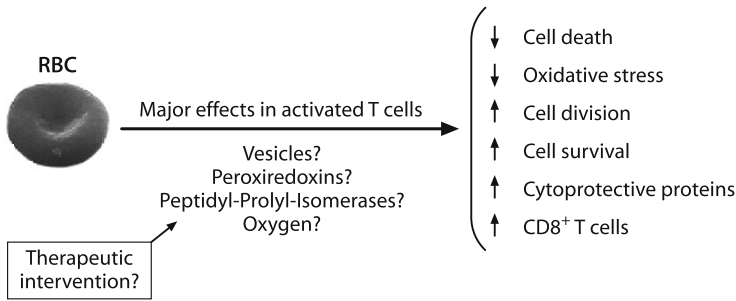


Fig. 1.2. Outline of the influence that human RBC have on activated T cells and the possible mechanisms involved

Most of our knowledge on IL-15 comes from studies in genetically targeted mice for IL-15 and IL-15R genes. IL-15^{-/-} and IL-15R α ^{-/-} mice lack NK cells, implying a crucial effect of IL-15 in murine NK cell ontogeny (Lodolce et al. 1998; Kennedy et al. 2000). In accordance with the murine data, *in vitro* studies have shown that IL-15 is an essential factor for human NK cell differentiation and maturation (Mrozek et al. 1996; Yu et al. 1998). On the other hand, several reports have shown that IL-15 also controls CD8⁺ T cells in both mice and humans. Studies in humans showed that naïve CD8⁺ T cells expand in response to IL-15 in an antigen-independent manner, although a higher responsive capacity to this growth factor is found in memory-type CD8⁺ T cells. In contrast, the response of CD4⁺ T cells is much lower (Kanegane and Tosato 1996; Alves et al. 2003; Cookson and Reen 2003; Schonland et al. 2003). Strikingly, when the IL-15R is analysed in the different subsets, naïve CD8⁺ T cells show, in comparison with memory-type cells, a lower expression of IL-15R β chain and a comparable level of IL-15R γ (constitutively expressed in lymphocytes). In both subsets, the level of IL-15R α is barely detectable by flow-cytometric analysis. Nonetheless, the capacity of naïve CD8⁺ T cells to respond to IL-15 is not limited by the lower expression of the IL-15R β chain. Rather, naïve CD8⁺ T cells upregulated the IL-15R β chain after contact with IL-15 (Alves et al. 2003). Moreover, the capacity to respond to IL-15 is not precluded by the absence of the IL-15R α chain (Dubois et al. 2002). These data indicate that in contrast to mice, human naïve CD8⁺ T cells acquire the ability to respond to IL-15.

Besides the aforementioned effects on CD8⁺ T cell proliferation, IL-15 also induces or initiates a CD8⁺ T cell differentiation program. In naïve CD8⁺ T cells, IL-15 induces a cytotoxic T lymphocyte (CTL)-phenotype, characterized by the loss of CD28 and CD45RA and acquisition of CD56. Concomitant with these phenotypic changes, naïve cells acquire functional properties typical of CTL, such as the ability to produce interferon γ (IFN- γ) and tumor necrosis factor α (TNF- α), the expression of perforin and granzyme B, and cytotoxic capacities (Alves et al. 2003; Cookson and Reen 2003). In concert with its effects on naïve T cells, IL-15 contributes to an augmented effector function of memory CD8⁺ T cells (Liu et al. 2002; Alves et al. 2003; Mueller et al. 2003).

The regulation of IL-15 transcription, translation and secretion involves multiple complex mechanisms (reviewed by Tagaya et al. 1996), and the posttranscriptional regulation seems to be the most important one. Three main checkpoints negatively regulate IL-15 mRNA translation: (1) multiple start codons in the 5' untranslated region which may diminish the efficiency of translation. Bamford and coworkers demonstrated that in COS cells the deletion of this region increases the production of IL-15 (Bamford et al. 1998); (2) the short and the long signal peptides (LSP and SSP, respectively) present in the IL-15 precursor protein which give rise to two IL-15 isoforms. Both IL-15 isoforms encode an identical mature IL-15 protein, differing only in the signal sequence. Immunofluorescence studies revealed that LSP-IL-15 localizes in the secretory pathway, while SSP-IL-15 is localized in the cytoplasm and nucleus (Waldmann and Tagaya 1999); and (3) a negative element seems to exist in the C-terminus of the coding sequence. It was demonstrated that modifying the 3' end of the IL-15 protein increases its production five- to tenfold (Bamford et al. 1998). This complex and tight regulation of the IL-15 gene is uncommon for most cytokines characterized hitherto and may indicate that its overproduction is harmful to the host.

1.3.2

Physiological Expression of IL-15: The Epithelial Cell Connection

SSP-IL-15 mRNA is produced by multiple non-lymphoid tissues including the heart, thymus and testis, whereas LSP-IL-15 is produced in the placenta, skeletal muscle, kidney, lung, heart, fibroblast, and liver (Grabstein et al. 1994; Meazza et al. 1996; Tagaya et al. 1997; Cookson and Reen 2003). IL-15 protein has been detected in a wide range of cells including bone marrow stroma cells, human spleen-derived fibroblasts and activated monocytes, macrophages and dendritic cells (Carson et al. 1995; Reinecker et al. 1996; Briard et al. 2002). Notably, IL-15 is also produced by epithelial cells of the intestine and the liver and its production is upregulated during stress or infection (Reinecker et al. 1996; Fehniger and Caligiuri 2001; Man et al. 2003; Golden-Mason et al. 2004). It has been proposed that an abnormal expression of IL-15 could be involved in the pathogenesis of autoimmune disorders such as rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and inflammatory bowel diseases (IBD). Increased levels of IL-15 have been detected in synovial fluids and in inflamed mucosa of patients with RA and IBD, respectively (McInnes et al. 1996; Liu et al. 2000). It is possible that the high levels of IL-15 found under these conditions might contribute to the maintenance and enhancement of the chronic inflammation, and therefore IL-15 might modulate T cell function in the inflamed environment (Mention et al. 2003).

In this context, IL-15 appears to regulate co-stimulatory pathways in human T cells, such as upregulation of NKG2D in CD8+ T cells lacking the expression of CD28 (Roberts et al. 2001). Interestingly, NKG2D is a ligand for a set of unconventional MHC-class I molecules expressed by epithelial cells that act as potent costimulatory receptors for CD8+ T cells, enhancing their function and survival (see below). These findings suggest that the functions and phenotype induced by IL-15 on CD8+ T cells mimic the ones triggered by TCR. In line with this, recent

work by Liu and coworkers highlighted that IL-15 and TCR stimulation induces a remarkable similarity in the gene expression, proliferation, effector molecule production and cytotoxicity of CD8+ T cells (Liu et al. 2002). It would be interesting to investigate thoroughly whether these two parallel signals, inducing similar molecular, cellular and functional events, will converge in a common pathway.

Despite the multiple biological activities exerted by IL-15, it is noteworthy that free IL-15 is not detectable either in biological fluids of healthy individuals or in supernatants of activated cells that express high levels of IL-15 mRNA. Thus, the role of IL-15 in cells of the immune system, particularly CD8+ T cells, is an important point that remains to be elucidated. Recently, Dubois et al. (2002) have elegantly demonstrated that IL-15 can be presented at the cell surface of activated monocytes bound to the IL-15R α , activating in *trans*-target cells expressing either intermediate- (IL-15R β and γ_c) or high- (IL-15R α , β and γ_c) affinity IL-15 receptors. Furthermore, Briard et al. (2002) have shown that IL-15 is bioactively expressed at the cell surface of human spleen-derived fibroblasts. Hence, these studies indicate a novel mechanism by which cells expressing the IL-15R α chain form complexes with IL-15 at their cell surface, thereby *trans*-presented to neighboring cells (CD8+ T cells) expressing intermediate-affinity IL-15R. These novel findings place IL-15 as a likely bridge in the communication between T cells and epithelial cells (Fig. 1.3).

1.3.3

Epithelial Tissues as Sites for CD8+ T Cell Positioning and Survival

The majority of T cells populating epithelial tissues (e. g., the small intestine and liver parenchyma) are phenotypically and functionally memory CD8+ T cells (Cerf-Bensussan and Gruy-Grand 1991; Lundquist et al. 1996; Hamann et al. 1997; Norris et al. 1998; Ishihara et al. 1999). Doherty and collaborators (Doherty et al. 1999; Kenna et al. 2003) demonstrated that a large fraction of human hepatic CD8+ T cells express NK receptors. These CD8+ T cells, called NKT cells, are also present in peripheral blood under a number of conditions and are characterized by lack of CD28 expression (Mingari et al. 1996; Speiser et al. 1999; Pittet et al. 2001; Arosa 2002). Although evidence for the expression of NK receptors by human intestinal intraepithelial lymphocytes (iIEL) is scarce, a number of studies suggest that T cells bearing NK receptors exist within the human intestine. Thus, BY55/CD160 is an NK receptor expressed by both circulating CD8+CD28- T cells and iIEL (Anumanthan et al. 1998). First described in circulating NK cells, CD160 is expressed by cord blood and bone marrow CD8+ T cells, and a large fraction of circulating CD8+ T cells in HIV patients (Bensussan et al. 1993, 1994; Maiza et al. 1993). Moreover, it is generally accepted that iIEL and hepatic CD8+ T cells lack cytotoxic activity but gain cytotoxicity after culture in IL-2 (Chott et al. 1997; Doherty et al. 1999), a feature also shared by memory CD8+ T cells. More recently, expression of NKG2D has been described in human intraepithelial CD8+ T cells in celiac disease (Hue et al. 2004). These phenotypic and functional similarities suggest that circulating memory CD8+CD28- T cells originate from

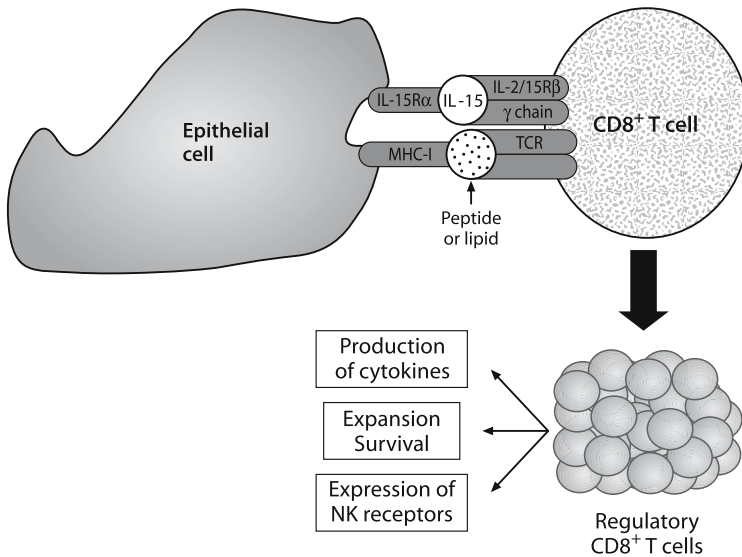


Fig. 1.3. Schematic model illustrating the effects of epithelial cells and IL-15 on human CD8⁺ T cells. Epithelial cells may activate CD8⁺ T cells through a variety of MHC-class I molecules presenting either peptides or lipids. In addition, under stressful conditions epithelial cells may produce IL-15 that binds to the IL-15Rα that presents IL-15 in *trans* to CD8⁺ T cells bearing intermediate-affinity IL-15Rβ/γc receptors. In combination, the transmembrane signals delivered by MHC-I and IL-15 play a pivotal role in activation, homeostasis and function of CD8⁺ T cells

CD8⁺CD28⁺ T cell precursors that have acquired typical NK receptors during the differentiation process in epithelial environments. Considering recent developments (see below), it is plausible to think that thymus and/or bone marrow-derived CD8⁺ T cells, in the context of signals provided by environments such as the liver parenchyma or the intestine, differentiate, lose expression of CD28 and express cell-surface NK receptors, thus becoming NKT cells (Arosa 2002).

1.3.4

Epithelial Cells Deliver Activation and Survival Signals Preferentially to CD8⁺ T Cells

Epithelial tissues are composed of sheets of epithelial cells that cover the external and internal body surface and line many important internal organs. In the intestine and the liver, enterocytes and hepatocytes are the most abundant epithelial cells, respectively. While enterocytes play a major role in protection and nutrient absorption, hepatocytes are the major metabolic achievers in the body (Kmieć 2001). Until recently both organs were considered to be inert from an immunological point of view. Evidence accumulated during recent years has changed this view, as gastroenterologists and immunologists have noted that

enterocytes and hepatocytes possess immunostimulatory properties (Hershberg and Mayer 2000; Mackay 2002).

Both the intestine enterocytes and the liver hepatocytes are in close contact with a variety of lymphocyte subsets, from NK cells to TcR $\alpha\beta$ and TcR $\gamma\delta$ cells, and they display features of memory/differentiated T cells. Studies conducted in the mid-1980s unveiled the capacity of intestinal epithelial cells (iEC) to activate human peripheral blood T cells in vitro, namely, CD8+ T cells (Mayer and Shlien 1987). In elucidating the molecular mechanisms involved in the preferential activation of CD8+ T cells by ex vivo iEC, Mayer and collaborators demonstrated that CD1d and a heavy glycosylated protein of 180 kDa (gp180) are the receptors involved in the activation of human CD8+ T cells through interaction with the TCR and CD8, respectively (Panja et al. 1993; Li et al. 1995; Yio and Mayer 1997; Allez et al. 2002; Van de Wal et al. 2003).

CD1d is a non-classical MHC-class I molecule specialized in binding lipids which is expressed by intestinal epithelial cells, hepatocytes, and stromal cells (Blumberg et al. 1991; Canchis et al. 1993), and interaction of the CD1d/gp180 complex with the TCR/CD8 activates the Src tyrosine kinase Lck (Panja et al. 1993; Li et al. 1995; Hershberg and Mayer 2000). The capacity of intestinal epithelial cells to activate human CD8+ T cells in vitro has been reported by other groups and has been observed with parenchymal hepatic cells and cell lines (Bumgardner et al. 1992; Volpes et al. 1992; Arosa et al. 1998), airway epithelial cells (Kalb et al. 1997), endothelial cells (Dengler et al. 2000; Choi et al. 2004) and fibroblasts (Roberts et al. 1997). Therefore, it appears that regardless of their origin, epithelial cells have the intrinsic capacity to deliver signals to human CD8+ T cells. Yet, this intercellular communication may not solely involve classical receptor–ligand interaction. Hence, cytokines such as IL-15 as well as RBC present in the tissue microenvironments might influence T cell growth and survival, and, as mentioned above, contribute to the amplification of the T cell response in inflammatory conditions (Briard et al. 2002; Dubois et al. 2002; Mention et al. 2003; Arosa et al. 2004; Golden-Mason et al. 2004; Hue et al. 2004). Finally, molecules of the MHC-class I molecules other than CD1d may also contribute in unexpected ways to the regulation of T cell growth and survival in the tissue environment, as discussed in the next section.

1.4

MHC-Class I Molecules: Pleiotropic Transmembrane Signaling Structures

1.4.1

The MHC Locus

The major histocompatibility complex (MHC) forms an extended genomic cluster, with an elevated number of genes coding for proteins that accomplish extremely important immunological functions. Two main classes of MHC proteins are encoded within the MHC locus, and in humans are designated as HLA (Gruen and Weissman 1997). The high polymorphism of MHC-encoded proteins defines the unique genetic fingerprint of an individual's immune system, explain-

ing the basis of tissue rejection in transplantation, and defining the repertoire of antigenic determinants to which each one of us is capable of responding (Howard et al. 1999). The MHC region is known to influence the population penetrance of a variety of autoimmune and non-autoimmune disorders, such as multiple sclerosis, systemic lupus erythematosus, myasthenia gravis, rheumatoid arthritis, ankylosing spondyloarthritis and hemochromatosis (Gruen and Weissman 1997; Cardoso and de Sousa 2003).

1.4.2

Folding and Assembly of MHC-Class I Molecules

The MHC-class I protein is a highly polymorphic, membrane-spanning heterotrimeric complex, formed of a transmembrane glycoprotein, named heavy chain (HC) with approximately 46 kDa, non-covalently associated with a light chain, beta 2 microglobulin (β_2m), with approximately 12 kDa and with a small peptide of eight to ten amino acids. The heavy chain contains an extracellular portion divided into three domains – $\alpha 1$, $\alpha 2$ and $\alpha 3$; in contrast to the highly conserved $\alpha 3$ domain, $\alpha 1$ and $\alpha 2$ domains have two polymorphic α helices with interconnected β sheets that form the peptide binding groove. The structure of the groove is believed to be maintained by the non-covalent association with β_2m (Bjorkman and Parham 1990).

Earlier events in the folding of MHC-class I molecules display many similarities with the assembly of other multisubunit glycoproteins. After entering the endoplasmic reticulum (ER), MHC-class I heavy chains are monoglucosylated and associate with the general chaperone calnexin. The soluble chaperone calreticulin comes to replace calnexin and, with the thiol-dependent oxidoreductase ERp57, promotes the formation of the disulfide bonds inside the heavy chain and the assembly with the β_2m (Parodi 2000; Dick et al. 2002). At a later stage, the process becomes more specific and complex, with the association of the accessory molecules tapasin and the transporter associated with antigen processing (TAP), leading to the formation of the peptide-loading complex. This complex is responsible for loading MHC-class I molecules with high-affinity peptides (Rudd et al. 2001; Williams et al. 2002). Correctly folded MHC-class I molecules are transported to the Golgi and then to the cell surface. MHC-class I molecules not properly folded are believed to be retrotranslocated to the cytosol and targeted for degradation (Hughes et al. 1997; Cresswell et al. 1999). The role of the various chaperones and accessory molecules in the folding and assembly of MHC-class I molecules has been recently reviewed (Antoniou et al. 2003).

1.4.3

Cell-Surface MHC-Class I Molecules: *trans*-Interactions with the TCR and NK Receptors

After leaving the ER, folded MHC-class I molecules enter the secretory pathway and egress, via the Golgi, to the plasma membrane of all nucleated cells,

where their main function is to present peptides to CD8+ T cells. The T cell receptor (TCR) complex comprises α/β subunits that recognize the peptide-MHC, non-covalently associated with the intracellular signal transduction subunits TCR ζ , and CD3 γ , δ and ϵ (Pitcher et al. 2003). Activation takes place through immunoreceptor tyrosine-based activation motifs (ITAM) present in the cytoplasmic domains of the CD3 chains. The first step in antigen receptor signal transduction is the activation of cytosolic protein tyrosine kinases of the Src, Syk and Tec families, which phosphorylate the ζ chain of the CD3 complex and several adaptor molecules, initiating signaling cascades that lead to calcium rises, proliferation, cytokine secretion and ultimately the generation of differentiated CD8+ T cells (Cantrell 2002; Lanzavecchia and Sallusto 2002). By restricting the peptides recognized by CD8+ T cells, MHC-class I molecules are involved not only in the selection of CD8+ T cells in the thymus, but also in the maintenance of the CD8+ T cell pool in the periphery, which differs according to the differentiation state of the CD8+ T cell (Seddon and Zamoyiska 2003).

In addition to the TCR, MHC-class I molecules can interact with a variety of receptors present on human T cells and collectively designated as NK receptors. These receptors include members of the killer Ig-like receptor (KIR) family, both stimulatory and inhibitory, members of the CD94–NKG2 family, and NKG2D (Moretta et al. 2001; Vivier and Anfossi 2004). While the ligands for the inhibitory KIR members include classical MHC-class I molecules as well as non-classical MHC-class I such as HLA-G, the identity of the ligands for the stimulatory KIR remains uncertain (Wagtmann et al. 1995; Dohring and Colonna 1996; Moretta et al. 2001). Members of the CD94–NKG2 family transmit negative signals, resulting in inhibition of target cell lysis upon recognizing the non-classical MHC-class I molecule HLA-E (Baker et al. 1998; Borrego et al. 2002). Finally, the ligands for NKG2D are the unconventional MHC-class I molecules MICA, MICB and ULBP (Bauer et al. 1999; Cosman et al. 2001; Raulet 2003). Importantly, expression of NK receptors is restricted, with the exception of NKG2D, to highly differentiated CD8+ T cells that have lost expression of CD28 (Anumanthan et al. 1998; Baars et al. 2000; Arosa 2002; Snyder et al. 2004). Regarding signal transduction, the various inhibitory receptors share a common regulatory sequence of amino acids in their cytoplasmic tails, named the immunoreceptor tyrosine-based inhibitory motifs (ITIM), which, upon phosphorylation, confer the capacity to recruit SH2-containing tyrosine phosphatase 1 and inhibit cell-mediated cytotoxicity (Baker et al. 1998; Moretta et al. 2001; Vivier and Anfossi 2004).

The immunological role of MHC-class I molecules in presenting peptides to CD8+ T cells through their TCR and interacting with a variety of NK receptors, both through *trans*-associations, is presently undeniable (Yewdell et al. 2003; Snyder et al. 2004). In the 1970s, however, two Danish immunologists put forward a hypothesis whereby MHC-class I molecules were involved in the regulation of ligand–receptor interactions not directly implicated in immune reactions through *cis* associations with those receptors (Svejgaard and Ryder 1976). This hypothesis was further refined and extended in the next decade (Simonsen and Olsson 1983; Simonsen et al. 1985), and from time to time there have been reports on functions of MHC-class I molecules that go beyond immunology (reviewed by Stagsted 1998). The remainder of this section will focus on unconventional aspects of

MHC-class I molecules, with emphasis on their impact on human T cell growth and survival.

1.4.4

Cell-Surface MHC-Class I Molecules: *cis*-Interactions with Growth Receptors

MHC-class I molecules have been associated with the function of many different cell-surface receptors responsible for growth and differentiation. Examples are receptors for glucagon, the epidermal growth factor, epinephrine, thromboxane A and endorphin, among others. In addition, a number of reports have suggested a direct structural association between MHC-class I molecules and hormone receptors, including receptors for luteinizing and gonadotropic hormones and insulin (Cremaschi and Sterin-Borda 1994). Interestingly, the major histocompatibility complex is the only major susceptibility locus that has been identified in association with diabetes mellitus and in animal models for this disease.

In 1986, Olsson and coworkers defined the MHC-class I heavy chain as a structural subunit of the human insulin receptor (IR). They showed that monoclonal antibodies against some of the monomorphic determinants of MHC-class I molecules reduced insulin binding and immunoprecipitated insulin receptors, and suggested that the association between MHC-class I molecules and the IR occurred as a result of displacement of β_2m by the IR (Due et al. 1986). Subsequent studies in humans and mice have contributed to defining the molecular basis for the association between MHC-class I molecules and the IR, as well as characterizing the biological impact of those interactions on IR-mediated intracellular signaling events (Samson et al. 1986; Cousin et al. 1987; Edidin and Reiland 1990). Elegant studies by Edidin and coworkers demonstrated that physical association between MHC-class I molecules and IR and its impact on IR signaling cascades, such as kinase activity, is a function of the HLA-class I allele and the ratio between HLA-class I molecules and insulin receptors (Kittur et al. 1987; Reiland and Edidin 1993; Ramalingam et al. 1997). Notably, as postulated by Olsson and coworkers (Due et al. 1986), cell-surface β_2m -free MHC-class I heavy chains are required for functional association with the IR (Ramalingam et al. 1997). However, whether the dissociation of β_2m unmask an IR binding site in the MHC-class I heavy chain or induces a conformational change that allows IR binding remains uncertain.

Despite the body of evidence implicating MHC-class I molecules in regulatory roles beyond immunology, the novelty of the findings and some discrepancies between studies led some authors to question these discoveries (Liegler et al. 1990, 1991). To overcome that problem and address this topic, Olsson and coworkers used a novel approach. In a series of pioneering studies, they showed that peptides derived from the $\alpha 1$ domain of MHC-class I molecules regulated IR functions, namely, inhibition of the tyrosine kinase activity of the IR, resulting in inhibition of IR internalization, augmented steady-state levels of IR signaling and finally enhanced glucose uptake (Hansen et al. 1989; Stagsted et al. 1990, 1993; Stagsted 1998). Importantly, it was shown that the bioactive peptides attached to

MHC-class I molecules on the cell surface, apparently to the $\alpha 1$ domain (Olsson et al. 1994). This innovative work shed light on the influence of MHC-class I molecules in receptor internalization and function. Considering that the interaction between MHC-class I molecules and the insulin receptor was shown to depend on $\beta 2$ m-free class I molecules, these studies strengthen the possible importance of misfolded MHC-class I molecules and their biochemical modifications upon association with the IR, or receptors for other growth factors such as the IL-2 receptor, on the regulation of T cell function (see below).

1.4.5

Cell-Surface MHC-Class I Molecules in T Cells: Are Misfolding and *cis*-Association Related Events?

MHC-class I molecules physically associate in *cis* on the cell surface of human T cells with receptors whose engagement influences cell activation and proliferation, including receptors for cytokines such as IL-2 (Pedersen et al. 1999). Work performed in the 1980s is crucial to envision the importance of these *cis* associations. In 1983, Monos and Cooper reported that MHC-class I proteins are the most prominently synthesized and rapidly turned over of all the cell proteins in quiescent human T lymphocytes, changing that pattern when the T cell is activated to a lower increase in synthesis. Subsequent studies showed that cell-surface MHC-class I molecules undergo spontaneous internalization via coated vesicles in resting human and mice T cells (Tse and Pernis 1984; Machy et al. 1987). Moreover, using monocytic cells, Dasgupta and coworkers (1988) showed that the endocytosed molecules are recycled back to the cell surface via trans-Golgi cisternae. These data revealed the capacity of MHC-class I molecules to behave like receptor molecules and traffic through endolysosomal compartments, a capacity that has been associated with their intrinsic ability to become misfolded and associate with receptors that may regulate T cell signaling, growth and survival, depending on the stage of the cell cycle and the differentiation status of the T cell.

Indeed, a remarkable but overlooked feature of cell-surface MHC-class I molecules is that they may dissociate from the peptide and the β_2 m, becoming misfolded MHC-class I heavy chains that are detected by antibodies recognizing specific peptide sequences within the polymorphic region of the $\alpha 1$ domain (Madrigal et al. 1991; Perosa et al. 2003). The activation and/or differentiation state of the lymphocyte was found to be the most important factor determining the MHC-class I/peptide dissociation and the generation of misfolded MHC-class I molecules at the cell surface of normal human T cells (Schnabl et al. 1990; DeMaria et al. 1992; Arosa et al. 1999). On the other hand, two separate studies demonstrated that dissociation of the MHC-class I heavy chain from the peptide and β_2 m involves conformational changes and partial dimerization of the heavy chains, as well as recycling of MHC-class I molecules through endosomal compartments (Little et al. 1995; Pickl et al. 1996). Finally, studies in mice have suggested that dissociation of MHC-class I heavy chains and β_2 m and formation of MHC-class I dimers are related events that occur as a result of loss or unavailability of β_2 m (Capps et al. 1993).

The self-association of MHC-class I molecules at the cell surface of a variety of transformed cell lines, including lymphoblastoid cells, has been shown by a number of groups and is likely the result of the activation state of these cells (Matko et al. 1994; Damjanovich et al. 1995; Jenei et al. 1997; Triantafilou et al. 1999). Indeed, misfolded MHC-class I molecules as well as MHC-class I dimers are seldomly observed in resting human T cells collected from peripheral blood, their expression increases sharply upon activation, and the ratio between folded and misfolded MHC-class I molecules changes according to the activation status of the T cell, with misfolded molecules increasing during active cell division and decreasing with a decline in proliferation (Arosa et al. 1999; Santos et al. 2004). Moreover, misfolded MHC-class I molecules present at the cell surface of activated normal human T cells are associated with chaperones such as calreticulin and ERp57, suggesting that cell-surface MHC-class I molecules may also be subjected to protein quality control (Arosa et al. 1999; Santos et al. 2004).

The biological importance of the misfolded MHC-class I molecules and the MHC-class I clusters present at the cell surface has several interpretations. Capps and coworkers, as well as other groups, regarded MHC-class I misfolding and clustering as a mechanism to remove immunologically dysfunctional molecules (Capps et al. 1993; Pickl et al. 1993; DeMaria et al. 1994). In contrast, Damjanovich and collaborators interpret the MHC-class I clustering as a mechanism to strengthen *trans*-interactions between professional APC and T cells (Jenei et al. 1997; Bodnar et al. 2003). Finally, Schnabl and colleagues (1990) envisioned MHC-class I misfolding as a mechanism whereby loss of β_2m and peptide allows the MHC-class I heavy chain to associate in *cis* with a new structure. This *cis*-association may be functionally important to the activated T cells depending on the nature of the new molecules with which the “free” heavy chains can associate (Schnabl et al. 1990; Arosa et al. 1999; Santos et al. 2004). Studies performed during the last two decades on the impact that cell-surface MHC-class I ligation has on parameters of T cell activation, proliferation and survival strongly support this view.

1.4.6

MHC-Class I *cis*-Associations and the Regulation of T Cell Growth and Survival

Early reports using soluble anti-MHC-class I antibodies showed inhibition of T cell proliferation induced by T cell mitogens (Taylor et al. 1986; De Felice et al. 1987; Dasgupta et al. 1988; Smith et al. 1994). In contrast, cross-linked anti-MHC-class I antibodies induced proliferation of stimulated T cells (Geppert et al. 1988; Gilliland et al. 1989; Wacholtz et al. 1989). It was soon demonstrated that T cell-surface MHC-class I molecules were involved in the regulation of biological processes in T lymphocytes, from calcium fluxes, tyrosine phosphorylation and cytokine secretion to cell division and death (Houlden et al. 1991; Skov et al. 1995; Genestier et al. 1997, 1998). More recent studies have shown that engagement of T cell-surface MHC-I molecules has different outputs depending on the domain engaged and the activation status of the cells. Thus, whereas cross-linking of anti- β_2m antibodies induces T cell apoptosis of activated human T cells, a process paralleled by the activation of

intracellular kinases such as Lck, ZAP-70, PI-3 and JNK, cross-linking of anti-MHC-class I heavy chain antibodies induces proliferation of resting normal human T cells (Bregenholt et al. 1996; Skov et al. 1997). These data reinforce the role played by T cell-surface MHC-I molecules in the regulation of transmembrane signaling on human T cells, and indicate that MHC-class I ligation has opposite effects in activated and non-activated T cells (Pedersen et al. 1999).

Because some of the signaling events modulated by MHC-class I ligation, such as calcium fluxes and IL-2 secretion, do not require the cytoplasmic domain of the molecule, the regulation is likely achieved by *cis*-associations with other cell-surface molecules (Gur et al. 1990). Indeed, a number of reports have shown that MHC-class I molecules are physically and functionally associated on the surface of normal and transformed human T cells with molecules such as CD3, CD8, CD45 and the IL-2R, all directly or indirectly associated with a signaling machinery (Bushkin et al. 1986, 1988; Blue et al. 1988; Sharon et al. 1988; Pedersen et al. 1999). More recent studies suggest that misfolded MHC-class I molecules preferentially associate with the CD8 β chain and also with intracellular Src kinases such as Lck (Santos et al. 2004). The MHC-class I *cis* associations with signaling molecules may reflect timely regulation of the function mediated by those receptors as demonstrated for growth receptors (Due et al. 1986; Olsson et al. 1994; Ramalingam et al. 1997). In this context, the negative modulatory effects observed on activated human T cells when cell-surface MHC-class I molecules are ligated could be a consequence of the interference with ongoing biological processes in the activated T cells regulated by MHC-class I molecules. The recent demonstration that MHC-class I molecules associate in *cis* with the natural killer receptor Ly49A and restrict natural killer cell inhibition is a further illustration of the pleiotropic nature of MHC-class I molecules (Doucey et al. 2004), and has renewed interest in this overlooked characteristic of MHC-class I molecules.

1.5

Concluding Remarks and Future Prospects

The preferential proliferation and differentiation of CD8+ T cells induced by erythrocytes, epithelial cells and IL-15 argue in favor of the existence of a specific receptiveness of CD8+ T cells to signals from the internal environment delivered by non-professional APC, such as epithelial cells from the gut and liver, as opposed to CD4+ T cells which are more receptive to signals from professional APC, such as dendritic cells and macrophages. The privileged communication that takes place between CD8+ T cells and their environment is a unique feature that may help to shed light on the phenotypic and functional changes that occur within the human T cell pool in a variety of situations (Arosa 2002).

Regarding RBC, we suggest that the modulation of CD8+ T cell growth and survival induced by RBC results from secreted vesicles. After binding to the plasma membrane of the activated T cells, these RBC vesicles initiate and/or intersect with intracellular signals that will ultimately modulate fundamental processes such as the entrance into the cell cycle, resistance to oxidative stress and apoptosis, and cell survival. Yet, considering that RBC deliver oxygen, and that

hypoxia can affect T cell function and fate (Naldini and Carraro 1999; Conforti et al. 2003), the possibility that RBC contribute to the increase in T cell growth and survival because of the more efficient oxygen transport into T cells deserves consideration. In any case, identification of the RBC molecules responsible may provide a valuable tool to develop therapeutic protocols aimed at reversing pathological situations linked to excessive or faulty T cell growth (Fig. 1.2).

Concerning the impact that epithelial cells and IL-15 have on CD8+ T cells, it is anticipated that this interaction will have reciprocal effects, i.e., the activated CD8+ T cells would be involved in the regulation of physiological processes of the neighboring epithelial cells. The likelihood of the activation of CD8+ T cells by IL-15 presented by liver epithelial cells, though not proven yet, has to be considered. In this scenario, molecules with the MHC-fold will likely play a critical and multifunctional role in the relationship between epithelial tissues and T cells. Depending on their folding status, cell-surface MHC-class I molecules may intervene in a variety of processes that will impact both the T cell and the neighboring cell (Fig. 1.4).

The study and characterization of novel functions for this family of molecules (e.g., regulation of receptor internalization) will contribute to a better understanding of the biology of human T lymphocytes.

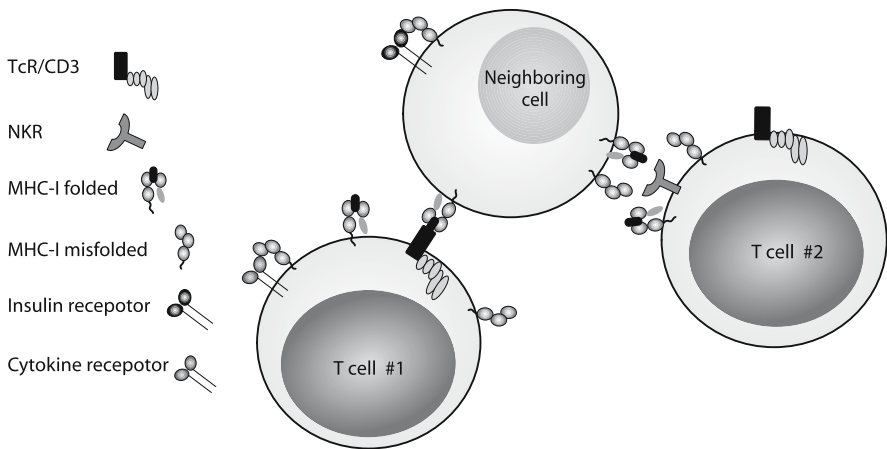


Fig. 1.4. Schematic model illustrating the role of folded and misfolded MHC-class I molecules on human T cell function. While folded MHC-class I molecules present on neighboring cells may interact in *trans* with the TCR/CD3 complex (*T Cell #1*) and with NK receptors (*T Cell #2*), misfolded MHC-class I molecules present in either neighboring cells or T cells (*T cells #1* and *#2*) may interact in *cis* with receptors for growth factors (e.g., insulin) and cytokines (e.g., IL-15). While the first type of interaction may result in T cell activation and proliferation, the second type may result in survival signals that facilitate expansion and differentiation. Ligand of cell-surface MHC-class I molecules in T cells may affect the balance between folded and misfolded MHC-class I molecules as well as *cis* interactions with signaling and/or growth receptors, thus interfering with the process of growth and survival

Acknowledgements. This work was supported by grants from FEDER and the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (POCTI/38264/MGI/2001), from the Gulbenkian Foundation (Prémio Estímulo à Investigação 2001) and from the American Portuguese Biomedical Research Fund.

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Novel Single Cell Fluorescence Approaches in the Investigation of Signaling at the Cellular Level

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2.1 Introduction

Treatment of human diseases relies on a clear understanding of the molecular mechanisms and cellular events behind pathophysiological processes. In most cancers, one or more steps in the transduction of signals from the extracellular environment to the nucleus are subverted, leading directly to the formation and evolution of the tumor. Consequently, drugs targeting transmembrane signaling proteins can be used as an effective and selective treatment approach (Sausville et al. 2003). Classical molecular biological methods (blotting, immunoprecipitation, chemical cross-linking) have given important insight into the details of transmembrane signaling processes. Most of these approaches include the disruption of the integrity of the cell (e.g. by detergent treatment), thereby precluding the study of the intricate details of signal transduction in its native, unperturbed environment. Additionally, these methods are inherently unable to reveal cell-to-cell differences caused by heterogeneous, endogenous or ectopic expression of proteins. Biochemical methods often lack the quantitative information needed to describe the physico-chemical processes accurately. In situ labeling of biomolecules by fluorescence offers a valuable alternative to biochemical methods. Detection of fluorescently labeled molecules is (1) sensitive: under favorable conditions even single molecules can be detected; (2) not harmful to the cell or to the environment because the use of ionizing radiation can be avoided; and (3) flexible and specific: fluorescently labeled antibodies or genes engineered to code for proteins with a fluorescent tag accurately report on the subcellular distribution of proteins. In this chapter we give a brief overview of the application of fluorescence in quantitative cell biological studies, with special emphasis on Förster-type fluorescence resonance energy transfer (FRET) and intracellular trafficking, and address the advantages and potential pitfalls of different detection and labeling strategies from the standpoint of a cell or molecular biologist.

2.2 Subcellular and Temporal Resolution Versus Statistical Reliability

Spatial and temporal organization of signal transduction events is important for the maintenance of the integrity of a complex biological system. Although both the temporal and spatial resolutions of fluorescence microscopy are limited

(discussed in detail later), the complexity of a large fraction of cell biological questions can be adequately addressed using this technique. From a practical point of view, the spatial resolution of conventional fluorescence microscopy is about 200–500 nm; thus it provides subcellular resolution and is able to interrogate subcellular organelles separately with a temporal resolution in the millisecond to second time domain. However, even the simplest biological parameters or phenomena usually show a large population variance, e.g. transient transfection often yields a two to three orders of magnitude difference in the cellular expression of the transfected gene. Consequently, sampling of a relatively large number of cells is necessary to obtain a statistically reliable representation of the population. Fluorescence microscopy is usually limited to the measurement of tens or hundreds of cells. The use of flow cytometry, where single cells cross a laser beam at a rate of hundreds or thousands of cells per second, provides statistically accurate data about fluorescence intensity, i.e. the concentration of fluorescent molecules in cells (Ormerod 1994; Shapiro 2002). Unlike microscopy, flow cytometry yields very limited information about morphology by measuring light scatter parameters sensitive to the shape and internal structure of cells (Jovin et al. 1976). Additionally, commercial flow cytometers provide no information about the subcellular distribution of fluorescent molecules. This can be a problem if one wishes to study, e.g., the properties of green fluorescent protein (GFP)-tagged membrane proteins which are present not only in the plasma membrane, but also in organelles along the secretory pathway (e.g. the Golgi complex). However, if less than ~10% of the protein is outside the plasma membrane, the contribution of these proteins to the measured signal will be negligible. In addition, attached cells have to be removed from the culture dish. Therefore, flow cytometric measurement of suspended cells may not faithfully reflect the properties of proteins in an attached cell. Given the disadvantages of microscopic and flow cytometric approaches, a combination of these two techniques is sometimes necessary (Lidke et al. 2003). However, both microscopy and flow cytometry are able to discriminate dead cells from live ones, an achievement not shared by conventional biochemical or fluorometric approaches.

Attempts have been made to combine the statistical reliability of flow cytometry with the subcellular and morphological resolution of fluorescence microscopy. This less widespread technique is called laser scanning cytometry (LSC) (Tarnok and Gerstner 2002). Fluorochrome-labeled cells are imaged under a conventional fluorescence microscope equipped with special software capable of identifying single cells on the microscope slide. Not only the fluorescence intensity but also parameters describing the morphology of the cell and the distribution of fluorescence are recorded in addition to the location of each cell. This latter feature makes repeated measurement of the same cell possible.

2.3

Labeling of Cells with Fluorescent Molecules

2.3.1

Monoclonal Antibodies and Their Derivatives

Monoclonal antibodies (mAb) are bivalent molecules with an approximate molecular weight (MW) of 160 kDa. They contain two antigen-binding fragments (Fab) and a constant fragment (Fc) (Hudson and Souriau 2003). Fluorescent dyes can be covalently conjugated to them, creating one of the most versatile tools in the hands of molecular biologists. Since the size of fluorescent molecules (Cy dyes, Alexa fluorophores, fluorescein, etc.) is small (MW ~0.5 kDa), they generally do not alter the binding affinity of the antibody. Similarly, the Ab usually does not deteriorate the fluorescent properties of the dye, especially if it is conjugated to the Ab through a spacer. In addition to labeling strategies with fluorescent primary antibodies, secondary fluorescent Abs can be used to label a non-fluorescent primary antibody. Alternatively, mAbs can be biotinylated *in vitro*, and fluorescent avidin can be used as a secondary label. Increases the signal to noise ratio, because several secondary Abs bind to a single primary antibody and they obviate the need to fluorescently modify every primary antibody. However, secondary labeling strategies have some disadvantages: (1) an increase in non-specific labeling [especially when using avidin for labeling intracellular antigens (Hollinshead et al. 1997)]. However, saturation of intracellular endogenous biotin with non-labeled avidin, and then – since avidin is tetravalent – saturation of the biotin binding sites of avidin with biotin can significantly reduce the non-specific background. In addition, high background due to binding of antibodies to Fc receptors can be prevented by using Fab or F(ab')₂ fragments; (2) due to the multivalent nature of the secondary Ab, cross-linking of the primary antibody and consequently the labeled protein may occur. This can result in activation, e.g. in the case of membrane proteins. Even the bivalent primary antibodies themselves can sometimes induce cross-linking and receptor activation (Park et al. 1995; Le et al. 2000; Cardarelli et al. 2002). Several strategies have been developed to reduce labeling-induced receptor activation: (1) monovalent Fab fragments can be used either as a primary or as a secondary label; (2) the secondary Fc-specific Fab can be conjugated to the primary antibody *in vitro* (Zenon kits from Molecular Probes), an approach that also reduces non-specific binding; (3) single chain variable fragments (scFv) of an antibody can also be used for primary labeling (Hudson and Souriau 2003); (4) camels, llamas and sharks naturally produce single chain antibodies (VHH) binding monovalently to their epitope (van der Linden et al. 1999; Desmyter et al. 2001; Hudson and Souriau 2003); and (5) small oligonucleotides called aptamers have been developed for strong and specific binding of various cellular entities (Jayasena 1999).

2.3.2

Visible Fluorescent Proteins

The discovery of green fluorescent protein (GFP) and its subsequent development revolutionized fluorescence microscopy because researchers could follow trafficking of proteins specifically in living cells by creating chimeras of the studied protein with GFP. Originally, GFP was isolated from the jellyfish *Aequorea victoria*. Several naturally occurring variants of GFP and other evolutionarily unrelated fluorescent proteins exist (Chalfie 1995; Matz et al. 1999). In addition, mutagenesis of the original proteins generated a large variety of fluorescent proteins with improved properties and different colors. We collectively refer to them as visible fluorescent proteins (VFPs, Table 2.1).

The original GFP from *Aequorea victoria* displayed two absorption peaks at 395 and 470 nm corresponding to the neutral and anionic forms of the chromophore, respectively, and a dim emission peak at 510 nm originating from the anionic form. The chromophore is formed by cyclization and oxidation of residues 65–67 (Ser-Tyr-Gly). The chromophore is buried in a β -barrel structure (Ormo et al. 1996; Yang et al. 1996; Youvan and Michel-Beyerle 1996), and its spectral properties are substantially modified by interactions with neighboring amino acids (Heim et al. 1994). An S65T mutation practically eliminated the UV absorption peak. Enhanced GFP (EGFP) contains an additional mutation (F64L). EGFP fluoresces 35 times brighter than wild-type GFP and as opposed to wild-type GFP the rate of chromophore maturation at 37°C is not significantly lower than at 28°C (Patterson et al. 1997). A number of different spectral variants were developed (cyan – CFP, 434/477; yellow – YFP, 514/527; blue – BFP, 380/440; the numbers refer to the excitation/emission maxima) (Tsien 1998; Clontech 2001). Although often referred to as CFP, YFP or BFP, these spectral variants are derivatives of EGFP, and are more correctly called ECFP, EYFP and EBFP. YFP was notorious for its sensitivity to pH, chloride concentration and photobleaching. Second-generation YFP displayed slightly better pH resistance. The perfect YFP has not yet been developed, but two third-generation YFPs have promising properties: citrine has much reduced chloride and pH sensitivity and higher photostability (Griesbeck et al. 2001) and Venus is the brightest and fastest maturing YFP so far (Nagai et al. 2002; Rekas et al. 2002).

Long-wavelength fluorescent proteins provide a valuable alternative to GFP family members, because their red fluorescence shows negligible overlap with cellular autofluorescence and with short-wavelength VFPs. The first such protein, DsRed, was isolated from a coral (Matz et al. 1999). Its widespread application has been severely limited by its slow maturation and the strong oligomerization tendency required for the generation of a functional chromophore (Sacchetti et al. 2002). A large number of other VFPs, including short and long wavelength types, and VFPs originating from different species are still being developed. These variants display brighter fluorescence, less oligomerization, lower photobleaching rate and faster maturation (Labas et al. 2002).

Most VFPs show at least a weak tendency to dimerize. In most cases, this phenomenon does not cause problems, because it takes place only at relatively high concentrations ($K_d \sim 0.1$ mM). YFP and CFP have slightly higher dimerization

Table 2.1. Photophysical properties of visible fluorescent proteins

Name	Mutations from wtGFP	Synonym	λ_{ex} (nm)	λ_{em} (nm)	Extinction coefficient (at λ_{ex} , max.)	Quantum yield (QY)	Notes	References
wtGFP		Wild type	395–397 and 470–475	508 (540)	36,500?	0.79		Shimomura et al. (1962)
EGFP	F64L, S65T		488	507–509	55,000	0.6	Possible FRET acceptor of EBFP	Heim et al. (1995)
PAGFP	V163A, T203H	WEGFPH	400 (488)	507–509			Fluorescence increases >100 times upon radiation at 400 nm	Patterson and Lippincott-Schwartz (2002)
YFP	S65G, S72A, T203Y	Gfp-10c	513	527				Ormo et al. (1996)
EYFP	YFP + V68L, Q69L		513	527	67,000	0.67	Possible FRET acceptor of ECFP	(Ormo et al. 1996)
ECFP	F64L, S65T, Y66W, N146I, M153T, V163A	W7	433 (453)	476	26,000	0.37	Possible FRET donor of EYFP	Heim and Tsien 1996
Cerulean	ECFP+ S72A, Y145A, H148D		433	475	43,000	0.62	Better possible FRET donor of EYFP, because of higher QY and single component lifetime	Rizzo et al. 2004

Table 2.1. Photophysical properties of visible fluorescent proteins (*Continued*)

Name	Mutations from wtGFP	Synonym	λ_{ex} (nm)	λ_{em} (nm)	Extinction coefficient (at λ_{ex} , max.)	Quantum yield (QY)	Notes	References
EBFP	F64L, Y66H, Y145F	P4-3	380-383	440-447			Possible FRET donor of EGFP	Patterson et al. (1997)
Citrine	YFP + V68L, Q69M		516	529	77,000	0.76	Acid resistant	Griesbeck et al. 2001
Venus	YFP + F46L, F64L, M153T, V163A, S175G		515	528	92,200	0.57	Faster maturation, less acid sensitive	Nagai et al. (2002)
mYFP	YFP + A206K		513	527	79,000	0.62	Monomeric, $K_d=74$ mM (compared to YFP $K_d=0.1$ mM)	Zacharias et al. (2002)
DsRed		drFP583	558	583	57,000	0.79	From <i>Discosoma</i> coral, tetrameric	Matz et al. 1999
mRFP			584	607	44,000	0.25	Monomeric DsRed	Campbell et al. (2002)
KFP1		asCP	532 (580)	600	123,000 (initial) 59,000 (kindled)	<0.001 (initial) 0.07 (kindled)	Kindling of this protein can be induced by 532 nm light. Fluorescence intensity increases 30-fold when kindling is irreversible	Chudakov et al. (2003)

Table 2.1. Photophysical properties of visible fluorescent proteins (*Continued*)

Name	Mutations from wtGFP	Synonym	λ_{ex} (nm)	λ_{em} (nm)	Extinction coefficient (at λ_{ex} , max.)	Quantum yield (QY)	Notes	References
Kaede			508 (480) 572	518 (green) 582 (red)			Forms a homotetrameric complex	Ando et al. (2002)
BifC	YN and YC, GN and GC, CN and CC + combinations thereof	Bimolecular fluorescence complementation-	Dependent on basis fluorophore				Two nonfluorescent fluorophores complement each other to form one fluorescent molecule	Hu et al. (2002); Hu and Kerppola (2003)

potency, and DsRed shows a strong tendency to form tetramers. This may result in the formation of large, nonfunctional protein aggregates especially if the fusion partner also shows a propensity to oligomerize (Zhang et al. 2002). Even if the oligomerized proteins are not inactivated, VFP-driven association results in the formation of artificial oligomers, hindering studies of protein associations. YFP- or CFP-containing chimeras have been shown to aggregate (Clayton et al. 2002; Zacharias et al. 2002; Lidke et al. 2003). In these VFPs, the dimerization tendency was practically eliminated by replacing a hydrophobic alanine with a positively charged lysine (A206 K) (Zacharias et al. 2002; Lidke et al. 2003). It required 33 mutations in DsRed to eliminate its tetramerization tendency (Campbell et al. 2002). Even if correct functioning of a protein is not disrupted by VFP-driven association, artificial aggregation may result in mistargeting of the protein. This was shown for DsRed-thymidine kinase (DsRed-TK) chimeras, which are not correctly imported to the nucleus despite the presence of several nuclear localization signals in TK. Coexpression of DsRed-TK with GFP-TK or untagged TK allowed these proteins to enter the nucleus by inhibiting the formation of DsRed-TK oligomers (Soling et al. 2002).

2.3.3

Novel Applications of VFPs in Cell Biology

Studying intracellular trafficking of VFP chimeras is made difficult by the presence of the VFP fusion protein in many cellular organelles. The presence of a VFP fusion protein in endocytotic and secretory vesicles due to the continuous recycling of membrane proteins is a confounding factor in studies of its internalization. The solution could be a VFP that can be activated selectively at a certain location of the cell (i.e. the cell membrane). Such a VFP is the T203H mutant of wild-type GFP (PA-GFP-64F-65S, photoactivatable GFP), which undergoes a ~100-fold increase in its fluorescence excited at 488 nm after irradiation with blue light at ~400 nm (Fig. 2.1; Patterson and Lippincott-Schwartz 2002; Post et al. 2005).

Non-activated PA-GFP has hardly any fluorescence, making it difficult to identify cells expressing it. Therefore Kaede, a GFP variant that changes color from green to red by irradiation at 350–400 nm, is even more suitable for these kinds of studies, because both the red and the green versions can be separately detected with excitation at 475 and 550 nm without any further change in color (Ando et al. 2002). Another variation on the topic has been recently published. Kindling fluorescent protein (KFP1) shows a 30-fold increase in its fluorescence ($\lambda_{\text{ex}}=580$ nm, $\lambda_{\text{em}}=600$ nm) when illuminated with green light. When the intensity of green light is low, photoactivation is reversible, and photoactivated KFP1 is spontaneously and reversibly quenched, which can be accelerated by illumination with blue light. When intense green light is used, photoactivation of KFP1 is irreversible (Chudakov et al. 2003).

VFP fused to protein domains interacting with special messengers can be used to visualize the spatial and temporal changes in the concentration of a messenger in living cells. Such an approach has already been successfully used to localize different phosphoinositides (Balla and Varnai 2002), diacylglycerol (Oancea et

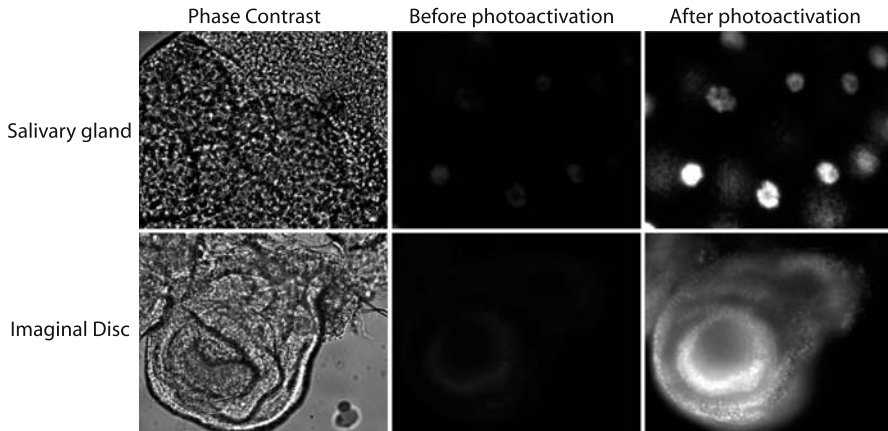


Fig. 2.1. Photoactivation of PA-GFP in *Drosophila* larvae. A transgenic *Drosophila melanogaster* fly line expressing PA-GFP-histone 2AvD was generated. PA-GFP was activated using a mercury-HBO 50-W lamp and an Ex 436/12 filter. For imaging, the following filters were used: Ex450–490, DC510FT, Em520 LP. Activation time was ~ 1 s when using a $40\times 1.3\text{NA}$ oil Plan-Neofluar objective. Fluorescence intensity increased after activation in different tissues dissected from third instar larvae. This image shows a salivary gland (*above*) and an imaginal disk (*below*)

al. 1998), phosphatidic acid (Rizzo et al. 2000) and calcium (Teruel and Meyer 2002).

FRET has found widespread application in the study of molecular conformations and associations (Jares-Erijman and Jovin 2003). We will give a detailed introduction to basic concepts and measuring methods of FRET in a separate section of this chapter. Now, we would like to highlight the benefit of combining VFPs with FRET experiments. FRET is usually measured between spectroscopically distinct molecules (hetero-FRET), less frequently between identical molecules (homo-FRET). The most widely used donor–acceptor VFP pair for hetero-FRET measurements is CFP-YFP. The BFP-GFP pair, which was used earlier, had unfavorable properties because of the dimness and fast photobleaching of BFP (Zhang et al. 2002). FRET between conventional fluorophores has been frequently used to study conformational changes in molecules. In such a case, both the donor and the acceptor are part of the same molecule. In one such application a calcium-sensitive protein called cameleon is engineered, consisting of CFP and YFP fused together through CaM, a peptide linker and M13. In the presence of Ca^{2+} the interaction between CaM and M13 brings CFP and YFP together, resulting in increased FRET (Miyawaki et al. 1997, 1999). Constructs sensitive to the activity of tyrosine kinases have also been reported: a phosphotyrosine-binding SH2 domain and a substrate peptide for the kinase of interest have been sandwiched between CFP and YFP. Kinase activation phosphorylates the substrate peptide in the reporter that will be recognized and bound by the SH2 domain, inducing a conformational change, and will consequently alter the FRET efficiency (Kurokawa et al. 2001; Sato et al. 2002). Another described reporter is sensitive to caspase activity. In this

case, CFP and YFP are fused together through a caspase-sensitive linker. Upon caspase activation, cleavage of the linker separates the donor and the acceptor, thus abolishing FRET (Rehm et al. 2002). In another type of application the donor and the acceptor constitute an intermolecular FRET pair reporting on the association state of the proteins they are fused to. EGF stimulation of cells expressing epidermal growth factor receptor (EGFR) fused to CFP and Grb2 fused to YFP resulted in a large increase in FRET efficiency, demonstrating recruitment of Grb2 to EGFR. Additionally, subcellular distribution of FRET showed that EGFR and Grb2 interact in endosomal compartments, indicating that signaling can occur in endosomes (Sorkin et al. 2000). Molecular associations can also be measured by homo-FRET. If homo-FRET takes place, the fluorescence anisotropy of VFP decreases. The high intrinsic anisotropy (r_0) of GFP and its variants (Volkmer et al. 2000) and the large R_0 values for VFP homo-FRET pairs (Patterson et al. 2000) make them suitable for such applications (for a detailed explanation of homo-FRET see Sect. 2.5.5.6). Time-resolved anisotropy measurements demonstrated homo-aggregation of herpes simplex virus thymidine kinase in transfected cells (Gautier et al. 2001). Steady-state anisotropy measurements have been successfully used to detect the homoassociation of MHC class I molecules (Rocheleau et al. 2003) and EGFR (Lidke et al. 2003).

Hu et al. (2002) described a method named bimolecular fluorescence complementation (BiFC), which is based on the formation of a fluorescent protein from two fragments of YFP brought together by the association of two interacting proteins fused to the two YFP fragments (Hu et al. 2002). Since in the absence of complementation no fluorescence is present (no background), this approach is exquisitely suited to monitoring the interaction between two lowly expressed proteins in living cells. However, both BiFC and FRET are limited in their applicability to measuring the association of a single protein pair. Multicolor fluorescence complementation has been developed from BiFC (Hu and Kerppola 2003). The authors realized that fragments from different VFP variants form fluorescent proteins with different colors. They have identified 12 different pairs of VFP fragments corresponding to 7 distinct spectral classes and used the method to simultaneously visualize the interaction of Fos with Jun ATF2 in live cells.

2.3.4

Labeling of Tetracysteine Motifs with Biarsenical Derivatives of Fluorophores

Fluorescent chimeras produced by fusing VFP to a protein offer a limited set of available colors and can have undesirable effects due to the large size of the VFP (~25 kDa). Griffin et al. proposed introducing a tetracysteine motif (usually Cys-Cys-Xaa-Xaa-Cys-Cys, where Xaa is any non-cysteine amino acid), probably forming a hairpin structure, into a recombinant protein. After expression of the protein, the tetracysteine motif can be reversibly labeled by a membrane-permeable biarsenical derivative of fluorescein (FLAsH-EDT₂, fluorescein arsenical helix binder-ethanedithiol), if cysteines are reduced, which is usually the case for intracellular proteins (Griffin et al. 1998; Adams et al. 2002). FLAsH-EDT₂ is non-fluo-

rescent until it binds to the four cysteines in the recombinant target protein. Toxicity and non-specific binding of the biarsenical compound to endogenous thiols are of concern. Both of these effects can be decreased by the simultaneous administration of micromolar concentrations of EDT or disperse blue to block binding of FLAsH-EDT₂ to endogenous cysteines and hydrophobic pockets, respectively (Griffin et al. 2000). However, addition of micromolar concentrations of EDT can also interfere with some cellular processes necessitating properly designed control experiments. Upon removal of excess FLAsH-EDT₂, the biarsenic dye persists on the tetracysteine motif, but newly synthesized proteins are not labeled. Therefore, biarsenic reagents can be used to follow the trafficking of proteins (Ju et al. 2004). Multicolor labeling can be achieved by combining FLAsH-EDT₂ and ReAsH-EDT₂ (resorufin arsenic helix binder). The latter exhibits red fluorescence after binding to a tetracysteine motif and also generates singlet oxygen which can photoconvert diaminobenzidine (DAB) to an electron-dense product, allowing visualization by electron microscopy (Gaietta et al. 2002). Serial labeling with FLAsH-EDT₂ and ReAsH-EDT₂ produced green and red proteins, respectively, because ReAsH-EDT₂ only labeled proteins synthesized after labeling with FLAsH-EDT₂, since tetracysteine motifs in old proteins were occupied by FLAsH-EDT₂. Recently, blue fluorescing biarsenical dyes have also become available (Adams et al. 2002). Under strong illumination the amount of singlet oxygen generated by ReAsH is sufficient to inactivate proteins within 5–50 nm. The approach, termed chromophore-assisted light inactivation (CALI), has been successfully used to abolish the function of gap junctions (Tour et al. 2003). Negatively charged, sulfonated biarsenical derivatives of fluorescent dyes can be used for selective labeling of tetracysteine motifs in the extracellular domain of membrane proteins after cysteines are reduced (Adams et al. 2002). A brief comparison between VFPs and molecules binding to tetracysteine motifs is given in Table 2.2.

2.3.5

Quantum Dots

Conventional fluorescent dyes and VFPs usually suffer from low brightness and photobleaching, i. e., a limited number of allowed excitation-emission cycles. One of the most exciting new approaches in fluorescence technologies has been the development of quantum dots (QDs) for biological applications (Jovin 2003). They are semiconductor nanocrystals displaying molecular properties due to their small size (quantum confinement; see later) and very bright fluorescence. A QD consists of several layers. In the center, a semiconductor core (e. g. CdSe) with a diameter of 3–5 nm is found. The core itself is the source of fluorescence, and its size determines the color (wavelength of the emitted photon) of the QD: larger QDs display red-shifted fluorescence compared to smaller ones (Alivisatos 1996). In semiconductor crystals absorption of a photon generates an excited, negatively charged electron, leaving a positively charged vacancy, a hole, behind. They are coupled to each other and are called an exciton. If the size of a semiconductor crystal is reduced below the characteristic size of an exciton (Bohr radius), quantum confinement takes place, resulting in the appearance of a well-defined band

Table 2.2. Pros and cons of labeling with VFP and tetracysteine motif-binding molecules

	VFP	Labeling of tetracysteine motifs
Molecular weight	~25 kDa	FIAsH: <1 kDa Tetracysteine motif: ~2 kDa
Position	Usually the C- or N-terminus	Can be added practically anywhere in the protein with the restriction that only reduced tetracysteine motifs can be labeled
Readout	Only fluorescence	Depends on the tetracysteine motif-binding molecule, e.g. fluorescence, fluorescent Ca^{2+} sensor, electron microscopy, NMR
Maturation/kinetics of labeling	Depends a lot on the spectral variant, but takes at least an hour	Labeling of the tetracysteine motif is completed within minutes (Adams et al. 2002)
Detection limit and background in live cells	~1 μM (Niswender et al. 1995) Low background	~10 μM (Adams et al. 2002) Higher, cell type-dependent background that can be reduced with EDT
Dynamics of the label	Once synthesized, VFP forms an integral part of the protein	Labeling of the tetracysteine motif is reversible, millimolar concentration of EDT reverse labeling

in the fluorescence emission spectrum. The size of the QD core is approximately equal to the Bohr radius, conferring molecular, quantum properties on it. The fluorescence quantum yield of an isolated semiconductor core is very low (typically in the order of a few percent). Therefore, the core is surrounded by a semiconductor shell (CdS, ZnS), increasing the quantum yield to 30–70% (Peng et al. 1997; Michalet et al. 2001). Core-shell QDs are soluble in non-polar solvents only. Water solubility is conferred by a shell of functionalized silica, amphipathic linkers or a polymer coating that will also allow further functionalization (Bruchez et al. 1998; Jovin 2003). Commercially available QDs (Quantum Dot Corporation, Evident Technologies) are either functionalized with streptavidin, protein A, or protein G for convenient and versatile use, or can be easily conjugated to proteins by the user.

QDs display several properties that make them an almost ideal label for cell biological applications: (1) they are bright primarily due to their very high absorption coefficient, (2) they are very photostable even during extended illumination, and (3) they have a continuous excitation spectrum and a narrow emission spectrum (full width at half-maximum is ~30–40 nm). The emission peak is

typically shifted very little from the long wavelength edge of the excitation spectrum (small Stokes shift) and its wavelength is independent of the excitation wavelength. Due to the continuous nature of the excitation spectrum, lower wavelength excitation can be used, so the excitation and emission wavelengths can be very far from each other (large apparent Stokes shift), reducing the background due to light scattering and cellular autofluorescence (typically displaying a low Stokes shift). A further advantage of the continuous excitation spectrum is that several different QDs can be excited at the same wavelength, and they can still be spectrally separated from each other due to their well-defined narrow emission bands. The disadvantages of QDs are their relatively large size (the core and the shell surrounded by the outer layer is 15–20 nm) and their blinking behavior (intermittent fluorescent and nonfluorescent states). The long-term toxicity of QDs is unknown, but short-term incubation of live cells with QDs does not seem to affect their viability (Chan and Nie 1998; Jaiswal et al. 2003; Lidke et al. 2004). A report about *in vivo* imaging of sentinel lymph nodes with QDs and an apparent lack of toxic effects in live animals also shows that the “therapeutic index” (the ratio between the toxic and therapeutic/diagnostic dose of a drug) is wide enough for live cell and animal experiments (Kim et al. 2003).

QDs have been successfully used as a secondary label on cultured cells and tissue sections demonstrating low non-specific binding. Streptavidin or anti-mouse IgG-coated QDs were specifically bound to primary biotinylated and non-biotinylated Abs (Wu et al. 2003). Multicolor labeling and long-term imaging have also been demonstrated (Jaiswal et al. 2003). Alternatively, QDs coated with streptavidin can be conjugated to biotinylated ligands or antibodies in a tube prior to cell labeling. In this way, QDs can be used to follow the trafficking of receptors in live cells (Dahan et al. 2003; Lidke et al. 2004). Using this labeling approach it was demonstrated that conjugation of QD-streptavidin to biotinylated EGF did not alter the affinity of the ligand to its receptor and that the relatively large size of QDs did not interfere with the ability of two QD ligands to bind to the two monomers of a dimeric receptor (Lidke et al. 2004).

2.3.6

Steric Effects of Fluorescent Labeling

Correct functioning of proteins depends on their interactions with each other. Fluorescent labeling of proteins may interfere with their interactions: the larger the label, the more profound effects can be expected. Additionally, the relatively low permeability of large whole antibodies across the membrane (even in detergent-permeabilized samples) causes them to have more restricted access to their epitope compared to Fab or F(ab')₂ fragments. The size of a conventional fluorescent dye is negligible compared to the size of an antibody. However, VFPs (MW ~25 kDa) and QDs (diameter ~15–20 nm) are comparable in size to a protein (Jares-Erijman and Jovin 2003). In some cases, even large fluorescent dyes (APC, PE) can limit how close the labeled proteins can get to each other (Batard et al. 2002). On the other hand, even large labels like QDs can have no effect on the binding properties of the antibody or ligand to which they are conjugated (Lidke

et al. 2004). Therefore, one has to carefully consider the pros and cons of labels before deciding which one to use. One cannot predict, a priori, whether the label will perturb the system being investigated. Proper controls must be employed to ensure that the label faithfully reflects the native system.

2.4

Methods to Detect Fluorescence in Cell Biological Applications

2.4.1

Spatial Resolution of Fluorescence Microscopy

The spatial resolution of a conventional fluorescence microscope is limited by the Abbe principle which states that the spatial resolution of a focusing light microscope is related to the size of its focal spot, which is in turn determined by the wavelength, the half aperture of the objective, and the index of refraction of the medium between the objective and the sample (Pawley 1995):

$$r = 0.61 \frac{\lambda}{NA} = 0.61 \frac{\lambda}{n \cdot \sin \omega} \quad (2.1)$$

where r is the spatial resolution defined as the minimal spacing between two point-like objects that can be separated from each other, λ is the wavelength of the emitted light, NA is the numerical aperture of the objective, n is the index of refraction of the medium between the objective and the sample and ω is the half-angular aperture of the objective. Due to theoretical and practical limitations on these parameters, the spatial resolution of a fluorescence microscope is approximately 200 nm (Hell 2003). Strictly speaking, the above reasoning applies to the lateral resolution of light microscopy, which is the smallest separation of two point-like objects in the X-Y plane that can be separated from each other. Both the temporal and axial resolutions of a microscope influence the apparent lateral resolution. Obviously, if the imaged object moves during the acquisition time, the image gets blurred. This may be a significant problem if a sample of low fluorescent intensity is imaged. In a conventional fluorescence microscope, the image is formed from a mixture of in-focus and a high proportion of out-of-focus photons, causing a loss of contrast and sharpness, because the axial resolution of objectives is three to four times lower than the lateral one (Pawley 1995). Therefore, the contribution of out-of-focus light to image formation decreases the effective lateral resolution. Considering the effect of the above factors, the lateral resolution power of a fluorescence microscope is ~500 nm from a practical point of view.

Although the theoretical limit of the lateral resolution of conventional fluorescence microscopy is ~200 nm, the position of a single object can be determined with far better accuracy (Betzig 1995). The peak in the intensity profile of a single fluorescent molecule corresponds to the location of the molecule. If the quality of the image is good, the position of the peak can be determined with subpixel accuracy (10–30 nm). If two different fluorescent molecules are imaged in separate

channels, their colocalization can be determined with a similar accuracy (Koyoma-Honda et al. 2005). QDs are especially good candidates for such nanometer-resolution multicolor colocalization experiments due to their brightness and photostability (Michalet et al. 2001).

2.4.2

Confocal Microscopy

The usefulness of fluorescence microscopy for biological applications can be profoundly increased by excluding out-of-focus light from image formation. In confocal fluorescence microscopy, a pinhole is placed between the objective and the detector, which is usually a photomultiplier tube. The pinhole rejects out-of-focus light, thus endowing a confocal microscope with the capability of making images of a single optical section with a thickness of ~ 500 nm. A single section is recorded on a pixel-by-pixel basis by raster scanning the illuminating laser beam over the field; therefore it is usually called confocal laser scanning microscopy (CLSM). A stack of X–Y sections can be used for 3D reconstruction of the distribution of fluorescence. The improved axial resolution of CLSM comes at a price: the pinhole rejects a considerable fraction of the fluorescence, hindering the proper imaging of dim samples. The lateral resolution of confocal microscopy is not significantly different from conventional fluorescence microscopy. Confocal microscopes are very widespread and affordable instruments that have revolutionized cell biological applications of microscopy (Pawley 1995).

Recently described improvements in confocal imaging include fast image acquisition with a programmable array microscope (Hanley et al. 1999, 2000; Heintzmann et al. 2001) and tomographic reconstitution of a 3D object imaged from different angles (Heintzmann and Cremer 2002).

2.4.3

Multiphoton Microscopy

Although detection of emitted photons in CLSM is limited to the focal plane, excitation and, consequently, photobleaching are not limited to a single plane. In addition to avoidable photodamage, this phenomenon decreases the effective resolution of the microscope because scattered photons from outside the observation volume get onto the detector. Multiphoton fluorescence microscopy gets around this problem (Zipfel et al. 2003). It was shown both theoretically and experimentally that photons of lower energy can collectively cause an excitation normally produced by a single photon, if they interact with the absorbing molecule at the same time (less than 10^{-16} s difference). In most applications, multiphoton processes are limited to two photons, and the process is called two-photon excitation (TPE). The probability of TPE is proportional to the square of the intensity; therefore it steeply declines away from the focal point (Denk et al. 1990). Consequently, TPE microscopy achieves confocality without a pinhole by essentially eliminating out-of-focus excitation of fluorescence (Sheppard and Gu.

1990). As a good approximation, TPE occurs at twice the wavelength of single photon excitation. Since selection rules governing single- and two-photon excitation processes are different, deviations from the above rule are not uncommon. The probability of TPE is very low; therefore high illumination intensities are necessary, which are usually achieved by pulsed lasers (Xu et al. 1996). This is one of the drawbacks of multiphoton microscopy, because pulsed laser sources are still rather expensive. The axial and lateral resolutions of TPE microscopy are ~ 500 and ~ 200 nm, respectively, not significantly different from confocal microscopy (Zipfel et al. 2003).

The advantages of multiphoton microscopy arise from the confinement of the excitation to the focal point. Consequently, all photons generated contribute to image formation and there is less photodamage and no out-of-focus background due to light scattering; therefore emission detection can be efficient and can be accomplished without a pinhole that would reject a valuable fraction of the emitted photons. Thick samples can also be imaged (Oertner 2002), because high wavelength (infrared) excitation used for multiphoton microscopy is scattered to a much lesser extent than visible and UV light, and the scattered infrared photons are not able to cause multiphoton excitation because their intensity reaches a level sufficient for such a process only in the focal point. Even whole animal imaging can be done with multiphoton excitation (Brown et al. 2001; McDonald and Choyke 2003).

2.4.4

Focusing Microscopes Breaking the Abbe Limit

In the past decade several innovative concepts have been developed to increase the resolution power of light microscopes beyond that predicted by the Abbe principle. Currently, these devices are very expensive and available in few institutions only. Therefore we refer to these approaches only briefly.

One of these uses confocal detection through two opposing lenses. This doubles the effective numeric aperture, resulting in ~ 100 nm axial resolution. This approach is termed 4π microscopy, based on the quest to increase numerical aperture as close to the full 4π steric angle as possible. (Hell and Stelzer 1992; Egner et al. 2002; Hell 2003). I⁵M microscopy is based on a similar principle, but uses non-confocal detection, resulting in significantly reduced image acquisition times (Gustafsson et al. 1999; Hell 2003). Stimulated emission depletion (STED) microscopy achieves a lateral resolution superior to any previously described approach. Fluorescent molecules are excited by laser light. Another red-shifted laser beam is used to deplete the excited state by stimulated emission. The intensity of the depleting laser light is spatially modulated such that depletion of the excited state does not occur at locations corresponding to the minima of the depleting laser intensity. Fluorescent molecules are only present inside these spots whose dimension, and consequently the lateral resolution of STED microscopy can be reduced infinitely from a theoretical point of view. The combination of the 4π concept with STED microscopy resulted in subwavelength (~ 50 nm) resolution in both the axial and X–Y directions (Dyba and Hell 2002; Dyba et al. 2003; Hell 2003).

2.4.5

Scanning Near-Field Optical Microscopy (SNOM)

As we have seen in previous sections, diffraction is a formidable problem in focusing light microscopes. Near-field optics developed in the 1980s breaks the lateral resolution limit by using an aperture with subwavelength diameter as a light source (Lewis et al. 1984; Lewis 1991). The distance of the aperture from the imaged surface is very small ($\sim 5\text{--}10\text{ nm}$), and therefore only those fluorescent molecules that are under the aperture are excited. Consequently, the lateral resolution of SNOM is determined by the size of the aperture, which can be as small as 50 nm . The intensity of light decreases exponentially in the near field, i.e., very close to the aperture; therefore molecules far from the aperture in the axial direction are not excited. The penetration of the near-field into the object depends on the aperture size, and in the case of large apertures it can be tens or hundreds of nanometers (Kirsch et al. 1998; Jenei et al. 1999), but usually it is limited to $10\text{--}50\text{ nm}$ (Lewis et al. 2003); thus SNOM is a surface imaging device from a practical point of view. It has been used to study single fluorescent molecules (Betzig and Chichester 1993) and phospholipid monolayers (Hwang et al. 1995) and only less frequently for cellular imaging due to the difficulties in maintaining the small separation between the aperture and the cell surface, which is especially problematic if SNOM imaging is carried out on cells in buffer. Therefore, most cellular imaging with SNOM has been carried out on dried cells. SNOM imaging of fluorescently labeled membrane proteins has demonstrated a patchy distribution on cells (Vereb et al. 1997; Hwang et al. 1998; Nagy et al. 1999b).

2.5

Fluorescence Resonance Energy Transfer (FRET)

2.5.1

A Brief Introduction to FRET

FRET is a process in which energy is transferred non-radiatively from an excited donor fluorophore to an acceptor molecule. From a biologist's point of view, the major merit of FRET is its sensitivity to the separation between the interacting molecules. Harnessing this property makes distance measurements between the donor and acceptor molecules possible. This is why FRET was called a "spectroscopic ruler" capable of determining distances in the $1\text{--}10\text{-nm}$ range (Stryer 1978). Although the theoretical foundation of FRET was laid in the middle of the 20th century by Förster (1946) and Dexter (1953), it was only in the past $10\text{--}20$ years that we witnessed an exponential growth in the number of papers about the biological applications of FRET. We will first give a brief introduction to the physics of FRET and then describe some approaches to measure it.

Several papers providing in-depth analysis of FRET have been published (Eisinger 1976; Matkó et al. 1988; Clegg 1995; Szöllősi et al. 1998; Vereb et al. 2002; Jares-Erijman and Jovin 2003), so we only give a short overview of the process. An excited fluorescent molecule has several alternative ways to lose energy in order

to return to the ground state. In the absence of a suitable acceptor, there are fluorescent and non-fluorescent de-excitation mechanisms whose rate constants are denoted by k_f and k_{nf} , respectively. In the presence of an acceptor, FRET presents itself as an alternative relaxation mechanism for the donor. If k_{fret} denotes the rate constant of FRET, the FRET efficiency is defined by the following formula:

$$E = \frac{k_{fret}}{k_f + k_{nf} + k_{fret}} \quad (2.2)$$

E gives the fraction of excited donor molecules transferring energy to an acceptor. The FRET rate can be described by the following equation:

$$k_{fret} = c J n^{-4} R^{-6} \kappa^2 \quad (2.3)$$

where c is a constant, J is the normalized overlap integral between the donor emission spectrum and the acceptor absorption spectrum, n is the index of refraction of the medium, R is the separation distance between the donor and the acceptor and κ is the orientation factor. Equation (2.3) shows that the FRET rate is inversely proportional to the sixth power of the separation distance between the interacting molecules. The orientation factor is a function of the relative orientations of the donor and acceptor molecules, or, more strictly speaking, the function of the relative orientation of the donor emission and acceptor absorption dipoles. Equation (2.3) states that the FRET efficiency is high if the donor emission spectrum overlaps with the acceptor absorption spectrum, the relative orientation of the two molecules is favorable and their separation distance is small. FRET efficiency can be expressed in a concise form:

$$E = \frac{R_o^6}{R_o^6 + R^6}, \quad R_o^6 = c J \kappa^2 n^{-4} Q_d \quad (2.4-2.5)$$

where R_o is a characteristic distance for a given donor-acceptor pair at which the FRET efficiency is 50%, and Q_d is the fluorescence quantum efficiency of the donor in the absence of the acceptor: $Q_d = k_f / (k_f + k_{nf})$, i.e., the fraction of excited molecules emitting fluorescence. R_o is usually 5–10 nm, and this defines the distance range for which FRET is applicable. The higher the R_o , the more efficient the given donor-acceptor pair is regarding their FRET interaction. J , n and Q_d can be relatively easily determined and all of them are usually constant during a FRET experiment. Therefore they and the constant c can be pooled into a new constant, c' . Thus, Eq. (2.4) can be rewritten as:

$$E = \frac{c' \kappa^2}{c' \kappa^2 + R^6} \quad (2.6)$$

It follows that a change in FRET efficiency depends not only on the separation distance between the donor and the acceptor, but also on their relative orientation. Fortunately, in most cell biological applications, the rotational freedom of the donor and the acceptor is high, so that they sample all possible relative orien-

tations during the excited state of the donor and an average random orientation can be used. It can be shown that $\kappa^2=2/3$ in this case (Dale et al. 1979), and any change in the FRET efficiency can be attributed to a change in the donor–acceptor separation. If R_o is known for a given donor–acceptor pair ($\kappa^2=2/3$ is usually assumed), the separation distance between the donor and the acceptor can be calculated from Eq. (2.4).

In cell biological FRET experiments it has to be emphasized that FRET efficiency reflects the *average* separation distance between the donor and the acceptor. In a homogeneous system where the distance between the donor and the acceptor is same for all molecule pairs, an increase in FRET efficiency means that the donor and the acceptor had gotten closer to each other. On the other hand, in a heterogeneous system where only a fraction of the acceptors is within FRET distance from a donor, an increase in FRET efficiency can be caused by an increase in the fraction of acceptors associating with a donor. These considerations have to be taken into account in the interpretation of cell biological FRET experiments.

2.5.2

Different Ways to Measure FRET

FRET manifests itself in the change of a number of physical parameters. Most of these manifestations are associated with a way to detect FRET. These approaches have been recently reviewed (Berney and Danuser 2003; Jares-Erijman and Jovin 2003).

2.5.2.1

Donor Quenching, Sensitized Emission of the Acceptor

FRET competes with all other de-excitation processes of the donor. This results in reduced donor fluorescence, i.e., donor quenching. Since FRET is an additional relaxation mechanism, it takes the donor less time to relax to the ground state, and thus the fluorescence lifetime of the donor is reduced. It can be shown that

$$E = 1 - \frac{I_{DA}}{I_D} = 1 - \frac{\tau_{DA}}{\tau_D} \quad (2.7-2.8)$$

where I_{DA} and I_D are the fluorescence intensities, and τ_{DA} and τ_D are the fluorescence lifetimes of the donor in the presence and absence of the acceptor, respectively.

The measurement of fluorescence quenching is probably one of the most straightforward ways to measure FRET. Unfortunately, this approach is probably the most error-prone for cell biological applications. The problem is that one has to compare the fluorescence intensities of two samples, one labeled with donor, another labeled with donor and acceptor. Due to the natural variability of the expression level of proteins and other unknown environmental factors, FRET is not the only process that can change the fluorescence intensity. If a sufficiently large

number of cells are measured and averaged, cell-to-cell differences are canceled. Therefore, donor quenching can only be reliably measured with flow cytometry.

The measurement of fluorescence lifetime is less error-prone than intensity measurements, because it does not depend on the number of fluorophores, i.e., the expression level of an antibody-labeled or VFP-tagged protein. Therefore, detection of a decreased fluorescence lifetime of the donor in the presence of an acceptor compared to that of the free donor is a reliable indicator of FRET. However, fluorescence lifetime measurements need sophisticated and expensive instrumentation (Bastiaens and Squire 1999; Haj et al. 2002).

If the acceptor molecule is fluorescent, it emits photons after the donor transfers energy to it. This is called sensitized emission, and constitutes another very basic way to detect FRET. Simple detection of acceptor emission excited at the donor absorption wavelength is error-prone, because the acceptor is usually directly excited at the donor absorption band too, and the intensity of sensitized emission depends not only on FRET, but also on the concentration of the donor. With narrow bandpass filters that minimize direct excitation of the acceptor these measurements are still feasible (Uster and Pagano 1986). A more accurate way to quantitate FRET through sensitized emission is based on the following formula:

$$E = \left(\frac{F_{AD}}{F_A} - 1 \right) \frac{\epsilon_A c_A}{\epsilon_D c_D} \quad (2.9)$$

where F_{AD} and F_A denote the fluorescence intensities of the acceptor excited at the donor absorption wavelength in the presence and absence of the donor, respectively, and ϵ and c (D and A indices refer to donor and acceptor, respectively) denote the molar absorption coefficient and the concentration of the molecules respectively.

2.5.5.2

Acceptor Photobleaching, Photochromic FRET

Donor quenching can be turned into a useful experimental approach to measure FRET, if the same sample can be measured with and without acceptor. First, the donor intensity in a donor-acceptor double-labeled sample is measured corresponding to I_{DA} in Eq. (2.7). Then the acceptor is photodestructured by an intense laser light, releasing of the donor from quenching. Therefore, the donor intensity measured afterwards corresponds to I_D in Eq. (2.7). The method called acceptor photobleaching uses the same pixels for the determination of I_D and I_{DA} ; therefore pixel-by-pixel determination of FRET is possible (Bastiaens et al. 1996).

A drawback of the above method, similar to any other photobleaching-based methods, is the lack of repeatability: kinetic measurements cannot be made. When diheteroarylethenes are exposed to near-UV light, they undergo photoconversion from an open to a closed form associated with an increase in their absorption at ~540–550 nm. Exposing the closed form to green light induces the reverse photoconversion. The closed form can serve as an acceptor for dyes emitting in the 500–600 nm range, and donor intensity measured in its presence corresponds to I_{DA} . Since the open form shows negligible absorption at ~540–550 nm,

measurement of donor intensity in the presence of the open form corresponds to the unquenched donor intensity (I_D). As switching between the open and closed forms can be repeated an unlimited number of times, this approach, termed photochromic FRET (pcFRET), can be used for following temporal changes in FRET (Giordano et al. 2002).

2.5.5.3

Donor Photobleaching

Photobleaching of a dye is initiated from its excited state. Since FRET decreases the fluorescence lifetime of the donor (Eq. 2.9), it spends less time in the excited state if FRET occurs. Consequently, FRET decreases the rate of donor photobleaching. It can be shown that

$$E = 1 - \frac{T_D}{T_{DA}} \quad (2.10)$$

where T_D and T_{DA} are the photobleaching time constants of the donor in the absence and presence of the acceptor, respectively (Jovin and Arndt Jovin 1989). FRET measurements based on donor photobleaching (pbFRET) also need two separate samples (donor-labeled, donor-acceptor double-labeled), but because the photobleaching rate is relatively insensitive to donor concentration (i.e., expression level of the labeled molecule), Eq. (2.10) is less error-prone than Eq. (2.7). Due to its simplicity, pbFRET has found widespread application and its physical background has also been intensely investigated (Young et al. 1994; Song et al. 1995, 1996, 1997; Nagy et al. 1998b).

2.5.5.4

FRET-Sensitized Photobleaching of the Acceptor

As already pointed out, photobleaching occurs only with molecules in the excited state. Since photobleaching is independent of the process by which the molecule got into the excited state, acceptor molecules excited by FRET can also undergo photobleaching. Acceptor molecules that are beyond FRET distance from a donor are insensitive to FRET-sensitized photobleaching. Consequently, the fraction of acceptor molecules within FRET distance from a donor can be determined using this method (Mekler et al. 1997); e.g., if only 80% of acceptor fluorescence can be bleached through the donor, 20% of acceptors do not actually accept energy from donors. Furthermore, the FRET efficiency can also be determined by comparing the rate of acceptor photobleaching in the presence and absence of the donor:

$$E = \frac{k_s(\lambda_D) \varepsilon_A(\lambda_D) c_A}{k_b(\lambda_D) \varepsilon_D(\lambda_D) c_D} \quad (2.11)$$

where $k_s(\lambda_D)$ and $k_b(\lambda_D)$ are the rate constants of FRET-sensitized acceptor bleaching and direct bleaching of the acceptor, respectively, excited at the donor

excitation wavelength, $\epsilon_A(\lambda_D)$ and $\epsilon_D(\lambda_D)$ are the molar absorption coefficients of the acceptor and the donor, respectively, at the donor excitation wavelength, and c_A and c_D are the concentrations of the acceptor and the donor, respectively. In principle, FRET efficiencies as low as 0.1% can be reliably measured with this technique due to the large increase in the rate of acceptor photobleaching in the presence of the donor, i. e., $k_s(\lambda_D)/k_b(\lambda_D) \gg 1$ (Mekler 1994).

2.5.5.5

Combined Donor and Acceptor Emission Measurements

For FRET methods based on measuring either only donor or only acceptor emission, two separate measurements on a donor and a donor-acceptor-labeled sample are necessary. Even though two samples are not needed for acceptor photobleaching or pcFRET measurements, the same sample is measured twice sequentially. Therefore any change (e. g., in donor concentration or fluorescence quantum yield) occurring with the sample between the two measurements distorts the calculations. A combined detection of donor and acceptor fluorescence signals makes the calculation of FRET efficiency possible from a single measurement. Such an approach has been implemented for flow cytometry (Trón et al. 1984; Szöllösi et al. 1984, 1987; Sebestyén et al. 2002) and digital imaging microscopy (Gordon et al. 1998; Nagy et al. 1998b; Elangovan et al. 2003). All of these approaches are based on solving a system of linear equations that usually contain equations describing donor emission, sensitized acceptor emission (FRET channel), and direct acceptor fluorescence and correction factors for the spectral overlap between the fluorescent detection channels.

Combined donor and acceptor emission measurements make pixel-by-pixel and cell-by-cell FRET measurements possible in microscopy and flow cytometry, respectively. The accuracy of pixel-by-pixel and cell-by-cell measurements is very sensitive to reliable autofluorescence subtraction. In most applications, an average autofluorescence value is subtracted from the intensity of every pixel or cell. This method is, however, not accurate when either the donor or the acceptor intensity is low. For cell-by-cell (Sebestyén et al. 2002) and pixel-by-pixel (Nagy et al. 1998b) corrections, the autofluorescence emission of cells without donor and acceptor labeling is determined at wavelengths corresponding to the fluorescence channels to be corrected (λ_{donor} , $\lambda_{acceptor}$, λ_{FRET}) and at a separate wavelength ($\lambda_{autofluorescence}$), where donor and acceptor fluorescence is negligible and spectral correction factors are determined, e. g.:

$$S = \frac{I(\lambda_{donor})}{I(\lambda_{autofluorescence})} \quad (2.12)$$

Then the autofluorescence of labeled samples is measured at $\lambda_{autofluorescence}$, and the contribution of autofluorescence to the donor channel, $AF(\lambda_{donor})$, is calculated and subtracted on a cell-by-cell or pixel-by-pixel basis:

$$AF(\lambda_{donor}) = S \cdot AF(\lambda_{autofluorescence}) \quad (2.13)$$

Using the above approach, the homoassociation of the CD45 tyrosine phosphatase could be studied in cells with a very low expression level (Dornan et al. 2002).

2.5.5.6

FRET Between Spectroscopically Identical Molecules

In the previous sections, we considered FRET between a donor and a spectroscopically distinct acceptor molecule (hetero-FRET). However, if the absorption and emission spectra of a molecule show significant overlap, an excited fluorophore can transfer energy nonradiatively to a nearby, identical molecule, if their relative orientation is favorable ($\kappa^2 \neq 0$). The process is termed homo-FRET or emFRET (energy migration FRET). A molecule excited by FRET is not different from a directly excited molecule: it can emit a fluorescent photon or relax nonradiatively, including FRET to a nearby molecule. It can be shown that due to the chain-like FRET interactions, neither the fluorescence intensity nor the fluorescence lifetime nor the photobleaching rate of the molecule changes. Fortunately, there is one single parameter, the fluorescence anisotropy or polarization of the molecule that is sensitive to FRET.

If a fluorescent molecule is excited by polarized light, molecules with absorption dipoles oriented parallel to the polarization of the light will be excited preferentially. During the excited state, lifetime, molecules may rotate randomly, and the more they rotate, the less oriented they will be when they emit. Furthermore, FRET to a spectroscopically identical molecule also depolarizes fluorescence emission, because molecules excited secondarily through FRET are orientationally uncorrelated with the donor. The more FRET takes place, the less polarized the emitted fluorescence is. The feasibility of such an experimental approach has been demonstrated for steady-state and dynamic fluorescence anisotropy measurements (Clayton et al. 2002). However, the fact that besides FRET, rotational mobility also influences the fluorescence anisotropy of a molecule complicates interpretation of the results and has hampered widespread application of this approach. Researchers may be intimidated by the overwhelmingly complex calculations and by the need for structural information about the orientation of the fluorophores (Runnels and Scarlata 1995; Blackman et al. 1998).

Three concepts have been recently applied to get around the above-mentioned problems. (1) This approach is analogous to the original observation of Perrin in the 1920s and 1930s (Perrin 1932). He found that the anisotropy of a concentrated solution is lower than that of a dilute one. The phenomenon termed concentration depolarization is the result of homo-FRET as described above. We used the same principle to interpret the fluorescence anisotropy of cells expressing GFP fused to epidermal growth factor receptor (Lidke et al. 2003). Since the measurements were carried out using flow cytometry, it was possible to correlate cellular anisotropy of GFP fluorescence with the expression level of the protein construct in a statistically reliable way due to the large number of cells measured. It was

found that cells expressing a high amount of EGFR-GFP showed lower anisotropy than low expressers even in the absence of ligand (EGF), indicating that the receptors formed homoassociations without ligand stimulation. (2) We and others introduced another method based on gradual photobleaching of GFP in order to decrease the number of GFP molecules. Assuming that the GFP-tagged molecules form clusters and homo-FRET occurs, the decrease in GFP density gradually abolishes homotransfer and increases fluorescence anisotropy, as it was observed for EGFR and class I major histocompatibility complex (MHC-I) molecules (Lidke et al. 2003; Rocheleau et al. 2003). (3) Recently, a novel approach has been introduced in which the contribution of homo-FRET to steady-state anisotropy is discerned from those due to rotational diffusion by exploiting the fact that homo-FRET fails upon excitation at the long wavelength edge of the absorption spectrum (Weber and Shinitzky 1970). An anisotropy value upon red-edge excitation that is higher than that upon excitation at around the absorption peak indicates that homo-FRET takes place (Squire et al. 2004).

Although homo-FRET measurements can only be used to detect homoassociation of the labeled molecule, they have an obvious advantage: the expression of only a single expression probe is needed, obviating the requirement for the balanced expression of a donor and an acceptor-tagged probe, which is often difficult to achieve.

2.6

Cell Biophysical Methods Reveal Molecular Interactions in the ErbB Signaling Pathway

The ErbB family of receptor tyrosine kinases has four members named ErbB1 (or epidermal growth factor receptor, EGFR), ErbB2, ErbB3, and ErbB4. They engage in a large variety of homo- and heteroassociations that undergo substantial reorganization upon binding of peptide growth factors to their extracellular domain. The role of ErbB proteins in physiological processes and in cancer development has been reviewed recently (Nagy et al. 1999a; Yarden and Sliwkowski 2001; Vereb et al. 2002; Holbro et al. 2003). The 284/1 issue of *Experimental Cell Research* was devoted to this topic. Below, we review some of our results concerning the molecular events behind ErbB-mediated signaling.

2.6.1

Small-Scale Associations: Homo- and Heterodimerization in the ErbB Family

Molecular-scale physical associations among ErbB family members have been studied by classical biochemical, molecular biological (Sliwkowski et al. 1994; Tzahar et al. 1996) and biophysical methods (Gadella and Jovin 1995; Nagy et al. 1998a, 2002). We estimated the association state of ErbB2 and assessed how it was affected by EGF treatment in breast tumor cell lines by measuring FRET between fluorescent monoclonal antibodies or Fab fragments using flow cytometry. There

was considerable homoassociation of ErbB2 and heteroassociation of ErbB2 with EGFR in quiescent breast tumor cells. ErbB2 homoassociation was enhanced by EGF treatment in SKBR-3 cells and in the BT474 subline BT474M1 with high tumorigenic potential, whereas the original BT474 line was resistant to this effect. These differences correlated well with EGFR expression. Flow cytometric FRET measurements provided only one single FRET efficiency value for each cell analyzed. In order to reveal heterogeneity in the homoassociation pattern of ErbB2 within a single cell, one of the microscopic FRET approaches had to be used. We used donor photobleaching FRET microscopy to visualize FRET efficiency within single cells, with spatial resolution limited only by diffraction in the optical microscope. This allows detailed analysis of the spatial heterogeneity of molecular interactions. First, we applied the donor photobleaching FRET in wide-field microscopy and revealed extensive pixel-by-pixel heterogeneity in ErbB2 homoassociation (Nagy et al. 1998a). In our measurements, ErbB2 homoassociation was also heterogeneous in unstimulated breast tumor cells; and membrane domains with ErbB2 homoassociation had mean diameters of less than 1 μm (Nagy et al. 1998a). It was not clear whether the domain size was imposed by the optical resolution limit of wide-field microscopy in the X-Y plane or whether it originated from the actual size of ErbB2 aggregates. In order to refine the size estimate of domains containing ErbB2 molecules, we combined FRET measurements with confocal microscopy (Nagy et al. 2002).

We implemented acceptor photobleaching FRET in a CLSM equipped with three lasers in order to study the correlation between the association of ErbB2 with ErbB2 and with ErbB3, and the local density of these RTKs. From fluorescence intensities generated in two optical channels, we were able to determine the FRET efficiency values on a pixel-by-pixel basis, while the third laser beam provided the signal for measuring the expression level of ErbB3. The homoassociation of ErbB2 correlated positively with the local concentration of ErbB2, but negatively with ErbB3 local density. This negative correlation suggests that ErbB2–ErbB3 heterodimers compete with ErbB2 homodimers and therefore a high number of ErbB3 molecules can disassemble ErbB2 homodimers (Nagy et al. 2002).

2.6.2

Large-Scale Associations of ErbB Proteins

In addition to the direct molecular association between membrane proteins, another level of clustering has been identified involving the concentration of proteins in domains with a characteristic diameter of several hundred nanometers (Damjanovich et al. 1995; Hwang et al. 1998). We used SNOM and confocal microscopy to image the distribution of ErbB2 on the surface of quiescent and ligand-stimulated cells (Nagy et al. 1999b). Clusters with an average diameter of 0.5 μm containing ~1,000 ErbB2 proteins were identified on several different breast cancer cell lines (Fig. 2.2). The diameter of ErbB2 clusters increased upon stimulation of cells with EGF, heregulin (ErbB3- and ErbB4-specific ligand) or Herceptin [partially agonistic anti-ErbB2 antibody used in the treatment of breast cancer (Baselga et al. 1996)]. The EGF-induced increase in ErbB2 cluster

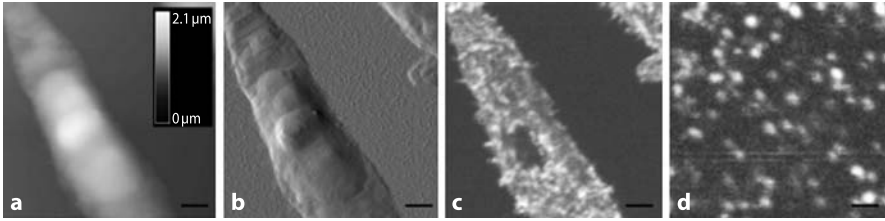


Fig. 2.2. SNOM images of ErbB2-expressing cells. CHO cells transfected with ErbB2 (**a–c**) or MCF-7 breast cancer cells (**d**) were labeled with a fluorescent anti-ErbB2 antibody on ice to prevent antibody-induced artifacts. **a** Topography of ErbB2-transfected CHO cells. **b** Feedback signal proportional to steepness of cell surface. **c, d** Fluorescence images showing the clustered distribution of ErbB2 on CHO (**c**) and MCF-7 (**d**) cells. Scale bars 4 μm (**a–c**), 1 μm (**d**)

size was dependent on the tyrosine kinase activity of EGFR (Nagy et al. 1999b). Large-scale clustering of receptor tyrosine kinases generates a high local density of signal transducing molecules, probably decreasing the distance receptors have to diffuse to form associations. The role of this level of clustering in signal transduction is underlined by the kinase activity-dependent increase in its size.

Lipid rafts are thought to be key players in transmembrane signal transduction (Simons and Toomre 2000). None of the methods used for raft identification is perfect, and the structures identified as lipid rafts may differ from method to method (Edidin 2001). We used the fluorescently labeled subunit B of cholera toxin (CTX-B) to label lipid rafts in intact cell membranes. We found that clusters of ErbB2 showed a substantial overlap with lipid raft domains. Glycosyl-phosphatidylinositol (GPI)-anchored proteins were reported to co-patch with CTX-B, if cells were incubated at 37°C to allow the pentavalent CTX-B to cross-link lipid rafts (Harder et al. 1998). The raft localization of ErbB2 was less stable than that of GPI-anchored proteins, because cross-linking of rafts by CTX-B did not induce co-migration of ErbB2. The removal of ErbB2 from lipid rafts by CTX-B was followed by changes in ErbB2-mediated signal transduction, indicating an important role of the correct membrane localization of ErbB2 in signaling (Nagy et al. 2002).

The use of GFP-fused proteins to image the unperturbed distribution of proteins in live cells has become very popular. We used multiphoton 4π microscopy to image the distribution of EGFR-GFP in live CHO cells in buffer (Fig. 2.3). The high lateral and axial resolutions of 4π microscopy let us visualize the nonhomogeneous distribution of EGFR in the membrane which was similar to that of ErbB2 imaged with SNOM (Fig. 2.2), although the speckled distribution in the 4π microscopic image was less conspicuous.

2.6.3

Focal Stimulation of Cells with Magnetic Beads

The question of whether ligands activate receptors all over the cell surface or whether they rather induce a local activation is an intensely investigated topic.

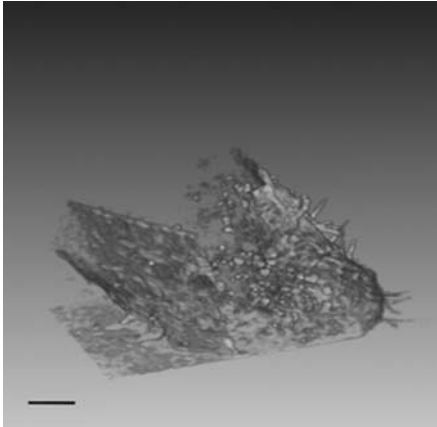


Fig. 2.3. Three-dimensional reconstruction of the distribution of EGFR-GFP in CHO cells. Multiphoton 4π microscopy was used to image live CHO cells expressing EGFR-GFP. A 3D reconstruction of part of a cell is shown. The cytoplasm contains numerous endo- and exocytic vesicles. Several membrane processes are clearly discernible on the membrane on the *right*. The *left* membrane segment shows the inhomogeneous distribution of EGFR-GFP. This clustered feature is reminiscent of what was observed using SNOM imaging ErbB2 shown in Fig. 2.2. Scale bar 1 μm

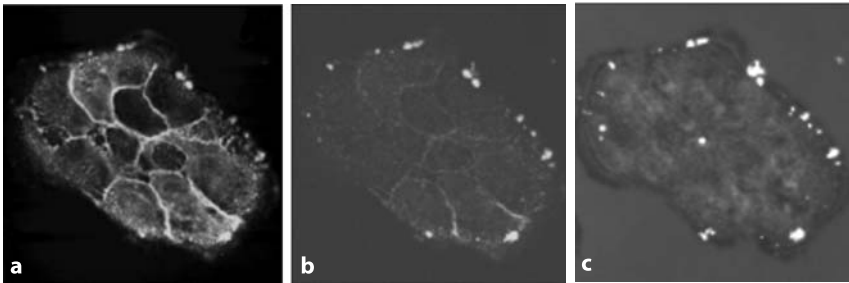


Fig. 2.4. Local activation of ErbB2 by Herceptin-coated microbeads. A431 cells expressing ErbB2 fused to the monomeric mutant of YFP (mYFP) were stimulated with Herceptin-coated magnetic beads and stained with a phosphorylation-specific anti-ErbB2 antibody. Bright spots in the reflection image (c) reveal the location of beads. Beads induced recruitment of ErbB2-mYFP (a) and localized phosphorylation of ErbB2 (b)

Tissues present a highly structured environment for ligand stimulation, and accumulating evidence shows that, at least in some cases, focal stimulation of receptors occurs (Meyer and Birchmeier 1995; Harris et al. 2003; Shilo 2003). Another important question is whether focal receptor stimulation gets generalized through the spread of receptor activation. To this end we used magnetic beads covalently coupled to EGF or Herceptin and showed that receptor activation remained localized to the site where the ligand- or antibody-coated bead bound (Brock and Jovin 2001; Brock and Jovin 2003; Fig. 2.4). Others have found that the extent of signal propagation from the site of receptor stimulation depends on receptor density (Sawano et al. 2002) or the activity of tyrosine phosphatases (Reynolds et al. 2003).

2.6.4

Image Cytometry in Assessing the Activation State of ErbB Receptor Tyrosine Kinases

The “central dogma” related to activation of RTKs postulates ligand-induced dimerization and consequential cross-phosphorylation of the receptors in the dimer. This is frequently followed by receptor internalization and downregulation, leading to the proposition that one mode of action of the anti-ErbB2 therapeutic antibody Herceptin (Trastuzumab) is the partial activation and consequent downregulation of the receptor. In contrast, other antibodies have been produced that do not activate the receptor, but nonetheless enhance internalization (Neve et al. 2001). Hence, experiments that can determine how spontaneous and ligand-induced receptor di- or oligomerization correlate with tyrosine phosphorylation, and how dimerization and/or activation evoked by ligands or antibodies correlates with concomitant internalization, could contribute significantly to our understanding of both signaling through and therapy against members of the ErbB family.

Development of red-shifted fluorescent dyes that allow relatively straightforward implementation of acceptor photobleaching FRET (in particular the indocarbocyanine dye Cy5 paired with either Cy3 or AlexaFluor 546) has opened the possibility to using the conventional laser lines (488, 514, and 543 nm) of confocal microscopes for detecting the emission from one or two additional labels. We used extracellular labeling of ErbB family members on live cells with pairs of antibodies carrying Cy3 and Cy5, respectively, followed by fixation, permeabilization, blocking of intracellular phosphatases, and indirect immunofluorescent labeling of phosphorylated ErbB2 with Ab18 as the primary antibody and Alexa-Fluor 488-conjugated secondary Fabs. FRET efficiency was measured between ErbB2–ErbB2 and ErbB1–ErbB2 receptor pairs and evaluated with a custom-written algorithm, taking into consideration possible shifts of the sample during imaging, photobleaching of the donor during the protocol, and fluorescence of the photoproducts of the bleached acceptor. The pixel-by-pixel FRET efficiency maps were then correlated with the fluorescence intensity characteristic of activated phospho-ErbB2 using image cross-correlation (Vereb et al. 2000). In SKBR3 breast tumor cells, highest activation of ErbB2 was found in focal adhesion points and at surfaces where adjacent cells were in contact. These areas also exhibited higher ErbB2–ErbB2 FRET values, even though the absolute density of ErbB2 was not higher than average in these pixels. ErbB2–ErbB1 FRET efficiency was neither correlated nor anticorrelated with ErbB2 phosphorylation in resting cells. However, upon stimulation with EGF, the prevalence of ErbB2–ErbB1 dimers or higher oligomers has increased, and ErbB2 phosphorylation also increased in parallel. As opposed to spontaneous ErbB2 homodimers, no preferential subcellular localization of these heterodimers could be observed.

When comparing the Herceptin-sensitive SKBR3 cells with a newly established Herceptin-resistant breast cancer line, it also became evident that basal levels of ErbB2 homoassociation and phosphorylation are both extremely low in the resistant line compared to the sensitive one. Stimulation with Heregulin or EGF, or addition of bivalent Herceptin, increased phosphorylation, homodimer-

ization, and internalization of ErbB2 in SKBR3, but not in the resistant line. Furthermore, the ErbB1–ErbB2 heteroassociation and transactivation via ErbB1 using EGF also failed to evoke a response in the resistant line, in spite of its relatively high expression of ErbB1 compared to SKBR3. Interestingly, when a higher local density of Herceptin was applied using Herceptin-derivatized microbeads (see Sect. 2.6.3), specific but localized tyrosine phosphorylation and concomitant structural changes, likely corresponding to an effort to internalize the Herceptin-coated bead, could be detected also in the resistant line. These together hint that (1) ErbB2 dimers or oligomers could be functional in resting, unstimulated cells and may have a relation to focal adhesion points, (2) the therapeutic antibody Herceptin does promote ErbB2 homoassociation, activation and internalization in ErbB2-overexpressing Herceptin-sensitive cells, and (3) Herceptin resistance can occur in ErbB2-overexpressing cells even though these ErbB2 molecules may be functional, possibly because of steric hindrance effects precluding ErbB2 homoassociation and Herceptin binding, and/or the shift of emphasis in signaling from ErbB2 homodimers and ErbB1–ErbB2 heterodimers to other active ErbB dimers, such as the highly mitogenic ErbB2–ErbB3 pair.

2.6.5

Following the Internalization of Receptors Using Fluorescence Approaches

Activation of ErbB receptors is usually followed by their internalization. This mechanism is thought to restrict the duration of receptor signaling (Yarden and Slivkowski 2001), although claims abound about the signaling competence of endocytosed receptors (Skarpen et al. 1998; Wiley 2003). Ligands or antibodies tagged with conventional fluorescent dyes and most VFPs suffer photobleaching under long-term illumination which is often necessary to follow intracellular trafficking, making quantitative analysis difficult. Therefore, we used fluorescent QDs that show negligible photobleaching. We coupled biotin-EGF to QDs covalently coated with streptavidin (qdEGF). Due to the extreme tight interaction between biotin and streptavidin, this complex can be used as a fluorescently labeled ligand. We observed specific binding and internalization of qdEGF in EGFR-expressing cells followed by directed motions and fusions of vesicles (Lidke et al. 2004). In addition, we described a novel directed motion of ligand-bound EGFR in filopodia transporting EGF/EGFR complexes towards the cell body. Next, we used a combination of flow and image cytometric approaches to study the effect of ErbB2 or ErbB3 expression on the internalization rate of EGFR. Flow cytometry is unable to discriminate between intracellular and cell-surface-associated fluorescence; therefore we used a brief exposure to acidic pH (2.5–3) which removes noncovalently bound material from the cell surface. We showed that EGF induced the formation of EGFR/ErbB2 dimers. Interestingly, the internalization of these heterodimers was retarded as compared to EGFR homodimers. EGFR/ErbB3 heterodimers did not form in response to EGF stimulation.

An alternative, but equally spectacular way to follow the internalization of receptors is to use immunoliposomes loaded with a fluorescent dye, and coated

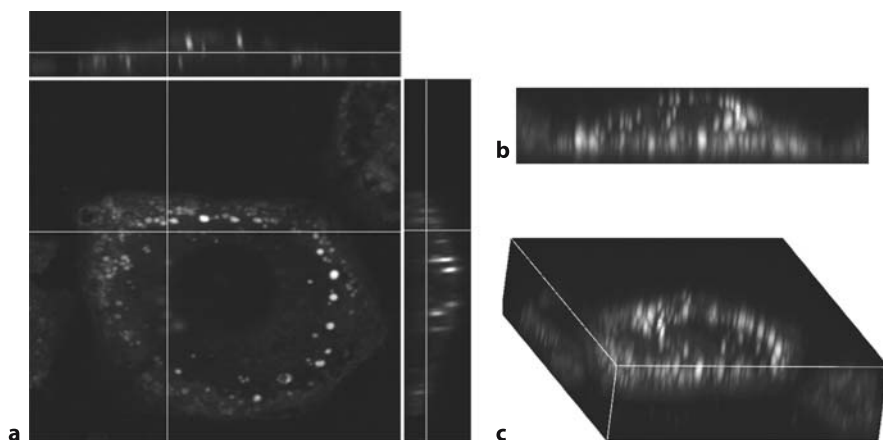


Fig. 2.5. Internalization of 4D5 Fab-coated immunoliposomes in SKBR-3 breast tumor cells. SKBR-3 breast tumor cells were incubated with rhodamine-loaded 4D5 Fab-coated immunoliposomes for 30 min at 37 °C. A stack of images was recorded using confocal microscopy. **a** A single Z slice is shown in the *middle*. An X–Z and a Y–Z vertical section taken at the *horizontal* and *vertical* lines are shown at the *top* and on the *right*, respectively. A side view (**b**) and a 3D projection (**c**) of the same cell are also displayed. **a** was made with Zeiss Image Browser, **b** and **c** were prepared with VoxBlast Light (Vaytek)

with a ligand, antibody or Fab fragment. Such “alternative ligands” have clinical relevance, since immunoliposomes can be loaded with cytostatic drugs and used as targeted drug delivery systems in cancer treatment (Park et al. 1995; Kirpotin et al. 1997). We used anti-ErbB2 Fab or scFv-coated immunoliposomes to show colocalization of liposome binding with lipid rafts and subsequent internalization of ErbB2 (Fig. 2.5; Vereb et al. 2002).

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Non-Random Patterns of Membrane Proteins and Their Roles in Transmembrane Signaling

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3.1

Introduction

The plasma membrane is the first line of encounter with any “own” or “foreign” molecule or hostile “visitor”. Our knowledge of the structure and function of the plasma membrane of mammalian cells was greatly advanced by the famous experiment of Frye and Edidin in 1970, which showed that distinct molecular elements of the surface of mouse and human lymphocytes labeled by green and red fluorescent dyes, respectively, were mixed upon fusing the two cell types. This finding was instrumental in the construction of the Singer–Nicolson fluid mosaic membrane model in 1972, which suggested the free mobility of proteins and other macromolecules in the plasma membrane (Singer and Nicolson 1972).

Experimental observations over past decades have led to the “membrane microdomain” concept describing compartmentalization/organization of membrane components into non-random, well-defined patterns. According to recent knowledge, the lateral order of membrane lipids and proteins is a general phenomenon that may have fundamental importance in the function of individual molecules as well as in that of the whole plasma membrane (Edidin 1993, 2001; Vereb et al. 2003).

The primary target of external stimuli is the plasma membrane, and non-random co-distribution of membrane proteins plays an important role in signal transduction across the cell membrane. The generalized occurrence of such cell-surface patterns of membrane proteins was suggested at the beginning of the 1980s (Damjanovich et al. 1981). Signal transduction processes are often accompanied by dynamic rearrangement of the two-dimensional patterns of the macromolecular constituents at the cell surface (Damjanovich et al. 1992). The structured, and at the same time dynamic, nature of the plasma membrane, i.e., the organization of its components into structures existing at different time and size scales, allows accumulation of the relevant molecules (and exclusion of others) needed for the appropriate response (Vereb et al. 1995, 2003; Edidin 2001).

Protein clusters generated by the physical association/molecular proximity of the molecules (nanometer or small-scale clusters) define the basic organization level of membrane proteins (Damjanovich et al. 1998). Different types of such protein clusters can be present in the plasma membrane (Damjanovich et al. 1997b): (1) in many cases, a given “functional unit” is formed by several components/subunits (e.g., the TCR/CD3 complex; Klausner et al. 1990); (2) rearrange-

ment of proteins in the plane of the plasma membrane caused by an external stimulus may also lead to the formation of protein patterns (e.g., aggregation of the epidermal growth factor receptor upon ligand binding (Zidovetzki et al. 1981)); and (3) apart from the aforesaid examples, where the individual components of protein patterns must be together before or upon ligand binding/external stimuli, seemingly unrelated proteins are also associated in many cases and held together in a dynamic cluster (e.g., Kv1.3 potassium channels and the TCR/CD3 complex (Panyi et al. 2003, 2004a)). Revealing the interactions between such proteins may call our attention to their potential functional relationship (Panyi et al. 2004b, c).

On the basis of presently available data, there are at least two well-defined hierarchical levels of non-random protein patterns in the cell membrane: in addition to the small (nanometer)-scale protein clusters, accumulation of these clusters in larger islands at the submicrometer/micrometer scale can be observed in many cases (Damjanovich et al. 1997b, 2002; Vereb et al. 2003).

The inhomogeneous cell-surface distribution (lateral order) of membrane proteins is the consequence of their restricted lateral diffusion, for which the following factors may be responsible (reviewed in Edidin 1993; Kusumi and Sako 1996; Damjanovich et al. 1997b; Vereb et al. 2003):

1. *Forces acting in the plane of the membrane*: lipids with similar physicochemical character (saturation, length, etc.) tend to form distinct microdomains in model membranes as well as in biological membranes (Edidin 1997). The lipid domain structure of the plasma membrane may cause selective accumulation of membrane proteins or their exclusion from distinct membrane areas through preferential interaction of the transmembrane region of a given protein with a select class of lipids. In addition to lipid-lipid interactions (Welti and Glaser 1994), protein-lipid and protein-protein interactions (e.g., between transmembrane α -helices) may also contribute to the stability of protein clusters and membrane microdomains (Lemmon and Engelman 1994; Tocanne et al. 1994). Microviscosity/orderedness of membrane regions may also physically affect the stability of protein clusters. A lipid raft is a specific type of membrane microdomain characterized by high cholesterol and (glyco)sphingolipid content, glycosyl-phosphatidyl-inositol (GPI)-anchored proteins, and high microviscosity ("liquid ordered phase") (Simons and Ikonen 1997; Edidin 2003; Simons and Vaz 2004). Since rafts also accumulate certain membrane proteins involved in signaling (receptors, ion channels, etc.) and intracellular signaling molecules (e.g., kinases, phosphatases, G-proteins), their role in controlling signaling processes is one of the hottest topics in current membrane biology (Hoessli et al. 2000; Horejsi 2002, 2003; Matkó and Szöllösi 2002; Lucero and Robbins 2004; Yang et al. 2004).
2. *Intracellular factors*: the plasma membrane-associated part of the cytoskeleton (membrane skeleton) can directly (e.g., through interaction with adapter proteins) or indirectly (steric hindrance) restrict the motion of proteins by trapping them in a given membrane area (Ritchie and Kusumi 2004). Free diffusion of membrane proteins can also be hindered by interaction with different cytosolic signaling elements (e.g., G-proteins, kinases, etc.).

3. *Vesicular transport*: vesicular transport mechanisms can also contribute to the selective accumulation of membrane proteins by means of “directed” transport of vesicular components to a given membrane region (Gheber and Edidin 1999; Tang and Edidin 2001). In polarized cells, the localization of lipids and proteins in the apical, basal or lateral surfaces is genetically determined. For quasi-symmetrical cells such as lymphocytes in the blood circulation, such determination seems to be less likely. However, receptor subunits, or proteins destined to cooperate closely in a larger supramolecular assembly, are likely to be synthesized simultaneously in a synchronized way upon the initiation of the same signals. After their synthesis they might be accommodated by the same lipid vesicles, and transported together to the plasma membrane to form a functional membrane microdomain (Damjanovich et al. 2002).
4. *Extracellular factors*: cross-linking ligands and the extracellular matrix may also promote the formation of protein complexes.
5. *Other factors*: changes in the membrane potential or other perturbing factors acting indirectly either through inducing conformational changes or via modification of the factors listed above.

There are several ways to detect molecular associations in the plasma membrane (Damjanovich et al. 1997b, 1999). The most commonly applied biochemical and immunological approaches (chemical cross-linking, co-immunoprecipitation, etc.) provide valuable information on the interaction of membrane proteins, but have several disadvantages. In the first place, with these methods proteins cannot be studied in their native environment. Second, the application of usual extraction and isolation procedures inherent in these techniques may also disrupt protein–protein interactions or, instead, may induce the formation of artificial protein aggregates. Fluorescence resonance energy transfer (FRET) gives us a suitable and convenient tool by which the distribution of membrane proteins can be mapped on intact cells *in situ* without a major interference with the physiological condition of the cells. Several techniques have been developed to measure FRET on cell surfaces (Damjanovich et al. 1977, 1997b, 1999; Szöllősi et al. 1998). In Chapter 2 (this Vol.), different microscopy-based FRET methodologies are described; in this chapter we give a detailed, protocol-like description of flow cytometric FRET measurements.

Most FRET methods have the limitation that they record a static picture, a “snapshot” of molecular proximities of the studied proteins, and give no information on the stability of protein–protein interactions. Co-localization at the nanometer scale revealed by FRET does not necessarily mean that the studied proteins form stable complexes with one another. Demonstrating the joint diffusive motion of proteins, i.e., their co-mobility, provides evidence of their stable interaction, which can be studied by a dynamic method: fluorescence cross-correlation spectroscopy. This method analyzes the temporal fluctuations of fluorescence signals arising from molecules diffusing across a subfemtoliter volume element, and yields the mobility and co-mobility parameters of molecules.

In this chapter, we will mostly focus on results gained by FRET and fluorescence cross-correlation spectroscopic (FCCS) experiments, but supporting data ob-

tained by other biophysical or biochemical methods will also be mentioned. Functional implications of the presented protein patterns will be discussed as well.

3.2

Fluorescence Resonance Energy Transfer (FRET)

Fluorescence resonance energy transfer (FRET) is a non-radiative process taking place between two dye molecules, whereby the excited donor transfers its excitation energy to a nearby acceptor via dipole–dipole coupling (Förster 1948). In order for FRET to occur it is necessary that the dipole moments of the dyes have a proper relative orientation and the emission spectrum of the donor and the absorption spectrum of the acceptor molecule overlap with each other (Clegg 1996). The rate of energy transfer is inversely proportional to the sixth power of the donor–acceptor distance. In combination with specific fluorescence labeling techniques, the method is a sensitive tool for the determination of inter- or intramolecular distances in the 1- to 10-nm range (Stryer and Haugland 1967).

Measurement of FRET by microscopy (see Chap. 2, this Vol.) provides subcellular mapping of protein–protein interactions, allowing the visual identification of compartments/organelles where the interactions of interest take place. However, besides this undoubted advantage, FRET microscopy has the drawback that the evaluation of a sufficiently high number of cells required for obtaining reasonable statistics is rather time-consuming. Both the acquisition and analysis of microscopic data are labor-intensive. To determine small quantitative changes in protein–protein interactions, usually at least several hundreds or thousands of cells must be evaluated. This can be most easily done by means of flow cytometric FRET measurements, as described later in this chapter (Szöllösi et al. 1998). The high number of cells that can be analyzed by flow cytometry provides for excellent statistics, high accuracy and reproducibility.

3.2.1

Measurement of FRET by Flow Cytometry

The procedure to measure FRET on a cell-by-cell basis by flow cytometry was introduced in 1983 (Damjanovich et al. 1983). The original method (Szöllösi et al. 1984; Trón et al. 1984) was devised for a single-laser setup using two laser lines (the 488- and 514-nm lines of an Ar ion laser), which is the minimum technical requirement of the technique. The sensitivity of the method has been improved by using longer excitation wavelengths along with long wavelength dyes to reduce the contribution of cellular autofluorescence, and by introducing cell-by-cell autofluorescence correction by applying three-color excitation (Sebestyén et al. 2002). In this chapter, the currently most advanced version of the method will be described.

The method, referred to as flow cytometric energy transfer (FCET), is based on the cell-by-cell measurement of three (in the case of cell-by-cell autofluorescence correction, four) fluorescence intensities, which are combinations of autofluorescence, donor fluorescence, sensitized acceptor fluorescence and directly

excited acceptor fluorescence signals. The donor and acceptor dyes should be selected to match the wavelengths of the laser lines used for excitation, and should fulfill the requirement of spectral overlap between donor emission and acceptor absorption. In this chapter, the equations will be given as appropriate for the Becton Dickinson FACSDIVA instrument equipped with three lasers: an Ar ion laser (emitting at 488 nm), a solid state laser (532 nm) and a HeNe laser (633 nm). Adequate donor dyes for this setup include Alexa Fluor 546, Alexa Fluor 568 and Cy3, whereas Alexa Fluor 633, Alexa Fluor 647 and Cy5 can be used as acceptor. The experimental and numerical procedures can be used with minor modifications for other instrumental setups as well.

3.2.1.1

Sample Preparation

Cell-surface proteins can be labeled by (preferably monoclonal) antibodies or their Fab fragments that had been tagged with fluorescent dye molecules (Szöllősi et al. 1996; Matkó and Edidin 1997). Polyclonal antibodies may have the capacity to induce aggregation of the labeled proteins, resulting in a rearrangement of protein–protein interactions and the structure of membrane microdomains (patching, capping). For the measurement of FCET, four types of samples are needed: unlabeled, donor-only, acceptor-only and double-labeled ones.

3.2.1.2

Signals and Calculations

The determination of FRET by flow cytometry is based on the measurement of a combination of four fluorescence signals measured from double-labeled cells. The equations given below involve cellular autofluorescence and specific donor and acceptor fluorescence, and account for the decrease in donor intensity (“donor quenching”) and the increase in acceptor intensity (“sensitized emission”) due to FRET. The measured signals are as follows:

$$FL1(488, 510 \pm 20) = AF \quad (3.1)$$

$$FL2(532, 575 \pm 13) = AF \cdot B_2 + I_D(1-E) \quad (3.2)$$

$$FL3(532, >650) = AF \cdot B_3 + I_D(1-E) \cdot S_1 + I_A \cdot S_2 + I_D \cdot E \cdot \alpha \quad (3.3)$$

$$FL4(633, 660 \pm 10) = AF \cdot B_4 + I_A \quad (3.4)$$

AF is the background or autofluorescence intensity in channel 1, I_D is the unquenched donor fluorescence intensity that would be measured in channel 2 in the absence of FRET, I_A is the directly excited acceptor fluorescence intensity in channel 4 and E is the mean energy transfer efficiency for the given cell. S and B factors characterize the “spectral spillover” between the detection channels (the ratios of the signals from, e.g., the donor-labeled, acceptor-labeled or unlabeled samples detected in the different channels; see Eqs. 3.5–3.9), which depend on

hardware parameters [laser intensity, filter transmission, photomultiplier tube (PMT) sensitivity] and instrument settings (amplifier voltages, optical adjustment, etc.) and on the spectral properties of the dyes. S_1 can be determined by using samples labeled only with donor according to the following equation:

$$S_1 = FL3 / FL2 \quad (3.5)$$

S_2 can be determined from acceptor-labeled cells according to:

$$S_2 = FL3 / FL4 \quad (3.6)$$

B_2 , B_3 and B_4 are determined from unlabeled cells as follows:

$$B_2 = FL2 / FL1 \quad (3.7)$$

$$B_3 = FL3 / FL1 \quad (3.8)$$

$$B_4 = FL4 / FL1 \quad (3.9)$$

The factor α defines the relative detection sensitivity of fluorescence from an excited acceptor molecule with respect to that of a donor molecule, and can be determined from measurements with a donor-labeled and an acceptor-labeled sample with the following formula:

$$\alpha = \frac{FL3_A}{FL2_D} \cdot \frac{N_D}{N_A} \cdot \frac{L_D}{L_A} \cdot \frac{\epsilon_D}{\epsilon_A} \quad (3.10)$$

where N denotes the mean number of receptors per cell labeled by the corresponding antibody, L is the labeling ratio (the mean number of dye molecules attached to an antibody determined by spectrophotometry) and ϵ is the molar extinction coefficient of the dyes at 532 nm; subscripts A and D refer to acceptor and donor. The ratios of N , L and ϵ values are correct for the different numbers of photons absorbed by the acceptor- and donor-only labeled samples.

Solving Eqs. (3.1)–(3.4) yields the mean FRET efficiency value E for each individual cell:

$$A = \frac{E}{1-E} = \frac{1}{\alpha} \cdot \frac{FL1 \cdot (B_2 S_1 + B_4 S_2 - B_3) - FL2 \cdot S_1 + FL3 - FL4 \cdot S_2}{FL2 - FL1 \cdot B_2} \quad (3.11)$$

$$E = A / (1 + A) \quad (3.12)$$

Similar expressions of the measured intensities give the cell-by-cell values of I_D , I_A and AF (Sebestyen et al. 2002). The above calculations can be most easily performed by the software FLEX (Szentesi et al. 2004), which is freely downloadable from <http://www.biophys.dote.hu/research.htm>. In addition to the usual analysis of standard flow cytometric list mode files, this software can generate frequency distribution histograms of cellular FRET efficiencies on selected cell

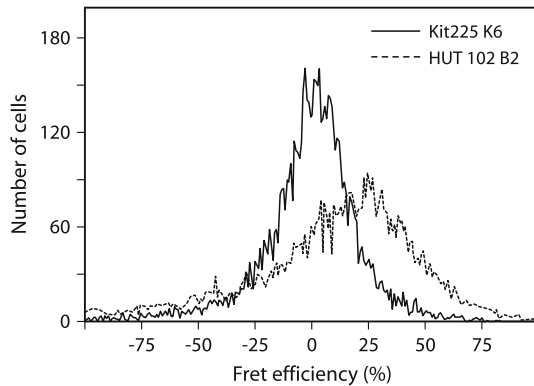


Fig. 3.1. Measurement of interleukin-2 receptor α submit homoassociation by flow cytometric cell-by-cell energy transfer. The FRET efficiency histogram for Kit 225 K6 cells has a mean value of 0, implying that the receptor subunits are in a monomeric form, whereas that for HUT102 B2 cells is ~25% owing to significant homoassociation. Receptor subunits were labeled by donor- and acceptor-tagged anti-Tac mAbs

populations. Figure 3.1 presents a representative example of two FCET measurements with positive and zero mean FRET efficiency.

As a check for the accuracy of the spectral correction factors, and also as a positive control, an intramolecular FRET efficiency can be measured. In our practice, we use the β 2-microglobulin (β 2m) and the MHC I heavy chain labeled with donor- and acceptor-tagged monoclonal antibodies, since these proteins are expressed in sufficient quantities by practically any human cell type. As a negative control, a donor-only labeled sample can be used, or two proteins that are known to be segregated in distinct membrane microdomains.

3.3

Mapping the Distribution of Cell-Surface Proteins

3.3.1

Self-Association of MHC I Molecules

Using the FRET technique, clustering (self-association) of class I major histocompatibility complex (MHC I; see Chap. 1, this Vol.) glycoproteins was observed on the surface of various human cell types (Bene et al. 1994, 2004; Matkó et al. 1994, 2002). A recent detergent-solubility analysis of their self-association properties has also confirmed that homotypic association is an inherent property of MHC I (and MHC II) molecules (Triantafilou et al. 2000), in accordance with earlier observations of their spontaneous clustering after reconstitution into liposome model systems (Chakrabarti et al. 1992). The degree of MHC I homoassociation highly depends on the culturing conditions, whether the cells are in log phase or in plateau phase (Matkó et al. 1994).

It was shown that expression of free MHC I heavy chains (lacking $\beta 2m$; “FHC”; Chap. 1, this Vol.) correlated reasonably well with the degree of MHC I oligomerization on numerous cell types: both of them were significant on cells with accelerated cellular metabolism (i.e., activated or transformed/tumor cells) (Matkó et al. 1994). Our FRET and scanning near-field optical microscopic (SNOM) data demonstrated the participation of FHCs and intact MHC I heterodimers in the same small- and large-scale protein clusters at the surface of JY human B lymphoblasts. Furthermore, culturing of JY cells with $\beta 2m$ remarkably decreased the homotypic association of intact MHC I molecules and reduced their co-clustering with free heavy chains, as assessed by FRET experiments. SNOM images indicated a moderate dispersing effect of $\beta 2m$ treatment on the large-scale MHC I clusters, as well (Bodnár et al. 2003). On the basis of these data, FHCs likely make an important contribution to MHC I clustering: their involvement seems to stabilize MHC I clusters and vice versa; their functionally active conformation, which is still capable of rebinding $\beta 2m$, may also be stabilized by participation in these clusters (Matkó et al. 1994; Bodnár et al. 2003). Otherwise FHCs would undergo irreversible denaturation and become functionally inactive and/or would be either internalized or released in a soluble form from the cell surface (Demaria et al. 1994; Pickl et al. 1996).

Electron and scanning force microscopic experiments disclosed the non-random (clusterized) organization of MHC I molecules at a higher hierarchical level, as well: immunogold-labeled MHC I molecules were observed to form several hundred-nanometer-sized domains (Damjanovich et al. 1995). Both small- and large-scale clusters of MHC I molecules were found to be dynamic, as revealed by SNOM and FRET measurements: dissociation and re-association of small-scale protein complexes and reformation of large-scale associations took place following fusion of cells separately labeled with fluoresceinated and rhodaminated Fab fragments against MHC I heavy chains (Nagy et al. 2001).

On the basis of recent studies with soluble MHC:peptide multimers (dimers, trimers or tetramers), aggregation of MHC molecules may significantly increase the efficiency of activation/immune response of T cells (Boniface et al. 1998; Cochran et al. 2000; Daniels and Jameson 2000). Since clustering of MHC molecules could be observed in “supramolecular activation clusters” within the immunological synapse (IS) (Monks et al. 1998; Grakoui et al. 1999), it is reasonable to assume that *in vivo* formation of MHC I clusters may promote IS formation, and the high local concentration of MHC I can significantly increase the avidity of APC-TC interaction (Bromley et al. 2001). Indeed, we showed that decreasing the extent of MHC I oligomerization by treatment with $\beta 2m$ on JY target cells significantly reduced the efficiency of activation as well as the effector function of allospecific cytotoxic T lymphocytes (Bodnár et al. 2003).

Modulation of the composition (microdomain structure) of the plasma membrane also influenced MHC I clustering at the surface of JY cells: the addition of cholesterol decreased the membrane fluidity and increased the degree of MHC I oligomerization (Bodnár et al. 1996). It is conceivable that the cholesterol content and fluidity of the plasma membrane also play an important role in the regulation of the degree of MHC I clustering and thus in controlling the efficiency of antigen presentation. This hypothesis is supported by earlier functional data showing that

the lysis of target cells by CTLs or NK cells was affected by the cholesterol content of the plasma membrane (Roozmond and Bonavida 1985; Szekeres-Bartho et al. 1989).

3.3.2

Heteroassociation of MHC I Glycoproteins

Co-localization of MHC I with several other membrane proteins has also been detected by biophysical and/or biochemical methods. Table 3.1 shows some examples of the heteroassociations of MHC I molecules, mainly – but not exclusively –

Table 3.1. Some examples of MHC I hetero-associations mainly – but not exclusively – revealed by FCET measurements

Interacting partner of MHC I	Cell type	References
MHC II	JY human B lymphoblasts HUT102 B2 human T lymphoma cells OCM-1 and -3 human uveal melanoma cells	Szöllősi et al. (1989); Bene et al. (1994, 2004)
IL-2R α	Activated human peripheral lymphocytes Human T lymphoma cells	Harel-Bellan et al. (1990); Bene et al. (1994); Matkó et al. (2002)
IL-2/IL-15R β and γ	Human T lymphoma cells	Matkó et al. (2002)
IL-15R α	Kit225 FT7.10 human T lymphoma cells	Vámosi et al. (2004)
Intercellular adhesion molecule-1 (ICAM-1)	JY human B and HUT102 B2 human T lymphoma cells LS 174T colon carcinoma cells OCM-1 and -3 human uveal melanoma cells	Bene et al. (1994, 2004); Bacsó et al. (2002);
Tetraspan molecules (CD53, CD81, CD82)	Human B lymphoblastoid cell lines (JY, LCL-721)	Szöllősi et al. (1996)
Transferrin receptor	HUT102 B2	Mátyus et al. (1995)
Insulin receptor	Lymphocytes, adipocytes, hepatoma cells	Edidin and Reiland (1990); Liegler et al. (1991); Reiland and Edidin (1993); Ramalingam et al. (1997)

revealed by FCET techniques. Other examples of heteroassociation of MHC I molecules with receptors involved in cell growth and differentiation, along with the potential functional importance of these “*cis* interactions”, are summarized in Chapter 1 (this Vol.). According to the examples listed in Table 3.1, MHC I glycoproteins apparently take part in several different association patterns in the plasma membrane, which in some cases may have functional relevance/importance as well. The cell-surface organization of the “partner” molecules also takes place at different hierarchical levels (Jenei et al. 1997; Vereb et al. 2000; Vámosi et al. 2004).

Existence of homo- and heteroassociates formed with the participation of MHC I molecules has also been corroborated by rotational diffusion and single particle tracking (SPT) techniques (Matkó et al. 1994; Smith et al. 1999). The results of the latter experiments indicated the anomalous diffusion of MHC I proteins on HeLa cells (Smith et al. 1999), which can be the consequence of the presence of obstacles (protein associates) or barriers (cytoskeletal elements, lipid domain barriers) trapping the molecules and thus hindering their free diffusion.

3.3.3

Association Patterns of MHC I, MHC II and ICAM-1 Molecules

Our FRET studies revealed the homoassociation of MHC class II molecules as well as their heteroassociation with class I MHC glycoproteins in the plasma membrane of numerous cell types, mainly of lymphoid origin (Table 3.1; Szöllösi et al. 1989; Jenei et al. 1997; Matkó et al. 2002). Atomic force and electron microscopic data showed that, like MHC I, MHC II molecules form homoclusters not only on the nanometer scale attainable by FRET, but also at a higher hierarchical level, in the micrometer distance range. Electron microscopy also revealed that a fraction of MHC II molecules was heteroclustered with MHC I at the same hierarchical level (Jenei et al. 1997). Similarly to MHC I, the large-scale MHC II clusters were also dynamic. Small- and large-scale heteroclusters of MHC I and MHC II also showed dynamic behavior in cell fusion experiments. At the same time, intermixing of components did not take place between small-scale clusters of MHC II (Nagy et al. 2001).

We could detect molecular associations between the ICAM-1 adhesion molecules and both types of MHC glycoproteins at the surface of human T and B lymphoma cell lines (Bene et al. 1994). In addition, a high degree of ICAM-1 self-association was found on HUT102 B2 human T lymphoma cells (Bene et al. 1994).

The above-mentioned association motifs of ICAM-1 and MHC glycoproteins were observed on non-lymphoid cells also. FCET and confocal laser scanning microscope experiments revealed that in OCM-1 and OCM-3 human uveal melanoma cells, MHC I, MHC II and ICAM-1 molecules are mostly confined to the same membrane regions, where they form similar protein patterns (homo- and heteroassociates) to those described above (Bene et al. 2004). Confocal microscopic co-localization experiments with GM1 gangliosides and the GPI-anchored CD59 molecules showed enrichment of MHC I, MHC II and ICAM-1 molecules in lipid rafts of these cells (Bene et al. 2004). Co-distribution of MHC I and ICAM-1 in lipid rafts was also reported for a colon carcinoma cell line, LS-174-T (Bacsó et al. 2002).

IFN- γ changed the expression levels of MHC and ICAM-1 molecules as well as induced rearrangement of their spatial distribution/association patterns on uveal melanoma and on colon carcinoma cells (Bacsó et al. 2002; Bene et al. 2004).

Effective T cell immune response requires well-organized, but dynamic arrangement of molecules present in the target cell–T cell contact region (immunological synapse) (Friedl and Storim 2004). It can be hypothesized that, along with MHC I oligomerization, the association patterns of MHC I, MHC II and ICAM-1 molecules on target (antigen-presenting) cells may play an important role in the regulation of the efficiency of antigen presentation. It is conceivable that by keeping the molecules forming the IS together, these “conservative” association patterns accommodated by lipid rafts may promote the rapid formation of the appropriate intercellular interactions upon target cell–T cell encounter (Bromley et al. 2001). This is corroborated by our observations demonstrating that diminishing the extent of MHC I oligomerization on JY B lymphoblasts was accompanied by their reduced susceptibility to specific lysis by allospecific CTL (Bodnár et al. 2003). Moreover, lipid raft-assisted compartmentation of MHC II was shown to enhance the efficiency of antigen presentation to CD4⁺ T cells (Anderson et al. 2000). Lipid raft association of proteins may also be important in organizing molecular interactions in CTL-s as well as during the formation of the immunological synapse. Recently, we have demonstrated that Kv1.3, the dominant voltage-gated potassium channel of T lymphocytes (Panyi et al. 1995; Panyi and Deutsch 1996), is recruited into the immunological synapse, which may be mediated by its association to lipid rafts (Hajdu et al. 2003; Panyi et al. 2004a).

3.3.4

Supramolecular Complexes of IL-2/IL-15R and MHC Glycoproteins on Human T Lymphoma Cells

IL-2 and IL-15 receptors share two subunits (IL-2/15R β and γ_c) responsible for one set of signaling events evoked by cytokine binding, but both of them have their own, “private” α -chain (for details see Chap. 4, this Vol.). As a result of combining various subunits, several forms of receptor complexes with different affinities may exist at the cell surface. We have shown by using FRET that the three subunits of the high-affinity IL-2R complex (IL-2R $\alpha\beta\gamma_c$) are in the molecular vicinity of each other at the surface of human T lymphoma cells even in the absence of IL-2. The addition of IL-2 or IL-15 rearranged the conformation of this preformed receptor complex: addition of IL-2 made it more compact, while IL-15 loosened the interaction of the three subunits (Damjanovich et al. 1997a). A similar pre-assembly of the heterotrimeric IL-15R (IL-15R $\alpha\beta\gamma_c$), as well as the molecular proximity of IL-15R α and IL-2R α , was also demonstrated on human T cells expressing all the elements of the IL-2/IL-15 receptor system. While the interaction of the two α -chains was unaffected by the relevant cytokines, interaction between IL-2/15R β and IL-15R α became tighter upon IL-15 treatment, as assessed by FRET measurements (Vámosi et al. 2004). Based on these data, a tetrameric IL-2/IL-15 receptor complex can be envisaged, where binding of the appropriate cytokine rearranges the receptor subunits to form a high-affinity

receptor trimer ($\alpha\beta\gamma_c$) with the participation of the cytokine-specific α -chain, whereas the “unused” α -chain rotates or shifts away from the site of cytokine–receptor interaction (Vámosi et al. 2004).

Our FRET experiments also indicated the homodimeric/oligomeric molecular association of IL-15R α (Vámosi et al. 2004). Homoassociation of IL-2R α may also occur in T lymphoma cells, although in a cell-type-dependent manner (see Fig. 3.1; Eicher et al. 2002; Vámosi et al. 2004).

It was shown by using biophysical (FRET and CLSM) and biochemical approaches that IL-2/IL-15R subunits are mainly partitioned into lipid rafts in the plasma membrane of human T lymphoma cells (Vereb et al. 2000; Matkó et al. 2002; Vámosi et al. 2004). It was also demonstrated that the integrity of lipid rafts has a crucial role in organizing the lateral distribution of IL-2R and it is also essential for IL-2-mediated signaling (Vereb et al. 2000; Matkó et al. 2002). Disruption of the native structure of lipid rafts by cholesterol extraction led to a reduction in tyrosine phosphorylation related to IL-2 signaling (Matkó et al. 2002). Upon cholesterol depletion the size of lipid rafts increased and the boundaries of the microdomains became fuzzier, i.e., the compactness and cohesion within the microdomain declined (Vereb et al. 2000). This implies that the lipid microenvironment, in particular cholesterol, might be an important factor in maintaining the integrity of signaling complexes. Lipid rafts may promote the formation and cytokine-specific modulation of IL-2R/IL-15R complexes and β - and γ_c -subunit “switching” between IL-2 and IL-15 receptors as well.

FCET experiments revealed the co-localization of the IL-2/IL-15R system and MHC I molecules in the plasma membrane of cells of human T lymphoma/leukemia origin (Matkó et al. 2002; Vámosi et al. 2004). Although the exact role of this co-localization has not been elucidated yet, a regulatory tyrosine phosphorylation cross-talk, as suggested earlier for the class I MHC–insulin receptor interaction (Ramalingam et al. 1997), cannot be excluded (Vereb et al. 2000; Matkó et al. 2002). Association of the IL-2/IL-15R with MHC II glycoproteins was also demonstrated (see Fig. 3.2; Matkó et al. 2002; Vámosi et al. 2004). Co-localization of the elements of the IL-2/IL-15R system with MHC glycoproteins also takes place in lipid rafts, as revealed by confocal microscopy (Vereb et al. 2000; Vámosi et al. 2004).

3.4

Fluorescence Correlation Spectroscopy (FCS)

FCS is a fluctuation correlation method that can measure the dynamics of molecular processes by observing spontaneous microscopic fluctuations of local concentrations of molecular species (Fig. 3.3). The driving force for these stochastic fluctuations is the thermal energy rather than a gradient or the non-equilibrium value of a macroscopic parameter. Thus FCS is capable of determining kinetic parameters in an equilibrium system, in contrast to conventional relaxation techniques. In a typical FCS experiment, a subfemtoliter volume element is illuminated by a focused laser beam, which excites fluorophores in the sensitive volume, and the time course of the arising fluorescence signal is detected. Since the rate of signal fluctuations depends on the rate of molecules diffusing in and

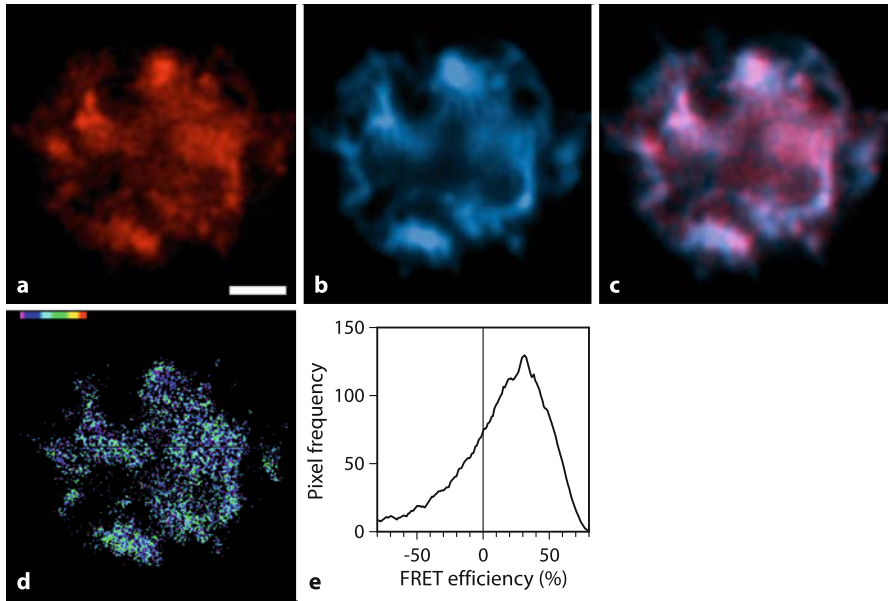
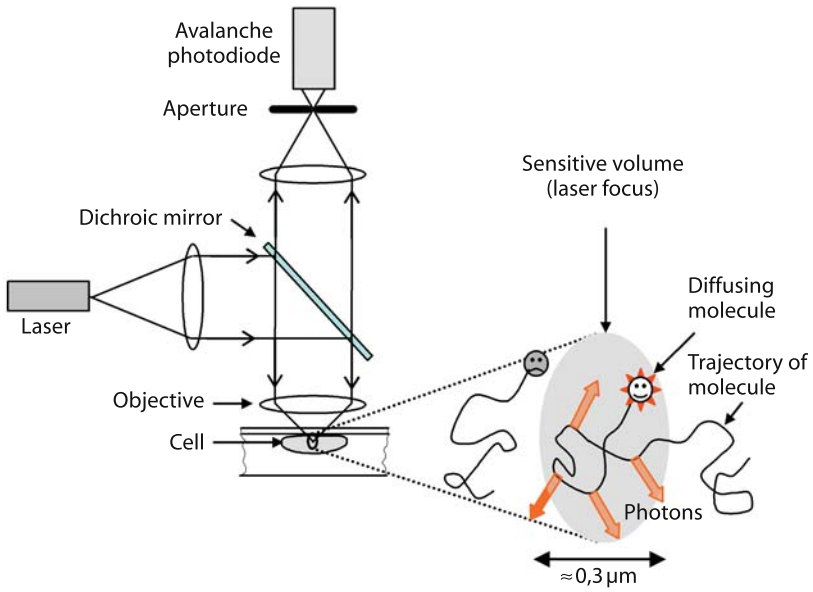
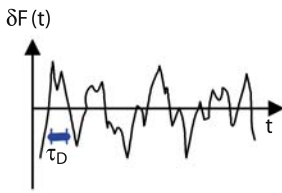


Fig. 3.2. Co-localization and pixel-by-pixel FRET experiment between IL-15R α and MHC II molecules on Kit225 FT7.10 cells. Confocal microscopic images of the distribution of IL-15R α subunits (**a**) and MHC II glycoproteins (**b**). Epitopes were labeled with Cy3–7A4 24 and Cy5–L243 mAbs, respectively. The overlay image (**c**) is *pink* where overlap is significant. **d** is a pixel-by-pixel FRET efficiency map between IL-15R α and MHC II as determined by the acceptor photobleaching technique (description of the method can be found in Chap. 2, this Vol.); the color code ranges between 0% (*black*) and 100% (*red*). **e** is the frequency distribution histogram of FRET efficiencies in the individual pixels. The negative tail of the distribution is due to presence of noise in the original images and consequential error propagation in the calculation of FRET efficiency. Scale bar 2 μ m

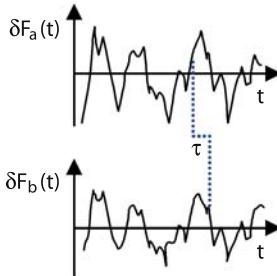
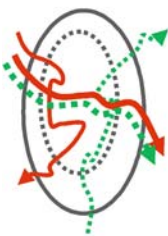
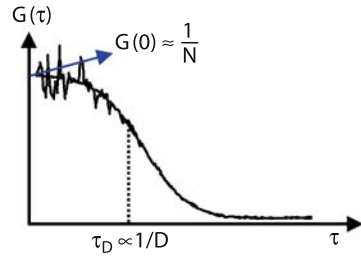
out of the sensitive volume, analysis of the fluctuations can yield the diffusion coefficient of the molecular species (Elson and Magde 1974; Elson et al. 1976). In fact, not only diffusion, but also the kinetics of any other molecular process causing a change in fluorescence intensity can be studied by FCS (e.g., molecular rate constants of chemical reactions and photophysical processes, conformational changes of biological macromolecules, etc.). For this analysis, the autocorrelation function of the fluorescence intensity is calculated, which contains information about the rates and amplitudes (and ideally about the mechanism) of the molecular processes occurring in the system. Fluorescence labeling provides for the specificity of the method. Since the ratio of the size of fluctuations relative to the total signal increases as the concentration of the molecules decreases, the technique has an exceptional signal-to-noise ratio and sensitivity compared to conventional fluorescence spectroscopy down to the nanomolar/picomolar range, allowing the detection of single molecules.



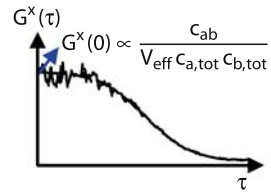
Fluorescence fluctuations



Autocorrelation function



Cross-correlation function



A recent compilation on the theory and applications of FCS can be found in the book edited by two of the pioneers of the technique, E. Elson and R. Rigler (2001). There has been a renaissance of interest in FCS due to recent developments in the instrumentation, and a growing recognition of the broad spectrum of problems to which it can be applied successfully. Cells are rapidly changing inhomogeneous systems; therefore there is a basic need for selection of the target with a good spatial resolution, and there is a limit to measurement duration over which the cell can be considered relatively invariable. The coupling of FCS with confocal microscopy allowed 3D observation of the sample and accurate selection of the measurement area. It also reduced the sensitive volume to the size of the diffraction-limited spot in the optimal case. This not only improved the spatial resolution, but also significantly shortened the necessary measurement time required to determine diffusion coefficients in the cell. Sensitivity of detection has been greatly improved by the application of avalanche photodetectors in place of conventional photomultiplier tubes. Current galvanometric scanners provide enough stability to allow direct FCS measurements through the confocal scanner at any desired position in the cell with 25-nm positioning accuracy (Wachsmuth et al. 2003).

The dependence of the diffusion coefficient on molecular dimensions makes it possible to detect interactions between molecular species. The binding of a small ligand to a large interacting partner can be readily detected through the decrease in the diffusion coefficient (corresponding to a decrease in the diffusion correlation time) (Pramanik 2004). This is especially the case if a soluble, mobile ligand (or antibody) is bound by its membrane receptor (or antigen), which has low mobility in its highly viscous membrane environment.

However, since the dependence of the diffusion coefficient on the molecular weight of the complex is weak (for spherical particles, $D \propto M^{-1/3}$), the method is not sensitive to smaller changes in the molecular weight of the jointly moving complex. The interaction of molecules of comparable size having a similar mobility can be detected by the dual color version of the technique, fluorescence cross-correlation spectroscopy (FCCS). The method can indicate the joint diffusion of the distinctly labeled and detected molecular species (Rippe 2000; Weidemann et al. 2002; Bacia and Schwille 2003). A non-zero cross-correlation amplitude means that at least a portion of the two molecular species is stably associated for at least the duration of the diffusion time. For detailed explanation of the auto- and cross-correlation functions see Box 3.1.



Fig. 3.3. Fluorescence correlation spectroscopy. Fluorescent molecules diffusing across the laser-illuminated sensitive volume give rise to a fluctuating fluorescence signal. From the signal fluctuations $\delta F(t)$ the autocorrelation function is calculated, which carries information about the diffusion coefficient D and mean number of labeled molecules N in the sensitive volume. Using two-color excitation and two-channel detection, the joint diffusive motion of distinctly labeled molecular species can be analyzed. If the labeled molecules form stable associates, the fluorescence intensities arising from the two types of fluorescent labels will fluctuate in a correlated fashion. Amplitude of the cross-correlation function is proportional to the fraction of molecules in the complex

Box 3.1.**The autocorrelation and cross-correlation functions**

The normalized autocorrelation function $G(\tau)$ of the fluorescence intensity is calculated from the fluctuations of fluorescence intensity according to the following formula:

$$G(\tau) = \frac{\langle \delta F(t) \cdot \delta F(t + \tau) \rangle}{\langle F \rangle^2} = \frac{\frac{1}{T} \int_0^T \delta F(t) \cdot \delta F(t + \tau) dt}{\langle F \rangle^2} \quad (3.13)$$

The angled brackets in the expression refer to averaging the expression over the duration of the measurement time. The variable τ is the lag time [the time difference between the samples taken from the $F(t)$ curve], $\langle F \rangle$ is the mean fluorescence intensity over the studied time interval and $\delta F(t) = F(t) - \langle F \rangle$ is the deviation of the actual fluorescence intensity from the mean. The rate of stochastic variations of the fluorescence intensity due to the diffusion of emitting particles across the sensitive volume depends on the mobility of the particles and on the geometrical parameters of the sensitive volume. In general, it is assumed that both the distribution of the illumination intensity and that of the detection probability have a 3D Gaussian shape. The product of these distributions is proportional to the probability that a photon will be emitted and detected from a fluorophore residing at the given location. The surface at which this probability drops to e^{-2} times the maximum value at the center of the distribution defines an ellipsoid (the sensitive volume). The autocorrelation function for the diffusion of a single molecular species in 2D (e.g., in the plane of the plasma membrane) undergoing singlet–triplet transition (Widengren et al. 1995) takes on the following form:

$$G(\tau) = \frac{1}{N} \cdot \frac{1 - \Theta_{tr} + \Theta_{tr} e^{\tau/\tau_{tr}}}{1 - \Theta_{tr}} \cdot \left(1 + \frac{\tau}{\tau_D} \right)^{-1} = \frac{1}{N} \cdot \frac{1 - \Theta_{tr} + \Theta_{tr} e^{\tau/\tau_{tr}}}{1 - \Theta_{tr}} \cdot \left(1 + \frac{4D\tau}{\omega_{xy}^2} \right)^{-1} \quad (3.14)$$

where N is the mean number of molecules in the sensitive volume, Θ_{tr} is the fraction of molecules in the triplet state, τ_{tr} is the phosphorescence lifetime and τ_D is the diffusion time (the mean dwell time of a molecule in the sensitive volume), D is the diffusion coefficient and ω_{xy} is the lateral radius of the e^{-2} ellipsoid. The diffusion time is inversely proportional to the diffusion coefficient:

$$D = \omega_{xy}^2 / 4\tau_D \quad (3.15)$$

If two molecular species are labeled with distinctly excitable and detectable fluorophores, their co-mobility can be studied by means of cross-correlation analysis (Schwille et al. 1997). Usually, distinct laser lines are used for the excitation of the dyes, and the fluorescence emission from the dyes is selectively detected through appropriate optical filters by separate detectors. Analogous to the autocorrelation function, the cross-correlation function of the two fluorescence signals is defined as:

$$G^{\times}(\tau) = \frac{\langle \delta F_a(t) \cdot \delta F_b(t+\tau) \rangle}{\langle F_a \rangle \langle F_b \rangle} \quad (3.16)$$

where the indexes “*a*” and “*b*” refer to the two different molecular species. The form of the cross-correlation function depends on the geometrical parameters of the laser foci, the diffusion properties of the different molecular species, and the concentrations of free and complexed molecules (Bacia et al. 2002; Weidemann et al. 2002). The amplitude of the diffusion cross-correlation function for a mixture of molecules *a*, *b* and their complex *ab* is proportional to the fraction of molecules in the complex:

$$G^{\times}(0) \propto \frac{c_{ab}}{V_{eff}(c_{a,tot})(c_{b,tot})} \quad (3.17)$$

where c_{ab} is the concentration of the complex, and $c_{a,tot}$ and $c_{b,tot}$ are the total concentrations of molecules *a* and *b*. Non-zero amplitude of the cross-correlation function implies complex formation between the two species.

3.4.1

Instrumentation

The “fluctuation microscope” used for FCS measurements is described in Wachsmuth et al. (2003). The device is a combination of a confocal FCS module (Wachsmuth et al. 2000) and a beam scanning unit attached to the video port of an inverted microscope. The 488- and 568-nm lines of an Ar-Kr laser focused to diffraction-limited spots were used to excite Alexa Fluor 488 and long-wavelength dyes Alexa Fluor 647 or Cy5, respectively. Fluorescence emission of the dyes was split by a 570 DRLP dichroic mirror and detected through 515- to 545-nm and 650- to 690-nm bandpass filters by avalanche photodiodes. Spectral separation practically excluded cross talk between the channels. The instrument can record confocal fluorescence images of the sample and perform FCS measurements at selected points of the image. In FCS measurements, continuous spot illumination by the low-intensity focused laser beam ($<0.7 \text{ kW/cm}^2$) resulted in fast photobleaching of immobile molecules (and molecules within slowly moving large macromolecular aggregates) in the first few seconds of the experiment. To separate photobleaching phenomena from diffusion processes, runs of 5×3 or 4×4 s were recorded, in which most of the photobleaching process took place in the first two runs.

3.4.2

Evaluation of FCS Experiments

Measured auto- and cross-correlation curves $G(\tau)$ were fitted to a model function assuming a single molecular species diffusing in 2D plus a triplet term (see Eq. 3.14, Box 3.1). The exact formula describing cross-correlation between two distinctly labeled species is more complex (Weidemann et al. 2002) than the auto-correlation function according to Eq. (3.14), but its overall shape is very similar. At the signal-to-noise ratios achievable in the cross-correlation measurements of membrane-bound antibodies, the above function gave a reasonably accurate fit to the experimental curves. The size of the sensitive volume was calibrated by measuring the diffusion correlation time of a standard solution with a known diffusion coefficient. For this purpose, a solution of 50 nM fluorescein in Tris buffer, pH 8, was used ($D=2.6 \times 10^{-10} \text{ m}^2/\text{s}$) (Swaminathan et al. 1996).

3.4.3

The Co-mobility of IL-15R α , IL-2R α and MHC I Was Studied in FT7.10 Cells

As mentioned above, the molecular proximity between IL-2R α , IL-15R α and MHC class I and class II glycoproteins in the plasma membrane of human T lymphoma cells has been demonstrated by flow cytometric and confocal microscopic (acceptor photobleaching) FRET experiments (Matkó et al. 2002; Vámosi et al. 2004). However, significant FRET efficiency values alone only suggest the possibility of stable interactions between the measured donor-/acceptor-labeled pairs, but do not prove the presence of stable complexes or give any information on the temporal stability of protein complexes. Static FRET (co-localization) and dynamic FCCS (co-mobility) are complementary approaches to studying interactions between molecular species. Therefore we probed these interactions by fluorescence cross-correlation spectroscopy as well. In Kit 225 FT7.10 T lymphoma cells, positive cross-correlation amplitude was obtained between IL-15R α and IL-2R α in ~20% of cases, whereas IL-15R α and MHC I yielded positive cross-correlation amplitudes in ~80% of all cases (see Fig. 3.4). In Kit 225 K6 T lymphoma cells, IL-2R α and MHC I showed non-zero cross-correlation in 80% of cases. These findings are in agreement with the positive FRET results and suggest that the studied molecular complexes are stable on a time scale of at least several tens of milliseconds, the correlation time (see Box 3.1; Vámosi et al. 2004).

As a positive control, MHC I molecules labeled with W6/32 antibodies simultaneously conjugated with Alexa Fluor 488 and Alexa Fluor 647 were used on FT7.10 cells, and resulted in positive cross-correlation. For the negative control experiment, which was performed on K6 cells, we labeled transferrin receptors (known to be accumulated in coated pits and excluded from lipid rafts) and IL-2R α subunits (localized in lipid rafts). The sensitive volume was placed on the boundary between IL-2R α and transferrin receptor positive membrane microdomains, but no cross-correlation could be detected.

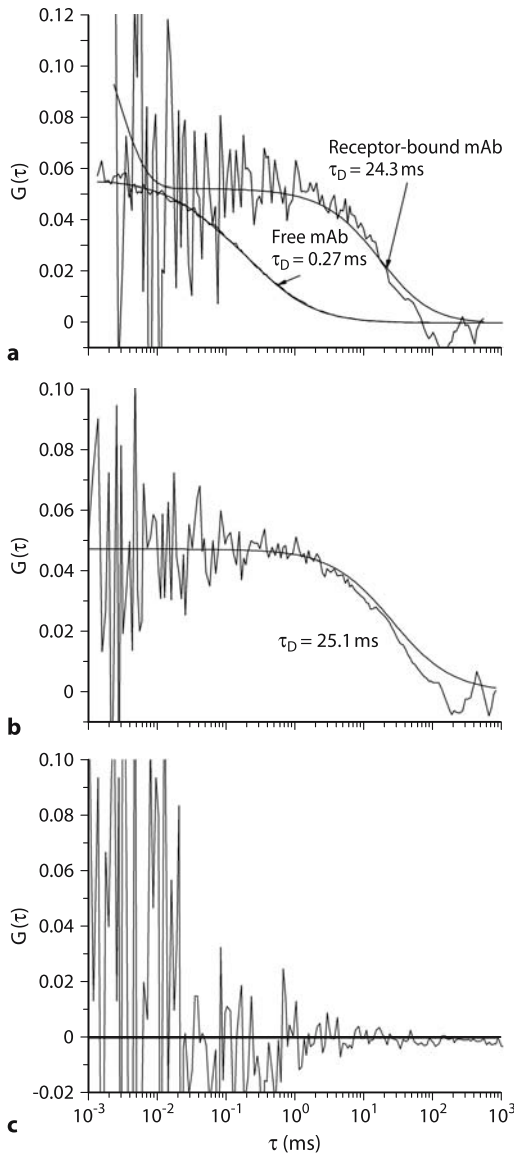


Fig. 3.4. Mobility and co-mobility measurements by FCS on Kit 225 FT7.10 and K6 T lymphoma cells.

a Autocorrelation curves detected from Alexa 488-tagged anti-FLAG mAbs free in solution and bound to IL-15R α subunits at the surface of FT7.10 cells. *Smooth curves* represent fits to the experimental data according to Eq. (3.14). Diffusion time τ_D of the antibody increased by two orders of magnitude upon receptor binding.

b Cross-correlation curve measured between IL-15R α and MHC I molecules labeled by Alexa 488-anti-FLAG and Cy5-W6/32 mAbs on FT7.10 cells. Non-zero cross-correlation amplitude suggests that at least a certain fraction of the two proteins are hetero-associated and form stable complexes. **c** Cross-correlation curve measured between transferrin receptors and IL-2R α subunits (tagged with Alexa 488-MEM75 and Cy5-anti-Tac mAbs) on K6 cells. Zero cross-correlation amplitude means that there is no interaction between the labeled proteins

An interesting conclusion to our results follows from the comparison of the expression levels of the studied proteins. The number of IL-15R α , IL-2R α and MHC I relates to one another approximately as 1:10:50–100 on the Kit 225 FT7.10 cell line used in our FCCS studies. If complexes of 1:1 stoichiometry were formed between, e.g., IL-15R α and MHC I, then the out-of-complex fraction of MHC I molecules would suppress the cross-correlation amplitude below the detection

level (see Eq. 3.17). This implies that probably higher-order aggregates of MHC class I molecules float together with IL-2 and IL-15 receptors in large supramolecular complexes in the plasma membrane. These results are in line with our previous observations on the homo-association (and hetero-associations) of MHC I (and MHC II) molecules detected by FRET and transmission electron microscopy/atomic force microscopy (see Sect. 3.3).

Acknowledgements. We thank Prof. J. Langowski for useful comments on the manuscript. This work was supported by the following grants: OTKA TS40773, T048745, T42618, T43509, F46497; ETT 602/2003, 603/2003; NATO Life Science and Technology Collaborative Linkage Grant 980200 and Bolyai János Research Fellowships (to G.V. and A.B.). A.B. and G.V. contributed equally to this manuscript.

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Transmembrane Signals Mediated by IL-2 and IL-15 Control the Life and Death of Lymphocytes

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4.1 Introduction

Immune responses are regulated by a series of cytokines that exhibit a high degree of redundancy and pleiotropy controlling a wide range of functions in various cell types. This redundancy is explained in part by the sharing of common receptor subunits among members of the cytokine receptor family. Each cytokine utilizes its own private receptor subunit but may also share public receptor subunits with other cytokines. This sharing of subunits is exemplified by the receptors within the common gamma (γ_c) receptor system. The γ_c is an essential element of the multisubunit receptors for IL-4, IL-7, IL-9, IL-21 as well as for the two cytokines, the focus of this chapter, IL-2 and IL-15 (Takeshita et al. 1992; Kondo et al. 1993; Noguchi et al. 1993; Leonard 2000). The shared actions of IL-2 and IL-15 on T and natural killer (NK) cells also require the expression of IL-2/15R β as well as the private alpha chains IL-2R α and IL-15R α used by IL-2 and IL-15 respectively (Sharon et al. 1986; Tsudo et al. 1986; Bamford et al. 1994; Giri et al. 1994, 1995; Grabstein et al. 1994). When this receptor constellation is utilized, IL-2 and IL-15 activate similar JAK1 and JAK3 (Janus kinases) as well as STAT5 (signal transducers and transactivators of transcription)-dependent signaling pathways (Witthuhn et al. 1994; Johnston et al. 1995; Lin et al. 1995). As might be anticipated from this sharing of receptor subunits and the use of common elements in one signaling pathway, there is a significant overlap between the immunological functions of IL-2 and IL-15 (Waldmann and Tagaya 1999).

Both cytokines stimulate the proliferation of different subsets of activated T cells involved in the maintenance of NK cells and act as co-stimulatory molecules for B cell immunoglobulin synthesis (Waldmann and Tagaya 1999). In addition to shared functions, IL-2 and IL-15 provide distinct and at times contrasting contributions to T cell-mediated immunity (Waldmann et al. 2001). IL-2 plays a central role in activation-induced cell death (AICD) and thereby is involved in peripheral tolerance to self. In contrast, the transgenic expression of IL-15 in mice inhibits IL-2-mediated AICD (Marks-Konczalik et al. 2000). Furthermore, IL-15 stimulates the persistence of CD8⁺ memory phenotype cells whereas IL-2 inhibits their survival (Zhang et al. 1998; Marks-Konczalik et al. 2000; Ku et al. 2000; Waldmann et al. 2001). The many biophysical elements involved in the relationships among receptor subunits as well as the transmembrane signals mediated by IL-2 and IL-15 that control the life and death of lymphocytes are the subjects of this chapter.

4.2

The Classical View of the IL-2 and IL-15 Receptor and Signaling Pathways That Underlie the Shared Functions of These Two Cytokines

The IL-2R is made up of at least three distinct membrane components: the 55-kDa alpha chain (IL-2R α), the 70- to 75-kDa beta chain (IL-2/15R β) and the 64-kDa gamma chain (IL-2R γ or γ_c) (Figs. 4.1, 4.2; Waldmann 1989a,b; Minami et al. 1993; Taniguchi and Minami 1993; Lin et al. 1995; Leonard 2000; Gaffen 2001; Shurin et al. 2003;). The development of the anti-Tac monoclonal antibody led to the identification and cloning of the gene encoding the first IL-2 binding protein now known as IL-2R α . IL-2R α , encoded on chromosome 10p14-p15, is composed of 251 amino acids as well as an NH₂-terminal 21 amino acid signal peptide (Uchiyama et al. 1981; Cosman et al. 1984; Leonard et al. 1984; Nikaido et al. 1984). The 219 terminal amino acids make up an extracellular domain that contains two potential N-linked glycosylation sites and multiple possible O-linked carbohydrates. A second 19 amino acid domain that contains a single hydrophobic region near the COOH terminus presumably represents a membrane-spanning region. The third domain is a short (13 amino acid) cytoplasmic domain. IL-2R α is an inducible receptor that is not expressed by resting cells but is expressed by activated T cells, B cells and NK cells (Waldmann 1989b; Leonard et al. 1984). In particular, IL-2R α is induced by the addition of anti-CD3 plus anti-CD28 antibodies, mitogens, antigens, the *tax* transactivator protein of HTLV-I and by certain cytokines including IL-15 as well as IL-2 itself (Waldmann 1989a). In addition, soluble forms of the IL-2R α and IL-15R α receptor subunits cleaved from the surfaces of receptor-expressing cells circulate in the biological fluids (Rubin and Nelson 1990).

Full-length IL-2/15R β encoded on human chromosome 22q11.2-12 is a 551 amino acid receptor that contains a 26 amino acid signal peptide and the mature IL-2/15R β subunit composed of 525 amino acids (Hatakeyama et al. 1989b). It contains an extracellular segment of 214 amino acids, a hydrophobic transmembrane stretch of 25 amino acids, followed by a 286 amino acid cytoplasmic domain. IL-2/15R β is constitutively expressed by NK cells, monocytes and most T cells (Sharon et al. 1986; Tsudo et al. 1986, 1987). It is further induced by anti-CD3 plus anti-CD28, mitogens, PMA and by cytokines such as IL-4. The cytoplasmic domain of IL-2/15R β has been divided into three broad regions: the serine-rich S region (amino acids 267-322), the acidic A region (amino acids 313-382) and the proline-rich H region (amino acids 378-525). The S region is involved in the recruitment of JAK1 at a proline-rich box 1 motif. The H region function relies on the critical tyrosine residues Y392 and Y510 for STAT docking and activation.

The common gamma subunit encoded on chromosome Xq 13.1 is a 269 amino acid residue peptide (Suzuki et al. 1989; Takeshita et al. 1992; Noguchi et al. 1993). This protein contains a 22 amino acid signal peptide, a 255 amino acid extracellular domain, a 29 amino acid hydrophobic transmembrane and an 86 amino acid C-terminal cytoplasmic domain. γ_c is constitutively expressed on lymphocytes

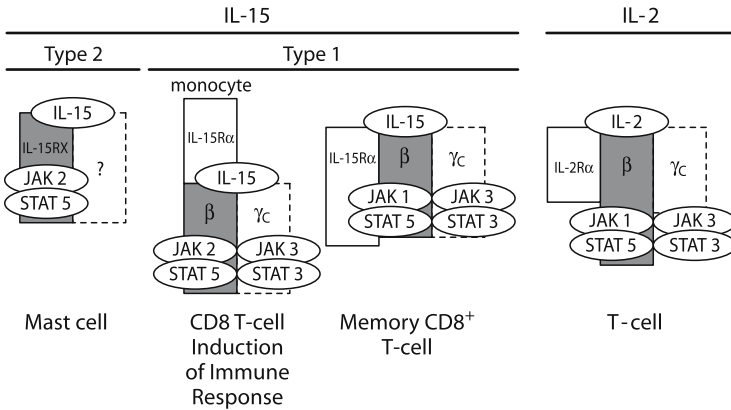


Fig. 4.1. Schematic diagram of the IL-2 and IL-15 receptor systems. IL-2R is made up of three distinct membrane components: IL-2R α , IL-2/15R β and γ_c . There are three forms of the IL-15 receptor. The receptor involved in T cell and NK cell activity utilizes the private IL-15R α receptor chain in association with IL-2/15R β and γ_c . During induction of the immune response, antigen-presenting cells such as monocytes coordinately express IL-15R α and IL-15. IL-15 is presented in *trans* to the beta and gamma subunits expressed on T and NK cells. Mature memory CD8⁺ T cells coordinately express IL-15R α , IL-2/15R β and γ_c . Mast cells express a novel IL-15RX receptor. The IL-2 and IL-15 receptors that are expressed in T and NK cells through IL-2/15R β and γ_c utilize JAK1/JAK3 and STAT3 and STAT5. The mast cell IL-15RX receptor includes tyrosine phosphorylation of JAK2 and an activation and nuclear translocation process limited to STAT5

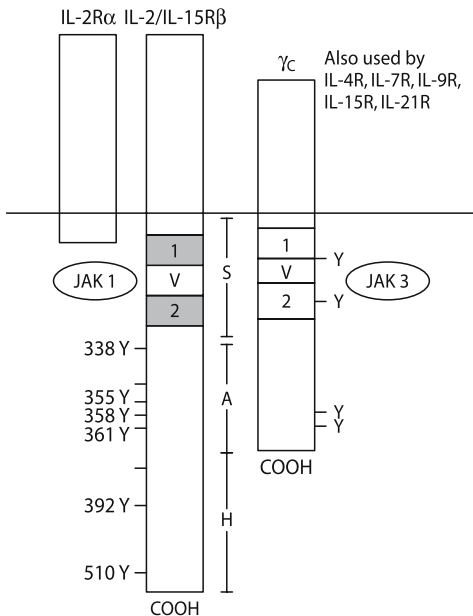


Fig. 4.2. Schematic diagram of the IL-2 receptor complex. IL-2R is composed of three subunits: IL-2R α , IL-2/IL-15R β which is shared with IL-15, and γ_c shared with the IL-4, IL-7, IL-9, IL-15 and IL-21 receptors. Box 1 and box 2 domains of IL-2/IL-15R β are conserved among members of the cytokine receptor superfamily. A variable spacer region (V) intervenes. Tyrosine residues in S, A and H regions are numbered according to Hatakeyama et al. (1989a), JAK1 associates constitutively with box 1-V and box 2 regions of IL-2/IL-15R β and JAK3 associates with γ_c . Some of the tyrosines on both chains become phosphorylated following receptor activation and serve to recruit STAT molecules that direct downstream signaling events

(Takeshita et al. 1992; Cao et al. 1993). Its expression on monocytes can be up-regulated at the post-transcriptional level by IFN- γ or IL-2.

IL-2/15R β and γ_c used by both IL-2 and IL-15 are members of the hematopoietin or cytokine I superfamily of receptors that contain four conserved cystines and a canonical membrane proximal WSXWS (Trp-Ser-X-Trp-Ser) motif (Bazan 1990; Leonard et al. 1999). Mice genetically deficient in γ_c manifest severe combined immunodeficiency since they cannot respond to IL-2, IL-4, IL-7, IL-9, IL-15 and IL-21 (Cao et al. 1995; DiSanto et al. 1995). They have markedly reduced numbers of T cells (related to the deficiency of the response to IL-7) (Puel et al. 1998), NK cells (related to the IL-15-deficient response) (Carson et al. 1994) and an abnormal B cell response related to the failure to respond by this pathway to IL-4 and IL-21.

IL-15 with T and NK cells utilizes IL-2/15R β and γ_c as well as a private receptor subunit IL-15R α (Fig. 4.1; Giri et al. 1995; Kennedy and Park 1996; Tagaya et al. 1996a; Waldmann and Tagaya 1999). IL-15R α is a type-1 membrane protein with a predicted signal peptide of 32 amino acids, a 173 amino acid extracellular domain, a membrane-spanning region of 21 amino acids and a 37 amino acid cytoplasmic domain. At least eight different IL-15R α transcripts associated with an exon-splicing mechanism have been reported. IL-15R α isoforms that include exon 2 are capable of binding IL-15, whereas those without exon 2 are not (Dubois et al. 2002). Functional differences have been ascribed to the two alternative cytoplasmic domains. The 41 amino acid isoform undergoes endosomal cycling, as discussed below, whereas the 21 amino acid isoform does not. IL-15R α is not a member of the cytokine I superfamily; however, a comparison between IL-2R α and IL-15R α revealed the shared presence of a conserved motif known as the "Sushi domain" or a GP-1 motif (Giri et al. 1995). The IL-2R α and IL-15R α genes have a similar intron:exon organization and are closely linked in both human (10q 14–15) and murine (chromosome 2) genomes (Anderson et al. 1995). Thus, IL-15R α and IL-2R α together define a new cytokine receptor family.

There are three forms of IL-2 receptors based on their affinity for the ligand IL-2. The very high affinity form (K_d 10^{-11} M) is made of the IL-2R alpha, beta and gamma subunits, the intermediate affinity form (10^{-9} M) encompasses the beta and gamma subunits, and the lower affinity form (10^{-8} M) is composed of IL-2R α alone (Lowenthal and Greene 1987; Wang and Smith 1987). The $\beta\gamma_c$ heterodimeric and the $\alpha\beta\gamma_c$ heterotrimeric forms of the IL-2R can induce a signal following interaction with IL-2. The IL-15R α receptor subunit binds IL-15 with a K_d of 10^{-11} M, a 1,000-fold higher affinity than that of IL-2R α for IL-2. The β and γ_c subunits together bind IL-15 at approximately K_d 10^{-9} M, whereas the heterotrimeric receptor involving alpha, beta and gamma has an affinity comparable to that of IL-15R α alone. There is a widespread cellular distribution but a low-level expression of IL-15R α (Anderson et al. 1995). IL-15R α expression is augmented in macrophage cell lines following the treatment with IFN- γ or interferon plus lipopolysaccharide (LPS) (Dubois et al. 2002).

4.3

IL-15 Utilizes a Novel Receptor in Mast Cells

Mast cells lack the required beta chain of the IL-2 receptor and therefore do not respond to IL-2. However, IL-15 is a growth factor for mast cells, where it utilizes a novel receptor system and signal transduction pathway which is distinct from that utilized in T cells. The IL-15 receptor in mast cells not only does not utilize the beta subunit but also does not require the action of γ_c . This latter trait was demonstrated by transfecting these cells with a cytoplasmic-truncated transdominant negative mutant of γ_c (Tagaya et al. 1996a,b). Furthermore, it appears that IL-15R α is not the critical element of the mast cell IL-15R. Using ^{125}I -IL-15 cross-linked to mast cell lines, these cells were shown to express a novel 60- to 65-kDa receptor, which we have provisionally designated IL-15RX (Fig. 4.1; Tagaya et al. 1996a,b).

4.4

The Shared and Contrasting Functions of IL-2 and IL-15

The roles of IL-2 and IL-15 in the life and death of lymphocytes may be considered in terms of a series of goals of the immune system including: (1) the generation of a rapid and adaptive response to invading pathogens, (2) the maintenance of a specific memory response to these pathogens, and (3) the elimination of autoreactive T cells to yield tolerance to self (Waldmann 1991; Taniguchi and Minami 1993; Waldmann et al. 2001). As a consequence of their sharing the receptor subunits IL-2/15R β and γ_c and their use of common JAK/STAT signaling elements, IL-2 and IL-15 also share a number of functions, including the stimulation of the proliferation of activated CD4 $^+$, CD8 $^+$, CD4 $^+$ 8 $^+$, CD4 $^+$, CD8 $^+$ and γ/δ subsets of T cells (Burton et al. 1994; Grabstein et al. 1994; Edelbaum et al. 1995; Garcia et al. 1998; Zhang et al. 1998; Waldmann and Tagaya 1999). Furthermore, the two cytokines facilitate the induction of cytotoxic effector T cells including CTL cells, and stimulate the proliferation and immunoglobulin synthesis of B cells activated by anti-IgM or CD40 ligand (Armitage et al. 1995). They also induce the generation, proliferation, activation and survival of NK cells (Carson et al. 1994; Mrozek et al. 1996; Mingari et al. 1997; Suzuki et al. 1997a; Ogasawara et al. 1998). In addition to these shared functions, IL-2 and IL-15 manifest contrasting contributions to T cell-mediated immune responses (Zhang et al. 1998; Ku et al. 2000; Ma et al. 2000; Waldmann et al. 2001). Although IL-2 is an important growth and survival factor, it also plays a pivotal role in activation-induced cell death (AICD), a phenomenon involved in peripheral tolerance by acting through the suicidal elimination of self-reactive T cells (Lenardo 1996; Marks-Konczalik et al. 2000; Waldmann et al. 2001). As demonstrated in IL-15 transgenic mice, IL-15 manifests anti-apoptotic actions and inhibits IL-2-mediated AICD (Dooms et al. 1998; Marks-Konczalik et al. 2000). In addition to their actions in AICD, IL-2 and IL-15 play opposing roles in the control of the homeostasis of CD8 $^+$ memory phenotype T cells. Zhang and coworkers (Zhang et al. 1998) demonstrated that IL-15, unlike IL-2, provides potent and selective stimulation of memory phenotype (CD44 $^{\text{hi}}$) CD8 $^+$ T cells in

vivo. Furthermore, Ku and coworkers (2000) reported that the division of CD8⁺ T cells of memory phenotype is stimulated by IL-15 but is inhibited by IL-2 through its actions on CD4⁺ CD25⁺ (T-regs) suppressor cells. IL-15 transgenic mice manifest high numbers of CD8⁺ memory phenotype T cells (Marks-Konczalik et al. 2000; Waldmann et al. 2001). IL-15 was also shown to play a role in the expression of antigen-specific, MHC I restricted memory phenotype CD8⁺ T cells that participate in the pathogenesis of the neurological disease HAM/TSP caused by infection with the retrovirus HTLV-I (Azimi et al. 1999, 2001).

These conclusions concerning the distinct and competing roles of IL-2 and IL-15 that derive from ex vivo functional studies are supported by an analysis of mice with disrupted cytokine and cytokine-receptor genes. In particular, IL-2^{-/-} and IL-2R α ^{-/-} mice develop massive enlargement of peripheral lymphoid organs associated with polyclonal T and B cell expansion (Schorle et al. 1991; Sadlack et al. 1994). Furthermore, the IL-2R α -deficient mice developed autoimmune diseases including hemolytic anemia and inflammatory bowel disease (Willerford et al. 1995). This lymphocyte expansion and associated autoimmune disease represent the loss of the IL-2-mediated checkpoints or brakes on the immune system discussed above. A similar phenotypic pattern is observed in IL-2/15R β -deficient mice secondary to the loss of their ability to respond to IL-2. In contrast to the phenotype observed with IL-2-deficient mice, mice genetically deficient in IL-15 did not manifest lymphoid enlargement, high immunoglobulin levels or autoimmune disease (Lodolce et al. 1998; Kennedy et al. 2000). Rather, they displayed a marked reduction in the number of thymic and peripheral blood NK cells, NK T cells and intestinal intraepithelial lymphocytes (IELs). Furthermore, they manifested a marked reduction in memory phenotype CD8⁺ T cells. Taken together, these studies support the view that in their special adaptive immune functions, IL-2 and IL-15 favor opposing actions that tend to emphasize one or the other of two competing major goals of the immune response: IL-2, through its contribution to AICD for CD4⁺ cells, its interference with the persistence of memory CD8⁺ phenotype T cells and its role in the induction of CD4⁺, CD25⁺ and T-regs, favors the elimination of select lymphocytes directed toward self-antigens and thus plays a critical role in the maintenance of peripheral self-tolerance; in contrast, IL-15, through its inhibition of IL-2-mediated AICD and its role in the maintenance of CD8⁺ memory phenotype T cells, favors the maintenance and survival of CD4⁺ and CD8⁺ T cells.

4.5

Classical IL-2, IL-15 Signal Transduction Pathways That Underlie the Shared Roles of IL-2 and IL-15

The IL-2 and IL-15 receptor subunits do not manifest intrinsic tyrosine kinase activity. However, in T and NK cells, IL-2 and IL-15, acting through heterotrimeric $\alpha\beta\gamma_c$ or heterodimeric $\beta\gamma_c$ receptors, activate JAK1 and JAK3 of the kinase family (Witthuhn et al. 1994; Johnston et al. 1995; Lin et al. 1995; Ellery and Nicholls 2002; Shurin et al. 2003). Using chimeric receptors composed of the cytoplasmic domains of the beta and gamma subunits and extracellular domains of either the

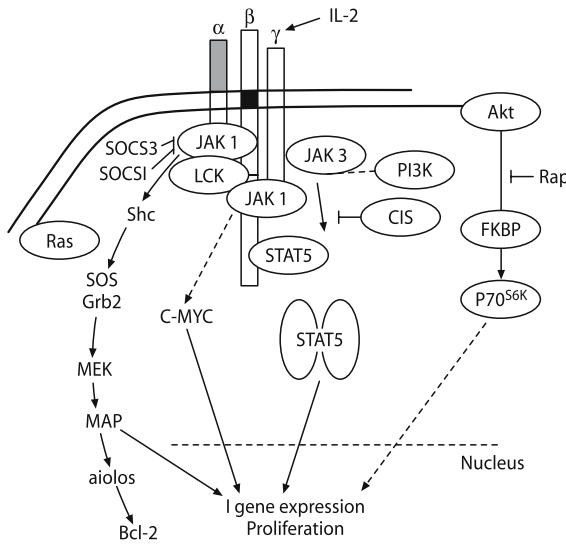


Fig. 4.3. Classical IL-2 receptor signaling pathways. Schematic representation of specific signaling pathways linked to the cytoplasmic domains of the IL-2/IL-15R β chain and γ_c

c-kit receptor or IL-2R α , it was demonstrated that oligomerization of IL-2/15R β and γ_c is necessary for signal transduction through the JAK/STAT pathways (Fig. 4.3; Nakamura et al. 1994; Nelson et al. 1994). JAK1 is associated with the S region of IL-2/15R β because this region contains a Box 1 and a Box 2 motif required for proliferation, similar to that of other type I cytokine receptors (Fig. 4.2; Miyazaki et al. 1994). JAK3 binds to the cytoplasmic domain of γ_c following cytokine-induced oligomerization of the beta and gamma receptor subunits. JAK3 and JAK1 are activated by transphosphorylation of critical tyrosines of the JAK kinases. The JAK kinases then phosphorylate tyrosines at positions 392 and 510 of IL-2/15R β . These phosphorylated tyrosines act as docking sites for the signal transducer and transactivator of transcription (STAT) proteins, which in the case of IL-2 and IL-15 involve STAT3 and STAT5 (Goldsmith et al. 1995; Lin et al. 1995, 1996; Friedmann et al. 1996; Fujii et al. 1998). The docked STAT proteins, when phosphorylated on a critical tyrosine, dimerize and then translocate to the nucleus where they permit transcription of target genes. Since IL-2, IL-4, IL-7, IL-9 and IL-15 activate the same JAK kinases, it is clear that JAK kinases per se do not determine the cytokine specificity of the immune response.

As noted above, in mast cells IL-15 utilizes a novel IL-15RX receptor. In further contrast to T cells, the membrane-proximal events of the mast cell IL-15-IL-15RX signaling pathway include the tyrosine phosphorylation of JAK2 rather than JAK1 and JAK3, as well as an activation and nuclear translocation process limited to STAT5 (Tagaya et al. 1996a,b).

4.6

Suppressors of Cytokine Signaling

Activation of the JAK/STAT pathway is short-lived. Two classes of endogenous cytokine signaling inhibitors (CIS/SOCS/Jab/SSI and PIAS family members) have been identified as cytokine-inducible factors that exert inhibitory activities on JAK and/or STAT proteins (Shurin et al. 2003). CIS (cytokine-inducible SH2-containing protein) is induced by a number of cytokines and growth factors including IL-2 (Yoshimura et al. 1995; Kovanen and Leonard 1999). CIS associates with the A-region of IL-2/IL-15R β (Aman et al. 1999). CIS inhibits IL-2-induced STAT5 activation. A second SOCS family gene, SOCS 1, inhibits multiple cytokines including IL-2 by binding to the catalytic loop in JAK kinases, thereby blocking downstream STAT activation (Marine et al. 1999; Sporri et al. 2001). SOCS 3 interacts with JAK1 and can inhibit JAK1 activation. Thus a number of CIS/SOCS/SSI family proteins are involved in the negative regulation of IL-2 signaling *in vivo*.

4.7

The Distinct Receptor Signaling Pathways That Underlie the Contrasting Roles of IL-2 and IL-15 in the Life and Death of Lymphocytes

A critical issue that remains to be fully resolved is how the two cytokines IL-2 and IL-15, which share two signaling receptor subunits and utilize as one of their signaling pathways a common JAK1/JAK3/STAT5 signaling pathway, manifest a number of contrasting functions. Many alternatives have been suggested as explanations for these differences. One distinction between IL-2 and IL-15 is in their binding interactions with IL-2/IL-15R β . Antibodies directed toward this receptor subunit such as MiK-Beta-1 block the functions of IL-15 but not those of IL-2 to their respective high affinity heterotrimeric receptors (Tsudo et al. 1989; Guex-Crosier et al. 1997). Furthermore, the response to the cytokines depends not only on the interactions of the subunits with the ligand but also on the interactions of the three subunits with each other. In this regard, the proximity of the IL-2R α subunit changes the function of the IL-2/IL-15R β to alter its IL-2 binding by mechanisms that do not require the binding of IL-2 to the IL-2R α subunit (Grant et al. 1992; Roessler et al. 1994).

Biophysical techniques have been applied in order to develop insights into the cytokine-dependent subunit assembly, which is indispensable for our understanding of the paradoxical distinct signaling capacities. By using fluorescence resonance energy transfer (FRET) techniques, Damjanovich and coworkers (Damjanovich et al. 1997) demonstrated that the three subunits of the high affinity IL-2R are in molecular vicinity of each other at the surface of T-lymphoma/leukemia cells even in the absence of IL-2 (Fig. 4.4). The addition of IL-2 resulted in the “tightening” of this preformed receptor complex. Moreover, IL-15 acts in the opposite direction by opening the triangle, possibly because IL-15R α becomes more closely associated with the beta and gamma subunits that it shares with the

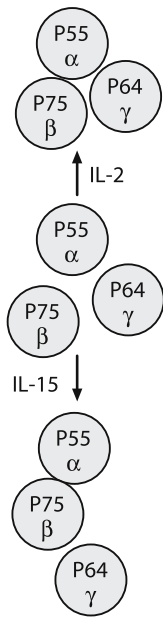


Fig. 4.4. Schematic representation of organization of subunits of the IL-2 receptor complex on Kit 225 K6 T cells. FRET data indicated that IL-2R α , β and γ subunits are preassembled, forming a heterotrimeric triangle on the surface of resting cells (*middle*). Addition of IL-2 promoted a stronger contact of the α subunit with β and γ chains (*above*). IL-15 induced a weakening of the contact between the γ_c and IL-2R α subunits, thereby leading to a somewhat linearized configuration of the IL-2R complex (*below*). (Reprinted with modifications with permission from Sándor Damjanovich et al. 1997)

IL-2R complex. It was theoretically possible that the IL-2 and IL-15 receptor systems might be expressed in different cell-surface compartments, thereby explaining their distinct functions. However, this was not shown to be the case. In particular, by using FRET and confocal microscopy, Vámosi and coworkers (2004) demonstrated that IL-2R α , IL-15R α , IL-2/15R β and γ_c subunits as well as MHC I and II glycoproteins formed supermolecular receptor complexes in lipid rafts of the T-lymphoma cell line, Kit 225 FT7.10.

Fluorescence cross-correlation microscopy was used to demonstrate the comobility of IL-15R α , IL-2R α and MHC I. A model was generated for subunit switching between IL-2R α and IL-15R α on binding of the appropriate cytokine, resulting in the formation of high affinity heterotrimeric receptors. The FRET data presented were compatible with a tetrameric structure of the IL-2/IL-15 receptor complex. IL-2R α and IL-15R α are in the molecular vicinity of each other in the presence and absence of cytokines. Binding of IL-2 or IL-15 leads to an increase in FRET efficiency between IL-2/15R β and IL-2R α or IL-15R α , respectively. These observations could be explained by the coordinated rotational/translational motion of the IL-2R α and IL-15R α subunits with respect to the $\beta\gamma_c$ heterodimer (Vámosi et al. 2004).

Another mechanism that may play a role in the quite distinct outcomes of the biological responses mediated by these two cytokines reflects the mode of action of the cytokines early in the immune response. In general, IL-2 produced by activated CD4 $^+$ cells is secreted into the biological fluids where it interacts with the preformed heterotrimeric IL-2 receptor expressed on activated responding T cells, B cells and NK cells. In contrast, we have demonstrated that IL-15 does not

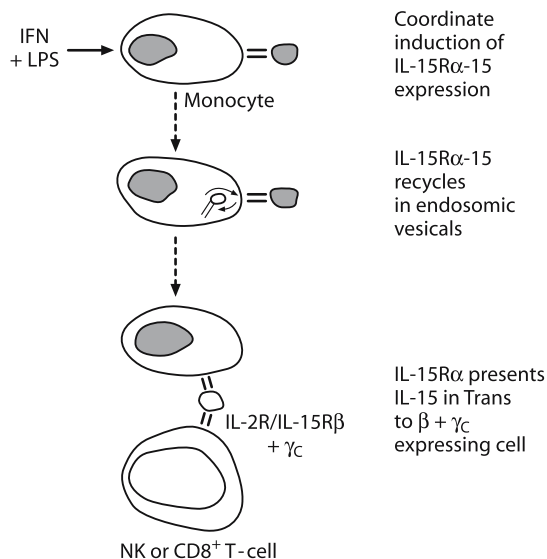


Fig. 4.5. IL-15Rα on antigen-presenting cells presents IL-15 in *trans* to NK and CD8⁺ memory T cells that express only IL-2/IL-15Rβ and γ_c. During induction of the immune response, IL-15Rα and IL-15 are coordinately expressed on the surface of APCs. On interaction between IL-15Rα and IL-15, the complex recycles in endosomal vesicals, leading to reappearance of IL-15 on the cell surface. IL-15Rα on these APCs then can present the tightly associated IL-15 in *trans* to NK cells or CD8⁺ memory T cells which express only IL-2/IL-15Rβ and γ_c. Such transpresentation events occur as part of an immunological synapse that provides associated co-stimulatory signals

usually act primarily as a secreted cytokine but rather as a membrane-associated molecule (Dubois et al. 2002). During the induction of the immune response, IL-15Rα and IL-15 are coordinately expressed on the surface of antigen-presenting cells such as monocytes and dendritic cells that have been stimulated by an interferon as well as through toll-like receptor 4 (Fig. 4.5).

The IL-15Rα on these antigen-presenting cells can then present the tightly associated IL-15 in *trans* to NK cells or CD8⁺ T cells that express only IL-2/15Rβ and γ_c but not IL-15Rα. Such transpresentation events occur as part of an immunological synapse that provides associated co-stimulatory signals such as those mediated by CD40L with CD40 and CD80/86 with CD28 in addition to those initiated by IL-15. It should be noted that during the late phases in the evolution of the immune response, co-expression of all three elements of the IL-15 receptor in the same membrane domain of an individual cell occurs in mature memory CD8⁺ T cells (Oh et al. 2003). Such co-expression of all three elements of the IL-15 receptor in responding T cells may be involved in the maintenance of long-term CD8⁺ memory responses by permitting the cells to respond to the exceedingly low physiological concentrations of IL-15 present in the biological fluids.

A final and most important explanation for the distinct actions of IL-2 and IL-15 focuses on the private cytokine-specific receptor elements IL-15R α and IL-2R α and on proteins nonrandomly associated with them.

4.8

The Distinct Roles of IL-2 and IL-15 in Signaling for AICD

As noted above, IL-2 plays a pivotal role in AICD, a function that appears to be nonredundant. If IL-2 is neutralized via antibodies or is genetically deleted, T lymphocytes can be repeatedly activated via their TCR without undergoing programmed cell death (Lenardo 1991). No other cytokine, including IL-4, IL-7 or IL-15, can replace IL-2 in this activity. One critical step during AICD proceeds via the death receptors Fas and p75. T cell apoptosis can be achieved by stimulating Fas (Russell and Wang 1993; Mixter et al. 1994; Anderson et al. 1995). T cells that carry mutations in Fas or its ligand (FasL) are resistant to AICD. The presence of IL-2 increases the amounts of the death receptor ligands TNF α and FasL upon TCR re-engagement. In contrast to IL-2, little upregulation of either FasL or TNF α is observed if mature T cells are grown in IL-15 (unpubl. data). This indicates signaling differences between the two cytokines that act upstream of death receptor ligands, resulting in their expression.

A number of transcription factors, including AP-1, SP-1, NF- κ B, NFAT, Egr1–3, c-myc and forkhead transcription factor 1, have been described as regulating both basal and inducible as well as tissue-specific transcription of FasL (Green et al. 2003). Our laboratory has focused on the different abilities of IL-2 and IL-15 to induce FasL expression after TCR re-engagement and analyzed the status of transcription factors in these cells. The most striking difference was observed with NFAT1 (unpubl. data). In contrast to previous reports (Lyakh et al. 1997), NFAT1 is not expressed in resting T cells, and the presence of IL-2 is absolutely necessary to induce the expression of NFAT1 in T cells following activation. There is strong evidence for a central role of NFAT1 in AICD as follows: (1) NFAT1-deficient T cells fail to upregulate FasL expression during TCR re-engagement and fail to undergo AICD (Hodge et al. 1996; Xanthoudakis et al. 1996); (2) TCR engagement in resting T cells does not cause apoptosis. While NFAT1 is not expressed at this state, a number of other transcription factors that are implicated in the regulation of FasL are activated during both primary and secondary TCR engagements (unpubl. data); and (3) inhibitors of NFAT activation such as FK506 or CsA reduce AICD if they are present during TCR re-engagement (Shi et al. 1989; unpubl. data). Thus the regulation of FasL via NFAT1 represents one pathway to AICD that is differently regulated by IL-2 and IL-15.

It is presently unclear what mechanism underlies the distinct regulation of NFAT1 by IL-2 and IL-15. Besides effects on the transcription of NFAT1, it is also regulated via degradation processes that could be inhibited by the presence of IL-2. No direct data are available about mediators that affect the presence of NFAT1. Circumstantial evidence points to an involvement of the Tec family kinase Itk (Lucas et al. 2003). Itk-deficient peripheral T lymphocytes are defective in AICD via their inability to upregulate FasL (Miller and Berg 2002). Persistent expression

of Itk in activated T cells depends on IL-2 that cannot be replaced by IL-15 (unpubl. data). Another potential mediator of NFAT1 expression could be Lck. Peripheral T cells that do not express Lck fail to undergo AICD (Yu et al. 2004). In contrast to Itk, Lck expression does not appear to be affected by the presence of IL-2. Differences between the effects of IL-2 and IL-15 are observed on the phosphorylation pattern of Lck, which indicates an activation by IL-2 but not by IL-15 in a manner different from that observed with TCR-induced activation (Hatakeyama et al. 1991; unpubl. data).

4.8.1

AICD Signaling Downstream of Death Receptors

Although IL-2 is necessary for the induction of FasL, FasL stimulation via cross-linking with antibodies still proves insufficient to cause apoptosis in IL-2-deficient cells (Kneitz et al. 1995; Nishimura et al. 1995). While many characteristics are shared between IL-2^{-/-} and IL-2/15R β ^{-/-} cells, T cells with a mutation in this IL-2/15R β receptor subunit are reported to respond normally to Fas ligation (Suzuki et al. 1997b). This points to an additional effect of IL-2 on AICD downstream of death receptor ligation that is mediated by either IL-2R α , γ_c or a molecule associated with them.

Ligation of death receptors results in the recruitment of FADD and caspase-8 (Curtin and Cotter 2003). Caspase-8 is subsequently activated via proteolytic cleavage. An interactor of caspase-8, FLIP, appears to have the potential to both positively and negatively affect caspase-8 activation (Curtin and Cotter 2003). Activated caspase-8 processes the Bcl-2-like protein Bid, setting the mitochondrial cascade in motion. Alternatively, caspase-8 may directly cleave caspase-3 to induce cell death independent of mitochondrial pathways.

IL-2 is implicated in the regulation of several mediators of post-death receptor AICD. Transcription of caspase-3 is induced by IL-2 (unpubl. data). Although caspase-3 expression has been reported to depend on NFAT1, we have not detected differences in caspase-3 expression between wild-type and NFAT1^{-/-} T cells in response to IL-2. IL-2 stimulation also activates the transcription of FLIP, which may represent a positive feedback since increased expression of FLIP in T cells also results in increased production of interleukin-2 (Kataoka et al. 2000).

The effects of IL-2 on post-death receptor pathways are more complex since a number of anti-apoptotic events are also induced by IL-2. These include an increased expression of Bcl-2 and XIAP as well as a downregulation of the pro-apoptotic Bok (Romero et al. 1999; unpubl. data). It appears to be likely that the final choice of an activated T cell between proliferation and death is based on the net-effect of several opposing mechanisms that would allow multiple targets for additional regulations. Some caution has to be employed in interpreting induction patterns, since anti-apoptotic proteins like Bcl-2 can also induce cell death under some circumstances (Cheng et al. 1997).

4.9

Distinct Signals for Proliferation Mediated by IL-2 and IL-15

An *in vitro* treatment of activated T cells with either IL-2 or IL-15 results in robust proliferation. These proliferation-inducing activities appear to be redundant *in vivo* since mice that carry a mutation in IL-2/15R β show no decrease in the number of most T cells (Suzuki et al. 1995). One exception may be the T regulatory cells that are absent in mice with disruptions in IL-2, IL-2R α or IL-2/15R β (Papiernik et al. 1998). However, controversy exists concerning the effect of IL-2 signaling on the number of T regulatory cells, since IL-2 regulates the expression of IL-2R α which is commonly used to identify T regulatory cells (Plaetinck et al. 1990). Mice with disruptions in either IL-15 or IL-15R α have reduced numbers of CD8⁺ memory cells (Lodolce et al. 1998; Kennedy et al. 2000). This decrease, however, is believed to result from defects in survival rather than expansion of these cells and their precursors (Burkett et al. 2003; Koka et al. 2003).

In attempts to analyze pathways that underlie the mitogenic activities of IL-2 and IL-15, we studied proliferation of T cells with deletions of FKBP12 and FKBP12.6 and in the presence of immunosuppressive drugs (Dubois et al. 2003). To our surprise, the proliferation-inducing activities of IL-2 and IL-15 proved to be quite different. IL-15 appears to employ a single signaling pathway to induce proliferation. This involves signaling through phosphoinositide-3 kinase (PI-3 K) and mammalian target of rapamycin (mTOR) to activate mediators of cell division such as p70^{S6K} or 4E-BP. Proliferation was virtually absent if mTOR activity was affected by either the presence of rapamycin or a genetic deletion of FKBP12. Proliferation was equally affected by a pharmacological inhibition of PI-3 K.

In contrast, IL-2 induces at least four distinct signaling pathways leading to proliferation. A reduction in IL-2-induced T cell proliferation requires that at least two of these pathways are inhibited. In contrast to previous reports (Kuo et al. 1992), effective inhibition of mTOR and p70^{S6K} activation by low doses of rapamycin only marginally decreases IL-2-induced proliferation, as does a mutation in the FKBP12.6 gene. A combination of both, however, reduces the mitogenic activity of IL-2 by about one third. An inhibition of PI-3 K alone reduces proliferation by about one third, indicating the branching of two signaling pathways downstream of PI-3 K. Proliferation was further reduced if PI-3 K was inhibited on an FKBP12.6^{-/-} background, suggesting independent pathways that are affected by PI-3 K and FKBP12.6 (unpubl. data). Since significant proliferation was still measured, a fourth pathway to proliferation must exist in response to IL-2.

4.9.1

The PI-3 K Pathway

IL-2 stimulation leads to a phosphorylation of the p85 regulatory subunit of PI-3 K via IL-2/15R β (Remillard et al. 1991). In the case of both IL-2 and IL-15, PI-3 K activates p70^{S6K} via mTOR, resulting in the translation of RNA species that are believed to be critical for cell division. PI-3 K also activates E2F via PKB (Brennan et al. 1997). E2F transcription factors mediate cell cycle entry into S phase. This

pathway appears to be independent of mTOR, and only IL-2 but not IL-15 is capable of signaling to E2F in activated T cells (Dubois et al. 2003).

4.9.2

The FKBP12.6 Pathway

The nature of signaling events that depend on FKBP12.6 in the context of IL-2 stimulation is unknown. Both FKBP12 and FKBP12.6 form a complex with the immunosuppressive drug FK506 which affects NFAT activation via calcineurin inhibition (Dumont 2000). We studied NFAT in activated T cells and observed that activation of NFAT2 differs if cells are grown in IL-2 or alternatively IL-15 (unpubl. data). However, effective nuclear translocation of NFAT2 requires TCR engagement, suggesting that IL-2 signaling is unlikely to proceed directly through NFAT2. Alternatively, the presence of FKBP12.6 may be required during TCR-mediated T cell activation, leading to the expression of a signaling molecule that is used by IL-2 but not by IL-15 to stimulate proliferation.

4.9.3

The MAPK Pathway

Activation of MAPK causes proliferation in many cell types. Stimulation by IL-2 results in the JAK3-mediated phosphorylation of IL-2/15R β (Gaffen 2001). Phosphorylation of one of the tyrosines (Y338) creates a docking site for the adaptor protein Shc, which activates the MAPK cascade via Grb2, Sos, Ras, Raf (Ravichandran and Burakoff 1994; Evans et al. 1995; Friedmann et al. 1996; Ravichandran et al. 1996). Since cells that express IL-2/15R β with mutations of Y338 are still able to divide, it was suggested that MAPK activation is neither necessary nor sufficient for IL-2-stimulated T cells to proliferate (Friedmann et al. 1996; Gaffen et al. 1996; Fujii et al. 1998). However, since the status of MAPK was not determined in these cells, alternative activation mechanisms may exist that provide a proliferative impulse. Along this line, pharmacological inhibition of MAPK p38 affects IL-2-induced proliferation (Crawley et al. 1997). An abrogation of proliferation in response to IL-15 by rapamycin or by a disruption of FKBP12 does not affect MAPK p42/44 (ERK) activation, indicating that ERK activation is not sufficient to cause cell division in response to IL-15 (Dubois et al. 2003).

Other studies have focused on IL-15R α , the private receptor subunit of IL-15. It has been reported that IL-15 can produce major effects on cells that bear IL-15R α but do not express IL-2/15R β . These IL-15-mediated actions utilize signaling pathways that do not involve JAK1/3 or STAT5. For example, it has been reported but not yet confirmed that following IL-15 addition there is a recruitment of TRAF2 and Syk kinase to the cytoplasmic tail of IL-15R α (Bulfone-Pau et al. 1999; Bulanova et al. 2001). Furthermore, the existence of two isoforms of IL-15R α that differ in their cytoplasmic domains and functions supports the concept of signaling through IL-15R α . Recent data from our laboratory suggest the interactions of a series of cytoplasmic proteins with IL-15R α .

4.10

Immunotherapy Targeted to the IL-2/IL-2R IL-15/IL-15R System

The IL-2R α chain has been widely used as a target for immunotherapy (Waldmann 1992, 1993; Waldmann et al. 1993; Morris and Waldmann 2000). The scientific basis for this strategy is that IL-2R α is not expressed by virtually all of the resting cells of the body, but is constitutively expressed by the T cells from patients with certain lymphoid malignancies, select autoimmune disorders and those involved in allograft rejection. To exploit the difference in IL-2R α antigen expression between normal resting cells and the abnormal T cells, clinical trials have been performed using unmodified murine anti-IL-2R α antibodies and humanized antibodies, as well as antibodies armed with toxins and alpha- and beta-emitting radionuclides. Reviews have been published concerning IL-2R α -directed therapy (Waldmann 1993; Morris and Waldmann 2000). Early human clinical trials involving IL-2R α -directed therapy focused on HTLV-I-associated adult T cell leukemia. The retrovirus HTLV-I encodes a 42-kDa protein termed *tax* which is responsible for the transactivation of numerous host genes, including those encoding IL-2, IL-2R α , IL-15 and IL-15R α which are involved in T cell activation and potentially HTLV-I-mediated leukemogenesis (Mariner et al. 2001). Therapy with the unmodified murine version of the anti-Tac monoclonal antibody (anti-CD25, daclizumab), which blocks the binding of IL-2 to IL-2R α and which also functions by antibody-dependent cellular cytotoxicity to eliminate target cells, has led to partial or complete remission in select patients with ATL (Waldmann et al. 1993). Increased efficacy of IL-2R α -directed therapy of leukemia was achieved by humanizing the antibody and by arming it with alpha- and beta-emitting radionuclides (Waldmann et al. 1995). In other studies, following encouraging results in animal models and in phase I/II trials, phase III randomized placebo controlled clinical trials were performed that included 535 evaluated patients receiving renal allografts to determine the value of humanized anti-Tac (daclizumab) in the prevention of renal allograft rejection (Vincenti et al. 1998). On the basis of the success of these phase III trials, Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval was obtained for the use of daclizumab and in the prevention of renal kidney transplant rejection. In a similar randomized trial it was shown that basiliximab, a mAb, which is also directed toward IL-2R α , was associated with reduced numbers of acute rejection episodes in renal allograft recipients (Nashan et al. 1997). In a further study, Nussenblatt et al. (1999) showed that daclizumab is of value in the therapy of select T cell-mediated autoimmune disorders. In particular, this humanized monoclonal antibody provided effective treatment for noninfectious intermediate and posterior uveitis in a clinical trial (Nussenblatt et al. 1999). Furthermore, it was demonstrated that there was an approximately 78% reduction in Gadolinium-enhanced MRI lesions in patients with multiple sclerosis who were failing beta interferon therapy when they were treated with daclizumab (Bielekova et al. 2004).

Although the use of monoclonal antibodies directed toward the IL-2R α subunit has been of great value, such therapy has limitations in certain conditions. In particular, IL-2R α -directed therapy does not inhibit the actions of IL-15, nor does it act on resting T and NK cells that do not express IL-2R α . Disorders of IL-15

expression have been observed in a number of inflammatory autoimmune diseases, including rheumatoid arthritis, psoriasis, inflammatory bowel disease, multiple sclerosis and disorders caused by the retrovirus HTLV-I (McInnes et al. 1997; Waldmann and Tagaya 1999; Mention et al. 2003). These disorders are associated with the fact that IL-15 induces the expression of TNF α and IL-1 β as well as inflammatory chemokines, inhibits self-tolerance mediated by AICD and facilitates CD8⁺ memory T cell survival (Waldmann et al. 2001). To circumvent these limitations, IL-15 receptor-directed therapy has been developed for use in autoimmune disorders as well as for the treatment of diseases caused by the retrovirus HTLV-I (Azimi et al. 2001). The soluble IL-15R α chain prevented the development of collagen-induced arthritis in mice (Ruchatz et al. 1998). An IL-15 antagonist produced by mutating a glutamine residue to aspartic acid within the C-terminus of IL-15 inhibited IL-15-triggered self-proliferation and enhanced pancreatic islet cell allograft survival in mice (Kim et al. 1998). Antibodies to IL-15 have been effectively used in murine models of autoimmune diseases including psoriasis (Villadsen et al. 2003). Furthermore, such an antibody has shown efficacy in a phase I/II trial involving patients with rheumatoid arthritis (Baslund et al. 2003). Our own IL-15-directed therapeutic approach involves an antibody, humanized MiK-Beta-1 (Hu-MiKa-Beta-1), directed toward the IL-2/15R β cytokine receptor that is shared by IL-2 and IL-15. This humanized antibody interacts with the IL-2/15R β receptor subunit and blocks IL-15-mediated stimulation of NK and T cells *ex vivo* (Hakimi et al. 1993; Guex-Crosier et al. 1997). This antibody, when used as a single agent, prolonged cardiac allograft survival in cynomolgus monkeys (Tinubu et al. 1994). In an effort to test the hypothesis that IL-15 plays a role in the pathogenesis of select autoimmune disorders, a clinical trial is being initiated with Hu-MiK-Beta-1 in patients with rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis, T cell LGL associated with granulocytopenia and arthritis, and HTLV-I-associated disorders including the neurological disease HAM/TSP.

As noted above, there is a sharing of receptor subunits and signaling pathway elements among IL-2 and its receptors and those of other cytokines that stimulate T cells. A corollary of this sharing of cytokine signaling pathways among cytokines is that therapy directed toward a shared signal transduction element may yield more profound immunosuppression than can be achieved by an antibody directed toward a private receptor subunit among the redundant cytokine molecules such as IL-2R α . Many groups have initiated programs directed toward developing and evaluating inhibitors of JAK3 as agents for controlled immunosuppression. JAK3 is involved in the signaling of the cytokines including IL-2 and IL-15 that employ γ_c , but is not essential for signaling by other growth factors (Witthuhn et al. 1994; Johnston et al. 1995). JAK3 expression is largely limited to lymphocytes and hematopoietic cells. JAK3 deficiency in the autosomal form of severe combined immunodeficiency disease (JAK3-deficient SCID) in humans yields immunodeficiency but not disorders in extraimmunological systems (Macchi et al. 1995; Russell et al. 1995). In parallel, mice made JAK3 deficient by gene targeting manifested an absence of NK cells and abnormalities of T and B cells, but, like the JAK3-deficient humans, do not have disorders in nonimmunological systems (Nosaka et al. 1995; Thomis et al. 1995). Taken together, these observations suggest that drugs that inhibit JAK3 action may be of value as therapeutic

agents in patients with constitutive JAK3 activation, such as those with T cell leukemia and lymphoma, as well as in patients with autoimmune disorders and those receiving allografts.

In conclusion, our emerging understanding of the IL-2/IL-2R and IL-15/IL-15R systems, including the definition of the actions that these cytokines share as well as those functions where their roles are distinct, provides a better understanding of the mechanisms underlying cytokine-mediated generation, proliferation, survival and apoptosis of lymphocytes. Multiple studies, including those directed toward the definition of new signaling pathways that involve the private receptor subunits and proteins nonrandomly associated with them, are providing insights into the mechanisms underlying the divergent actions of IL-2 and IL-15. Furthermore, our greater understanding of these cytokine/cytokine receptor systems is opening up new possibilities for the development of more rational immune interventions which may be of value in prevention of allograft rejection and in the treatment of lymphocytic leukemia/lymphoma and T cell-mediated autoimmune disorders, as well as diseases associated with the retrovirus HTLV-I.

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Single-Molecule Imaging of Diffusion, Recruitment, and Activation of Signaling Molecules in Living Cells

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5.1 Introduction

Techniques that allow researchers to track single molecules or small groups of molecules in the cell membrane in living cells are becoming important tools in the investigation of the cell membrane. These methods include single fluorescent molecule video imaging (SFVI) using fluorescent probes, and single-particle tracking (SPT) using colloidal gold probes (De Brabander et al. 1985, 1988, 1991; Gelles et al. 1988; Sheetz et al. 1989; Kusumi et al. 1993; Schmidt et al. 1995; Sako et al. 2000; Schütz et al. 2000b; Harms et al. 2001; Iino and Kusumi 2001). They have given researchers an unprecedented ability: directly observing the movement, assembly, and localization of individual single molecules in the plasma membrane of living cells in culture (Kusumi and Sako 1996; Saxton and Jacobson 1997; Schütz et al. 2000a).

This ability has fostered a new fundamental understanding of molecular diffusion in the cell membrane. High-speed SPT and SFVI have revealed that the plasma membranes of virtually all mammalian cells in culture are compartmentalized with regard to the translational diffusion of practically all of the membrane molecules, and that virtually all of these molecules undergo non-Brownian diffusion in the plasma membrane, i.e., short-term confined diffusion in a compartment and long-term hop diffusion over the compartments in the cell membrane (see Figs. 5.1–5.3; details will be given later; Kusumi and Sako 1996; Fujiwara et al. 2002; Murase et al. 2004). This entails a paradigm shift of the structure of the plasma membrane: the plasma membrane in space scales greater than several tens of nanometers should not be considered as a two-dimensional continuum fluid, but rather as being partitioned in closely apposed compartments (*compartmentalized fluid model*; see Fig. 5.2).

An important corollary of these results is that the rate of diffusion cannot be described by a single diffusion coefficient; thus all of the diffusion coefficients obtained by fluorescence redistribution after photobleaching (FRAP) or those estimated by single-molecule techniques at slow rates (like a video rate) must be thought of as “*effective diffusion coefficients*”, which may be useful only when the involved time window is specified (Nagle 1992; Ghosh and Webb 1994; Saxton 1994, 1996; Feder et al. 1996; Kusumi and Sako 1996; Fujiwara et al. 2002; Murase et al. 2004). However, the fundamental importance of the fact that membrane molecules do not undergo simple Brownian diffusion (although they may undergo “effective simple Brownian

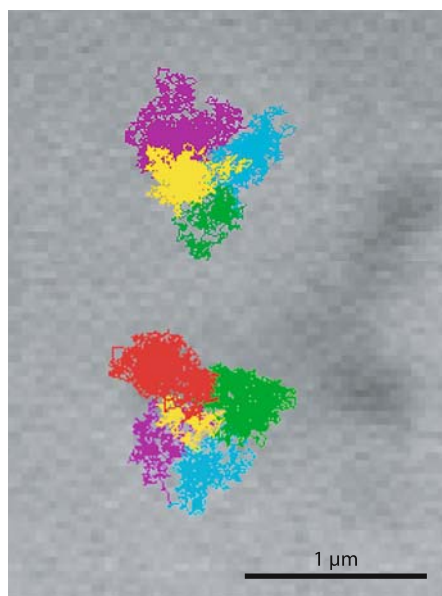


Fig. 5.1. Typical trajectories of 40-nm gold probes bound to a transferrin receptor, recorded at a time resolution of 25 μ s for a duration of 250 ms (10,000 frames). The *background* is the actual image of a single frame. Different *colors* represent various plausible compartments, detected by computer software developed in our laboratory (in a time sequence of *purple, blue, green, yellow, and red*). These trajectories suggest that transferrin receptor molecules undergo short-term confined diffusion in a compartment and long-term hop diffusion between compartments. This was confirmed by the statistical analysis method developed by Fujiwara et al. (2002)

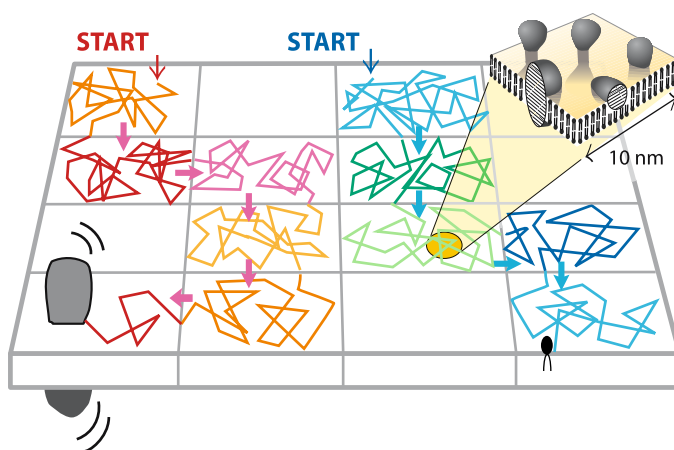


Fig. 5.2. A paradigm shift for the plasma membrane concept is required from the (two-dimensional) continuum model to the compartmentalized fluid model, in which membrane constituent molecules undergo short-term confined diffusion within a compartment and long-term hop diffusion between compartments. The plasma membrane is partitioned into many compartments with regard to translational diffusion of membrane-incorporated molecules, and practically all of the molecules undergo macroscopic diffusion by repeating their confinement within a compartment and hopping to an adjacent one. The two-dimensional fluid-mosaic model of Singer and Nicolson is perfectly adequate if the size is limited within 10 nm (*inset*), as shown in the original cartoon, but it cannot be overextended to a cell membrane structure over several tens of nanometers

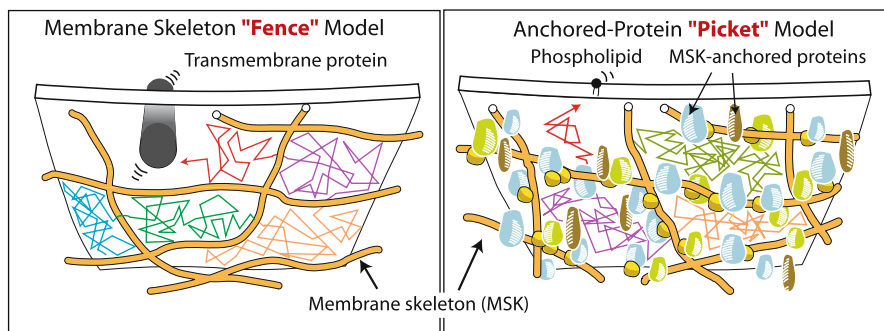


Fig. 5.3. Effects of the membrane-skeleton "fence" (left) and anchored-protein "pickets" (right) that together partition the entire plasma membrane into small compartments. See text for further details. The hydrodynamic friction-like effect was first described by Bussell et al. (1994, 1995)

diffusion" in limited time windows) has not been widely recognized (Harms et al. 2001; Niv et al. 2002; Vrljic et al. 2002).

Therefore, in this chapter, we begin by briefly describing the plasma membrane compartmentalization, which induces hop diffusion of practically all of the molecules in the cell membrane. Then, we discuss the important consequence of this plasma membrane compartmentalization regarding signal transduction in the plasma membrane: when membrane molecules, including receptor molecules and other signaling molecules in the membrane, form oligomers or molecular complexes, their diffusion rates drop dramatically or they may be temporarily immobilized (*oligomerization-induced trapping* model; Iino et al. 2001; also see Nelson et al. 1999; Hegener et al. 2004). This is completely opposite to the general view of membrane biologists: if one believes in the two-dimensional continuum fluid model for the plasma membrane at the macroscopic scale (over several tens of nanometers), then what diffusion theory teaches us is that oligomerization or the formation of molecular complexes hardly reduces the diffusion rate (Saffman and Delbrück 1975). However, in the compartmentalized fluid model, in which the plasma membrane is partitioned by the actin-based membrane skeleton and various transmembrane proteins are anchored to and lined up along the membrane skeleton, molecular complexes and oligomers will stay longer within a compartment (because they cannot hop across the compartment boundaries as fast as monomers) or become tethered to the actin-based membrane skeleton (due to their avidity effects) (Iino et al. 2001). The experimental results indicated that, upon oligomerization, the diffusion coefficients drop dramatically, consistent with the compartmentalized membrane and oligomerization-induced trapping models (Iino et al. 2001; Murase et al. 2004).

To understand the signal transduction process in the plasma membrane, observing the diffusion of signaling membrane molecules within the plasma membrane and the recruitment of cytoplasmic signaling molecules to the plasma membrane, would be very useful (Hibino et al. 2003; Lommerse et al. 2004;

Mashanov et al. 2004; Murakoshi et al. 2004). However, it would be even more useful and interesting if we could observe the *activation of each individual signaling molecule* in the plasma membrane as we observe their movement and recruitment (Murakoshi et al. 2004). In this way, the activation state of the signaling molecule in the cell membrane and that of the recruited cytoplasmic molecules can be determined, perhaps leading to an understanding of how these molecules become activated in the cell membrane. Furthermore, this would allow us to observe the changes in the diffusion of signaling molecules upon activation, perhaps due to its binding to scaffolding proteins and/or stabilized, enlarged raft domains, and the formation of molecular complexes for signaling. As described in the previous paragraph (and contrary to the general view of membrane biologists), *molecular motion is a particularly good parameter for detecting molecular complexes in and/or on the cell membrane*. Thus, in this chapter, we describe (1) the compartmentalization of the plasma membrane, which induces the hop diffusion of practically all molecules in the cell membrane, (2) the oligomerization-induced trapping and tethering of membrane (signaling) molecules, and (3) the single-molecule imaging of the activation of signaling molecules in living cells; in particular, the activation of the small G protein, Ras.

5.2

The 30-Year-Old Enigma Concerning the Diffusion Rate of Membrane Molecules in the Plasma Membrane

If one considers the statement “*molecular motion is a particularly good parameter for detecting molecular complexes in and/or on the cell membrane*” to be wrong, then it is a good indication of an understanding of the molecular diffusion events occurring in liposomes and reconstituted membranes, but not those taking place in the cell membrane. Based on the fluid-mosaic model of Singer and Nicolson (1972), Saffman and Delbrück (1975) derived an equation that relates the diffusant size to the translational diffusion coefficient in a two-dimensional continuum fluid. For a cylinder (a transmembrane protein) of radius a and height h , floating in a two-dimensional fluid of viscosity μ with a matched thickness (h) immersed in an aqueous medium of viscosity μ' , the translational and rotational diffusion coefficients, D_T and D_R , respectively, for the cylinder can be expressed as:

$$D_T = \frac{k_B T}{4\pi\mu h} \left(\log \frac{\mu h}{\mu' a} - \gamma \right) \quad (5.1)$$

$$D_R = \frac{k_B T}{4\pi\mu a^2 h} \quad (5.2)$$

where γ is the Euler constant (~ 0.5772). This equation predicts that translational diffusion is very *insensitive* to the diffusant size: tetramer formation from monomers (an increase in radius by a factor of 2) will decrease the diffusion rate by only a factor of 1.1, and even 100 mers (an increase in radius by a factor of 10)

will have their diffusion rate reduced by only a factor of 1.4 from monomers, assuming a 0.5-nm monomer radius of the membrane-spanning domain. (In contrast, the rotational diffusion rate is quite sensitive to changes in the oligomerization size. It is inversely proportional to a^2 , i.e., to the number of proteins in a complex in larger oligomers.)

However, actual observations revealed that the macroscopic (over several 100 nm) diffusion coefficient of the transmembrane protein E-cadherin was decreased by a factor of 40 upon oligomerization (including various sizes of clusters ranging from dimers up to perhaps 10 mers) in the plasma membrane (Iino et al. 2001). Here, “macroscopic” generally refers to space scales greater than several hundred nanometers, corresponding to the typical photobleaching area size in the FRAP experiments (generally 300 nm or greater in diameter) or to the compartment size in the compartmentalized (or partitioned) membrane model (compartment sizes range between 30 and 230 nm, depending on the cell type). Even an unsaturated phospholipid, L- α -dioleoylphosphatidylethanolamine, upon artificial cross-linking, exhibited a fivefold slower macroscopic diffusion rate (over several 100 nm) (Murase et al. 2004). These results clearly indicate that the plasma membrane cannot be considered as a two-dimensional continuum fluid.

There has been another problem regarding the diffusion coefficient for all of the membrane molecules in the plasma membrane. For 30 years, membrane biologists have wondered why the diffusion coefficients for both proteins and lipids in the plasma membrane are lower than those found in artificially reconstituted membranes and liposomes, by factors of 5–50 (Murase et al. 2004). Note that here the diffusion coefficients are those measured at length scales greater than 300 nm, using FRAP, or those observed by SFVI or SPT at the normal video rate (time window of about 100 ms). Further, Peters and Cherry (1982) found that the Saffman–Delbrück theory, which failed in the plasma membrane as described above, worked well in the reconstituted membranes of bacteriorhodopsin.

5.3

Corraling Effects of the Membrane Skeleton for Transmembrane Proteins (the Membrane-Skeleton Fence Model)

Even prior to the single-molecule era, numerous FRAP reports indicated that the reduction in the macroscopic diffusion coefficient in the plasma membrane from that found in artificial membranes may be caused by the actin-based membrane skeleton (Sheetz 1983; Sheetz et al. 1980; Tank et al. 1982; Wu et al. 1982; Tsuji and Ohnishi 1986; Tsuji et al. 1988; Saxton 1989; Paller 1994). This is summarized in Box 5.1. All the results indicated that the membrane skeleton is involved in slowing the diffusion of membrane molecules in the plasma membrane, although the means by which the membrane skeleton causes such a large reduction, by a factor of 5–50, could not be resolved. Among the explanations, the picket-fence model of the membrane skeleton for the reduction in the translational diffusion coefficient was first proposed by Sheetz (1983). Tsuji and Ohnishi (1986) and Tsuji et al. (1988) carried out *both translational and rotational diffu-*

sion measurements for the transmembrane protein band 3 in human red blood cell ghost membranes, providing the first data substantiating the picket-fence model. Furthermore, they found that the passage across the membrane skeleton fence is due to the temporary dissociation of the spectrin tetramers into dimers (spectrin tetramer–dimer equilibrium gate model or SPEQ gate model, see Box 5.1). The percolation threshold idea advanced by Saxton played an important role in these studies (Saxton 1990).

The single-particle tracking (SPT) technique, in which a single or a small number of membrane molecules are conjugated to a colloidal gold particle of 20 or 40 nm in diameter and their movements are imaged by optical transmission microscopy, was developed in the late 1980s (De Brabander et al. 1985, 1988, 1991; Gelles et al. 1988; Schnapp et al. 1988; Kucik et al. 1989; Sheetz et al. 1989; Kusumi

► **Box 5.1.**

Effect of the actin-based membrane skeleton on molecular diffusion in plasma membrane measured by *frap*, before the single-molecule era

Sheetz et al. (1980) found that the transmembrane protein band 3 (the majority of the ConA receptor observed in this study is known to be band 3) diffuses about ten times faster (Sheetz et al. 1980) in spectrin-deficient mutant mouse erythrocytes than in normal cells. In mammalian red blood cells, the spectrin meshwork, instead of the f-actin network, forms the underlying structure of the plasma membrane, called the membrane skeleton. Furthermore, a number of reports have shown that the lateral diffusion coefficients of transmembrane proteins were increased in blebbed membranes or after partial depolymerization of actin filaments (for example, see Tank et al. 1982; Wu et al. 1982; Paller 1994).

Tsuji and Ohnishi (1986) and Tsuji et al. (1988) showed that the translational diffusion coefficient of band 3 was increased (decreased) when the spectrin network that forms the underlying structure of the human erythrocyte membrane was stabilized [destabilized, i.e., the tetramer–dimer equilibrium of spectrin was shifted toward the tetramer (dimer)], whereas the rotational diffusion coefficient of band 3 was unaffected. These results clearly indicate that (1) the spectrin meshwork partitions the membrane into small compartments, (2) the non-specific collision of band 3 with the spectrin tetramer, which forms the compartment boundary, is responsible for the reduction in the translational diffusion coefficient in the erythrocyte membrane, and (3) the spectrin tetramer is the effective barrier, and when it temporarily dissociates into dimers, band 3 molecules can cross the compartment boundary. Based on these observations, Tsuji et al. (1988) proposed a “spectrin dimer–tetramer equilibrium” gate model (SPEQ gate model). As such, data showing the involvement of the membrane skeleton in the reduction of the translational diffusion rate were abundant in the era before single-molecule observations, but direct observations of molecules undergoing short-term diffusion within a compartment (made of the membrane skeleton) and long-term hop diffusion over the compartments had to wait until the single-molecule technologies became available.

et al. 1993). Using SPT, Sako and Kusumi (1994) were the first to directly observe the “hop diffusion” of membrane molecules: transferrin receptor, a transmembrane protein, is temporarily confined in a compartment of about 700 nm in diameter in the membrane, and then it hops to an adjacent apposed compartment, where it again becomes trapped temporarily. By repeating such confinement and hop movements between the compartments, which was termed hop diffusion, the receptor covers macroscopic areas (Figs. 5.1 and 5.2). Since virtually all of the examined transferrin receptor molecules and $\alpha 2$ -macroglobulin receptor molecules were found to undergo hop diffusion, it was proposed that the entire plasma membrane is basically partitioned into small compartments (except for specialized membrane domains, such as clathrin-coated pits, cell–cell and cell–substrate junctions, and microvilli).

The transferrin receptor molecule hop rates for the smaller and greater compartments in NRK cells (NRK cells have a plasma membrane with nested double compartments with sizes of 260 and 710 nm; Fujiwara et al. 2002) have been recently found to be on average every 58 and 530 ms; direct SPT measurements gave 55 and 1,800 ms, respectively, but the latter value needed to be corrected with a macroscopic diffusion coefficient determined by SFVI (a time window of 3 s, giving $0.24 \mu\text{m}^2/\text{s}$) and the compartment size determined by SPT (710 nm) (Fujiwara et al. 2002); however, see Box 5.2 for the history of reaching this correct value. Furthermore, all of the transmembrane proteins examined thus far, including E-cadherin (Sako et al. 1998), transferrin receptor (Sako and Kusumi 1994), $\alpha 2$ -macroglobulin receptor (Sako and Kusumi 1994), CD44 (Ritchie and Kusumi, unpubl. observ.), band 3 (Tomishige et al. 1998), stem cell factor receptor (Kobayashi, Murakami, and Kusumi, unpubl. observ.), and various G protein-coupled receptors (GPCRs) (Kasai, Prossnitz, Suzuki, and Kusumi, unpubl. observ.), undergo hop diffusion. The macroscopic diffusion coefficients for these molecules, determined by SPT (reflecting hop diffusion rate over many compartments), are basically consistent with the single fluorescent molecule video imaging (SFVI) data and the FRAP data (due to cross-linking effects, the diffusion coefficients may be smaller by a factor of 1–3, but this was corrected using the SFVI data).

What makes the boundaries between these compartments for transmembrane proteins? Based on the single-molecule observation data and the optical trapping results using specimens with modulated cytoskeleton or the modulated cytoplasmic domain of transmembrane proteins, as summarized in Box 5.3, as well as on the FRAP and the rotational diffusion data before the single-molecule era, as summarized in Box 5.1, it was concluded that the part of the actin-based membrane skeleton mesh that is associated with the cytoplasmic surface of the plasma membrane forms the plasma membrane compartment boundaries. Here, transmembrane proteins are temporarily confined in the membrane skeleton mesh, and then undergo a hop movement to an adjacent compartment (Kusumi et al. 1993; Sako and Kusumi 1994, 1995; Sako et al. 1998; Tomishige et al. 1998; Fujiwara et al. 2002). Based on these results, the “membrane-skeleton fence” or “membrane-skeleton corraling” model was proposed (Fig. 5.3, left). Transmembrane proteins protrude into the cytoplasm, and, in this model, their cytoplasmic domains collide with the membrane skeleton, which induces temporal confinement or cor-

Box 5.2.**Beginner's luck in single particle tracking, which highlights the pitfalls of these observations**

In the early years of single particle tracking, the observation frame rate was only 30 Hz (video rate). In hindsight, the observation of hop diffusion at such a low frame rate was possible at that time due to beginner's luck, in two ways (everybody was a beginner at that time). First, NRK cells were selected for the SPT studies, because at that time we hoped that the previous endocytosis work, by Sako et al. (1990), in which NRK cells were used, would be combined with observations of transferrin receptor movement on the cell surface, in future studies of the endocytosis mechanism for this receptor. It turned out that the plasma membrane of NRK cells has nested double compartmentalization (Fujiwara et al. 2002), and that the greater compartment is unusually large (~700 nm), as compared with the compartments found in other cell types (30–230 nm; Murase et al. 2004); this made the 700-nm compartments easy to detect even at the low video-rate time resolution.

The second piece of luck was the choice of transferrin receptor as our target molecule (for the same reason as above). As beginners, it was difficult to prepare good gold particles coated with transferrin that did not cross-link receptor molecules. These gold particles cross-linked transferrin receptor molecules much more readily than the ones we prepare presently. This greatly decreased the hop rate of the gold particle bound to the transferrin receptor across the barrier between the compartments (this in itself is consistent with the oligomerization-induced trapping concept, and is inconsistent with the two-dimensional continuum idea for the plasma membrane. Furthermore, this result is inconsistent with the simple viscoelastic concept of the plasma membrane and the simple anomalous diffusion concept of membrane molecules). Due to the slow intercompartmental hop rate (once every 19 s on average) and the unusually large compartment size of the NRK cell membrane (~700 nm), the hop diffusion of (cross-linked) transferrin receptor became clearly visible, even in video-rate observations (the macroscopic diffusion coefficient obtained was about $0.0014 \mu\text{m}^2/\text{s}$, compatible with the FRAP results for various other transmembrane proteins, probably because FRAP could not differentiate the temporary incorporation of the receptor molecules in the clathrin-coated pits). The correct hop rates for the transferrin receptor molecule in the smaller and larger compartments in NRK cells have been recently found to be 58 and 530 ms, respectively (Fujiwara et al. 2002).

ralling of the transmembrane proteins in the membrane skeleton mesh. Transmembrane proteins may hop between the compartments when a space that allows the passage of the cytoplasmic domain of the transmembrane protein is formed between the membrane and the membrane skeleton. This space is formed as a consequence of the thermal fluctuation of these structures, when the actin filament that forms the compartment boundary temporarily dissociates, and when the transmembrane protein incidentally has sufficient kinetic energy to overcome

Box 5.3.**Summary of evidence supporting the membrane skeleton fence and anchored transmembrane protein picket models for compartmentalization of the cell membrane**

Other models could explain one or several of the following observations, but not *all* of these observations:

1. Hop diffusion of transmembrane proteins and lipids (determined by statistical analyses) depends on the integrity of the membrane skeleton (Sako and Kusumi 1994; Tomishige et al. 1998; Fujiwara et al. 2002; Murase et al. 2004). Very mild latrunculin and cytochalasin D treatments increased the compartment size. Note that the effect on the macroscopic diffusion coefficient, under these mild conditions, can be very small, between a factor of 1 and 2. This is a consequence of the slightly decreased hop rate due to the increased compartment size (Fujiwara et al. 2002; Nakada et al. 2003; Murase et al. 2004). Hop diffusion cannot be found in liposomes and in membrane blebs, where the membrane skeleton is largely lost (Fujiwara et al. 2002; Murase et al. 2004; Suzuki and Kusumi, unpubl. observ.). In these membranes, the membrane molecules undergo rapid, simple Brownian diffusion that can be characterized by a single diffusion coefficient in the range of 5–10 $\mu\text{m}^2/\text{s}$ for DOPE or 3 $\mu\text{m}^2/\text{s}$ for transmembrane proteins.
2. Mild treatments with jasplakinolide, which stabilizes the actin filaments, reduced the macroscopic diffusion coefficient, without strongly affecting the compartment size, by decreasing the hop frequency (Fujiwara et al. 2002; Nakada et al. 2003; Murase et al. 2004).
3. The instances of hops are clearly visible and also detectable with a computer program in the analysis of single-molecule observations with sufficient time resolution (Fujiwara et al. 2002; Murase et al. 2004; Suzuki and Kusumi, unpubl. observ.).
4. The hop rate increases after the partial removal of the cytoplasmic domain of transmembrane proteins (Sako et al. 1998; Tomishige et al. 1998).
5. The hop diffusion is not affected by removing the major fraction of the extracellular domains of transmembrane proteins and the extracellular matrix (Fujiwara et al. 2002; Murase et al. 2004; Suzuki and Kusumi, unpubl. observ.), indicating that these are not the major causes of the induction of hop diffusion.
6. The removal of cholesterol has no major effects on hop diffusion (Fujiwara et al. 2002; Murase et al. 2004; Suzuki and Kusumi, unpubl. observ.), suggesting that lipid rafts are not the major causes of membrane compartmentalization or hop diffusion.
7. The idea that the presence of membrane protrusions and dips over the entire membrane causes apparent confinement within a compartment, reducing the macroscopic diffusion coefficient by a factor of 10, is rejected, because such high protrusions or deep dips (100- to 300-nm structures) that are present throughout in the cell membrane are clearly inconsistent with electron microscope observations (possibly except for the brush-border membranes of epithelial cells) (Rothberg et al. 1992; Morone and Kusumi, unpubl. observ.).

8. Oligomerization of transmembrane proteins or lipids reduces the macroscopic diffusion coefficient and the intercompartmental hop rate without affecting the compartment size (oligomerization-induced trapping; lino et al. 2001; Murase et al. 2004). This can be easily explained by the models of fences and pickets, but cannot be naturally explained by the two-dimensional continuum fluid model, the viscoelastic model for the suppression of diffusion of membrane molecules, the general anomalous diffusion model, or the model of long membrane protrusions and deep dips throughout in the membrane.
9. The compartment size detected by the free dragging length in optical trap experiments employing very weak trapping forces agrees with the compartment size detected by single-molecule diffusion measurements with high time resolutions (Sako and Kusumi 1995; Sako et al. 1998).
10. The optical trapping experiments revealed that the compartment boundaries are elastic, consistent with the model in which the basis for the compartment barrier is the membrane skeleton meshwork (Sako and Kusumi 1995; Sako et al. 1998; Tomishige et al. 1998). This cannot be explained by models involving raft-induced compartmentalization of the plasma membrane, crowding of the extracellular surface by the extracellular domain of membrane molecules, anomalous diffusion, protrusion and dips throughout in the membrane, or a two-dimensional continuum fluid.
11. Dragging of the membrane skeleton moved transmembrane proteins that are not bound to the membrane skeleton (Tomishige et al. 1998).
12. The compartment sizes detected by transmembrane proteins (transferrin receptor, α_2 -macroglobulin receptor) and the phospholipid DOPE are the same in all of the cell types examined thus far (Sako and Kusumi 1994; Fujiwara, Iwasawa, and Kusumi, unpubl. observ.; Murase and Kusumi, unpubl. observ.).
13. The compartment sizes detected from diffusion measurements of transmembrane proteins and lipids are consistent with the mesh size of the membrane skeleton on the cytoplasmic surface of the plasma membrane, determined by atomic force microscopy (AFM) or electron microscope computed tomography (Takeuchi et al. 1998; Tomishige et al. 1998; Morone and Kusumi, unpubl. observ.).
14. Monte Carlo simulations reproduced the experimentally observed residency times when only 20–30% of the compartment boundaries were occupied by the anchored transmembrane protein pickets (Fujiwara et al. 2002; Nakada et al. 2003; Murase et al. 2004). This represents the anchoring of only about 15% of the total transmembrane proteins in the plasma membrane.

the confining potential energy of the compartment barrier when it is in the boundary region.

Several reports employing FRAP or low-speed (video rate or slower) single-molecule tracking have noted the absence of an effect of actin depolymerization on the movement of various membrane molecules (Vrljic et al. 2002; Schmidt and Nichols 2004). Latrunculin or cytochalasin D treatment may slightly increase the

compartment size, while at the same time it tends to slightly decrease the hop rate (because the frequency of collisions of membrane molecules with the compartment boundaries decreases due to the increase in the compartment size) (Fujiwara et al. 2002; Murase et al. 2004), leading to minor increases in the *macroscopic* diffusion coefficients, by a factor of 1–2, depending on the cell type (Fujiwara et al. 2002; Murase et al. 2004). A clear example is found in Table 5 in Murase et al. (2004). After cytochalasin treatment, the average compartment size increased from 45 to 87 nm, but the hop rate for gold-tagged dioleoylphosphatidylethanolamine (DOPE) decreased from an average of once every 15 ms to once every 39 ms, thus resulting in practically the same diffusion coefficient before and after the cytochalasin treatment (0.042 or 0.046 $\mu\text{m}^2/\text{s}$, respectively). In addition, if FRAP, a technique for observing the ensemble-averaged behavior of many molecules, or single-molecule techniques with low time resolutions like a video rate are employed, changes in the motional characteristics of the membrane molecules may easily be missed. Furthermore, the use of high concentrations of actin-depolymerizing drugs and/or the long incubation periods often employed in cell biological studies may complicate the results, as summarized in Box 5.4.

The evidence, obtained by a variety of observational methods and under various conditions, supporting the membrane-skeleton fence model (and anchored transmembrane protein picket model) is summarized in Box 5.3. Furthermore, how hop diffusion could be observed very clearly, even at the low time resolution available in the early era of single-particle tracking, is described in Box 5.2.

5.4

Lipids Also Undergo Hop Diffusion in the Plasma Membrane

The next natural question is “What about lipids?” Surprisingly, Fujiwara et al. (2002) and Murase et al. (2004), using high-speed SPT with a time resolution of 25 μs , found that an unsaturated phospholipid, L- α -DOPE, undergoes hop diffusion (Fig. 5.4). To observe DOPE movement, it was tagged with the fluorescent dye Cy3 or with a 40-nm-diameter colloidal gold particle. In video-rate observations and in NRK cells, both yielded about the same diffusion coefficients, as long as we remained in time windows shorter than 100 ms, which justifies the use of such a large colloidal gold particle as a probe. Over longer time scales, the diffusion coefficient of gold-tagged DOPE was smaller than that of Cy3-tagged DOPE by a factor of 3, due to the cross-linking effect of gold probes (Fujiwara et al. 2002; which, by the way, in itself shows that the plasma membrane cannot be considered as two-dimensional continuum fluid). In the case of FRSK cells (a cell line derived from a fetal rat skin keratinocyte), which have much smaller compartments of ~ 40 nm, even in the time window of 100 ms, the diffusion of gold-tagged DOPE was slower than that of Cy3-tagged DOPE by a factor of 3. Therefore, to obtain the correct residency time within a compartment, the macroscopic diffusion coefficient obtained from single fluorescent molecule observations at a video rate (SFVI) and the compartment size obtained from the high-speed SPT (this should not be affected by oligomerization) were used ($[\text{compartment size}]^2/4D$). This

Box 5.4.**How can FRAP and low-time-resolution single-molecule tracking miss the large changes in the diffusion characteristics of membrane molecules after actin depolymerization?**

The observation of the effect of actin depolymerization on the diffusion of membrane molecules is tricky (Sako and Kusumi 1994; Fujiwara et al. 2002; Nakada et al. 2003). One might think that, based on the membrane skeleton “fence (or corral)” and anchored-transmembrane protein “picket” models, depolymerization of actin filaments, using drugs like cytochalasin D or latrunculin, would restore the fast simple Brownian diffusion to that found in artificial membranes, but this turned out to be an enormous oversimplification.

The behavior of actin filaments upon drug-induced depolymerization is complex because, after drug treatment, they form various types of aggregates, with different levels of interactions with the membrane and membrane molecules, which are compounded by the dependence on the drug concentration and the duration of the drug treatment. We strongly recommend very mild actin depolymerization, in which the drug treatment is carried out with microscopic observation of the specimen at 37°C, at very low concentrations (50–250 nM) of latrunculin (A or B) or cytochalasin D, with preincubation periods of 2–5 min, and with all of the observations completed within 10–15 min after the addition of these drugs (Fujiwara et al. 2002). In some epithelial cell lines, higher concentrations of the drugs may be required: for example, 1 μ M for KB cells (Murakoshi et al. 2004) and 13 μ M for FRSK cells (Murase et al. 2004); however, the preincubation periods must be kept short, normally less than 5 min, and all of the experiments should be finished within 15 min. To induce changes in the neuronal initial segment membrane where actin and its associating proteins are concentrated, 1.7 μ M of latrunculin A (experiments are finished within 5 min) was used (Nakada et al. 2003). One might think that lower concentrations of the drugs with longer incubation periods would give similar results and simplify the experiments. However, this does not seem to work, probably due to the occurrences of compounding effects over time, resulting in large cell-to-cell variations in the effects and greater tendencies toward side effects, such as major morphological changes and cell death.

Observations under these conditions using high-definition SPT at a frame rate of every 25 μ s detected a slight increase in the compartment size with a slight decrease in the hop rate (since the collision frequency of the observed molecule with the compartment boundaries was decreased, due to the increased compartment size). These countering effects tend to exert only very minor effects on the macroscopic diffusion rate (for apparent simple Brownian diffusion) over many compartments, by a factor of only 1–2 (Fujiwara et al. 2002; Murase et al. 2004), which may not be detectable with FRAP or low-time-resolution single-molecule tracking techniques (Vrljic et al. 2002; Schmidt and Nichols 2004).

The employment of higher concentrations of actin-depolymerizing drugs and/or longer incubation periods is more common in cell biological studies (such as incubation in 0.3–20 μ M of latrunculin cytochalasin for over 20 min). Under these conditions,

actin aggregates may form beneath the cell membrane (Wakatsuki et al. 2001), and as membrane molecules become trapped in or interact with these aggregates, they exhibit peculiar behaviors (as observed at the single-molecule level). When membrane molecules are observed at the level of single molecules at video rate under these conditions, they tend to exhibit either an increase or a decrease of (1) the immobile components, (2) the fraction of molecules diffusing faster, and (3) the fraction of molecules diffusing more slowly, perhaps depending on the sizes of the aggregates, their interactions with the remaining membrane skeleton mesh, and the extent to which the membrane molecules under study are trapped in the actin aggregates. Thus, the end results regarding the diffusion of membrane molecules vary greatly, depending on the cell type and molecules under study, and are unpredictable (Paller 1994; Sako and Kusumi 1994; Murase et al. 2004). Under these conditions, changes may or may not be detectable using a low-time-resolution single-molecule tracking technique or FRAP. In the presence of messy actin aggregates, using methods that carry out averaging over time (e.g., due to the long frame time of the camera, in single-molecule observations) and/or over all of the molecules under observation (ensemble averaging, like FRAP) makes the interpretation of the data difficult or impossible. Since there may be many reasons for the same averaged behaviors, it will be impossible to determine exactly how the membrane molecules behave after partial depolymerization of actin filaments from these measurements. There is no question that techniques such as FRAP and single-molecule tracking at video rate can be used for observations of various membrane processes, as described in the text, but it may be unwise to try using these techniques for *examinations of diffusion models in messed-up membranes*. In addition, even when single-molecule observation methods with high time resolutions are employed, if the obtained trajectories are short (which tends to happen when high-speed imaging of single fluorescent molecules is carried out, because, to enhance the signal-to-noise ratio, strong illumination is employed, causing rapid photobleaching), then anomalies in diffusion or hop diffusion can easily be missed. Particular attention should be paid to both the time resolution and the duration of the observation.

was necessary because, with single fluorophore observations, obtaining trajectories with both a sufficient length and sufficient time resolution is difficult, due to poor signal-to-noise ratios and photobleaching.

Figure 5.4 shows representative trajectories of gold-tagged DOPE in the plasma membrane of NRK cells, recorded at time resolutions of 33 ms and 25 μ s. At a 33-ms resolution (normal video rate), practically all of the DOPE trajectories were classified into the simple Brownian diffusion mode. However, when the time resolution was enhanced to 25 μ s, it became clear that the simple Brownian nature found at the 33-ms resolution is only an apparent one. The hop diffusion is clear even visibly (individual compartments were detected by the computer program we developed), and the statistical analysis method developed by Fujiwara et al. (2002) indeed showed that over 85% of DOPE molecules undergo hop diffusion, rather than simple Brownian diffusion.

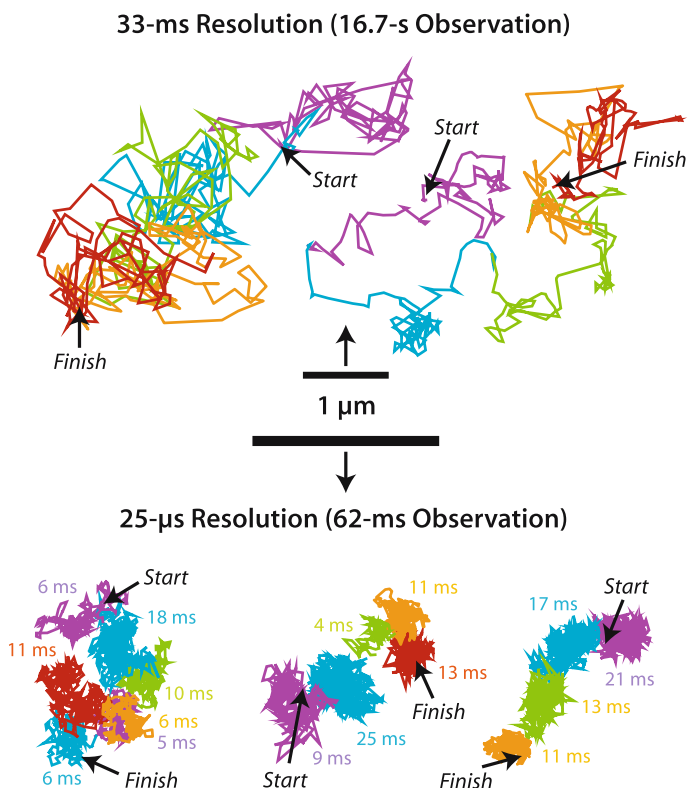


Fig. 5.4. Representative trajectories of single or small groups of DOPE molecules recorded at time resolutions of 33 ms and 25 μ s. See text for details. *Above* The different colors of trajectories obtained at a 33-ms resolution simply represent a time sequence of every 3.3 s. *Below* The different colors of trajectories obtained at a 25- μ s resolution represent various plausible compartments, detected by computer software developed in our laboratory (in a time sequence of purple, blue, green, orange, and red for both time resolutions). These results show that the simple Brownian nature of diffusion observed at a video rate (33 ms/frame) is only superficial, and that it is due to the low time resolution of the observation: the confined + hop movement of each DOPE molecule is totally smeared out at video rate. To resolve such movement, the time resolution must be considerably shorter than average residency time within a compartment

Quantitative analysis showed that the average compartment size was 230 nm. The average residency time within each 230-nm compartment was 11 ms. No wonder we did not see hop movement at video rate, with a time resolution of only 33 ms. In fact, all of the trajectories shown in Fig. 5.4 are 62 ms long, and if we had used video rate observations, there would have been only two or three points in the whole trajectory, and there would have been no way of detecting the hop diffusion of DOPE molecules.

The diffusion rate within the 230-nm compartment, which is $5.4 \mu\text{m}^2/\text{s}$ on average, is interesting. It is almost as large as that of DOPE molecules observed in artificial membranes, such as giant liposomes. Therefore, lipid diffusion in the cell membrane is slow, not because the diffusion per se is slow, but because (1) the plasma membrane is compartmentalized with regard to the translational diffusion of phospholipids, (2) the lipid molecules undergo hop diffusion over these compartments, and (3) it takes time to hop from a compartment to an adjacent one (Fig. 5.2). This solved the 30-year-old enigma in the fluid mosaic model: the mechanism underlying the reduction of the diffusion rate in the plasma membrane by a factor of 50–50 from that found in artificial membranes.

What makes the boundaries between these compartments, which even work for phospholipids located in the outer leaflet of the membrane? Fujiwara et al. (2002) and Murase et al. (2004) examined the involvement of the membrane skeleton, as well as the effects of the extracellular matrices, the extracellular domains of membrane proteins, and the cholesterol-rich raft domains, on phospholipid hop diffusion. They found that when they modulated the membrane skeleton, the phospholipid movement was only affected when they modulated the membrane skeleton, consistent with previous FRAP observations, in the sense that the modulation of the membrane skeleton influences the lipid movement (although FRAP did not allow researchers to observe such detailed motion; see Paller 1994). Furthermore, Fujiwara et al. (2002) observed DOPE diffusion in membrane blebs (balloon-like structures of the plasma membranes, where the membrane skeleton is largely lost, and these authors further reduced the actin-based membrane skeleton by treating cells with latrunculin) as well as in liposomes, and found that DOPE molecules undergo rapid, simple Brownian diffusion with a diffusion coefficient of $\sim 9 \mu\text{m}^2/\text{s}$ in these membranes. All of these results point to the involvement of the membrane skeleton in both the temporal corralling and hop diffusion of phospholipids.

However, this is very strange. Since the DOPE molecules they observed were located in the extracellular leaflet of the membrane (DOPE may flip, but the large gold particle cannot get into the cytoplasm), but the membrane skeleton is located on the cytoplasmic surface of the membrane, DOPE and the membrane skeleton cannot interact directly. To explain this apparent discrepancy, the “anchored transmembrane-protein picket model” was proposed (Fig. 5.3, right). In this model, various transmembrane proteins anchored to and lined up along the membrane skeleton (fence) effectively act as rows of pickets (these transmembrane proteins act like posts for the fence, and are thus termed pickets) against the free diffusion of phospholipids, due to steric hindrance as well as the hydrodynamic friction-like effects of immobilized anchored membrane protein pickets. The hydrodynamic friction-like effect, first proposed by Hammer’s group (Bussell et al. 1994, 1995), is particularly strong when exerted by immobile molecules, and it propagates over about several nanometers (this effect is prominent in the membrane because the membrane viscosity is much greater than that in water, by a factor of ~ 100). Therefore, when these transmembrane proteins are lined up along the membrane skeleton at a density over a certain threshold (a series of Monte Carlo simulations by Fujiwara et al. indicated that 20–30% coverage of the intercompartmental boundary by these anchored transmembrane pro-

tein pickets is sufficient to reproduce the experimentally observed residency time of 11 ms in a 230-nm compartment in NRK cells), the rows of pickets on the membrane-skeleton fences become effective diffusion barriers that confine phospholipids for some time. Note that these transmembrane picket proteins do not have to be stably bound to the membrane skeleton for a long time. Assuming that the boundary region between the compartments is 10 nm wide, it takes about 10 μ s for a molecule to traverse this region. Therefore, the zeroth approximation is that if a transmembrane protein is bound to the membrane skeleton for at least 10 μ s, then it becomes an effective picket to participate in the formation of the diffusion barrier. Note that, in this model, the transmembrane proteins anchored to the membrane skeleton are coupling the membrane skeleton, which is located on the cytoplasmic surface of the membrane, with the phospholipids that are located in the outer leaflet of the membrane. The evidence, obtained by a variety of observational methods and under various conditions, supporting the anchored transmembrane protein picket model (and membrane-skeleton fence model) is summarized in Box 5.3.

How universal is this plasma membrane compartmentalization? Using the unsaturated phospholipid DOPE, Murase et al. (2004, and unpubl. observ.) found such plasma membrane compartmentalization in all of the nine mammalian cells examined thus far. However, the compartment size varies greatly, from 30 nm up to 230 nm, and also the residency time of DOPE varies between 1 and 17 ms.

The anchored transmembrane protein pickets would be operative on any molecules incorporated in the membrane, including transmembrane proteins. Therefore, the diffusion of transmembrane proteins will be doubly suppressed in the membrane. Both the fence and picket will act on transmembrane proteins.

5.5 Oligomerization-Induced Trapping

The partitioning of the plasma membrane into many small compartments could explain why the diffusion in the plasma membrane is very sensitive to oligomerization or the formation of molecular complexes (Fig. 5.5, left), in contrast to the prediction from the two-dimensional continuum fluid model (Fig. 5.5, right). Monomers of membrane molecules may hop across the picket line with relative ease, but upon oligomerization or molecular complex formation, the oligomers or the complexes as a whole, rather than single molecules, have to hop across the picket-fence line all at once; therefore, these complexes are likely to have a much slower rate of hopping between the compartments, as found with E-cadherin-GFP (Iino et al. 2001) and oligomers of DOPE (Murase et al. 2004). In addition, molecular complexes are more likely to be bound or tethered to the membrane skeleton, perhaps temporarily, which also induces (temporary) immobilization or trapping of molecular complexes. Such enhanced confinement and binding effects induced by oligomerization or molecular complex formation were collectively termed “*oligomerization-induced trapping*” (Iino et al. 2001).

Such oligomerization-induced trapping might play very important roles in the temporary spatial confinement of a cytoplasmic signal at the very early stages of

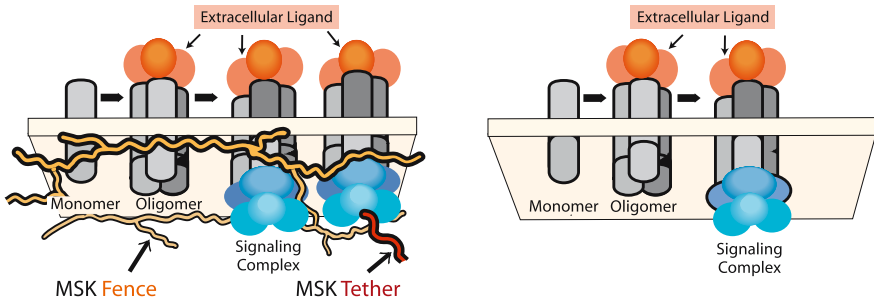


Fig. 5.5. Oligomerization-induced trapping model, indicating how slowing or immobilization of membrane molecules may be induced upon oligomerization or formation of greater molecular complexes. Upon oligomerization or molecular complex formation (*left*), the hop rate across the intercompartmental barrier would be reduced greatly, because, in contrast to monomers, in the case of molecular complexes, all of the molecules that form the complex have to hop across the picket-fence line simultaneously. In addition, due to the avidity effect, molecular complexes are more likely to be tethered to the membrane skeleton, perhaps temporarily, which also reduces their overall diffusion rate. This enhanced confinement and the binding effects induced by oligomerization or molecular complex formation are collectively termed “oligomerization-induced trapping” (lino et al. 2001). This would not occur in the absence of membrane skeleton fences and pickets (*right*): the diffusion theory by Saffman and Delbrück (1975) predicts that diffusion rates of oligomeric complexes would be almost the same as single receptor molecules

signal transduction. When an extracellular signal is received by a receptor molecule, the receptor often forms oligomers and signaling complexes by recruiting cytoplasmic signaling molecules. Due to the “oligomerization-induced trapping”, these oligomeric complexes tend to be trapped in the same membrane skeleton compartment as that where the extracellular signal was received. Therefore, the membrane skeleton fence and the anchored transmembrane-protein pickets temporarily help to confine the cytoplasmic signal to the place where the extracellular signal was received. Such spatial confinement is particularly important for signals that induce local or polarized reorganization of the cytoskeleton or chemotactic events.

This would not occur in the absence of membrane skeleton fences and pickets (Fig. 5.5, right). If there were no such structures, then even when the signaling complex is formed, the diffusion rate of such a complex would be almost the same as that of the single receptor molecules, as the diffusion theory teaches us (Saffman and Delbrück 1975).

Therefore, in the plasma membrane, oligomerization or molecular complex formation is tied to immobilization by the membrane skeleton fence and anchored-protein pickets.

5.6

A Paradigm Shift of the Plasma Membrane Structure Concept Is Necessary: From the Simple Two-Dimensional Continuum Fluid Model to the Compartmentalized Fluid Model

As described above, the membrane-skeleton “fence” and the anchored-protein “picket” together solved the two long-standing problems of molecular diffusion in the plasma membrane: (1) the oligomerization-induced slowing of diffusion and (2) the reduced diffusion coefficients of membrane molecules in the plasma membrane, compared with that found in artificial membranes, by a factor of 5–50. These results could not be explained by the two-dimensional continuum fluid model. The two-dimensional continuum fluid model is fine, as long as the spatial scale is limited to the size of the original cartoon depicted by Singer and Nicolson (1972) (although at the smaller limit of the molecular scale, the continuum model would also fail), which is about 10×10 nm, based on the number of lipid molecules in the cartoon (Fig. 5.2, inset). However, in spatial scales over several tens of nanometers in the plasma membrane, simple extensions of the fluid-mosaic model of Singer and Nicolson and the theory by Saffman–Delbrück fail. The cell appears to have developed (during evolution) a means to control the long-range diffusion of membrane molecules, and to make it sensitive to the diffusant size. The long-range control of diffusion appears to be carried out by the actin-based membrane skeleton, as indicated by the partitioning (corralling) effect of the membrane skeleton and the rows of anchored-protein pickets.

Furthermore, when the cell needs to build a macroscopic diffusion barrier that blocks the diffusion of even phospholipids over the barrier region, like that found in the initial segment region of the neuronal cell membrane, the cell achieves this task by forming very dense picket-fence lines in the barrier region, effectively blocking the diffusion of membrane molecules across this region (Kobayashi et al. 1992; Winckler et al. 1999; Nakada et al. 2003).

As such, a paradigm shift in the concept of plasma membrane structures in the space scales greater than several tens of nanometers is required from the two-dimensional continuum fluid to the compartmentalized fluid, in which its constituent molecules are undergoing hop diffusion over the compartments.

5.7

FRET Strategy for Detecting the Activation of Single Molecules of Ras

In studies of the temporal-spatial regulation of signal transduction, it would be quite useful if we could study, at the level of individual molecules, the activation states of signaling molecules on the plasma membrane, as well as their movement in the plasma membrane (Lommerse et al. 2004) and their recruitment to specific sites in the plasma membrane (Prior et al. 2001). Murakoshi et al. (2004) were the first to achieve such observations using the small GTP-binding proteins, H- and K-Ras.

Ras activation is initiated by the binding of a GDP-GTP exchange factor (GEF) such as Sos, which promotes the release of GDP from Ras, thereby allowing free GTP in the cytoplasm to bind to Ras [it is generally believed that the GTP concentration is an order of magnitude higher than the GDP concentration in the cytoplasm (Gamberucci et al. 1994)]. GTP binding activates the Ras molecule; i.e., the GTP-bound Ras molecules are in the activated state. These Ras molecules are turned off by the binding of GTPase-activating protein (GAP), which stimulates the weak intrinsic GTPase activity of Ras, thereby inducing the hydrolysis of GTP to GDP by Ras itself and returning Ras to its inactive conformation (Satoh et al. 1992). The key function of Ras in the signaling cascade for cell proliferation has been established (Satoh et al. 1992; Rebollo and Martinez 1999).

Murakoshi et al. (2004) have developed a method to *visualize the activation of individual molecules* of Ras and the behavior of activated Ras molecules at video rate. Such a single-molecule method would allow direct investigations of the interactions of activated Ras, separate from inactive Ras, with its effector and scaffolding proteins and its localization in specialized domains. These studies would provide valuable information in the understanding of the signal transduction mechanism after Ras becomes activated.

In order to visualize the instances of activation of single individual Ras molecules, Murakoshi et al. observed GTP binding to Ras using a single-molecule FRET technique, i.e., single-molecule FRET between YFP-Ras and BodipyTR-GTP (Fig. 5.6). First, KB (human epidermoid mouth carcinoma) cells stably expressing YFP-H-Ras were microinjected with GTP conjugated with a fluorescent tag, BodipyTR (BodipyTR-GTP) (Draganescu et al. 2000; McEwen et al. 2001). We then stimulated these cells with 20 nM epidermal growth factor (EGF), which should lead to the release of pre-bound GDP from Ras and the binding of BodipyTR-GTP to the YFP-Ras molecule. The Förster distance for this dye pair was estimated to be 5.5 nm, assuming that the orientation factor is 2/3. Since the distance between the YFP chromophore and the BodipyTR on Ras was estimated to be about

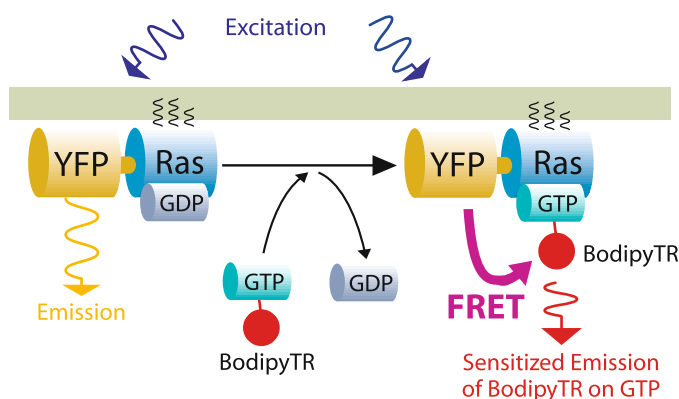


Fig. 5.6. Schematic design of the single-molecule FRET experiment for detecting activation of individual single Ras molecules by monitoring GTP binding. See text for details

3–5 nm, based on crystallographic data (Krengel et al. 1990; Ormo et al. 1996; Yang et al. 1996), the sensitized emission of BodipyTR conjugated to GTP, due to energy transfer from YFP on Ras, should be observed. In fact, Murakoshi et al. succeeded in observing FRET in vitro. Thus Ras activation, i.e., GTP binding, may be detected as the appearance of a sensitized emission spot of BodipyTR-GTP at the place superimposable with the YFP-H-Ras spot, which would become dimmer upon the appearance of the BodipyTR spot.

To image single-molecule FRET, an objective-lens-type total internal reflection fluorescence microscope (TIRFM) was employed (Fig. 5.7). The YFP and BodipyTR signals were chromatically separated and simultaneously observed on two detection arms, using two video cameras working synchronously (at video rate, 33 ms/frame).

5.8

Visualizing the Activation of Single Molecules of H-Ras in Living Cells

The occurrence of FRET from YFP-H-Ras to BodipyTR-GTP in KB cells was examined by exciting YFP, using a 488-nm laser line. YFP-H-Ras expressed in KB cells exhibited a fluorescence intensity distribution with two peaks; 75% of the spots exhibited a distribution similar to that of single molecules of purified YFP (YFP was expressed in *E. coli* and then purified) non-specifically adsorbed on the coverslip, whereas the remaining 25% of the YFP-H-Ras spots had higher intensities (Murakoshi et al. 2004). The latter spots may represent YFP-H-Ras in clusters, microdomains, or an incidental proximity. The majority of the YFP-H-Ras spots with single YFP intensities were photobleached in a single step. This single-step photobleaching suggests that the fluorescent spots we observed were single molecules of YFP-H-Ras.

Approximately 30 s after stimulation with 20 nM EGF, BodipyTR-GTP spots undergoing sensitized emission started appearing on the plasma membrane, exactly where the YFP-H-Ras spots had been observed, and they remained superimposable as long as the BodipyTR signal was visible (Fig. 5.8A). Figure 5.8B, C shows the time-dependent changes in the fluorescence images and intensities, respectively, of the YFP-H-Ras (energy donor) spot and the BodipyTR-GTP (acceptor) spot excited by FRET from YFP-H-Ras. In the time code shown in Fig. 5.8B, C, at 0.6 s, a BodipyTR-GTP spot started appearing at the place superimposable with the pre-existing YFP-H-Ras spot, and as the YFP-H-Ras spot dimmed, the sensitized fluorescence spot of BodipyTR-GTP became brighter. At ~0.9 s, the BodipyTR-GTP molecule was photobleached or released from the YFP-H-Ras with the concomitant recovery of the fluorescent intensity of the YFP-H-Ras donor molecule, until it also was photobleached at ~1.3 s. The single-molecule FRET results for YFP-K-Ras were very similar to those for YFP-H-Ras. The 488-nm beam could directly excite the BodipyTR-GTP acceptor, but the efficiency of direct excitation was so low that the signals from individual molecules did not form identifiable spots in the presence of the background noise.

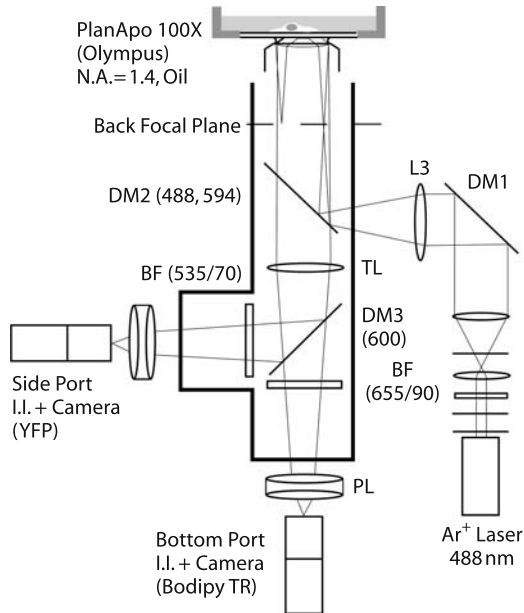


Fig. 5.7. Microscope setup for single-molecule FRET. An Olympus IX-70 microscope was used as a base. The mirror turret was modified to allow side entry of excitation laser beams into the microscope. YFP is excited with a 488-nm Ar⁺ laser beam. Excitation was performed through a laser beam steered into the microscope by a dual color dichroic mirror (Chroma), so as to focus at the back focal plane of the objective. The excitation arm consists of the following optical components: *S* electronic shutter; *ND* neutral density filter; *1/4* quarter-wave plate; *L1* and *L2* working as a 10× beam expander (*L1*, *F*=150 mm; *L2*, *F*=15 mm); *FD* field diaphragm; *M* mirror, *DM* dichroic mirror; *L3* focusing lens (*F*=35 mm); *BP* band-pass filter. When direct observation of the acceptor is needed, a 594-nm beam from a He-Ne laser incident into *DM 1* (passing) was used. An Olympus PlanApo 100× oil immersion with a numerical aperture of 1.4 was used. The fluorescence images of YFP (FRET donor) and BodipyTR (FRET acceptor) were separated by a dichroic mirror (600 nm, *DM 3*), and were projected into two detection arms with band-pass filters (500–570 nm for YFP, and 605–700 nm for BodipyTR, on the side and bottom ports, respectively). A microchannel plate intensifier (VS4–1845, VideoScope, Sterling, Virginia) and a silicon-intensified target tube (SIT) camera (Hamamatsu Photonics) were used in each arm, enabling us to observe single-molecule FRET from both the donor and acceptor sides simultaneously and synchronously at video rate (33 ms/frame). *TL* Tube lens (1× or 2×); *BF* barrier filter; *PL* projection lens (2×); *I.I.* image intensifier

5.9

Ras Diffusion Slows Upon Activation

Figure 5.9A shows typical trajectories of YFP-H-Ras on the cell membrane. Before EGF stimulation, the majority of the H-Ras molecules diffuse rapidly (Fig. 5.9A, left; Niv et al. 1999, 2002), as fast as phospholipids. In contrast, the activated

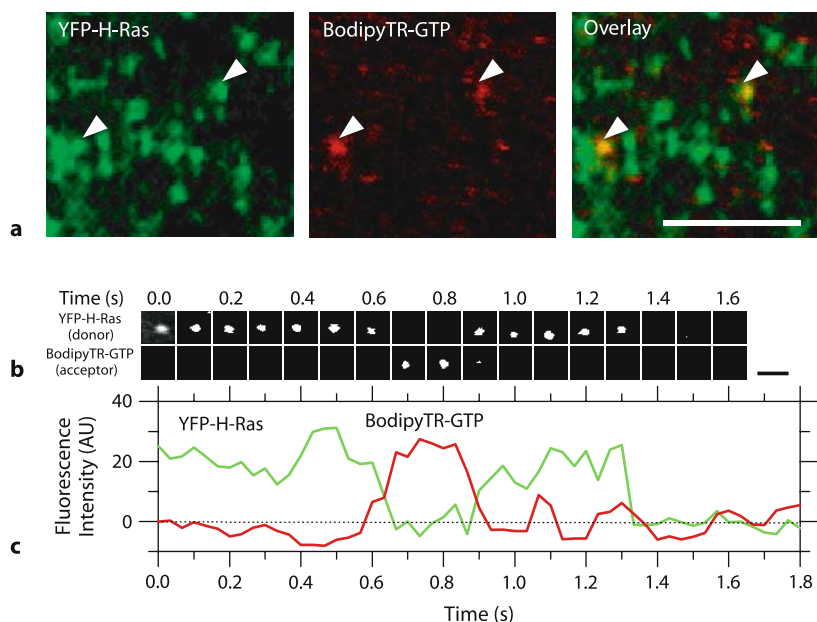


Fig. 5.8. Activation of single H-Ras molecules, monitored by single-molecule FRET from YFP-H-Ras to BodipyTR-GTP upon their binding. **a** Single-molecule FRET observations with simultaneous imaging in the YFP (*left*) and BodipyTR (*middle*) channels. Single frames (33 ms) in the video-rate recordings are shown. Excitation was at 488 nm with an Ar⁺ laser beam. Fluorescent spots shown in the BodipyTR channel appeared as a result of FRET from YFP on Ras to BodipyTR on GTP (*arrows*). *Scale bar* 5 μ m. **b** Images of single molecules of YFP-H-Ras (donor) and BodipyTR-GTP (acceptor) undergoing FRET. Note that time scales for **b** and **c** are the same. *Scale bar* 0.5 μ m. **c** Fluorescence intensities of the spots displayed in **B** plotted as a function of time: a representative example of anticorrelation between donor and acceptor fluorescence intensities. (Adapted from Fig. 2 of Murakoshi et al. 2004, with permission)

Ras molecules, which could be tracked by following both the donor and the FRET signals, exhibited trajectories indicating that their diffusion is substantially slowed or blocked (Fig. 5.9A, right). These results are consistent with the data reported by the Parton–Hancock group (Roy et al. 1999; Prior et al. 2001, 2003; Parton and Hancock 2004; Rotblat et al. 2004) in the sense that, upon activation, the H- and K-Ras molecules change their distributions in different domains in the plasma membrane and/or their binding to different scaffolding molecules or structures, in a very dynamic manner.

In the cells at the resting (steady) state before EGF stimulation, the trajectories indicate that only about 9% of the YFP-H-Ras (16% of the K-Ras) molecules are immobile. Among the mobile YFP-H-Ras molecules, over 90% of them exhibited rapid diffusion similar to that of the non-raft phospholipid DOPE (Fujiwara et al. 2002). This result suggests that the H-Ras molecules may make only temporary (perhaps shorter than 100 ms, which is our time window here) interactions with

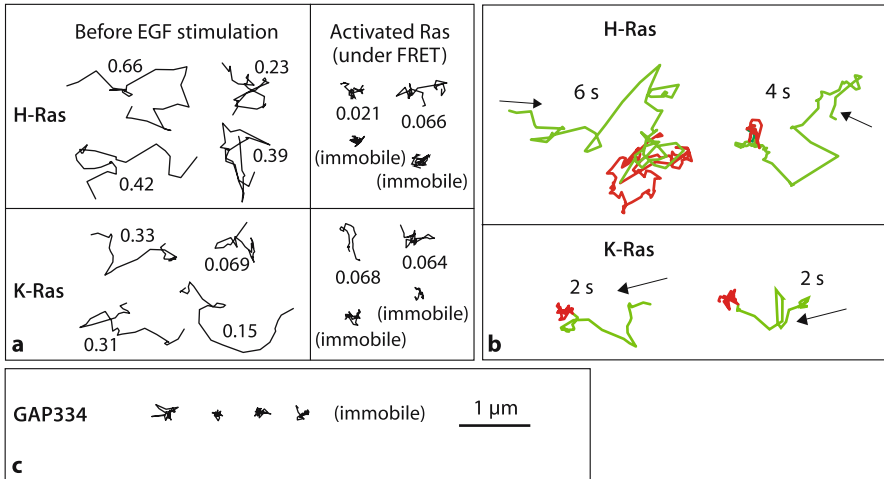


Fig. 5.9. Representative trajectories of YFP-Ras and GAP334-GFP on the cytoplasmic surface of plasma membrane, indicating that Ras molecules become largely immobile upon activation. **a** (left) Typical 1-s trajectories of single YFP (H and K)-Ras molecules on the cell membrane, recorded at a video rate. Numbers represent $D_{100\text{ ms}}$ (left column) before EGF stimulation (inactive YFP-Ras). **a** (right) Typical trajectories of *activated* Ras molecules, i.e., those of single-molecule pairs of YFP (H or K)-Ras and BodipyTR-GTP undergoing FRET. **b** Representative trajectories of single YFP-Ras (donor, green) molecules, which later became activated by binding of BodipyTR-GTP, as detected by the FRET signal (red). During the occurrence of FRET, the donor signal became very weak, and therefore the YFP (H or K)-Ras trajectory shown in green is connected with the red trajectory of the sensitized emission spot of BodipyTR-GTP. YFP-Ras diffusion is substantially blocked or slowed during FRET periods. **c** Typical 1-s trajectories of single GAP334-GFP molecules recruited to the cell membrane, recorded at a video rate. In a time course similar to that of H- and K-Ras activation, GAP334-GFP molecules were recruited to the cell membrane, where they hardly exhibited diffusion

caveolae or large and stable rafts (Mineo et al. 1996; Wu et al. 1997; Roy et al. 1999; Prior et al. 2003), if they interact with these structures at all in the steady-state resting cells. This is consistent with the discussion advanced by Prior et al. (2001, 2003), who argued that the partitioning of Ras molecules into rafts may be very dynamic, with Ras entering and exiting the rafts rapidly.

The activated H- and K-Ras molecules undergoing FRET after the EGF application exhibited substantial slowing/immobilization (Fig. 5.9A, right). About half of the activated Ras molecules (observed between 1 and 3 min after EGF stimulation) became immobilized. The remaining half were classified into the mobile mode, but their diffusion rates were decreased by a factor of 3–4 from those before EGF application. Typical trajectories exhibiting the slowing of diffusion upon the activation of H-Ras molecules are shown in Fig. 5.9B.

5.10

A Model for the Formation of the Active Ras Signal Transduction Complex

Based on these observations, we propose a model in which activated Ras molecules may be bound by activated Ras-specific scaffolding proteins, like SUR-8 (Sieburth et al. 1998; Li et al. 2000), spread (Wakioka et al. 2001), and galectin-1 (Paz et al. 2001; Prior et al. 2003), which might initiate the cooperative formation of transient signaling complexes including effector molecules, such as Raf-1, and deactivating proteins for Ras, such as RasGAP (Fig. 5.10). The formation of such

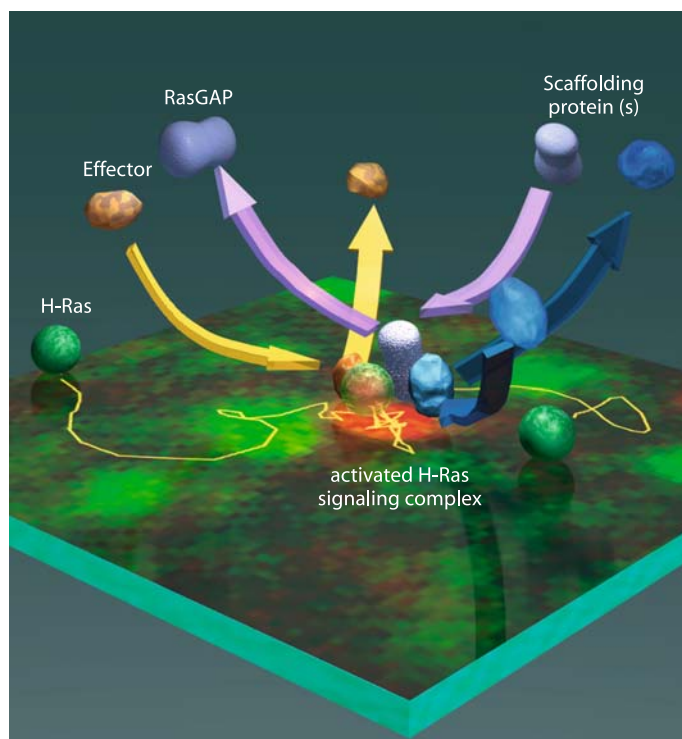


Fig. 5.10. Model for formation of the activated-Ras signaling complex with the aid of scaffolding proteins like SUR-8, spread, and/or galectin 1. On top of the actual FRET image of an activated H-Ras molecule (see *red spot in center*) superimposed by the actual trajectory of the H-Ras molecule (*yellow line*), the view of an artist (Junko Kondo) for the transient assembly of the activated-Ras-dependent signaling complex is further superimposed. When an H-Ras molecule becomes activated (*red FRET signal in center*), diffusion is greatly suppressed, due to transient formation of a signaling molecular complex (oligomerization-induced trapping). Formation of such a signaling complex is likely to be facilitated by Ras-activation-dependent scaffolding proteins. The complex may then interact with effector molecules, such as Raf-1 and the Ras-deactivating protein RasGAP

a large signaling complex on the plasma membrane would induce its trapping in and/or binding to the actin-based membrane skeleton mesh, described in previous sections as “oligomerization-induced trapping” (Kusumi and Sako 1996; Iino et al. 2001; Fujiwara et al. 2002). The diffusion of the activated-Ras signaling complex is greatly reduced because the complex formation would enhance the binding to the membrane skeleton due to the avidity effect of the molecular complex, and enhance its corralling by the membrane skeleton “fences” and the anchored-protein “pickets”, due to the increased size of the diffusant upon molecular complex formation.

5.11

Recruitment of GAP334, the Ras-Binding, Catalytic Domain of p120RasGAP, on the Cell Membrane

To test the model for the formation of the transient signaling complex of activated Ras and the subsequent confinement within and/or binding to the membrane skeleton mesh, the recruitment and movement of GFP-tagged GAP334 (the catalytic domain of p120RasGAP that binds to activated Ras) on the plasma membrane was examined. GAP334-GFP, which is normally in the cytoplasm, binds to activated Ras on the plasma membrane, and greatly accelerates the hydrolysis of the GTP molecule bound to Ras for its deactivation. As expected, individual GAP334-GFP molecules suddenly appear on the membrane from the cytoplasm after EGF stimulation (Fig. 5.11). Representative trajectories of GAP334-GFP on the membrane (Fig. 5.9C) indicated that the majority of the GAP334-GFP recruited to the plasma membrane is rather stationary, consistent with the activated Ras being corralled or bound by the membrane skeleton mesh. Latrunculin

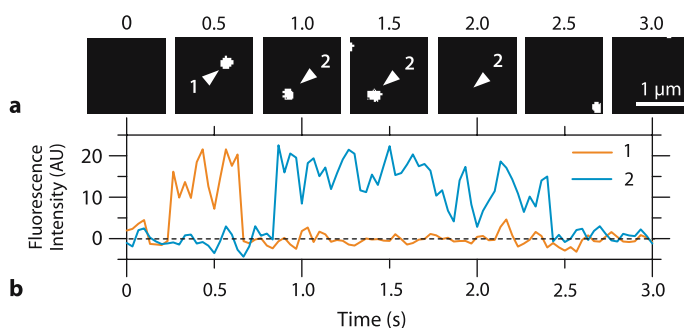


Fig. 5.11. GAP334-GFP molecules recruited to the membrane after EGF stimulation are stationary. Images of single molecules of GAP334-GFP (a) and their fluorescence intensities (b). GAP334-GFP molecules are recruited to the plasma membrane at ~0.25 s (green line) and 0.9 s (blue line) after EGF stimulation, and most of them are immobile (arrowheads). At ~0.6 s (green line) and 2.4 s (blue line), GAP334-GFP molecules were either photobleached or dissociated from the membrane. Scale bar 1 μm

treatment mobilized GAP334-GFP without affecting the recruitment of GAP334-GFP to the cell membrane. These results are consistent with a model in which the activated-Ras-induced signaling complex is confined in and/or bound to the membrane skeleton mesh.

5.12

Conclusions Regarding the FRET Method for Monitoring the Activation of Single Ras Molecules

The single molecule FRET method to detect the binding of BodipyTR-GTP to a G protein fused with YFP in real time is a new, useful technique to study the activation of G proteins and the dynamics of activated G proteins at the level of single molecules, and can be applied to many other G proteins. Taken together, we envisage that simultaneous observations of the movement, recruitment, and activation of signaling molecules at the level of single molecules will become a particularly useful method for investigation of the signaling mechanisms in live cells.

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Chemokine Signaling: The Functional Importance of Stabilizing Receptor Conformations

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6.1 Chemokines and Their Receptors

The family of low molecular weight pro-inflammatory cytokines termed chemokines has been the focus of exceptional interest over the last 25 years (Mackay 2001). Originally described as specific mediators of leukocyte directional movement, current perspectives implicate the chemokines in a wide variety of cell types and functions. The chemokines have thus been linked to lymphocyte trafficking (Baggiolini 1998), regulation of T cell differentiation (Sallusto et al. 1998), HIV-1 infection (Berger et al. 1999), angiogenesis (Belpario et al. 2000), development (Zou et al. 1998; Raz 2003), and tumor metastasis (Müller et al. 2001).

Nearly 50 different chemokines have been described, which have remarkably comparable three-dimensional structures despite their limited amino acid sequence similarity (Rollins 1997). The original classification of chemokines based on structural criteria (C, CC, CXC, and CX3C chemokines) is being abandoned, and replaced by a functional classification by which chemokines are grouped into two main categories, constitutive and inducible (Baggiolini 1998). In general, constitutive chemokines are usually regulated during development, whereas inducible chemokine expression is regulated mainly during inflammatory processes. In addition, several viruses encode highly selective chemokine receptor ligands that serve as agonists or antagonists, and may thus have a role in viral dissemination or evasion of host immune response (Alcami 2003).

Based on their broad range of functions, it is easy to deduce that chemokines must be central players in a variety of diseases characterized by inflammation and cell infiltration. They have become a major focus of interest as therapeutic targets, as there is a clear correlation between the expression of specific chemokines and the orchestrated recruitment of cell populations during the course of certain disease processes (Proudfoot 2002).

The chemokines act by binding to class A, rhodopsin-like, seven-transmembrane, G protein-coupled receptors (GPCR) (Horuk 2001). Interaction with the receptor is thought to involve the receptor N-terminal domain and third extracellular loop, while its intracellular regions bear motifs that allow participation in different signaling cascades (Rodríguez-Frade et al. 1997; Rossi and Zlotnik 2000). The 18 receptors characterized to date are classified as CCR, CXCR, CX3CR, and XCR, based on the ligand they bind (Rossi and Zlotnik 2000). Most chemokine receptors are able to interact with more than one chemokine (shared receptors), although there are examples of specific chemokine-receptor pairs (specific recep-

tors) (Horuk 2001). Expression of these receptors is finely regulated by several factors that include cytokines, growth factors, and cell cycle status (Loetscher et al. 1996; Parks et al. 1998; Papadopoulos et al. 1999). It is therefore not surprising that cells respond differently to a chemokine, depending on the microenvironment. In addition, some chemokine receptors are used by the HIV-1 virus as co-receptors for cell entry, a fact that has greatly motivated the search for chemokine receptor-based AIDS pharmaceuticals (Berger et al. 1999).

The contribution of chemokines to the control of cell movement assigns these molecules a role in physiological or pathological processes in which cells are recruited to specific sites. Most diseases involve the coordinated recruitment of cell populations, which correlates with the expression of specific chemokines, as shown in the murine model of asthma (Gerard and Rollins 2001; Lukacs et al. 2003). In another case, leukocyte migration to synovial tissue in rheumatoid arthritis (Yang et al. 2002; Bruhl et al. 2004), CCR1, CCR2, CCR3, CCR4, and CCR5 participate in monocyte recruitment from the circulation, CXCR4 contributes to T cell accumulation in the synovium, and CCR3 and CCR5 are implicated in leukocyte retention in the joint. Other well-established examples are experimental autoimmune encephalitis (EAE) (Rajan et al. 2000; Godessart and Kunkle 2001), nephritis (Zernecke et al. 2001), inflammatory bowel disease (Ulbrich et al. 2003), multiple sclerosis (Sorensen et al. 1999), diabetes (Kim et al. 2002; Carvalho-Pinto et al. 2004), and HIV-1 infection (Berger et al. 1999). Of particular interest is the role of some chemokine receptors in tumor progression and metastasis; here, chemokines can act as growth factors, attracting dendritic cells to the tumor, or to induce angiogenesis, migration, and invasion by increasing integrin expression or by triggering expression of mediators such as TNF, uPAR, PAI-1, and MMP1 (Müller et al. 2001; Homey et al. 2002).

Animal models are important tools for correlating a given chemokine with a specific disease, although conclusions from animals cannot always be extrapolated to man. Mice have been developed that lack (knockout, KO) or overexpress (transgenic) nearly every chemokine and chemokine receptor described to date. Although this strategy has not clarified the role of chemokines in all cases, some KO mice have indicated additional chemokine functions. This was the case of the CXCR4/CXCL12, and CXCR5/CXCL13 KO mice, whose study led to recognition of the role of chemokines in development (Förster et al. 1996; Zou et al. 1998).

6.2

Signaling Through Chemokine Receptors

6.2.1

Background

Chemokine receptor function was originally assumed to be mediated entirely through G_i-mediated processes (Bokoch 1995), in analogy with classic studies of other G protein-coupled receptor families. More recent studies of GPCR signaling broadened this view, as the GPCR were found to activate G proteins other than their originally assigned “partners” (Soede et al. 2001). In addition, GPCR can

induce G protein-independent signaling, as occurs in some tyrosine kinase-related pathways (Ali et al. 1997; Park et al. 2000; Showkat et al. 2000).

The chemokine receptors, which should be considered as a discrete GPCR family, integrate numerous signaling pathways (Mellado et al. 2001a; Soriano et al. 2003). These receptors can form homo- or heterodimers, thus enhancing their signaling possibilities (Rodriguez-Frade et al. 2001). The conformational changes induced by ligands on these receptor complexes allow coupling of JAK (Janus kinases) that, by phosphorylating the receptors, activate STAT (signal transducers and transactivators of transcription) and G proteins. Thus, chemokine functions are blocked in cells lacking JAK or in cells treated with JAK inhibitors (Soriano et al. 2003; Stein et al. 2003). These two major signaling cascades are responsible for most known chemokine functions, including gene transcription and cytoskeletal reorganization, as well as receptor internalization and recycling.

6.2.2

The Use of Biophysical Techniques to Measure Chemokine Receptor Oligomerization

The importance of GPCR dimerization in signaling has only recently attracted the attention of the scientific community, although it was first proposed 25 years ago and corroborative evidence has accumulated since then. Chemokine receptors were initially thought to function as monomers, but in analogy to other GPCR, chemokine receptor dimers and/or oligomers have been described, as has their importance in signaling (Lee et al. 2003; Milligan et al. 2003). Until recently, most assays to demonstrate receptor oligomerization have been based on biochemical approaches such as immunoprecipitation or cross-linking. Alternatively, dominant negative receptor mutants abrogated wild-type receptor functions by forming non-functional complexes (Rodriguez-Frade et al. 1999).

Although chemokine receptor homo- and heterodimer formation can be observed, these approaches only allow imprecise definition of the role of ligands in complex formation. Chemokines could promote receptor oligomerization or stabilize pre-existing dimers, and the results from biochemical and genetic studies showed that the dimerization process is chemokine-triggered. Nonetheless, recent data obtained using new technologies have modified this outlook. These new approaches, based on energy transfer between fluorochromes, followed by confocal microscopy, take advantage of important technological advances such as laser light sources, fluorescent probes, and advances in computer science that allow digital imaging and image analysis.

Modern optical microscopy allows us not only to visualize organelles and molecules, but also to study their function. In living cells, we can analyze how a molecule moves, changes location, or associates with other molecules. Such phenomena were originally evaluated using colocalization assays, which detect light from two different fluorophores and evaluate a digital image for the presence of the same pixel in two distinct channels. Signal colocalization indicates the adjacency of fluorophores, and thus of the molecules they label. A high-numerical aperture microscope lens permits resolution near 300 nm, sufficient to locate

molecules in different cellular compartments, but not to demonstrate molecular association.

Fluorescence resonance energy transfer (FRET) is another new approach. This quantum mechanical process is based on energy transmission from a donor fluorophore to a nearby acceptor without photon emission. The use of a donor emission spectrum that overlaps acceptor absorption, and a distance between donor and acceptor in the 2- to 10-nm range, make FRET a highly sensitive technique for the study of protein–protein interactions. Energy transfer requires very short distances between donor and acceptor, as efficiency varies inversely with the distance between fluorophores (Sekar and Periasamy 2003).

Several methods determine and quantify FRET; the most commonly used are (1) sensitized acceptor fluorescence, (2) increase in donor fluorescence after acceptor photobleaching, and (3) decrease in donor fluorophore lifetime. In the case of sensitized acceptor fluorescence, the donor fluorescent dye is excited and the acceptor signal is quantitated (Fig. 6.1). An appropriate filter set is used to excite donor and detect acceptor emission, and a factor is included to correct for autofluorescence, photobleaching, and crossover between donor and acceptor emission (Sorkin et al. 2000).

The acceptor photobleaching method is based on quenching donor fluorescence. Some donor photons are used to excite the acceptor, decreasing the emission energy detected. Photobleaching of the acceptor abolishes FRET, increasing donor light emission (Kenworthy 2001; Fig. 6.2).

Fluorescence lifetime imaging microscopy (FLIM) measures a chromophore's fluorescence lifetime, allowing spatial resolution of biochemical processes. The fluorescence lifetime of a donor dye decreases under FRET conditions, independently of fluorophore concentration or of excitation intensity. Fluorescence lifetime imaging on a pseudocolor scale allows analysis of molecule localization and the intermolecular associations triggered (Elangovan et al. 2002; Fig. 6.3).

For all these approaches, donor/acceptor choice is critical in determining FRET. Ideally, donor emission spectra should have maximum overlap with acceptor absorption spectra, although acceptor and donor emissions should be clearly separable in order to minimize background interference. Fluorochrome incorporation in the protein to be analyzed is another feature to be considered. To study fixed cells, specific antibodies can also be used, which are conjugated to appropriately selected fluorescent dyes. For example, although Cy3 dye as donor and Cy5 as acceptor form a suitable fluorochrome pair, the Cy2 donor/Cy3 acceptor pair is often more convenient, as it permits use of the widely available 488-nm argon laser line. Use of secondary antibodies is occasionally necessary; although the increased distance between fluorophores complicates FRET detection; this can be resolved using dye-labeled F(ab') fragments.

To evaluate FRET in living cells, the protein of interest is modified to incorporate a fluorochrome. Chimeric constructs are generated in which each of the proteins of interest is fused to a different, modified form of the green fluorescent protein (GFP); the most commonly used variants are cyan (CFP) as donor and yellow (YFP) as acceptor (Pollok and Heim 1999).

Bioluminescence resonance energy transfer (BRET) is another method that makes use of non-radiative energy transfer between a light donor and a fluores-

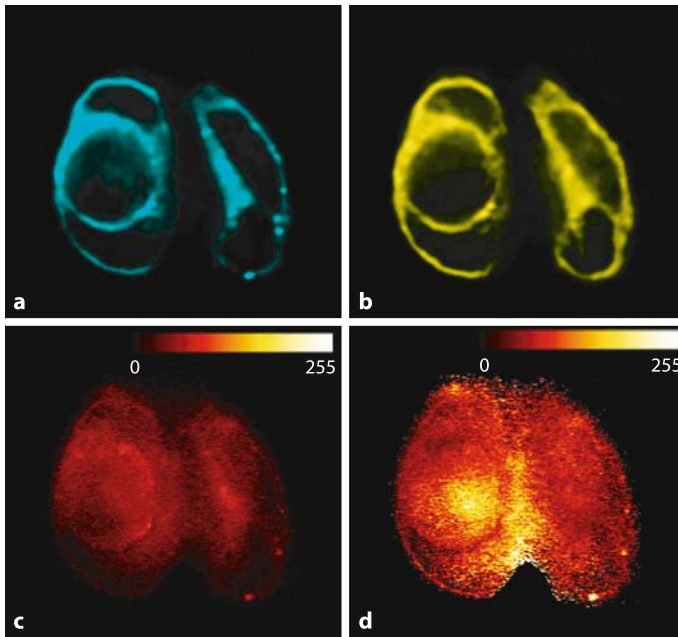


Fig. 6.1. FRET evaluation of chemokine receptor dimerization using a sensitized acceptor fluorescence method. Unstimulated CCR5-Cyan/CCR5-Yellow HEK 293 cells were evaluated by fluorescent microscopy. **a** CFP was detected using a specific filter set (435/10-nm excitation filter, 455-nm dichroic beam splitter, and 480/20-nm emission filter). **b** YFP was viewed under a filter set with a 500/20-nm excitation filter, 515-nm dichroic beam splitter, and 535/30-nm emission filter. **c** FRET was detected with a 435/10-nm excitation filter, 455-nm dichroic beam splitter, and 535/30-nm emission filter. **c** shows the corrected FRET (FRETC) image obtained by subtracting autofluorescence and bleed-through from original FRET images, displayed in quantitative pseudocolor (arbitrary linear units of fluorescence intensity). **d** Normalized FRET (FRETn), calculated on the CCR5-CFP and CCR5-YFP colocalization areas using pixel-by-pixel analysis of images **a** and **c** and displayed in quantitative pseudocolor

cent acceptor. In BRET, the bioluminescent energy resulting from the catalytic degradation of coelenterazine by luciferase is transferred to an acceptor fluorophore, which in turn emits a fluorescent signal (McVey et al. 2001).

6.2.3

Characterization of Chemokine Receptor Homo- and Heterodimerization

Chemokine receptors are found on the cell membrane in various conformational states that include monomers, homodimers, heterodimers, and higher molecular weight oligomers. Ligands stabilize the conformation that initiates sub-

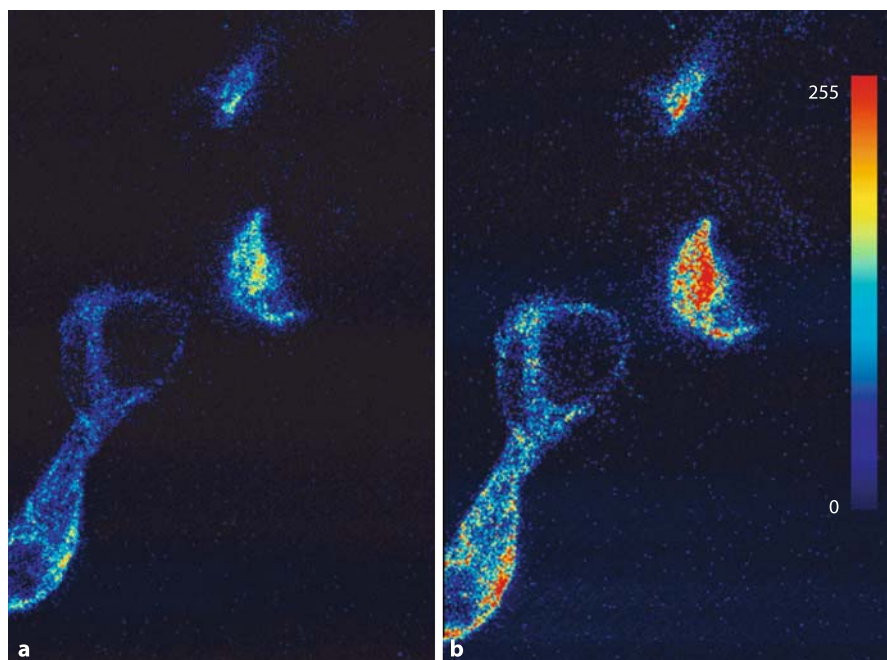


Fig. 6.2. FRET evaluation of chemokine receptor heterodimerization using an acceptor photo-bleaching method. Unstimulated CCR2/CCR5 HEK 293 cells were fixed and stained with anti-CCR2 (IgG) and anti-CCR5 (IgM) mAb, followed by Cy2-mIgGFab or Cy3-mIgMFab (excitation at 488 and 543 nm, respectively). **a** Cy2 fluorescence determined before Cy3 photobleaching. **b** Cy2 fluorescence determined after Cy3 photobleaching. In both cases, images are displayed in quantitative pseudocolor

sequent signaling cascades. Ligand-induced homodimerization was shown for CCR2, CCR5, and CXCR4, and its functional relevance has been described (Rodríguez-Frade et al. 1999; Vila-Coro et al. 1999; Mellado et al. 2001b). The role of these receptor complexes was described for AIDS, as HIV-1 entry into cells through CCR5 can be inhibited by inducing receptor dimerization (Vila-Coro et al. 2000; Rodríguez-Frade et al. 2004).

Bioinformatic analysis of the chemokine receptor family predicts TM1, TM2, and TM4 as the principal transmembrane (TM) domains implicated in the interaction between receptor monomers; mutation of these regions gives rise to non-functional receptors unable to form dimers (Hernanz-Falcon et al. 2004). Energy transfer techniques (FRET and FLIM) were used to show that a CCR5 with TM1 and TM4 point mutations did not dimerize even after ligand stimulation, although membrane expression and ligand binding capacity were indistinguishable from those of wild-type CCR5. In other FRET experiments, ligand binding induced only a modest alteration of FRET values, suggesting that the ligand does not drive dimerization, but rather stabilizes the dimeric conformation.

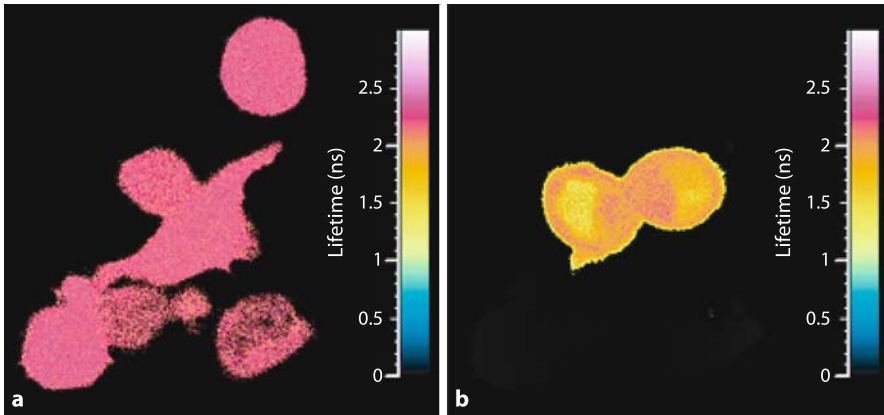


Fig. 6.3. FRET evaluation of chemokine receptor dimerization using the fluorescence lifetime imaging method (FLIM). CFP fluorescence lifetime images calculated from the phase shift of HEH 293 cells expressing CCR5-CFP (a) or CCR5-CFP/CCR5-YFP (b). The pseudocolor scale ranges from 0 ns (black) to 3.0 ns (white). Arrowheads indicate Golgi localization, showing that FLIM detection is not dependent on the level of receptor expressed

Chemokine receptor oligomers are not detected in unstimulated cells using Western blot assays, however, indicating that many factors affect dimer stability; these include the detergents used to lyse cells for immunoprecipitation, which could explain the current controversy regarding the effect of the ligand on GPCR dimerization. These data support a model of GPCR structural flexibility for activation-associated conformational changes, with the monomeric conformation as an inactive state, unable to trigger function or to activate the steps that initiate chemokine signaling.

In most physiological and pathological situations, several chemokines and receptors coexist in the same environment (Gerard and Rollins 2001). Under these conditions, specific chemokine receptor heterodimers can be formed, which mediate functions that cannot be implemented by the homodimer alone. This is the case with CCR2 and CCR5, whose heterodimerization results in coupling of pertussis toxin (Ptx)-insensitive G proteins, in a reduced response threshold to the ligand, and in distinct phosphoinositide-3 kinase (PI3 K) activation kinetics compared to homodimers (Mellado et al. 2001b). Chemokine receptor heterodimerization also affects HIV-1 infection. A CCR2-specific monoclonal antibody (mAb) that induces CCR2/CCR5 and CCR2/CXCR4 heterodimer formation blocks HIV-1 entry (Rodríguez-Frade et al. 2004).

Chemokines are produced within specific tissues in response to a variety of mediators; once they enter the circulation, they are immobilized by low-affinity binding to heparin-bearing proteoglycans on the vascular endothelial barrier (Culley et al. 2003). Chemokine availability dictates the formation of signaling domain complexes, regulating receptor sensitivity (Fig. 6.4); this affects the ability of a ligand to stabilize homo- or heterodimer conformations. Receptor homo-

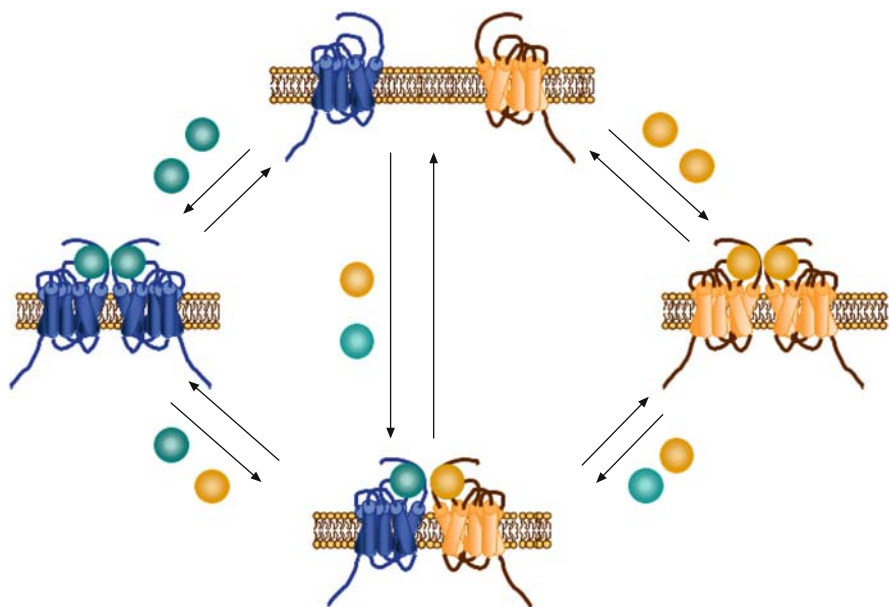


Fig. 6.4. Chemokine availability stabilizes different receptor conformations. Schematic representation of the equilibrium between chemokine receptors and showing that availability of specific chemokines stabilizes receptor homo- or heterodimers

or heterodimerization increases immune system plasticity and specificity. The range of chemokine responses is thus modulated by the spread of activity through a receptor array, explaining the abundance and variety of chemokine receptors and receptor conformations observed (Rossi and Zlotnik 2000).

Further complexity is added by chemokine receptor interaction with other GPCR such as the opioid receptors (Lee et al. 2003). Opium-induced inhibition of chemotaxis was first reported over a century ago. More recent indications of this cross-talk include increased opioid receptor ligand-mediated susceptibility to HIV-1 infection, as well as altered humoral or cell-mediated immune responses when both receptor types are coexpressed (Suzuki et al. 2002; Szabo et al. 2002). This cross-talk was previously explained as heterologous desensitization, whose signaling pathways remain poorly defined. Nonetheless, the mechanism underlying this GPCR cross-talk might also be the formation of heterologous heterodimers that trigger specific responses; in fact, coimmunoprecipitation assays showed ligand-independent complexes formed by δ , μ or κ opioid receptors and CCR5 (Suzuki et al. 2002). Once again, energy transfer technologies may help define the precise role of chemokines and opioids in stabilizing these complexes.

Several functional implications have been proposed for chemokine receptor dimerization. Oligomeric assembly is an important endoplasmic reticulum (ER) control mechanism for the GPCR, as it modulates specific retention signals and

hydrophobic patches to retain or release proteins from the ER (Reddy and Corley 1998). An example for the chemokine receptors is CCR5, whose oligomerization with the CCR5 Δ 32 variant impedes its cell-surface expression (Benkirane et al. 1997).

The importance of GPCR dimerization for the generation of pharmacological diversity was first indicated by Jordan and Devi in studies of opioid receptors (Jordan and Devi 1999). Dimerization could affect ligand binding affinity (Jordan and Devi 1999) or modulate signal transduction (Terrillon and Bouvier 2004). We observed that specific chemokine receptor heterodimers trigger specific signaling events which in turn promote specific cell functions, for example, cell adhesion.

The role of the ligand in promoting or inhibiting receptor dimerization continues to be debated. Whereas several studies suggest that ligand binding regulates dimer formation (Rodriguez-Frade et al. 1999), others conclude that dimerization is a constitutive process that is not modulated by ligand binding (Issafras et al. 2002; Trettel et al. 2003). This discrepancy may result from differences in the analytic techniques employed, although it can also mirror the diversity of individual receptor behaviors, such as preferential localization in specific cell membrane domains.

6.2.4

Chemokines Trigger JAK/STAT Pathway Activation

JAK/STAT signaling was traditionally associated with single-transmembrane domain cytokine family receptors (Liu et al. 1998). GPCR have been only recently shown to activate the JAK/STAT pathway. In *Dictyostelium*, G protein-independent GPCR activation of STAT has been reported. Other examples of GPCR-mediated activation of this pathway include the receptors for angiotensin II, serotonin, α -MSH, and chemokines such as CCL5, CCL2, and CXCL12 (Araki et al. 1998; Buggy 1998; Park et al. 2000; Showkat 2000; Mellado et al. 2001a; Pelletier et al. 2003). In contrast to cytokine receptors, GPCR ligands and thus chemokines mediate JAK association with the receptor in a transient process (Mellado et al. 1998). Experiments using mutated chemokine receptor forms, JAK inhibitors and JAK-deficient cells showed that JAK activation is earlier than that of the G protein (Soriano et al. 2003). Lack of JAK activation abrogates G protein coupling to the chemokine receptor and receptor functions. These data indicate clearly that chemokines activate at least two distinct pathways: one involving G proteins, and the other, JAK family members.

There are several steps in JAK/STAT activation through chemokine receptors. First, ligand binding promotes or stabilizes receptor dimers, giving rise to a new receptor conformation that permits JAK interaction. This interaction may be direct or involve an adaptor protein, but it requires the conserved DRYLAIV motif in the second intracellular loop of the receptor. Once associated, JAK is activated by transphosphorylation, which in turn phosphorylates the receptor. This phosphorylated receptor/JAK complex can then bind G protein, which triggers functional responses (Mellado et al. 2001a).

6.2.5

Chemokine Signaling Involves G Protein Activation

In addition to the role of JAKs in chemokine signaling, G protein activation is critical in most chemokine-driven events (Kuang et al. 1996). Signaling studies showed potent, chemokine-dependent inhibition of adenylyl cyclase and mobilization of intracellular calcium, consistent with receptor coupling to $G\alpha_i$ (Locati et al. 1994). $G\alpha_i$ also associates with several chemokine receptors in response to ligand binding (Mellado et al. 1998; Rodriguez-Frade et al. 1999; Vila-Coro et al. 1999); consistent with G_i association, the majority of these responses are inhibited by Ptx treatment. Under certain conditions, however, chemokine receptors also associate with other, Ptx-insensitive G proteins (Kuang et al. 1996; Wright et al. 2003). One of these cases is the activation of chemokine receptor heterodimerization, which associates with $G_{q/11}$, indicating that chemokine signaling is much more versatile than previously thought. Although by stabilizing a specific receptor conformation, the ligand may determine the G protein that associates with the receptor, we cannot discard an effect of cell type on G protein availability (Mellado et al. 2001b).

G proteins mediate activation of several signaling molecules, among them PI3 K, phospholipase C β (PLC β), and small GTPases, which cooperate to mediate chemokine-associated functions, including actin cytoskeleton reorganization, polarization, cell adhesion, and detachment (Fukata et al. 2003). Although the PI3 K γ isoform is directly associated with GPCR, the role of PI3 K in cell migration is controversial. Whereas PI3 K $\gamma^{-/-}$ mice show impaired neutrophil migration, PI3 K blockade affected T cell migration only slightly (Hirsch et al. 2000; Ward 2004). The influence of other proteins on cell migration may differ depending on cell type. Through PIP3 generation, PI3 K activates Rho small GTPases including Rac1, RhoA, and Cdc42, which connect receptors with the cytoskeleton, modulating the changes needed for acquisition of a migratory phenotype (Hall 1998; Ridley 2001).

Thus for chemokines as well as for other GPCR, ligand availability conditions cell responses. Depending on the receptor conformation stabilized, chemokines activate distinct signaling pathways that trigger specific cell functions.

6.3

General Considerations on the Biophysical Aspects of Signaling

Transmembrane signaling is affected by biophysical considerations that are not often taken into account, and which vary depending on the cell system analyzed. In the case of chemokine signaling, several variables should be kept in mind, including receptor expression, recycling, and cell polarization.

6.3.1

Receptor Expression

Chemokines and their receptors are classified as constitutive or inducible according to functional criteria. The former group is comprised of cell-surface receptors with little fluctuation in expression levels, whereas expression of inducible receptors is altered by factors such as stimulation or cell cycle status (Baggiolini 1998; Papadopoulos et al. 1999).

The chemokine receptor C-terminal region is of particular importance in receptor expression. It has several serine and threonine residues, which are targets for the molecules that trigger receptor desensitization and internalization, such as G protein-coupled kinases (GRK) and arrestins (Franci et al. 1996; Aragay et al. 1998). Chemokine receptor internalization requires receptor phosphorylation, β -arrestin association, and clathrin vesicle formation (Yang et al. 1999). Certain signaling events, such as initiation of the MAPK cascade, are activated by receptor internalization (Pouyssegur 2000).

When receptor expression is debated, the intracellular pool of chemokine receptors should not be overlooked, even though their function remains to be elucidated. The sum of these observations demonstrates that chemokine receptor expression is a finely regulated phenomenon. This must be recalled when both planning and evaluating biophysical methods that require receptor overexpression or the use of fluorescence-labeled receptor constructs, as these manipulations may interfere with correct receptor localization or function.

6.3.2

Receptor Localization

Cell migration is an essential part of physiological and pathological processes such as inflammatory responses, lymphocyte homing, development, and tumor metastasis (Baggiolini 2000; Homey et al. 2002; Ara et al. 2003). Forward cell movement requires coordination between substrate adhesion at the cell front and detachment at the rear, that is, cell polarity (Sanchez-Madrid and del Pozo 1999). Many molecules, including chemokines and cytokines, induce lymphocyte polarization; during this Rho GTPase-associated process, a cell leading edge and a uropod are developed, with redistribution of signaling molecules and receptors (del Pozo et al. 1999). For example, adhesion molecules and ezrin-radixin-moesin (ERM) complex proteins accumulate in the uropod of chemoattractant-stimulated neutrophils and T lymphocytes (Serrador et al. 1997). In migrating T lymphocytes, β -actin and chemokine receptors concentrate at the leading edge, while myosin II, the Golgi apparatus, and a microtubule meshwork are packed into the uropod (Sanchez-Madrid and del Pozo 1999). This asymmetric organization serves the specialized functions of each compartment, as the leading edge directs cell migration and the uropod sustains cell-cell interactions and lymphocyte recruitment.

Chemokine receptors and signaling molecules associate with rafts, which are lipid-based plasma membrane domains that appear to have a role in receptor redistribution (Manes et al. 1999). Their condensed cholesterol- and sphin-

golipid-rich structure dictates specific physical properties, which condition protein inclusion or exclusion. Glycosylphosphatidylinositol (GPI)-anchored proteins (Hooper 1999), double-acylated proteins such as the G protein α subunit (Resh 1999), and palmitoylated proteins (Brown and London 1998) are examples of molecules with raft affinity. It is not yet clear why some transmembrane proteins are included in rafts, but mutational analysis has shown that amino acids in the transmembrane domains near the exoplasmic leaflet are critical (Scheiffele et al. 1997). In any case, raft domains may serve as platforms for interaction between receptors and signal transduction molecules, thus increasing, restricting, or modulating signaling efficiency. In some models, rafts define the signaling molecules able to bind a receptor, but also facilitate interaction between different receptors at the cell surface. This has been observed for certain HIV-1 chemokine coreceptors and CD4, which localize to the same raft domains and whose physical association is necessary for HIV-1 infection; manipulation of these platforms may thus be of interest for blocking HIV-1 entry (Manes et al. 2000). Furthermore, rafts might influence chemokine receptor homo- and heterodimer stabilization.

Receptor localization also affects formation of the immunological synapse. This structure is a contact face formed during T cell interaction with antigen-presenting cells (APC). Polarity is inherent to crawling lymphocytes prior to APC contact; APC recognition and binding take place at the T cell leading edge (Kupfer and Singer 1989). Ongoing research is attempting to determine how these supramolecular assemblies are formed, and progress has been made in defining the order in which several molecules are recruited to signaling centers (Jacobelli et al. 2004). Although the role of the chemokine receptors has yet to be clarified, active cytoskeleton-driven mechanisms are thought to be responsible for synapse assembly (Wulfig and Davis 1998).

6.4

Concluding Remarks

Chemokines are the principal chemotactic factors implicated in the regulation of leukocyte traffic as well as in establishing lymphoid organ architecture. They regulate lymphocyte precursor entry into primary lymphoid organs as well as mature lymphocyte migration to secondary lymphoid organs, where, following activation, they are responsible for triggering functional immune responses. The chemokines implicated in these activities constitute the homeostatic chemokines. Another large subset of chemokines appears to provoke inflammatory cell migration into tissues: the so-called inflammatory chemokines. Both chemokine subsets mediate their function by interacting with specific receptors belonging to the family of seven-transmembrane, G protein-coupled receptors, expressed on the leukocyte surface.

Much information is available on the biochemical pathways activated by this large receptor family. In addition, recent studies have shown that chemokines and other ligands activate a tyrosine kinase pathway that shares many components with the biochemical cascade activated by cytokine receptors. As in cytokine

responses, this activation depends on ligand-mediated receptor homo- and heterodimerization. These findings indicate a new way to intervene in chemokine responses, especially those involving tissue infiltration, and link chemokine and cytokine function.

In the near future, new experiments need to be designed to elucidate the precise role of the ligand in promoting or stabilizing receptor dimerization. The use of classical biochemical techniques, such as cross-linking, immunoprecipitation, or Western blot, must be implemented with new technologies such as those based on energy transfer between fluorochromes and microscopy analysis. For these techniques, methodological questions will need to be clarified, including use of different cell types, overexpression of proteins, or use of chemical inhibitors that can alter in vitro distribution, availability, and/or function of chemokine receptors compared to their in vivo behavior. Correctly used, biophysical analysis techniques will clearly be of value in disentangling the complex web of ligands, receptors, and their signals.

Acknowledgements. We thank the members of the DIO chemokine group, who contributed to some of the work described in this chapter. We also thank C. Bastos and C. Mark for secretarial support and helpful editorial assistance, respectively. This work was partially funded by grants from the Spanish MCyT. The Department of Immunology and Oncology was founded and is supported by the Spanish Council for Scientific Research (CSIC) and by Pfizer.

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Signaling and Reverse Signaling in the Tumor Necrosis Factor/TNF Receptor System

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7.1 The TNF/TNFR System

An anti-tumor activity elicited by severe bacterial infections was first noted more than 100 years ago. When modern scientists revisited the observation, they discovered two closely related cytokines, tumor necrosis factor (TNF) and lymphotoxin (LT), that caused hemorrhagic necrosis of tumor tissues and lysis of certain types of cells, including certain tumor cells (Granger et al. 1969; Carswell et al. 1975).

These factors, produced by macrophages and lymphocytes, turned out to be multifunctional proteins that coordinate innate and adaptive immune responses, regulate differentiation and activation of different types of immune cells and control developmental processes, such as the organogenesis of peripheral lymphoid tissues, morphogenesis of exocrine glands, hair and teeth, and bone metabolism. Prolonged or inappropriate production of these factors or abnormal activation of their signaling pathways has been implicated in the pathogenesis of a wide spectrum of human diseases, including allograft rejection, autoimmune diseases (such as multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis and inflammatory bowel diseases), septic shock, cachexia and wasting, bone resorption and osteoporosis, atherosclerosis, cerebral malaria, diabetes and cancer metastasis (for reviews see Locksley et al. 2001; Khosla 2003; Pfeffer 2003; Tumanov et al. 2003).

Intensive research on the regulation of immune functions and recent genome projects have identified close to two dozen TNF homologues, establishing the TNF superfamily of proteins (Fig. 7.1). Corresponding receptors constitute the TNFR superfamily with even larger numbers of proteins (Locksley et al. 2001; Pfeffer 2003). The receptors of the TNF family have unique structural attributes that couple them directly to sophisticated signaling pathways for apoptosis, survival, proliferation, differentiation and activation (Fig. 7.2). TNFR superfamily members, just like TNF receptors themselves, can be divided into three classes: death domain (DD)-containing receptors, signaling receptors without death domain and decoy receptors. Decoys are soluble or membrane-anchored molecules, which bind their ligands with high specificity and affinity but elicit no intracellular signals (Locksley et al. 2001; Pfeffer 2003).

There are eight death domain receptors: the smaller (p55 or p60) receptor of TNF (TNFR1), Fas, death receptor 3 (DR3), DR4/TRAILR1, DR5/TRAILR2, DR6, nerve growth factor receptor (NGFR) and XEDAR. Better characterized members of the expanding family of TNF receptors *without death domain* include: 4-1BB,

AITR/GITR, BAFFR, BCMA, CD27, CD30, CD40, EDAR, HVEM, LT β R/TNFR3, OX40, RANK, TACI, TNFR2, TWEAKR and XEDAR. The decoy receptors are DcR1 and DcR2, which bind only TRAIL, DcR3, interacting with LIGHT and TLA1, the soluble form of CD40, osteoprotegerin (OPG), which interferes with the activity of RANK and TRAIL receptors, and finally the soluble forms of the two TNF receptors. Both DcR1 and -2 are membrane-associated proteins, and DcR2 is the only decoy receptor that possesses a large, inactive intracellular domain.

Detailed information on TNF/TNFR superfamily members can be found online at <http://www.gene.ucl.ac.uk/users/hester/tnfinfo.htm> and www.copewithcytokines.de. The TNF Pathway Connections Map at Science's Signal Transduction Knowledge Environment presents current knowledge of the pathway's components and connections between them (http://stke.sciencemag.org/cgi/cm/cmp_7107).

7.1.1

Evolution of the TNF/TNFR System

The first invertebrate tumor necrosis factor (TNF) superfamily ligand, Eiger, that can induce cell death was described in *Drosophila* (Igaki et al. 2002). Eiger is a type II transmembrane protein with a C-terminal TNF homology domain. It is predominantly expressed in the nervous system. Overexpression of Eiger is sufficient to induce apoptosis. Eiger acts on its receptor Wengen (Kanda et al. 2002); however, it induces cell death indirectly by triggering JNK signaling, which, in turn, causes activation of the apoptosome. A direct mode of action via the apical FADD (*Fas-associated death domain*)/caspase-8 pathway may have been coopted by some TNF signaling systems only at subsequent stages of evolution. (Moreno et al. 2002).

Elements of the vertebrate signaling pathways used by members of the TNFR family predate the emergence of TNF/TNFR systems. In insects, not only Toll receptor signals the presence of infectious non-self. The intracellular components of the *Drosophila* and mosquito Imd pathways are fairly similar to the molecules utilized by the death receptors of the mammalian TNF family (Hoffmann and Reichhart 2002). The receptor is still not known, but Imd is a death domain protein with significant sequence homology with the TNFR *receptor interacting protein* (RIP). In *Drosophila* downstream of Imd we find dFADD, a homologue of FADD, and dTAK, a protein kinase, which is the most likely activator of the DmIKK β -DmIKK γ complex, an equivalent of the mammalian signalosome. The *Drosophila* caspase DREDD together with dFADD forms a complex that seems to process Relish, liberating the DNA-binding N-terminal part clipping off the inhibitory domain (Hu and Yang 2000; Khush et al. 2001; Leulier et al. 2002). The pathway is almost identical in mosquito (Christophides et al. 2002).

The death domain found in many of the above proteins is related to the ankyrin domain, an oligomerization domain found – among others places – in many signaling proteins. The death domain is always encoded by a single exon, a property that has been conserved from *Drosophila* to mammals.

Most proteins of the TNF and TNFR superfamilies regulate the development, proliferation, activation or death of B and T lymphocytes. As the adap-

tive immune system became more and more sophisticated during evolution, more and more regulatory mechanisms were needed. The number of genes of these superfamilies multiplied parallel with the development of the adaptive immune systems (Locksley et al. 2001). Gene duplication and multiplication of whole gene clusters participated in this process. Many of the TNF and TNFR genes are linked in discrete loci, reflecting their evolutionary derivation. The TNF homologue found in fish seems to be a common ancestor of TNF and LT (Hirono et al. 2000; Bobe and Goetz 2001; Laing et al. 2001). In humans and other mammals, TNF and the two LT genes (LT α and LT β) are neighbors. The conserved chromosomal location, transcriptional orientation and high amino acid homology prove their common origin, just as the shared receptor usage. Duplication of this chromosome segment might have given rise to another set of three ligand genes (4-1BB, CD27L and LIGHT). All these genes are still located on the same chromosome in mice (Ch 17). Translocations to other chromosomes multiplied the number of ligand genes. In human, the four clusters are located on separate chromosomes – OX-40L, Fas and GITP on Ch 1, LT α , LT β and TNF on Ch 6, 4-1BB, CD27L and LIGHT on Ch 19, and finally CD40L, EDA1 and 2 on Ch X – while the remaining genes are scattered over the genome as singles or pairs (Pfeffer 2003).

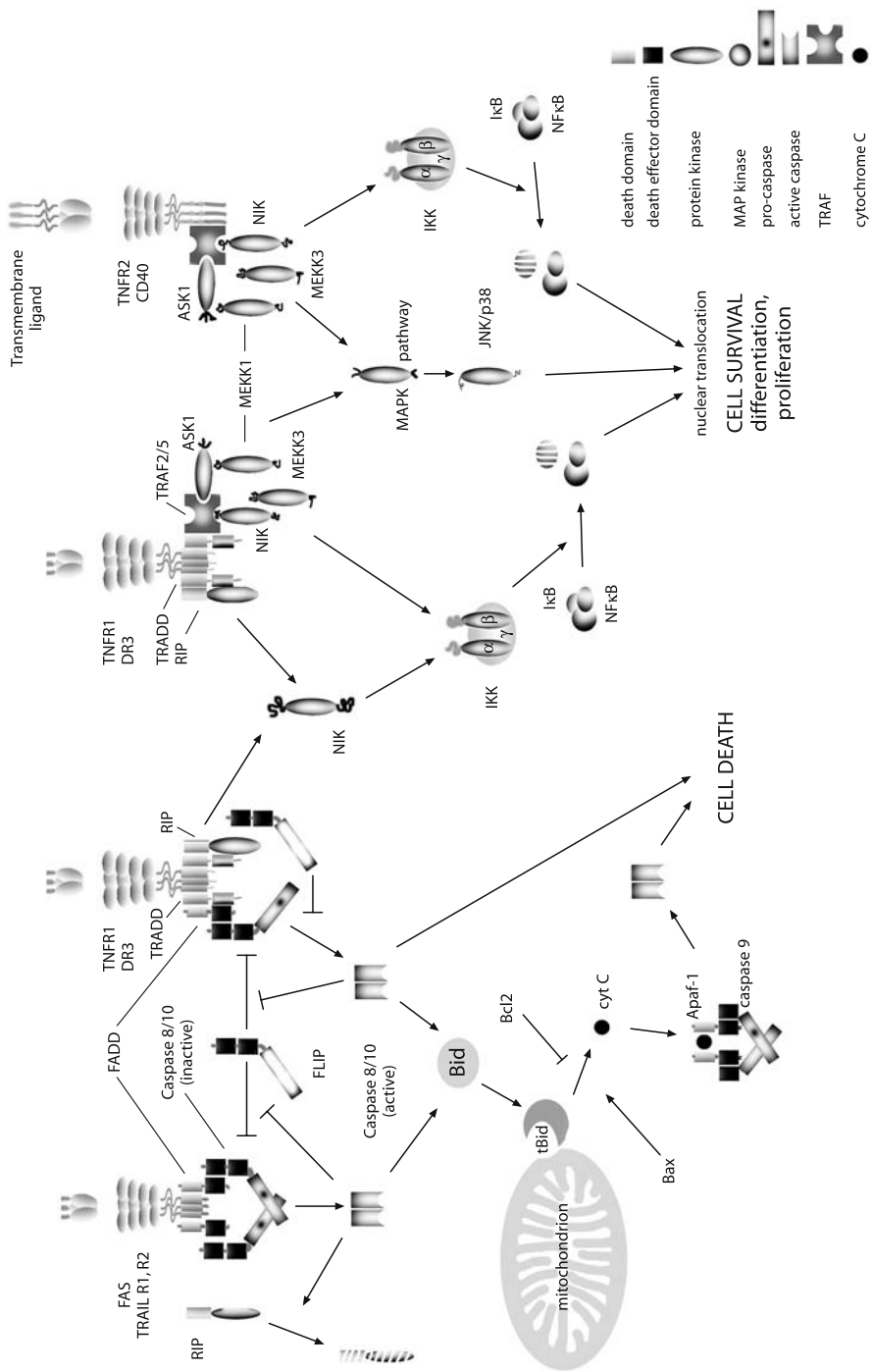
A similar evolution of the receptor genes must have taken place. TNF receptors found on human chromosome 12 (TNFR1, LTR and CD27) might have duplicated and translocated to Ch 1 (TNFR2, HVEM, OX40, CD30, AITR, 4-1BB and DR3). Another cluster of five receptor genes (receptors and decoy receptors of TRAIL) are located on Ch 8. Interestingly, homologues of these five genes are scattered over three different chromosomes in mice (Pfeffer 2003).

The odd member of the TNFR superfamily is the NGFR, which does not interact with TNF-like ligands. It binds neurotrophin ligands and interacts with the Trk family of receptor tyrosine kinases. It is the only death domain receptor that forms dimers, not trimers, and even the exon-intron structure of its gene is unique, suggesting that its evolution followed a different path from very early times onwards (Rabizadeh and Bredesen 2003).

One of the unusual features of the TNF superfamily is that most ligands are transmembrane proteins. They exert juxtacrine effects, typically observed in development and morphogenesis. Frequently, transmembrane and soluble forms have distinct biological roles. A number of receptors have soluble forms to modulate the effect of their ligand(s). An increasing number of publications suggest that the interaction with certain members of the “receptor family” induces intra-



Fig. 7.2. Signaling pathways of TNF receptor prototypes. Fas and TRAIL receptors (*left*) usually elicit death signals, activation of the caspase cascade and release of cytochrome *c* from mitochondria. Death-inducing signaling complexes (DISCs) are formed around the tails of these receptors and around the cytochrome *c* molecule. TNFR1- and DR3-type receptors (*middle*) are able to trigger both death signals and survival signals. TNFR2- and CD40-type receptors (*right*) generally induce proliferation and differentiation through activation of MAPK and NF- κ B signaling pathways



cellular signaling in cells exhibiting the corresponding ligand. The phenomenon, called “reverse signaling”, might be a further tool to modulate functions of the immune system (Ferran et al. 1994).

Considering the enormous importance of TNF/TNFR proteins in the coordination of the immune response and in the proliferation and death of immune cells, it is not surprising that pathogenic organisms – from viruses to multicellular parasites – carry genes that correspond to (parts of) cellular genes of TNFR family members. These sequences were obviously captured from the host genome and code for decoy receptors, constitutive intracellular signaling domains or molecules participating in the signaling pathway (Locksley et al. 2001; Pfeffer 2003). The function of these truncated genes is either attenuation of the inflammatory immune response (poxvirus, *Schistosoma*), prevention of apoptosis (vIAP, baculoviruses) or immortalization of the infected cells (LMP-1 of EBV herpesvirus).

7.1.2

General Structure

7.1.2.1

Receptors

TNFR family proteins are trimers of type I transmembrane subunits that form elongated structures stabilized by three intrachain disulfide bridges between six highly conserved cysteines. The disulfide bonds form “cysteine-rich domains” (CRDs), characteristic 40 amino acid pseudorepeats with a core motif of CXXCXXC (Harless Smith and Cancro 2003). Although four CRDs can be regarded as typical among family members, significant variations occur from BAFFR with only a partial CDR to six in CD30 (Hsu and Chao 1993; Gordon et al. 2003). Although the low affinity nerve growth factor receptor (NGFR) has the classic CRD structure, it binds proteins structurally and functionally unrelated to TNF family members (Gruss and Dower 1995).

The elongated receptor chains fit in the “grooves” formed between the subunits of the trimeric ligands. The crystal structure of LT- α in complex with the TNFR1 extracellular domain reveals no direct contact between the individual chains of the receptor (Banner et al. 1993). Comparing the structure of the LT/TNFR1 complex with that of DR5 receptor engaged with its ligand, TRAIL (Hymowitz et al. 1999), a striking conservation of structural details can be seen, though the protein sequences exhibit a rather low degree of sequence homology.

Homotrimeric structures are not frequent among proteins and unusual among receptors. However, trimers require more contacts than dimers and may cause an exponential increase in avidity and specificity. In the case of TNF receptors, both ligand binding and signal complex formation involve stoichiometrically defined protein complexes with three-fold symmetry. TNFR family proteins bind their ligands with high affinity (K_d 5×10^{-9} – 10^{-10} M) (Vandenabeele et al. 1995).

The characteristic structure in the intracellular tail of one type of the receptors is the death domain (Tartaglia et al. 1993). The death domain is a globular

bundle of six α -helices (60–65 amino acids). The death domains found in the receptors and adaptor molecules share little sequence homology (only 10–20%), but the structure is highly conserved. Very similar domains, called *death effector domains* (DEDs) and *caspase recruitment domains* (CARDs), share the same overall six α -helical structure (Martin 2001). The other type of receptors contain a *TRAF* (*TNFR-associated factor*) *interacting motif* (TIM). This structural element is short, with less than a dozen contact residues in the receptor tail. During signaling it is clutched by a pocket in the globular head group of the TRAF molecules through charged residues (Fesik 2000).

Ligand-induced clustering of receptor subunits is not typical for TNF receptors; at least several receptors in the TNFR family self-assemble in the absence of ligand, and signaling involves rearrangement or conformational changes of the preassembled chains (Chan et al. 2000; Siegel et al. 2000).

7.1.2.2 Ligands

The characteristic structural element of the TNF-related ligands is the extracellular TNF homology domain (THD) and the trimeric configuration (Gruss and Dower 1995). The THD folds into an anti-parallel “jellyroll” beta-sandwich. The individual subunits interact at hydrophobic interfaces and self-assemble into inverted bell-shaped, non-covalent trimers (Fesik 2000).

Sequence homology of different ligands is largely confined to internal aromatic residues responsible for oligomerization. The external surfaces of the molecules exhibit little sequence conservation, which accounts for receptor selectivity (Gruss and Dower 1995).

Not members of the TNF superfamily, but structurally related proteins with TNF homology domains and trimeric configuration are complement protein C1q (its globular domain) and a number of C1q-like proteins (Kishore and Reid 2000). TNF and other family members tend to form multimeric structures. This and the fact that a large group of structurally related proteins that form highly organized oligomers are viral capsid proteins indicate that ancestors of TNF receptors might have served as virus-detecting pattern recognition molecules (Locksley et al. 2001).

7.2 TNFR1 and the Apoptotic Signal

A prototype of the TNFR superfamily of proteins is the smaller (55–60 kDa) TNFR1. Although it contains an intracellular death domain, it can also signal survival and proliferation, depending on the balance of several signaling pathways activated by its interaction with its ligands (TNF and LT) (Bhardwaj and Aggarwal 2003). Experimental evidence shows that – unlike subunits of growth factor receptors – subunits of the trimeric TNFR are clustered in the absence of ligands. The *pre-ligand assembly domain* (PLAD) structure is responsible for the aggrega-

tion and seems to be essential for ligand binding (Chan et al. 2000). However, this clustering of the subunits does not lead to activation; actually this structure of the trimeric receptor seems to prevent accidental oligomerization of the intracellular death domains. Clustering of death domains – which can be facilitated by overproduction of the receptor subunits or expressing fusion proteins of death domain and proteins of trimeric structure – activates the caspase cascade (Van-devoorde et al. 1997). Deletion of the death domain results in a non-functional receptor, indicating that the death domain is required for all the different biological functions of the receptor (Devergne et al. 1996).

Since simple overexpression of death receptors leads to apoptosis, there must clearly be further mechanisms to prevent ligand-independent activation of death receptors. By the yeast two hybrid method, a protein was found that constitutively associates with TNFR1 (and DR3). This protein is a *silencer of death domain* (SODD), which inhibits receptor association of adaptor molecules of the apoptotic pathway [FADD and TRADD (*TNFR-associated death domain*)], competing for the binding site on the death domain of TNFR1 (and DR3) (Jiang et al. 1999).

In nature, ligand binding-dependent conformational changes are responsible for activation. Interaction with specific ligands can lead to the recruitment of intracellular death domain-containing adaptors such as FADD and TRADD. TNFR1 (and DR3) can recruit both FADD and TRADD, while death domains of Fas, TRAIL-R1 and TRAIL-R2 are restricted to interacting with only FADD (Chinnaiyan et al. 1996; Kischkel et al. 2000).

FADD is a 26-kDa protein with a C-terminal death domain and a homologous death effector domain (DED). Within minutes of ligand binding, the conformational change of the receptor triggers the assembly of a death-inducing signaling complex (DISC), containing FADD and caspase-8 (Kischkel et al. 1995; Boldin et al. 1996). Caspase-8 has two DEDs that interact with the homologous domain of FADD. Caspase-8 is a proenzyme, a zymogen, which can be activated by crowding in the death-inducing complex. A two-step activation removes the prodomain and the smaller, 10-kDa subunit, liberating the active protease of 20 kDa (Medema et al. 1997). The activated caspase-8 can process its precursor and downstream procaspases. Caspase activation is an amplification process, which proceeds in a hierarchical manner, resulting in the serial proteolytic activation of effector caspase-3, caspase-6 and caspase-7. Activation of executor caspases leads to apoptosis. Experimentally induced aggregation of caspase-8 elicits proteolytic activation of the molecule and results in cell death (the induced proximity model of caspase activation) (Yang et al. 1998). In type I apoptosis, robust DISC association and processing of caspase-8 activates the effector caspases directly, committing the cells to death with characteristic fragmentation of DNA.

Activated caspase-8 cleaves not only downstream caspases, but also Bid, releasing a potent pro-apoptotic fragment, tBid. tBid is targeted to the outer mitochondrial membrane (Li et al. 1998), inducing type II apoptosis. Type II apoptosis relies on organelle dysfunction, on the failure of anti-apoptotic activity of Bcl-2 family proteins. In living cells, anti-apoptotic family members Bcl-2 or Bcl-XL, containing a *Bcl-2 homology domain-4* (BH-4), balance the pro-apoptotic members of the same family, such as Bax or Bak [which contain *Bcl-2 homology domains-1 to -3* (BH-1 to -3) but not BH-4] (Hsu et al. 1999).

Caspase-generated tBid induces the oligomerization of Bak, which forms a pore complex in the membrane, leading to dissipation of the mitochondrial transmembrane potential and allowing the release of cytochrome *c* (Wei et al. 2000). In the cytoplasm, cytochrome *c* drives oligomerization of the *apoptotic protease activating factor-1* (Apaf-1) (Zou et al. 1997), which contains a *caspase activation and recruitment domain* (CARD). In a reaction resembling the formation of DISC, cytochrome *c* and Apaf-1 interact with the CARD containing caspase-9, forming a functional apoptosome (Shiozaki et al. 2002). The assembly requires the presence of ATP. The apoptosome can cleave and activate procaspase-3, thereby completing the same cycle of activation as the initiator caspase-8. The balance between caspase-8-mediated cleavage of Bid and inhibition of tBid by the presence of Bcl-2 and other anti-apoptotic members of the Bcl-2 family regulates cytochrome *c* release and cell fate in type II apoptosis.

There is competition between anti-apoptotic and pro-apoptotic pathways and several mechanisms have evolved to inhibit different steps leading to apoptosis. TNFR1-induced anti-apoptotic signaling through NF-kappaB (NF- κ B) activation upregulates the synthesis of proteins (Bcl-x and Bcl-2) that can sequester Bak and prevent pore formation of mitochondrial membranes (Gedrich et al. 1996; Galibert et al. 1998).

A gene duplication of the initiator caspase-8 (previously also called FLICE) gene could have generated the gene of caspase-8 inhibitor, *FLICE-inhibitory protein* (FLIP). Like caspase-8, FLIP has two DED and a caspase-like domain, which cannot be converted into an active protease. FLIP forms complexes with FADD and caspase-8, inhibiting auto-activation of caspase-8. FLIP inhibits the apoptotic signaling pathways of all known human death receptors (Irmeler et al. 1997). As expected, cells from FLIP knockout (KO) animals exhibit very high sensitivity to stimulation of death receptors.

Vertebrate cells are programmed to perform apoptosis in case of viral infection. Obviously, viruses use different strategies to block this process. *Inhibitor of apoptosis protein* (IAP) was described as a viral protein, which specifically inactivated the effector caspases, but soon after, a family of related cellular proteins – c-IAP-1, c-IAP-2 and X-linked IAP (XIAP) – was discovered (Uren et al. 1996). These proteins contain three *baculovirus IAP repeats* (BIR) and an N-terminal ring finger motif. XIAP, the best known member of the group, inhibits three different caspases, i.e. caspase 3 and caspase 7 which act in concert as well as caspase 9, through binding to their intermediate and fully cleaved forms. Its ring finger domain exhibits a ubiquitin–protein ligase activity, which facilitates the ubiquitination and proteosomal degradation of caspase-3, providing additional protection against apoptosis (Suzuki et al. 2001). However, if the pro-apoptotic signal is strong, Smac/DIABLO is released from the mitochondria of apoptotic cells and accelerates cell death activation by displacing XIAP from the caspases (Takeuchi et al. 1996; Wang et al. 2001).

In *Drosophila*, caspases are produced in the active form and need no proteolytic processing. They are counterinhibited by IAPs, and relief of IAP-mediated caspase inhibition triggers cell death.

7.3

TNF Receptors and the Survival Signal

Activation of Fas almost always leads to cell death. On the other hand, TNFR1 only signals for cell death in certain types of cells or in special circumstances (inhibition of protein synthesis) and TNFR2 does not activate apoptotic pathways. TNFR1 ligation induces several pathways that can synergize or antagonize each other. In most cases TNFR1 signaling provides a mechanism to suppress the apoptotic stimulus and induce the synthesis of pro-inflammatory cytokines. Fas directly recruits FADD, but TNFR1 frequently associates with TRADD. TRADD can in turn associate with the death domain of FADD, thereby initiating the caspase-8 activation pathway.

Alternatively, TRADD can recruit TRAF2, TRAF1 and *receptor-interacting protein* (RIP) to activate the NF- κ B and JNK pathways, protecting cells from apoptosis and initiating inflammatory responses (Stanger et al. 1995; Hsu et al. 1996). RIP is the primary mediator of NF- κ B activation: animals with a targeted deletion for RIP are unable to activate NF- κ B in response to TNFR1 stimulation, inevitably leading to TNF-induced apoptosis (Kelliher et al. 1998). In contrast, TRAF2 deficiency prevents activation of the MAP kinase JNK in response to TNF stimulation (Yeh et al. 1997), also resulting in an apoptotic response to TNF stimulation.

Ligand-induced activation of TNFR1 leads to the recruitment of a signaling complex that can activate both the apoptotic and the anti-apoptotic pathways. The balance is regulated at several levels, including strength of signal, expression of signaling molecules and protective enzymes and cross talk with other signals. Experiments on TNFR-mediated signaling suggest that strength of signal and complex stability are controlled by receptor–ligand interactions. Soluble ligands can transiently activate a few receptors. Interaction between receptor-producing cells and cells with thousands of surface-bound ligand molecules obviously produces longer lasting and stronger signals (Krippner-Heidenreich et al. 2002).

The balance between death and survival pathways is influenced by other factors. RIP protein inhibits the interaction between TRADD and FADD. However, caspase-8-dependent cleavage of RIP prevents the RIP-mediated activation of NF- κ B (Lin et al. 1999). The death domain-containing cleavage product RIPc serves as a dominant negative inhibitor of NF- κ B activation. In addition, binding of RIPc to TRADD enhances the interaction between TRADD and FADD. RIP cleavage is also seen in TRAIL- and Fas-stimulated cells, implying that RIP is a general molecular switch between apoptosis and activation in death receptor signaling.

In a similar way, caspase-3 can specifically cleave the *I- κ B-specific kinase* (IKK) during TNF-induced apoptosis. This proteolytic step prevents degradation of the inhibitor, tilting the balance towards caspase-mediated apoptosis (Tang et al. 2001).

7.3.1

TNF Receptor-Associated Factors (TRAF1–7)

Interacting partners of TRADD include survival factors RIP and TRAFs (Stanger et al. 1995; Hsu et al. 1996). Those members of the TNF receptor superfamily that do not contain intracellular death domains possess a short TIM sequence within their cytoplasmic tail that serves as a direct recognition site for TRAF proteins (Rothe et al. 1994; Chen et al. 1995; Pullen et al. 1998).

As adapter proteins, TRAFs elaborate receptor signal transduction by serving as both a convergent and a divergent platform. Different TRAFs evolved with individual biological roles. Without any detectable enzyme activity these proteins are able to mediate the activation of protein kinases, leading to signaling through several pathways. Their characteristic feature, the large TRAF domain (200 amino acids), is highly conserved; proteins with similar domains were found in *Dicystostelium*, plants, worms and insects (*Drosophila* has three TRAF homologues, dTRAF1, 2 and 3). TRAF proteins are also known to be associated with IL-1 and Toll-like receptors. The TRAF domain, which is located at the C terminus of mammalian TRAF proteins, is responsible for receptor binding. Its distal TRAF-C part is a coiled-coil domain, able to interact with downstream signaling molecules, such as NIK, while the proximal TRAF-N domain associates with anti-apoptotic molecules (cIAP1 and 2).

TRAFs are homo- and heterotrimers, different combinations serving individual receptors. TRAF1 – unlike other TRAFs – lacks a ring finger domain, which seems to be essential for NF- κ B activation, but TRAF1 can form activating trimers with other TRAFs. The intact TRAF domain is required for trimerization, and TRAF domains spontaneously form trimers in solution.

TRAFs also have a number (5–7) of zinc finger domains, which are essential for downstream signaling through JNK and NF- κ B. The significance of the isoleucine zipper domain found in some TRAFs is not known.

7.3.2

Signaling Pathways Activated by TRAFs

TRAF2 is the prototypical member of the TRAF family. A close relative of TRAF3 and 5, TRAF2 plays a cytoprotective role, through activation of the JNK/SAPK pathway. Deficiency of the factor caused severe runting and premature death of the KO mice. Lack of TRAF2 or the expression of its dominant-negative form resulted in a severe reduction in JNK/SAPK activation (Lee et al. 1997; Yeh et al. 1997).

TRAF2 can associate with several upstream MAP kinases to induce NF- κ B and AP-1 activation. These include NIK (Malinin et al. 1997; Song et al. 1997), MEKK1 and MEKK3 (Baud et al. 1999) for IKK activation, and ASK1, MEKK1 and MEKK3 for initiating MAP kinase pathways and AP-1 activation (Nishitoh et al. 1998, Baud et al. 1999, Hoeflich et al. 1999, Shi et al. 1999).

TRAF1 is a negative regulator of signaling by certain receptors of the TNF family; it has the most restricted expression among TRAFs, and is found almost

exclusively in activated lymphocytes and dendritic cells. TRAF1 protects cells from apoptosis and cooperates with TRAF2 and cIAPs to fully suppress TNF-induced apoptosis. TRAF1 is induced by NF- κ B and plays a role in the feedback regulation of receptor signaling (Speiser et al. 1997; Wang et al. 1998; Carpentier and Beyaert 1999; Schwenzer et al. 1999; Nolan et al. 2000).

Interestingly, clustering of the receptor subunits – at least in the case of CD40 – does not lead to direct interaction of their intracellular domains. Crystallographic analyses suggest that individual tails of the receptor subunits may contact TRAF trimers, each multiplying the numbers of molecules participating in the process and amplifying the signal (McWhirter et al. 1999; Park et al. 1999).

TRAF4 might interact with some of the TNFR family members (Krajewska et al. 1998; Ye et al. 1999); its biological importance stems from its morphogenetic role: TRAF4-deficient mice (Shiels et al. 2000) exhibited severe tracheal malformation, suggesting a parallel function with the *Drosophila* Toll pathway.

TRAF5 is considered to be a close functional and structural homologue of TRAF2, and overexpression of TRAF5 can also activate NF- κ B and AP-1 transcription factors (Ishida et al. 1996; Nakano et al. 1996). However, deletion of TRAF5 did not cause perinatal lethality, perhaps owing to the more restricted expression pattern of TRAF5 compared with TRAF2 (Ishida et al. 1996; Nakano et al. 1996).

TRAF6 has a unique position among TRAFs, as the signaling mediator for both the TNF receptor superfamily and the IL-1R/TLR superfamily, a central player in innate immunity against pathogens. TRAF6 also has a crucial role in TRANCE-R-mediated osteoclast activation and participates in the adaptive immune response as the signaling partner of CD40 in B-cells (Lomaga et al. 1999; Naito et al. 1999; Wong et al. 1999). TRAF7 is the most recently identified member of the family, found to interact with MEKK3, a MAP3 K needed for TNF-induced activation of NF- κ B. TRAF7 activated JNK and p38 but had little effect on IKK activation (Bouwmeester et al. 2004).

Since TRAFs can form homo- and heterodimers of different compositions, it is conceivable that different forms regulate the specificity of signaling. The expression of TRAF genes depends on the cell's lineage and degree of differentiation, and consequently the activation of the same receptor could lead to diverse results in different cells.

In certain cases, TNFR family members seem to compete for TRAFs: CD30 activation induces the formation of receptor-TRAF complexes in the cells, decreasing the level of available TRAF2 molecules. As a consequence, these cells exhibit an increased sensitivity to TNF, since TRAF2 depletion results in the association of less anti-apoptotic cIAP molecules to TNFR trimers, shifting the balance toward cell death. On receptor activation, TRAFs tend to redistribute into membrane microdomains (see later) which leads to a more sustained signaling of the activated receptor. The simultaneous depletion of TRAFs in the cytoplasm leads to the downregulation of subsequent TRAF-dependent signals elicited by other receptors (Arch et al. 2000).

Interestingly, several TRAFs have been shown to interact with proteins of the cytoskeleton, such as the p62 nucleoporin, a component of the nuclear pore central plug (Gamper et al. 2000), the *microtubule-binding protein* MIP-T3 (Ling and

Goeddel 2000) and filamin (Leonardi et al. 2000). Activation of TNFR2 triggers the binding of TRAF2 to caveolin-1, a protein characteristic of caveoli and associated with receptor-mediated endocytosis. The receptor-associated complex is needed for the activation of NF- κ B and the anti-apoptotic effect of TNFR2 activation (Feng et al. 2001).

7.3.3

The NF- κ B Pathway

The mammalian Rel family is composed of five structurally related members, RelA/p65, RelB, c-Rel, p52 and p50, which form various homo- and heterodimeric combinations. The dimers bind to κ B transcriptional elements and are called *nuclear factor kappaB* (NF- κ B). κ B sites are present in a large number of genes involved in cell survival, stress response, inflammation and other immune responses; therefore NF- κ B activates the transcription of an impressive number of genes.

All five members share a large (300 amino acids) *Rel homology domain* (RHD), which mediates dimerization, nuclear transport and DNA recognition (unexpectedly, RelB homodimers do not bind to κ B sites). RelA, RelB and c-Rel also contain a C-terminal domain responsible for transcriptional activation. In most cells, p50 and p52, lacking this domain, cannot transactivate [the thymus seems to be an exception (Ishikawa 1998)], but repress the expression of target genes (Li and Verma 2002). They are produced as precursors of 105 and 100 kDa, respectively.

The function of NF- κ B dimers is inhibited by a third partner, one of the *inhibitor of kappaB* (I κ B) isoforms. I κ B α inhibits the interaction of NF- κ B with DNA transcription elements, and with the help of its two nuclear export sequences promotes the export of NF- κ B from the nucleus. It covers only one of the two nuclear localization sequences (NLS) of NF- κ B dimers, allowing the NF- κ B/I κ B complex to shuttle between the nucleus and the cytoplasm.

I κ B β has a higher affinity to NF- κ B, and by masking both NLSs of NF- κ B, it restricts its presence to the cytoplasm. Degradation of I κ B β by the proteasome is needed to allow nuclear translocation of NF- κ B. TNFs mediate a rapid activation of *I-kappaB kinases* (IKK) which phosphorylate I κ B (leading to ubiquitinylation and degradation) and the p65 subunit of the liberated NF- κ B (activating it in several steps). IKK is composed of a heterodimer of the catalytic subunits, IKK α and β and the regulatory γ subunit (also called NEMO). NEMO is catalytically inactive; still, it is essential for activation of the complex. The two other subunits – a catalytic and a leucine-zipper domain – share approx. 50% sequence homology.

Different subunits of NF- κ B are activated by two distinct pathways. RelA, RelB and c-Rel are activated by the above, canonical (type 1) mechanism, leading to the degradation of I κ B. The β subunit plays a dominant role in the TNFR-induced “canonical” activation of NF- κ B (Li Q et al. 1999b; Li ZW et al. 1999; Tanaka et al. 1999). The alternative, type 2 pathway controls the processing of the p100 precursor of NF- κ B subunit p52 and is governed by the α subunit.

There were two models of TNFR-induced activation of the IKK complex. One suggested that autophosphorylation was the result of the recruitment of IKK to the signaling complex formed at the cytoplasmic tail of the receptor after TNF-mediated receptor activation. According to the other model, members of the *mitogen-activated protein kinase kinase kinase* (MAP3 K) family were responsible for the activation of IKK. *NF- κ B-inducing kinase* (NIK), *NF- κ B-activating kinase* (NAK), *receptor-proximal kinase* (RIPK1), *TGF- β -activating kinase* (TAK1) and *MAP kinase/ERK kinase kinases* (MEKK1 and 3) were found to be involved in phosphorylation of IKK.

Recent data indicate that RIP and TRAF2 have roles in recruiting IKK to the receptor complex. RIP directly interacts with the regulatory subunit (NEMO) of IKK, although its enzyme activity is not required for IKK activation. (Devin et al. 2001). The ubiquitin ligase activity of TRAF6 and 7 is important in the activation of TAK1 and MEKK3, respectively. These MAP3 kinases then stimulate IKK activity (Wang et al. 2001). TAK1 and MEKK3 seem to be the key players in the activation of NF- κ B – and also in the activation of AP1 (Bouwmeester et al. 2004). Although genetic experiments have argued against the essential role of the other above-mentioned enzymes in the canonical NF- κ B pathway, the negative results cannot rule out their participation in an activation process, with redundant kinases compensating for the loss of individual members.

The non-canonical pathway leading to NF- κ B activation regulates the processing of p100, modulating the levels (and activity) of the RelB/p52 heterodimer. p100 contains ankyrin repeats, homologous to those present in I κ B. Therefore the RelB/p100 complex binds I κ B with low affinity, but remains in the cytoplasm due to the shielding effect of p100 sequences on the NLS of RelB. p100 is processed by a signal-dependent post-translational mechanism, which is dependent on the activity of the NF- κ B-inducing kinase, NIK and IKK α . NIK starts the processing of p100 by inducing IKK α to phosphorylate the C-terminal part of p100 (Senftleben et al. 2001). Recombinant IKK α can phosphorylate p100, which induces ubiquitination (Amir et al. 2004). Production of p52 leads to the accumulation of RelB/p52 dimers in the nuclear compartment of the cells.

As targeted deletion of the gene encoding the IKK α subunit proved, IKK α plays a unique role in epidermal differentiation, mammary gland development and lactation (Hu et al. 1999, 2001; Li Q et al. 1999a; Takeda et al. 1999; Cao et al. 2001; Sil et al. 2004). This phenomenon is related to RANK signaling (Cao et al. 2001; Hu et al. 2001). BAFFR, CD40 and LT β R-elicited signals also involve this subunit, and malfunctions of the pathway result in defects in secondary lymphoid organogenesis and germinal center formation (Kaisho et al. 2001; Matsushima et al. 2001).

A further role of the IKK α subunit has been revealed recently: IKK α proved to be a histone H3 kinase, which activated TNF-induced genes binding to the promoter regions of target genes. IKK α interacted with the transactivation domain of *CREB-binding protein* (CBP), and by phosphorylating H3 it enhanced CBP-dependent histone acetylation and remodeling of the chromatin structure (Yamamoto et al. 2003). Nuclear IKK α helped to make promoter and transcriptional factor binding sequences available for DNA binding proteins and synergized with the transcription-activating effect of NF- κ B.

7.3.4

The Role of Membrane Microdomains (Rafts) in the Formation of Signaling Complexes

Before we discuss the activation of the MAP kinase pathway, we have to look at the role of membranes in signaling. The chemical composition of the membrane lipids does not allow homogenous distribution of the different molecular species. Spatial separation of lipid mixtures leads to the dynamic formation of membrane (micro)domains. Since the physical state and thickness of these membrane domains are different they can accommodate diverse sets of membrane proteins with different transmembrane domain structures.

Sphingolipid and cholesterol-rich microdomains, also called “rafts”, constitute only a small fraction of the plasma membrane; therefore they can serve as platforms to facilitate the interaction of raft-associated molecules. In receptor-mediated signaling events, relatively large numbers of different proteins should interact with each other, and thus rafts seem to be the ideal location for signaling molecules. The importance of these microdomains in the initiation of signaling pathways has only been recognized during the last decade.

Rafts have a lower density than other cellular membranes and at low temperatures they are resistant to non-ionic detergents. These facts allow relatively easy isolation of the rafts and microdomain-associated proteins. Recruitment of TRAF2 and 3 to detergent-insoluble membrane fractions was first shown to occur during the interaction of CD40 with its ligand in intact B cells (Hostager et al. 2000). Simultaneously with TRAF recruitment, JNK and Lyn (a kinase of the Src family) were also translocated into rafts and became phosphorylated, activating new signaling pathways. The ring finger and zinc finger domains of TRAFs were shown to be required for communication between CD40 and microdomain-associated signaling molecules.

TNFR signaling leads to activation of sphingomyelinases (SM) liberating ceramide. Rafts are modified by ceramide to form larger domains, which serve to cluster receptor molecules. The generation of a high receptor density might be required for the amplification of receptor-specific signaling and explain the function of the SM and ceramide in multiple signaling pathways.

More recently, rafts have been implicated in the signal transduction by several other members of the TNF receptor family. Raft microdomains proved to have a crucial role in RANK signaling (Ha et al. 2003a). The majority of the ectopically expressed RANK and a substantial portion of endogenous TRAF2 and 6 were detected in the low-density membrane fractions. RANKL stimulation increased the association of TRAF6 with rafts. Disruption of rafts blocked the RANK ligand-induced translocation of TRAF6 and impeded the interaction between RANK and TRAF6. These observations demonstrated that proper RANK signaling requires the function of raft membrane microdomains.

Further studies (Ha et al. 2003a) proved that the raft microdomain also played an essential role in osteoclast function and differentiation. Expression of raft component flotillin greatly increased during osteoclast differentiation, whereas engagement of RANK induced the translocation of TRAF6 to rafts where Src was constitutively resident. Disruption of rafts blocked TRAF6 translocation and Akt

activation by RANK ligand in osteoclasts and further reduced the survival of osteoclasts. Actin ring formation and bone resorption by osteoclasts were also found to require the integrity of rafts (Ha et al. 2003b).

A number of TNF/TNFR superfamily members are expressed both as transmembrane and as soluble proteins. Proteolytic processing (shedding) of the precursor forms by metalloproteinases is controlled since the soluble forms frequently have regulatory functions (e.g., soluble CD30 is able to suppress the Th1-type immune response). Microdomains were found to influence this process. Cholesterol depletion obviously leads to the disruption of rafts. Treatment of human lymphoma-derived cell lines with cholesterol-binding methyl-beta-cyclodextrin or drugs interfering with cholesterol metabolism, such as lovastatin, cholesterol oxidase and filipin, led to the increased release of sCD30. Since TNF-alpha-converting enzyme (TACE), the enzyme responsible for CD30 shedding, is not raft-associated, while CD30 is partially present in lipid rafts, disintegration of lipid rafts converts raft-associated CD30 into a better substrate, resulting in enhanced shedding of CD30 (von Tresckow et al. 2004).

No Fas-associated proteins can be detected prior to Fas-L binding. However, stimulation with the ligand induces clustering and the rapid recruitment of FADD and caspase-8 to the Fas DISC (Medema et al. 1997; Scaffidi et al. 1999). Interestingly, the DISC has been shown to assemble in the glycosphingolipid-rich microdomains. This localization is dependent on an intact death domain. Indeed, raft localization can be transferred from TNF-R1 to TNF-R2 by recombinantly grafting the TNF-R1 death domain (Cottin et al. 2002).

7.3.5

Activation of JNK

The N-terminal zinc fingers of TRAFs seem to be essential for the activation of the MAP kinase pathway, which eventually leads to activation of the AP1 transcription factor (a dimer of c-Fos and c-Jun), through the activation of *c-Jun N-terminal kinase* (JNK). The MAP kinase pathway consists of four levels of Ser/Thr kinases, which are sequentially activated, proceeding downstream from the fourth level.

A significant proportion of death domain receptors and TRAF molecules are associated with detergent-resistant membrane domains. Overexpression of most TRAFs (2, 4, 5 or 6) activated the MAPK pathway. TRAF3 was the only exception. TRAF3 was also the only one that proved to be detergent soluble. Myristoylation of the molecule changed both subcellular localization and the ability to activate MAP kinases (Dadgostar and Cheng 2000).

Apoptosis signal-regulating kinase 1 (ASK1) seems to be the key upstream activator of JNK and p38 MAPK signaling cascades, and is activated after TNFR engagement or in case of TRAF overexpression. Its deletion or negative dominant mutations lead to loss of JNK activation and inhibition of apoptosis (Ichijo et al. 1997; Nishitoh et al. 1998). Evidence shows that the *ASK1-interacting protein*, AIP1, plays an important role in TNF-induced ASK1 activation by facilitating dissociation of ASK1 from its inhibitor.

Several other MAP4Ks (germinal center kinases) were also shown to play a role in TNFR-mediated activation of JNK, but their importance is limited to embryonic stem cells (Yujiri et al. 2000).

7.4

Signaling of Other Family Members

7.4.1

4-1BB

4-1BB (CD137) is one of the costimulatory members of the TNFR family. Activation of these receptors generates costimulatory signals, which have been defined as signals that fortify or modify signals elicited by the interaction of TCR and MHC-peptide complexes on antigen-presenting cells. In most cases, T cells are ineffective, become unresponsive or undergo apoptosis in the absence of costimulatory signals. 4-1BB is expressed on activated CD4(+) and CD8(+) T cells, on a series of malignant cell lines as well as on dendritic cells and monocytes. 4-1BB-mediated T cell costimulation involves recruitment of TNFR-associated factor 2 (TRAF2) and activation of the stress-activated protein kinase cascade. In normal T cells, p38 MAPK is activated synergistically by immobilized anti-CD3 plus immobilized 4-1BB ligand. T cells from TRAF2 dominant-negative mice are impaired in 4-1BB-mediated p38 MAPK activation. A link between TRAF2 and the p38 cascade is provided by ASK-1. A T cell hybrid expressing a kinase-dead ASK-1 fails to activate p38 MAPK in response to 4-1BB signaling.

In yeast two-hybrid screening, a novel leucine-rich repeat (LRR)-containing protein, LRR-1, was found to specifically interact with the cytoplasmic domain of 4-1BB. Overexpression of LRR-1 suppressed the activation of NF- κ B induced by 4-1BB or TRAF2. In addition, LRR-1 downregulated JNK1 activity. These results indicate that LRR-1 negatively regulates the 4-1BB-mediated signaling cascades and the activation of NF- κ B and JNK1.

4-1BB is induced on CD4+ and CD8+ T cells upon engagement of the TCR/CD3 complex with the antigen bound to MHC. The transient nature of its expression on activated CD4+ T cells is the result of proteolytic shedding catalyzed by metalloproteinases.

4-1BB plays an important role during T cell activation, enhances clonal expansion and rescues T cells from apoptosis. The survival of the activated CD8+ T cells following expansion is the result of the upregulation of anti-apoptotic genes *bcl-x(L)* and *bfl-1* via 4-1BB-mediated NF- κ B activation, but no increase is detected in *Bcl-2* expression. 4-1BB enhances cell cycle progression and proliferation of CD8(+) T cells in both an IL-2-dependent and -independent manner. 4-1BB upregulates the expression of cyclins D2, D3 and E, and the translation of cyclin D2 via the *phosphatidylinositol 3-kinase* (PI3K)-Akt pathway. The enhanced cyclin D2 and D3 expression inhibits the expression of the *cyclin-dependent kinase inhibitor* p27(Kip1).

4-1BB is the regulator of regulators: signaling through the 4-1BB receptor inhibits the suppressive function of CD4+CD25+ regulatory T cells (Treg), espe-

cially when these cells are preactivated. However, *proliferation* of Treg cells is only marginally influenced by 4-1BB-elicited signaling.

7.4.2

BAFFR

BAFFR (Bcmd/BR3) is one of the receptors of the *B-cell activation factor* (BAFF), also known as BlyS. BAFFR signaling plays a critical role in the maturation, selection and survival of B cells. BAFFR activation induces B cell survival, at least in part, through the regulation of Bcl-2 family members via NF- κ B-mediated mechanisms. Experimental evidence suggests that BAFFR expression is controlled by B cell antigen receptor signaling, linking specificity-based selection and BlyS-mediated survival. BAFFR and BCMA have the shortest ligand-binding modules within the family. The extracellular domain of BAFFR comprises a minimal TNF receptor-like module that encodes a highly focused ligand-binding site. This is analogous to the first half of a canonical TNFR CRD but is stabilized by an additional non-canonical disulfide bond. Several of the key BAFF-binding residues form a beta-turn that was shown to be sufficient for ligand binding when transferred to a structured beta-hairpin scaffold (Kayagaki et al. 2002).

7.4.3

BCMA

The ligand of *B-cell maturation antigen* (BCMA) is a rather new member of the TNF family: A *proliferation-inducing ligand* (APRIL, also called TRDL-1 or TALL-2) is thus named for its capacity to stimulate the proliferation of tumor cells in vitro. Its expression is low in normal tissues but elevated in several types of tumors and transformed cell lines. In immunodeficient mice, APRIL increases tumorigenicity of tumor grafts. Obviously, this is not its physiological role.

APRIL and BAFF [also termed as *B-lymphocyte stimulator* (BlyS), TALL-1, THANK and zTNF4) form a new subfamily of TNF-like ligands that are expressed in hematopoietic cells. Both ligands can bind their cognate receptors and the *transmembrane activator and calcium modulator cyclophilin ligand interactor* (TACI).

As a special twist in the story of transmembrane and soluble forms of ligands of the TNF superfamily of proteins, Pradet-Balade et al. (2002) described a chimeric molecule, TWE-PRIL. Genes of TWEAK and APRIL are located very close on human Ch 17. TWEAK is a transmembrane protein expressed on the cell surface, whereas APRIL acts solely as a secreted factor. A hybrid transcript between TWEAK and APRIL was identified in human primary T cells and monocytes, and TWE-PRIL protein composed of cytoplasmic and transmembrane domains of TWEAK fused to the C-terminal domain of APRIL was detected in primary human T lymphocytes and monocytic cell lines. TWE-PRIL proved to be a biologically active ligand, as it stimulated cycling in T- and B-lymphoma cell lines.

7.4.4 CD27

CD27 is a lymphocyte-specific member of the TNF receptor (TNFR) family, another costimulatory molecule for peripheral T cells. In a yeast two-hybrid screen, CD27 directly associated with TRAF2 and 3 (Gravestine et al. 1998; Yamamoto et al. 1998). Transfection experiments using dominant-negative TRAF2 indicated that CD27 communicates with Jun N-terminal kinase (JNK) via TRAF2 (Gravestine et al. 1998). CD27 augments TCR-induced JNK activity in primary murine lymph node T cells. Since TRAF proteins initiate anti-apoptotic signaling, CD27 regulates not only proliferation but also survival of T lymphocytes. CD27 and its ligand, CD70, are crucial molecules to direct the differentiation of CD27+ memory B cells toward plasma cells in cooperation with IL-10, while preventing IL-10-mediated apoptosis (Gravestine et al. 1998).

CD27 is unique in this family for its disulfide-linked homodimerization of 55-kDa monomers. Overexpression of CD27 in 293 cells induces a low level of NF- κ B activation, and the ligation of the receptor by its ligand dramatically augments this signal. The NF- κ B activation signal is inhibited by dominant-negative TRAF2 or intact TRAF3, indicating that in this case TRAF2 and 3 have antagonistic effects (Yamamoto et al. 1998).

The induction of immunoglobulin isotype switching in B cells requires several signals given by cytokines and cell contact-delivered cosignals. Interaction of CD27 with its ligand increased IgE synthesis synergistically in the presence of IL-4 plus anti-CD40 mAb. CD27 negative B cells do not produce IgE (Nagumo et al. 1998). CD27/CD70 interaction upregulates the *positive regulatory domain 1-binding factor-1*, resulting in enhanced B cell proliferation and promotion of differentiation into plasma cells in the presence of IL-4 or IL-4 plus anti-CD40 (Nagumo et al. 1998).

A death domain-containing pro-apoptotic protein, Siva-1, was identified as an intracellular partner of CD27 and GITR. Overexpression of Siva protein triggers a typical apoptotic process mediated by the activation of both initiator and effector caspases. This pathway involves a mitochondrial step, evidenced by activation of Bid and cytochrome *c* release (Spinicelli et al. 2002).

7.4.5 CD30

CD30 is a characteristic cell-surface receptor for activated lymphocytes and the malignant cells of Hodgkin's disease (HD), anaplastic large cell lymphoma (ALCL) and a few other non-Hodgkin's lymphomas. CD30 functions include participation in negative selection of thymocytes, costimulation of activated T cells, isotype switching of B cells and regulation of the effector activity of cytotoxic lymphocytes. CD30-mediated signal transduction is capable of promoting cell proliferation and cell survival as well as anti-proliferative effects and cell death, depending on cell type and costimulatory effects.

Some data indicate the opposite signaling of CD30 in HD or ALCL cells, while other information points to pleiotropic signaling pathways in both malignancies. Most Hodgkin and Reed-Sternberg (H-RS) cells are derived from germinal center B-cells. Ligand-independent signaling by overexpressed CD30 was shown to be a common mechanism that induced constitutive NF- κ B activation in these cells (Horie et al. 2003).

7.4.6 CD40

The CD40 receptor is expressed constitutively on B cells and also found on macrophages and dendritic cells. In B lymphocytes, CD40 provides essential signals controlling clonal expansion, antibody production and isotype switching. In monocytes and CD8⁺ T cells, its signals enhance antigen presentation (Grewal et al. 1995, 1996; van Essen et al. 1995; Soong et al. 1996; Stout et al. 1996; Maruo et al. 1997; Moodycliffe et al. 2000). CD40 was found to be expressed transiently on CD8⁺ T cells during an immune response, providing important signals for the generation of T cell memory (Bourgeois et al. 2002).

During complex interactions between B and T cells, CD40 and its ligand provide a number of signals that play important roles in regulating the adaptive immune response. Defective signaling due to a mutation of CD154 leads to the rare human disease *X-linked hyper-IgM syndrome* (HIGM), a block in isotype switching of the immunoglobulin synthesis (Callard et al. 1993; DiSanto et al. 1993; Fuleihan et al. 1993; Korthauer et al. 1993).

CD40 upregulates surface molecules involved in T cell–B cell interactions (costimulatory and adhesion molecules, cytokines and their receptors). Defects in or absence of CD40 signals lead to defects in antigen presentation by B cells, macrophages and dendritic cells, causing severe deficiencies in cell-mediated as well as humoral immunity (Campbell et al. 1996; Grewal et al. 1995, 1996; van Essen et al. 1995; Grewal and Flavell 1996; Hollander et al. 1996; Kamanaka et al. 1996). Studies with CD40- and CD154-deficient mice have revealed the importance of these molecules in T cell-dependent B cell activation.

As mentioned above, the CD40 signaling complex is assembled in membrane rafts. Before stimulation, CD40 is present in detergent-sensitive domains of the plasma membrane of B cells, exhibiting no interaction with TRAF molecules. Straight after engagement with ligands on the surface of T cells, CD40 aggregates in detergent-resistant rafts recruiting TRAF molecules. CD40 binds at least four distinct TRAFs, and three of these (TRAFs 1–3) have overlapping binding sites (Bishop et al. 2002). Additional microdomain-associated signaling molecules interact with the TRAFs, forming a signaling complex, or become activated by its assembly. CD40 engagement has been shown to activate the Src family kinase Lyn, and to induce the phosphorylation of phosphatidylinositol-3 kinase (PI3 K), the Ser/Thr kinase Pim-1 and phospholipase C2 in B cells (Ren et al. 1994; Zhu et al. 2002).

CD40 signaling induces rapid ubiquitination and subsequent degradation of TRAF molecules (both TRAF2 and 3, but not TRAF1 or 6) (Hostager et al. 2000;

Brown et al. 2001). Ubiquitination-dependent degradation of the TRAF molecules is a negative regulatory feedback ending the signaling process. Blocking CD40-mediated TRAF2 degradation leads to intensive and long-lasting CD40 signals in B cells (Brown et al. 2002). At the same time, ubiquitination of other signaling molecules seems to be required for the initiation of signaling.

CD40 signaling leads to the activation of JNK, stress-activated protein kinase, p38 and NF- κ B. *Germinal center kinase* (GCK) and related enzymes (Yuasa et al. 1998; Shi et al. 1999) can interact with the TRAF domain of TRAF2 in B cells, and by interaction with MEKK1 may contribute to CD40-induced JNK activation (Sanchez et al. 1994; Yan et al. 1994; McAdam et al. 2001). ASK1 seems to be involved also with CD40 signal, participating in the activation of JNK and p38 (Ichijo et al. 1997). The NF- κ B-inducing MAP3-kinase, NIK (Malinin et al. 1997; Song et al. 1997), turned out to be essential only for LT β R, but dispensable in the CD40-mediated activation of NF- κ B (Yin et al. 2001).

B cell receptors and CD40 do not exhibit homologous structures; the signaling pathways induced by ligation of these two receptors are able to cooperate in a synergistic way (Wheller et al. 1993; Bishop et al. 1995). Activation of both types of receptors activates similar targets: *extracellular signal-regulated kinase* (ERK), JNK, p38 and similar transcription factors, such as NF-B, NF-AT and AP-1 (Francis et al. 1995; Li et al. 1996; Sutherland et al. 1996).

The relationship between CD40 and Fas is extremely interesting. During activation of mature B cells, CD40 signals upregulate Fas, which renders activated B cells more susceptible to apoptosis induction by the Fas ligand present on activated T cells. However, the Fas signaling complex is disabled by CD40 signals, upregulating the expression of the anti-apoptotic caspase homologue c-FLIP (Hennino et al. 2000; Wang et al. 2000). Defects resulting in an absence of Fas signals in vivo result in dramatic dysregulation of humoral immune responses, resulting in autoimmunity, splenomegaly and lymphadenopathy (Krammer 2000).

The human herpesvirus, Epstein-Barr virus (EBV), codes for a membrane protein, LMP1, which participates in the immortalization of B cells. (EBV is the etiological agent for mononucleosis and Burkitt lymphoma.) The intracellular domain of LMP1 assembles a signaling complex quite similar to that of CD40, but its activation is constitutive. The strong and sustained B cell signaling induced by this virus-encoded protein correlates with its ability to prevent ubiquitination and degradation of TRAF proteins (Brown et al. 2001).

7.4.7

DR3/TRAMP and DcR3

DR3 is a death domain-containing receptor that is upregulated during T cell activation. Its ligand, TL1A, is produced by endothelial cells. In T cells, TL1A acts as a costimulator of gamma IFN synthesis, and increases IL-2 responsiveness and secretion of proinflammatory cytokines both in vitro and in vivo. TL1A induces NF- κ B activation and apoptosis in DR3-expressing cell lines; the same effects can be elicited by DR3 overexpression. TL1A also binds to decoy receptor DcR3

(which interacts with LIGHT, too). The interaction of TL1A with DR3 promotes T cell expansion during an immune response, whereas DcR3 has an opposing effect.

7.4.8

DR4 and DR5 (TRAILR1 and R2) and Decoy Receptors DcR1 and DcR2

It seems that nature judged the ligand of these receptors simply too dangerous to regulate at the transcriptional and translational levels. The ligand, *tumor necrosis factor-related apoptosis-inducing ligand* (TRAIL) or Apo2 ligand (Apo2L), interacts with a complex system of receptors: two pro-apoptotic death receptors and three anti-apoptotic decoys. TRAIL/Apo2L is able to trigger apoptosis through engagement of its death receptors, TRAILR1 and 2, and its activity is attenuated by the presence of two membrane-associated receptors and a soluble decoy, DcR1, DcR2 and osteoprotegerin (OPG), the last one carrying non-functional death domains.

TRAILR1 and 2 contain cytoplasmic death domains and signal apoptosis. Many cancer cell lines preferentially express TRAILR1 and TRAILR2, suggesting differential regulation of the death and decoy receptors. As TNF did two decades earlier, TRAIL raised high hopes among tumor immunologists and oncologists as a promising anti-tumor factor, since it can selectively induce apoptosis of a variety of transformed and malignant cells, without killing most types of normal diploid cells.

TRAIL is expressed as a transmembrane protein on the surface of different cells of the immune system and plays a role in both T-cell- and natural killer cell-mediated tumor surveillance and suppression of tumor metastasis. One of the key regulators of TRAIL expression in lymphocytes is the NF- κ B transcription factor. Transcriptional activation of Apo2L/TRAIL by interferons and a number of other cytokines suggests a possible involvement of this protein in the activation of natural killer cells, cytotoxic T lymphocytes and dendritic cells.

TRAILR1 is broadly expressed in many tissues including the spleen and lung, and TRAILR2 level is high in the lung, heart, spleen and peripheral blood lymphocytes. At first sight it is difficult to understand the puzzling TRAIL resistance of these organs. The presence of decoy receptors that express TRAIL-binding ectodomains and either minimal cytoplasmic domains (DcR2) or GPI anchors (DcR1) provides one explanation of how apoptosis can be avoided (Pan et al. 1997).

7.4.9

EDAR

The pathway activated by the ligation of this receptor was discovered through the cloning of human genes that cause *hypohidrotic ectodermal dysplasia* (HED) syndrome. All components of this system, the ligand, ectodysplasin or EDA, the death domain-containing receptor EDAR and the death domain adapter molecule

EDARADD, were previously unknown proteins. Their exact roles were investigated in mice by the analysis of mutation in the corresponding genes (*crinkled*, *downless* and *Tabby*). These mutants showed defects in the development of certain exocrine glands and morphogenesis of hair and teeth.

Ectodysplasin-EDAR has unique, important functions in the regulation of embryonic development, but its effects are mediated by the activation of the well-known NF- κ B (and probably other, unidentified pathways). EDAR mediates cell-cell interactions within the ectoderm and regulates the initiation and growth of hair and teeth. In evolutionary respect it is interesting to note that EDAR is also necessary for the development of *fish scales*, indicating that this pathway and its function have been conserved during the evolution of ectodermal organs.

The development of hair follicles and the sebaceous glands is the process whereby NGFR, the odd member of the TNFR family, works together with the EDA/EDAR, XEDAR, Troy system. Hair follicle formation in the mouse begins with intense NGFR expression. During hair follicle development, NGFR expression is attenuated and the receptors EDAR, XEDAR and Troy, as well as the ligand EDA, help form the hair follicle.

7.4.10

Fas Signaling

Fas (Apo-1, CD95) and its ligand (FasL, CD95L) are extremely important members of the TNFR and TNF families, respectively, with a crucial role in the regulation of activation-induced cell death, clonal selection of lymphocytes, T-cell-induced cytotoxicity, immune privilege, tumor surveillance and immune escape. Malfunction of the FasL/Fas system has been implicated in lymphoproliferative and autoimmune diseases, fulminant hepatitis and immune deficiency. Until recently, the FasL/Fas system was mainly appreciated with respect to its potential to kill, and the apoptotic features of the FasL/Fas system and the corresponding signaling pathways have been well investigated. There is increasing evidence that activation of Fas can lead to cell proliferation or NF- κ B activation; however, the pathways that are utilized by Fas to transduce proliferative and activating signals are not very well understood.

7.4.11

GITR/AITR

Glucocorticoid-induced TNFR family-related gene product (GITR) is expressed in different cell types, including T lymphocytes, and its cytoplasmic region shows high homology with that of other costimulatory receptors of the TNFRSF. GITR stimulation potentiated the proliferative response of the anti-CD3 stimulus in CD8+ and CD4+ peripheral T cell subpopulations, and increased the production of IL-2 and IFN-gamma and expression of IL-2 receptor alpha. GITR is also involved in MAPK-pathway activation, since GITR-elicited signaling enhanced the anti-CD3-induced ERK phosphorylation.

GITR has a stimulatory effect on CD4+CD25+ regulatory T cell proliferation, simultaneously downregulating suppressor activity of these cells. GITR expression is probably dispensable for the development of Treg cells, since GITR^{-/-} CD4+CD25+ cells are capable of exerting suppressor activity on CD4+CD25- responder cells.

7.4.12

HVEM

HVEM belongs to a rather complex system: it has three ligands, LIGHT, lymphotoxin (LT) alpha and LT α β 2, all of which interact with at least one more receptor. HVEM also serves as a receptor protein for human herpes simplex virus. The physiological role of HVEM is the regulation of T cell immune responses and it shares its ligand, LIGHT, with the lymphotoxin-beta receptor (LT β R) and one of the soluble decoy receptors, DcR3. LIGHT has emerged as a potent initiator of T cell costimulation signals, effecting CTL-mediated tumor rejection, allograft rejection and graft versus host disease. Constitutive activation of HVEM through overexpression of LIGHT leads to tissue destruction and autoimmune-like disease syndromes. In contrast to LT α β 2, LIGHT plays a minimal role in lymphoid tissue development, yet some evidence indicates a role in negative selection in the thymus.

7.4.13

Lymphotoxin- β Receptor

The lymphotoxin- β receptor (LT β R) is expressed on most cell types including cells of epithelial and myeloid lineages. This receptor is most closely related to TNFR2 and CD40, not only in sequence but also in its signaling capacity by belonging to the family of non-death-domain receptors (Hehlgans and Männel 2002). LT β R plays a critical role in inflammation and lymphoid organogenesis through activation of NF- κ B (Futterer et al. 1998; Rennert et al. 1998). The first evidence in vivo has been observed in mice homozygous for the *aly* point mutation in the *NF- κ B-inducing kinase* (NIK), resulting in alymphoplasia, a phenotype similar to that found in mice that have been genetically deleted for LT β R.

Although wild-type and *aly*-NIK do not differ in their in vitro binding to TRAF1, 2, 3 or 6 or in their in vivo association with TRAF2 and do not differ in their poor binding to I κ B kinase beta (IKK β), only wild-type NIK is able to bind to IKK. These results demonstrate that activation of NF- κ B by LT β R is mediated by an interaction of NIK with IKK that is abrogated in the *aly* mutation (Dejardin et al. 2002). In addition to this classical NF- κ B activation which requires NIK and IKK, an IKK α -dependent activation is required for the expression of proinflammatory molecules including VCAM-1, MIP-2 and MIP-1. In contrast, IKK controls the LT β R-dependent expression of chemokines and cytokines involved in lymphoid organogenesis, including SLC, BLC and ELC. Thus LT β R signaling induces different patterns of gene expression via distinct NF- κ B pathways (Luftig et al. 2001).

7.4.14

RANK and Osteoprotegerin (OPG)

The RANK/RANKL system is linked to the DR4 and DR5/TRAIL system through a common decoy receptor, OPG, which has affinity to both RANKL and TRAIL, two transmembrane ligands. The discovery of OPG was a very significant step in understanding bone metabolism. The molecule interacting with OPG [initially called OPG-ligand/osteoclast differentiating factor (ODF), now RANKL or TRANCE], was identified as the key mediator of osteoclastogenesis. It was expressed as a transmembrane protein on the surface of various cell types and particularly on pre-osteoblastic/stromal cells and activated T cells. RANKL can be cleaved and the soluble form is biologically active. RANKL induces the differentiation of osteoclast precursor cells and stimulates the resorption function and survival of mature osteoclasts. The decoy receptor, OPG, strongly inhibits bone resorption by binding with high affinity to RANKL, thereby preventing RANKL from engaging its receptor RANK. This system is regulated by the calciotropic hormones.

Mutations of mice affecting expression of the genes of this system resulted in abnormal skeletal phenotypes (osteoporosis and osteopetrosis), proving the decisive role played by these factors in regulating bone metabolism. Manipulation of the RANK/RANKL system could provide therapy for very common, debilitating human diseases (e. g., postmenopausal osteoporosis, osteolytic metastatic cancer, arthritis and periodontitis).

The pleiotropic RANKL has other activities as well: it is a survival factor for activated dendritic cells, and RANK signaling seems to be important for the maintenance of immunological tolerance. Activated T cells express RANKL, and knockout mice for RANKL acquire severe immunological abnormalities (and osteopetrosis). Also in the developmental processes leading to both lymph node formation and the expansion and function of mammary glands during pregnancy and lactation, RANKL has been shown to play essential roles.

7.4.15

TACI

Transmembrane activator and calcium modulator and cyclophilin ligand interactor (TACI) shares one of its ligands, BAFF, with BAFFR, while the other, APRIL, also binds to BCMA. Both ligands are usually expressed by myeloid cells. They are crucial survival factors and powerful B cell-activating molecules for B cells, attenuating apoptosis, increasing NF- κ B activation, upregulating Bcl-2 and Bcl-x(L) and downregulating Bax.

7.4.16

TNFR2

Signaling information concerning TNFR2 is rather limited compared to signaling via TNFR1. For activation of TNFR2, soluble TNF can serve as a ligand;

however, the membrane-bound 26-kDa form of TNF is superior to soluble TNF (Grell et al. 1995). Different splice variants of TNFR2 have been described. Besides the full-length membrane-located TNFR2 (Lewis et al. 1991) and an intracellularly expressed splice variant which is identical to the full-length TNFR2 (Seitz et al. 2001), a soluble TNFR2 lacking the transmembrane and intracellular domain (Lainez et al. 2004) has been found. A PLAD domain is present in the extracellular part of TNFR2. The intracellular part of the molecule does not contain a death domain but still recruits adapter proteins such as TRAF2 and can be a target for kinases (MacEwan 2002). Since TNFR2 is readily cleaved by metalloproteases into a soluble form, which is still capable of TNF binding (Higuchi and Aggarwal 1994; Crowe et al. 1995), one obvious function of this decoy TNFR2 is the modulation of TNF activity by neutralization.

7.4.17

TWEAKR/Fn14

TWEAKR/Fn14 is the smallest member of the TNF receptor superfamily, with one single cysteine-rich domain (CRD) in its extracellular ligand binding structure. It is a type I transmembrane protein alternatively referred to as either TWEAK receptor or *fibroblast growth factor-inducible* 14 (Fn14). It has multiple biological activities, including stimulation of cell growth and angiogenesis, induction of inflammatory cytokines and – under some experimental conditions – stimulation of apoptosis. TWEAKR appears to signal via recruitment of several different TRAFs.

Its ligand, *tumor necrosis factor-like weak inducer of apoptosis* (TWEAK), is a relatively new, not very well-characterized member of the TNF superfamily. TWEAK is a cell-surface-associated type II transmembrane protein and, like several other members of the family, it is processed into a smaller, biologically active soluble form. According to our present knowledge, there is one receptor that binds TWEAK with high affinity.

7.5

Reverse Signaling

Reverse signaling, i.e. the activation of cells expressing transmembrane ligands by their receptors, is characteristic of the TNF/TNFR system (Eissner et al. 2004). Stimulation of the membrane-associated form of TNF (mTNF) has been described for T cells (Ferran et al. 1994; Chen et al. 2001; Chou et al. 2001) and monocytes, where in the latter it serves as a silencing mechanism rather than a stimulatory signal. Interaction of mTNF with TNF *receptor* positive cells, soluble receptor molecules or anti-TNF antibodies confers resistance to bacterial endotoxin (LPS) in monocytes. As a result, such prestimulated monocytes no longer respond to LPS with the release of soluble (yet unidentified) pro-apoptotic factors and cytokines such as TNF, IL-1 and IL-10 (Eissner et al. 2000). Thus, reverse sig-

naling by mTNF causes an anergic state of these cells. Under pathological conditions, mTNF might additionally transmit apoptotic signals, as it has been shown for monocytes and T cells from patients with Crohn's disease (Lugering et al. 2001; ten Hove et al. 2002).

mTNF has receptor-like properties and its cytoplasmic domain was detected in the nuclei after anti-TNF stimulation (Domonkos et al. 2001). Very recently, we have begun to unravel the intracellular cascades that mediate reverse signaling by mTNF. Activation of mTNF triggered at least two independent pathways that could be distinguished by *protein kinase C* (PKC) inhibitors. The suppression of the LPS-induced Death Factor X (Eissner et al. 2000) was dependent on PKC, whereas the suppression of LPS-mediated cytokine release was not. Both LPS and reverse signaling stimulated the (MAPK)/extracellular signal-regulated kinase (ERK) pathway (Kirchner et al. 2004). Interestingly, the activation of reverse signaling by mTNF rendered monocytes and macrophages refractory to a subsequent activation of the MAPK/ERK pathway by LPS (Kirchner et al. 2004). It remains to be elucidated where the LPS and the mTNF signals separate, but preliminary data suggest that a differential engagement of PKC isozymes by the antagonistic stimuli LPS and mTNF, respectively, might, at least in part, do that. LPS is known to stimulate classical PKC isozymes, whereas reverse signaling rather activates non-classical PKCs.

Reverse signaling is not limited to TNF α . CD30, a lymphoid activation marker, is shed into the cell environment after endoproteolytic cleavage of its ectodomain. Soluble (s)CD30 is able to suppress the Th1-type immune response (von Tresckow et al. 2004). Recombinant 4-1BB that was immobilized on culture plates strongly inhibited M-CSF/RANKL-induced *in vitro* osteoclast formation from bone marrow cells. Antibody against 4-1BB ligand was also active (to a lesser extent), indicating involvement of reverse signaling through 4-1BBL during inhibition of osteoclast formation. Reverse signaling abolished RANKL-mediated induction of *nuclear factor of activated T cells* (NFAT)-2, and experimental results suggest that it probably interfered with the PI3 K/Akt pathway, and *casein kinase I* (CKI) was also involved in the signaling process (Saito et al. 2004).

Soluble GITR induced cell cycle arrest in murine macrophages by decreasing the activities of cdk2 and 4 as a result of lowering the expression of cyclins A and D2 and cdk4. Inhibition of G1/S phase transition provoked by sGITR acting on its membrane-bound ligand lead to apoptosis of the cells (Shin et al. 2004). The GITR ligand is constitutively expressed on macrophages, though its level is low.

Multiple myeloma (MM)-induced bone destruction requires increased RANK-L expression and is facilitated by a concurrent reduction in OPG, a natural decoy receptor for RANK-L. Administration of the RANK-L antagonist RANK-Fc limited MM-induced osteoclastogenesis, development of bone disease and MM tumor progression. RANK-Fc is a recombinant RANK-L antagonist that is formed by fusing the extracellular domain of RANK to the Fc portion of human IgG1. *In vitro*, addition of RANK-Fc virtually eliminated the formation of osteoclasts in cocultures of MM with bone marrow and osteoblast/stromal cells.

Clearly more experimental evidence is required to conclusively answer important questions as to what extent reverse signaling of TNF ligand family members is important *in vivo*. The data obtained so far strongly suggest that this signaling

system contributes to the fine tuning of the cellular and functional interactions in the immune system. The fact that the majority of reverse signals so far described in B and T cells are of a stimulatory nature (Suzuki and Fink 1998; Harashima et al. 2001), whereas monocytes are mainly inhibited in their effector functions by reverse signaling (Eissner et al. 2000; Lugering et al. 2001), argues for a differential role of this signal type in adaptive and innate immunity. The bi-directional signaling of mTNF in monocytes could be a mechanism to control inflammatory responses, thus limiting the destructive potential of monocytes against other target cells. Furthermore, preliminary evidence suggests that experimental induction of reverse signaling via mTNF by antibodies or soluble receptors leads not only to resistance, but also to a generalized anergy towards non-specific inflammatory stimuli, and even to cell death under specific conditions (Lugering et al. 2001; ten Hove et al. 2002).

If such regulatory circuits are acting *in vivo*, one has to critically reconsider therapeutic and prophylactic anti-TNF strategies, which are used in inflammatory bowel diseases (for review see van Deventer 2001), rheumatoid arthritis and allogeneic stem cell transplantation (Holler et al. 1995). In all these clinical settings there is still a need for fighting secondary infections due to immunosuppression or other therapeutic modalities, and a total monocytic loss of function rather than controlled immune reactivity is undesirable. Indeed, infectious complications have been reported in anti-TNF-treated patients (Nahar et al. 2003). Another important aspect to be taken into account is the nature of the therapeutic agents. Recent data indicate a differential clinical effect of the humanized anti-TNF antibody infliximab versus the humanized TNF receptor etanercept (Scallon et al. 2002), which might be explained by a different reverse signaling of mTNF.

7.6 Therapy/Intervention

The TNF superfamily encompasses a number of biologically powerful members and knowledge of their function is steadily increasing. So far, only one molecule, namely TNF, has been found to be able to serve as a useful target for immunotherapy. For treatment of patients with chronic inflammatory diseases like rheumatoid arthritis or Crohn's disease, either monoclonal antibodies or soluble TNFR constructs have been used as TNF antagonists with benefit for the patients (Hanauer et al. 2002; Shanahan and St Clair 2002; ten Hove et al. 2002). However, since TNF has a central role in the defense of microbial infections, therapeutic neutralization of TNF not only reduces the inflammatory reaction in patients with chronic inflammatory diseases but also enhances the risk of infections such as tuberculosis (Gardam et al. 2003).

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Regulation of Immunoreceptor Activities: The Paradigm of the Type I Fc ϵ Receptor

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8.1

Introduction

Antigen-specific activation of immunocytes is initiated upon clustering their respective multichain immune recognition receptors (MIRR) (e. g. TCR, BCR, Fc receptors; Keegan and Paul 1992). All members of the MIRR family consist of membranal subunits responsible for antigen recognition, the majority of which are non-covalently associated with one or more transmembrane subunits, containing conserved 18-amino-acid-long sequences (E/DxxYxxLxxxxxxxxYxxL) (where x denotes any amino acid) within their cytoplasmic tails. These motifs were first identified and described by Michael Reth in 1989 (Reth 1989), and were later named immunoreceptor tyrosine-based activation motifs (ITAMs) (Cambier 1995), as they are responsible for coupling the respective MIRRs to their cellular signaling cascades. The key event required for initiating the signaling machinery is phosphorylation of the ITAMs' canonical tyrosines by protein tyrosine kinases (PTKs) which become proximal to the receptors upon their aggregation (Paolini et al. 1991). Signals generated thereafter involve many of the same coupling molecules, which become activated and subsequently induce events such as the transient rise in free cytosolic calcium ion concentrations, gene transcription and exo- or endocytosis, etc.

Here, we illustrate a receptor's stimulus-response coupling cascade using type I Fc ϵ receptor (Fc ϵ RI) as a model. In the first part of this chapter (Sect. 8.2), we discuss in detail the current understanding of the molecular mechanisms that couple the Fc ϵ RI stimulus to the secretion of proinflammatory mediators. Our focus will then be on distinct regulatory mechanisms, primarily those exerting inhibition of the above cascade (Sect. 8.3).

8.2

Type I Fc ϵ Receptor (Fc ϵ RI)-Mediated Cell Responses

8.2.1

Fc ϵ RI Structure, Expression and Function

Fc ϵ RI is a tetrameric molecule composed of three polypeptide subunits: α -, β - and a disulfide-linked γ -chain homodimer (Metzger 1992). The extracellular part of the α -subunit contains two extracellular Ig-like domains (Garman et al. 1998),

which bind with high affinity ($K_d=10^{-9}$ – 10^{-10} M) to the Fc part of monomeric IgE class antibodies (Helm et al. 1988). The single transmembrane stretch of the α -subunit contains several charged amino acid residues, which together with hydrophobic interactions mediate the association of the α -subunit with the ITAM containing γ - and β -chains (Zidovetzki et al. 2003). While the γ -subunit is essential for the Fc ϵ RI-induced signal transduction (Letourneur and Klausner 1991), the β -subunit has been proposed to function as an amplifier (Lin et al. 1996) and/or as a possible suppressor, i.e., a modulator (Erdei et al. 1995, 1998; Wilson et al. 1995; Furumoto et al. 2004), of the γ -chain-mediated signaling events.

While the Fc ϵ RI of rodents has an obligatory $\alpha\beta\gamma_2$ tetrameric structure, human Fc ϵ RI is expressed as both trimeric ($\alpha\gamma_2$) and tetrameric ($\alpha\beta\gamma_2$) structures (Kinet 1999). The cellular distribution of human and rodent Fc ϵ RI is also different. Rodent Fc ϵ RI is only expressed on mast cells (MCs) and basophils, whereas expression of human Fc ϵ RI extends to monocytes (Maurer et al. 1993), eosinophils (Gounni et al. 1994), platelets (Joseph et al. 1997), Langerhans cells (Bieber et al. 1992; Wang et al. 1992) and dendritic cells (DC) (Maurer et al. 1996). Interestingly, normal human monocytes express 10- to 100-fold less Fc ϵ receptors than circulating basophils (Maurer et al. 1993; Kinet 1999).

Clustering of the Fc ϵ RI on mast cells and basophils triggers a biochemical cascade that culminates in secretion of granule-stored mediators (Barsumian et al. 1981), and the de novo synthesis and secretion of arachidonic acid metabolites (Lewis et al. 1982; Razin et al. 1983; Siraganian et al. 1983) and several cytokines (Wodnar-Filipowicz et al. 1989; Gordon et al. 1990; Galli et al. 1991; Gordon and Galli 1991; Sayama et al. 2002). Upon secretion, these mediators affect many other cells: in particular, they mobilize immune system cells (e.g., neutrophils) and thus initiate an early immune response to pathogens such as parasites and bacteria (reviewed in Malaviya and Abraham 2001). On the other hand, secretion of these mediators is also often associated with the induction of type I IgE-dependent allergic reactions (Kinet 1999).

The relevance of Fc ϵ RI expression on the antigen-presenting cells (APC) (such as monocytes and DC/Langerhans cells) is not yet fully understood. However, several studies suggest that Fc ϵ RI functions as an allergen-focusing molecule on these cells (Maurer et al. 1995). It has been shown that allergens are more efficiently taken up, processed and presented to T cells following targeting to APC via Fc ϵ RI compared to allergen binding to APC in the conventional manner in vivo (Stingl and Maurer 1997; Kraft et al. 2001). This seems to contribute to IgE-mediated delayed-type hypersensitivity reactions that are thought to play a pivotal role in atopic diseases. Indeed, it has been reported that Langerhans cells of atopic individuals display elevated levels of Fc ϵ RI (particularly in atopic dermatitis skin). In addition, recent studies of Fc ϵ RI signal transduction and function on APC suggest additional mechanisms by which Fc ϵ RI engagement on APC could affect inflammatory reactions. Specifically, engagement of Fc ϵ RI on APC has been shown to induce major signaling events such as activation of protein tyrosine kinases and increased activation of transcription factors, eventually resulting in secretion of several cytokines (TNF- α) and chemokines (IL-8, MCP-1) (Kraft et al. 2002a,b).

8.2.2

FcεRI Stimulus-Response Coupling Cascade on Mast Cells

Our understanding of stimulus-response coupling networks in cells of the immune system has undergone dramatic advancement during the past decade, together with the field of molecular signaling, which is one of the fastest evolving fields in the life sciences. It is constantly changing, making it difficult to present a final paradigm. To illustrate this, we first briefly present the “original” model of the FcεRI stimulus-response coupling cascade in mast cells, and then follow this with detailed updates summarizing current understanding.

8.2.2.1

The “Original” Model

In unperturbed mast cells, a fraction of the PTK Lyn molecules is constitutively associated with the FcεRI β-chain (probably via its SH3/SH4 domains) (Vonakis et al. 1997, 2001). Upon FcεRI clustering, the adjacent Lyn transphosphorylates the ITAMs present on both β- and γ-chains of the receptor complex (Eiseman and Bolen 1992; Pribluda et al. 1994). While the phosphorylated β-chain functions as a binding site for the SH2 domain of activated Lyn (and hence the β-chain may serve as an amplifier), the phosphorylated γ-chain dimer serves as a docking site for SH2 domains of another PTK–Syk, which is then activated by proximal Lyn (Kihara and Siraganian 1994; Scharenberg et al. 1995). These two activated PTKs then phosphorylate a set of several signal-relay or adaptor molecules such as the linker for activation of T cells (LAT) (Saitoh et al. 2000) and enzymes including phosphatidylinositol 3-kinase (PI3 K) and Bruton’s tyrosine kinase (Btk) (Kawakami et al. 1994), which in turn contribute to the activation of phospholipase C-γ (PLC-γ) (Nadler et al. 2000). Activated PLC-γ subsequently hydrolyzes the membranal phosphatidylinositol-3,4-bisphosphate [PI(3,4)P₂] into the two second messengers, inositol-1,4,5-trisphosphate (IP₃) and diacylglycerol (DAG). IP₃ then binds to specific receptors on the endoplasmic reticulum (ER), causing release of Ca²⁺ ions from ER internal stores. Depletion of the latter triggers influx of extracellular calcium and results in the prolongation of the transient elevation of free cytosolic Ca²⁺ ion concentration, which is required for the FcεRI-mediated responses. DAG is essential for the activation of certain isoforms of protein kinase C (PKC), which are required for the secretory response as well as coupling of the stimulus to the nucleus (Zhang et al. 1997b).

However, during the last 5 years, some novel insights have been obtained concerning the above stimulus-response cascade. Specifically: (1) binding of monomeric IgE molecules to the FcεRI has been reported to initiate several important cellular responses, suggesting that it does not only play a passive role; (2) the initiation of FcεRI signaling has been suggested to depend on the involvement of plasma membrane microdomains known as lipid rafts; (3) PTK Lyn, which was considered to be the key kinase of the FcεRI coupling cascade, was found to be dispensable for the secretory response, implying that an alternative PTK must be involved; (4) a novel PTK required for coupling the receptor stimulus to the secre-

tory response has recently been identified as Fyn; (5) the Fc ϵ RI-mediated PLC- γ activation, which was originally thought to be dependent on Btk and PI3 K activity, is apparently controlled by in different mechanisms; (6) regulation of Fc ϵ RI-induced gene transcription and subsequent protein de novo synthesis are currently better understood.

All these findings are presented in detail below.

8.2.2.2

The Function of Monomeric IgE (mIgE)

The long-standing paradigm of the Fc ϵ RI stimulus-response coupling cascade states that IgE binding to Fc ϵ RI endows it with specific antigen recognition capacity and that only upon Fc ϵ RI clustering (e. g., with multivalent antigen or anti-IgE Abs) does triggering of the cascade take place (Beaven and Metzger 1993; Turner and Kinet 1999). Recently, however, several reports have suggested that monomeric IgE (mIgE) binding to Fc ϵ RI initiates multiple signaling pathways, which result in several important cellular responses. These range from enhanced cell adhesion to secretion of stored and/or de novo synthesized mediators (Kalesnikoff et al. 2001; Oka et al. 2004). Unfortunately, upon critical examination of these reports, considerable discrepancies are observed in experimental protocols, results and conclusions. Hence, the above observation requires a more elaborate and critical discussion.

Probably the first observation suggesting that Fc ϵ RI binding of mIgE is capable of inducing a biological response was reported by Hsu and Yamaguchi, who showed that exposure of (human and rodent) mast cells to IgE results in a striking (up to 32-fold) upregulation of surface expression of Fc ϵ RI, both in vitro or in vivo (Hsu and MacGlashan 1996; Yamaguchi et al. 1997a,b). Further studies have established that this enhanced expression is in fact caused by the increased half-life of the surface-resident Fc ϵ RI rather than by its increased synthesis and/or transport to the plasma membrane (Borkowski et al. 2001; Kubo et al. 2001).

More recently, two independent studies have reported that mIgE binding leads to the prolonged survival of mouse mast cells under growth-factor-limiting conditions (Asai et al. 2001; Kalesnikoff et al. 2001). However, these two studies differed in the proposed mechanisms: Kalesnikoff et al. found that mIgE binding to Fc ϵ RI induces tyrosine phosphorylation of several intracellular components (e. g., the receptor's β - and γ -chains, Shc and SHIP), as well as activation of PI3 K, Akt and MAP kinases (Erks, JNK, p38). This response was followed by increased de-novo cytokine synthesis which was suggested to be responsible for the observed cell survival in an autocrine-dependent fashion (Kalesnikoff et al. 2001). In contrast, Asai et al. did not detect any signaling events, or significant cytokine secretion by the mIgE-treated cells. Further confusion has been caused by several more recent papers demonstrating that, in contrast to the studies of Kalesnikoff and Asai, mIgEs are capable of inducing secretion of granule-stored mediators by the rat mucosal mast cells of the RBL-2H3 line (Oka et al. 2004; Pandey et al. 2004). These marked differences in cellular responses naturally raised several key questions: namely, what is the nature of the assumed stimulus produced by mIgE bind-

ing and what mechanism couples it to the biological response? Does mIgE binding to FcεRI induce in it a conformational change that couples it to the biological response or does it rather mediate aggregation of the FcεRI resident molecules?

The simplest rational could be that the supposed mIgE still contains traces of IgE oligomers, which upon FcεR binding cause its clustering. However, in most of the studies, considerable efforts were made in mIgE purification and in ascertaining its monomeric nature. Hence one may exclude this explanation.

Further insights into the events induced upon mIgE binding have been provided by a recent study by Kitaura et al. (2003). They found that mIgE binding does not induce any biological responses in mast cells ablated of Syk, implying that the coupling does involve tyrosine phosphorylation (although not always detectable) mediated by this PTK. More importantly, however, their (and other) studies demonstrated that addition of monovalent haptens for which the IgE is specific abrogates the responses (Kalesnikoff et al. 2001; Kitaura et al. 2003; Pandey et al. 2004). This raised the possibility that FcεRI resident IgEs may be clustered via binding of their antigen recognition site to an epitope on their own structure or to another cell-surface component. Such an interaction may result from artificial experimental conditions employed in all these studies, where the rather high cell-surface expression levels of FcεRI (10- to 100-fold higher than those of TCR) are all occupied by one and the same monoclonal IgE. Moreover, one is dealing with the two-dimensional concentration of the FcεRI-IgE complexes, which is therefore markedly higher (Schweitzer-Stenner and Pecht 2005). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that under such non-physiological conditions, even a low affinity of the IgE will still lead to either homo- or heterotypic aggregation and induce clustering of the receptors. In line with this rational is the observation that different monoclonal IgEs were found to have distinct capacities to induce FcεRI aggregation and the subsequent biological responses (Kitaura et al. 2003). While IgE-class mAbs such as SPE7 induce significant cytokine production with strong antiapoptotic effects, others (such as H1) display a lower (or undetectable) capacity to induce cytokine secretion and exert less robust survival effects. Significantly, recent studies of mAb SPE7 have demonstrated that its binding site may exist in at least two distinct (unbound) conformations, which markedly differ in their epitope binding specificities (James and Tawfik 2003; James et al. 2003). The first conformation has a relatively flat binding site, whereas the other isomer exhibits a deep hole typical of hapten binding antibodies. As expected, screening studies have demonstrated that SPE7 binds to several structurally unrelated compounds with a broad range of affinities (James et al. 2003).

8.2.2.3

Lipid Rafts and FcεRI Activation

The current model for the initiation of FcεRI signaling proposes the existence of plasma membrane microdomains known as lipid rafts (Baird et al. 1999). These detergent-insoluble structures (enriched in sphingolipids and cholesterol) are thought to control the spatial organization of key coupling molecules, including receptors, non-receptor PTKs and phosphatidylinositol-associating proteins.

According to this model, Fc ϵ RI (which is excluded from rafts in unperturbed cells) translocates upon its aggregation into these microdomains (Field et al. 1995, 1997), where it interacts or becomes proximal to Src-family kinases. These enzymes are constitutively associated with lipid rafts (Honda et al. 2000), as they are myristoylated/palmitoylated on their N-terminus (saturated fatty acid preferentially associates with cholesterol and hence with rafts). This interaction and proximity are suggested to initiate their trans-activation, and thereby the subsequent signaling events which eventually result in a biological response.

In order to maintain an efficient response, it is important that Src family members are strictly controlled: Their negative regulation is carried out by the C-terminal Src kinase (Csk), which is recruited to the lipid rafts upon Fc ϵ RI clustering by a transmembrane adaptor named Cas-binding protein (CBP) (see Sect. 8.3.2). There, Csk phosphorylates these kinases at an autoregulatory C-terminal tyrosine (Honda et al. 1997) and keeps their activity in check (see Sect. 8.3.1). In contrast, the positive regulation involves CD45, a transmembrane protein tyrosine phosphatase (PTP), which dephosphorylates the regulatory tyrosine, and thereby activates the PTK and potentiates the Fc ϵ RI-induced secretory response (Berger et al. 1994; Adamczewski et al. 1995; Murakami et al. 2000; Hamaguchi et al. 2001).

8.2.2.4

Lyn Activation and Its Significance

The above-described original linear cascade model (8.2.2.1), where Lyn functions as the exclusive PTK initiating Fc ϵ RI signaling, has served as a paradigm for a long time (Nadler et al. 2000). However, more recent studies have suggested that Lyn may not be the sole Src family member required for Fc ϵ RI activation and proposed the activity of another PTK (Parravicini et al. 2002). The first evidence supporting this notion mainly came from studies of bone marrow mast cells (BMMC) derived from Lyn-deficient mice (Nishizumi and Yamamoto 1997; Kawakami et al. 2000b). It was reasoned that if Lyn is the only PTK required for initiating the Fc ϵ RI signal transduction cascade, then Lyn ablation should abrogate all Fc ϵ RI-mediated downstream events (in a manner analogous to the Syk knock-out; Costello et al. 1996; see below). Indeed, defects in Fc ϵ RI-mediated calcium mobilization and tyrosyl phosphorylation were observed in Lyn-deficient mast cells. Surprisingly, however, Fc ϵ RI-induced degranulation, MAP kinase activation and cytokine production were found operative in these lyn $^{-/-}$ mast cells (Nishizumi and Yamamoto 1997; Kawakami et al. 2000b). Recent studies by Rivera and colleagues have demonstrated that lyn $^{-/-}$ mast cells display even higher secretory response to Fc ϵ RI clustering than wild-type (WT) cells (Parravicini et al. 2002). Furthermore, the activation of Akt, PKC δ and MAP kinases (e.g., JNK and Erk), as well as the subsequent production and secretion of cytokines such as IL-2 and TNF- α , are markedly enhanced (and/or prolonged) in the Lyn-deficient mast cells (Kawakami et al. 2000b). These data therefore imply that Lyn is dispensable for the Fc ϵ RI-induced secretory response and that an alternative mechanism(s) must be involved (see Sect. 8.2.2). Moreover, these results demonstrate that, in

addition to its activating capacity, Lyn is also involved in regulatory functions (Harder et al. 2001), which modulate the Fc ϵ RI-induced responses. Such a “dual” role for Lyn has previously been observed in B cells derived from Lyn-ablated mice, which are hyper-responsive to membranous IgM clustering-induced proliferation, while they are impaired in that induced by membranous IgD aggregation (Wang et al. 1996; Horikawa et al. 1999). Additional support for a regulatory function of Lyn stems from studies showing that Lyn is responsible for phosphorylating inhibitory receptors, such as Fc γ RIIB (Malbec et al. 1998), gp49B1, PIR-B (Ho et al. 1999) and MAFA (Xu et al. 2001). These receptors are involved in the negative regulation of the Fc ϵ RI-mediated response, for example, discussed in more detail in Section 8.3 of this chapter.

Finally, it should be stressed that none of the studies involving Lyn-deficient mast cells (MC) monitored the tyrosine phosphorylation of γ -subunits [despite the fact that several reviews (Turner and Kinet 1999; Nadler et al. 2000) report that it is, like β -chain, abolished in *lyn*^{-/-} cells]. Since the tyrosine phosphorylation of γ -ITAM was shown to be essential for initiating the Fc ϵ RI-mediated secretory response, logically an additional PTK must be involved in its phosphorylation. Honda et al. (2000) provided indirect evidence that PTK Fyn can also induce tyrosine phosphorylation of both β - and γ -receptor subunits (Honda et al. 2000). To provide a complete answer to this crucial question, additional studies (e.g., using *fyn*^{-/-} *lyn*^{-/-} double knockout mice) are necessary.

8.2.2.5

Fyn–Gab-2–PI3 K-Mediated Signaling

As mentioned above, Lyn's exclusive role has been challenged, and another Fc ϵ RI proximal PTK, the Src family member Fyn (feline yes-related protein), was clearly shown to be an essential element of the coupling cascade. Evidence that Fyn is responsible for inducing signaling events crucial for mast cell degranulation was provided by Parravicini et al. (2002), who showed that *fyn*^{-/-} BMMCs are (unlike *lyn*^{-/-} BMMC) impaired (close to 90%) in their Fc ϵ RI-induced secretory response. The same group also identified a downstream effector of Fyn activity – the adaptor protein Gab2 – which was found to exhibit markedly reduced tyrosine phosphorylation in *fyn*^{-/-} but not in *lyn*^{-/-} mast cells upon Fc ϵ RI clustering (Parravicini et al. 2002). Furthermore, mast cells derived from *gab2*^{-/-} and *fyn*^{-/-} mice display similar phenotype (e.g., defective activation of PI3 K, and secretory response) (Gu et al. 2001), suggesting that Gab2 may be a key coupling element between Fyn and PI3 K activation.

PI3 K is assumed to play a central role in linking the Fc ϵ RI stimulus with the mast cell secretory response, as its specific inhibition by wortmannin results in a dramatic suppression of Fc ϵ RI-induced degranulation (and the *de novo* synthesis of several cytokines) (Barker et al. 1995). The products of PI3 K activity are: phosphatidylinositol-3,4-bisphosphate [PI(3,4)P₂] and phosphatidylinositol-3,4,5-trisphosphate [PI(3,4,5)P₃], which can bind to pleckstrin homology (PH) domains of several signaling proteins such as Btk, PLC- γ , Akt and PDK1 (see Fig. 8.1). This interaction facilitates recruitment of the above proteins to the plasma

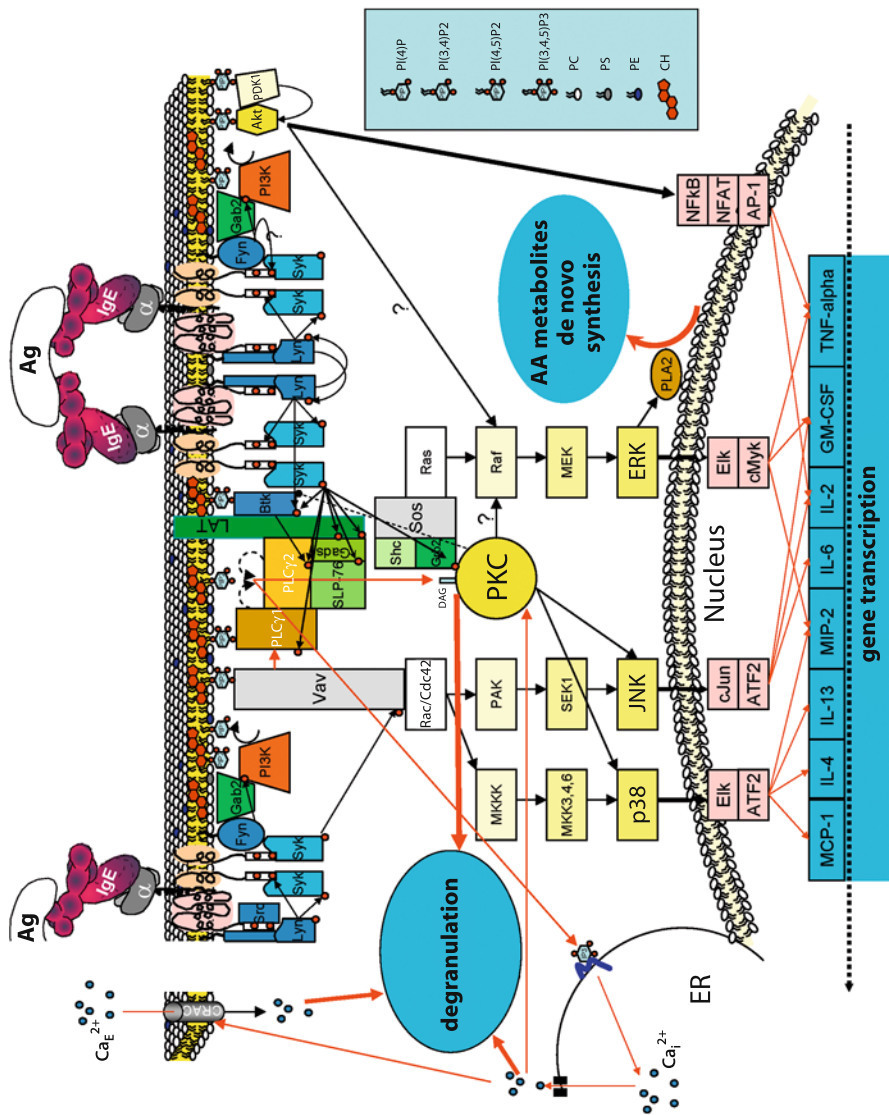


Fig. 8.1. A scheme illustrating the network coupling the type I Fc receptor for IgE (FcεRI) to mast cell secretory responses: aggregation of IgE-residing in FcεRI leads to translocation of receptors into lipid rafts, where they interact with raft-associated Src family kinases such as Fyn and Lyn. This interaction is a prerequisite for efficient phosphorylation of the ITAMs present on both β- and γ-chains of the FcεRI complex. The phosphorylated γ-chain dimer then serves as a docking site for PTK–Syk, which becomes activated mostly by proximal Lyn associated with β-chain. Activated Syk then phosphorylates membrane-associated protein LAT which becomes a docking site for a number of cytosolic proteins such as SLP-76, Gads and PLC-γ. This multiprotein complex is then phosphorylated by Syk and/or Lyn. In parallel, activated Fyn phosphorylates the adaptor protein Gab2, which then associates with PI3 K and thereby enables its recruitment to the plasma membrane and subsequent activation. Active PI3 K catalyzes the production of PI(3,4)P₂ and PI(3,4,5)P₃ which bind to pleckstrin homology (PH) domains of several signaling proteins such as Btk, PLC-γ, Vav, Akt and PDK1. This interaction also promotes translocation of the above proteins to the plasma membrane, where they become activated. Tyrosine-phosphorylated PLC-γ catalyzes hydrolysis of PIP₂ in the membrane, forming IP₃ and 1,2-diacylglycerol – second messengers that release Ca²⁺ from internal stores and activate PKC, respectively. Binding of IP₃ to specific receptors in the endoplasmic reticulum results in a depletion of Ca²⁺ stores, which activates store-operated Ca²⁺ entry (I_{CRAC}) from the extracellular medium. Btk, SLP-76, LAT and PLC-γ are all essential for generating signals for sustained Ca²⁺ influx. Both elevated Ca²⁺ levels and activated PKC eventually induce secretion of granule-stored mediators. Tyrosine phosphorylation and activation of other enzymes and adaptors, including Vav, Shc, Grb2 and Sos, stimulate small GTPases such as Rac, Cdc42 and Ras. These pathways lead to activation of the ERK, JNK and p38 MAP kinases, phosphorylation of transcription factors that induce the de novo synthesis and secretion of cytokines, and activation of cytoplasmic phospholipase A₂ (cPLA₂) to release arachidonic acid (AA) metabolites. Adaptor proteins are illustrated in *green*; PTKs in *blue*; S/T kinases in *yellow*; lipases in *brown*; GTPases in *white*; GDP/GTP exchange factors in *grey*; transcription factors in *pink*. *Black arrows* indicate (de)phosphorylation; *red arrows* binding/activation



membrane, where they may become activated. This step is assumed to be essential for coupling the activating stimulus to the respective biological response. Taken together, the Fyn–Gab2 complex therefore appears to be an important link between FcεRI clustering and PI3 K activation, and thus is essential for coupling the FcεRI stimulus to the secretory response (Fig. 8.1).

8.2.2.6

The Syk–LAT–SLP-76 Signaling Pathway

The spleen tyrosine kinase (Syk) is expressed by hematopoietic, epithelial and endothelial cells (Taniguchi et al. 1991). In mast cells, Syk plays an essential role in coupling the FcεRI-mediated tyrosine phosphorylation to the secretion of granules stored and de novo synthesized inflammatory mediators (reviewed in Siraganian et al. 2002). One of the first indications of the critical role of Syk in the FcεRI signaling pathway came from the early studies of Siraganian and col-

leagues, who identified a variant of the RBL-2H3 cell line with no detectable Syk expression and activity (Zhang et al. 1996). In these Syk-deficient TB1A2 cells, FcεRI aggregation leads to tyrosine phosphorylation of the receptor's β- and γ-subunits, while it did not induce any detectable tyrosine phosphorylation of other cellular proteins and any secretory response. Reconstitution of Syk expression by transfection restored the protein tyrosine phosphorylation as well as the increase in intracellular free Ca²⁺ and histamine release in response to the FcεRI aggregation (Zhang et al. 1996). These findings were then confirmed by the studies of Costello et al. (1996), who used mast cells derived from Syk-deficient mice. These cells also failed to degranulate, as well as to synthesize and secrete leukotrienes or cytokines upon FcεRI clustering.

Activated Syk has been shown to phosphorylate a number of cytosolic substrates (see Fig. 8.1), such as Shc (Jabril-Cuenod et al. 1996), Cbl (Ota et al. 1996) and SLP-76 (SH2 domain-containing leukocyte protein of 76 kDa) (Hendricks-Taylor et al. 1997), some of which were also shown to play an essential role in coupling the upstream signals to the secretory response. One of the most important ones, however, seems to be LAT. This small transmembrane adaptor protein couples the activated PTKs to their downstream substrates, as, upon its tyrosine phosphorylation, LAT recruits them to the plasma membrane, where they may become activated (see Fig. 8.1). LAT-deficient BMMCs display an intact tyrosine phosphorylation of FcεRI β- and γ-chains, of Syk, and Vav following FcεRI aggregation. However, the tyrosine phosphorylation of the downstream elements including SLP-76, PLC-γ1 and PLC-γ2, as well as Ca²⁺ mobilization are dramatically reduced. Hence, the FcεRI-induced degranulation, MAPK activation and subsequent cytokine production are disrupted in LAT-deficient BMMCs (Saitoh et al. 2000). Consistent with these results, BMMCs from SLP76(−/−) mice fail to degranulate and to secrete IL-6 upon FcεRI clustering, suggesting that the Syk-dependent LAT–SLP-76 complex is essential for FcεRI-induced secretory response (Pivniouk et al. 1999).

Taken together, the current model of FcεRI-induced activation of mast cells involves two independent coupling pathways (Fig. 8.1): the first involving (Lyn)–Syk–LAT, and the second that of Fyn–Gab2–PI3 K signaling. Both pathways are activated in parallel, and complement each other's induction of the secretory response.

However, even this updated model does not provide a complete understanding of the FcεRI coupling cascade. In particular, it is still unclear why Lyn, which is thought to operate upstream of Syk (reviewed in Turner and Kinet 1999), is dispensable (Nishizumi and Yamamoto 1997), while Syk is essential for mediating secretory responses (Costello et al. 1996). The simple explanation could be that, in addition to Lyn, another PTK may also activate Syk. Indeed, experiments using Lyn-deficient mast cells demonstrated that FcεRI-induced tyrosine phosphorylation of Syk is delayed and dramatically reduced, yet is still clearly detectable (Paravicini et al. 2002). Furthermore, *in vitro* kinase assays using GST-HS1 as substrate demonstrated that Syk is significantly activated even in Lyn−/− mast cells in response to FcεRI clustering (Kawakami et al. 2000b). However, it is still unclear which PTK contributes to Syk activation. Therefore additional studies using, e.g., double knockout mice are needed for its identification.

More recently, Reth et al. came up with a novel concept of Syk's activation and involvement in BCR signaling. They found that Syk can interact with BCR independent of Lyn activity, and, unlike Lyn, can phosphorylate both tyrosines of the BCR ITAM motif (Rolli et al. 2002). These data therefore suggest that Syk may not necessarily be controlled by Lyn's activity and can actually initiate the BCR signaling cascade by itself. Whether this model can also be applied to other activating receptors, such as Fc ϵ RI, is still unknown.

8.2.2.7

The (Btk)–PLC- γ –PKC Coupling Cascade

In addition to the PTK family members discussed above, Fc ϵ RI clustering was also found to activate Bruton's tyrosine kinase (Btk) (Kawakami et al. 1994). Btk is a member of the Btk/Tec family of PTKs, which are distinguished by the presence of a large N-terminal region containing a PH domain, a single SH3 and SH2 domains, and by the lack of an autoregulatory C-terminal tyrosine (Kawakami et al. 1996, 1999). The importance of Btk in the Fc ϵ RI coupling cascade has been demonstrated in studies using mast cells derived from both btk $^{-/-}$ and x-linked immunodeficiency (Xid) mice (which express a mutated Btk) (Hata et al. 1998a; Kawakami et al. 2000b). These mast cells display a reduction in the transient rise of free cytosolic Ca $^{2+}$ ions, degranulation and, particularly, the production and secretion of certain cytokines. In contrast, tyrosine phosphorylation levels of several proteins such as SLP-76, LAT and Vav are normal in these cells (Hata et al. 1998a; Kawakami et al. 2000b).

According to an accepted model, the PH domain of Btk is required for its recruitment to the plasma membrane (PM), where it binds to PI(3,4,5)P $_3$, a product of PI3 K activation (Salim et al. 1996). There, Btk becomes an accessible substrate for Syk and Lyn, which activate it by tyrosine phosphorylation (Rawlings et al. 1996; Kawakami et al. 2000a). Btk then activates both PLC- γ 1 and PLC- γ 2 isoforms (Schneider et al. 1992; Wen et al. 2002), which have also been recruited to the PM by their PH domains (i.e., in a PI3 K-dependent manner) upon Fc ϵ RI clustering. However, more recent findings contradict this model and call for its reconsideration.

First, Btk was recently found to be dispensable for PLC- γ 1/2 activation, as Btk-deficient BMMCs demonstrate no or minimal changes in PLC- γ 1 and PLC- γ 2 phosphorylation respectively (Kawakami et al. 2000b). Second, the two PLC- γ isoforms seem to differ in their intracellular localization and mechanisms of activation (particularly regarding species differences). While PLC- γ 1 is recruited from the cytosol to the plasma membrane upon Fc ϵ RI clustering, PLC- γ 2 was shown to be plasma membrane associated even in unperturbed RBL-2H3 cells (Barker et al. 1998). Finally, Fc ϵ RI-induced activation of PLC- γ 2 is not blocked by wortmannin (PI3 K inhibitor) in RBL-2H3 cells, suggesting that it is independent of PI3 K activity (Barker et al. 1998) [PLC- γ 1 activation is independent of PI3 K in human mast cells (Tkaczyk et al. 2003)].

The PI3 K-independent mechanism of PLC- γ 1/2 activation seems to involve a multiple signaling complex assembled on the transmembrane adaptor LAT

with molecules such as SLP-76 and Gads (Pivniouk et al. 1999; Saitoh et al. 2000; Fig. 8.1). This complex serves as a scaffold, which keeps PLC- γ in proximity to the plasma membrane, so that it can be activated by proximal PTKs such as Lyn and Syk. Mast cells deficient in LAT or SLP-76 exhibit significantly reduced PLC- γ 1 and completely abolished PLC- γ 2 activation upon Fc ϵ RI clustering. Furthermore, the guanine nucleotide exchange factor Vav was also shown to regulate PLC- γ activity, yet by a mechanism that is still not fully understood (Manetz et al. 2001).

When activated, both PLC- γ isoforms hydrolyze membrane-associated phosphatidylinositol 4,5-bisphosphate [PI(4,5)P₂] into the second messengers, i.e., (1) inositol 1,4,5-triphosphate (IP₃) and (2) diacylglycerol (DAG). While the former is required for calcium release from internal stores and subsequent activation of the Ca²⁺-dependent isoforms (i.e., α - and β) of protein kinase C (PKC), the latter activates Ca²⁺-independent PKC isoforms (δ -, ϵ - and ζ) (Ozawa et al. 1993; Chang et al. 1997). It has been shown in several studies that activated PKC is essential (and sufficient) for Fc ϵ RI-induced MC degranulation (Sagi-Eisenberg et al. 1985). Furthermore, PKC was shown to directly activate several MAP kinases (e.g., p38 and JNK) and thus to control the de novo cytokine production (Razin et al. 1994; Zhang et al. 1997b).

Taken together, recent data suggest that both PLC γ isoforms are regulated by two distinct mechanisms and that Btk is dispensable for their activation. How then does Btk regulate calcium mobilization (which should reflect PLC- γ activity)? A possible explanation may come from recent studies of BCR signaling. It has been shown that BCR clustering induces Btk association with phosphatidylinositol 4-phosphate 5-kinase (PIP₅ K), the enzymes that synthesize PI(4,5)P₂ (Saito et al. 2003). This enzyme–enzyme interaction provides a shuttling mechanism that allows Btk to stimulate the production of PI(4,5)P₂, which is then hydrolyzed by PLC- γ into the second messengers. Whether this mechanism is also involved in the Fc ϵ RI coupling cascade is yet to be shown.

8.2.2.8

The Role of MAP Kinases in Fc ϵ RI-Induced Gene Transcription

Concomitantly with the secretion of granule-stored mediators (first phase response), Fc ϵ RI aggregation initiates a network of biochemical processes, which couple the stimulus to nuclear responses such as gene transcription and subsequent de novo protein synthesis (see Fig. 8.1).

DNA microarray analysis of Fc ϵ RI-induced gene expression has recently demonstrated that after 1–2 h of Fc ϵ RI stimulation, more than 2,400 genes (half of them of unknown function) exhibit 2- to 200-fold changes in their mRNA levels (Sayama et al. 2002). The Fc ϵ RI-induced transcriptional processes include changes in the expression of a dozen different cytokines (IL-1–6, IL-9–14, IL-16, IL-18, MIF, TNF- α , GM-CSF, LIF, CSF-1, etc.) and chemokines (IL-8, MCP-1–4, MIP-1, MIP-3, RANTES, etc.) as well as that of numerous adhesion molecules (α - and β -integrins, ICAM-1, SLAMF, CD40L, CD82, CD83, etc.) (Galli et al. 1991; Gonzalez-Espinosa et al. 2003). These newly synthesized proteins are then either

secreted by the cell (cytokines and chemokines) and may thus contribute to sustained inflammatory responses (second phase response), or expressed on the MC surface (e. g., adhesion molecules) in order to mediate/modulate interactions with other immunocytes or epithelial cells.

Fc ϵ RI-induced transcription of the above genes is regulated by a variety of transcription factors (e. g., Elk, NFAT, AP-1), which, upon their activation, translocate into the nucleus and bind to specific gene promoters (Turner and Cantrell 1997; Kitaura et al. 2000). These factors are activated by multiple coupling pathways, which particularly involve the mitogen-activated protein kinases (MAPK) (Fukamachi et al. 1993; Kimata et al. 2000) and the Ser/Thr protein kinase Akt (PKB) (Kitaura et al. 2000). It has been shown that Fc ϵ RI aggregation activates three distinct members of the MAPK family, namely Erk (extracellular signal-regulated kinases) (Fukamachi et al. 1993), JNK (c-Jun NH₂-terminal kinase) (Ishizuka et al. 1996) and p38 MAPK (Zhang et al. 1997a). In general, these kinases are 60–70% identical to each other and differ mainly in the sequence and size of their activation loop. Each MAPK subfamily activates different transcription factors regulating distinct genes (Johnson and Lapadat 2002). In contrast, one specific gene can also be regulated by distinct transcription factors and thus by different MAPK pathways (e. g., Fc ϵ RI-induced GM-CSF production may be driven by both the ERK and JNK pathways) (Kimata et al. 2000).

It has been shown that the intensity of extracellular stimulus exerted by Fc ϵ RI (i. e., Ag concentration, Fc ϵ RI occupancy by specific IgE) controls which MAPK pathway will be preferentially activated. While a weak stimulus favors the p38 MAPK pathway, leading to the production of lymphokines such as IL-4, IL-13 and MCP-1, a stronger stimulus favors the Erk coupling pathway (Gonzalez-Espinosa et al. 2003), causing the production and secretion of, e. g., TNF- α and metabolites derived from free arachidonic acid (AA) (Zhang et al. 1997a; Miura et al. 1999). Unlike cytokines, the latter class of mediators, which includes prostaglandins (PGD) and leukotrienes (LT), is synthesized and secreted in a very different time frame following Fc ϵ RI clustering; While secretion of most cytokines usually requires at least 2–6 h for completion, secretion of newly synthesized fatty acid metabolites is essentially complete after 15 min and thus immediately follows the secretion of granule-stored mediators. All MAP kinases are activated by the dual phosphorylation of their Thr and Tyr residues in a “TXY” activation motif by the dual-specificity MAPKK. The MAPKK, in turn, is phosphorylated by a serine/threonine kinase termed MAPKKK (Dong et al. 2002; Johnson and Lapadat 2002).

Below we discuss the role of the three MAPK family members and of Akt in Fc ϵ RI-induced *de novo* synthesis.

Extracellular Signal-Regulated Kinase (Erk)

In general, the Erk signaling pathway is involved in the regulation of diverse biological responses such as cell growth and differentiation. It is activated in response to a wide range of extracellular stimuli, including growth factors, cytokines, virus infection, GPCR ligands, carcinogens, transforming agents and antigens. When activated, cytosolic Erk translocates to the nucleus and activates transcription by phosphorylation of kinases such as p90RSK and MSK-1 and transcription factors such as Elk-1, c-Myc and Stat3.

Activation of Erk1 and 2 occurs upon double phosphorylation of their Thr-Glu-Tyr motif by an upstream MAP kinase kinase (MKK1/2) (reviewed in Dong et al. 2002; Johnson and Lapadat 2002). MKK1/2 is activated by a serine/threonine protein kinase Raf-1 which exists in three different isoforms (i.e., c-Raf, B-Raf, A-Raf). The most common activator of Raf-1 is the proto-oncogene Ras. Active, GTP-bound Ras recruits Raf-1 to the plasma membrane, where Raf-1 is activated by phosphorylation. One of the Raf-1 isoforms (B-Raf) can also be activated by another small GTPase – Rap – which has an identical effector domain to that of Ras. Interestingly, Rap was shown to suppress activation of c-Raf, and therefore serves as both the activator as well as the inhibitor of Erk signaling. Further known activators of Raf include PTK Src, PKC and Akt (reviewed in Chong et al. 2003).

In FcεRI-activated mast cells, the Raf–MKK–Erk pathway is one of the most important coupling elements involved in induced gene transcription. FcεRI clustering was shown to activate all Erk pathway components, including Ras (Prieschl et al. 1995), Raf-1, MKK, Erk1/2 itself (Fukamachi et al. 1993) and the transcription factor Elk (which is downstream of Erk) (Turner and Cantrell 1997; Fig. 8.1). On the other hand, Erk seems also to be activated by a Ras-independent mechanism, as inhibitors of Ras (lovastatin and the farnesylation-specific inhibitor BZA-5B) do not affect FcεRI-induced Erk activation (Graham et al. 1998). Furthermore, unlike other MAPK pathways, FcεRI-mediated Erk activation seems to be independent of PI3 K activity, as PI3 K-specific inhibitors wortmannin or LY294002 have only marginal or no effect on its activation (Ishizuka et al. 1999; Miura and MacGlashan 2000).

FcεRI-induced Erk activation initiates transcription of specific cytokine genes such as TNF-α (Zhang et al. 1997a; Csonga et al. 1998; Miura et al. 1999; Gonzalez-Espinosa et al. 2003), GM-CSF (Kimata et al. 2000) and MIP-2 (Miura et al. 1999; Numahata et al. 2003), while it has no or little effect on, e.g., IL-4 (Ishizuka et al. 1999) or IL-13 (Gibbs and Grabbe 1999; Miura et al. 1999) production. Interestingly, in contrast to previous data, Gelfand et al. reported that FcεRI-induced TNF-α synthesis is not regulated by the Erk pathway in mouse BMMC (Ishizuka et al. 1999).

In addition, several studies have shown that Erk1/2 is also involved in the regulation of AA metabolism and leukotriene de novo synthesis. A selective inhibitor of Erk activity (PD098059) was found to dramatically inhibit FcεRI-induced cPLA₂ activation and subsequent LTC₄ and PGD₂ secretion (Gibbs and Grabbe 1999; Miura et al. 1999; Kimata et al. 2000).

c-Jun Amino-Terminal Kinase (JNK)

Another member of the mitogen-activated protein kinase superfamily is the c-Jun amino-terminal kinase (JNK). JNK is activated following its dual phosphorylation at a Thr-Pro-Tyr motif mostly in response to stress conditions (e.g., heat shock, UV, proinflammatory cytokines or antigens). When activated, JNK phosphorylates c-Jun, a component of the AP-1 transcription factor, which in turn increases its transcriptional activity (Franklin et al. 1992; Pulverer et al. 1991; Smeal et al. 1991). Moreover, JNK was shown to also activate other transcription factors such as ATF2 (Gupta et al. 1995; Livingstone et al. 1995), Elk-1 (Whitmarsh et al. 1995) and Sap-1a (Janknecht and Hunter 1997).

More recently, Fc ϵ RI aggregation has been shown to activate JNK as well as protein kinases upstream of JNK, such as MEK kinase 1 (MEKK1) and JNK kinase (JNKK) (Ishizuka et al. 1996). Further studies have suggested that Fc ϵ RI-induced JNK activation is mostly dependent on PI3 K and its downstream effector Btk. Kawakami et al. (1997) showed that JNK activity is compromised in *btk*-null (or *Xid*) mast cells. These findings are in line with observations demonstrating that the PI3 K inhibitor wortmannin significantly suppresses JNK activation and subsequent TNF- α production following Fc ϵ RI clustering (Ishizuka et al. 1996, 1999).

In addition, Fc ϵ RI-mediated JNK activation is also dependent on the small GTPase Rac1, which is activated by the specific guanine nucleotide exchange factor (GEF) Vav (Teramoto et al. 1997; Arudchandran et al. 2000; Fig. 8.2).

Fc ϵ RI-induced JNK signaling was shown to activate several transcription factors, such as c-Jun, Elk-1 and Sap-1a, which, in turn, initiate transcription of cytokine genes, such as IL-2, IL-6 (Song et al. 1999) and TNF- α (Hata et al. 1998b). Production of GM-CSF in response to Fc ϵ RI aggregation (as well as IL-10 and IL-13 in mast cells activated by LPS) (Masuda et al. 2002) also depends on JNK.

MAP Kinase of 38 kDa (p38)

Over the years, it has been established that, like JNK, p38 is activated mostly in response to stress conditions such as heat shock, UV light, changes in osmotic pressure, pro-inflammatory cytokines, growth factors and upon clustering of a MIRR such as Fc ϵ RI.

There are four known p38 MAP kinase isoforms (α - δ), and all are activated upon phosphorylation of their Thr-Gly-Tyr motif. At least three different MAPK kinases (MKK3, MKK4 and MKK6) can activate p38. These are regulated by other upstream serine-threonine kinases (MAPKK kinases, e. g., Tak1, Ask1 and Mlk3), which are controlled by GEF-proteins such as Rac1 and Cdc42 and probably by some other, still poorly understood, mechanisms (see Fig. 8.2).

Studies using wortmannin, or of mast cells derived from *Btk*-null mice, have demonstrated that Fc ϵ RI-mediated p38 activation is significantly (but not fully) inhibited. This suggests that the Fc ϵ RI-mediated activation of p38 is, similarly to JNK, dependent on Btk and PI3 K activity (Kawakami et al. 1997).

The Fc ϵ RI-induced p38 pathway was shown to regulate expression of genes for several cytokines, such as IL-4 (Hirasawa et al. 2000), IL-13 (Gibbs et al. 2002), MCP-1 (Gonzalez-Espinosa et al. 2003), MIP-2 (Numahata et al. 2003) and, only marginally, TNF- α (Gonzalez-Espinosa et al. 2003).

Protein Kinase B (PKB/Akt)

Protein kinase B (PKB), better known as Akt, is a serine/threonine protein kinase belonging to the "AGC" kinase superfamily (reviewed in Scheid and Woodgett 2003). Interest in Akt has intensified upon recognition of its role in promoting cell survival signals, which mostly lead to the inactivation of a series of proapoptotic proteins. Akt sequence is composed of three functionally distinct regions: an N-terminal pleckstrin homology (PH) domain, a central catalytic domain and C-terminal hydrophobic motif (HM). The PH domain directs Akt to PI3K-generated membranal phosphoinositides PI(3,4,5)P₃ and PI(3,4)P₂. At the plasma membrane, proximal Akt molecules become activated by autophosphory-

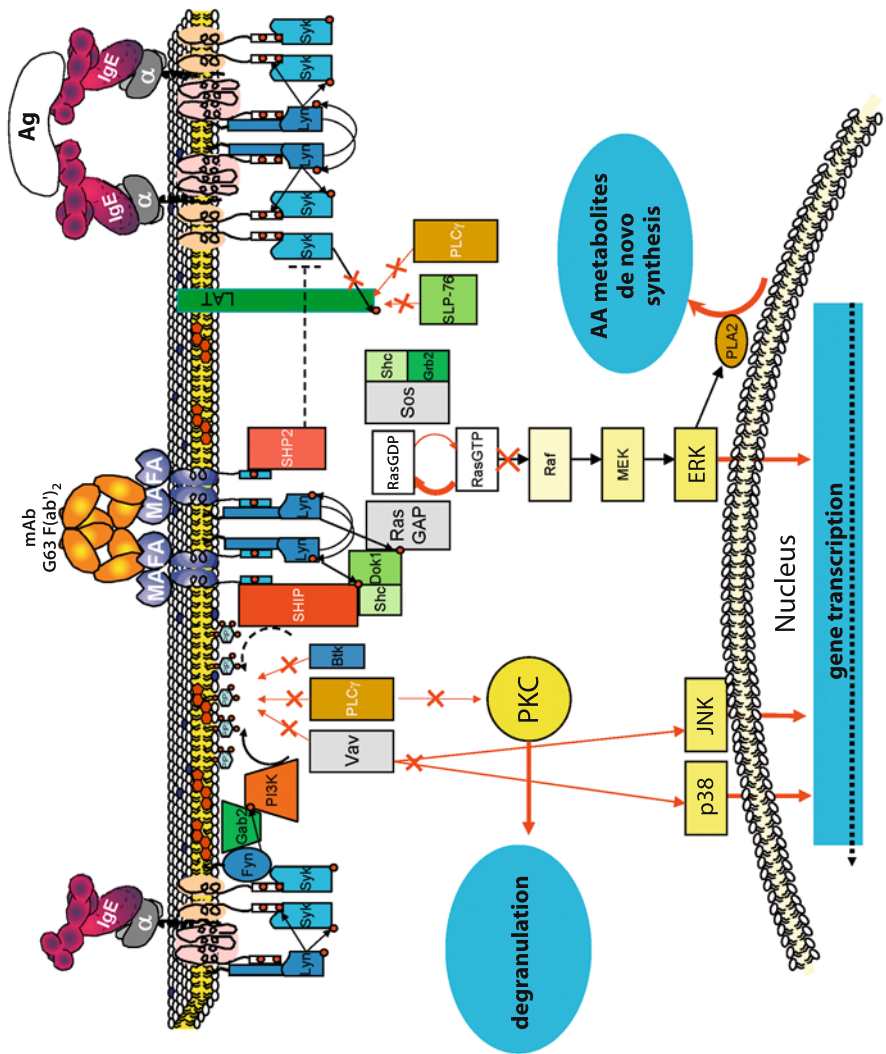


Fig. 8.2. A scheme illustrating the mechanism of MAFA-mediated inhibition of response to FcεRI stimulus: MAFA clustering leads to a rapid tyrosine phosphorylation of its ITIM sequence by PTK Lyn which is associated with MAFA even in unperturbed cells. Once phosphorylated, ITIM binds directly to several SH2 domain-containing molecules, such as Lyn, SHP-2 and SHIP. At the plasma membrane, SHP-2 dephosphorylates Syk (and thereby suppresses generation of the LAT signaling complex), while SHIP interferes with PI3 K signaling. Both are thereby suppressing FcεRI-induced recruitment and activation of PLCγ. This leads to inhibition of downstream coupling events of the FcεRI stimulus, culminating in suppression of degranulation and gene expression. In parallel, SHIP becomes phosphorylated and recruits the adaptor molecule Dok-1, which then binds the Ras GTPase-activating protein (RasGAP). RasGAP is a negative regulator of the Ras signaling pathway and its recruitment to the plasma membrane inhibits activation of Erk. This eventually results in suppression of de novo synthesis of proteins and AA metabolites. *Black arrows* indicate phosphorylation; *black striped arrows* dephosphorylation; *red arrows* binding/activation; *red strikes* suppression; *green* adaptor proteins; *blue* PTKs; *red* PTPs; *yellow* S/T kinases; *brown* lipases; *white* GTPases; *gray* GDP/GTP exchange factors

lation (i.e., by catalytically competent Akt) at the Ser-473 and by phosphoinositide-dependent kinase-1 (PDK-1) which phosphorylates its Thr-308 (Toker and Newton 2000). Akt phosphorylated at both sites becomes active and phosphorylates target proteins, most of which are involved in the regulation of gene transcription.

Akt has recently been shown to become active in response to FcεRI stimulation (Kitaura et al. 2000), and its activation was shown to depend on Fyn (Parravicini et al. 2002), Btk and Syk (Kitaura et al. 2000). Mast cells deficient in either Fyn, Btk or Syk all exhibit a reduced activity of Akt compared to WT cells. Significantly, *lyn*^{-/-} cells showed a several-fold more robust and prolonged Akt activation than WT cells, suggesting that Lyn acts as a negative regulator of the Akt signaling cascade (Kitaura et al. 2000; Parravicini et al. 2002).

Furthermore, the results of Kawakami and colleagues demonstrated that Akt regulates activity of several transcription factors, such as NF-κB, NF-AT and AP-1, which are critical for the expression of the IL-2 and TNF-α genes. In their experiments, the overexpression of WT Akt in BMDC significantly affected the FcεRI-induced activities of NF-AT and AP-1 and concomitantly led to an increased secretion of IL-2 and TNF-α compared to vector-transfected cells or transfectants overexpressing a mutated form of Akt (Kitaura et al. 2000).

8.2.2.9

Overview of the Current Model of the FcεRI Stimulus-Response Coupling Network

According to the current model, FcεRI translocates upon its aggregation into lipid rafts (Field et al. 1995, 1997), where it becomes proximal to raft-associated src kinases such as Lyn or Fyn. This interaction is thought to initiate tyrosine phosphorylation of the ITAMs present on both β- and γ-chains of the FcεRI com-

plex (Eiseman and Bolen 1992; Pribluda et al. 1994). The phosphorylated γ -chain dimer recruits the PTK Syk, which is then activated mostly by proximal Lyn (associated with phosphorylated ITAM of β -chain). Nevertheless, current data suggest that Lyn is not the sole PTK that phosphorylates ITAMs and activates Syk, and thus is dispensable for Fc ϵ RI-induced secretory responses (Nishizumi and Yamamoto 1997; Kawakami et al. 2000b; Parravicini et al. 2002). Activated Syk then phosphorylates the membrane-associated protein LAT, which becomes a docking site for a number of cytosolic proteins such as SLP-76, Gads and PLC- γ 2. Recruited proteins are sequentially phosphorylated by proximal PTKs (Syk, Lyn, etc.), which leads to creation of the multiprotein complex and eventually to PLC γ activation.

In parallel with Syk activity, activated Fyn phosphorylates the adaptor protein Gab2, which then associates with PI3 K and thereby enables its recruitment to the plasma membrane and subsequent activation. Active PI3 K catalyzes the production of PI(3,4)P2 and PI(3,4,5)P3, which bind to the PH domains of several signaling proteins such as Btk, PLC- γ , Vav, Akt or PDK1. This interaction also promotes translocation of the above proteins to the plasma membrane, where they become activated. It is noteworthy that both PLC γ isoforms seem to be regulated by two distinct mechanisms involving either PI3 K activity and/or formation of the LAT-centered multiprotein complex. Therefore, an efficient initiation of Fc ϵ RI stimulus coupling cascade involves two independent signaling paths: one involving Syk activity and the other involving activity of Fyn. Both paths are activated in parallel, and are complementing each other's induction of the secretory response.

When activated, both PLC- γ isoforms hydrolyze membrane-associated PI(4,5)P2 into the second messengers, i.e., (1) IP3 and (2) DAG. IP3 binds to specific receptors in the endoplasmic reticulum, which then triggers release and later depletion of Ca²⁺ stores, leading to activation of store-operated Ca²⁺ entry (I_{CRAC}) from the extracellular medium. The continuation of the transient elevation of free cytosolic Ca²⁺ ion concentration eventually results in activation of the Ca²⁺-dependent isoforms (i.e., α - and β) of protein kinase C (PKC). DAG activates Ca²⁺-independent PKC isoforms (δ -, ϵ - and ζ) (Ozawa et al. 1993; Chang et al. 1997). It has been shown in several studies that activated PKC is essential (and sufficient) for Fc ϵ RI-induced MC degranulation (Sagi-Eisenberg et al. 1985). Furthermore, PKC was shown to directly activate several MAP kinases (e.g., p38 and JNK) and thus to control de novo cytokine production (Razin et al. 1994; Zhang et al. 1997b).

Tyrosine phosphorylation and activation of other enzymes and adaptors, including Vav, Shc, Grb2 and Sos, stimulate small GTPases such as Rac, Cdc42 and Ras. These pathways lead to activation of the ERK, JNK and p38 MAP kinases and the subsequent phosphorylation of transcription factors that induce the de novo synthesis and secretion of cytokines. In parallel, the ERK pathway activates cytoplasmic phospholipase A₂ (cPLA₂) and thereby the de novo synthesis and release of AA derivatives.

8.3

Mechanisms Regulating Response to the Fc ϵ RI Stimulus

In order to avoid hyper-responsiveness and maintain an effective immune response, activation signaling has to be controlled by regulatory mechanisms that can either terminate it or attenuate it.

The simplest mechanism would probably involve a loss of activating stimuli (i.e. antigen dissociation from the receptor), thereby resulting in receptor disengagement. However, the dissociation rate of multivalent antigens from Fc ϵ RI is usually very slow and therefore cannot be a cause of effective signal termination *in vivo*. The modulation of Fc ϵ RI signaling is therefore based on a wide range of complex mechanisms that respond to specific stimuli. Since phosphorylation of both proteins and lipid-based molecules was shown to be a crucial element in coupling Fc ϵ RI to the secretory response, dephosphorylation by specific phosphatases seems to be the most effective mode of inhibition. Indeed, phosphatases have been shown to be an important part of a built-in autoregulatory apparatus, which is activated in parallel with or following the activating network in order to keep it in check. This may be illustrated by the tyrosine phosphorylated ITAM of the Fc ϵ RI β -chain, which is known to bind to the protein tyrosine phosphatases SHP-1 and SHP-2, as well as the phosphatidylinositol 5'-phosphatase SHIP. These enzymes, when recruited to this receptor component, counteract the PTK-based activation signal and thereby downregulate the cellular response.

Other mechanisms involve regulation of the cell-surface Fc ϵ RI expression levels. These can be mediated either by the internalization and degradation of receptors (see below: Cbl family) or by downregulation of Fc ϵ RI synthesis and expression (see below: β_T).

Finally, negative regulation of Fc ϵ RI-induced responses is mediated by several inhibitory receptors expressed on the cell surface by mechanisms which are discussed in more detail below (see Sect. 8.3.3).

8.3.1

Regulatory Cytosolic Molecules

8.3.1.1

Phosphatases

SH2 Domain-Containing Inositol 5' Phosphatase (SHIP):

The "Gatekeeper" of Mast Cell Degranulation

As discussed in Section 8.2.2, one of the most important pathways coupling the stimulus produced by aggregated Fc ϵ RI to the secretory response of cells involves PI3 K (Yano et al. 1993; Barker et al. 1995). Its activity's main product is the plasma membrane-associated second messenger PI(3,4,5)P₃, which is the site of recruitment of several proteins (such as Btk, PLC- γ , Akt and PDK1) to the plasma membrane, where they become activated and couple the upstream signals to the secretory response.

To ascertain that this pathway is accurately controlled, several regulatory mechanisms have evolved. One of them involves a tumor suppressor, phosphatase and tensin homologue (PTEN, also known as MMAC1/TEP1), which hydrolyses the newly synthesized $\text{PI}(3,4,5)\text{P}_3$ back to $\text{PI}(4,5)\text{P}_2$ (Maehama and Dixon 1998). Another mechanism is carried out by two different SH2-containing inositol 5'-phosphatases – SHIP1 (Ono et al. 1996) and its more ubiquitous homologue SHIP2 (Pesesse et al. 1997). Both enzymes, when recruited to the plasma membrane, dephosphorylate $\text{PI}(3,4,5)\text{P}_3$ to $\text{PI}(3,4)\text{P}_2$ (Pesesse et al. 1998). This reduces the pool of $\text{PI}(3,4,5)\text{P}_3$, as well as the recruitment of certain PH-containing proteins to the plasma membrane, resulting in downregulation of the cellular response (Ono et al. 1996; Malbec et al. 1998). In immunocytes, SHIP was shown to serve as one of the most important molecules in downregulation of the activating signals produced by several different ITAM-containing receptors, including BCR (Liu et al. 1998), TCR (Jensen et al. 2001) and Fc ϵ RI (Ono et al. 1996; Xu et al. 2001). SHIP's inhibitory action is mostly dependent on ITIM-containing receptors (see Sect. 8.3.3), which upon phosphorylation of their ITIM tyrosines become binding sites for SHIP's SH2 domain. It is interesting to note, however, that also several ITAM-containing molecules, including TCR (Osborne et al. 1996) and Fc ϵ RI (Osborne et al. 1996; Kimura et al. 1997a; Muraille et al. 2000), may recruit SHIP to the plasma membrane (via their phosphorylated ITAMs) upon their engagement.

The importance of SHIP in Fc ϵ RI signaling became apparent from studies using BMMCs derived from SHIP $^{-/-}$ mice. These showed that SHIP $^{-/-}$ BMMCs are far more prone to Fc ϵ RI-mediated cell degranulation as well as inflammatory cytokine production and secretion (Kalesnikoff et al. 2002). Furthermore, unlike WT cells, the former degranulated vigorously even in response to binding mIgE (see Sect. 8.2.2) alone (Huber et al. 1998). These findings led Krystal and colleagues to propose that SHIP functions as a "gatekeeper" of mast cell response to Fc ϵ RI by keeping the $\text{PI}3\text{K}$ -generated $\text{PI}-3,4,5\text{-P}_3$ levels in check, thereby regulating the subsequent secretory response (Huber et al. 1998).

SH2 Domain-Containing Protein Tyrosine Phosphatase-1 (SHP-1)

SHP-1 (also known as SHPTP-1, SHP, HCP, PTPN6, PTPH6 and PTP1C) is a 67-kDa cytosolic enzyme expressed mainly in hematopoietic cells (Matthews et al. 1992). It contains two adjacent amino-terminal SH2 domains, followed by a phosphatase domain and a carboxy-terminal region containing two conserved tyrosine phosphorylation sites (Martin et al. 1999).

As a tyrosine phosphatase, SHP-1 counteracts the action of protein tyrosine kinases, which are mostly activated upon engagement of ITAM-containing receptors.

In mast cells, overexpression of WT SHP-1 was shown to suppress the Fc ϵ RI-induced tyrosine phosphorylation of several intracellular components, including the Fc ϵ RI β - and γ -subunits and PTK Syk. In contrast, Fc ϵ RI-mediated histamine release was unaffected, suggesting that the extent of the receptor's tyrosine phosphorylation is not the sole determinant of the Fc ϵ RI-induced secretory response (Kimura et al. 1997b). Moreover, SHP-1 appears to exert a dual effect on the Fc ϵ RI-mediated signaling network, as it was also shown to enhance phosphorylation of JNK and subsequent TNF- α production (Xie et al. 2000). Similar results were

observed in Lyn-deficient mast cells, which are severely impaired in their Fc ϵ RI-induced cellular protein tyrosine phosphorylation pattern (including that of Syk and β -chain), and yet are normal or augmented in their secretory response (see Sect. 8.2.2).

Taken together, SHP-1 does not appear to be the key phosphatase keeping the secretory response to Fc ϵ RI activation in check.

SH2 Domain-Containing Protein Tyrosine Phosphatase-2 (SHP-2)

SHP-2 (also known as Syp, PTP1D, PTP2C and SHPTP-2) is a widely expressed cytosolic enzyme of 72 kDa. Upon Fc ϵ RI aggregation, SHP-2 was shown to bind directly via its SH2 domains to the tyrosine-phosphorylated β -subunit of Fc ϵ RI (Kimura et al. 1997b). There it becomes activated by tyrosine phosphorylation from a so far unknown PTK (Kimura et al. 1997b). In vitro experiments demonstrated that both β - and γ -subunits of Fc ϵ RI can be dephosphorylated by recombinant SHP-2, suggesting the existence of a negative feedback loop which regulates the extent of this receptor's tyrosine phosphorylation. SHP-2 is therefore assumed to be part of a built-in autoregulatory apparatus of Fc ϵ RI-mediated signaling. Moreover, SHP-2 is found to bind directly to the tyrosine-phosphorylated ITIM sequences of several inhibitory receptors, such as MAFA (Xu et al. 2001), PECAM-1 (Sagawa et al. 1997a), LMIR (Kumagai et al. 2003) and Fc γ RIIB (Fong et al. 1996), and thus it serves as the mediator of their regulatory actions. When recruited to the plasma membrane, SHP-2 dephosphorylates numerous substrates, including Syk, and thus counteracts the activating signaling mediated by protein tyrosine kinases (Xu and Pecht 2001).

Megakaryocytic Protein Tyrosine Phosphatase-2 (PTP-MEG2)

PTP-MEG2 is a 68-kDa non-receptor PTP originally cloned from human endothelial cells and megakaryocyte lines which has recently been discovered in several cell lines of hematopoietic lineage (Gu et al. 1992). The C-terminal region of MEG2 contains a conserved PTP catalytic domain, whereas the N-terminal domain has significant homology to yeast SEC14p (Bankaitis et al. 1989), and was recently shown to bind membranal PI(3,4,5)P₃ and phosphatidylserine (Huynh et al. 2003; Zhao et al. 2003).

In mast cells, PTP-MEG2 was found on the secretory granules, probably as a result of binding of the N-terminal Sec14p homology domain to PI(3,4,5)P₃ on secretory vesicle membranes. Overexpression of PTP-MEG2 in RBL-2H3 cells leads to a dramatic enlargement of these intracellular granules, suggesting that it regulates their formation (Wang et al. 2002). Therefore PTP-MEG2 may likely be involved in the modulation of the mast cell secretory response, though probably in an indirect manner.

Haematopoietic Protein Tyrosine Phosphatase (HePTP)

HePTP (also known as PTPN7, LC-PTP and PTPNI) is a 40-kDa protein tyrosine phosphatase expressed in mast cells, T cells and B cells. It has an ~55% sequence homology with CD45, yet unlike CD45 it is expressed in the cells' cytoplasm (Adachi et al. 1994). Primary lymphocytes from HePTP $^{-/-}$ mice show enhanced activation of ERK upon TCR aggregation, suggesting that HePTP serves

as a physiological regulator of ERK (Gronda et al. 2001). Although the involvement of HePTP in mast cell function is not completely understood, it has been shown that FcεRI aggregation induces its tyrosine phosphorylation in RBL-2H3 cells (Swieter et al. 1995). Further experiments showed that HePTP does not immunoprecipitate with molecules such as Lyn, Syk and FcεRI subunits, suggesting that they are not physiological substrates of HePTP. Taken together, HePTP, as a physiological regulator of ERK, may control the later phases of mast cell response to FcεRI at an unidentified site in the coupling cascade.

8.3.1.2

Protein Kinases

C-Terminal Src Kinase (Csk) – A PTK with an Intrinsic Inhibitory Function

C-terminal Src kinase (Csk) is a cytoplasmic PTK expressed ubiquitously, albeit in larger amounts in hematopoietic cells (reviewed in Latour and Veillette 2001). Recent studies have shown that Csk is a potent negative regulator of MIRR signaling in activated T cells (Chow et al. 1993), B cells (Hata et al. 1994) and mast cells (Honda et al. 1997). This inhibitory activity correlates with the exquisite ability of Csk to phosphorylate the inhibitory carboxy-terminal tyrosine of the Src family kinases such as Lyn, Lck and Fyn. Once this tyrosyl residue is phosphorylated, it creates a binding site for the kinases' own SH2 domain. Such an interaction results in a "closed" conformation of Src kinases, where the catalytic domain is blocked and thus inactive (Cooper and Howell 1993). Disruption of this intramolecular interaction (e.g., through dephosphorylation of the C-terminal tyrosine by CD45) results in kinase activity ("open" conformation).

Csk shares structural similarities with Src family PTKs but lacks the C-terminal regulatory tyrosine and the N-terminal myristylation signal required for membrane localization (Nada et al. 1991). Structural analyses indicate that, in addition to its catalytic domain, the Src homology 3 (SH3) and 2 (SH2) regions of Csk are essential for its capacity to inhibit cell signaling. The SH3 domain of Csk was found to bind constitutively to the proline-enriched protein tyrosine phosphatase (PEP) and PTP-PEST [for Pro(P), Glu(E), Ser(S) and Thr(T)-rich domains], two cytosolic PTPs abundantly expressed in hemopoietic cells (Cloutier and Veillette 1996; Davidson et al. 1997). This suggests that in addition to the direct suppression of Src kinases, Csk also recruits PTPs, which may further contribute to the inhibition of phosphotyrosine-dependent signaling.

The involvement of Csk in the negative regulation of FcεRI signaling has been demonstrated by Honda et al. (1997), who generated RBL-2H3 sublines overexpressing different Csk variants. Results of these studies showed that several cellular events, including Lyn activation, tyrosyl phosphorylation of Syk, elevation of free intracellular calcium concentration and histamine release, are delayed in Csk overexpressing RBL-2H3 cells. On the other hand, the amplitude of histamine release is rather augmented (Honda et al. 1997), similarly to that observed upon FcεRI clustering in lyn^{-/-} mast cells (Nishizumi and Yamamoto 1997; Kawakami et al. 2000b).

8.3.1.3

Adaptor Proteins

Downstream of Tyrosine Kinases (Dok) Proteins – Modulators of FcεRI-Induced De Novo Cytokine Synthesis

Dok proteins (Dok-1–Dok-5) are members of a recently discovered family of adaptors tyrosyl-phosphorylated by a range of PTKs. Dok-1, which is a prototype member of the family, was originally identified as a tyrosyl-phosphorylated molecule of ~62 kDa, associated with the RasGAP protein – a negative regulator of Ras (Yamanashi and Baltimore 1997). Dok-1 possesses several characteristic domains and motifs: at its N-terminus it contains a PH domain that is followed by a phosphotyrosine-binding (PTB) domain. Its C-terminal tail harbors ten potential tyrosyl-phosphorylation sites and seven PxxP motifs, which may serve as potential docking sites for SH2 and SH3 domain-containing proteins, respectively. Indeed, phosphorylation of the multiple tyrosine residues at the C-terminus has been shown to create docking sites for proteins containing SH2 domains, including RasGAP, Nck, SHIP, CrkL and Csk (Lock et al. 1999; Dunant et al. 2000; Martelli et al. 2001).

Both Dok-1 and Dok-2 have been recently shown to be involved in the FcεRI stimulus-response network. FcεRI clustering induces marked tyrosine phosphorylation of the above two proteins, with a concomitant increase in their binding to RasGAP (and to several other adaptors). This suggests that Dok proteins negatively regulate the FcεRI-induced Ras/Raf1/Erk signaling cascade. Indeed, both Ras and Erk activation as well as the subsequent de novo TNF-α synthesis are markedly reduced in RBL-2H3 cells overexpressing Dok-1 (Abramson et al. 2003). In contrast, the FcεRI-induced release of preformed mediators is apparently unaffected by Dok-1 overexpression, suggesting that Dok-1 selectively regulates the late phase of mast cells response.

The regulatory function of Dok-1 in mast cells is further supported by findings demonstrating that it is also involved in coupling the inhibitory action of ITIM-bearing receptors such as MAFA (Abramson and Pecht 2002) and FcγRIIB (Ott et al. 2002).

Signal Transducing Adaptor Protein (STAP-2): Suppressor of PLCγ Activity

STAP-2 (also known as breast tumor kinase substrate – BKS) is a recently discovered adaptor molecule containing PH- and SH2-like domains, which has been identified as a c-fms-interacting protein by yeast two-hybrid screening.

Overexpression of STAP-2/BSK in RBL-2H3 cells results in suppression of FcεRI-mediated tyrosine phosphorylation of PLC-γ, calcium mobilization and degranulation. Furthermore, STAP-2/BSK was found to associate with PLC-γ in vivo, suggesting that it negatively controls FcεRI-mediated calcium mobilization and degranulation by direct modulation of PLC-γ activity (Yamamoto et al. 2003).

Grb2-Associated Binder 2 (Gab2): One Adaptor with Two Opposing Roles

Gab2 is a recently identified 97-kDa molecule that is a member of the Dos/Gab adaptor molecules family, which also includes mammalian Gab1, IRS and the *Drosophila* daughter of sevenless Dos. Gab2 contains an N-terminal PH domain

followed by a long region with multiple tyrosine-containing motifs and two proline-rich domains (Gu et al. 1998; Zhao et al. 1999). The tyrosine-containing motifs, once phosphorylated, provide binding sites for SH2 domain-containing signaling molecules including the p85 subunit of PI3-kinase, PLC γ and SHP-2 (Zhao et al. 1999). The proline-rich regions of Gab2 are potential binding sites for SH3-domain-containing proteins such as Src-family protein tyrosine kinases.

As already mentioned, Gab2 has been proposed to function as the missing link between Fc ϵ RI stimulus and PI3 K activation, and thus to play an essential role in the evoked secretory response (Parravicini et al. 2002; see Sect. 8.2.2). Indeed, Gab2 $^{-/-}$ mast cells display defective degranulation and cytokine gene expression in response to Fc ϵ RI clustering (Gu et al. 2001). However, in addition to its activating role, Gab2 also seems to function as an inhibitory molecule, which can modulate MIRR-induced signaling. It has been previously shown that T cells derived from transgenic mice expressing WT Gab2 exhibit impaired T-cell responses, while T cells from Gab2-deficient mice show enhanced proliferation upon TCR stimulation (Pratt et al. 2000; Yamasaki et al. 2001).

Similarly, Siraganian et al. found that RBL-2H3 cells overexpressing Gab2 exhibit a lower Fc ϵ RI-induced tyrosine phosphorylation (e.g., of Syk, Fc ϵ RI β - and γ -subunits), degranulation and cytokine production (e.g., TNF- α and IL-6) (Xie et al. 2002). These results therefore suggest that Gab2 expression levels may regulate the amplitude of the Fc ϵ RI-induced secretory response. The activating potential of Gab2 seems to be mediated by PI3 K, while the inhibitory capacity is likely due to SHP-2 which associates with tyrosine-phosphorylated Gab2.

8.3.1.4

E3 Ubiquitin Ligases – Negative Regulation by Protein Endocytosis and Degradation

MIRR signaling has also been found to be regulated through selective protein endocytosis and degradation. The mechanism of such a process generally involves multiple steps, including covalent addition of ubiquitin (Ub) molecules to an internal lysine side chain of a target protein, followed by proteolysis of the ubiquitinated protein in the proteasome – a multisubunit protease complex (reviewed in Marmor and Yarden 2004).

The process of ubiquitination is carried out by a cascade that involves several enzymes of the ubiquitin–protein isopeptide ligase family (E3s). These provide specificity to the ubiquitin system because they are responsible for substrate recognition and for promoting Ub ligation to the target protein. The Cbl-related protein family members belong to this class of E3 ubiquitin ligases (Joazeiro et al. 1999). In immunocytes these are employed in the above mechanisms of modulating the stimuli induced by a variety of activating receptors, notably the MIRRs.

The Cbl family (reviewed by Rao et al. 2002) comprises three members – c-Cbl, Cbl-b and Cbl-3 (Cbl-3 is not expressed in lymphocytes). Their structure is highly conserved and contains the following characteristic motifs: (1) an amino-terminal variant SH2 domain, (2) a RING finger with E3 ubiquitin ligase activity,

(3) multiple proline-rich regions and sites of tyrosine phosphorylation, and (4) a leucine zipper-like sequence.

c-Cbl – A Suppressor of PTK and MIRR Expression

The first evidence suggesting that c-Cbl is involved in the negative regulation of immunoreceptor signaling stems from the studies of Samelson et al. They reported that overexpression of c-Cbl in RBL-2H3 cells leads to inhibition of the FcεRI-induced Syk tyrosine phosphorylation (and its activity), with a concomitant suppression of serotonin release (Ota and Samelson 1997). Further studies revealed that c-Cbl, as a ubiquitin ligase, mediates ubiquitination of Syk and Src and their subsequent targeting to the proteasome, where they are degraded. More recent studies have demonstrated that c-Cbl is also responsible for the ubiquitination of the FcεRI β- and γ-subunits and the receptor's subsequent internalization and degradation (Paolini et al. 2002). This is induced by a Syk-dependent phosphorylation of c-Cbl with a concomitant increase in their binding. This Syk–Cbl complex is then recruited to the cell membrane, where the activated c-Cbl ubiquitinates both receptor β- and γ-subunits as well as Lyn (Kyo et al. 2003) and Syk (Ota et al. 1996). This implies the existence of a negative feedback loop, where Syk activity is required for its own degradation and that of both FcεRI β- and γ-chains. The eventual proteasome-dependent degradation of ubiquitinated receptor complexes and activated Syk plays a crucial and general role in the downregulation of the coupling networks of all MIRR family members (TCR, BCR, FcεRI, etc.).

Cbl-b

Cbl-b is another member of the Cbl-family of E3 ubiquitin–protein ligases (Keane et al. 1995). While c-Cbl mostly catalyzes ubiquitination of the MIRR components, recent studies have indicated that Cbl-b rather promotes ubiquitination of downstream signaling molecules such as PTKs (e.g. Lyn, Syk) (Sohn et al. 2003), PLC-γ1, PKC (Heissmeyer et al. 2004), the CrkL–C3G complex (Zhang et al. 2003b), PI3 K (Fang et al. 2001; Zhang et al. 2003a) and Gab-2 (Qu et al. 2004).

In mast cells, Cbl-b overexpression leads to a strong inhibition of FcεRI-mediated tyrosine phosphorylation of the β- and γ-receptor subunits of Gab2 and of Syk. Furthermore, Gab2 expression levels are also reduced upon Cbl-b overexpression, suggesting that Cbl-b induces its degradation. As expected, Cbl-b was shown to suppress FcεRI-induced cell degranulation, MAPK activation and subsequent cytokine gene transcription (Qu et al. 2004). These data therefore suggest that Cbl-b also plays an important autoregulatory role in FcεRI-induced secretory responses.

8.3.2

Transmembrane Adaptors Modulating Fc ϵ RI Signaling

8.3.2.1

Adaptor Proteins

Csk-Binding Protein (Cbp): A Transmembrane Adaptor Protein with an Inhibitory Function

Cbp [also known as phosphoprotein associated with GEMs (PAG)] is a recently discovered 75- to 85-kDa membrane protein that regulates the activity of Src family kinases (Brdicka et al. 2000; Kawabuchi et al. 2000). Cbp, like LAT, possesses a short extracellular domain, a transmembrane region and a long cytoplasmic domain, which contain several potential sites of tyrosine phosphorylation. It is palmitoylated, probably at two cysteines positioned in the juxtamembrane portion of its cytoplasmic domain. This palmitoylation is presumed to be responsible for targeting Cbp to lipid rafts (Brdickova et al. 2001). When phosphorylated on a specific tyrosine residue, Cbp becomes a docking site for the SH2 domain of Csk (the negative regulator of Src family kinases; see Sect. 8.3.1).

Recently, Cbp has also been shown to negatively regulate the Fc ϵ RI-mediated response (Ohtake et al. 2002). Fc ϵ RI aggregation leads to a very rapid (a matter of seconds) tyrosyl-phosphorylation of Cbp, with its concomitant increased binding to Csk. Overexpression of Cbp in RBL-2H3 cells was shown to inhibit Fc ϵ RI-mediated cell degranulation. In addition, elevated levels of Cbp expression significantly decreased tyrosine phosphorylation of both Fc ϵ RI subunits, suggesting that Cbp/PAG is regulating the earliest events induced upon this receptor aggregation. Thus, Cbp/PAG is likely to function as a negative feedback regulator of mast cell response to the Fc ϵ RI stimulus.

8.3.2.2

Tetraspanins

β_T : A Suppressor of Fc ϵ RI Expression and Maturation

Recently, an alternative spliced product of the β -gene has been identified (Donnadieu et al. 2003). The corresponding protein, designated β_T , is a truncated form of the Fc ϵ RI β -subunit and migrates on SDS-PAGE as a 21.4-kDa molecule. While the β -subunit has been proposed to serve as an amplifier of Fc ϵ RI expression (Donnadieu et al. 2000), the β_T isoform has been shown to interfere with α -chain maturation and therefore it negatively regulates Fc ϵ RI expression (Donnadieu et al. 2003). The importance of β -expression on rodent mast cells was previously demonstrated in studies using mast cells derived from mice deficient in the β -subunit. These cells express no Fc ϵ RI on their surface and demonstrate no IgE-mediated passive cutaneous anaphylaxis (PCA) (Hiraoka et al. 1999). The results therefore suggest that β_T is competing with β for control of Fc ϵ RI expression levels at the cell surface, and thus helps to regulate a proper biological response. The molecular mechanisms determining which isoform should be expressed still need to be resolved.

CD81: A Tetraspanin Modulating FcεRI-Induced Degranulation

CD81 (TAPA-1) is a 26-kDa membrane protein containing four transmembrane (TM) stretches and two extracellular (EC) loops which classify it as a member of the tetraspanin (TM4) protein superfamily.

In mast cells of the RBL-2H3 line, CD81 was shown to act as a negative regulator of FcεRI-induced degranulation. Binding of two different CD81-specific monoclonal antibodies (5D1 and 1A12) was found to downregulate the FcεRI-induced mast cell secretory response as well as the IgE-dependent passive cutaneous anaphylaxis reactions (Fleming et al. 1997).

Unlike typical inhibitory receptors (see Sect. 8.3.3), CD81 lacks an immunoreceptor tyrosine-based inhibitory motif (ITIM) within its cytoplasmic domains and fails to inhibit FcεRI-induced tyrosine phosphorylation, the $[Ca^{2+}]_i$ signal, and leukotriene C_4 production. Molecular mechanisms underlying CD81-mediated inhibition remain elusive, but they clearly differ from those employed by ITIM-containing receptors.

More recently, another similar tetraspanin molecule – CD63 – has also been shown to suppress the FcεRI-induced secretory response when clustered by its specific antibodies (Kraft et al. 2005).

8.3.3

Modulation of the FcεRI Signaling Cascade by ITIM-Containing Receptors

While this chapter has so far dealt with attenuation or termination of immune responses by a relatively wide range of diverse regulatory mechanisms, probably the most important one involves the family of inhibitory receptors, which regulates the activating cascades triggered primarily by the ITAM-containing receptor family.

Lymphocyte receptors that display inhibitory functions now number about 30. These are transmembrane glycoproteins and can be grouped into two major classes on the basis of their extracellular domains, which classifies them as members of either the Ig-like or the C-type lectin superfamilies respectively (Gergely et al. 1999). Their intracellular domains contain one or more copies of ITIMs which share a consensus amino acid sequence – (I/V/L/S)xYxx(L/V) – where x denotes any amino acid (Bolland and Ravetch 1999). Practically all these receptors, upon coclustering with an ITAM-containing receptor, undergo phosphorylation on their tyrosine residue in the ITIM sequence by a Src family PTK. The phosphotyrosines then become binding sites for SH2 domain-containing molecules that carry out the inhibitory actions. So far, these have been found to be protein tyrosine- and/or phosphatidylinositol-phosphatases, which, upon recruitment to the ITIMs at the plasma membrane and following subsequent activation, dephosphorylate their respective cellular substrates which would otherwise mediate activation. As a result, the coclustering of inhibitory and activating receptors eventually leads to a reduction in or ablation of the cellular response. It is, however, noteworthy that not all ITIM-bearing receptors require coclustering with their activating counterparts. Several receptors such as MAFA and PECAM

were shown to modulate FcεRI-induced responses even without the coclustering. Furthermore, inhibitory receptors bind to their specific extracellular ligands (see Table 8.1), which may also induce their inhibitory action independent of their coclustering with ITAM-containing receptors. Interestingly, in some cases the activating (PIR-A) and inhibitory (PIR-B) receptors may bind to the same molecule (e.g., HLA-I molecules), suggesting that one and the same ligand may exert two opposing responses and can thus either up- or downregulate the biological response. It also implies that an effective response is achieved not only by the presence/intensity of extracellular stimuli, but also by the expression levels of respective (i.e., activating/inhibitory) receptors.

In this section we review the current knowledge on those ITIM-bearing receptors that have been shown to interfere with the FcεRI-induced stimuli.

Table 8.1. ITIM-containing receptors expressed on mast cells

Names	Ligands	ITIM sequences	In vivo (in vitro) recruited
FcγRIIB (CD32)	IgG (Fc part)	ITYSLL	SHIP (SHP-1, SHP-2)
LIRs (ILT, CD85)	HLA class I	VTYAEV SIYATL VTYAQL	SHP-1
PIR-B	HLA class I	SLYASV VTYAQL SVYATL	SHP-1 (SHP-2)
gp49B1	α _v β ₃ (integrin)	IVYAQV VTYAQL	SHP-1 (SHP-2)
PECAM (CD31)	α _v β ₃ (integrin) PECAM (Ig-like receptor) CD38	VQYTEV TVYSEV	SHP-2 SHP-1 (weak)
SIRPα (SHPS-1)	CD47 (Ig-like receptor associated with α _v β ₃)	ITYADL	SHP-1; SHP-2
Siglec-3	Sialic acid residues	LHYASL TEYSEV	SHP-1
LMIR-1 (MAIR-1)	?	VEYSTL LHYSSV	SHP-1, SHP-2, SHIP
MAFA (KLRG1)	Mannose binding capacity	SIYSTL	SHIP, SHP-2

8.3.3.1

ITIM-Bearing Immunoglobulin-like Receptors

Type IIB Fc γ Receptor (Fc γ RIIB)

Fc γ RIIB (CD32) is the first identified member of the inhibitory receptor superfamily. It is expressed throughout the hematopoietic system in three alternatively spliced isoforms (Fc γ RIIB1, Fc γ RIIB1' and Fc γ RIIB2). While Fc γ RIIB1 and Fc γ RIIB2 are expressed in both humans and rodents, the Fc γ RIIB1' isoform is found only in mice. All isoforms share the same extracellular region, with two C2-type Ig-like domains (reviewed in Daeron 1997), yet differ in their intracellular parts, containing a conserved ITIM sequence.

The inhibitory role of Fc γ RIIB was first described in B cells, where it functions as a negative regulator of BCR-mediated cell proliferation (Phillips and Parker 1984). Under physiological conditions, Fc γ RIIB (because of its relatively low affinity) only binds to the Fc part of IgG molecules which are in the immune complex with a specific antigen. Therefore, if this antigen is also recognized by a specific BCR (or Fc ϵ RI-bound IgE on mast cells) the immune complex will mediate coclustering of both Fc γ RIIB and BCR (or Fc ϵ RI-IgE). This will then trigger an inhibitory cascade, abrogating the activating machinery induced by the clustering of the respective ITAM-containing receptor.

The importance of Fc γ RIIB in regulating immune responses was particularly evident in Fc γ RIIB-null mice, which exhibit enhanced antibody production, anaphylactic responses and autoimmune symptoms (Takai et al. 1996; Yuasa et al. 1999).

Coclustering of Fc γ RIIB with Fc ϵ RI on RBL-2H3 cells was shown to inhibit Fc ϵ RI-mediated degranulation and TNF- α secretion (Daeron et al. 1995). When coclustered with Fc ϵ RI, Fc γ RIIB undergoes a rapid tyrosine phosphorylation within its ITIM sequence by the Fc ϵ RI-associated Lyn (Malbec et al. 1998). While synthetic peptides with sequences corresponding to the tyrosine phosphorylated Fc γ RIIB ITIM bind SHP-1, SHP-2 and SHIP from mast cell lysates, neither SHP-1 nor SHP-2 were found to associate with Fc γ RIIB in vivo (Fong et al. 1996). Furthermore, Fc γ RIIB-mediated inhibition is unimpaired in mast cells derived from SHP-1 null mice (Fong et al. 1996), supporting the predominant role of SHIP in mediating the Fc γ RIIB inhibitory activity in these mast cells. As detailed in Section 8.3.1, SHIP contains a catalytic domain that hydrolyses the 5'-phosphate of PI(3,4,5)P3 and PI(1,3,4,5)P4. Thus its activity interferes with Fc ϵ RI-induced recruitment and activation of Btk and phospholipase C γ 1 (PLC γ 1). This leads to inhibition of downstream coupling events of the Fc ϵ RI stimulus, culminating in suppression of degranulation and gene expression (Ono et al. 1996).

More recently, an additional inhibitory mechanism of Fc γ RIIB in B cells and mast cells has been described (Tamir et al. 2000; Ott et al. 2002). When Fc γ RIIB binds SHIP, the enzyme becomes phosphorylated and recruits the adapter molecule Dok-1, which then binds the Ras GTPase-activating protein (RasGAP). RasGAP is a negative regulator of the Ras signaling pathway and its recruitment to the plasma membrane inhibits activation of Erk and subsequent B-cell proliferation. It is noteworthy, however, that inhibition of Fc ϵ RI-induced activation of MAP kinases by Fc γ RIIB in Dok-1-deficient mast cells was found to be similar to

that of WT cells (Ott et al. 2002). These results may imply the existence of an additional/complementary inhibitory mechanism that operates in the absence of Dok-1 (such as Dok-2).

Significantly, Fc γ RIIB was also found to inhibit c-kit-induced mast cell proliferation, demonstrating that Fc γ RIIB inhibitory activity is not limited to the regulation of ITAM-mediated signals (Malbec et al. 1999).

Regulation mechanism(s) of the expression of ITIM-bearing receptors such as Fc γ RIIB are, so far, largely unknown. However, a recent study showed that in vitro, IL-4 decreases the B-cell-surface levels of Fc γ RIIB (Rudge et al. 2002). IL-4 had similar effects on three other ITIM-containing receptors, namely, paired Ig-like receptor [(PIR)-B; see below], Siglec-2 (CD22; see below) and CD72. Moreover, the decrease in Fc γ RIIB and Siglec-2 expression were, as expected, accompanied by a decline in inhibitory function of these receptors (Rudge et al. 2002). These findings have important implications for the induction of allergic diseases, where Th2 polarization favors the production of IL-4 leading to the generation of IgE (which is known to upregulate Fc ϵ RI expression; see Sect. 8.2.2).

gp49B1

Both gp49B1 and gp49A murine proteins are close homologues of the human killer cell Ig-like receptors (KIRs) family. Their extracellular parts contain two C2-type Ig-like domains (Arm et al. 1991; Castells et al. 1994). The cytoplasmic domain of gp49B1 contains two different ITIMs, whereas that of gp49A does not (McCormick et al. 1999).

gp49B1 is expressed on the surface of mouse mast cells (Katz et al. 1996), macrophages, natural killer (NK) cells (Wang et al. 1997, 2000), activated T cells (Gu et al. 2003) and neutrophils (Zhou et al. 2003). When coclustered with respective activating receptors or upon binding to its ligand – $\alpha_v\beta_3$ integrin – gp49B1 was found to modulate biological responses of the above cells, i.e., to suppress NK cell-mediated target cell lysis (Rojo et al. 1997), to prevent neutrophil-dependent vascular injury in response to lipopolysaccharide (LPS) (Zhou et al. 2003) or to downregulate IgG-induced TNF- α production in macrophages (Matsumoto et al. 2001).

Coclustering of gp49B1 with Fc ϵ RI on mast cells inhibits the induced secretion of stored pro-inflammatory mediators, as well as of newly generated lipid mediators (e.g., leukotriene C4) (Katz et al. 1996). The molecular mechanism(s) by which gp49B1 inhibits Fc ϵ RI-induced mast cell activation involve SHP-1 rather than SHP-2 or the inositol phosphatase SHIP (Lu-Kuo et al. 1998; Lu-Kuo et al. 1999). In-vivo experiments demonstrated no association of gp49B1 with SHIP and/or SHP-2, suggesting that SHP-1 is the major phosphatase responsible for gp49B1 inhibitory action. Still, gp49B1 was found to inhibit the Fc ϵ RI-induced secretory response of SHP-1-deficient BMDCs only partially, suggesting that SHP-1 may not be the exclusive mediator of gp49B1 inhibitory activity (Lu-Kuo et al. 1999). It is also noteworthy that under in-vitro conditions, SHP-2 binds to phosphorylated tyrosine-containing peptides corresponding to both gp49B ITIM sequences, while SHIP was found to bind only to its second ITIM (ETQD-VTYAQLCIR) (Kuroiwa et al. 1998). It is therefore still unclear whether SHP-2, SHIP and/or other, still unknown, molecules are also involved in the gp49B1

inhibitory action. Interestingly, mutations of both ITIM tyrosines completely abolish the gp49B1 inhibitory activity, while mutation of either one reduces it only partially (Lu-Kuo et al. 1999), suggesting that both ITIMs are required for attaining full inhibitory function.

More recently, Castells et al. (2001) reported that the integrin $\alpha_v\beta_3$ binds to gp49B1 in solution as well as in cell–cell binding studies, suggesting that $\alpha_v\beta_3$ is its natural ligand. Moreover, soluble $\alpha_v\beta_3$ binding to gp49B1 on BMMCs was shown to inhibit the Fc ϵ RI-mediated secretory response. Since $\alpha_v\beta_3$ is expressed on a wide variety of cells, including those of the vasculature, the above results suggest that gp49B1 can constitutively downregulate mast cell activation. Indeed, experiments using gp49B1 null mice demonstrated an augmented mast cell degranulation and the resultant early tissue inflammation in IgE-dependent passive cutaneous anaphylaxis (PCA) (Daeshia et al. 2001). Furthermore, gp49B1-deficient mice died more frequently from anaphylactic shock compared to normal mice in response to a systemic antigen challenge.

Paired Ig-like Receptors of Inhibition (PIR-B)

Both paired Ig-like receptors of activation (PIR-A) and inhibition (PIR-B) were originally identified as murine protein molecules with a high sequence similarity to the KIR, LIR, murine gp49B and human Fc receptors for IgA (Hayami et al. 1997). PIRs are also members of the immunoglobulin (Ig) superfamily, as their extracellular part consists of six Ig-like domains. Both types of PIR are expressed on various hematopoietic cell lineages, such as B cells, mast cells, macrophages, granulocytes and dendritic cells (DCs), but not on T and NK cells (Kubagawa et al. 1997; Chen et al. 1998; Kubagawa et al. 1999; Roach et al. 1999).

Coclustering PIR-B with Fc ϵ RI on mouse mast cells was shown to inhibit the Fc ϵ RI-mediated secretory response (Uehara et al. 2001). This inhibitory capacity is presumably mediated by its cytoplasmic tail, which contains three potential ITIMs (see Table 8.1). Two of these motifs, when phosphorylated on their tyrosines, were shown to recruit SHP-1 (Blery et al. 1998; Maeda et al. 1998), which was thought to downregulate B-cell and mast cell activation (Maeda et al. 1999). More recently, however, SHP-1 has been shown to be entirely dispensable for PIR-B inhibitory activity, since PIR-B-mediated inhibition of Fc ϵ RI-induced secretion was unimpaired in SHP-1-deficient mast cells (Uehara et al. 2001). These results suggest that some other molecule(s) are likely to be involved in the inhibitory activity of PIR-B.

Efforts to identify a specific ligand for PIR-B have so far been unsuccessful. Still, several observations suggest that it interacts with class I MHC-encoded molecules. It has recently been reported that HLA-G (MHC class Ib molecule) tetramers bind to cells transfected by PIR-B cDNA, suggesting a direct interaction between HLA-G and PIR-B molecules. Furthermore, analysis of PIR-B expression and its tyrosine phosphorylation status in DC from HLA-G-transgenic mice showed that it is highly phosphorylated (Liang et al. 2002).

Signal Regulatory Protein- α (SIRP α)

SIRP molecules [also known as: SHPS-1 (src homology 2 domain-containing phosphatase substrate-1), BIT (brain immunoglobulin-like molecule with a tyro-

sine-based activation motif), P84 and MFR (macrophage fusion receptor)] all belong to a large family of membrane proteins which consists of at least 15 related SIRP variants. This large family can be divided into two subtypes based on the presence (in SIRP α) or absence (in SIRP β) of an intracellular domain-containing ITIM sequence (Kharitonov et al. 1997). Both SIRP α and SIRP β molecules are encoded by separate genes clustered in the same locus (human chromosome 20p12.2–13 and mouse chromosome 2). The presence of three Ig-like domains in the extracellular part classifies them as members of the immunoglobulin superfamily. However, unlike other ITIM-bearing receptors of the Ig-superfamily, expression of which is usually restricted to immunocytes, SIRPs are expressed by virtually all human tissues, including the brain, lung, liver and kidney (SIRP is actually the first ITIM-containing receptor found to be expressed by non-hemopoietic cells) (Oshima et al. 2002). More recently, however, different SIRP variants have been also discovered in hematopoietic and to lesser extent in myeloid cells (Adams et al. 1998; Veillette et al. 1998; Ghannadan et al. 2002).

As expected from their broad tissue distribution, SIRPs were shown to be involved in diverse biological responses. These include suppression of anchorage-independent cell growth, negative regulation of immune cells, self-recognition of red blood cells, mediation of macrophage multinucleation, skeletal muscle differentiation, entrainment of circadian clock, neuronal survival and synaptogenesis (reviewed in Oshima et al. 2002).

When artificially expressed in RBL-2H3 cells (as a chimeric molecule containing the extracellular domain of murine Fc γ RIIB and the TM and IC domains of human SIRP α), and coclustered with Fc ϵ RI, it inhibits Ca²⁺ mobilization, ERK activation and the subsequent release of secretory granule-stored mediators and cytokine synthesis. This suppression involves recruitment of SHP-1 and SHP-2 to the cytoplasmic tail, which contains two ITIMs and a proline-rich region (Lienard et al. 1999).

Recently, CD47 (also known as integrin-associated protein – IAP), another Ig-superfamily member involved in cell adhesion processes, has been identified as a SIRP α ligand (Jiang et al. 1999; Seiffert et al. 1999; Vernon-Wilson et al. 2000). Interestingly, CD47 was first identified as a protein coisolated with the $\alpha_v\beta_3$ integrin, which is a ligand for other inhibitory receptors – gp49B1 and PECAM (see Table 8.1). CD47–SIRP α binding was reported to prevent the phenotypic and functional maturation of human immature DCs and to suppress interleukin-12 (IL-12) production by mature DCs (Latour et al. 2001).

Leukocyte Ig-Like Receptors (LIR)

The human inhibitory LIRs (also known as Ig-like transcript, ILT, or CD85) contain one, two or four Ig-like domains in their extracellular parts and two to four ITIMs in their cytosolic domains. This inhibitory family comprises so far of six members (LIR-1, -2, -3, -5, -8, LAIR-1), where LIR-5 represents the closest human ortholog of the mouse inhibitory receptor gp49B1. LIRs are mostly expressed on human mast cells, basophils, eosinophils, B cells, mononuclear phagocytes, neutrophils and NK cells (Arm et al. 1997; Colonna et al. 1997; Tedla et al. 2001). It has been shown that lung mast cells express mRNA encoding LIR-3 (Arm et al. 1997), and basophils and eosinophils each express LIR-2 and LIR-3

proteins (Tedla et al. 2001). More recently, it has been shown that coligation of LIR3 to Fc ϵ RI by means of a second monoclonal antibody significantly inhibits histamine release, leukotriene production and IL-4 secretion from human basophils (Sloane et al. 2004). Similarly, serotonin secretion is suppressed upon coclustering of Fc ϵ RI with ILT2 (LIR-1) artificially expressed in RBL cells (Colonna et al. 1997). The inhibitory mechanisms involve protein tyrosine phosphatase 1 (SHP-1), which has recently been found to be recruited by tyrosine-phosphorylated ITIMs of ILT2 upon pervanadate treatment of RBL-2H3 cells (Bellon et al. 2002). LIR-1 and LIR-2 bind classical and non-classical MHC-class I molecules (Navarro et al. 1999), which may therefore provide a constitutive down-regulation of cell activation, because of the widespread expression of MHC class I molecules.

Leukocyte Mono-Ig-Like Receptor 1 (LMIR1)

LMIR1 (also known as myeloid-associated Ig-like receptor, MAIR; Yotsumoto et al. 2003) and LMIR2 were originally discovered on Fc ϵ RI-stimulated BMMCs, in an attempt to identify additional regulatory molecules (Kumagai et al. 2003). Their extracellular domains contain a single Ig-like domain, hence its classification. While LMIR1 contains two ITIM sequences in its cytoplasmic domain, the LMIR2 lacks both and has only a short cytoplasmic domain. However, LMIR2 associates (via its TM domain) with several ITAM-containing adaptors, such as DAP10, DAP12 and γ -chain, and thus serves as an activating receptor. Besides its abundant expression in mouse mast cells, the mRNA of LMIR molecules is also found at high levels in B cells and myeloid cells. Nonetheless, LMIR1/2 is not expressed in T cell lines and no ligand(s) for LMIR molecules have so far been identified.

LMIR1 capacity to counteract activating stimuli in immune cells was first reported for B cells, where coclustering of LMIR1 with the BCR caused a rapid tyrosyl phosphorylation of its intracellular ITIMs, which, in turn, recruited the tyrosine phosphatases SHP-1 and SHP-2 as well as the inositol polyphosphate 5-phosphatase, SHIP (Kumagai et al. 2003). Coclustering of LMIR1 with Fc ϵ RI on mouse mast cells was found to interfere with the signaling of the latter receptor (Yotsumoto et al. 2003). Furthermore, its high expression levels in mast cells suggest that LMIR1 plays an important role in the modulation of Fc ϵ RI-mediated responses.

Platelet Endothelial Cell Adhesion Molecule-1 (PECAM-1)

PECAM-1 (also known as CD31) is a newly discovered member of the Ig superfamily containing six extracellular Ig domains and two cytosolic ITIMs (interestingly, the cytosolic tail also contains a deduced ITAM-like sequence) (Lu et al. 1997). PECAM-1 was found to be expressed in humans, mice and rats, mostly at the lateral junctions of endothelial cells, and at lower levels on the surfaces of neutrophils, monocytes, platelets, NK cells, T and B cell subsets, and on mast cells. PECAM-1 was found to be involved in a number of biological processes, including leukocyte transmigration, cell migration, angiogenesis and cell adhesion as well as modulation of intracellular signaling (reviewed in Jackson 2003).

In the RBL-2H3 line, PECAM-1 was shown to undergo rapid tyrosine phosphorylation on its ITIMs in response to Fc ϵ RI clustering alone (without any need for the coclustering of receptors) (Sagawa et al. 1997b). Studies based on plasmon resonance measurements of peptides corresponding to its ITIM sequence showed that, once phosphorylated, it binds to SHP-2 and SHP-1, yet to the former with considerably higher affinity (Hua et al. 1998). SHP-2 therefore may be the major mediator of its inhibitory activity (Sagawa et al. 1997a). Recent studies using PECAM-1-deficient mice have further demonstrated that PECAM-1 plays an important role in modulation of Fc ϵ RI-induced responses. PECAM-1 $^{-/-}$ mice exhibited an enhanced IgE-mediated systemic anaphylaxis and an increased sensitivity to local cutaneous IgE-dependent anaphylaxis compared to PECAM-1 $+/+$ mice. Interestingly, *in vitro* analyses demonstrated that PECAM-1-deficient BMMCs also exhibit enhanced serotonin release in response to Fc ϵ RI stimulation compared to WT BMMCs (Wong et al. 2002). This phenomenon was not observed (*in vitro*) in other inhibitory receptor knock-outs, including Fc γ RIIB $^{-/-}$ and gp49B1 $^{-/-}$ BMMCs. A possible explanation may be that Fc ϵ RI induces rapid tyrosine phosphorylation of PECAM-1 on its ITIMs, while Fc γ RIIB and gp49b1 require coclustering with the Fc ϵ RI in order to mediate inhibitory signaling *in vitro*. The mechanism whereby Fc ϵ RI clustering induces PECAM-1 phosphorylation on its ITIMs is not clear, but may involve PECAM's homophilic interactions (i.e., PECAM-1 on one cell serves as a ligand for PECAM-1 on another cell), which have been reported recently (Sun et al. 1996). Other physiological ligands of PECAM-1 include $\alpha_v\beta_3$ integrin (Piali et al. 1995) and CD38 (Deaglio et al. 1998). It is noteworthy that $\alpha_v\beta_3$ integrin also serves as a ligand for gp49B1, another ITIM-bearing Ig-like receptor that modulates Fc ϵ RI signaling (see above). This further suggests that $\alpha_v\beta_3$, being an adhesion molecule, plays an important role in the negative regulation of Fc ϵ RI-mediated secretory responses *in vivo*.

Sialic Acid Binding Ig-like Lectins (Siglec)

Human mast cells and basophils were shown to express several members of the Siglec family. So far, at least 11 different Siglec molecules have been identified in humans and all but Siglec-1 possess ITIM or ITIM-like sequences (reviewed in Crocker and Varki 2001; Crocker 2002). The Ig-like domains present in their extracellular regions bind sialic acid residues, which are typically found attached to extracellular domains of certain glycoproteins present in the PM.

Siglecs are mostly expressed on monocytes, macrophages, neutrophils, NK cells and B cells in both humans and mice. Human mast cells and basophils have long been known to express Siglec-3, also known as CD33 (Valent et al. 1989). More recently, Siglec-5 and Siglec-8 have been discovered on human mast cells and basophils (Kikly et al. 2000; Ghannadan et al. 2002; Nutku et al. 2003). Still, the question whether these Siglecs have the capacity to inhibit the Fc ϵ RI-induced secretory response has not yet been addressed. Additional studies are therefore required to better understand their role in the above cells.

8.3.3.2

ITIM-Bearing C-Type Lectins

Mast Cell Function-Associated Antigen (MAFA)

MAFA (its mouse homologue renamed as KLRG1) is a type II membranal glycoprotein originally discovered on the surface of the rat mucosal-type mast cells of the RBL-2H3 line. This was in the frame of a search for membrane molecules capable of modulating the Fc ϵ RI secretory response (Ortega and Pecht 1988). The monoclonal antibody (mAb) G63, which was shown to bind it specifically, efficiently inhibited the Fc ϵ RI-induced secretory response of these cells yet required MAFA clustering. More recently, the genes encoding the human and mouse MAFA homologues were cloned and sequenced (Blaser et al. 1998; Butcher et al. 1998). In humans, MAFA was found to be expressed not only on basophils but also on peripheral NK cells. Significantly, the mouse MAFA homologue was not detected on mice mast cells, and was therefore renamed as killer cell lectin-like receptor G1 (KLRG1), as it is expressed only by lymphokine-activated NK cells and by effector CD8 T cells. The inhibitory function of KLRG1 on these cells has been shown in transfection studies, which demonstrated that it inhibits both cytokine production and NK cell-mediated cytotoxicity (Robbins et al. 2002). In addition, MAFA (KLRG1) has been discovered on a subset of human NK cells and antigen-experienced T cells that lack proliferative capacity (Voehringer et al. 2001, 2002).

MAFA's extracellular domain shares a marked homology with the carbohydrate recognition domain (CRD) of several members of the calcium-dependent (C-type) lectins (sugar-binding proteins) superfamily (Guthmann et al. 1995), such as the type II Fc ϵ R (CD 23), CD 69, CD 72 and several killer cell inhibitory receptors (KIR). So far, terminal mannose binding capacity has been established for rat MAFA (Binsack and Pecht 1997). This might suggest MAFA's potential involvement in cell-cell or cell-matrix interactions. Nevertheless, the sugar binding capacity of MAFA does not exclude the possibility of binding to a protein epitope of a ligand, as has been found, e. g., for CD23.

The intracellular domain of MAFA contains a single ITIM sequence (SIYSTL), which classifies MAFA as part of the inhibitory receptors family (Guthmann et al. 1995). However, unlike other ITIM-containing receptors, it inhibits the Fc ϵ RI stimulus without the requirement for their coclustering, i.e., MAFA clustering alone causes inhibition. Still, its coclustering with Fc ϵ RI was shown to markedly increase the inhibition (Licht et al. 2005).

MAFA clustering leads to a rapid tyrosine phosphorylation on its ITIM sequence by Lyn (serine residues also undergo phosphorylation). Lyn is associated with MAFA even in unperturbed cells, and in vitro measurements established that this interaction involves Lyn's SH3 domain and a PAAP sequence on MAFA's intracellular tail. This association may be important for Lyn's trans-activation and subsequent phosphorylation of MAFA ITIM tyrosine. Once phosphorylated, the ITIM binds directly to several SH2 domain-containing molecules, such as Lyn, SHP-2 and SHIP (see Fig. 8.2), but not SHP-1 or Syk (Xu et al. 2001). Moreover, SHIP binding exhibits considerably higher affinity than SHP-2 binding, suggesting that SHIP is the major phosphatase that is recruited upon clustering MAFA. Indeed, WT SHIP overexpression in RBL-2H3 cells causes, upon MAFA

clustering, a markedly stronger inhibition of the Fc ϵ RI-induced secretory response than in control cells (Xu et al. 2001). In addition, SHIP undergoes considerable phosphorylation on its tyrosines upon MAFA clustering, providing a binding site for SH2 domain-containing molecules, which are thereby recruited to the plasma membrane (Abramson and Pecht 2002). These molecules include, for example, two adaptor proteins of the Dok family (Dok-1 and Dok-2), which in turn also undergo tyrosine phosphorylation. Phosphorylated Dok-1 then binds the Ras GTPase-activating protein (RasGAP) that ultimately inhibits activation of the Ras-ERK signaling pathway (see Fig. 8.2).

Indeed, MAFA has recently been shown to interfere with Fc ϵ RI-induced Erk-1/2 and p38 MAPK activation and thereby with the late phase of secretory response (unpubl. data). The Fc ϵ RI-induced gene transcription and *de novo* synthesis of cytokines including IL-1, IL-4, IL-6, IL-10, IL-12, TNF- α and IFN- γ are selectively suppressed upon MAFA clustering, while that of IL-3, IL-5 and IL-16 are unaffected (unpubl. results).

8.4 Epilogue

Crucial life-maintaining biological activities like those performed by the immune system obviously require close and strict regulation. In this chapter, we have reviewed primarily the different currently identified cell-membrane components involved in negative regulation of the cellular response to one member of the MIRR family, the type I Fc ϵ receptor. As it may become evident from this discussion, the field is still developing and at a fast rate. New proteins endowed with regulatory function(s) are still being discovered. Moreover, our current understanding of the complex networks by which they exert regulation is still quite limited. Also, among other issues, we hardly addressed here the exceptionally important regulatory elements operating at the level of the different key players in these networks, namely, enzymes and adaptor proteins. One particular example illustrating this topic is the protein tyrosine kinases family, where intriguing control elements are built into their structure. This topic is of course too broad and out of the scope of this chapter but would complement it. As an evolving field in life sciences, our review is bound to become outdated soon, but we have tried to provide a snapshot of it at this point in time.

Acknowledgements. The research done in I. Pecht's laboratory is supported by a grant from the Israel National Science Foundation, founded by the Israel Academy of Science and Humanities and by the E. and B. Shoon Foundation.

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Histamine Receptors and Signaling

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9.1

Introduction

Histamine is considered as one of the most important immunomodulator molecules owing to being a mediator of allergy and inflammation processes. Moreover, histamine is a chemical messenger and aminergic neurotransmitter, playing an important role in a multitude of physiological processes in the central nervous system and peripheral tissues. Histamine is synthesized in a restricted population of neurons located in the tuberomammillary nucleus of the posterior hypothalamus implicated in many brain functions (e.g., sleep/wakefulness, hormonal secretion, cardiovascular control, thermoregulation, food intake, and memory formation). In peripheral tissues, histamine is stored in mast cells, basophils and enterochromaffin cells. Mast cell histamine plays an important role in the pathogenesis of various allergic conditions, e.g., histamine release leads to various well-known symptoms of allergic conditions in the skin and the airway system. Histamine can influence the tumor cell proliferation and promotion directly as a growth factor, e.g., in colon tumor, gastric tumor and melanoma, and indirectly via the modification of, e.g., cytokine production in the tumor and in the tumor-surrounding environment.

The effects of histamine are mediated through four pharmacologically distinct subtypes of receptors, i.e., the H_1 , H_2 , H_3 , and H_4 receptors, which are all members of the G-protein coupled receptor (GPCR) family. Histamine receptors display seven transmembrane (TM) domains, which are predicted to form α -helices that span the cell membrane, an extracellular N-terminus and a cytoplasmic C-terminus of variable length. The third and fifth TM domains of the receptors appear to be responsible for ligand binding, while the third intracellular loop is responsible for signaling pathway connection (Fig. 9.1).

Interestingly, the genes encoding the H_1 , H_2 , and H_3 receptors share less protein sequence identity with each other than with other biogenic amine receptor family members, e.g., with M2 muscarinergic receptor. Their overall homology is low (average 38%), suggesting that these histamine receptors evolved from different ancestor sequences (Zhu et al. 2001). Although lacking significant overall sequence homology, the histamine receptors apparently acquired crucial elements for the recognition of histamine during their evolution, e.g., in their ligand binding region. Nucleotide sequences of human H_3 , H_4 , H_1 , and H_2 receptors are shown in Fig. 9.2.

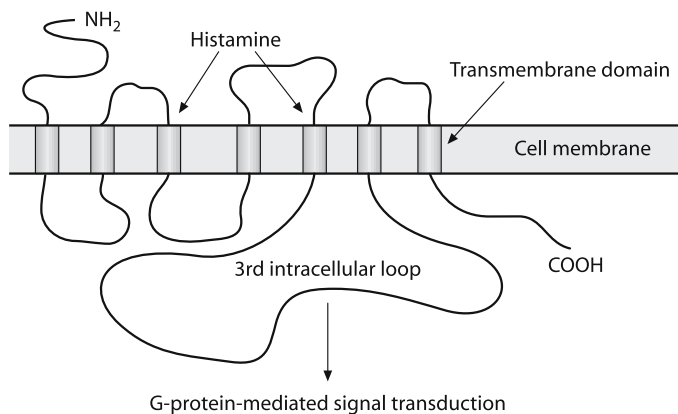


Fig. 9.1. General structure of histamine receptors. The third intracellular loop of receptors is mainly involved in the signal transduction pathways

9.2

H₁ Receptor

Human H₁ receptor (H₁R) is localized on the third chromosome (3p21-p14), composed of 487 amino acids and showed ~75–85% interspecies homology. Mouse and rat H₁R contains 488 and 486 amino acids, respectively. The human H₁R gene contains an intron in the 5' untranslated region, immediately upstream of the start codon, but the coding sequence of this receptor is intronless. The promoter region of the gene appears to share some similarities with other GPCR genes, such as absence of the TATA and CAAT box at the appropriate localization (Smit et al. 1999; Bakker et al. 2004). Some nucleotide polymorphisms have been described in the H₁R gene, but these do not seem to be associated with atopic asthma (Sasaki et al. 2000).

9.2.1

The H₁ Receptor Signaling Pathway

H₁ receptor preferentially couples to the Gq/11 family of G-proteins and causes mobilization of intracellular Ca²⁺ in a pertussis toxin (PTX)-insensitive fashion. Histamine activates phospholipase C (PLC), which mediates the cleavage of the membrane phosphatidyl inositol diphosphate (PIP₂), which results in formation of inositol triphosphate (IP₃) and 1,2-diacyl glycerol (DAG). IP₃ in turn mediates Ca²⁺ release from endoplasmic reticulum, and also increases Ca²⁺ influx from the extracellular space as a secondary but longer lasting event. This latter effect can be inhibited by nifedipine, suggesting the involvement of an L-type voltage-dependent Ca²⁺ ion channel. As a consequence of Ca²⁺ ion influx, a secondary breakdown of membrane phosphoinositides occurs. IP₃ can be phospho-

Fig. 9.2. Sequence alignment of histamine receptor proteins. Human histamine receptor polypeptide sequences deduced from the cloned cDNAs from H₃, H₄, H₁, and H₂ receptors were aligned. An alignment will display by default the following *symbols* denoting degree of conservation observed in each column: *asterisk* means that the residues or nucleotides in that column are identical in all sequences in the alignment; *colon* means that conserved substitutions have been observed; *dot* means that semi-conserved substitutions are observed

rylated to produce IP₃ which further increases the intracellular Ca²⁺ level. DAG activates a serine/threonine kinase, the protein kinase C (PKC) that can phosphorylate and activate other effector proteins in the cells. Additional secondary signaling pathways can be induced by the increased intracellular Ca²⁺ level and DAG. Via calcium/calmodulin (Ca²⁺/CAM)-dependent enzyme, nitric oxide (NO) activity is stimulated to produce an elevated NO level, which results in the activation

of guanylyl cyclase enzyme to produce cyclic guanosine-3',5'-monophosphate (cGMP). Besides PKC activation, DAG can stimulate another enzyme, namely, phospholipase A2 (PLA2), which can form active arachidonic acid metabolites, such as prostaglandin E2, prostacyclin, and thromboxane A2 (Leurs et al. 1994; Hill et al. 1997).

Recently, some of the downstream elements of the H₁R signaling pathway have been described (Bakker et al. 2001). One of them is a transcription factor, the nuclear factor kappa B (NF- κ B). Using luciferase-based reporter gene assay in H₁R transfected CHO cells, it was found that histamine stimulates the *c-fos* promoter through the activation of a PKC- α isoform and the mitogen-activated protein kinase (MAPK) pathway (Megson et al. 2001).

Data indicate that both Gq/11- and G-subunits play a role in H₁R-mediated NF- κ B activation similar to NF- κ B activation mediated via the bradykinin B2 receptor or US28 (Xie et al. 2000; Casarosa et al. 2001). The constitutive H₁R-mediated activation of NF- κ B is mediated via free G-subunits from Gq/11-proteins, whereas histamine-mediated NF- κ B activation is most likely regulated via Gq/11-subunits. Although PKC is a proper candidate for Gq/11-mediated NF- κ B activation (Shahrestanifar et al. 1999) and both phosphatidylinositol 3-kinase (PI3 K) and the serine/threonine protein kinase Akt (Akt) have been shown to be involved in the G-protein-mediated activation, the actual target(s) of the G-protein and G-protein subunits in the H₁R-mediated responses are not well known and are currently under investigation.

The MAPK family can be divided into three different subfamilies: the extracellular signal-regulated kinases (ERK), the stress-regulated kinases (p38 MAPK) and the Jun N-terminal kinases (JNK). These kinases can be activated by distinct intracellular cascades, which are able to induce their phosphorylation on threonine (Thr) and tyrosine (Tyr) residues. They are expressed abundantly in the adrenal gland, where they participate in regulation of calcium homeostasis, and the synthesis and secretion of catecholamines. It has been demonstrated that in bovine adrenal chromaffin cells (BACC), the Ca²⁺ ion-dependent upregulation of tyrosine hydroxylase (TOH) produced by nicotine and KCl requires the participation of MAPK kinase 1/2 (MEK1/2), the upstream kinase that is capable of activating ERK1/2 (Griffiths and Marley 2001). Recently, it has been shown that in pheochromocytoma cells, overexpression of glia maturation factor induces TOH phosphorylation through a mechanism dependent on p38 and its downstream substrate, MAP kinase-activated protein kinase 2 (MAPKAP kinase-2) (Zaheer and Lim 1998).

Histamine can induce the H₁R-dependent activation of ERK1/2 and p38 in the smooth muscle cell line DDT(1)MF-2 (Robinson and Dickenson 2001) as well as the upregulation of JNK in gastric parietal and peritoneal mast cells (Nagahara et al. 1998; Azzolina et al. 2002). Some known elements and their function in the H₁ receptor-mediated signaling pathway are summarized in Fig. 9.3.

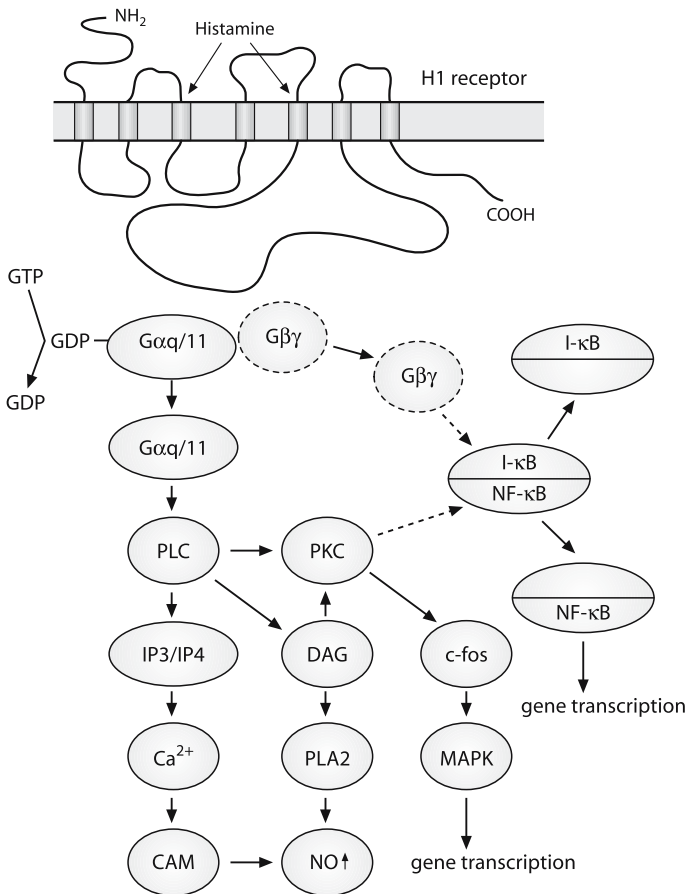


Fig. 9.3. Some known elements of H₁ receptor signaling pathways. *Arrows with solid line* show well-characterized pathways and relations, while *arrows with dashed line* show connections that are not so well characterized, evidence coming from few experiments

9.2.2

Some Effects of Histamine Through H₁ Receptor

As mentioned above, H₁ receptor was the first membrane protein to be discovered as a mediator of histamine action. Its main activities include smooth muscle contraction and vascular permeability. It is the chief histamine receptor subtype involved in acute inflammatory and allergic disorders. H₁ receptors have been found in a wide variety of tissues including mammalian brain, airway smooth muscle, the gastrointestinal tract, genitourinary system, cardiovascular system, adrenal medulla, endothelial and various immune cells. Enhanced expression of H₁R was observed in the nasal mucosa of patients with allergic rhinitis, in cul-

tured aortic intimal smooth muscle cells of patients suffering from atherosclerosis, in the inflamed joints of rheumatoid arthritis patients, etc. (Takagishi et al. 1995).

Histamine is widely distributed throughout the mammalian nervous system, e. g., in type 2 astrocytes where histamine stimulates phosphoinositide turnover and increases intracellular calcium concentration via H_1 receptors. In C6 glial cells, H_1R is involved in liberating calcium from internal stores by activation of PLC. The consequent increase in intracellular Ca^{2+} ions activates a Ca^{2+} -dependent K^+ ion channel, resulting in hyperpolarization of cell membrane. In addition, histamine H_1R activation has been shown to produce neuronal depolarization by blocking potassium conductance, which has a role in determining the membrane potential (Weiger et al. 1997).

H_1 receptor-deficient mice display abnormal circadian rhythm of locomotor activity, with increased activity during the light cycle and lower activity during the dark cycle, as well as decreased exploratory activity in a novel environment (Inoue et al. 1996).

Further reports indicate that H_1 receptor knockout ($H_1R^{-/-}$) mice demonstrate lower levels of anxiety and aggressiveness (Yanai et al. 1998); moreover, animals were less sensitive to pain, as measured by a variety of thermal, mechanical, and chemical nociceptive tests (Mobarakeh et al. 2000). Neurochemical analysis showed that cortical levels of dopamine and its metabolites were higher and the turnover rates of dopamine and serotonin were increased in $H_1R^{-/-}$ mice, indicating changes in monoamine activity. Fat deposition in response to a high fat diet was more rapid and the suppression of feeding behavior induced by leptin was attenuated in H_1R mutants, demonstrating the involvement of H_1R in regulation of feeding behavior (Masaki et al. 2001).

H_1 receptor agonists do not appear to have any therapeutic potential according to our recent knowledge, but they are useful tools in research regarding the H_1 receptor function in different experimental conditions. New, highly potent and selective H_1R agonists seem to be the family members of histaprodifen. Its methylated derivative, $N\alpha$ -methylhistaprodifen, is the most potent H_1 agonist known so far (Elz et al. 2000). As for H_1R antagonists, classical antihistamines included compounds such as mepyramine (also called pyrilamine) and triprolidine (Hill et al. 1977; van der Goot and Timmerman 2000). They are highly potent H_1 antagonists, and easily penetrate the brain, causing sedation. Many new so-called second-generation antihistamines are non-sedating H_1 antagonists (e. g., cetirizine, astemizole and loratadine), and they are used to treat allergic conditions (Curran et al. 2004).

9.3

H_2 Receptor

The sole existence of the H_1 receptor could not explain the effects of histamine on cardiac muscle and gastric acid secretion; therefore a second subtype was proposed, termed the H_2 receptor. It is involved in a wide array of physiological his-

tamine actions, including the relaxation of airway and vascular smooth muscle, regulation of right atrial and ventricular muscle of the heart, inhibition of basophil chemotactic responsiveness, various actions on immune cells and inhibition of prostaglandin E₂-stimulated duodenal epithelial bicarbonate secretion. Its principal action from a clinical point of view is related to its role in gastric acid secretion. H₂ receptor knockout mice have been recently developed, and appear to be viable and fertile, but show considerable alterations in the morphology and structure of the gastric mucosa (Kobayashi et al. 2000).

The H₂R gene located on chromosome 5 was cloned in 1991 (Gantz et al. 1991). The 5' untranslated region of the gene contains some regulatory elements such as cAMP response element, GATA motifs and AP2 site, but apparently without TATA box-like sequence. In addition, multiple transcription initiation sites were revealed in this gene. Similarly to the H₁ receptor gene, the coding parts of the H₂ receptor gene lack intron sequences (Del Valle and Gantz 1997; Igaz et al. 2002). Several nucleotide sequence variants of the gene have been described. Among these, Lys207Arg, Asn217Asp and Lys231Arg could be particularly interesting since they are located in the third intracellular loop of protein involved in the signal transduction pathway (Orange et al. 1996). Val133Gly may also be relevant, since the second intracellular loop where it is situated appears to have some role also in the signal transduction pathway.

Human H₂ receptor protein contains 359 amino-acid residues, and its ligand binding site appears to be similar to the corresponding region of H₁R. The most notable difference between the two receptors is the comparatively much shorter third intracellular loop and the longer C-terminus in the H₂ receptor sequence (Del Valle and Gantz 1997).

9.3.1

The H₂ Receptor Signaling Pathway

Histamine H₂ receptors couple to adenylyl cyclase via the G_s protein, and histamine stimulates cAMP production in many different cell types, e. g., the CNS and CNS-derived cells, gastric mucosa, cardiac myocytes, fat cells, vascular smooth cells, basophils and neutrophils (Del Valle and Gantz 1997). Elevated cAMP concentration activates protein kinase A (PKA), which is the downstream effector kinase of this pathway, phosphorylating a wide variety of proteins in the cells mentioned above.

However, the H₂R signaling pathway shows a dual face. In addition to the adenylyl cyclase-mediated one, histamine through H₂ receptor can increase the intracellular Ca²⁺ ion level in some cell types, e. g., gastric parietal cells and HL-60 leukaemic cell line. This action of histamine seems to be a direct effect mediated by another G_q member of the PTX-sensitive G-protein family (Hill et al. 1997). In contrast to other receptors that stimulate the dual signaling pathway, H₂R activates each pathway directly and the required histamine concentration for the stimulation of both systems is identical.

9.3.2

Some Effects of Histamine Through H₂ Receptor

Dual coupling of H₂Rs to G_s and G_q was demonstrated for the first time in cardiac myocytes. It represents a novel mechanism to augment positive inotropic effects by activating two different signaling pathways via one type of histamine receptor. Activation of the G_s-cAMP-PKA pathway promotes Ca²⁺ influx through phosphorylation of L-type Ca²⁺ channels. Simultaneous activation of G_q-signaling pathways might result in phosphoinositide turnover and Ca²⁺ release from intracellular stores, thereby augmenting H₂-induced increases in the intracellular Ca²⁺ ion (Wellner-Kienitz et al. 2003).

Previously, it had been found that histamine H₁ and H₂ receptors are expressed in the atrium (Hattori et al. 1991). It was also known that the heart contains as much as 3 µg histamine/g tissue (Endou and Levi 1995). Effects of histamine on the regulation of cardiac function are species-specific and also tissue-specific, even in the same animal. Histamine has been known to increase force of contraction in rabbit and human atria via activation of adenylyl-cyclase and to increase cAMP production (Longhurst and McNeill 1982).

It was found that activation of G-protein-coupled histamine H₂ receptor decreases atrial ANP release via cAMP-protein kinase signaling. A histamine-induced decrease in ANP release was a function of cAMP production. Because accentuation of cAMP production results in activation of L-type Ca²⁺ channels, and also an increase in Ca²⁺ influx via L-type channels inhibits ANP release in the beating atria and perfused heart, a role for increased Ca²⁺ influx in cAMP inhibition of ANP release by histamine was expected (Li et al. 2003).

Lie et al. (2003) found that both positive inotropic effect and an increase in cAMP production were blocked by cimetidine but not mepyramine, which indicates that the effects are related to the activation of histamine H₂ receptor. It was shown in rabbit atria that the increase in contractility and cAMP production by histamine is caused exclusively by an activation of H₂ receptor. An increase in intracellular cAMP production may increase Ca²⁺ influx via cAMP-dependent protein kinase A (PKA), which in turn may result in an increase in contractility. It was shown that histamine-induced increase in Ca²⁺ current is blocked by H₂-receptor antagonist cimetidine and PKA inhibitor RP-adenosine 3',5'-cyclic monophosphorothioate [RP-cAMP(S)].

H₂R agonists have been proven to be effective for acid peptic disorders of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract. H₂ receptor agonist, dimaprit, is a relatively selective H₂ receptor agonist, with minimal H₁R receptor agonism but considerable antagonistic potency on the H₃ and H₄ receptors. Amthamine [2-amino-5-(2-aminoethyl)-4-methylthiazole], a rigid dimaprit analogue, combines high H₂R selectivity and is equipotent to or slightly more potent than histamine itself (van der Goot and Timmerman 2000). One impromidine analog, arpromidine, due to its high agonistic potency at the H₂ receptor, can be considered a potential candidate for treatment of congestive heart failure.

Among H₂ receptor antagonists, cimetidine was the first to be clinically used for the treatment of gastric and duodenal ulcers, but it has become clear that cimetidine binds to non-H₂R imidazole recognition sites as well (van der Goot

and Timmerman 2000). Besides cimetidine, tiotidine and ranitidine are potent and more selective H₂ receptor antagonists. Both compounds inhibit gastric acid secretion, but only ranitidine possesses therapeutic potential in gastric ulcer treatment because of the severe side effects of tiotidine.

Evidence has accumulated indicating that histamine exerts a variety of immunoregulatory actions. It inhibits CD4⁺ T cells and CD8⁺ T cells to produce histamine when activated with ConA (Kubo and Nakano 1999). Furthermore, histamine regulates cytokine production by T cells and macrophages (Sonobe et al. 2004). Histamine affects the balance of cytokines from T helper type 1 (Th1) cells and T helper type 2 (Th2) cells by shifting cytokine production from a Th1 to a Th2 pattern (Packard and Khan 2003). It is known that in certain circumstances, stress mediators, as well as histamine and adenosine, can be increased, and due to histamine effects the upregulated Th2 cytokines may also play a role in induction and progression of certain processes, e.g., in allergic/atopic reactions and in tumor growth. Modulation of IL-12 and IL-10 secretion by histamine involved the H₂ and H₃ receptors of antigen presenting cells. Histamine-dependent suppression of IL-2 mRNA expression and secretion from mouse splenocytes is abrogated by a protein kinase A-inhibitor, whereas the amine did not influence histaminase. In contrast to IFN- γ , neither α -FMH nor histaminase had any appreciable effect on the production of IL-4.

IL-10 production was enhanced by histamine through either an H₁R- or an H₂R-dependent fashion (Osna et al. 2001). The pretreatment of the splenocytes with histamine stimulates PMA- and ionomycin-induced IL-10 secretion from the cells, which was reversed by either H₁R or interfere with signal transduction pathways downstream of PKC, leading to production of IL-2 (Poluektova et al. 1999).

However, evidence has also accumulated to indicate cross talk between these receptors. For example, stimulation of the signal transducing system associated with PLC also activates H₂R-mediated reactions, leading to increased synthesis of cAMP (Garbarg and Schwartz 1988). In addition, histamine stimulates IL-10 production in Th2 cells which was reversed by either H₁R or H₂R antagonists, and the release of IFN- γ and IL-13 was enhanced by histamine in both H₁R- and H₂R-deficient spleen cells (Sonobe et al. 2004). Inhibition of IFN- γ synthesis by histamine was reversed by either cimetidine, an H₂R antagonist, or pyrilamine, an H₁R antagonist (Simons et al. 1995).

9.3.3

H₁ and H₂ Receptors on Human Neoplasias

In addition to the data available from studies of tumor cell lines derived from different human neoplasias and xenotransplanted models in nude mice, many investigations have also been carried out in biopsies of tumor tissues. Most reports are coincident in showing an increase in histamine synthesis and content in tumors as well as in the presence of histamine receptors.

In humans, several clinical trials have been carried out with H₂R antagonists as an adjunct to surgical resection, with conflicting results. While the H₂ antagonist cimetidine has been shown to inhibit the presence of tumor-infiltrating

lymphocytes in colorectal cancer, this was not found in the case of breast cancer. Comparing breast cancer with colorectal cancer, no relationship between preoperative cimetidine administration and tumor cell proliferation was seen overall (Bowrey et al. 2000). A study with tissue samples obtained by surgery on 25 patients indicated that both H_1 and H_2 receptors are present in the human mammary gland, in benign lesions, and in breast carcinomas. In the different benign lesions, H_2R produced the increase in cAMP levels, while H_1R was coupled to PLC activation. On the other hand, the response observed in carcinomas was different: H_1R was invariably linked to the PLC pathway, but H_2R stimulated indistinctively both transductional pathways. In agreement with a previous report, approximately 25% of breast carcinomas were negative for H_2R . In all cases, the lack of expression of H_2R corresponded to tumors from patients with poor prognosis or evolution (Davio et al. 1993). According to a follow-up study to check risk factors for ovarian cancer development in females, long-time usage (5 years) of histamine receptor antagonists could be a risk factor in females (Lacey et al. 2004).

9.4

H_3 Receptor

As for H_1 and H_2 receptors, H_3R was initially identified on a pharmacological basis. The first report of the H_3 receptor came from Arrang et al. (1983) who found a new histamine receptor that acted as an autoreceptor which mediated histamine release from neurons. Lovenberg et al. (1999) cloned the receptor in 1999 after extensive searches through databases to identify sequences that might be GPCRs. They identified a sequence that encoded a 445-amino acid coding region with low homology to other biogenic amine receptors, which may have allowed it to elude discovery for so long. However, it did have an aspartic acid residue in transmembrane domain 3 which is a conserved residue for receptors that bind to primary amines. The cloned receptor, once expressed, clearly showed the pharmacological profile characteristic of the H_3 receptor (Lovenberg et al. 1999). The gene is located on human chromosome 20 (Coge et al. 2001a; Tardivel-Lacombe et al. 2001) and contains several introns, which is unusual for GPCRs. It has been reported that splice variants of the H_3 receptor exist in several species including humans, although their functional relevance remains somewhat controversial (Liu et al. 2000; Coge et al. 2001a; Drutel et al. 2001; Tardivel-Lacombe et al. 2001; Wellendorph et al. 2002; Wiedemann et al. 2002; Chen et al. 2003). Variants appear to either be truncated proteins that are not functional, or have partial deletions of the third intracellular loop, leading to varying pharmacology (Coge et al. 2001a; Drutel et al. 2001; Tardivel-Lacombe et al. 2001; Wellendorph et al. 2002). In addition, there are reports of polymorphisms, including one at position 280 (alanine to valine) in a patient with Shy-Drager syndrome (Wiedemann et al. 2002).

The H_3 receptor binds to histamine with a high affinity ($K_d \sim 5$ nM), which is consistent with its role as an autoreceptor. There has been a large body of work concerning the development of H_3 receptor ligands (see Stark 2003 for a review).

Most agonists of the receptor are imidazole derivatives related to histamine. The most commonly used reference agonists are R- α -methylhistamine and imetit, both of which bind to the H₃ receptor with subnanomolar affinity. However, both of these ligands have some cross-reactivity with the H₄ receptor (see below). Much more work has been done in developing H₃ receptor antagonists, since they appear to have more therapeutic utility. The early antagonists were also imidazoles like the agonists. This class includes thioperamide, which is a standard H₃ receptor antagonist used in many studies. As for the imidazole-based agonists, thioperamide also shows cross-reactivity to H₄ receptors in addition to cross-reactivity with 5-HT₃ and sigma receptors (Leurs et al. 1995). Recently, there has been much work to develop non-imidazole antagonists. Some examples of the different imidazole replacements are imidazopyridine (Shah et al. 2002; Chai et al. 2003), benzylamine (Apodaca et al. 2003), benzthiazole (Walczynski et al. 1999), aminoalkylguanidine (Linney et al. 2000), piperidine (Meier et al. 2002; Miko et al. 2003), quinoline (Turner et al. 2003) and piperazine amide (Faghih et al. 2002a,b; Vasudevan et al. 2002; Esbenshade et al. 2003). The piperazine amides have been shown to be efficacious in mouse obesity and dipsogenia models (Faghih et al. 2003; Gfesser et al. 2004).

The expression of the H₃ receptor based on mRNA appears to be mainly restricted to the central nervous system. The human receptor mRNA has been found in human brain samples, with the highest expression being in the caudate, cortex and thalamus and little expression seen in peripheral tissues (Lovenberg et al. 1999). The rat and mouse receptors show a similar pattern of expression in the brain and no expression in other tissues (Lovenberg et al. 2000; Morisset et al. 2000; Drutel et al. 2001; Chen et al. 2003). The distribution of the receptor can also be probed using radiolabeled ligands. This approach has shown the existence of the H₃ receptor protein in rat cerebral cortical membranes, striatum, hippocampus, substantia nigra and olfactory nucleus (Arrang et al. 1987; Pollard et al. 1993). Ligand binding has also been observed in guinea pig cerebral cortical membranes (Kilpatrick and Michel 1991), the lung (Arrang et al. 1987), ileum and large intestine (Korte et al. 1990). Human and non-human primate brains also have H₃ receptor ligand binding sites (Martinez-Mir et al. 1990).

9.4.1

The H₃ Receptor Signaling Pathway

In cells transfected with the human or rat H₃ receptor, histamine and R- α -methylhistamine could inhibit forskolin-stimulated cAMP production, and this inhibition is abolished by pretreatment of the cells with PTX, indicating that the receptor is coupled to G_{i/o} G-proteins (Lovenberg et al. 1999, 2000; Drutel et al. 2001; Schwartz et al. 2003). The receptor can also signal via increases in intracellular calcium, as seen when the mouse receptor is cotransfected with chimeric G_{q15} G-proteins (Chen et al. 2003). Furthermore, it has been shown that activation of rat H₃ receptor can increase p44/p42 MAP kinase phosphorylation and arachidonic acid release in transfected cells (Drutel et al. 2001; Schwartz et al. 2003). As for the cAMP response, both of these responses are PTX-sensitive. Finally, there is

some evidence in transfected systems that the H_3 receptor can inhibit the activity of Na^+/H^+ exchangers (Silver et al. 2001).

In tissues, data are consistent with the results from transfected cells that the H_3 receptor is a GPCR that can couple to $G_{i/o}$ G-proteins. R- α -methylhistamine increases [^{35}S]GTP γ S binding in rat cerebral cortical membranes which can be blocked by pretreatment with PTX (Clark and Hill 1996). It has been shown that histamine and R- α -methylhistamine can inhibit the release of noradrenaline in rat spinal cord slices and this effect can be blocked by PTX, but it appeared that cAMP did not play a role in the signaling (Celuch 1995). Poli et al. (1993) showed that R- α -methylhistamine reduced cholinergic neurotransmission in guinea pig duodenum that once again was PTX-sensitive but did not seem to involve changes in cAMP levels. The H_3 receptor in this system appeared to inhibit N-type Ca^{2+} channels, thereby reducing the intracellular calcium level (Poli et al. 1994). The H_3 receptor has been shown to inhibit Ca^{2+} channels in a PTX-sensitive fashion which led to inhibition of adrenergic responses in guinea pig heart (Endou et al. 1994), acetylcholine release in guinea pig ileum (Lee and Parsons 2000; Blandizzi et al. 2001), glutamate release in rat striatal synaptosomes (Molina-Hernandez et al. 2001), and GABA release from rat neurons (Jang et al. 2001). These effects do not seem to involve changes in cAMP or cGMP levels, or kinase activation.

One interesting aspect of H_3 receptor signaling is that it appears to possess a high degree of constitutive activity; that is, activity in the absence of agonists. In cells transfected with the H_3 receptor there is an inhibition of forskolin-mediated cAMP levels compared to untransfected cells, which can be further inhibited by the addition of agonists (Wieland et al. 2001). This opens up the possibility that H_3 receptor ligands that were initially characterized as antagonists may in fact be inverse agonists, i.e., they inhibit the constitutive activity of the receptor. Indeed, this has been found to be the case for thioperamide, clobenpropit, and iodophenpropit, whereas proxyfan acts as a neutral antagonist (Morisset et al. 2000; Wieland et al. 2001). Constitutive activity of the H_3 receptor has also been found in tissues and in vivo, where inverse agonists increase histamine neuronal activity (Morisset et al. 2000).

9.4.2

Some Effects of Histamine Through H_3 Receptors

The H_3 receptor was initially identified as an autoreceptor that mediated histamine release from neurons (Arrang et al. 1983). In histaminergic neurons, the H_3 receptor controls both the release and the synthesis of histamine (Arrang et al. 1987). The H_3 receptor has also been shown to act as a heteroreceptor where it affects the release of other neurotransmitters. Activation of the H_3 receptor has been shown to inhibit the release of acetylcholine (Clapham and Kilpatrick 1992; Blandina et al. 1996; Lee and Parsons 2000; Blandizzi et al. 2001), glutamate (Molina-Hernandez et al. 2001), noradrenaline (Schlicker et al. 1994), norepinephrine (Imamura et al. 1996; Levi and Smith 2000; Yamasaki et al. 2001; Koyama et al. 2003a), dopamine (Schlicker et al. 1993; Molina-Hernandez et al. 2000), sero-

tonin (Schlicker et al. 1988; Fink et al. 1990), substance P (Ohkubo et al. 1995), and GABA (Arias-Montano et al. 2001; Jang et al. 2001). While the H₃ receptor appears to be involved in the induced release of many neurotransmitters, it may not play a role under steady-state conditions, since brain levels of dopamine, norepinephrine, and serotonin are not changed in H₃ receptor-deficient mice, whereas levels of histamine are decreased (Toyota et al. 2002).

This effect on neurotransmitter release has several physiological consequences. R- α -methylhistamine appears to increase slow-wave sleep and decrease wakefulness and REM sleep, whereas thioperamide can block these effects and on its own increase wakefulness (Lin et al. 1990; Monti et al. 1991). Studies on thioperamide-induced wakefulness in H₃-deficient mice proved that this effect was due to the H₃ receptor (Toyota et al. 2002). The H₃ receptor has also been linked to changes in memory and learning. H₃ agonists such as R- α -methylhistamine lead to impaired object recognition and passive avoidance responses in rats (Blandina et al. 1996). Two H₃ antagonists have been found to enhance the performance of rats in a repeat acquisition avoidance response, which is a model for attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (Fox et al. 2002). In addition, thioperamide can partially block scopolamine-induced amnesia in a rat passive avoidance test (Giovannini et al. 1999). The H₃-deficient mice show normal learning behavior but are resistant to the effects of thioperamide on scopolamine-induced amnesia (Toyota et al. 2002). H₃R has also been implicated in food intake. Thioperamide and other H₃ receptor antagonists have been shown to decrease feeding and body weight in rats and mice (Attoub et al. 2001; Gfesser et al. 2004). Itoh et al. (1999) showed that thioperamide can inhibit peptide YY-induced hyperphagia in rats. There is one report (Takahashi et al. 2002) of the H₃ receptor knockout mice showing signs of mild obesity, but this may depend on the feeding conditions since it was not seen in another study (Toyota et al. 2002).

As a final note on the effects of histamine via the H₃ receptor, it must be pointed out that many of the studies have relied on the use of agonist/antagonist pairs such as R- α -methylhistamine and thioperamide as proof of H₃ involvement. However, it is now known that most of the imidazole-based H₃ ligands also have affinity for the H₄ receptor, and the findings in the literature should be judged accordingly.

9.4.3

Uses of H₃ Receptor Antagonists

As detailed above, animal studies indicate a role for H₃ receptors in numerous brain functions. The receptors clearly play a role in food intake, memory and sleep/wake cycles. This suggests that H₃ receptor ligands may be of use in treating a variety of conditions including sleep, memory, and cognitive disorders as well as obesity. In addition, there is evidence that H₃ antagonists may be useful in treating myocardial ischemia. There is a greater incidence and longer duration of ventricular fibrillation and increases in norepinephrine overflow in hearts subjected to ischemia when the H₃ receptor is absent (Koyama et al. 2003a,b). Cur-

rently there are no H_3 antagonists on the market, but several are reported to be in clinical trials for conditions including insomnia, cognitive disorders, anxiety, and obesity.

9.5 H_4 Receptor

Cloning of the H_3 receptor led directly to identification of the histamine H_4 receptor (Hough 2001; Liu et al. 2001a). Unlike the H_3 receptor, the H_4 receptor was largely unanticipated in the literature, except for a description by Raible et al. (1992, 1994) of a non- H_1 , H_2 , H_3 receptor on eosinophils. The primary amino acid sequence of the H_4 receptor clearly identifies it as a member of the GPCR family. The 390 amino acid protein is predicted to have seven transmembrane regions, DRY sequence at the end of transmembrane helix 3 and an aspartic acid residue in the second transmembrane domain, which indicate that it is a member of the biogenic amine GPCR family. The aspartic acid residue at position 94 in transmembrane helix 3, which is conserved among the other histamine receptors, is crucial for the binding of histamine (Shin et al. 2002). The H_4 receptor has highest sequence homology to the H_3 receptor, but its homology to H_1 and H_2 receptors is actually lower than that to other GPCRs (Nguyen et al. 2001). The H_4 receptor has been mapped to chromosome 18q11.2 and has a similar genomic structure as the H_3 receptor in that it contains two introns and three exons (Coge et al. 2001b; Liu et al. 2001a; Zhu et al. 2001). This suggests the possibility of the existence of splice variants, but to date none has been reported.

Most of the pharmacology of the H_4 receptor has been mapped out using transfected cells (see Jablonowski et al. 2004 for a review). Like the H_3 receptor, the H_4 receptor has a high affinity for histamine, with K_d values of approximately 8 nM, which is not surprising given that the sequence homology in the transmembrane region is 58% between the two receptors. This is also reflected in the fact that the standard imidazole-based ligands of H_3 also have affinity for the H_4 receptor (Nakamura et al. 2000; Oda et al. 2000; Liu et al. 2001a; Morse et al. 2001; Zhu et al. 2001). This includes R- α -methylhistamine and thioperamide, the latter of which binds to the H_4 receptor with an affinity comparable to that on H_3 receptors (Liu et al. 2001a). Most of the H_1 and H_2 receptor ligands, such as diphenhydramine, ranitidine and cimetidine, do not have affinity for the H_4 receptor. Recently, selective imidazole-based agonists (Hashimoto et al. 2003) and non-imidazole antagonists (Thurmond et al. 2004) for the H_4 receptor have been reported. The availability of selective ligands has been essential in probing the physiological role of the different histamine receptors (see above) and will be very important for the H_4 receptor as well.

Like the H_3 receptor, the H_4 receptor has a restricted expression pattern and seems to be limited to cells of the hematopoietic lineage (Oda et al. 2000; Liu et al. 2001a; Morse et al. 2001; Zhu et al. 2001). There are hints of expression on many hematopoietic cell types, but it is clearly expressed on eosinophils, mast cells, basophils, dendritic cells, and T cells (Liu et al. 2001a; Gantner et al. 2002; Hofstra et al. 2003). While this expression pattern differs from that of the H_3 receptor,

there is significant overlap with H₁ and H₂ receptor, whose expression has also been reported on these cell types. However, expression of H₄ appears to be restricted to these hematopoietic cells, whereas the H₁ and H₂ receptors are more widely expressed. Eosinophils, mast cells, basophils, dendritic cells and T cells are all major players in the inflammatory response and presence of the H₄ receptor on these cell types suggest that it plays a role in inflammation. In support of this, it has been shown that H₄ mRNA levels can be modulated by IL-10 and IL-13 (Morse et al. 2001) and that the promoter region of the gene indicates that it may be regulated by other inflammatory stimuli such as interferon, TNF α and IL-6 (Coge et al. 2001b).

9.5.1

The H₄ Receptor Signaling Pathway

In transfected cells, the H₄ receptor can inhibit forskolin-stimulated cAMP increases; however, the levels of inhibition are much lower than those seen with the H₃ receptor under similar conditions (Nakamura et al. 2000; Oda et al. 2000; Liu et al. 2001a; Zhu et al. 2001). The effect on cAMP can be blocked by pretreating the cells with PTX, suggesting a role for G $\alpha_{i/o}$ proteins (Oda et al. 2000). Activation can also lead to increases in intracellular calcium, but this requires that it be cotransfected with promiscuous or chimeric G-proteins (Oda et al. 2000; Liu et al. 2001a,b; Morse et al. 2001; Zhu et al. 2001). There has been one report of activation of MAP kinases in transfected HEK-293 cells (Morse et al. 2001). The phosphorylation of the p44/p42 MAP kinase was sensitive to PTX treatment, implying that this effect is downstream of G-protein activation.

In primary cells, H₄ receptor signaling is mediated by increases in intracellular calcium levels. Raible et al. (1992, 1994) showed that histamine can induce calcium mobilization in human eosinophils and that this effect is not mediated by H₁, H₂, or H₃ receptors, implying a role for the H₄ receptor. In mouse primary mast cells, histamine induces calcium mobilization from intracellular stores which can be blocked by H₄ receptor antagonists but not by antagonists for other histamine receptors (Thurmond et al. 2004). In addition, histamine is unable to induce a calcium response in mast cells from H₄ receptor-deficient mice (Hofstra et al. 2003). The calcium response is similar to that seen via H₁ receptor activation in that it can be blocked by a phospholipase C inhibitor, U73122 (Hofstra et al. 2003). It is also blocked by PTX treatment, whereas the H₁R pathway is not affected, suggesting the involvement of different mechanisms. Thus, in primary cells, activation of H₄R leads to increases in intracellular calcium, which in mast cells is mediated by G $\alpha_{i/o}$ proteins and phospholipase C. It has been speculated that phospholipase C is activated by the released G $\beta\gamma$ subunits, and hydrolyzes phosphatidylinositol 4,5-bisphosphate (PIP₂) to diacylglycerol and inositol-1,4,5-trisphosphate (IP₃), leading to the release of calcium from intracellular stores such as the endoplasmic reticulum (Hofstra et al. 2003).

9.5.2

Some Effects of Histamine Through H₄ Receptors

The biological consequences of H₄R activation are also still being elucidated. Histamine can induce eosinophil chemotaxis, which can be blocked by thioperamide and the H₄ receptor-specific antagonist JNJ 7777120 (Clark et al. 1975, 1977; Wadee et al. 1980; O'Reilly et al. 2002; Ling et al. 2004). In addition, the chemotactic responses of eosinophils to other chemokines such as eotaxin can be enhanced by activation of the H₄ receptor (Buckland et al. 2003; Ling et al. 2004). Chemotaxis requires the polymerization of G-actin to F-actin and histamine has been shown to induce actin polymerization in eosinophils (Buckland et al. 2003). This effect can be blocked by thioperamide, suggesting that it is mediated by the H₄ receptor (Buckland et al. 2003). Adhesion molecules on the surface of eosinophils such as CD11b/CD18 (Mac-1) and CD54 (ICAM-1) can be upregulated by histamine (Buckland et al. 2003; Ling et al. 2004). This effect can be blocked by H₄ receptor antagonists, implying that the H₄ receptor is involved (Buckland et al. 2003; Ling et al. 2004). Thus, in eosinophils, the H₄ receptor mediates many of the events important for localization of eosinophils to sites of inflammation, like chemotaxis and adhesion molecule upregulation.

As for eosinophils, the H₄ receptor mediates histamine-induced chemotaxis in mast cells. This chemotaxis can be blocked by H₄ receptor antagonists and is absent in mast cells from H₄ receptor-deficient mice (Hofstra et al. 2003; Thurmond et al. 2004). Histamine-induced migration of mast cells can also be observed *in vivo*. Thurmond et al. (2004) showed that after histamine inhalation in mice there is an increase in the number of tracheal mast cells and a redistribution from connective tissues toward the epithelium. This effect can be blocked by the H₄ receptor antagonist, JNJ 7777120 (Thurmond et al. 2004). As seen with histamine inhalation, it is known that there is a redistribution of mast cells to the epithelial lining of the nasal mucosa in response to antigens (Fokkens et al. 1992; Slater et al. 1996). In addition, mast cell numbers increase at sites of inflammation in a number of different pathophysiological conditions such as asthma, rhinitis, rheumatoid arthritis, psoriasis, and cardiovascular disease (Kirby et al. 1987; Crimi et al. 1991; Marone et al. 1997; Peterson et al. 1998; Amin et al. 2000; Gauvreau et al. 2000; Kassel et al. 2001; Krishnaswamy et al. 2001; Woolley 2003). Histamine-induced chemotaxis via the H₄ receptor may play a role in the local migration of mast cells to sites of inflammation.

The H₄ receptor appears to be expressed on dendritic cells, as well as both CD4⁺ and CD8⁺ T cells, but little is known about its function in these cells. In T cells, the H₄ receptor may control cytokine release. Both cimetidine (an H₂ receptor antagonist) and thioperamide were able to block the histamine-induced IL-16 release from CD8⁺ T cells, which implied a role for both H₂ and H₄ receptors (Gantner et al. 2002).

H₄ receptor antagonists have shown anti-inflammatory properties in mice. Both thioperamide and JNJ 7777120 have been shown to reduce neutrophil infiltration in response to zymosan *in vivo* (Takeshita et al. 2003; Thurmond et al. 2004). The compounds are only effective in mast cell-mediated models, suggesting that these cells are the target cells for the antagonists. In one of the models

(Takeshita et al. 2003), the H₄ receptor antagonist reduced the levels of leukotriene B₄ presumably produced by mast cells. Since leukotriene B₄ is a potent neutrophil chemotactic agent, this may provide an explanation for the anti-inflammatory effects.

9.5.3

Uses of H₄ Receptor Antagonists

While no H₄ antagonists are currently used in the clinic, the current literature suggests several possible indications. Histamine is a major mediator in allergic rhinitis where H₁ receptor antagonists are useful but not completely effective. One indication that H₄ antagonists may have a therapeutic use in this condition comes from the fact that neither H₁ nor H₂ antagonists can inhibit histamine-induced congestion (Howarth et al. 2000). Furthermore, the major role that mast cells play in allergic rhinitis, coupled with the expression of H₄ on these cells, may also suggest that H₄ receptor antagonists will be useful for treating this condition. Another aspect where the H₄ receptor may be of benefit is in the allergic hyper-responsiveness developed upon repeated exposure to antigens that is characterized by increased sensitivity to allergens. An increase in the number of mast cells and other inflammatory cells in the nasal mucosa is thought to be responsible for this response. Therefore, if H₄ receptor antagonists can inhibit mast cell and eosinophil accumulation at sites of inflammation, they may be effective in reducing allergic hyper-responsiveness.

The expression and function of the H₄ receptor in mast cells, eosinophils, dendritic cells and T cells open up the possibility of use in a number of therapeutic areas. These cell types play a major role in the etiology of asthma. Histamine is known to be released in asthma; however, H₁ receptor antagonists have only modest effects (Larsen 2001; Lordan and Holgate 2002; Walsh 2002), leaving open the possibility that H₄ receptor antagonists may be useful.

Autoimmune diseases, such as rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis, type I diabetes and systemic lupus erythematosus, are other areas that deserve further study in order to elucidate the role of the H₄ receptor, since these conditions are driven by dendritic cells and T cells. Finally, itching associated with conditions like atopic dermatitis and urticaria is also thought to be partially mediated by histamine (Hagermark 1992), and, although H₁ antagonists are useful in the treatment of urticaria, they are ineffective in other conditions like atopic dermatitis (Henz et al. 1998). In support of the role of H₄ receptors in itch, Bell et al. (2004) implicated both H₁ and H₄ receptors in modulating histamine-induced itch in mice.

Table 9.1 summarizes the most important data of the four known and characterized histamine receptors.

Table 9.1. Histamine receptors and some elements of their signal pathways

Receptor	Chromosomal localization	Amino acids	G-protein type	Main elements of the signaling pathway
H1	3	487	Gq/11	PKC, PLC, PLA NOS, MAP kinases, e.g., ERK1/2, p38
H2	5	359	Gsα and Gq	PKA, PLC, c-fos
H3	20	445	G _{i/o}	MAP kinase, e.g., p44/42 kinase High constitutive activity
H4	18	390	G _{i/o}	PLC MAP kinase, e.g., p44/42 kinase

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Signal Transduction by Ion Channels in Lymphocytes

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10.1 Introduction

The best-known function of ion channels is the generation of action potentials in excitable cells; however, these pore-forming transmembrane proteins play crucial roles in non-excitabile cells, such as lymphocytes, as well. Among other essential cellular processes, many ion channels are involved in signal transduction pathways. In lymphocytes, various ion channels affect these pathways mainly via the control of the membrane potential and calcium signaling.

This chapter deals with the role of ion channels in cellular responses to different stimuli, such as T cell activation following antigenic challenge, regulatory volume decrease in lymphocytes in hypoosmotic media and apoptosis induced by drugs, ligands, or ionizing radiation. The distribution of lymphocyte ion channels in the plasma membrane and its functional role are also discussed.

10.2 The Role of Ion Channels in T Cell Activation

For an efficient generalized immune response upon antigenic challenge, the clonal expansion of lymphocytes is necessary. T lymphocytes must first recognize foreign antigenic peptide fragments presented by antigen-presenting cells. The binding of the peptide-loaded major histocompatibility complex (MHC) to the T cell receptor complex (TCR/CD3) initiates the signal transduction pathway, which ultimately leads to the activation of T cells (Fig. 1). After a few hours of T cell receptor stimulation, lymphocytes are committed to proliferate even if the activating stimulus is removed (McCardy et al. 1988). The concentration of intracellular ions (e. g. Ca^{2+} , Na^+ , pH; reviewed in Grinstein and Dixon 1989; Cahalan et al. 2001) and metabolites (glucose, amino acids) changes due to the alteration in membrane-transport processes during this period (Jacobs et al. 1989; Bental and Deutsch 1993). Then, the transcription of a variety of activation-associated genes occurs, including that of the autocrine growth factor interleukin-2, which drives cell-cycle progression (Shaw et al. 1988).

The stimulation of T cells via the T cell receptor complex activates protein tyrosine kinases, such as members of the Src, Zap-70/Syk, Tec and Csk families of non-receptor tyrosine kinases, and consequently phospholipase C- γ (PLC γ). Following activation, PLC γ cleaves phosphatidylinositol 4,5-bisphosphate (PIP₂) into

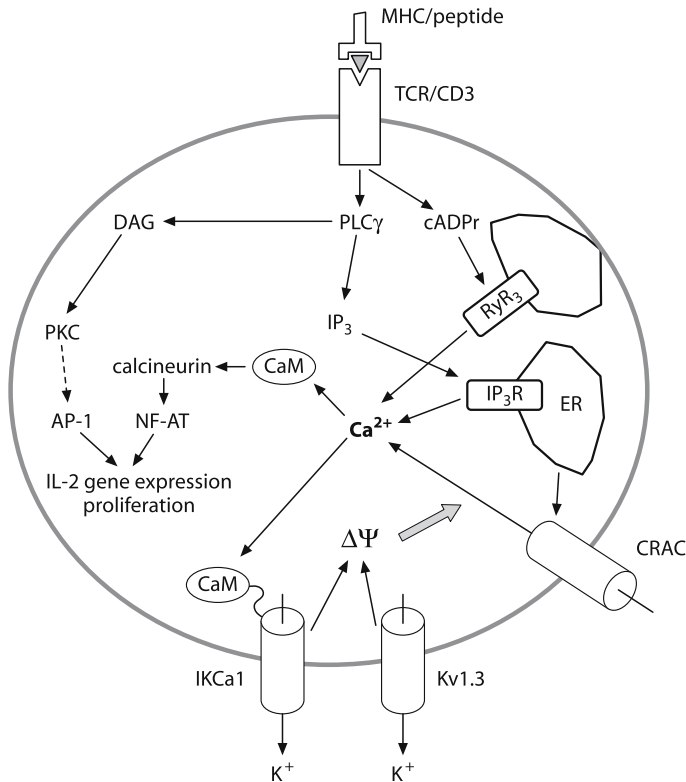


Fig. 10.1. Signal transduction steps during T cell activation. Stimulation of the T cell receptor/CD3 (TCR/CD3) complex by the peptide-loaded major histocompatibility complex of an antigen-presenting cell activates tyrosine kinases and phospholipase C- γ , which cleaves phosphatidylinositol 4,5-bisphosphate into 1,2-diacylglycerol (DAG) and inositol 1,4,5-trisphosphate (IP $_3$). DAG activates the protein kinase C (PKC) pathway that ultimately leads to assembly of the Fos/Jun transcription factor complex (AP-1). IP $_3$ binds to its receptor in the endoplasmic reticulum (ER) membrane, causing Ca $^{2+}$ release. TCR/CD3 stimulation also leads to generation of cyclic ADP-ribose (cADPr), which releases Ca $^{2+}$ from internal stores as well. IP $_3$ -dependent store-emptying activates Ca $^{2+}$ release-activated Ca $^{2+}$ (CRAC) channels that provide a sustained Ca $^{2+}$ influx from the extracellular space. The Ca $^{2+}$ binding protein calmodulin (CaM) activates phosphatase calcineurin, which then dephosphorylates the nuclear factor of activated T cells (NF-AT), enabling it to accumulate in the nucleus and together with AP-1 promote interleukin-2 gene expression. Sustained Ca $^{2+}$ influx through CRAC channels requires sufficient driving force provided by the adequately negative membrane potential. This is generated by Ca $^{2+}$ and voltage-activated K $^{+}$ channels. RyR3 Type 3 ryanodine receptor; IKCa1 intermediate conductance KCa ion channel in human lymphocytes

1,2-diacylglycerol (DAG) and inositol 1,4,5-trisphosphate (IP_3), and at this point two signaling pathways of lymphocyte activation diverge. In the protein kinase C (PKC) pathway, membrane-associated DAG activates PKC, which phosphorylates several intracellular substrates and triggers transcription via the assembly of the Fos/Jun transcription factor complex on AP1 elements in several genes (Northrop et al. 1993; Acuto and Cantrell 2000). In the first phase of the Ca^{2+} -dependent pathway, IP_3 binds to its receptor located in the membrane of the endoplasmic reticulum, which results in the release of Ca^{2+} stored in the lumen of the ER. This causes an increase in the free intracellular Ca^{2+} concentration ($[Ca^{2+}]_i$) from a resting level of ~ 100 nM to a peak concentration of ~ 500 nM.

Along with IP_3 , cyclic ADP-ribose (cADPr) is also capable of inducing Ca^{2+} release from internal stores other than the endoplasmic reticulum in certain T lymphocyte cell lines (Bourguignon et al. 1995; Guse et al. 1995). These stores were found to be insensitive to thapsigargin and localized close to the plasma membrane. Sustained increased levels of cADPr are generated in Jurkat cells by the activation of the soluble ADP-ribosyl cyclase following the stimulation of the TCR/CD3 receptor complex (Guse et al. 1999). Thus, cADPr acts as a second messenger, which is generated in response to the stimulation of the T cell receptor and produces Ca^{2+} release from intracellular stores. The molecular target of cADPr seems to be the type-3 ryanodine receptor/calcium-release channel expressed in Jurkat T cells (Guse et al. 1999).

The relationship between the IP_3 -dependent and cADPr-dependent signaling pathways was investigated by Guse and coworkers (1999) in Jurkat T cells. They showed that IP_3 -mediated Ca^{2+} release is necessary for further Ca^{2+} signaling, but cADPr is essential for its sustained phase. Thus, the two systems seem to act in a temporal sequence rather than in an alternative manner.

For efficient signal transduction, the sustained elevation of cytosolic free Ca^{2+} concentration is required, which is realized by Ca^{2+} influx from the extracellular space. This Ca^{2+} influx relies on the operation of the ion channels in T cells, especially the Ca^{2+} release-activated Ca^{2+} (CRAC) channel, and two potassium channels that help control the membrane potential during the sustained Ca^{2+} signal, the voltage-gated Kv1.3 and the Ca^{2+} -activated IKCa1 potassium channels. The Ca^{2+} -calmodulin-dependent phosphatase calcineurin is activated by the calcium signal and it dephosphorylates the transcription factor NF-AT (nuclear factor of activated T cells), which then accumulates in the nucleus and binds to the promoter element of the interleukin-2 gene (Rao et al. 1997; Crabtree 1999). At this point the IP_3 -dependent and PKC pathways of activation converge as NF-AT and AP-1 proteins act synergistically by forming complexes to regulate gene expression (Macian et al. 2001). In order to keep NF-AT in the nucleus in the transcriptionally active state, a sustained Ca^{2+} signal is required. Activation of the IL-2 gene and IL-2 expression are critical commitment points beyond which further T cell activation becomes antigen independent (Crabtree 1989).

The Ca^{2+} entry from the extracellular space, which underlies the sustained Ca^{2+} signal essential for the function of the immune system, is triggered by the depletion of intracellular Ca^{2+} stores, rather than by the direct action of the increased IP_3 or cADPr concentration generated during signal transduction. This was proven by demonstrating Ca^{2+} influx in response to the depletion of Ca^{2+}

stores without a specific IP_3 or cADPr signal induced by, for example, thapsigargin, a SERCA Ca^{2+} pump inhibitor or the use of intracellular Ca^{2+} chelators, such as BAPTA.

10.2.1

Ca^{2+} Release-Activated Ca^{2+} (CRAC) Channels

The ion channel that responds to store depletion and generates Ca^{2+} influx in T cells is the Ca^{2+} release-activated Ca^{2+} (CRAC) channel. Zweifach and Lewis (1993) provided the first electrophysiological evidence for the existence of these channels in Jurkat cells. They found that the thapsigargin-activated Ca^{2+} current was indistinguishable from the one activated by the cross-linking of the T cell receptor.

Likewise, the cross-linking of the T cell receptor-CD3 complex and intracellular store depletion by intracellular perfusion of inositol triphosphate or thapsigargin or extracellular perfusion of ionomycin elicited similar low-amplitude Ca^{2+} -selective currents in human T cells (Partiseti et al. 1994). This implies that the store depletion-activated CRAC channels control the main Ca^{2+} influx pathway upon mitogenic stimulation in human T cells.

CRAC channels are not easily identified and characterized due to their very low Ca^{2+} conductance and the enormous number of low conductance cation channels with similar properties. For a few years there was confusion regarding the conductance of the CRAC channel because a Mg^{2+} -inhibited cation channel (MIC) with somewhat similar properties but much greater conductance was mistaken for CRAC (Kerschbaum and Cahalan 1999). Later, the two channels were distinguished on the basis of several differing characteristics.

The molecular identity of CRAC channels is still a mystery, although many candidates have been suggested from the superfamily of transient receptor potential (TRP) cation channels. The ion channels encoded by this gene family are related to the *Drosophila trp* gene. They are expressed in a variety of tissues and cell types and perform a wide range of functions such as temperature sensor, taste receptor, mechano- and osmosensor; and they are also involved in Ca^{2+} transport mechanisms (Minke and Cook 2002). To date, none of these candidates have been indisputably confirmed as the real CRAC channel.

The search for the molecular identity of this channel has been hampered by the lack of potent and highly specific blockers. Capsaicin and SKF 96365, two compounds reported to have inhibitory effects on CRAC current, do not fulfill these requirements (Fischer et al. 2001; Kozak et al. 2002; Prakriya and Lewis 2002). However, a recently discovered bistrifluoromethyl pyrazole derivative, termed BTP2, has been shown to specifically inhibit CRAC channels in the nanomolar range, thereby becoming a very promising candidate for probing CRAC channel structure and function (Zitt et al. 2004).

Based on the results of several laboratories, the hallmarks of the CRAC current that distinguish it from other similar inward cation currents have been established (Parekh and Penner 1997; Hermosura et al. 2002; Kozak et al. 2002; Prakriya and Lewis 2002). It has high selectivity for Ca^{2+} , but also conducts some other

divalent ions, e. g. Ba^{2+} ; it is not blocked by internal Mg^{2+} ; it has very low single channel conductance for Ca^{2+} (~21 fS), but in divalent-free solutions conducts Na^+ ions well (~0.2 pS); it displays strong inward rectification and strong inhibition by 20 μM SKF96365.

The Ca^{2+} current through CRAC channels is regulated by various feedback mechanisms. In different cell types the modulation of I_{CRAC} was reported by mechanisms such as direct Ca^{2+} -induced inactivation, inhibition by calmodulin or indirect effects via membrane potential changes generated by Ca^{2+} -sensitive ion channel activities (Zweifach and Lewis 1995; Vaca 1996). Additional mechanisms that were identified as modulators of I_{CRAC} include PKC-dependent phosphorylation and sphingomyelinase-mediated production of sphingosine (Parekh and Penner 1995; Mathes et al. 1998).

There seem to be some missing links in the Ca^{2+} entry phase of the signal transduction cascade, since besides the CRAC channels' molecular identity and structure, the mechanism by which they sense the depletion of internal Ca^{2+} stores is also ambiguous. Several distinctly different models have been suggested to explain how store depletion leads to the opening of CRAC channels. One of these models attributes the transmission of the signal to a diffusible molecule, a "calcium influx factor" (CIF). Several groups isolated such factors that could generate Ca^{2+} influx, but later most of these proved to lack one or more criteria that would be required of a "true" CIF (Bird and Putney 1993; Randriamampita and Tsien 1993; Su et al. 2001).

Another model proposes that following store depletion, functional CRAC channels are inserted into the membrane from vesicles. This hypothesis is supported by experiments in which single channels seemed to appear one by one during the whole-cell measurement of CRAC current (Fasolato et al. 1993; Kerschbaum and Cahalan 1999). Despite some supporting results (Yao et al. 1999), no decisive proof has been found for this proposition either.

Yet another theory hypothesizes that there is direct physical coupling between the IP_3 receptor (IP_3R) and the CRAC channel such that store depletion induces a conformational change of IP_3R , which in turn directly activates CRAC channels. This theory is as controversial as the other models. Thus, it is possible that several different mechanisms such as conformational coupling or signaling by a diffusible factor exist for initiating capacitative Ca^{2+} entry and the actual mechanism used may vary according to cell type or may even occur by the combination of different mechanisms (Putney et al. 2001).

10.2.2

Voltage-Gated and Ca^{2+} -Activated K^+ Channels

The opening probability of CRAC channels, unlike that of voltage-gated channels, does not depend on the membrane potential; it is linked to the emptying of the internal Ca^{2+} stores (Zweifach and Lewis 1993). When CRAC channels are opened by the appropriate stimulus, the magnitude of the Ca^{2+} current through these channels depends on the electrochemical driving force for Ca^{2+} . A more negative membrane potential results in larger Ca^{2+} current.

The resting membrane potential of unstimulated T lymphocytes is between -50 and -70 mV (reviewed in Grinstein and Dixon 1989; Lewis and Cahalan 1995). Since the membrane potential of T cells is mainly set by potassium channels, the modulation of Ca^{2+} influx through CRAC channels heavily relies on the operation of these channels.

The dominant voltage-gated K^+ channel in human T cells, the *n*-type potassium channel, was first characterized in 1984 (Decoursey et al. 1984; Matteson and Deutsch 1984). This channel is encoded by the *Kv1.3* gene, and therefore it has been referred to as the *Kv1.3* channel within the *Shaker* family of Kv channels.

The structure as well as the biophysical properties and mode of assembly of this channel have been well characterized using the whole-cell (Cahalan et al. 1985; Pahapill and Schlichter 1990; Panyi et al. 1995; Panyi and Deutsch 1996) and cell-attached patch modes of the patch-clamp technique (Pahapill and Schlichter 1992; Verheugen et al. 1995). As *Kv1.3* is a voltage-gated channel, its open probability increases with increasing voltage, reaching saturation at -10 to 0 mV; the activation threshold is about -60 mV. The single channel conductance is 10 – 12 pS.

Kv1.3 channels can effectively control the membrane potential, because their activation threshold is close to the resting potential of the cells and the open probability increases very steeply with depolarizations exceeding the activation threshold. Furthermore, at depolarized membrane potentials, the channels enter an inactivated state, but at the resting potential this steady-state inactivation is not complete. Thus, through feedback loops a range of membrane potentials is determined at which these channels are active. It is also important that the lymphocyte membrane has extremely high electrical resistance (10 – 20 G Ω). As a result, the activity of a small number of ion channels generates detectable changes in the membrane potential (Maltsev 1990; Verheugen et al. 1995).

In summary, the biophysical properties of *Kv1.3* channels and that of the lymphocyte membrane provide the basis for effectively clamping the membrane potential close to the activation threshold of the channels.

In addition to the ones gated by voltage (Kv), potassium channels exist in a wide variety of forms, such as ATP-gated, G-protein-regulated or mechanical stress-activated. Even two-pore potassium channels have been described (Hajdu et al. 2003a). Ca^{2+} -activated K^+ channels (K_{Ca}) are also present in the plasma membrane of various non-excitable cells (Weidema et al. 1993; Hajas et al. 2004) including human and rodent T cells. Human T lymphocytes express an intermediate conductance Ca^{2+} -activated K^+ channel with ~ 11 pS unitary conductance. This channel is encoded by the *hKCa4* gene (Logsdon et al. 1997) and referred to as the *hKCa1* channel (or $\text{K}_{\text{Ca}3.1}$).

This channel is considered to be voltage-independent, since the opening of the channels is not affected significantly by the membrane potential (Grissmer et al. 1993). In contrast, the opening of *IKCa1* channels is highly sensitive to the intracellular Ca^{2+} concentration. The activation threshold of the channels is between 200 and 300 nM $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_i$, half-maximal activation occurs between 300 and 450 nM $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_i$ and maximal activation of the conductance requires 1 μM $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_i$ (Grissmer et al. 1993; Verheugen et al. 1995). These channels are silent in intact resting T lymphocytes because the resting $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_i$ is below the activation threshold of the *IKCa1* channels.

The Ca^{2+} sensor of the IKCa1 channel is the Ca^{2+} -binding protein calmodulin (CaM). CaM binds to the C-terminus of IKCa1 subunits and mediates the changes in $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_i$ to the channel (Fanger et al. 1999). Each of the channel subunits binds a CaM molecule and the concerted action of the four molecules leads to channel opening.

10.2.3

Ion Channels, Membrane Potential and Lymphocyte Activation

The key role of K^+ channels during lymphocyte activation was demonstrated by the use of classical blockers of K^+ channels, such as quinine, 4-aminopyridine, and tetraethylammonium, which were shown to inhibit T cell activation. These blockers inhibited PHA-induced proliferation and interleukin-2 production of human peripheral blood T cells at concentrations comparable to those required to block the K^+ current (Chandy et al. 1984; Decoursey et al. 1984; Deutsch et al. 1986). Even some of the classical immunosuppressive agents, such as cyclosporin A, were found to affect the membrane potential and block K^+ currents in lymphocytes (Vereb et al. 1990; Panyi et al. 1996). However, these compounds were not specific for Kv1.3 or IKCa1 channels, and blocked these channels with low affinity. Peptide toxins isolated from scorpion venoms proved to be much more efficient and specific blockers, and, as such, facilitated the determination of the role of K^+ channels in lymphocyte physiology.

Charybdotoxin (ChTx), for example, blocks voltage-gated and Ca^{2+} -activated K^+ channels of lymphocytes (Sands et al. 1989; Grissmer et al. 1993), and inhibits lymphocyte proliferation and IL-2 synthesis at mRNA level at nanomolar concentrations (Price et al. 1989; Freedman et al. 1992). The discovery of peptide toxins, which were selective for Kv1.3 over IKCa1, allowed the separation of the contribution of these channels to the control of membrane potential. Selective block of Kv1.3 channels by Margatoxin (MgTx) and Noxiustoxin (NxTx) depolarized the membrane potential of resting T cells to a similar extent as ChTx, which blocked both IKCa1 and Kv1.3 channels (Leonard et al. 1992). This suggested that the membrane potential in resting T cells is determined by Kv1.3 but not by IKCa1 channels.

The critical link between K^+ channel activity, membrane potential and lymphocyte activation is the modulation of the Ca^{2+} influx by the membrane potential (Sarkadi et al. 1990); thus, interfering with K^+ channel activity should affect Ca^{2+} signaling during T cell activation. This was demonstrated by Lin et al. (1993) who showed that ChTx inhibits specifically T cell activation induced by signals that elicit a rise in $[\text{Ca}^{2+}]_i$, whereas alternative activation pathways (e.g. anti-CD28/phorbol ester-dependent proliferation) remained unaltered. They also found that the Kv1.3-specific blockers NxTx and MgTx were as effective in inhibiting the Ca^{2+} signal as ChTx, strengthening the hypothesis that Kv1.3 is the K^+ channel responsible for the maintenance of a proper Ca^{2+} signal. Several recent experiments with more potent and selective Kv1.3 inhibitors have confirmed these observations (Kalman et al. 1998).

Based on these results, the following model has been proposed for the involvement of K^+ channels in lymphocyte activation (reviewed in Lewis and Cahalan

1995; Cahalan and Chandy 1997; Cahalan et al. 2001; Panyi et al. 2004b). During the Ca^{2+} signal, Ca^{2+} current through CRAC channels causes depolarization (Fanger et al. 2001), which would decrease further Ca^{2+} entry due to the decreased electrochemical driving force for Ca^{2+} in the absence of counterbalancing cation efflux. This cation efflux is provided by Kv1.3 channels that are activated by depolarization. Their steep voltage dependence allows these channels to respond promptly to a small Ca^{2+} -induced depolarization; the outward K^+ current through Kv1.3 channels can clamp the membrane at a hyperpolarized potential and thus allow sustained Ca^{2+} influx through CRAC channels required for gene expression (Negulescu et al. 1994; Kerschbaum et al. 1997).

Although the initial rise in the Ca^{2+} concentration following TCR/CD3 stimulation should be sufficient for the activation of Ca^{2+} -activated K^+ channels, their very limited number in resting T cells makes the contribution of these channels minimal to membrane potential control. In contrast, preactivated human T cells upregulate IKCa1 channels, so their influence on membrane potential and, consequently, on Ca^{2+} signaling, increases dramatically.

Accordingly, anti-CD3 and PMA/ionomycin-induced proliferation of human peripheral blood lymphocytes that were preactivated by similar treatments was suppressed by nanomolar concentrations of the IKCa1 selective blocker TRAM-34. In contrast, much higher concentrations of TRAM-34 were required to inhibit the mitogen-induced proliferation of resting T cells (Ghanshani et al. 2000; Wulff et al. 2000). Conversely, the mitogen-induced proliferation of resting T cells was effectively suppressed by selective Kv1.3 inhibitors, whereas selective IKCa1 inhibitors were ineffective (Ghanshani et al. 2000). Moreover, chronically activated T cells, such as those involved in autoimmune responses, express very high numbers of Kv1.3 and low numbers of IKCa1 channels, and consequently they are effectively suppressed by low concentrations of Kv1.3-specific blockers (Beeton et al. 2001b).

Thus, high-affinity blockers of T cell K^+ channels can interfere with the signal transduction pathways of T cell activation *in vitro*. Several recent publications have reported that K^+ channel blockers could inhibit immune responses *in vivo* as well (Koo et al. 1997; Beeton et al. 2001a,b), thereby emphasizing the potential use of these blockers as immunosuppressive agents in autoimmune diseases. The latest discovery of T cell subset-specific expression K^+ channels holds even more promise for specific and well-targeted modulation of certain immune processes.

10.2.4

Distribution of Kv1.3 Channels in the Lymphocyte Membrane

The plasma membrane isolates cellular components from the environment and supports membrane proteins, but, in addition to these basic functions, it also plays an active role in signal transduction. Specialized membrane domains, lipid rafts, are involved in numerous signaling pathways. There is a growing body of evidence for the participation of such rafts in the T cell activation signaling pathway and the role of the association of potassium channels with these rafts.

The *in vivo* activation of T cells requires interaction with professional antigen-presenting cells. During this interaction, a specialized contact area, called the

immunological synapse (IS), is formed between the cells, where functionally important proteins segregate into microdomains (Davis 2002). The redistribution of TCR/CD3, CD28 and CD2 membrane proteins to the center and that of the lymphocyte function-associated antigen 1 (LFA-1) to the periphery of the supramolecular activation clusters (SMACs) have been reported, along with the selective enrichment of cytosolic protein talin in the periphery, and Lck or PKC θ in the center of the IS (Monks et al. 1998; Grakoui et al. 1999; Bromley et al. 2001; Holdorf et al. 2002; van der Merwe 2002). Protein redistribution during IS formation might be guided by lipid raft reorganization and by physical coupling mediated by adaptor proteins or by cytoskeletal attachments.

Ion channels are embedded in the plasma membrane and therefore have intimate contact with the surrounding lipid environment. Consequently, changes in the composition or physicochemical properties of this lipid environment may modify the operation of the channels (Martens et al. 2000; Romanenko et al. 2002; Hajdu et al. 2003b; Tillman and Cascio 2003).

Several recent studies have demonstrated the uneven distribution of ion channels in the membrane of non-excitabile cells (Martens et al. 2000; Szucs et al. 2004). Voltage-gated potassium channels in particular were shown to localize to specialized membrane microdomains (reviewed in Martens et al. 2004). Changes in lipid raft structure or redistribution of ion channels to different rafts are expected to modulate channel activity. This was demonstrated for Kv1.3 channels as well, by showing that biophysical parameters of the channel changed as the cholesterol content of the membrane was modified. Moreover, increasing the cholesterol content of the membrane resulted in whole-cell currents with biphasic activation kinetics, suggesting the existence of two channel populations in different lipid microenvironments (Hajdu et al. 2003b). Another study reported that Kv1.3 channels localize to small sphingolipid- and cholesterol-enriched membrane rafts and that the transformation of these rafts to large ceramide-enriched platforms by various means resulted in the clustering of Kv1.3 within these platforms and the inhibition of the channel's activity (Bock et al. 2003).

As detailed above, Kv1.3 channels have a pivotal role in the signal transduction leading to T cell activation. The localization of these channels to lipid rafts may facilitate the redistribution of channels to the proximity of signaling molecules, for example kinases, which in turn can modify channel activity to fine tune certain signaling steps.

This notion is supported by electron microscope images that showed non-random distribution of Kv1.3 channels in the plasma membrane of Jurkat T cells, indicating the preferential localization of these channels in certain areas of the membrane. Also, a high degree of overlap was found in the distribution of Kv1.3 channels and CD3 molecules in the membrane, and energy transfer measurements showed the molecular proximity of these two molecules (Panyi et al. 2003). Moreover, fluorescently labeled Kv1.3 channels showed a patchy but nearly even distribution in the membrane of solitary allogene-activated human cytotoxic T lymphocytes (CTLs), whereas channels clustered in the IS in CTLs engaged with target cells (Panyi et al. 2004a).

The proximity of Kv1.3 to several other molecules important in signaling was also demonstrated, indicating the involvement of Kv1.3 channels in the signal

transduction machinery of T cells. Direct interaction of the human homologue of the *Drosophila* discs-large tumor suppressor protein (hDlg) and p56^{lck}, an Src-family tyrosine kinase with distinguished role in early T cell activation, was shown, in addition to the in vivo association of hDlg with Kv1.3 in T lymphocytes (Hanada et al. 1997). These results suggest that hDlg may function as an adaptor protein coupling p56^{lck} to Kv1.3, facilitating efficient tyrosine phosphorylation of the channel.

Similarly, ZIP1 and ZIP2 adaptor proteins were shown to bind to both potassium channel K_vβ₂ subunits, which are cytoplasmic auxiliary proteins modifying channel activity, and protein kinase C-ζ (PKC-ζ), acting as a physical link between the ion channel and the kinase (Gong et al. 1999; McCormack et al. 1999). Since Kv1.3 channel activity is known to be modulated by phosphorylation (Jonas and Kaczmarek 1996; Bowlby et al. 1997), the proximity of kinases involved in signaling allows for the precise regulation of Kv1.3 activity within the signaling complex.

The reported molecular proximity and possible functional coupling between Kv1.3 channels and β₁-integrin in the plasma membrane of T cells may be important in the regulation of T cell activation, since β₁-integrin is known to stabilize the IS (Levite et al. 2000).

Thus, Kv1.3, at least at certain stages of the signaling pathway, appears to be part of a large signaling complex containing TCR/CD3, CD4, β₁-integrin, intracellular adaptor proteins and kinases. The physical closeness of Kv1.3 to these signaling molecules seems to be essential for efficient and well-controlled signal transduction. However, further work is needed to characterize and understand the significance of Kv1.3 compartmentalization in the membrane of T cells and its functional consequences.

10.3

The Role of Ion Channels in Volume Regulation by Lymphocytes

The earliest observations on the volume regulation of lymphocytes described the response of human peripheral blood mononuclear cells (PBM) to the application of hypotonic media (Cheung et al. 1982). Electronic cell sizing, electron microscopy and cellular water determinations showed that hypotonic swelling was followed by a regulatory volume decrease (RVD) phase. The experimental findings suggested that RVD occurred largely by passive loss of cellular K⁺, resulting from a selective increase in permeability to this ion. In addition, the Na⁺-K⁺ pump appeared to be activated upon cell swelling by a mechanism other than Na⁺ entry into the cell, but this was not essential for RVD.

Patch-clamp recording soon led to the characterization of ion channels expressed in several types of cells of the immune system, including T lymphocytes, B lymphocytes and macrophages (Cahalan et al. 1987; Gallin and Sheehy 1988). Besides the role of these ion channels in lymphocyte activation, their role in the regulation of cell volume was implicated (Grinstein et al. 1984). T cells placed in hypotonic solutions initially swell as water enters, but then lose K⁺, Cl⁻

and water as the cell resumes its original volume. The ability of lymphocytes to regulate their volume in the face of osmotic gradients may be essential to their proper function in regions of the kidney, and may also reflect a homeostatic mechanism responsive during cell adhesion and growth.

At least two independent ionic transport pathways, one for K^+ and one for Cl^- , become activated during RVD (Sarkadi et al. 1984a,b). The discovery of osmotically activated Cl^- channels promoted a hypothesis for RVD, in which the activation of chloride channels is the triggering event. This results in depolarization and subsequent activation of K^+ channels and causes the loss of K^+ , Cl^- and water, as the cell returns to its original volume following osmotic swelling (Cahalan and Lewis 1988).

The basic idea of this hypothesis has not been ruled out; a wide variety of lymphocyte ion channels have been characterized and the role of some in homeostatic volume regulation has been established (Deutsch and Lee 1989; Cahalan and Lewis 1990; Schlichter et al. 1990; Gardner et al. 1991; Lee et al. 1992; Deutsch and Chen 1993; Lewis et al. 1993). In one line of investigations the properties of the K^+ pathway underlying RVD in human blood lymphocytes were further studied by using an animal toxin, charybdotoxin (ChTX). At least two types of channels, one ChTX-sensitive and the other ChTX-insensitive, were observed in human T lymphocytes (Grinstein and Smith 1990; Deutsch et al. 1991). The observations also suggest that K^+ loss during RVD is mediated by Ca^{2+} -independent, ChTX-sensitive voltage-gated ion channels in human blood lymphocytes.

It is the Kv1.3 voltage-gated K^+ channel that plays a role in RVD of T lymphocytes in response to hypotonic shock. A mouse cytotoxic T lymphocyte cell line, CTLL-2, devoid of voltage-dependent K^+ channels, is not capable of volume regulation. Transient transfection of these cells with Kv1.3 reconstituted their ability to volume regulate (Deutsch and Chen 1993). As predicted from the experiments, the ability of RVD depends critically on the ability of the cells to respond to volume-induced changes in membrane potential.

Parallel to the identification of the role of K^+ channels in RVD, another line of investigations focused on the role of Cl^- channels in RVD of lymphocytes. As mentioned above, a special type of chloride channel has been described in T cells that could be activated by a transmembrane osmotic gradient (Cahalan and Lewis 1988; Lewis et al. 1993). The unitary conductance of this Cl^- channel is around 2 pS and each cell contains on the order of 10^4 such channels that can be activated, making these osmotically activated chloride channels the most abundant and widespread ion channels in lymphocytes. In addition, a large (maximum unitary conductance 365 pS), multiple conductance Cl^- channel was discovered in human T lymphocytes (Schlichter et al. 1990).

The existence of the mini- Cl^- channels together with the recognition of the importance of K^+ channels have been essential in formulating the hypothesis of RVD described above (Cahalan and Lewis 1988). Details of this hypothesis are as follows. The triggering event of RVD is the activation of the mini- Cl^- channels. RVD is associated with membrane depolarization as a result of the chloride conductance increase. The increase in Cl^- conductance induced by cell swelling is expected to depolarize the cells from the normal resting potential (normally fluctuating) of -50 to -70 mV. The depolarization itself would increase the driving

force for K^+ efflux through open K^+ channels, but more importantly would increase activation of the *n*-type K^+ channels (Kv1.3), further increasing K^+ efflux. The membrane potential would thereby take up a value between the K^+ and Cl^- equilibrium potentials, driving both K^+ and Cl^- ions out of the cell through their respective channels. As the cell loses KCl, water would follow, and the cell would change size until the reduction in cell volume is sufficient to close the Cl^- channels. According to this hypothesis, osmotically activated Cl^- channels act as sensors for cell volume increase and their influence controls the activation of K^+ channels and RVD.

Although mini- Cl^- channels are favored in this model, the role of maxi- Cl^- channels cannot definitely be excluded. A small number of highly conductive anion channels might be switched on during RVD (Sarkadi et al. 1984b).

The model is also valid for RVD of lymphocytes, although a calcium-permeable cation channel activated by cell swelling may complement this normally Ca^{2+} -independent process for RVD in thymocytes (Cahalan and Chandy 1997; Cahalan et al. 2001). It has been shown that the outward-rectifying chloride conductance activated by osmotic swelling can also be regulated by an increase in extracellular K^+ . This effect seems to be general since it has been observed in osteoblasts, as well as in human leukemic T lymphocytes (Steinert and Grissmer 1997). The volume regulation of human lymphocytes can also be affected by PKC due to the enhancement of Kv1.3 activity in T cells. The PKC-induced increase in Kv1.3 conductance may increase the ability of lymphocytes to volume regulate (Chung and Schlichter 1997). It is also an interesting observation that an increase neither in cytosolic Ca^{2+} nor in membrane area is necessary for activation of volume-sensitive anion channels in lymphocytes (Ross et al. 1994; Ross and Cahalan 1995); however, the participation of cytoskeletal elements in channel activation has been demonstrated. Most interestingly, the presence of intracellular ATP is necessary for maintenance and repeated activation of the swelling-activated anion current (Levitan et al. 1995).

The osmotic swelling of lymphocytes was shown to open outwardly rectifying chloride channels (ORCC) through the Src-like kinase $p56^{lck}$. Osmotic activation of ORCC could be blocked by tyrosine kinase inhibitors; furthermore, ORCC activation could be achieved not only by osmotic swelling, but also by intracellular purified $p56^{lck}$. In addition to osmoregulation in lymphocytes, these mechanisms may play an important role when cells actively change their volume, i.e. during proliferation and apoptosis (Lepple-Wienhues et al. 2000).

Cell volume regulation has further implications in connection with lymphocyte apoptosis, because the loss of cell volume is an early and fundamental feature of programmed cell death or apoptosis. One of the most interesting questions relating apoptotic cell shrinkage to volume regulation and ion channels is how the cell death pathway is coupled to the activation of cell shrinkage and whether cellular shrinkage utilizes cell volume regulatory paths commonly employed in osmotic responses.

The loss of cell volume is not a passive component of apoptosis because a number of experimental findings highlight the importance of this process as an early and necessary regulatory event in the signaling of the cell death cycle. Additionally, the loss of intracellular ions has been shown to play a primary role in cell

shrinkage, caspase activation, and nuclease activity during apoptosis. Thus, an understanding of the role that ion channels and plasma membrane transporters play in cellular signaling during apoptosis may have important physiological implications for immune cells, especially lymphocyte function (Gomez-Angelats et al. 2000).

10.4

The Role of Ion Channels in the Apoptosis of Lymphocytes

Lymphocyte ion channels have been implicated not only in the activation, proliferation and volume regulation of lymphocytes but also in the control of apoptosis in these cells.

Lymphoid cells can undergo apoptosis in response to a wide variety of stimuli, including exposure to glucocorticoids (Wyllie 1980; Compton et al. 1987), T cell receptor stimulation (Smith et al. 1989), ionizing radiation (Klassen et al. 1993), Fas/CD95 receptor ligation (Nagata 1994; Matiba et al. 1997), chemotherapeutic drugs (Friesen et al. 1996), Ca^{2+} influx (Caron-Leslie and Cidlowski 1991) and extracellular ATP (Nagy et al. 2000).

An early event in cells undergoing apoptosis is the loss of cell volume or cell shrinkage. Primary thymocytes, for example, which represent one of the most extensively studied model systems for apoptosis, exhibit cell shrinkage following the administration of glucocorticoids (Wyllie 1980; Thomas and Bell 1981; Compton et al. 1987). Similarly, thymocytes irradiated with γ -rays underwent a quick loss of cell volume in the first stage of apoptotic cell shrinkage, which was followed by a more gradual shrinking phase (Klassen et al. 1993). Both stages were attributed to a loss of both water and ions. The loss of intracellular ions, particularly potassium, was shown to play a primary role in cell shrinkage, caspase activation and nuclease activity during apoptosis, and the prevention of K^+ efflux inhibited the execution of the apoptotic program (Bortner et al. 1997; Hughes et al. 1997). The significant K^+ efflux in the cell death process was found to be independent of the apoptosis-inducing stimulus (Dallaporta et al. 1998).

Several studies reported a connection between apoptotic stimuli and Kv1.3 channel activity. However, some of these results are contradicting and a clear role of Kv1.3 channels in the cell death program is yet to emerge. A suppression of the activity of voltage-gated Kv1.3 channels was described during Fas-induced apoptosis in Jurkat T cells, which was mediated by the Src-like tyrosine kinase p56^{lck} (Szabo et al. 1996). Similarly, treatment with ceramide, a lipid metabolite synthesized following Fas ligation, also inhibited Kv1.3 channels in a p56^{lck} -dependent manner (Gulbins et al. 1997). In contrast, a Fas-associated death domain protein and caspase 8-dependent increase in Kv1.3 channel activity following Fas ligation was also reported in Jurkat cells (Storey et al. 2003). The opposing results may arise from the use of different solutions, the tenfold difference in the Fas ligand concentrations used or the fact that one group preincubated the cells with the ligand and the other added it only after achieving whole-cell configuration. Certainly, the enhanced activity of Kv1.3 channels and the concomitant K^+ efflux would be a plausible explanation for the loss of K^+ during apoptosis observed by

several other groups. However, the presence of the potent Kv1.3 blocker Shk-Dap²² did not prevent cell shrinkage (Storey et al. 2003), which implies the involvement of other channels in potassium efflux, possibly that of two-pore domain potassium channels (Trimarchi et al. 2002). Nevertheless, the compatibility of Kv1.3 inhibition by Fas ligation with K⁺ loss and cell shrinkage cannot be ruled out if other possible pathways are considered.

The requirement of Kv1.3 activity was also demonstrated in actinomycin D-induced apoptosis in CTLL-2 T lymphocytes (Bock et al. 2002). These cells, which genetically lack Kv1.3 channels, proved apoptosis-resistant upon the administration of the cytostatic drug. Expression of Kv1.3 channels in these cells following transfection rendered them actinomycin D-sensitive. Furthermore, the same study observed an enhancement of Kv1.3 activity in Jurkat T cells after 16 h of incubation with actinomycin D. Thus, the role of Kv1.3 channels in the apoptotic program may vary by cell type or according to the initiating stimulus, or may even consist of various phases in which channel activity is modulated differentially.

Other ions, as well as different osmolytes, were also shown to play an important role in Fas-induced apoptosis in Jurkat T cells, similarly to Kv1.3 channels, the stimulation of the Fas receptor in Jurkat cells or the administration of ceramide-induced activation of the outwardly rectifying chloride channel via a mechanism that involves Src-like kinase-dependent phosphorylation (Szabo et al. 1998). Pharmacological inhibition of this chloride conductance resulted in the inhibition of apoptosis.

Earlier studies provided evidence indicating a role for Ca²⁺ in the apoptotic pathway (Story et al. 1992; Oshimi and Miyazaki 1995). More recently, the block of CRAC channels following CD95 stimulation has been reported. The block occurred via sphingomyelinase and resulted in the prevention of Ca²⁺ influx, NF-AT activation and IL-2 synthesis.

Thus, stimulation of lymphocytes through CD95 exerts multiple effects on ion channels. The CD95-associated apoptotic pathway seems to activate the outwardly rectifying chloride channels and inhibit CRAC channels, and its effect on Kv1.3 is controversial and may be biphasic.

As mentioned earlier, following treatment with ceramide or the stimulation of acid sphingomyelinase, Kv1.3 channels localized to ceramide-rich membrane platforms, which inhibited their activity (Bock et al. 2003). Similarly, ceramide was shown to be essential for CD95 clustering which appears to be a necessary step in apoptotic signaling (Grassme et al. 2001). In addition, the coupling of p56^{lck} tyrosine kinase to Kv1.3 by hDlg was also demonstrated. These results suggest that the fusion of membrane rafts and the concomitant redistribution of Kv1.3, p56^{lck} and CD95 molecules to large ceramide-rich platforms create a signaling complex in which the proximity of these molecules allows for efficient phosphorylation and modulation of Kv1.3 in the apoptotic pathway, as is the case during the antigenic activation of T cells.

In the immune system, apoptosis is involved in intrathymic elimination of self-reactive thymocytes. The role of a nonselective cation channel P_{2X1}, activated by ATP, was described in the dexamethasone-induced apoptosis of thymocytes. These channels are upregulated during apoptosis and their antagonists inhibit cell death. However, P_{2X1} channels do not play a role in the apoptosis of peripheral

T cells, providing a unique mechanism that contributes to thymocyte cell death (Chvatchko et al. 1996). Extracellular ATP was shown to affect the membrane potential and induce apoptosis in murine thymocytes in a dose- and cytosolic pH-dependent manner. Ca^{2+} -dependent hyperpolarization and cytosolic acidification triggered by low extracellular ATP doses are essential early signals in the apoptosis of murine thymocytes, and are probably mediated by P_{2X_1} -type ATP-gated ion channels (Matkó et al. 1993; Nagy et al. 2000).

Besides plasma membrane ion channels, the involvement of intracellular ion channels has been implicated in lymphocyte apoptosis. T lymphocytes that were made deficient in type-1 IP_3 receptors could not produce IP_3 -induced Ca^{2+} release, exhibited defective signaling via the TCR (Jayaraman et al. 1995) and became resistant to apoptosis induced by stimuli such as dexamethasone, TCR stimulation, ionizing radiation and Fas (Jayaraman and Marks 1997). Conversely, an increase in the number of functional IP_3 receptors resulted in enhanced cell death (Boehning et al. 2004). Thus, IP_3 receptors are required for the completion of the apoptotic program; in turn, type-1 IP_3 receptors are degraded by caspases during apoptosis of Jurkat T cells (Hirota et al. 1999).

Mitochondrial channels are also known to have a central role in apoptosis. The involvement of mitochondrial ATP and Ca^{2+} -activated potassium channels was shown in various cell types (Inoue et al. 1991; Holmuhamedov et al. 1998; Siemen et al. 1999; Xu et al. 2002) and that of a putative chloride intracellular channel (CLIC) was also suggested (Ashley 2003). Similar mitochondrial channels may also exist in lymphocytes and function in the cell death pathway.

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