

Oxidative DNA modifications

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Abstract

Oxidative DNA modifications are frequent in mammalian DNA and have been suggested an important mechanism in carcinogenesis, diabetes and ageing. The foundations for this suggestion are:

Evidence for the importance of oxidative DNA modifications in cancer development is: high levels of oxidative lesions in cancer tissue; highly conserved and specific DNA repair systems targeting oxidative lesions; high levels of oxidative DNA lesions in oxidative DNA repair knock-out animals; defective repair of oxidative lesions in cancer-prone progeria syndromes; reduced cancer incidence in populations with high dietary antioxidant intake; and increased oxidative stress to DNA in tobacco smokers. Conflicting evidence for a relation between oxidative stress to DNA and cancer is: disagreement about the true levels and occurrence of the oxidative lesions *in vivo*; failure to identify the localization of oxidative lesions in important genes, e.g. tumor suppressor and oncogenes; lack of evidence that the oxidative lesions induce mutations *in vivo*; no cancer development in animals knocked-out for specific DNA repair enzymes in spite of high tissue levels of oxidative lesions; and unchanged cancer rates after antioxidant interventions in large clinical controlled and randomized trials.

The rate of DNA oxidation has been estimated from urinary excretion of repair products and it is evident that if these lesions were not repaired, a large part of DNA would be oxidized to a degree not compatible with living.

The methodologies by which oxidative DNA modifications are measured cover a wide and different range, advantages and disadvantages will be presented. One particular problem is artificial oxidation, and methods to prevent such artifacts will be presented together with results from a large interlaboratory standardization program. The methodology by which the lesions can be measured is complicated and prone to artifacts during DNA isolation, digestion, derivatization and maybe even during the separation procedure proper prior to detection. A large effort from 20+ laboratories supported by a grant from the EU has reduced artifacts considerably and work towards interlaboratory standardization of the methodology is in progress. The presently agreed “normal” levels of the most frequent known lesion 8-oxodG is about 5 per million dG's in DNA.

A comprehensive evaluation of the evidence, from chemistry to clinical and epidemiological trials, linking oxidative modifications to cancer will be given. Finally, an estimate of the quantitative role oxidative DNA modifications play among the multiplicity of other insults is given.

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While there is no question that all of these oxidative mechanisms do exist, quantitative data on their importance for the human situation do not exist. Prospective human studies that can provide such quantitative data on different mechanisms are underway.

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Introduction

Cells are constantly exposed to oxidants from metabolic and other biochemical reactions as well as external factors. Oxidative modifications of DNA are abundant, mutagenic and thought to be important in carcinogenesis and aging as supported by experimental studies in animals and in vitro (Ames et al., 1995; Loft and Poulsen, 1996; Wiseman and Halliwell, 1996). Indeed cells are constantly exposed to oxidants from both physiological processes, such as mitochondrial respiration (Chance et al., 1979), and pathophysiological conditions such as inflammation, ischemia/reperfusion, foreign compound metabolism and radiation (Ames et al., 1995). The bodily defences against oxidants include an extensive system of antioxidant enzymes and radical scavengers and chain breakers, of which many are nutritionally dependent. Failure of the system of enzymatic, endogenous and nutritional antioxidants may lead to mutagenic oxidative DNA damage as well as deregulation of cell cycle control, resulting in carcinogenesis. Fortunately, damage to DNA is also repaired with high efficiency in the cells in the body (Demple and Harrison, 1994; Laval, 1994). DNA repair enzymes, such as glycosylases, including *OGGI* and also nucleotide excision repair enzymes, including *ERCCI*, appear highly active in order to prevent oxidative damage from resulting in mutations. However, there is limited knowledge about the regulation of these genes in relation to oxidative stress and DNA damage.

DNA damage

The cellular DNA is subject to a wide variety of modifications induced by normal cellular functions as well as by external agents. These agents induce damage either by formation of reactive oxygen species (ROS) or by direct damage in the form of purine dimers, cross-links, strand breaks, or adduct formation.

DNA damages are considered as the most serious ROS-induced cellular modifications as DNA is not synthesized de novo but copied and hence the modifications can induce mutations and genetic instability. Nearly 100 different free radical modifications in DNA have been identified (von Sonntag, 1987; Dizdaroglu, 1992), classified as base- or deoxyribose lesions, strand

breaks or cross-links. By measuring excretion of some of the DNA repair products in the urine, it has been estimated that without repair accumulation of DNA oxidations would double in 60–190 days and result in oxidation of 1% of the DNA bases in 8 years (Poulsen et al., 1998a).

Despite antioxidant defense systems and extensive DNA repair of oxidatively modified DNA, complete protection from the noxious effects of ROS cannot be provided. The oxygen species are thus suspected to be implicated in a number of diseases including cancer, atherosclerosis, diabetes, several neurodegenerative disorders, and stressors like noise and university examinations (Ames, 2001; Vasavada and Agarwal, 2005; Masalkar and Abhang, 2005; Carlsson et al., 2005; Schulze and Lee, 2005; Sullivan and Brown, 2005; Drost et al., 2005; Maguire-Zeiss et al., 2005; Sato et al., 2005; Sivonova et al., 2004; Liu et al., 2005; Behl, 2005).

Analysis of oxidized DNA and excreted repair products

High-performance (or pressure) liquid chromatography (HPLC) is particularly suited for small water-soluble molecules and proteins. Most used for analysis of DNA fragments is the reverse-phase HPLC. Quantification by electrochemical detection (Loft et al., 1992) or mass spectrometry (Weimann et al., 2001, 2002) is preferred. Regarding mass spectrometry with triple quadrupoles, it must be emphasized that unknown urinary substances similar in mass to 8-oxodG need to be separated from 8-oxodG by elaborate chromatography, just as is the case with electrochemical detection.

Following derivatization it is possible to use the gas chromatography separation procedure coupled with mass spectrometry to measure oxidized DNA products. However, this method has with few exceptions not been used for urinary measurements of DNA oxidation products, but has been the method used for estimation of tissue DNA, actually the modified bases after hydrolysis, and other DNA oxidation products in tissue. For urine measurements by gas chromatography–mass spectrometry (GC–MS) a semi-preparative HPLC procedure was applied, followed by hydrolysis, derivatization and then GC–MS analysis (Pourcelot et al., 1999; Faure et al., 1998).

GC–MS used for quantification of oxidative DNA products in tissue has been criticized for errors due to artificial oxidation, however, provided that sufficient precautions are taken; this can be avoided and results similar to those from HPLC-ECD can be provided regarding 8-oxodG in DNA (Rodriguez et al., 2000). Presumably, this is also valid for other oxidative DNA products, but needs to be validated. In case of 8-oxodA the validity has been questioned (Poulsen et al., 1998b) regarding 8-oxodA in an experiment with vitamin C and vitamin E intervention (Podmore et al., 1998) and using HPLC-MS/MS it seems likely that the high reported 8-oxodA values relates to artificial oxidation (Weimann et al., 2001). Many of the problems regarding artificial oxidation relate to the very high content of non-oxidized dG in DNA hydrolysates, about 1,000,000 times higher than 8-oxodG. This means that oxidation of only a very minute fraction of dG gives deleterious artifacts from a quantitative aspect. For urine measurements, the levels of oxidized and non-oxidized nucleosides are similar and would a priori not present a problem of the same magnitude. For these reasons most groups have abandoned the use of GC–MS for tissue analysis.

The use of a specific antibody could be the basis for a fast and effective methodology to measure 8-oxodG. However, it has proven difficult to produce an antibody with sufficient specificity for analysis in urine. Several publications have appeared (Erhola et al., 1997; Leinonen et al., 1997; Tsuboi et al., 1998; Thompson et al., 1999). However, although some characterization of the antibody and epitope is given, it appears not to be tested against the many different DNA and RNA products in urine (Schram, 1998). Furthermore, testing against the present method of choice HPLC-ECD, GC–MS or HPLC-MS/MS has only been stated without data, and at the present time the data have not been made available in the literature (Erhola et al., 1997). One particular problem with the immunologically based assays may relate to the high number of DNA/RNA fragments/metabolites and similar substances excreted into urine. In case of RNA products, high concentrations of very similar chemical substances are excreted into urine (Schram, 1998). A similar myriad of DNA products undoubtedly is also excreted. Together this may make it very difficult to produce a specific antibody. A commercially available kit tested out against the three-dimensional HPLC-ECD showed clear non-specificity (Prieme et al., 1996). Until clear demonstration of close correlation to the verified HPLC-ECD or HPLC-MS/MS methods, the use of immunologically based methods for quantification of 8-oxodG in urine cannot be recommended. A very comprehensive and detailed review of all the methodologies has been published by Guetens et al. (2002).

Interpretation of urinary excretion and tissue levels of 8-oxodG

The urinary excretion of 8-oxodG in pigs following i/v injection follows simple kinetics with a half-life of about 2.5 h, a clearance of about $4 \text{ mL min}^{-1} \text{ kg BW}^{-1}$ and a volume of distribution close to $1 \text{ L kg}^{-1} \text{ BW}$ (Loft et al., 1995), and moreover the urinary excretion rate corresponded to the infusion rate. After liver transplantation we observed an increased urinary excretion of 8-oxodG and in a vena cava clamp experiment the excretion was temporarily reduced. These experiments indicate that steady state between formation and urinary excretion is obtained rapidly. Collectively, these data indicate that the 8-oxodG in the urine mainly originates from genomic DNA. However, on a more detailed level the contribution of 8-oxodG from the nucleotide pool cell turnover, cell death, and from inflammatory cells is unknown. Presently, neither direct nor indirect data from the in-vivo situation are available.

Accepting that the contribution of nuclear DNA reflects the oxidation of nuclear DNA, the urinary excretion is a reflection of the average total oxidative stress to DNA of all body cells. In most experimental situations in vivo, it is reasonable to argue that a given person is in a steady state, i.e. a constant 8-oxodG level in DNA and a constant repair. Mass conservation will be applicable and consequently the amount of excreted 8-oxodG will equal newly formed 8-oxodG. The urinary measurement is therefore equal to the rate of oxidative stress to DNA. If an experimental or other form of change happens (say smoking cessation, antioxidant intervention), a new steady state will soon be reached and a change in the rate of oxidation of DNA can be identified. It is important to stress that this measure is independent of DNA repair, a point often not recognized.

Tissue levels of 8-oxodG in DNA reflect a balance between newly formed 8-oxodG's and removal by repair. An increased level can consequently reflect either an increased formation (increased oxidative stress) or a decrease in repair or a combination. It is important to note that a distinction cannot be made solely from measurement of the concentration in DNA of modified bases. In conclusion urinary excretion of 8-oxodG is a measure of the rate of whole body DNA oxidation, and tissue levels reflect the concentration resulting from balance between formation and repair.

Biological consequences of oxidative stress

Oxidative stress can result in damage to important macromolecules such as lipids, proteins and DNA, and have been related to arteriosclerosis (Salonen, 1988,

Table 1. Oxidative DNA damage and exposure to polluted air in humans

Chemical exposure	Increased biomarkers	No increase
Tobacco smoking	8-oxodG in urine, WBC and sperm, comet SSB	Comet assay 8-oxodG in WBC and sperm
Urban air pollution	8-oxodG and 8-oxoGua excretion, comet SSB	
Benzene	8-oxodG excretion Comet SSB	8-oxodG in WBC Comet SSB, Fpg
Styrene, solvents, Vinyl chloride	Comet SSB Comet SSB	Fpg/Endonuclease III sites
Waste matter	Comet SSB	
Wood dust	Comet SSB	Comet SSB

Adapted from Loft and Poulsen (1996, 1998a, b, 1999); Loft et al. (1998, 1999); Moller et al. (2000).

SSB: single strand breaks; Fpg: fapyguanine glycosylase.

2000; Steinberg et al., 1989; Steinberg and Witztum, 1990), cancer (Ames, 2001; Ames et al., 1993, 1995; Halliwell, 1998; Hoeijmakers, 2001) and cataract (Shichi, 2004; Ramana et al., 2004; Varma et al., 1984).

Cellular processes lead to generation of oxidants, including ROS. However, also a large number of environmental factors can lead to increased DNA oxidation. Some relevant environmental factors are listed in Table 1.

The theory of oxidative stress and disease development builds on a rather simplistic view that oxidation was damaged and if prevented, disease could be prevented or the onset protracted. A number of trials have been initiated; however, particularly in the prevention of cancer the results have been negative. The ATBC study (Albanes et al., 1996; The Alpha-Tocopherol and Beta-Carotene Cancer Prevention Group, 1994) showed that smokers who ingested large amounts of beta-carotene had an increased risk of developing lung cancer and no protection against arteriosclerosis, which was also confirmed in other subsequent large controlled trials (Hennekens et al., 1996). Most recently, a controlled trial with prevention of secondary primary cancers in head and neck reported higher rate after high vitamin E intake (Bairati et al., 2005). All these trials used single or few antioxidants in high doses.

The recent SU.VI.MAX study (Hercberg et al., 2004) pointed at a possible benefit in men but not in women from low doses of multiple antioxidant vitamins.

Presently, it must be concluded that large-dose antioxidant vitamins do not prevent cancer or arteriosclerosis.

The negative findings in clinical trials give rise to reconsiderations about the underlying mechanisms. The trials indicate that antioxidant vitamins have biological effects, although they do not appear on the beneficial side, and probably the simplistic idea about quenching of damaging ROS by antioxidants is not sufficient, if valid at all.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the redox status and oxidants per se induce a large number of changes in cells. In Table 2, some important genes that are regulated by oxidants are compiled. Table 3 provides examples of changes in intracellular signalling brought about by oxidants and antioxidants. The exact meaning and consequences of such changes are presently not sufficiently clear to understand the relation to disease development.

Presently, there is no epidemiological evidence available that high levels of oxidative DNA modification in tissue or high urinary excretion of oxidatively modified nucleic acid products are predictive for cancer development in man. Such data are mandatory to establish that DNA oxidation is relevant for cancer development, and also a requirement in other diseases and ageing.

Conclusions

Oxidative stress is well documented as a biological phenomenon. It has been demonstrated that oxidative stress leads to oxidation of important macromolecules, particularly DNA and it has been hypothesized as an important pathogenic factor in the development of cancer. Controlled trials with antioxidant supplementation did show biological effects of such supplementation; however, the results consistently point at increased cancer rates. Oxidants as well as antioxidants have been shown to modulate gene regulation and intracellular signalling. The hypothesis of antioxidant function as quenches of free oxygen radicals is most probably much too simple; rather, it should be appreciated that a large number of cellular processes including gene regulation and intracellular signalling are modulated by oxidants and antioxidants resulting in a complex cellular change. If this has relation to the oxidation of DNA is not clear. Presently, it is clear that the complex result of large-dose antioxidants can result in increased cancer rates. It is

Table 2. Oxidative stress and gene regulation/activity

Gene/enzyme/protein	Regulation by oxidants: (O) = oxidants; (A) = antioxidants	Regulation by anti-oxidants	Reference
JUN kinase (JNK)	Induced (O)	Inhibited (GSH)	Choi and Moore, 1993; Karin and Smeal, 1992; Karin, 1995; Lander et al., 1995
c-FOS	Increased transcription (O)	Inhibited (phenolics)	Choi and Moore, 1993; Sachsenmaier et al., 1994; Stein et al., 1989
MAP kinase	Stimulation (O)		Whisler et al., 1995
Tyrosine phosphatase	Inhibition (O)		Whisler et al., 1995
KAM-1, IL-1 α , IL6, IL8, heme oxygenase	Induced (O)		Grether-Beck et al., 1997
Metal binding proteins (MT-genes)	Induced (O)		Bauman et al., 1991, 1992a, b; Dalton et al., 1994, 1996; De et al., 1990; Min et al., 1991
Heme oxygenase-1	Induced (O)		Inamdar et al., 1996
Caspases	Induced (O)		Yang et al., 1997; Kluck et al., 1997; Zamzami et al., 1995, 1996; Dypbukt et al., 1994
Caspases	Inhibited by severe oxidative stress (O)		Kim et al., 1997
PKC	Induced (O)		Whisler et al., 1995; Larsson and Cerutti, 1989; Brawn et al., 1995; Kass et al., 1989
PKC	Inactivated (O)		Gopalakrishna and Anderson, 1987, 1991
Ras	Activated (O)		Lander et al., 1995, 1996, 1997
Phospholipase A and D	Activated		Ito et al., 1997; Natarajan et al., 1996

Table 3. Oxidative stress and intracellular signalling

Elements	Effect of oxidants (O) and anti-oxidants (A)	Reference
NF-kb	Activation (O) blocking (A) controversial	Devary et al., 1993; Mohan and Meltz, 1994; Schulze-Osthoff et al., 1993, 1995, 1997; Staal et al., 1990
AP-1	Activated (O,A) blocking (O,A)	Toledano and Leonard, 1991; Droge et al., 1994; Galter et al., 1994
Ca ²⁺	Intracellular increase (O)	Abate et al., 1990, 1991; Edwards and Mahadevan, 1992; Hunter and Karin, 1992; Karin, 1995; Yang-Yen et al., 1990
AP-1	Activated (O)	Hoyal et al., 1996; Suzuki et al., 1997
p53	Complex regulation	Abate et al., 1990; Okuno et al., 1993
		Hainaut and Milner, 1993; Hainaut et al., 1995; Hupp et al., 1993

unclear if it is possible to devise a means based on such principles that will be able to reduce cancer rates. The effects of attempts to modulate disease outcome by dietary antioxidants clearly point very complicated and complex mechanisms.

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