Burial of the Polymorphic Residue 129 in Amyloid Fibrils of Prion Stop Mutants*‡

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Lukasz Skora‡1, Luis Fonseca-Ornelas‡1, Romina V. Hofele‡1, Dietmar Riedel‡, Karin Giller‡, Jens Watzlawik§, Walter J. Schulz-Schaeffer‡, Henning Urlaub‡4, Stefan Becker‡, and Markus Zweckstetter‡2

From the ‡Max Planck Institute for Biophysical Chemistry, 37077 Göttingen, the §Prion and Dementia Research Unit, Department of Neuropathology and the ¶Department of Clinical Chemistry, University Medical Center Göttingen, 37075 Göttingen, and the †German Center for Neurodegenerative Diseases (DZNE), 37077 Göttingen, Germany

Background: In human prion diseases, the phenotype is modified by a methionine/valine polymorphism at codon 129.

Results: Prion stop mutants have a conserved amyloid core comprising residue 129.

Conclusion: The polymorphic residue 129 is buried in the amyloid core structure.

Significance: The data support a critical role of the methionine/valine 129 polymorphism in human prion diseases.

Misfolding of the natively α-helical prion protein into a β-sheet-rich isoform is related to various human diseases such as Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease and Gerstmann-Sträussler-Scheinker syndrome. In humans, the disease phenotype is modified by a methionine/valine polymorphism at codon 129 of the prion protein gene. Using a combination of hydrogen/deuterium exchange coupled to NMR spectroscopy, hydroxyl radical probing detected by mass spectrometry, and site-directed mutagenesis, we demonstrate that stop mutants of the human prion protein have a conserved amyloid core. The 129 residue is deeply buried in the amyloid core structure, and its mutation strongly impacts aggregation. Taken together the data support a critical role of the polymorphic residue 129 of the human prion protein in aggregation and disease.

Misfolding of the natively α-helical prion protein (PrP(C))3 into a β-sheet-rich isoform is related to various human diseases such as Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease and Gerstmann-Sträussler-Scheinker syndrome collectively known as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (1). The form of disease is determined by two prion types (2), which are a cross species phenomenon (3). Prion types are characterized by differences in stability against denaturing agents, different proteinase K-cleavage sites, and different forms of prion aggregate deposits (3). These differences were attributed to distinct prion conformations (4). In humans, a methionine/valine polymorphism at codon 129 of the prion protein gene contributes to determining disease phenotypes (2). Although both prion types can be formed with each polymorphism at codon 129, methionine shows a strong association with prion type 1 and valine with prion type 2 (5). Homozygosity at this position predominates in sporadic Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, where up to 89% of patients of large epidemiological studies had either Met/Met or Val/Val at codon 129 (6). It has also been demonstrated that to achieve a more efficient prion transmission in human PrP-transgenic mice models, both the inoculum and the mouse should bear the same amino acid at position 129 (7).

Although the high-resolution structures of PrP(C) from many species are well described (8), little is known about the structure of PrPSc. X-ray fiber diffraction showed that infectious prions have cross-β structure, confirming that prions can form amyloid (9). Antibody mapping studies suggested that when PrP(C) is converted into PrPSc, a conformational rearrangement occurs in the region comprising residues 90–176 (10). Mass spectrometric analysis of hydrogen-deuterium exchange of brain-derived PrPSc suggested that prion protein conversion involves refolding of the entire region from residues ~80–90 to the C terminus (11). Electron microscopy of two-dimensional crystals of the 27–30-kDa infectious fragment, PrP27–30, suggested that PrP amyloid fibrils might consist of stacked trimers of left-handed β-helices with the core formed by residues 89–140 (12–14).

Characterization of PrPSc at high resolution is currently not possible. Therefore, a variety of studies have investigated the structure of amyloid fibrils produced in vitro from recombinant prion protein. Mass spectrometry-coupled exchange experiments of amyloid fibrils of human prion protein (humPrP) comprising residues 90–231 indicated strong solvent protection in the region encompassing residues ~160–230 (15). In contrast, for mouse PrP(23–231), residues 24–98 and 182–212 were protected (16). Hydrogen exchange measurements by mass spectrometry and NMR spectroscopy of mouse PrP(89–143) bearing a P101L mutation identified a high level of protection from solvent exchange for residues 102–109 and 117–136 (17). In addition, molecular dynamics simulations provided models for the conformation of PrP in prions (18).

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1 These authors contributed equally to this work.

2 To whom correspondence should be addressed: German Center for Neurodegenerative Diseases (DZNE) and Max Planck Institute for Biophysical Chemistry, Am Fassberg 11, 37077 Göttingen, Germany. E-mail: markus.zweckstetter@dzne.de.

3 The abbreviations used are: PrP, prion protein; PrP(C), cellular prion protein; PrPSc, scrapie form of prion protein; humPrP, human PrP; HSQC, heteronuclear single quantum coherence; H/D, hydrogen/deuterium.
Hereditary prion diseases include C-terminally truncated variants of the prion protein, Y145X, Q160X, Y226X, and Q227X, where X indicates the truncation site (see Fig. 1A). Although a single experiment to transmit human 145stop mutant prions to mice failed (19), the stop mutants provide a particularly valuable model for studying misfolding of prion protein (20, 21) as they: (i) lack the normally present glycosylphosphatidylinositol anchor and are secreted into the intercellular medium, which appears to favor fibrilization and aggregation (21, 22); (ii) show in vivo prion deposits in the form of amyloidogenic plaques or plaque-like aggregates, like other prion diseases (23); and (iii) aggregate under nondenaturing conditions in vitro (20, 22). Previously, we showed that the β-sheet content is highly similar in amyloid fibrils of the Y145X and Q160X prion stop mutants (22), and solid-state NMR spectroscopy revealed extended β-sheet conformation in the 112–140 region (24–26). Here we investigated the importance of the polymorphic residue 129 for the formation and structure of amyloid fibrils of human prion stop mutants. Using a combination of hydrogen/deuterium (H/D) exchange coupled to NMR spectroscopy, hydroxyl radical probing detected by mass spectrometry, and site-directed mutagenesis, we demonstrate that the valine/metionine residue 129 is deeply buried in the amyloid core of the stop mutants, supporting its critical role in aggregation and disease.

**EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES**

**Protein Expression and Purification**—Plasmids encoding Q160X and N174X were expressed in *Escherichia coli* BL21(DE3) by using M9 minimal medium with [15N]NH4Cl (1 g/liter) as the only nitrogen source and as required [13C6]glucose (4 g/liter), to obtain uniformly 15N- or 13C,15N-labeled protein, and purified according to Ref. 27. Variants of humPrP(108–143) were expressed in *Escherichia coli* strain BL21(DE3) by using M9 minimal medium with [15N]NH4Cl (1 g/liter) and dialyzed overnight against 500 ml of 25 mM Tris, pH 7.5, and dialyzed in a 1:5 ratio in 7.5M guanidine hydrochloride, 25 mM NaH2PO4, pH 6.5. Peptide concentrations were determined by UV absorption at 280 nm.

**Electron Microscopy (EM)**—The sample was bound to carbon-coated grids and stained with 1% uranyl acetate. Pictures were taken at 72,000× magnification at a CM 120 with a 2048×2048 pixel TemCam (Tietz) in spotscan mode.

**NMR-detected H/D Exchange**—Fibrils were collected by centrifugation (10,000 × g for 5 min) and washed 3–4 times with 50 mM phosphate buffer (pH 6.5) to remove residual monomeric protein or low molecular weight oligomers. To initiate exchange, the pellet was resuspended in D2O buffer (0.1% formic acid in D2O, pD 2.5) and incubated at 4 °C for 3 and 7 days. The samples were then immediately frozen in liquid nitrogen and lyophilized. For the NMR experiments, lyophilized proteins were resolubilized in ice-cold solution of 2 M guanidinium thiocyanate in 50% H2O, 50% D2O, pD 2.5, and a series of 1H,15N heteronuclear single quantum coherence (HSQC) spectra was recorded over a period of 24 h to follow the back-exchange process (28). NMR spectra were acquired at 278 K on a Bruker Avance 900 MHz spectrometer equipped with a 5-mm triple resonance cryogenic probe head. Experiment time was ~23 min, and the dead time for sample preparation and acquisition setup was 15 min. NMR data were processed and analyzed using NMRPipe (29). For nonresolvable residues within the octarepeat region, protection levels were calculated using averaged intensities. Signals originating from residues Gly-30, Trp-31, Gly-35, Arg-37, Tyr-38, Tyr-49, Gly-53, Gly-55, Trp-57, Met-109, Lys-110, Met-112, Leu-125, Ile-138, and Tyr-145 were overlapping in the denaturing condition. As signal overlap might distort the analysis and lead to false protection factors, these residues were not included into the analysis. Exchange curves were fitted to Equation 1 using IgorPro 5.01.

\[ I/I_0 = A_1 + A_2 \times \exp(A_3 \times t) \]  
(Eq. 1)

where \(I_0\) is the signal intensity observed in the first HSQC spectrum after dissolution, and \(A_1–A_3\) are fitting variables.

**NMR Resonance Assignment**—Sequential backbone assignment of humPrP mutants in fibril dissolving buffer was obtained from three-dimensional HACANNH, HNCACB, and HNN experiments (30, 31) recorded at 278 K on a Bruker Avance spectrometer operating at 900 MHz and equipped with a 5-mm triple resonance cryo probe. The samples used for resonance assignment contained typically 0.4 mM 13C,15N-labeled variant humPrP in 2 M guanidinium thiocyanate, 90% H2O, 10% D2O, pH 2.5. Due to severe signal overlap in the octarepeat region, only 89 resonances for 123 non-proline residues of human humPrP(23–159) were observed in two-dimensional 1H,15N HSQC spectra of the denatured monomer. 64 of these resonances could be assigned unambiguously, whereas the rest could only be located to the octarepeat region. Measurement of Diffusion Coefficients—The molecular weight of the amyloid fibrils was estimated using NMR pulsed-
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field gradient methods experiments (32). 10 mg of unlabeled fibrils were placed in a rotor, and diffusion coefficients were measured using the LED pulse sequence with bipolar gradients (33). Spectra were recorded on a Bruker Avance 900-MHz spectrometer equipped with a 4-mm high-resolution magic angle spinning probe. The sample was spun at 7.2 kHz, total diffusion time was $D = 100 \text{ms}$, and gradient pulse length $d = 3 \text{ms}$. Sine-shaped gradients were used, and their strength was incremented in 16 steps from $g = 0.07 – 0.48 \text{G/mm}$. The diffusion coefficients were calculated by fitting the intensity decay curves (see Fig. 1C) with the equation

$$I/I_0 = \exp[-D(\gamma g d)^2(D - d/3 - t/2)] \quad \text{(Eq. 2)}$$

where $\gamma$ is the gyromagnetic ratio of the $^1H$ nucleus, and $t = 200 \mu s$ is the delay for gradient switching. For molecular weight estimation, 1,4-dioxane (88 Da) and bovine serum albumin (66 kDa) were used as internal and external references.

**Mass Spectrometry (MS)**—humPrP(108–143) was probed in the monomeric and fibrillar state by chemically generated hydroxyl radicals, as described in Ref. 34. 70 µl of 50 µM sample were added to an Eppendorf tube containing 10 µl of 13 mM Fe-EDTA (Sigma-Aldrich and Merck, respectively) solution and 10 µl of 0.2 M sodium ascorbate (Sigma-Aldrich) solution, both in 50 mM Na$_2$HPO$_4$, pH 6.5 buffer. For control purposes, a 17-µl aliquot was transferred to 40 µl of quenching buffer (2 M Tris, pH 7.2, Prolabo). Finally, 10 µl of 3% v/v H$_2$O$_2$ (Sigma-Aldrich) were added to the Fenton mixture to start the reaction. At 10, 60, 150, and 300 s, 17-µl aliquots were removed and transferred to new Eppendorf tubes containing 40 µl of quenching buffer.

To disassemble the probed peptides prior to further analysis, samples were dissolved in 200 µl of acetonitrile. The total volume was reduced to ~20 µl. Subsequently, 150 µl of 100 mM Tris, 10 mM CaCl$_2$ buffer and 0.5 µg of chymotrypsin (Roche Applied Science) were added, and digestion was allowed to proceed overnight at 25 °C. The digested samples were desalted with C8 (3M) STAGE tips (35).

**Nano-liquid Chromatography Separation and MS Analysis**—For LC-MS/MS analyses, samples were dissolved in 30 µl of sample solvent (5% v/v acetonitrile, 1% v/v formic acid). 5 µl were injected onto a nano-liquid chromatography system (Agilent 1100 series, Agilent Technologies) including an ~2-cm-long, 150-µm inner diameter C18 trapping column in-line with an ~15-cm-long, 75-µm inner diameter C18 analytical column (both packed in-house, C18 AQ 120 Å 5 µm, Dr. Maisch GmbH, Ammerbuch, Germany). Peptides were loaded on the trapping column at a flow rate of 10 µl/min in buffer A (0.1% formic acid in H$_2$O, v/v) and subsequently eluted and separated on the analytical column with a gradient of 7.5–37.5% buffer B (95% acetonitrile, 0.1% formic acid in H$_2$O, v/v) with an elution time of 37 min and a flow rate of 300 nl/min.

Online electrospray mass ionization-MS was performed with an LTQ-Orbitrap Velos instrument (Thermo Scientific), operated in data-dependent mode using a TOP10 method. MS scans were recorded in the $m/z$ range of 350–1600. The 10 most intense ions were selected for subsequent MS/MS. Both precursor ions as well as fragment ions were scanned in the Orbitrap. Fragment ions were generated by higher energy collision dissociation activation (normalized collision energy = 40) and recorded from $m/z = 100$. As precursor ions as well as fragment ions were scanned in the Orbitrap, the resulting spectra were measured with high accuracy (<5 ppm) both in the MS and in the MS/MS level.

**Determination of Oxidized Sites**—Data analysis was performed using MaxQuant 1.1.1.14 (36). Database search was performed against humPrP(108–143) with Andromeda (37) considering a total of 14 variable modifications: hydroxylation (+16 Da) in His, Val, Met, Leu, Tyr, Arg, Pro, Ile, Phe; dioxidation (+32 Da) of Met, Tyr, Phe; deguanidination (~43 Da) in Arg; and ring opening (~22) in His. The oxidation levels at any given time point were calculated on a per-residue basis. By making use of extracted ion chromatograms, obtained with Xcalibur (10 ppm tolerance), the ratios of oxidized to nonoxidized peptides in which a specific residue is involved were determined according to Ref. 38 and as illustrated below for Met-112

$$\text{IKHM(O)AGAAAAGAVVGGKGGY(O)}_\text{O} + \text{IKHM(O)AGAAAAGAVVGGKGGY}_\text{O} + \text{IKHM(O)AGAAAAGAVVGGKGGY}_\text{O}$$

(Eq. 3)

where O indicates the oxidized residue. Because ionization efficiencies of modified and unmodified species are similar, but not identical, the results need be interpreted in a relative context (i.e. fibrillar versus monomeric states). For quantification of peptides that contain several modifications in different combinations that lead to the same $m/z$ value (termed isobaric oxidized peptides), we made use of the fact that these elute at different retention times from the LC into the mass spectrometer (ranging from 1 to 9 min with respect to the nonoxidized peptide). To the same purpose, only the most abundant charge state of each peptide was considered.

**Error Calculation**—Two independently prepared fibril samples and two monomeric samples were measured and used for error calculation, and the error informed corresponds to the S.E. It should be noted that the sum of the intensities corresponding to different combinations of oxidized residues (the case for most methionines) lead to higher uncertainties, which stresses the need for the results to be interpreted in a relative context.

**RESULTS**

**Size Estimation of humPrP(23–159) Fibrils**—To characterize the molecular weight of humPrP(23–159) fibrils (Fig. 1B), we have used pulsed-field gradient methods (32) combined with high-resolution magic angle spinning (Fig. 1C). High-resolution magic angle spinning averages out NMR signal broadening caused by inhomogeneity in magnetic field anisotropy and thus allows detection of flexible regions in aggregates, whereas NMR-based pulsed field gradient methods provide an estimate of the diffusion coefficient of aggregates. To take into account the nonspherical shape of fibrils and contribution from rotational diffusion, the equations described by Perrin (39) were applied to calculate the corresponding diffusion constant of a spherical molecule of the same molecular weight. For this calculation, the average diameter and length of the fibrils were estimated from EM micrographs as 15 and 500 nm, respec-
Using the Stokes-Einstein relation, the molecular weight of humPrP(23–159) fibrils was estimated to be in the order of 4 MDa.

Solvent Protection in the Fibrillar State—The solvent accessibilities of single residues in amyloid fibrils (Fig. 2) of the hereditary stop mutant Q160X were probed using NMR-detected H/D exchange (40). To allow detection by liquid-state NMR and at the same time preserve the H/D exchange pattern, fibrils that had been exposed to H/D exchange were rapidly converted to monomers in a 2 M solution of guanidinium thiocyanate in 50% H2O, 50% D2O (28). Back-exchange was then monitored in the denatured state by a series of two-dimensional 1H,15N HSQC spectra (Fig. 2). Neglecting back-exchange before and during the first HSQC after dissolution, the intensity ratio is 1.0 for an amide proton, for which the protection level in the fibril is 50%, and reaches a minimum of 0.5 for an amide proton with a 100% protection level in the fibrillar state.

To allow a residue-specific analysis of the H/D exchange, an assignment of the denatured protein in the dissolving buffer was required. Due to severe signal overlap in the octarepeat region, 89 distinct resonances for 123 non-proline residues of human humPrP(23–159) were observed in two-dimensional 1H,15N HSQC spectra of the denatured monomer. Sequence-specific backbone assignment was obtained for 64 of these resonances from a set of standard three-dimensional HACANNH, HNCA, and HNN experiments (30, 31). The rest could only be located to the octarepeat region. Based on the sequence-specific resonance assignment, a solvent protection map was constructed that revealed back-exchange ratios of more than 1.2 for the segments 23–108 and 143–173 (Fig. 3A). In the central domain comprising residues 109–142, two regions could be distinguished: residues 109–120 and 140–142 with intermediate amide proton back-exchange ratios (exchange ratios of 1.0–1.2) and residues 121–139 with high protection values (>70%). A very similar protection map was obtained after 3 instead of 7 days of H/D exchange (Fig. 3A).

Methionine 129 Is Strongly Protected from Solvent Exchange—Comparison of H/D exchange profiles for individual residues (Figs. 2B and 3A) provides further insight. Firstly, within the region 109–140, Gly-119 and Ala-120 showed the most pronounced increase in signal intensity during the back-exchange process, suggesting that a turn may be formed by these residues. Secondly, the striking change in the exchange profiles from Ile-139 to His-140 points to a well defined boundary of the fibrillar core. Thirdly, residues 144–156 that form helix1 in the native structure of the human prion protein (8) showed high back-exchange ratios, comparable with the flexible N-terminal domain and suggesting that the helix1 region is highly solvent-accessible in amyloid fibrils of humPrP(23–159). Fourth, the polymorphic residue Met-129 is strongly protected from solvent exchange.
A Common Amyloid Core of Human Prion Stop Mutants—
To probe the structural consequences of residues 160QVYY163, which form β-strand 2 in the native PrP structure, we performed H/D exchange on amyloid fibrils of the designed stop mutant N174X. The solvent protection map of N174X was very similar to the exchange profile of the Q160X stop mutant (Fig. 3B). The high solvent accessibility of residues 160–170 suggested that this region is not part of the fibrillar core in the N174X stop mutant. In longer peptides, however, more extensive structure could be present in this sequence stretch. The combined H/D exchange data indicate that the hydrogen-bonded core of amyloid fibrils of Q160X and N174X stop mutants of the human prion protein comprises residues 121–139, flanked by residues 109–120 and 140–142.

The Side Chain of the Polymorphic Residue 129 Is Buried in the Amyloid Core—Next, we investigated the organization of single side chains in the amyloid structure of prion stop mutants using hydroxyl radical probing (Fig. 4). Hydroxyl radicals covalently modify side chains of solvent-accessible amino acids. The modifications induce a mass shift that can be detected by mass spectrometry (41). Measurements were performed for the peptide humPrP(108–143) that covers the fibrillar core of the stop mutants (Fig. 3) (24–26) and for which amyloid fibrils are morphologically similar to those of the stop mutants (Fig. 5). When compared with the stop mutants, the humPrP(108–143) peptide has two important advantages: (i) peptides obtained by solid-phase synthesis and stored as lyophilized powder are less prone to oxidation of methionine residues, a problem previously reported for recombinant prion protein (42); and (ii) the disordered N-terminal tail comprising residues 23–107 does not modulate the rate of aggregation. Hydroxyl radical probing was applied to humPrP(108–143) in both the disordered monomer and the fibrillar state (Fig. 4 and supplemental Fig. S1). Oxidative modifications were observed for residues Met-109, Met-112, Tyr-128, Met-129, Leu-130, Met-134, Arg-136, Pro-137, Ile-138, Ile-139, His-140, and Phe-141 (Fig. 4 and supplemental Fig. S2). Other amino acid residues were not modified because of their lower reactivity or solvent accessibility. Strikingly, a pronounced reduction in oxidation was observed for the side chains of Tyr-128, Met-129, and

FIGURE 2. Solvent protection in amyloid fibrils of the Q160X stop mutant. A, excerpts from two-dimensional 1H,15N correlation spectra showing changes in signal intensities during the back-exchange process. The spectra were taken 1 (top), 6 (middle), and 24 h (bottom) after the dissolution of fibrils. Sequence-specific assignments are indicated. B, changes in signal intensities over time of individual residues in the region 111–141 due to back-exchange in the denatured monomeric state. Only data for residues that do not overlap in the two-dimensional 1H,15N HSQCs are shown.
The importance of the 129 position for prion aggregation was further supported by seeding experiments. After 6 h of aggregation, Met-129 humPrP(108–143) amyloid fibrils were fragmented and homogenized with three 5-min sonication cycles. Three different volume/volume percentages (0.1, 1, and 5%) were used as seeds on fresh preparations of monomeric Met-129, Asn-129, and Asp-129 peptides. Regardless of the seed concentration, there was no seeding effect on either Asn-129 or Asp-129 peptides, whereas the Met-129 seed on Met-129 fresh monomer completely removed the nucleation phase (Fig. 5D).

**DISCUSSION**

Biochemical analyses of aggregated prion protein in patients with a stop codon mutation suffering from a prion disease have shown that the protein resulting from the mutated allele forms the aggregates (23, 43, 44). However, a single experiment to transmit human 145stop mutant prions to New Zealand White mice failed (19).

Using H/D exchange coupled to NMR spectroscopy, we showed that the Q160X and N174X stop mutants of the human prion protein have a common solvent-protected core (Fig. 3) that starts at residue 109 and ends at residue 142. Residues 160QVYY163, which form β-strand 2 in the native PrP structure, are not part of the fibrillar core of these stop mutants. In addition, residues 144–156 that form helix 1 in the native structure (8) remain highly solvent-accessible in amyloid fibrils of humPrP(23–159). In vitro aggregated amyloid fibrils of Q160X and Y145X are morphologically similar according to electron microscopy (20, 22) and have similar proteinase K cleavage sites (22). Moreover, solid-state NMR measurements of Y145X located the β-sheet-rich amyloid core to residues 112–140 (24). Taken together the data suggest that their amyloid fibrils share a common structure starting at residue 109 and ending at residue 140–142. The identified fibril core is consistent with a major PrP fragment of ~7 kDa that was detected in amyloid fibrils purified from the 145stop mutant (43), from the 227stop mutant (44), and from Gerstmann-Sträussler-Scheinker brains and spans residues 81–82 to 144–153 (45). Moreover, the fibrillar core represents the most conserved sequence element in mammalian and nonmammalian prion proteins (46) and encompasses the peptide fragment 112–119 that is essential for the replication of the infectious agent in tissue culture (47).

Recently, some of us determined the backbone fold of amyloid fibrils of the Y145X stop mutant by application of the CS-Rosetta structure calculation program to experimental solid-state NMR chemical shifts (24, 48). The calculations revealed a left-handed β-helix formed by three β-strands. The Met-129 side chain is located in the beginning of the third β-strand and points inward to the hydrophobic core of the left-handed β-helix. The structural model is well supported by the solvent accessibility of individual side chains obtained by mass spectrometry.

Met-129 shows a pronounced reduction of solvent accessibility in the amyloid state (Fig. 4), in line with the structural model proposed for the Y145X stop mutant (48).

Besides Met-129, the side chains of Tyr-128 and Leu-130 are solvent-protected in the amyloid state according to mass spectrometry (Fig. 4). In the β-helix model of the Y145X stop mutant, the two residues belong, together with Met-129, to a...
single β-strand formed by 128YMLGSAMSR136 (48). The experimental solvent accessibilities of the 128YMLGSAMSR136-β-strand suggest that both sides of this β-strand are protected. The side harboring the Met-129 side chain forms the hydrophobic core of the β-helix. In contrast, the side harboring Tyr-128 and Leu-130 is not protected in a single filament. A possible explanation for the solvent protection of the Tyr-128 and Leu-130 side chains in light of the β-helix model could be the pairing of two or more filaments, a hypothesis that would be supported by the dimensions of amyloid fibrils of the prion stop mutants observed by electron microscopy (22).

In humans, the disease phenotype is modified by a methionine/valine polymorphism at codon 129 of the prion protein gene in addition to the prion type. Increasing evidence suggests that changes between methionine and valine do not affect the folding or stability of the native structure, implying that its influence takes place at downstream stages in the disease. Based on the broadening of the signals of Met-129 in solid-state NMR measurements of the Y145X stop mutant, it was suggested that Met-129 is located in a flexible loop (24). In contrast, using a combination of H/D exchange coupled to NMR spectroscopy and hydroxyl radical probing detected by mass spectrometry, we demonstrate that the amide proton of Met-129 has slow solvent exchange in the fibrillar state and that its side chain becomes buried upon aggregation into amyloid. We therefore attribute the line broadening observed in solid-state NMR experiments for residues 121–141 (25) to dynamics between different filaments. At the same time, a high rigidity of a single PrP filament is supported by the finding that submicrosecond time scale dynamics are uniform across the amyloid core (25).

In agreement with the burial of Met-129 in the amyloid core, the presence of a valine residue at position 129 strongly enhanced aggregation of humPrP(108–143) (Fig. 5A). The strong effect of the Val-129 substitution might at first sight appear surprising as the Val-129 variant of humPrP(23–144) converted to amyloid fibrils only slightly faster than Met-129 in previous in vitro studies (49). We attribute the differences to the entropic barrier provided by the unstructured residues 23–108 thereby masking differences between different PrP variants. In support of an entropic barrier, aggregation of humPrP(23–144)
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Besides differences in the experimental settings, an explanation may be that the C-terminally truncated mutants aggregate to a different prion type than the N-terminally truncated one. From large epidemiological studies, we know that 87% of the methionine-homozygous sporadic Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease subjects accumulate prion type 1 and 97.5% of the valine homozygous Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease subjects accumulate prion type 2 (2). Taking this into account, the observed structure, starting at 109–112 and ending at 140–142, may represent the structural motif of prion type 2.

In summary, we demonstrated that the polymorphic residue 129 is deeply buried in the amyloid core of stop mutants of the human prion protein. In line with its burial in the amyloid core structure, the identity of the 129 side chain is important for aggregation into amyloid fibrils. Our data support a critical role of the polymorphic residue 129 in the packing of protein chains into prion particles.

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The finding that the Val-129 variant aggregates faster than Met-129 of humPrP(23–144) is in contrast to previous aggregation experiments using recombinant PrP(90–231), where methionine is more aggregation-promoting than valine (51).
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