Malondialdehyde Conjugated With Albumin Induces Pro-Inflammatory Activation of T Cells Isolated From Human Atherosclerotic Plaques Both Directly and Via Dendritic Cell–Mediated Mechanism

Mizanur Rahman, PhD,a Johnny Steuer, MD, PhD,b Peter Gillgren, MD, PhD,b Ákos Végvári, PhD,c Anquan Liu, MD, PhD,a Johan Frostegård, MD, PhDa

HIGHLIGHTS

- MDA conjugated with HSA activates T cells from human atherosclerotic plaques through a direct mechanism.
- MDA-HSA also induces maturation and activation of human dendritic cells, which in turn promote activation of autologous T cells from the same donor's plaques, although this effect appears somewhat weaker than the direct activation.
- M1 polarization of macrophages, potentially an atherogenic effect, were also induced by MDA-HSA.
- Heat shock protein 60 was induced in T cells by MDA-HSA, is atherogenic, and could promote dendritic cell/T cell activation.
- Two peptide modifications of serum albumin in atherosclerotic patients' HSA were similar to those generated by treatment of HSA with MDA in vitro.

Rahman, M. et al. J Am Coll Cardiol Basic Trans Science. 2019;4(4):480-94.
T

ypical of atherosclerosis, the major cause of cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the presence in atherosclerotic plaques of activated immune competent cells including T cells, dendritic cells (DCs) and monocytes/macrophages, dead cells (in a necrotic core), and oxidized low-density lipoprotein (OxLDL), commonly present in inert mainly macrophage-derived foam cells (1,2). In previous studies, findings have indicated that OxLDL can activate T cells (3–6), including those from human atherosclerotic plaques (3,6,7). Moreover, we have shown that the oxidized phospholipid moiety of OxLDL promotes immune activation, including production of interferon (IFN)-γ (8,9), but the underlying mechanisms and possible activation of T cells by other components of OxLDL remain unclear. In contrast to the situation in mice (10), we observed no low-density lipoprotein (LDL)-mediated activation of human T cells, including any that might be found isolated in plaques (6).

Both murine models of atherosclerosis and human ex vivo investigation indicate that T cells play major roles in atherosclerosis and ensuing CVD.

Transfer of CD4⁺ T cells to atherosclerotic mice exacerbates atherosclerosis, possibly by abrogation of T-cell transforming growth factor-beta (TGF-β) signaling (11,12). In humans, an association between the CD8⁺ subset of T cells and CVD has been reported (13). The DCs and T cells co-localized in plaques may play a role in local immune reactions within lesions (14). DCs may be of major importance during different stages of the development of atherosclerosis in humans (15–17).

Oxidation of LDL generates a variety of compounds from both protein (apolipoprotein B [apoB]) and lipids. Two of the products from lipid malondialdehyde (MDA) and phosphorylcholine (PC) appear to be of particular interest and elicit a pronounced antibody response in humans that may have atheroprotective properties (2).

We reported recently that production of antibodies against both PC and MDA conjugated with an albumin is dependent on T cells in humans. Moreover, these antibodies together strongly and negatively correlated with atherosclerosis and vulnerable plaques in systemic lupus erythematosus (where the risk of CVD is exceedingly high) and also with the risk of CVD in a general population (18,19).

Heat shock protein (HSP) 60 may be involved in activation of T cells by OxLDL, as well as the atherosclerotic immunity in general (20), and more specifically in T-cell activation (6,21).

From the 1Institute of Environmental Medicine, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden; 2Section of Vascular Surgery, Department of Surgery, Södersjukhuset, Institution of Clinical Science and Education, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden; and the 3Division of Chemistry I, Department of Medical Biochemistry and Biophysics, Biomedicum, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden. This research was financed by the Swedish Heart-Lung Foundation, the Swedish Research Council, the King Gustav V 80th Birthday Fund, the Swedish Association Against Rheumatism, Vinnova, and Torsten Söderberg’s Foundation. These funders played no role in study design, data collection, and analysis; the decision to publish; or preparation of the manuscript. Dr. Frostegård is named as inventor on patents and patent applications related to phosphorylcholine, but also for malondialdehyde, which is a topic in this paper. All authors have reported that they have no relationships relevant to the contents of this paper to disclose.

All authors attest they are in compliance with human studies committees and animal welfare regulations of the author’s institutions and Food and Drug Administration guidelines, including patient consent where appropriate. For more information, visit the JACC: Basic to Translational Science author instructions page.

Manuscript received July 18, 2018; revised manuscript received March 11, 2019, accepted March 13, 2019.
We report that MDA–human serum albumin (HSA) activates DCs and T cells, the latter even directly, and that this effect is inhibited by anti-MDA antibodies. The implications of these findings are discussed.

**METHODS**

**DC DIFFERENTIATION.** Monocytes were isolated using human enrichment cocktail (STEMCELL Technologies, Grenoble, France) and thereafter were cultured in Roswell Park Memorial Institute (RPMI) medium containing 50 ng/ml each of recombinant human granulocyte-macrophage colony-stimulating factor (GM-CSF) and interleukin (IL)-4 (ImmunoTools, Friesoythe, Germany). After 72 h of incubation, half of the medium was replaced with fresh medium. After 6 days of culture, cells were collected and 2 × 10^6/ml were cultured in the presence or absence of 10 μg/ml MDA-HSA prepared as described previously (18). Endotoxin was not detected in MDA and HSA by the Limulus Amebocyte Lysate test.

The cells collected after 24 h were ≥90% viable. DCs were stained with antibodies against CD11c-PE/BV421, CD86-Percp-Cy5.5, CD80-FITC, and CD40-DCs were stained with antibodies against CD11C-PE/anti-MDA antibodies (Academy Biomedical, Houston, Texas) for 24 h. Furthermore, CD3 T cells were incubated with 20 μmol/l/ml MitoTEMPO (Sigma Aldrich, St. Louis, Missouri) for 30 min to inhibit mitochondrial reactive oxygen species (ROS) production and subsequently cultured with or without MDA-HSA for a maximum of 20 h.

**CO-CULTURE OF DCs AND T CELLS.** CD3 T cells were isolated from theuffy coat of healthy donors with the human T-cell enrichment cocktail (STEMCELL Technologies) in accordance with the manufacturer’s instructions. Differentiated DCs were cultured as described earlier in the presence or absence of MDA-HSA for overnight or for 12 h, then washed and resuspended in complete RPMI medium; thereafter, they were co-cultured with 4 × 10^5 DC3 T cells for 48 h. To block human leukocyte antigen II (HLA-II), 8 μg/ml of low-endotoxin, azide-free purified anti-HLA-II antibodies (Biologend, Dedham, Massachusetts) were added to DCs before co-culturing with T cells. Cells collected after 48 h of co-culture were stained with anti-CD3-Perp-Cy5.5, anti-CD25-PE/FITC, anti-CD69-APC/FITC, and anti-CD71-BV421/FITC (BD Bioscience, San Jose, California).

**MACROPHAGE CULTURE.** Isolated monocytes were cultured with 50 ng/ml recombinant human GM-CSF in RPMI medium, which was replaced on day 3 with fresh medium. On day 5, these cells were treated with MDA-HSA for 48 h to investigate M1 (pro-inflammatory) macrophage differentiation. Further, macrophages were co-cultured with T cells (pre-treated with MDA-HSA for 6 h, and then for 48 h).

**CELL PROLIFERATION.** Cell proliferation was determined using the colorimetric BrdU kit in accordance with the manufacturer’s protocol (Sigma Aldrich). In brief, DCs cultured with or without 10 μg/ml MDA-HSA were cultured for 12 h, washed, and resuspended in the complete RPMI medium, and then 0.5 × 10^5 DCs were co-cultured with 2 × 10^5 autologous T cells in a 96-well round-bottom plate (Becton Dickinson, Franklin Lakes, New Jersey). In addition, T cells were also cultured alone with or without MDA-HSA. After 72 h of incubation, the cells were labeled with BrdU, incubated for 20 more hours, centrifuged, and dried at 60 °C for 1 h. The dried cells were fixed with a FixDenat (Roche) solution before incubation with anti-BrdU peroxidase antibodies. After 2 h of incubation, the cells were washed and substrate solution added for development of color. To stop the reaction, 1 mol/l H_2SO_4 was added and absorption at 450-nm wavelength (with 690 nm as reference) determined.
STAINING OF INTRACELLULAR CYTOKINES. CD3 T cells with or without MDA-HSA were incubated for 24 h; lysed with 0.1% saponin; stained for IFN-γ, IL-4, and IL-17A; and analyzed by flow cytometry.

CYTOKINE QUANTIFICATION. The levels of INF-γ, IL-6, IL-4, tumor necrosis factor (TNF)-α, IL-10, and TGF-β collected after 18 h were assessed by enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (R&D systems, United Kingdom). In the same manner, HSP60 was determined in supernatant from CD3 T cells or DCs after 12 h of stimulation with MDA-HSA. In the case of T cells were stimulated with MDA-HSA for 2 h, then with cellular ADENOSINE TRIPHOSPHATE ASSAY. The raw data obtained were converted into the Mascot Generic Format (mgf) using a written Raw2mgf program written in-house. Proteins were identified by searching the SwissProt database (Porcine) with the Mascot v 2.4 (Matrix Science) database search engine.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS. Statistical analysis was performed by Student’s t-test; p ≤ 0.05 was considered as statistically significant. p ≤ 0.05, p ≤ 0.01, and p ≤ 0.001 were expressed as *, **, and ***, respectively. The bar diagrams are expressed as mean ± SD.
RESULTS

INDUCTION OF DC-MEDIATED T-CELL ACTIVATION BY MDA. After testing 1, 5, and 10 μg/ml MDA-HSA, we chose the highest dose for use. MDA-HSA enhanced the expression of markers of DC activation and several co-stimulatory proteins (Figure 1A) (median fluorescence intensity from 3 individual experiments are presented in Supplemental Figure 1A), as well as the levels of IL-6 and TNF-α. In contrast,
FIGURE 2 MDA-HSA Induces Pro-Inflammatory Activation on T Cells From Both Plaques and Healthy Blood Donors

(A) CD3 T cells were activated by incubation with 10 μg/ml MDA-HSA and the treatment-induced T-cell activation.

(B) MDA-HSA induced differentiation of INF-gamma- and IL-17A-positive cells but no significant change in IL-4-positive T cells.

(C) MDA-HSA induced pro-inflammatory but not anti-inflammatory cytokines in plaque T cells.

(D) MDA-HSA induced the transcription factors RORC, but not T-bet, GATA3, or FoxP3. Mean of 3 independent experiments (A-D).

(E) T cells from atherosclerotic plaques duplicates were activated by MDA-HSA.

(F) The level of IFN-gamma in the supernatant of plaque T cells from patients was elevated by MDA-HSA. (Mean of 3 patients.) FoxP3 = forkhead box P3; IFN = interferon; other abbreviations as in Figure 1.
TGF-β levels were not significantly altered, and IL-10 levels declined (Figure 1B). HSA itself was without effect (Supplemental Figures 1B to 1D). Furthermore, MDA-HSA promoted activation of T cells by DCs (Figure 1C). To investigate HLA-II–mediated T-cell activation, MDA-HSA–induced DCs were cultured with T-cell presence or absence of HLA-II blocking antibodies. Blockage of HLA-II with specific antibodies did not inhibit induction of CD25, a marker of activation, by MDA-HSA (not shown); whereas silencing of TCR-α and -β inhibited MDA-HSA–induced DC-mediated activation of T cells (Figure 1D).

Treatment of DCs derived from peripheral monocytes of patients with MDA-HSA and subsequent co-culture with T cells obtained from plaques of the same patients gave similar results (Figure 1E).

**THE EFFECT OF MDA-HSA ON DC-INDEPENDENT ACTIVATION OF T CELLS.** MDA-HSA (Figure 2A) caused potent activation of T cells, whereas once again HSA alone had no effect (Supplemental Figure 2A). Silencing or inhibition of TLR2, TLR4, or TCR (α/β) did not alter this response to MDA-HSA (Supplemental Figure 2B). MDA-HSA was found to bind to the cell/cell membrane directly and/or penetrate into the cell (Supplemental Figure 2C), and intracellular staining showed activation of pro-inflammatory Th1 and Th17 but not Th2 T cells (Figure 2B). In the supernatants from cells treated with MDA-HSA, the levels of IFN-γ were increased; IL-4 and TGF-β showed no significant change (Figure 2C). IL-17 was undetectable in our enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay.

Transcription factors for Th17 cells (RORC) were induced by MDA-HSA with no alteration in the case of GATA3, Tbet-1, or Fox P3 (Figure 2D).

As with peripheral blood T cells, plaque T cells were also activated by MDA-HSA (Figure 2E), and the level of IFN-γ in the cells supernatant was elevated (Figure 2F).

**CELL PROLIFERATION.** MDA-HSA did not stimulate DCs and T cell proliferation (Supplemental Figure 2D).

**INDUCTION OF HSP60.** MDA-HSA induced HSP60 in both T-cells (Figure 3A) and DCs (Figure 3B) from healthy donors as well as plaque T cells (Figure 3C).
**ACTIVATION INDUCES APOPTOSIS IN DCs AND T CELLS.** The concentration of MDA-HSA used, which is not highly toxic to the cells, induced apoptosis in both DCs and T cells that increased with time (Figure 3D).

**M1 MACROPHAGE DIFFERENTIATION BY MDA-HSA.** When macrophages (identified by CD11b) were treated with MDA-HSA, the percentage expressing M1-specific marker CD86 was increased (Figure 4A).

CD40 ligation plays an important role in the inflammation associated with CVDs; this protein was also induced by MDA-HSA (Figure 4A), and mean fluorescence intensity of 3 individual experiments is shown (Supplemental Figure 3A).

Our hypothesis that MDA-HSA-induced T cells influence M1 development in atherosclerotic lesions was supported by the finding that MDA-HSA-treated T cells induced expression of CD86 in macrophages (Figure 4B); MFI from 3 individual experiments are shown (Supplemental Figure 3B). Only mild apoptosis occurred in the macrophages treated with MDA-HSA (Supplemental Figure 3C).

**INHIBITION OF T-CELL ACTIVATION.** Direct activation of T cells by MDA-HSA was inhibited by anti-MDA antibodies (Figure 5A), as was the binding of MDA-HSA to T cells (Supplemental Figure 3D). MitoTEMPO inhibited mitochondrial ROS as expected (Supplemental Figure 3E), and partially reduced the activation of T cells in response to MDA-HSA (Figure 5B).

**MDA-HSA INDUCES P38 MITOGEN-ACTIVATED PROTEIN KINASE, TLR2, AND TLR4.** MDA-HSA increased the activation of p38 mitogen-activated protein kinase (MAPKp38), as well as expression
levels of TLR2 and TLR4 in cells from each individual (Figure 6); MFI are shown from 3 individuals’ experiments (Supplemental Figure 4), but not of the P65 subunit of nuclear factor kappa-light-chain-enhancer of activated B cells (NF-kB) (not shown).

**MS ANALYSIS.** After treating HSA in vitro, 31 peptides could be identified (Table 1) (see Supplemental
Figure 5 for a representation of MS tracings). In the HSA of atherosclerotic patients, there were 9 MDA-modified peptides (Table 2), 2 of which were similar to those obtained in in vitro modification (set in boldface in Tables 1 and 2).

**DISCUSSION**

OxLDL has a complex structure, the different parts of which might play varying roles in immune activation. Apparently, mice and humans differ in this respect; LDL in a murine model activates T cells. We have shown that OxLDL activates T cells in humans (4,5), which has recently been further developed (6,21). Therefore, we chose here to study T cells isolated directly from human atherosclerotic plaques in relation to DCs from the same individuals, that is, an ex vivo human model similar to that described previously (6,21).

We report for the first time that MDA, conjugated with autologous human albumin, activates T cells, including those isolated from plaques, by both direct and, to some extent, indirect mechanisms via DCs. As expected, albumin itself has no effect.

MDA-HSA induced a pro-inflammatory activation of DCs, indicated by increased expression of CD86, CD80, and CD40 markers and production of cytokines. The direct effect on T cells from plaques (and peripheral blood) was strong, whereas DC-mediated MDA-HSA-induced T-cell activation was weaker.

MDA-HSA induced secretion of pro-inflammatory cytokine secretion as IFN-γ, but not IL-17. At the same time, cell proliferation was unaltered, which is not the case with DC-mediated activation of T cells in response to OxLDL (6,21).
Because MDA is exposed extensively in atherosclerotic lesions (not only on proteins and OxLDL but also on the dead cells present) (23), this finding could have important implications for plaque rupture and thus CVD. Activation of pro-inflammatory T cells and DCs is a typical phenomenon in vulnerable plaques, that is, plaque especially close to areas prone to rupture or where rupture has already occurred.

Peptides of serum albumin from atherosclerotic patients’ plasma are modified by MDA.

Circulating levels of antibodies against OxLDL (anti-OxLDL) have been reported to be both negatively and positively associated with atherosclerosis and CVD (2,18).

Different components of OxLDL could be involved here. For example, OxLDL cross-reacts with cardioliopin, and antibodies against cardioliopin are well known to be associated with an increased risk of CVD, most likely through oxidized phospholipids (35). Antibodies against apoB or peptides thereof have also produced varying results, sometimes as a protection, and in other cases they have provided to be risk markers (2,19).

We focused on the phospholipid portion of OxLDL, where compounds such as PC and MDA are typically elevated in many conditions with increased oxidative stress and chronic inflammation, not only atherosclerosis and CVD but also diabetes, Alzheimer’s disease, and systemic lupus erythematosus (23,27-29).

Previously, immunization with MDA-modified LDL (which is also produced during oxidation of LDL by copper ions among different methods) was found to inhibit the development of atherosclerosis in animal models (30,31). The MDA in OxLDL may play an important role in connection with pro-inflammatory effects and sterile inflammation (23,32). Little is known about the direct effects of MDA conjugates on T-cell activation (33), although in an earlier investigation, Jurkat cells developed a more pronounced pro-inflammatory phenotype in response to MDA (34).

DCs activated by MDA-HSA could promote T-cell activation induced by other antigens, presented to T cells by DCs. In addition, to some extent, T cells could be activated indirectly by MDA-HSA, although the underlying mechanism remains to be elucidated. However, 2 h of MDA-HSA stimulation caused a mild reduction in the level of ATP in T cells (Supplemental Figure 6), indicating an energy-dependent mechanism, possibly involving active diffusion. It is thus possible that MDA-HSA enters cells through diffusion and activates cells by mitochondrial ROS. This change in the ATP level was not due to cell death. Direct activation of T cells in plaques by pro-inflammatory MDA-modified proteins could thus, in principle, promote plaque rupture and ensuing CVD, stroke, and myocardial infarction because both activated DCs and T cells are localized in vulnerable plaques, that is, plaque especially close to areas prone to rupture or where rupture has already occurred.

Two peptides from patients’ plasma had similar modification as in vitro modification (bold).

MDA = malondialdehyde; HSA = human serum albumin.

### Table 1: Mass Spectrometric Analysis of MDA-Modified-HSA In Vitro

| Peptide | Sequence (HSA) | Mascot Scores |
|---------|----------------|---------------|
| LVnEVTEFAK | LVIETVEFNAKL | 29.88 |
| SLnTLFGDK  | SLTLNFGDKK | 23.33 |
| LVnEVTEFAKTC | LVIETVEFNASKL | 71.82 |
| SLnTLFGDKLTVT1L | SLTLNFGDKKTVT1L | 56.61 |
| qEPnRNeCFLQHK | qEPnRNeCFLQHKK | 28.78 |
| qEPnRNeCFLQHKDnPNPLR | qEPnRNeCFLQHKDnPNPLRK | 15.34 |
| nEFLQHK  | nEFLQHKK | 39.93 |
| nEFLQHKDnPNPLR | nEFLQHKDnPNPLRK | 43.00 |
| DDnPNLPR | 131-138/N3 | 11.1 |
| RnPYYAPELLFAKR | RnPYYAPELLFAK | 35.63 |
| AEFnAEVKLNTDnTVhETcchHGDnLEcADDR | AEFnAEVKLNTDnTVhETcchHGDnLEcADDR | 31.06 |
| LVTnDLTKVhETcchHGDnLEcADDR | LVTnDLTKVhETcchHGDnLEcADDR | 128.26 |
| VhETcchHGDnLEcADDR | VhETcchHGDnLEcADDR | 120.50 |
| VhETcchHGDnLEcADDRADnLAAX | VhETcchHGDnLEcADDRADnLAAX | 68.46 |
| LKEcKEPLLECSHlAEVEInEdMPADPLSAADFVESm | LKEcKEPLLECSHlAEVEInEdMPADPLSAADFVESm | 14.62 |
| EccKEPLLECSHlAEVENEdMPADPLSAADFVESmvk | 301-341/H12 | 4.2 |
| nYAEAK | 342-347/N1 | 23.17 |
| RnPYDSSvLl | 361-37/N2 | 77.98 |
| hPDYDSvLl | 362-372/N2 | 37.38 |
| ccAAADPnEhCvAKdfEFKVLVFLVEQPnLk | ccAAADPnEhCvAKdfEFKVLVFLVEQPnLk | 7.40 |
| QnELFQEQGEYK | 414-426/N2 | 69.33 |
| FqNALLVR | 427-434/Q2 | 38.27 |
| YTKnVnYSTTPLLEVSm | YTKnVnYSTTPLLEVSm | 39.37 |
| KVPnVSTTPLLEVSm | KVPnVSTTPLLEVSm | 38.21 |
| VPnPSTTPLLEVSm | VPnPSTTPLLEVSm | 20.88 |
| nLGRGSG | 453-460/N1 | 34.56 |
| nLGRVnGSGckc | 453-463/N1 | 17.75 |
| EfNAETFTFHADhTcTSEK | EfNAETFTFHADhTcTSEK | 114.90 |
| EfNAETFTFHADhTcTSEK | EfNAETFTFHADhTcTSEK | 41.65 |
| qIcKQnTALELVK | qIcKQnTALELVK | 69.53 |
| qIcKQnTALELVK | qIcKQnTALELVK | 38.42 |
| KqTALELVK | 449-458/Q2 | 39.75 |
| KqTALELVK | 449-462/Q2 | 25.23 |
| qTALELVK | 550-558/Q1 | 51.03 |
| LVAASnQaALGL | LVAASnQaALGL | 24.37 |
| TcVADESAEnELKSLHTFLGDK | TcVADESAEnELKSLHTFLGDK | 3.92 |
generated and exposed, the latter binding especially readily to proteins.

Both anti-PC and anti-MDA immunoglobulin M (IgM) antibodies are markers of protection, even when exposed on compounds other than those related to oxLDL such as albumin (2,18). Surprisingly, IgM anti-MDAs are T-cell dependent (18); therefore, we have focused on the effects of MDA conjugated IgM antibodies are markers of protection, even when exposed on compounds other than those related to oxLDL such as albumin (2,18). Surprisingly, IgM anti-MDAs are T-cell dependent (18); therefore, we have focused on the effects of MDA conjugated IgM antibodies are markers of protection, even when exposed on compounds other than those related to oxLDL such as albumin (2,18). Surprisingly, IgM anti-MDAs are T-cell dependent (18); therefore, we have focused on the effects of MDA conjugated IgM (directed against MDA conjugated with HSA) are markers of protection in patients with SLE (especially in relation to atherosclerosis) and also for oxidative stress in peripheral blood mononuclear cells. Moreover, MDA-HSA promotes polarization of T cells after directly, indicating that MDA-HSA might contribute to cell death in plaques, in which accumulation of dead cells is a typical characteristic.

We hypothesized that OxLDLs promote immune activation and inflammation indirectly by inducing HSP60 in monocytes/macrophages (36) and recently confirmed and extended this notion by showing that OxLDL-induced activation of T cells (also from plaques) depends on HSP60 because silencing of HSP60 inhibited OxLDL-induced T-cell activation through DCs. Moreover, we recently reported that HSP60 is a classic T-cell antigen, presented by DCs to plaque T cells through major histocompatibility complex class II (22).

Our findings do not support the proposal that OxLDL induction of HSP in DCs is caused largely by MDA epitopes because this compound itself did not induce HSP60 strongly in DCs.

However, the direct induction of HSP60 in both plaque and blood T cells by MDA-HSA was pronounced. This could contribute to activation of plaque T cells through DC-mediated activation as well as other mechanisms because HSP60 also elicits a more nonspecific pro-inflammatory state, such as activation of monocytes/macrophages.

We reported that HSP60 is essential for oxLDL-induced DC-mediated activation of T cells (6); however, it is also implicated in statin-induced inhibition of this effect (21) and could in principle be a target for atherogenic anti-HSP60 antibodies (37,38).

Moreover, we have recently shown that a classic T-cell antigen HSP60 elicits a pro-inflammatory response from atherosclerotic plaque cells (22). Induction of HSP60 in T cells by MDA-HSA could thus contribute to atherogenesis, as well as immune activation and inflammation in plaques.

We have recently shown that MDA-HSA induces oxidative stress in peripheral blood mononuclear cells/monocytes, and, furthermore, that anti-MDA IgM antibodies inhibit this effect (18). Such anti-MDA IgM (directed against MDA conjugated with HSA) are markers of protection in patients with SLE (especially in relation to atherosclerosis) and also for risk of CVD among 60-year-old patients (18,19). The underlying mechanisms proposed include enhanced clearance of dead or dying cells and inhibition of the uptake of OxLDL by macrophages/foam cells (2,18).

We show here that specific anti-MDA IgGs inhibited direct activation of T cells by MDA-HSA, indicating a potential protective property of these antibodies and providing support for elevation of anti-MDA levels through active or passive immunization as a therapeutic intervention.

In addition, direct activation of T cells by MDA-HSA was attenuated by an inhibitor of oxidative stress, MitoTEMPO. In general, ROS are chemically very active, small, and short-lived oxygen-containing molecules in which a common denominator is that their unpaired electrons (i.e., free radicals) may play various roles in both health and disease, for example, by damaging proteins, DNA, and lipid bilayers. ROS play a direct role in innate immune responses to pathogens and may also be common signaling molecules in cells, tissues, and organs.

Mitochondria are a source of ROS. Although the relationship between ROS and immunity in general has been studied extensively, the role of ROS in the activation of T cells is less well described. In general, ROS may participate and modulate various processes, including hyporesponsiveness and apoptosis in a complex and situation-dependent manner (39,40).

Our finding that MDA-HSA-induced apoptosis in both DCs and T cells after directly, indicates that MDA-HSA might contribute to cell death in plaques, in which accumulating dead cells is a typical characteristic.

TLR2 and TLR4 were induced in both T cells and DCs by MDA-HSA. Neither is involved T-cell activation, but they play a role in the inflammatory response to MDA-HSA.

Moreover, MDA-HSA promoted polarization of macrophages toward the M1 phenotype. Much attention has been paid to the macrophage subtypes M1 and M2, where M1 is involved in pro-inflammatory kill responses and M2 in repair.

| Peptide Position in Protein/MDA | Mascot Scores |
|--------------------------------|--------------|
| Peptide Sequence (HSA)         |              |
| LVTDLTkVhteccgdllecaddr        | 258-281/K7 H9 H14 | 5.01 |
| QncelfeqllgyfQoaAllvytk        | 414-437/K13 N16 R21 | 1.17 |
| Tcvadelphiaencdksllhtlfgdkclctvatlr | 76-105/N10 K13 H16 | 14.46 |
| VhtechgdlllecaddrdlaayiiceiQdissk | 265-298/R17 K22 N27 | 17.40 |

Two peptides from patients’ plasma had similar modification as in vitro modification (bold). Abbreviations as in Table 1.
M1 is associated with Th1 and M2 more with Th2 responses, whereas M1 may both be induced by and promote the Th1 phenotype (41).

Macrophages play major roles in all stages of atherogenesis, from the initiation with fatty streak formation and foam cells derived from macrophages, to later complex lesions with a necrotic core and inflammation with macrophages and other immune-competent cells producing primarily pro-inflammatory cytokines (1). However, apoptosis among macrophages’ response to MDA-HSA was much less pronounced than that among T cells and DCs. Thus, macrophages may reprogram in response to MDA-HSA to adapt.

MDA-HSA induced activation of MAPKp38 but not NF-Kb in both DCs and T cells. MAPKp38 are signaling molecules of major importance, regulating cellular response to stressors. Because they regulate pro-inflammatory cytokines, these may be underlying factors in chronic inflammatory conditions, including rheumatic and autoimmune diseases, as well as atherosclerosis. Accordingly, inhibition of MAPKp38 is being tested in various clinical settings. Induction of MAPKp38 could thus represent yet another pro-inflammatory property of MDA-HSA (42).

TLRs, especially TLR2 and TLR4, are implicated in innate immune responses, and inhibition of these to ameliorate atherosclerosis, CVD, and other chronic inflammatory conditions is being discussed as a therapeutic possibility.

Although not directly involved here in MDA-HSA-mediated T-cell activation, TLR2 and TLR4 were induced by MDA-HSA and may thereby promote atherosclerosis and CVD through innate immune responses and inflammation in plaque (43). Furthermore, TLR2 may be involved in plaque erosion, a potentially important underlying factor in CVD (44).

In addition, macrophages of the M1 and M2 phenotypes have been divided into further subtypes, and several stimuli have been described that could promote such processes. In general, the M1 subtype is believed to be atherogenic, and in light of its pro-inflammatory features, it may also promote CVD. Whereas the M1 phenotype is known to be induced by OxLDL and cholesterol crystals, little is known about the effect of MDA in this context. MDA coupled with carriers such as HSA might promote atherosclerosis and other complications by promoting the M1 phenotype.

The present investigation reveals that MDA modified HSA peptides in vitro and, moreover, that the serum of albumin of atherosclerotic patients contains MDA-modified HSA peptides.

Importantly, 2 of the modifications in atherosclerotic patients were similar to those in vitro. This is an indication that the in vitro MDA-modified HSA is of biological relevance and might cause T-cell activation in human atherosclerotic plaques.

Taken together, the novel properties of MDA-HSA observed here may play a role in inflammation and immune activation in atherosclerotic plaques. Both DCs and, directly, T cells were activated, in the latter case with the apparent involvement of ROS.

However, DC-mediated T-cell activation was modest. HSP60 was induced potently in T cells by MDA-HSA, which is interesting because HSP60 is a much-discussed possible contributing cause to atherosclerosis at different stages of disease development. IgG anti-MDA antibodies inhibited the effects of MDA-HSA on T cells, a finding with therapeutic implications. Amelioration of MDA-mediated immune activation in connection with atherosclerosis by immunization or by other means could be a valuable therapeutic option.

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: Dr. Johan Frostegård, Unit of Immunology and Chronic Disease, Institute of Environmental Medicine, Karolinska Institutet, Nobels väg 13, 171 65 Stockholm, Sweden. E-mail: Johan.frostegard@ki.se.

PERSPECTIVES

COMPETENCY IN MEDICAL KNOWLEDGE: In this paper, we delineate a possible new pathway and mechanism by which T cells could be activated in human atherosclerotic plaques. It is possible that immune modulation could be implemented in the future in this field, but there are also consequences of our study for current clinical practice.

TRANSITIONAL OUTLOOK: From a translational point of view, our findings provide information for further development aimed at ameliorating and modulating immune responses related to MDA in atherosclerotic plaques, where immunization is one interesting possibility we think deserves more attention.
REFERENCES

1. Frostegard J, Ulfgren AK, Nyberg P, et al. Cytokine expression in advanced human atherosclerotic plaques: dominance of pro-inflammatory (Th1) and macrophage-stimulating cytokines. Atherosclerosis 1999;145:33-43.

2. Frostegard J. Immunity, atherosclerosis and cardiovascular disease. BMC Med 2013;11:117.

3. Fei GZ, Huang YH, Swedenborg J, Frostegard J. Oxidised LDL modulates immune-activation by an IL-12-dependent mechanism. Atherosclerosis 2003;169:77-85.

4. Huang YH, Ronnelid J, Frostegard J. Oxidized LDL induces enhanced antibody formation and MHC class II-dependent IFN-gamma production in lymphocytes from healthy individuals. Arterioscler Thromb Vasc Biol 1995;15:1577-83.

5. Frostegard J, Wu R, Giscombe R, Holm G, LeFvert AK, Nilsson J. Induction of T-cell activation by oxidized low density lipoprotein. Arterioscler Thromb Vasc Biol 1999;19:461-7.

6. Liu A, Ming JY, Fiskesund R, et al. Induction of dendritic cell-mediated T cell activation by modified but not native low-density lipoprotein in humans and inhibition by annexin A5 involvement of heat shock proteins. Arterioscler Thromb Vasc Biol 2015;35:197-205.

7. Stemme S, Faber B, Holm J, Wiklund O, Witttum JL, Hansson GK. T lymphocytes from human atherosclerotic plaques recognize oxidized low density lipoprotein. Proct Natl Acad Sci U S A 1995;92:3893-7.

8. Huang YH, Schafer-Elinder L, Wu R, Claesson HE, Frostegard J. Lysophosphatidylcholine (LPC) induces proinflammatory cytokines by a platelet-activating factor (PAF) receptor-dependent mechanism. Clin Exp Immunol 1999;116:326-31.

9. Frostegard J, Huang YH, Ronnelid J, Schafer-Elinder L. Platelet-activating factor and oxidized LDL induce immune activation by a common mechanism. Arterioscler Thromb Vasc Biol 1997;17:963-8.

10. Herrmanns A, Kateluth DF, Strothoff D, et al. Inhibition of T cell response to native low-density lipoprotein reduces atherosclerosis. J Exp Med 2010;207:1081-93.

11. Zhou X, Nicolleti A, Elhage R, Hansson GK. Transfer of CD4(+)- T cells aggravates atherosclerosis in immunodeficient apolipoprotein E knockout mice. Circulation 2000;102:2919-22.

12. Goeva A, Brun V, Esposito B, et al. Specific abrogation of transforming growth factor-beta signaling in T cells alters atherosclerotic lesion size and composition in mice. Blood 2003;102:4052-8.

13. Kolbus D, Ljungcrantz I, Andersson L, et al. Association between CDB1-T-cell subsets and cardiovascular disease. J Intern Med 2013;274:41-51.

14. Bobryshev YV, Watanabe T. Ultrastructural evidence for association of vascular dendritic cells with T-lymphocytes and with B-cells in human atherosclerosis. J Submicrosc Cytol Pathol 1997;29:209-21.

15. Mihalich G, Niedergger H, Rabl W, et al. Network of vascular-associated dendritic cells in intima of healthy young individuals. Arterioscler Thromb Vasc Biol 2001;21:503-8.

16. Yilmaz A, Locho M, Traeg F, et al. Emergence of dendritic cells in rupture-prone regions of vulnerable carotid plaques. Atherosclerosis 2004;176:101-10.

17. Liu P, Yu YR, Spencer JA, et al. CX3CR1 deficiency impairs dendritic cell accumulation in arterial intima and reduces atherosclerotic burden. Arterioscler Thromb Vasc Biol 2008;28:243-50.

18. Rahman M, Sing S, Golabkesh Z, et al. IgM antibodies against malondialdehyde and phosphocholine are together strong protection markers for atherosclerosis in systemic lupus erythematosus: regulation and underlying mechanisms. Clin Immunol 2016;166-167:27-37.

19. Thilagarajan D, Frostegard AG, Singh S, et al. Human IgM antibodies to malondialdehyde conjugated with albumin are negatively associated with cardiovascular disease among 60-year-olds. J Am Heart Assoc 2016;5:e004415.

20. Wick G, Jakic B, Buszko M, Wick MC, Grundman C. The role of heat shock proteins in atherosclerosis. Nat Rev Cardiol 2014;11:516-29.

21. Frostegard J, Zhang Y, Sun J, Yan K, Liu A. Oxidized low-density lipoprotein (OxLDL)-treated dendritic cells promote activation of T cells in human atherosclerotic plaque and blood, which is repressed by statins: microRNA let-7c is integral to the effect. J Am Heart Assoc 2016;5:e003976.

22. Rahman M, Steuer J, Gillgren P, Hayderi A, Bobryshev YV, Watanabe T. Ultrastructural demonstration of oxidation-specific epitopes in rupture-prone regions of vulnerable human plaques. Arterioscler Thromb Vasc Biol 1998;18:1972-82.

23. Palinski W, Miller E, Witttum JL. Immunization of low density lipoprotein (LDL) receptor-deficient mice with homologous malondialdehyde-modified native LDL reduces atherosclerosis. Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A 1995;92:821-5.

24. Busch CJ, Binder CJ. Malondialdehyde epitopes as mediators of sterile inflammation. Biochim Biophys Acta Mol Cell Biol Lipids 2017;1862:396-406.

25. Raghavan S, Subramaniam G, Sharmmugam N. Proinflammatory effects of malondialdehyde in lymphocytes. J Leukoc Biol 2012;92:1055-67.

26. Natarajan K, Mathilagana GD, Raghavan S, Sharmmugam N. The advanced lipidation end product precursor malondialdehyde induces IL-17E expression and skews lymphocytes to the th17 subset. Cell Mol Biol Lett 2015;20:647-62.

27. Vaarala O, Althann G, Jauhiainen M, Leirisalo-Reimo M, Aho K, Palosuo T. Crossreaction between antibodies to oxidised low-density lipoprotein and to cardiopin in systemic lupus erythematosus. Lancet 1993;341:923-5.

28. Frostegard J, Klemtan B, Gillund M, Andersson B, Jindal S, Kiessling R. Induction of heat shock protein in monocytes by oxidized low density lipoprotein. Atherosclerosis 1996;121:93-103.

29. Xu Q, Willert J, Marosi M, et al. Association of serum antibodies to heat-shock protein 65 with carotid atherosclerosis. Lancet 1993;341:255-9.

30. Frostegard J, Lemme C, Andersson B, van der Zee R, Kiessling R, de Faire U. Association of serum antibodies to heat-shock protein 65 with borderline hypertension. Hypertension 1997;29:40-4.

31. Belkov AV, Schraven B, Simeoni L. T cells and reactive oxygen species. J Biomed Sci 2015;22:85.

32. Murphy MP, Siegel RM. Mitochondrial ROS fire up T cell activation. Immunity 2013;38:201-2.
41. Mills CD. Anatomy of a discovery: m1 and m2 macrophages. Front Immunol 2015;6:212.
42. Fisk M, Gajendragadkar PR, Maki-Petaja KM, Wilkinson IB, Cherian J. Therapeutic potential of p38 MAP kinase inhibition in the management of cardiovascular disease. Am J Cardiovasc Drugs 2014;14:155-65.
43. Moghimpour Bijani F, Vallejo JG, Rezaei N. Toll-like receptor signaling pathways in cardiovascular diseases: challenges and opportunities. Int Rev Immunol 2012;31:379-95.
44. Quillard T, Franck G, Mawson T, Folco E, Libby P. Mechanisms of erosion of atherosclerotic plaques. Curr Opin Lipidol 2017;28:434-41.

KEY WORDS atherosclerosis, dendritic cells, T cells, malondialdehyde, oxidized low-density lipoprotein

APPENDIX For supplemental figures, see the online version of this paper.