Control of Myogenic Differentiation by Fibroblast Growth Factor Is Mediated by Position in the G1 Phase of the Cell Cycle

BRIAN LATHROP,* K. THOMAS,* and L. GLASER*
*Department of Biological Chemistry, Division of Biology and Biomedical Sciences, Washington University School of Medicine, St. Louis, Missouri 63110; and *Merck, Sharp & Dohme Research Laboratories, Rahway, New Jersey 07065

ABSTRACT We have used the expression of the muscle form of creatine phosphokinase (M-CPK) to assay myogenic differentiation in the cloned muscle cell line BC3H1. BC3H1 cells express M-CPK when arrested in the G0 portion of the cell cycle. Addition of the anionic form of brain fibroblast growth factor (B-FGF) rapidly represses synthesis of M-CPK with a half-time of 7 h. Even though B-FGF is not mitogenic for the cells, it causes quiescent BC3H1 cells to exit from the G0 portion of the cell cycle, and to accumulate at a new restriction point ~4 to 6 h in the G1 portion of the cell cycle. The repression of M-CPK synthesis by B-FGF is reversible upon removal of B-FGF, and cells which have re-initiated expression of M-CPK have also returned to the G0 portion of the cell cycle. The primary control of M-CPK expression by B-FGF appears to be at the level of gene transcription. We conclude that arrest of cells at G0 but not at other positions in the G1 phase of the cell cycle provides permissive conditions for the expression of muscle-specific proteins, and that defined polypeptide growth factors, in this case B-FGF, are important in the control of the expression of muscle-specific proteins.

The process of muscle differentiation requires the coordinated expression (induction) of a group of proteins associated with the muscle phenotype (1–3). The induction of muscle-specific proteins occurs after myoblasts cease proliferation, and are arrested early in the G1 portion of the cell cycle (4, 5).

A number of permanent cell lines can be induced to express proteins associated with the muscle phenotype (for review see reference 1). Some of these cell lines, which do not fuse to form multinucleated myotubes, also do not become irreversibly committed to the differentiated phenotype. Upon addition of mitogens, usually serum, these cells reinitiate growth and concomitantly the expression of muscle-specific proteins is repressed (5–7). We have used BC3H1 cells, a clonal muscle cell line, to examine the control of cell differentiation by mitogenic polypeptides using the muscle form of creatine phosphokinase (M-CPK)1 as a probe to assay cell differentiation. We have reported recently that addition to differentiated BC3H1 cells of serum, commercial (impure) pituitary fibroblast growth factor, or pure anionic brain fibroblast growth factor (B-FGF) results in repression of M-CPK synthesis (7, 8). Under the conditions used, B-FGF is nonmitogenic for BC3H1 cells, suggesting that it is possible to dissociate the mitogenic response from the repression of muscle-specific protein synthesis. Observations have recently been reported in preliminary form showing that cell growth is not required for repression of muscle-specific functions (9).

In this communication we examine in detail the repression of M-CPK by addition of B-FGF to differentiated BC3H1 cells. We demonstrate that B-FGF causes quiescent BC3H1 cells to exit from G0 into G1 and become arrested at a new restriction point within G1. The repression of M-CPK synthesis appears to be concomitant with, or follow shortly after, the exit of BC3H1 cells from G0, and apparently reflects a rapid decline in the rate of transcription of the M-CPK gene.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Cell Culture: BC3H1 cells (10) were grown in Dulbecco’s modified Eagle’s medium supplemented with 20% fetal calf serum in an atmosphere of 10% CO2 as described (8). Cell growth was arrested at subconfluent densities.

1 Abbreviations used in this paper: B-CPK and M-CPK, the brain and muscle forms of creatine phosphokinase; B-FGF, the anionic form of brain fibroblast growth factor.
by re-feeding with DME supplemented with 1% serum. Unless otherwise indicated, B-FGF (5 ng/ml) was added to quiescent differentiating BC3H1 cells in a simplified medium of DME and F12 at a 3:1 ratio supplemented with 250 

\[ \text{ug/ml bovine serum albumin (BSA), 50 \mu g/ml transferrin, 0.25\% serum, and antibiotics as described (8).} \]

**Determination of Rate of CPK Synthesis:** The rate of CPK synthesis was determined by immunoprecipitation of Triton X-100-solubilized extracts that had been pulse labeled for 2 h with 100 \mu Ci/ml [\text{35S}]methionine as described (8). M- and B-isozymes of CPK were separated by SDS PAGE, and the radioactive bands were visualized by fluorography. The relative rate of synthesis of M-CPK was determined by densitometry of fluorographs (8).

**Ornithine Decarboxylase Assay:** Ornithine decarboxylase was assayed by the release of radioactive CO2 from l-ornithine essentially by the method of Heller et al. (11). Cell monolayers were washed twice with cold phosphate-buffered saline and harvested by scraping in 10 mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.2, 50 mM KCl, 0.1 mM EDTA, 0.05 mM pyridoxal phosphate, 5 mM dithiothreitol, and 0.025% Tween 20 at 4°C. Reactions were carried out in stopped 12-ml glass conical centrifuge tubes at 37°C for 1 h. 150 \mu l of extract were added to 15 \mu l 1-\text{H}CO2Hornithine (Amersham Corp., Arlington Heights, IL) (8 x 10^-3 M) at a final specific radioactivity of 7.5 Ci/mol, and 10 \mu l of 0.5 M Tris-HCl, pH 7.2. Reactions were quenched by injecting 0.2 ml of 10% trichloroacetic acid through the stopper, and liberated radioactive CO2 was trapped with a wick soaked with 100 \mu l of 10% NaOH held in place by a center well (Kontes Co., Vineland, NJ). Wells with wicks were counted in 10 ml 3a70 scintillation fluid (Research Products International Corp., Mt. Prospect, IL). The assay was linear with respect to extract concentration and time.

**Other Procedures:** Fixing, mounting and developing cultures for autoradiography after labeling with [\text{3H}]thymidine was carried out essentially by the method of Cassel et al. (12). Cultures were grown on 35-mm dishes, and after labeling with [\text{3H}]thymidine, the cultures were washed once with 2 ml of phosphate-buffered saline, and fixed overnight with 2 ml of 4% paraformaldehyde in the same buffer. The rim of the dishes was removed and the bottom processed for autoradiography (12). 1 \mu Ci/ml of [\text{3H}]methylthymidine (6.7 Ci/mmol; New England Nuclear, Boston, MA) was used for 48-h labeling of BC3H1 cultures. For 15-h cumulative labeling experiments, 3 \mu Ci/ml were used.

The rate of thymidine incorporation was measured by trichloroacetic acid-precipitable radioactivity incorporated after a 1-h pulse with 3 \mu Ci/ml of [\text{3H}]thymidine (6.7 Ci/mmol), as described by Whittenberger and Glaser (13). Uridine incorporation was measured by the same procedure after cultures had been pulsed with 2 \mu Ci/ml of [\text{3H}]uridine (30 Ci/mmol; New England Nuclear) for 1 h. Labeling was linear with respect to time at these concentrations of isotopes. Epidermal growth factor was prepared as described (14).

**RESULTS**

When BC3H1 cells are cultured in 1% serum, they cease to proliferate and synthesize muscle-specific proteins such as M-CPK. Fig. 1 shows that addition of B-FGF to differentiated cells, as described in Materials and Methods, results in a rapid decline of the rate of M-CPK synthesis as measured by immunoprecipitation from cells labeled with [\text{35S}]methionine for 2 h. A half-life of 7 h for the decline in the rate of M-CPK synthesis can be estimated from the data in Fig. 1, and within the resolution of the method the decline is initiated without a significant time lag.

The decline in the rate of M-CPK synthesis observed in Fig. 1 could either reflect a decrease in the rate of transcription of the M-CPK gene or a specific destabilization of the M-CPK mRNA. A preliminary assessment of which of these alternatives applies can be obtained by the use of actinomycin D to block transcription in the absence of B-FGF. If the rate of M-CPK mRNA degradation is unaffected by the addition of B-FGF, then the decline in the rate of M-CPK should be the same whether B-FGF or actinomycin D is added to cells.

The data in Fig. 2 document the decline in the rate of M-CPK synthesis after addition of actinomycin D, and these data have been incorporated in Fig. 1B (triangles). The decline in the rate of M-CPK synthesis is the same whether B-FGF or actinomycin D are added to cells. The observations were similar using different levels of actinomycin D from 0.05 to 0.2 \mu g/ml. The former level decreased the rate of uridine incorporation into RNA by 89% and the latter by 97%. Under the same conditions, the rate of synthesis of a number of major cellular polypeptides detected by one-dimensional gel electrophoresis was reduced by <25%, indicating that actinomycin-D does not significantly block protein synthesis nonspecifically under these conditions. While these observations will have to be confirmed by direct measurements of the cellular level of M-CPK mRNA, they strongly suggest that the major effect of B-FGF is at the level of gene transcription.
FIGURE 2 Effect of actinomycin D on the rate of M-CPK synthesis. Differentiated cultures were treated with actinomycin D for the duration and at the concentration indicated. Cultures were washed to remove actinomycin D, and the rate of M-CPK synthesis was determined, as described in Materials and Methods. A fluorograph of extracts which had been subjected to gel electrophoresis is shown. The M and B isozymes of CPK are indicated by arrows. The rate of M-CPK synthesis in the presence of 0.05 μg/ml actinomycin D is shown in Fig. 1 by black triangles.

BC3HI Cells in the Presence of B-FGF Transit from G0 to G1

Previous observations (8) have indicated that, under our culture conditions, B-FGF was not mitogenic for BC3HI cells as determined by cell number 48 h after addition of B-FGF to cells. We have, in addition, used various combinations of B-FGF with insulin (1 μg/ml), epidermal growth factor (10 ng/ml), dexamethasone (0.5 μg/ml), and phorbolmyristic acid (100 ng/ml), and failed to observe an increase in cell number due to B-FGF after addition to quiescent BC3HI cells.

A more sensitive assay to determine whether B-FGF can cause even a small fraction of cells to traverse the cell cycle is to culture cells with [3H]thymidine in the presence of B-FGF and determine by autoradiography the fraction of cell nuclei labeled with [3H]thymidine as a measure of the fraction of cells that have entered S-phase in the cell cycle. 48 h after addition of B-FGF and [3H]thymidine to BC3HI cells, only 9.8 ± 0.8% of nuclei were labeled, compared to 13.4 ± 1.6% in the absence of B-FGF, confirming that B-FGF does not allow BC3HI cells to enter S-phase.

If B-FGF does not cause BC3HI cells to traverse the cell cycle, does it nevertheless move cells from G0 to G1? When quiescent BC3HI cells are stimulated with serum, they enter S-phase after ~12 h (Fig. 3). If B-FGF causes BC3HI cells to move into G1, then when serum is added to BC3HI cells pretreated with B-FGF, the time required for these cells to enter S-phase should be shortened. Fig. 3 illustrates that this is in fact observed; pretreatment of BC3HI cells for either 4 or 12 h with B-FGF before addition of 20% serum decreases the time required to enter S-phase from 12 h to 7 or 8 h, consistent with B-FGF permitting the movement of BC3HI cells ~4 h into G1. Since a 4-h pretreatment with B-FGF almost maximally reduces the duration of G1 (Fig. 3), B-FGF must move cells rapidly out of G0. The same observations have been obtained in three independent experiments. The time dependence of the movement of cells out of G0 is consistent with time required to initiate repression of M-CPK synthesis.

There is a potential ambiguity in measuring the rate of entry of cells into S-phase by the use of acid-precipitable thymidine which may not correlate precisely with the number of cells entering S-phase. We have repeated the experiment in Fig. 3 by measuring the number of cells entering S-phase by autoradiography following labeling of cells with [3H]thymidine to determine directly the number of cells entering S-phase. The results in Fig. 4 confirm the data in Fig. 3 and clearly indicate that B-FGF addition to quiescent BC3HI cells brings these cells 3–4 h into G1.

An independent measure of entry of cells into G1 is the induction of ornithine decarboxylase (15). In Fig. 5 we show that addition of B-FGF to quiescent BC3HI cells causes a small but reproducible increase in ornithine decarboxylase, fully consistent with the entry of these cells into G1, and arrest at a new restriction point ~4–6 h into G1, at which point induction of ornithine decarboxylase is possible. The obser-
vation that ornithine decarboxylase is activated by B-FGF indicates that this growth factor activates at least some of the ordered series of events that occur when cells are stimulated to transit G1 (16, 17). Because various components in serum may also influence the induction of ornithine decarboxylase, we do not believe that the absolute level of ornithine decarboxylase after the addition of B-FGF to quiescent cells can be compared in a meaningful way with the level observed after addition of serum.

Is the Repression of M-CPK Synthesis by B-FGF Reversible?

Since B-FGF causes BC3H1 cells to arrest within G0, and simultaneously represses M-CPK synthesis, is this repression reversible, and is it reversible in the absence of progression through the cell cycle? To answer this question, quiescent BC3H1 cells, which synthesize M-CPK, were treated with B-FGF for 48 h. Control cells received fresh B-FGF at 24 h. After addition of B-FGF, the rate of M-CPK synthesis is depressed (Fig. 6; compare lane 2 with lane 4). However, 48 h after addition of B-FGF (in the absence of daily addition of B-FGF), the rate of M-CPK synthesis has returned to the fully-induced level (compare lanes 3 and 5), indicating that the repression is reversible. The reinduction at 48 h most likely reflects the depletion of B-FGF from the medium, and continued addition of B-FGF maintains the repressed state (compare lane 6 with lane 5).

We asked whether the cells under these conditions had returned to G0 by measuring the time required for such cells to enter S-phase after stimulation by serum. The data in Fig. 7 are consistent with these cells having returned to G0. Cells which have re-entered the differentiation program after exposure to B-FGF are indistinguishable from cells never exposed to B-FGF when we measure the time required by these
cells to enter S-phase after addition of 20% serum (Fig. 7). Labeling of cells with [3H]thymidine during the 48-h reversal period, followed by autoradiography, indicates that only ~13% of the cells traversed the S-phase either in the presence or absence of B-FGF and, therefore, that the majority of the cells returned to G0 without traversing the cell cycle. It is known from other cells that commitment to proceed through the cell cycle is a late event in G1 (16). B-FGF-treated BC3H1 cells are arrested early in G1, presumably before this commitment point is reached.

DISCUSSION

The original definition of G0 was that of a restriction point early in G1, at which normal cells arrested in the absence of mitogens (16). Several observations suggest that G0 represents a unique metabolic state of quiescent cells and that, during logarithmic growth, cells bypass G0 and never enter this metabolic state (see, for example, references 16, 18, and 19). Our observations define the metabolic state of BC3H1 cells and, by inference, of other muscle cells as the state which is permissive for the expression of muscle-specific proteins.

The addition of polypeptide growth factors to quiescent BC3H1 cells initiates movement of the cells from G0 to G1. Exit of the cells from G0 appears to be closely associated with repression of the synthesis of M-CPK. Though our data suggest that B-FGF allows BC3H1 cells to progress rapidly into G1 (see Fig. 3), the repression of M-CPK synthesis seems to start immediately after addition of B-FGF so that, 3 h after addition of this growth factor, the rate of M-CPK synthesis is already decreased by 40%.

Although all the experiments reported here were carried out with B-FGF, we have recently carried out similar experiments with identical results with highly purified pituitary FGF prepared as described by Bohlen et al. (20). Although these two polypeptide growth factors are distinct proteins, their metabolic effects on BC3H1 are very similar.

Differentiation of a few other cell lines has been examined carefully regarding the role of different compartments in the cell cycle in the differentiation process. For example, the conversion of 3T3 preadipocytes to adipocytes occurs in G0, but arrest of cells later in the cell cycle is nonpermissive for adipocyte differentiation (21, 22).

We would suggest that the control by polypeptide growth factors of cell differentiation is not only relevant to established cell lines in culture, but may also be of importance in controlling the expression of muscle cell proteins in vivo, first in preventing differentiation during periods of active cell proliferation, but also in mature cells by controlling the expression of gene products characteristic of differentiated cells in the absence of cell division. Note that in BC3H1 cells it is possible to go from a differentiated phenotype (high rate of synthesis of M-CPK) to a relatively undifferentiated state (low rate of synthesis of M-CPK) and back again to the differentiated state in the absence of cell division, and to do so without traversing the cell cycle by simply controlling the level of B-FGF in the culture medium. A critical test of the validity of this speculation will require an increased understanding of the role of B-FGF in the whole animal.

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