The Roles of Sterol Regulatory Element-binding Proteins in the Transactivation of the Rat ATP Citrate-Lyase Promoter*

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Young-Ah Moon‡, Jae-Jung Lee§§, Sahng-Wook Park¶, Yong-Ho Ahn‡, and Kyung-Sup Kim§§

From the ‡Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, Institute of Genetic Science, Yonsei University College of Medicine, 134, Shinchon-dong, Seodaemun-gu, Seoul 120-752, South Korea and the ¶Department of Biochemistry, Kwandong University College of Medicine, 522, Naekok-dong, Kangnung, Kangwon-do, 210-701, South Korea

ATP citrate-lyase (ACL) is a key enzyme supplying acetyl-CoA for fatty acid and cholesterol synthesis. Its expression is drastically up-regulated when an animal is fed a low fat, high carbohydrate diet after prolonged fasting. In this report, we describe the role of sterol regulatory element-binding proteins (SREBPs) in the transactivation of the rat ACL promoter. ACL promoter activity was markedly stimulated by the overexpression of SREBP-1a and, to a lesser extent, by SREBP-2 in Alexander human hepatoma cells. The promoter elements responsive to SREBPs were located within the 55-base pair sequences from −114 to −60. The gel mobility shift assay revealed four SREBP-1a binding sites in this region. Of these four elements, the −102/−94 region, immediately upstream of the inverted Y-box, and the −70/−61 region, just adjacent to Sp1 binding site, played critical roles in SREBPs-mediated stimulation. The mutation in the inverted Y-box and the coexpression of dominant negative nuclear factor-Y (NF-Y) significantly attenuated the transactivation by SREBP-1a, suggesting that NF-Y binding is a prerequisite for SREBPs to activate the ACL promoter. However, the multiple Sp1 binding sites did not affect the transactivation of the ACL promoter by SREBPs. The binding affinity of SREBP-1a to SREs of the ACL promoter also was much higher than that of SREBP-2. The transactivation potencies of the chimeric SREBPs, of which the activation domains (70 amino acids of the amino terminus) were derived from the different species of their carboxy-terminal region, were similar to those of SREBPs corresponding to their different species of their carboxyl-terminal region. Therefore, it is suggested that the carboxy-terminal portions of SREBPs containing DNA binding domains are important in determining their transactivation potencies to a certain promoter.

ATP citrate-lyase (ACL) is a cytosolic enzyme that catalyzes the cleavage of citrate into oxaloacetate and acetyl-CoA. In liver and adipose tissue, this enzyme plays an important role in supplying acetyl-CoA for both fatty acid and cholesterol synthesis. As the specific inhibition of ACL in rats significantly decreases the plasma levels of triacylglycerol and cholesterol, ACL is expected to be a potential target for hypolipidemic intervention (3, 4). The activity of ACL is mainly regulated at the transcriptional level by diet regimen and insulin, like other lipogenic enzymes, such as fatty acid synthase and acetyl-CoA carboxylase (5). The sequences of the 5′ flanking region of the ACL gene are highly conserved in humans and rats, whereas there is no homology in the regions of the 5′ untranslated region and the first intron, suggesting that transcription is regulated in the same manner in these two species (6, 7). Although ACL plays an important role in fatty acid and cholesterol biosynthesis and is highly controlled by diet at the transcriptional level, studies on the structure and function of this promoter have been very limited thus far.

SREBPs are the transcription factors that regulate the transcription of many genes involved in cholesterol and fatty acid synthesis, such as low density lipoprotein (LDL) receptor, farnesyl-pyrophosphate synthase, squaene synthase, hydroxymethylglutaryl-CoA reductase, hydroxymethylglutaryl-CoA synthase, fatty acid synthase, and acetyl-CoA carboxylase (8–12). Nascent SREBPs reside in the endoplasmic reticulum and the nuclear envelope as precursor forms (13). The transcriptionally active amino-terminal segments are released from the precursor SREBPs by a sequential two-step cleavage process. Once cleaved, the amino-terminal segment translocates into the nucleus where it binds to sterol regulatory elements (SREs) in the promoters of target genes. Three isoforms of SREBP have been identified. SREBP-1a and -1c are derived from a single gene, using different transcription start sites. SREBP-1c is known as a weak activator because of its short acidic domain. SREBP-2 is transcribed from a separate gene, and it shows about 50% sequence homology to SREBP-1 isoforms. The in vivo roles of the SREBP isoforms have been characterized in transgenic mice overexpressing active forms of each isoform (14–16). Those reports have shown that SREBP-1 is associated more with the genes involved in fatty acid synthesis, whereas SREBP-2 preferentially stimulates genes involved in cholesterol synthesis. For example, transgenic mice that overexpress the active forms of SREBP-1a and -1c showed more elevated expression of the mRNAs of lipogenic enzymes such as fatty acid synthase and acetyl-CoA carboxylase than those of the LDL receptor and other cholesterogenic enzymes.

Recent reports have shown that SREBP-1 might be the potential transactivator that mediates lipogenic enzyme gene regulation during the fasting/refeeding cycle. Feeding a high carbohydrate/low fat diet following long-term fasting up-regulates the nuclear concentration of mature SREBP-1 and its mRNA in adipose tissue and liver (17, 18). Recently, insulin was reported to increase SREBP-1c mRNA in streptozotocin-induced diabetic rat liver and isolated hepatocytes, and
SREBP-1c was suggested as possibly mediating insulin action upon regulation of the genes involved in lipid and carbohydrate metabolism (19, 20). However, the action of the SREBPs on the promoters of lipogenic enzymes is confirmed in only a few genes, which include fatty acid synthase, acetyl-CoA carboxylase, stearoyl-CoA desaturase, and glycerol-3-phosphate acyltransferase (21–25). Thus, studies on SREBP activation of other lipogenic genes including ACL may add more data for the generalization of the hypothesis.

In this study, we demonstrate that SREBPs stimulate the ACL promoter through their binding to an upstream promoter region and that the activation requires NF-Y binding. We also show that SREBP-1a and -2 have different potencies in activating the ACL promoter derived from their carboxyl-terminal domain and not from the amino-terminal activation domain.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Cell Culture**—Alexander cells obtained from ATCC were cultured in minimal essential medium supplemented with 10% fetal calf serum, 100 unit/ml penicillin G-sodium, 100 μg/ml streptomycin sulfate, and 0.25 μg/ml amphotericin B. All cell culture materials were purchased from Life Technologies, Inc.

**Construction of ACL Promoter-Luciferase Plasmids**—The rat ACL promoter fragments spanning −1860 to +67, −419 to +67, −99 to +67, and −60 to +67 were amplified by polymerase chain reaction (PCR) using Pfu polymerase and respective primers based on the sequences reported previously (6). The amplified fragments were gel-purified with a Qiagen quick gel extraction kit (Qiagen Inc.) and then subcloned into the Smal site of pG3-basic plasmid (Promega, Madison, WI). The ACL promoter-luciferase constructs were designated as pACL1860, pACL419, pACL99, and pACL60, respectively. Plasmid pACL114 construct was generated by the deletion of the SacI fragment of −419 to −115 from pACL419. Mutant constructs were generated from pACL114 and pACL419 with the mutagenic oligonucleotides (20 mer) using the Quick change II-site-directed mutagenesis kit (Stratagene). Mutated sequences are shown in Figs. 3 and 4. The sequences of all the constructs were confirmed using the T7 sequencing kit (Amersham Pharmacia Biotech). The construct of pSxSRE-tk was generated by inserting 5 copies of LDLR SRE1 sequence 1 into SacI site and herpes simplex thymidine kinase promoter into Smal and XhoI sites of pG3-basic plasmid. All transfection plasmids were prepared with the Qiagen Plasmid Midi Kit (Qiagen Inc.).

**Transient Transfection Assay**—Alexander cells were plated at a density of 2 × 10^5 cells/35-mm dish. On the following day, transfection was performed with 0.4 μg of the indicated ACL promoter-luciferase constructs, 0.2 μg of pCMV-β-galactosidase plasmid (CLONTECH), and the indicated amounts of pCDNA3 (Invitrogen) or SREBP expression plasmids pCSA10 or pCS2. Plasmid pCSA10, which encodes amino acids 1–142 of SREBP-1a, and pCS2, which encodes amino acids 1–485 of SREBP-2, were provided by Dr. T. Osborne (University of California, Irvine). The chimeric SREBPs constructs (Fig. 5) were generated as follows: the BgIII restriction site was introduced into pCSA10 and pCS2 at the 70th codon of SREBP-1a cDNA, and the EcoRI-BgIII fragments (220 base pairs) corresponding to activation domains were exchanged between pCSA10 and pCS2. Plasmid pMY (Δ4YA13 m29), which encodes the dominant negative form of the A subunit of NF-Y, was also formed using FuGENE6 transfection reagent (Roche Molecular Biochemicals) for 6 h according to the manufacturer’s instructions. After 2 days, cells were washed with phosphate-buffered saline (Life Technologies, Inc.) and lysed in 200 μl of reporter lysis buffer (Promega). Luciferase activities were measured using the Luciferase Assay System (Promega) and normalized with β-galactosidase activities (27) to correct the transfection efficiency. Relative luciferase activity is expressed as the normalized luciferase activity per microgram of protein.

**Preparation of Recombinant Human SREBP and Nuclear Extracts**—Recombinant human SREBPs were expressed in *E. coli* BL21(DE3)pLyS3. SREBP expression vectors pET-SREBP-1a and pET-SREBP-2 were generated by inserting the cDNA fragments from pCSA10 and pCS2, respectively, between the EcoRI and SauI sites of pET-21a (Novagen). The bacteria freshly transformed with each expression vector were grown to mid-log phase, and proteins were induced for 4 h with 1 mM isopropyl-β-D-thiogalactopyranoside. The bacteria were harvested by centrifugation and disrupted by sonication. The recombinant proteins containing amino-terminal T7 and carboxyl-terminal polyhistidine (His~6~) tag were purified to homogeneity by Ni-NTA-agarose (Qiagen) chromatography. The purity and concentration of the recombinant proteins were verified by SDS-polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis followed by Coomassie Brilliant Blue staining. Nuclear extracts were prepared from the liver of Harlan Sprague-Dawley rats (weighing about 200 g) according to the procedures described previously by Gorski et al. (28).

**DNase I Footprinting**—The probes corresponding to nucleotides −142 to +67 of the ACL promoter were generated by PCR using pACL419 as a template. 32P-labeled oligonucleotides (nucleotides −142 to −116) and unlabeled antisense oligonucleotides (+4 to +67) were used to label the sense strand, whereas 32P-labeled antisense oligonucleotides (−20 to +5) and unlabeled sense oligonucleotides (−142 to −116) were used as primers to label the antisense strand. The PAGE-purified probes (50,000 cpm) were incubated with 0.1, 2, and 4 μg of purified SREBP-1a for 20 min on ice in 50 μl of reaction buffer containing 10 mM HEPES, pH 7.9, 60 mM KCl, 1 mM EDTA, 5 mM dithiothreitol, 7% glycerol, and 1 μg of poly(dI-dC). Then, DNase I (Roche Molecular Biochemicals) diluted in 50 μl of 10 mM MgCl2, 5 mM CaCl2, was added to the DNA-protein binding reactions. After a 2-min incubation at room temperature, the digestion reactions were stopped by adding 100 μl of stop buffer containing 1% (w/v) SDS, 200 mM NaCl, 20 mM EDTA, pH 8.0, and 0.1 μg/ml glygogen. The DNA was extracted with phenol/chloroform and recovered by ethanol precipitation. The DNA pellet was dissolved in low-salt buffer and then digested using 6% polyacrylamide gel. The footprints were compared with the G+A ladder produced by the chemical cleavage sequencing reaction of the same probe to determine the corresponding nucleotide sequences.

**Gel Mobility Shift Assay**—The probes corresponding to nucleotides −99 to −41 and −142 to −80 of the ACL promoter were generated by PCR using 32P-labeled primers (20 mer) and pACL419 plasmid as a template. To generate mutant probes, corresponding mutant pACL419 plasmids were used as templates. The PAGE-purified probes (20,000 cpm) were incubated with purified recombinant SREBPs (1 μg) or liver nuclear extract (7.5 μg) in a final volume of 20 μl containing 10 mM HEPES, pH 7.9, 75 mM KCl, 1 mM EDTA, 5 mM dithiothreitol, 5 mM MgCl2, 10% glycerol, 1 μg of poly(dI-dC), and 0.5% BSA. After a 20 min incubation at room temperature, samples were resolved on a 4% polyacrylamide gel in 1× TBE (45 mM Tris, 45 mM boric acid, 1 mM EDTA) at 200 V for approximately 1 h at 4 °C. For the competition assays, unlabeled oligonucleotides indicated in the figures were added to the reactions at an approximately 100-fold molar excess. For the NF-Y supershift assay, the antibody against the B subunit of NF-Y (0.2 μg), provided by Dr. R. Mantovani, was added to the reactions. The sequences of SREBP binding sites and the corresponding DNA sequence are: NF-Y, 5'-GGGTTAGGAAAAGGTTAACAGATGG-3' (29); LDL receptor-SRE1, 5'-TTTTGAATACCCCATCACTGGCAAC-3' (9); ACL −142 to −116, 5'-AGACAGCGATGGGCGGTCGCAA-3'; ACL −102 to −73, 5'-GGTGGTTGAAAACTGCGCGGCTATGGCGC-3'; ACL −67 to −41, 5'-GCTGATGGGGCGGGGAGGAGG-CCGCA-3'.

**RESULTS**

**SREBPs Strongly Induced ACL Promoter Activity**—To determine whether SREBPs are able to activate the rat ACL promoter and to focus on the responsive regions, we prepared a series of plasmid constructs containing the various lengths of the rat ACL promoter linked to the luciferase gene. ACL promoter-reporter constructs and the putative binding sites of transcription factors are shown in Fig. 1. The nucleotide sequence is numbered based on the published sequence of the rat ACL gene (6). Promoter-reporter constructs were transiently transfected into the Alexander cells in the presence or absence of pCSA10. The promoter activities of pACL1860 and pACL419 were almost the same in presence or absence of SREBPs. The level of promoter activities of pACL1860 and pACL419 tested, SREBP-1a showed higher activation than SREBP-2. In most constructs tested, SREBP-1a showed higher activation than SREBP-2. The level of promoter activities of pACL1860 and pACL419 were almost the same in presence or absence of SREBPs. Nucleotide sequence analysis showed six Sp1 binding sites and one NF-Y binding site in the region from −419 to +67 (6). Deletion of five Sp1 binding sites (pACL114) markedly de-
creased the basal transcription to 16% relative to that of pACL419. However, the luciferase activity of pACL114 could be highly induced to the level of 98% and 58% of the induced activity of pACL419 by SREBP-1a and -2, respectively. Further deletion to nucleotide −100 (pACL99) reduced the enhancement by SREBP-1a and -2 to the level of 43 and 70%, respectively, of the induced activity of pACL114. Deletion to −61 (pACL60) abolished the basal transcription activity and the transactivation of SREBPs. The constructs pACL114Δ(−99/−80) and pACL114Δ(−79/−60), which were generated from pACL114 by deleting the region from −99 to −80 and from −79 to −60, respectively, significantly decreased the induction by SREBPs. These results demonstrated that the SREs responsible for the induction of ACL promoter activity by SREBPs exist in the region from −114 to −60.

SREBP Binding Regions Were Determined by DNase I Footprinting and Gel Mobility Shift Assay—To localize the SREBP-1a binding sites in the region from −114 to −60 of the ACL promoter, DNase I footprinting was performed using purified recombinant human SREBP-1a expressed in E. coli (Fig. 2). SREBP-1a protected two regions, from −72 to −57 and from −88 to −113, adjacent to the inverted Y-box. The inverse sequence of −71 to −62 (GTGAGCTGAT/ATCAGCTCAC) has 80% homology to SRE1 (ATCACCCTCA) identified in the promoter of LDL receptor (8). The sequence from −116 to −107 (CTCAGCCTAG) has 90% homology to SRE3 (CTCAGCCTAG) of glycerol-3-phosphate acyltransferase promoter (25).

To confirm the SREBP binding to these two footprinted regions, gel retardation assays were done. We prepared downstream (−99/−41) and upstream probes (−142/−80) covering the protected regions (Figs. 3A and 4A). SREBP-1a produced two shifted bands with −99/−41 probe (Fig. 3B), of which the upper band was the complex containing two molecules of SREBP-1a. When the LDLR-SRE1 sequence was added to the reaction, an additional shifted band with lower intensity between shifted bands were not caused by the differences in the specific activities between wild type and mutant probes. These results suggest that SREBP-1a binds not only to the conserved SRE1 sequence but also weakly to the inverted Y-box (m4) slightly decreased the formation of the complex and prevented the formation of complex containing two molecules of SREBP-1a (Fig. 3C). The mutations of the inverted Y-box (CCAAT) to CGTTT (m4) slightly decreased the formation of the complex and prevented the formation of complex containing two molecules of SREBP-1a (Fig. 3C). The mutations in both conserved SRE1 and inverted Y-box (m2/4) completely inhibited binding of SREBP-1a to the probe (Fig. 3C). Because all probes were generated by PCR using the same 32P-labeled antisense primer (−66/−41) and then PAGE-purified, the differences in intensity between shifted bands were not caused by the differences in the specific activities between wild type and mutant probes. These results suggest that SREBP-1a binds not only to the conserved SRE1 sequence but also weakly to the inverted Y-box in the ACL promoter.

When the −99/−41 probe was incubated with nuclear extracts isolated from rat liver, one major shifted band was present (Fig. 3D, lane 1). This band disappeared when anti-NF-YB antibody was added to the reaction (Fig. 3D, lane 2), suggesting that this band was produced by the binding of NF-Y. The NF-Y band was not present if the mutated inverted Y-box (m4) was used as a probe (Fig. 3D, lanes 5–8). When SREBP-1a was added to the reaction, an additional shifted band with lower intensity was detected (Fig. 3D, lanes 9–11).
The sequences of wild type and mutant probes (nucleotides -99 to -41) utilized for the gel retardation assay are shown in A. The inverted Y-box (Inv. Y-box), SRE1, and Sp1 binding sites are underlined. The mutated sequences are presented on the top of the strand at the respective positions. Mutants are named m1 to m4 and mSp1. Gel mobility shift assays and competition assays shown in B were performed with the P-labeled wild type probe and recombinant SREBP-1a (1 μg). Unlabeled oligonucleotides LDLR-SRE1, -102/-73 of the ACL promoter, the conserved NF-Y-binding sequence, and -67/-41 of the ACL promoter were added as competitors at 100-fold molar excess where indicated. The shifted DNA-protein complexes are indicated.

NF-Y binding to the Inv. Y-box and that SREBP-1a binds to four regions, designated as regions A, B, C, and the inverted Y-box (Figs. 3A, 3D, lane 5). The binding of SREBP-1a diminished the complex formed by NF-Y alone. The upstream probe, -142/-80 (Fig. 4A), also produced the three shifted bands with SREBP-1a (Fig. 4B). The binding of SREBP-1a was completely competed by the conserved SRE1 sequence of the LDL receptor promoter but was not competed by the conserved Y-box (29) or the oligonucleotide (-142/-116) that contained the Sp1 binding. The unlabeled oligonucleotide (-102/-73), containing the inverted Y-box, slightly decreased the complex formation in a manner similar to that observed in the experiment with the -99/-41 probe (Fig. 4B, lane 4). To determine the SREBP-1 binding sites, a gel mobility shift assay was performed with mutant probes generated by PCR using the same 32P-labeled sense primer. SREBP-1a binding to m5 and m7 mutants was slightly decreased (Fig. 4C, lanes 2 and 4). Introducing a double mutation (m5+7) nearly abolished the SREBP-1a binding (Fig. 4C, lane 5), and the shifted bands were completely abolished by triple mutations (m4+5+7) (data not shown). However, the mutation outside the potential protein binding sites (m6) did not affect SREBP-1a binding. Mutant m5, which has mutations 3 base pairs away from CCAAT, did not affect NF-Y binding (data not shown).

These gel retardation results show that NF-Y binds to the inverted Y-box and that SREBP-1a binds to four regions, designated as regions A, B, C, and the inverted Y-box (Figs. 3A and 4A).
The mutant clones, basically produced from pACL114, were transiently transfected into Alexander cells, and their responsiveness to SREBP-1a was tested (Fig. 6). The constructs have mutations that prevented the binding of SREBP-1a and/or NF-Y in the gel mobility shift assays (Fig. 3, 4). Any single mutation did not completely abolish the responsiveness of pACL114 to SREBPs. Mutation at conserved SRE1 in region C (m2) and at nucleotides in region B immediately upstream of the inverted Y-box (m5) significantly decreased activation by SREBPs without changing the basal transcription activity. However, the m7 mutation did not affect the activation, even though it also prevented the binding of SREBP-1a and thereby made this site nonfunctional. The double mutations at regions B and C (m2) and at nucleotides in region B immediately upstream of the inverted Y-box (m4) significantly decreased the basal promoter activity as well as the responsiveness to SREBP-1a. The double mutations at region C and the inverted Y-box (m2+4) decreased the basal promoter activity to a level similar to that of m4 and decreased stimulation of the ACL promoter by SREBP-1a. The mutations at the most proximal Sp1 binding site (mSp1) did not affect the responsiveness of SREBP-1a. Because both SREBP1a and SREBP-2 to the ACL promoter and activities of chimeric SREBPs. The transient transfection assay shown in A was done by introducing pACL114 or p5xSRE1-tk (0.5 μg) together with 40 ng of expression plasmid. The fold increase was shown as the ratio of the luciferase activities in the presence of expression plasmid to those in the absence of expression plasmid. The gel mobility shift assay shown in B was done with 32P-labeled LDLR-SRE1, ACL promoter fragments −142/−80, and −99/−41. The probes were incubated with the indicated amount of purified human SREBP-1a or SREBP-2 protein. Two chimeric SREBP expression plasmids, p2A-1aD and p1aA-2D, were generated by exchanging the coding sequences for amino acids 1–70 between SREBP-1a and -2, as illustrated in C. The ACL promoter-luciferase construct, pACL114 (0.5 μg), was transfected together with 40 ng of the expression plasmids. Two days after transfection, cells were harvested, and the luciferase activities were measured (D). The results were expressed as the normalized luciferase activity/μg of protein in the cell extracts. Values represent the mean ± S.E. obtained from three independent experiments performed in triplicate.
mPCSA10 or pCS2 along with 0.4 by SREBPs is dependent on NF-Y.
mmid pcDNA3 (0.4 indicated (mean ties were measured. Normalized luciferase activities expressed as the transfected DNA equal. Two days after transfection, luciferase activi-
bounding to the inverted Y-box is required for the effective trans-
used (data not shown). These results suggested that NF-Y
construct containing mutations at the inverted Y-box (m4) was
by adding pmYA. We could obtain the same result when the
SREBP-1a-induced activation of p5xSRE-tk was not changed
(0.4 suppressed almost to the basal level (Fig. 7
the ACL promoter activity by SREBP-1a and -2 was effectively
mediated regulation.
The importance of the Sp1 binding sites for the action of SREBPs has been reported in many promoters, such as LDL receptor (31), acetyl-CoA carboxylase (22), and fatty acid synthase promoter (32). But in the case of ACL, although the deletion of five upstream Sp1 binding sites decreased the basal activity of the ACL promoter, it did not alter the effect of SREBPs activating the ACL promoter (Fig. 1). Also, the mutation of the most proximal Sp1 binding site downstream of region C did not affect the activation by SREBPs (Fig. 6). On the other hand, the responsiveness to SREBPs was markedly reduced when the binding of NF-Y was disturbed by the mutation at the inverted Y-box or by the overexpression of the dominant negative form of NF-Y-A (Figs. 6 and 7). These results indicate that the regulation of the ACL promoter by SREBPs requires the neighboring binding of NF-Y, as was observed in farnesyl-pyrophosphate synthase, squalene synthase, hydroxymethylglutaryl-CoA synthase, glycerol-3-phosphate acyltransferase, and SREBP-2 genes (9, 10, 12, 25, 33). The ACL promoter activation by SREBP-1a and -2 were quite different. The amino-terminal 60 amino acid region of SREBP-1a is known to be an activation domain that interacts with multiprotein complex including CREB-binding protein (34, 35). SREBP-1c, which is derived from the same gene as SREBP-1a by using different transcription start site, is known as a weak activator because of its short amino-terminal region (36). However, the different potencies of SREBP-1a and -2 for the ACL promoter activation were not originated from their differences in activation domains. Instead, SREBP-2 showed much less affinity to SREs in the ACL promoter than SREBP-1a, and the chimeric SREBP, which has the SREBP-2 activation domain followed by remaining the carboxyl-terminal region of SREBP-1a, could activate the ACL promoter as efficiently as SREBP-1a itself. This finding implies that SREBPs can activate preferential target genes through their different affinities to SREs in the promoters. The mechanism by which SREBPs activate their preferential target genes has not been studied thus far. Therefore, it will be necessary to evaluate promoter selection by studying the binding affinity of SREBP isoforms in other promoters too.

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**Figure 7.** The stimulation of ACL promoter-luciferase construct by SREBPs is dependent on NF-Y. The indicated amounts of pCSA10 or pCS2 along with 0.4 μg of pACL114 and 0.2 μg of pCMV-β-galactosidase plasmid were transfected into Alexander cells (A). Plasmid pcDNA3 (0.4 μg) or pmYA29 (0.4 μg) encoding a dominant negative form of NF-YA was cotransfected as indicated. The plasmid p5xSRE-tk (0.4 μg) was transfected with 40 ng of pCSA10 and 0.4 μg of pmYA as indicated (B). The plasmid pUC9 was used to make the total amount of transfected DNA equal. Two days after transfection, luciferase activities were measured. Normalized luciferase activities expressed as the mean ± S.E. from three independent experiments are shown.

**DISCUSSION**

SREBPs are known as a family of transcription factors that regulate the genes involved in fatty acid and cholesterol synthesis. It has been suggested that SREBP-1 and SREBP-2 have different effects on target genes, that is, SREBP-1 preferentially activates genes involved in fatty acid synthesis and SREBP-2 activates genes involved in cholesterol synthesis. Recent reports have suggested that SREBPs stimulate the expression of ACL gene and that SREBP-1a would be a more specific factor. Shimomura et al. (30) reported that the level of mRNA for ACL was elevated by 3- to 4-fold in transgenic mice overexpressing the mature form of SREBP-1a or -1c and by 1.5-fold in transgenic mice overexpressing SREBP-2. In this study, we demonstrate that the rat ACL promoter is highly activated by the direct interaction of SREBPs with multiple SREs on the ACL promoter, and that SREBP-1a is more effective activator than SREBP-2. In addition, we show that the binding affinities of these SREBPs to ACL SREs determine their potency in this promoter, supporting previous reports that SREBPs have preferential target genes.

In the ACL promoter, the region between nucleotides −114 and −60 was the major determinant for the activation by SREBPs. The recombinant SREBP-1a strongly bound to three regions, A, B, and C, in the proximal promoter of the ACL gene. The SRE in region C (GTGACGCTGA) bears sequences homologous to SRE1, which has been found in many target genes of SREBPs. As expected, mutations at region C significantly reduced the responsiveness to SREBPs without decreasing basal activity of ACL promoter. The SRE in region B, the upstream region of the inverted Y-box, showed a novel sequence (5’-AACCGTCTG-3’; −104 to −95) differing from known consensus SREs. The mutation at region B prevented the binding of SREBP-1a (Fig. 4C) without changing NF-Y binding (data not shown) and also decreased the stimulation of ACL promoter by SREBP-1a (Fig. 6). Region A has sequences highly homologous to SRE3, which was reported in glycerol 3-phosphate acyltransferase promoter. However, mutations in region A (m7) did not alter the responsiveness to SREBPs, even though SREBP-1a showed strong affinity to this region and its binding was significantly reduced to the mutant probe (m7). The fact that mutations at both SREs in region B and C resulted in complete loss of responsiveness of the ACL promoter to SREBP-1a suggested that these two SREs play important roles in SREBP-mediated regulation.

The importance of the Sp1 binding sites for the action of SREBPs has been reported in many promoters, such as LDL receptor (31), acetyl-CoA carboxylase (22), and fatty acid synthase promoter (32). But in the case of ACL, although the deletion of five upstream Sp1 binding sites decreased the basal activity of the ACL promoter, it did not alter the effect of SREBPs activating the ACL promoter (Fig. 1). Also, the mutation of the most proximal Sp1 binding site downstream of region C did not affect the activation by SREBPs (Fig. 6). On the other hand, the responsiveness to SREBPs was markedly reduced when the binding of NF-Y was disturbed by the mutation at the inverted Y-box or by the overexpression of the dominant negative form of NF-Y-A (Figs. 6 and 7). These results indicate that the regulation of the ACL promoter by SREBPs requires the neighboring binding of NF-Y, as was observed in farnesyl-pyrophosphate synthase, squalene synthase, hydroxymethylglutaryl-CoA synthase, glycerol-3-phosphate acyltransferase, and SREBP-2 genes (9, 10, 12, 25, 33). The ACL promoter activation by SREBP-1a and −2 were quite different. The amino-terminal 60 amino acid region of SREBP-1a is known to be an activation domain that interacts with multiprotein complex including CREB-binding protein (34, 35). SREBP-1c, which is derived from the same gene as SREBP-1a by using different transcription start site, is known as a weak activator because of its short amino-terminal region (36). However, the different potencies of SREBP-1a and -2 for the ACL promoter activation were not originated from their differences in activation domains. Instead, SREBP-2 showed much less affinity to SREs in the ACL promoter than SREBP-1a, and the chimeric SREBP, which has the SREBP-2 activation domain followed by remaining the carboxyl-terminal region of SREBP-1a, could activate the ACL promoter as efficiently as SREBP-1a itself. This finding implies that SREBPs can activate preferential target genes through their different affinities to SREs in the promoters. The mechanism by which SREBPs activate their preferential target genes has not been studied thus far. Therefore, it will be necessary to evaluate promoter selection by studying the binding affinity of SREBP isoforms in other promoters too.

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