The effect of aflatoxin B\textsubscript{1} treatment on expression of transient receptor potential melastatin 8 in mouse ovary and testes

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INTRODUCTION

Aflatoxin is an Aspergillus flavus or Aspergillus parasiticus mold product commonly found in corn, oats, barley, wheat, and other livestock feeds. Of the four aflatoxin forms, aflatoxin B\textsubscript{1} (AFB\textsubscript{1}) is considered the most potent and exposure can lead to reproductive deficiencies in a variety of species, including humans, livestock, and mice (Uriah et al., 2001; Verma and Nair, 2002; Kanora and Maes, 2009). In male mice, AFB\textsubscript{1} exposure is tied to histological changes in the testes, decreased sperm counts, and differences in sperm motility and litter size (Uriah et al., 2001; Verma and Nair, 2002). In female rats, AFB\textsubscript{1} exposure has been shown to negatively impact uterine and ovarian size, as well as disturb cyclicity of the estrus cycle and reduce conception and litter sizes. AFB\textsubscript{1} has also been linked to increased rates of fetal resorption (Supriya et al., 2016). AFB\textsubscript{1} reduces steroidogenesis by competitively binding to the StAR protein in rats (Supriya et al., 2014). A reduction in circulatory testosterone may impact transient receptor potential melastatin 8 (TRPM8) expression. TRPM8 channels are expressed in the prostate, testis, sperm, vascular tissue, lung tissues, uterus, placenta, liver, skin, eye, bladder urothelium, heart, dorsal root ganglion sensory neurons, trigeminal ganglia sensory neurons, and taste papillae of higher animals (De Blas et al., 2009; Almaraz et al., 2014; Asuthkar et al., 2015a; Majhi et al., 2015). Recently, TRPM8 was found to act as an ionotropic testosterone receptor and may play a role in testosterone-induced behaviors including sexual drive, aggressiveness, fear conditioning, and other behavioral traits (Asuthkar et al., 2015a, 2015b). Due to TRPM8’s role as a testosterone receptor and AFB\textsubscript{1}’s influence on steroid hormone production and fertility, we hypothesized AFB\textsubscript{1} exposure could influence the expression of TRM8 channels in reproductive tissues.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Female mice were paired with proven male mice, four to a cage, and mated over the course of 1 week. At the end of the week, males were removed and females were fed aflatoxin 0.1 mg/kg BW (n = 8) in the form of oral drench using corn oil as vehicle for approximately 3 weeks before parturition. Control females (n = 7) were fed a placebo of corn oil. Fertile male mice were treated with either 50 µg/kg/day AFB\textsubscript{1} (n = 4) using corn oil as a vehicle or corn oil alone (n = 3) for 45 days via intraperitoneal injection (Austin et al., 2012). Mice were weighed weekly and dosages of AFB\textsubscript{1} and placebo were adjusted accordingly. Mice were killed by cervical dislocation and exsanguination. Gonads were excised, preserved in 4% paraformaldehyde, paraffin infused, and sectioned at 6 µm per standard immunohistochemistry procedures.
Rabbit TRPM8 polyclonal antibody was purchased from Lifespan Biosciences, Inc. (Seattle, WA) and used 1:100 dilution. Anti-rabbit HRP conjugated secondary antibody (Jackson Labs, Bar Harbor, ME; 1:10,000) with positive staining detected using a DAB substrate kit from Vector Laboratories (Burlingame, CA). All slides were dehydrated through graded ethanol and equilibrated in xylene. Coverslips were mounted using Permount (Thermo Fisher, Waltham, MA). Positive staining appeared brown. Negative control staining was obtained in the absence of primary antibody.

Images of stained tissue were captured using Cell Sense Software with a consistent light setting at 200× magnification. Mean gray scale intensity was calculated for granulosa cells, theca cells, and seminiferous tubules using ImageJ software (NIH). All images were converted to gray scale. Minimum and maximum gray value, mean gray value, and limit to threshold were recorded for all measurements. Four measurements per cell type per image were recorded. An average mean gray value was calculated for each cell type per image. Smaller mean gray values indicated darker shades of gray suggesting darker TRPM8 staining and thus greater TRPM8 channel expression.

All statistical analysis were performed using GLM (Minitab 18). Average intensity per cell/tissue type was calculated for each animal. Intensity differences between granulosa and theca cells was determined. Treatment effects were determined for theca cells, granulosa cells, and seminiferous tubules. To determine if expression differed by follicle type, average intensity of granulosa cells within secondary and tertiary follicles were determined and analyzed for treatment, follicle type, and treatment by follicle type interactions using GLM analysis.

**Figure 1.** Mean gray scale intensity of granulosa cells from females treated with AFB1. Aflatoxin decreased gray scale intensity ($P = 0.04$) reflecting greater staining intensity and presumed increased expression of TRPM8 channels.

**Figure 2.** Mean gray scale intensity of theca cells from females treated with AFB1. Aflatoxin decreased gray scale intensity ($P = 0.05$) reflecting greater staining intensity and presumed increased expression of TRPM8 channels.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Robust TRPM8 channel expression was detected in both the granulosa and theca cells of the ovary. Granulosa cells appear to have greater expression of TRPM8 channels when compared with theca cells as reflected by greater staining intensity and measured with decreased (P < 0.001) gray scale. Both cell types have steroidogenic capacity under the control of the gonadotropins which utilize calcium in their signaling pathway. TRPM8 is a putative testosterone receptor (Asuthkar et al., 2014b), and it is possible TRPM8 channels may influence this signaling pathway especially in granulosa cells which are responsive to testosterone. Since gray scale measurements of granulosa cells did not differ (P = 0.5) by follicle type, it is unlikely that expression of the TRPM8 channels differ as the follicle matures.

Reproductive effects of aflatoxins have been reported in domestic animals (Cortinovis et al., 2014) and murine models (Supriya et al., 2016). Aflatoxins are toxic to the gametes (Liu et al., 2015) and influence fertility. Because the TRPM8 channel is a testosterone receptor, it would be expected that it may influence cell response to testosterone which may have greater implications in the granulosa cells.

Seminiferous tubules from the mice testes were treated with aflatoxin B1 alone and combined with deoxynivalenol or zearalenone on porcine granulosa cell proliferation and steroid production. Thioreiogenology 81:1042–1049. doi:10.1016/j.thieryogenology.2014.01.027

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