Adhesion, Growth, and Matrix Production by Fibroblasts on Laminin Substrates

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ABSTRACT Human embryonic skin fibroblasts have been shown to attach and spread on laminin substrates in the absence of protein synthesis and presence of fibronectin-depleted serum and anti-fibronectin antibodies. Rates of attachment and the type of spreading are virtually identical on fibronectin and laminin-coated substrates with the development of microfilament bundles and focal adhesions. Antibodies to laminin, but not fibronectin, will prevent or reverse fibroblast adhesion to laminin, whereas antibodies to fibronectin but not laminin will give similar results on fibronectin-coated substrates. These and other results indicate that fibroblasts possess distinct receptors for laminin and fibronectin which on contact with suitable substrates promote adhesion through interaction with common intermediates. This type of adhesion is compatible with subsequent growth and extracellular matrix production.

The adhesion of cells to a substratum is a prerequisite for the survival and proliferation of most normal eucaryotic cells (11, 23, 31). The mechanism of cell adhesion has, therefore, attracted a lot of interest during the last few years. Although the detailed cellular events involved in the adhesion process have not yet been revealed, we now recognize several phases of cell adhesion (13). Initially, the rounded cell attaches to the substrate. This phase involves an interaction between cell surface receptors and appropriate ligands deposited on the substrate. Recently, several attachment proteins (i.e. laminin, chondronectin, and fibronectin) have been identified (for review see reference 22), although it appears as if a cell will attach to any substrate for which the cell possesses an appropriate surface receptor. For example, rat hepatocytes will attach not only to some of the attachment proteins but also to heparin, insulin, and asialoglycoproteins (26).

A second phase of adhesion is cell spreading, which will occur on some substrata, whereas other substratum-bound ligands permit only attachment. It is presently unknown whether substrate-bound ligands that induce spreading interact with a special class of surface receptor(s) that can interact with the intracellular cytoskeleton or whether all ligands have the potential of inducing cell spreading, and a successful reaction depends on the number and organization of bonds between the cell surface receptor and the ligand on the substratum (1, 14).

A third phase in the cell adhesion process is the formation of specialized contacts between the cell and substratum (6, 7). Focal contacts and focal adhesions are structures which may develop at this further stage of cell adhesion in parallel with microfilament bundle formation (3, 16). Transmembrane linkages between extracellular macromolecules and the intracellular cytoskeleton at the focal adhesions are suggested by several lines of evidence (17, 30) although the identity of the interacting molecules is not known.

With the discovery of several adhesion proteins, a theory developed implying that different cells use different proteins in their substrate adhesion, i.e. mesenchymal-derived cells use fibronectin, whereas epithelial cells use laminin and chondrocytes use chondronectin (22). Along with this hypothesis, early studies demonstrated the presence of fibronectin in focal adhesion sites formed by fibroblasts (3, 18), and this glycoprotein was proposed to be an integral component of these specialized sites of attachment (24). The presence of fibronectin in fibroblast focal adhesion sites has since been questioned (5, 10). However, recent data suggest that fibronectin is not detected at all focal adhesions (2) even though in some cases it clearly can promote their formation (7).

In the present communication, we report that human skin fibroblasts attach not only to fibronectin but also to laminin. In response to the laminin substrate, the fibroblasts showed cell spreading with formation of focal adhesions and associated...
microfilament bundles. Furthermore, the laminin substrate facilitated cell proliferation and pericellular matrix production.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Cells and Microscopy: Human embryo fibroblasts (gifts from Dr. K. Hedman, Helsinki, Finland and Dr. J. Thompson, Birmingham, AL; or obtained from Flow Laboratories, Irvine, Scotland) were routinely cultured in Minimum Essential Medium (MEM) (Flow Laboratories) containing 10% fetal calf serum (FCS) (Flow Laboratories) and penicillin (100 IU/ml) and streptomycin (100 µg/ml) and used between their 4th and 15th passages. For some experimental procedures, cells were preincubated for 2 h and seeded in the presence of 35 µg/ml cycloheximide (Sigma Chemical Co., Poole, Dorset) in complete medium for 2 h at 37°C before trypsinization and seeding. Detachment was achieved in 0.05% trypsin/0.02% EDTA (Gibco, Paisley, Scotland) and 5 x 10⁵ cells were seeded onto glass coverslips in 35-mm plastic petri dishes. Fibronectin-depleted serum, used in some procedures, was prepared by passing FCS down a gelatin-Sepharose column, followed by a column containing rabbit anti-bovine plasma fibronectin IgG bound to Sepharose as previously described (20). Samples were checked by immunodiffusion for the absence of fibronectin. Cells were examined on a Leitz Ortholux II microscope fitted with epi-illumination for fluorescence and interference reflection microscopy. Photographs were taken on Ilford FP4 and HP5 film.

Preparation of Coated Coverslips: Human plasma fibronectin was prepared by the methods of Vuorio and Vaheri (35) and reduced, and alkylated mouse plasma fibronectin was a gift from Dr. B. L. M. Hogan (Imperial Cancer Research Fund, Mill Hill, London). The fibronectin samples were checked for their ability to promote rat and human fibroblast attachment and spreading, which could further be prevented by addition of antibodies against these proteins (see below). Laminin was purified from the transplantable mouse EHS tumor (33) and, as shown previously (33), these preparations did not contain any detectable fibronectin. Further immunodiffusion studies showed no detectable fibronectin in the laminin samples or laminin in the fibronectin samples, utilizing the appropriate antibodies indicated below.

Glass coverslips were cleaned in ethanol and flamed before placing in 35-mm plastic petri dishes. 1.5 ml of water was added to each and 15 µg of purified human plasma fibronectin, mouse plasma fibronectin or laminin, or 50 µg of bovine serum albumin (BSA) (Sigma Chemical Co.) introduced into the dishes. The proteins were allowed to dry down onto the coverslips. These were rinsed with distilled water before treatment with 1 mg/ml BSA in phosphate-buffered saline (PBS) for 30 min at room temperature. Coverslips were washed three times with PBS before use in experiments. In some experiments the laminin was incubated for 1 h with anti-human fibronectin IgG or anti-mouse fibronectin IgG coupled to Sepharose CL-4B (Pharmacia Fine Chemicals, Hounslow, Middlesex). The Sepharose was removed by brief centrifugation and the laminin dried onto dishes as before.

Antibodies: Rabbit anti-human plasma fibronectin IgG was prepared and characterized as described previously (27). Rabbit anti-mouse plasma (reduced and alkylated) fibronectin IgG was prepared from serum which was a gift from Dr. B. L. M. Hogan (Imperial Cancer Research Fund, Mill Hill, London). The IgG preparations were used in the adhesion, spreading, and growth assays at 250-400 µg/ml. Sheep antilaminin serum was a gift from Dr. B. L. M. Hogan (Imperial Cancer Research Fund, Mill Hill, London). The Sepharose was removed by brief centrifugation and the laminin substrate could further be prevented by addition of antibodies against these proteins (see below). Laminin was purified from the transplantable mouse EHS tumor (33) and, as shown previously (33), these preparations did not contain any detectable fibronectin. Further immunodiffusion studies showed no detectable fibronectin in the laminin samples or laminin in the fibronectin samples, utilizing the appropriate antibodies indicated below.

RESULTS

Attachment of Fibroblasts to Laminin

When a suspension of human embryonic skin fibroblasts was seeded on petri dishes coated with different proteins, >75% of the cells attached within 15 min to fibronectin-coated dishes. A similar number of cells attached to laminin-coated dishes and the kinetics of the attachment process to the two substrates were essentially the same (Fig. 1). Virtually no cells attached

![Figure 1](image-url)
to petri dishes coated with BSA (Fig. 1). Since cells were arrested in their protein synthesis by the continual presence of cycloheximide, it appears likely that they bind directly to the attachment substrates without the help of any secreted protein. In further studies to test the specificity of the attachment, cells were seeded on protein-coated coverslips in the presence of appropriate antibodies (Tables I and II). These results show that while attachment to human or mouse fibronectin was severely diminished in the presence of 400 μg/ml anti-human or mouse fibronectin IgG respectively, it was totally unaffected by 200 μl/ml anti-laminin serum. Similarly, attachment to laminin substrates was unimpaired by the same concentration of antifibronectins but greatly reduced in the presence of antilaminin serum.

To further rule out the possibility that the laminin samples contained small amounts of mouse fibronectin, they were preincubated with anti-human or anti-mouse fibronectin IgG coupled to Sepharose CL-4B before use as adhesion substrates. Neither preadsorption with anti-human (not shown) nor anti-mouse fibronectin (Table II) had any effect on attachment of human fibroblasts to the laminin substrate, which in both cases remained susceptible to the addition of antilaminin serum but not to antifibronectin IgG. Nonimmune rabbit IgG and sheep serum did not affect fibroblast attachment when substituted for their immune counterparts in the attachment assay (results not shown). These results provide evidence that fibroblasts possess distinct classes of receptors for the two ligands.

Fibroblast attachment to human fibronectin (FN) and mouse laminin (LM) substrates and the effect of antibodies. Cells were allowed to attach for 30 min (see Materials and Methods) and the number of cells attaching to each substrate in the absence of antibodies was set at 100%. Other results are directly comparable to these.

| Substrate | Antibody                  | Relative Number Attached |
|-----------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Human FN  | —                         | 100                      |
| Human FN  | 200 μl/ml a mouse LM      | 88                       |
| Human FN  | 400 μg/ml a human FN      | 32                       |
| Mouse LM  | —                         | 100                      |
| Mouse LM  | 200 μl/ml a mouse LM      | 4                        |
| Mouse LM  | 400 μg/ml a human FN      | 133                      |

Fibroblast attachment to mouse fibronectin (FN) and mouse laminin (LM) substrates and the effect of appropriate antibodies. Cells were allowed to attach for 30 min (see Materials and Methods) and the number of cells attaching to each substrate in the absence of antibodies was set at 100%. Other results are directly comparable to these.

| Substrate | Antibody                  | Relative Number Attached |
|-----------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Mouse FN  | —                         | 100                      |
| Mouse FN  | 200 μl/ml a mouse LM      | 101                      |
| Mouse FN  | 400 μg/ml a mouse FN      | 11                       |
| Mouse LM  | —                         | 100                      |
| Mouse LM  | 200 μl/ml a mouse LM      | 9                        |
| Mouse LM  | 400 μg/ml a mouse FN      | 82                       |
| Mouse LM* | —                         | 92                       |
| Mouse LM* | 200 μl/ml a mouse LM      | 48                       |
| Mouse LM* | 400 μg/ml a mouse FN      | 85                       |

* Results for laminin preadsorbed with anti-mouse fibronectin are comparable to those for substrates of untreated laminin.

Effect of Specific Antibodies on Cell Spreading

The spreading of cells on laminin- and fibronectin-coated substrata could be prevented by addition of appropriate antibodies at the time of seeding (see above). Some reversal of cell spreading could also be achieved by addition of antibodies
immediately after a fully spread state had been reached (~4 h). Anti-human fibronectin antibodies caused some impairment of the degree of spreading on human fibronectin-coated coverslips (Fig. 5 A) but had no effect on cells spread on laminin (Fig. 5 B). Similarly, the addition of anti-laminin antiserum to fibroblasts spread on laminin-coated substrata (Fig. 6 A) caused considerable cell rounding but did not affect cells on fibronectin-coated coverslips (Fig. 6 B).

**Cellular Response to the Adhesion Substrata**

Induction of cell proliferation and extracellular matrix production are two of the most prominent eventual cellular responses to successful substrate adhesion and spreading. As shown in Fig. 7, human embryonic skin fibroblasts adhering to petri dishes coated with laminin or fibronectin, in both cases, were capable of DNA-synthesis. The medium in these experiments was supplemented with 10% fibronectin-depleted FCS. There was no apparent difference in the rate of proliferation between cells growing on laminin and fibronectin, respectively. Appropriate antibodies added at the time of seeding prevented entry into S-phase, presumably though their effects on cell spreading and, as shown earlier, cell attachment was considerably reduced. Antibodies not directed against the substratum coat did not reduce the number of cells capable of synthesizing DNA. Direct observation of cultures on laminin or fibronectin-coated substrates showed that cells could progress through mitosis and complete cytokinesis.
In addition to growth, human fibroblasts spread on either laminin- or fibronectin-coated coverslips in the presence of fibronectin-depleted serum secreted substantial amounts of pericellular matrix material in fibrillar arrays. Fig. 8 shows the distribution of fibronectin and type III procollagen on the surfaces of cells spread on the two protein substrates. No qualitative differences in the matrix form of fibronectin or type III procollagen could be discerned between cells on the two substrates. We have also noted small amounts of laminin incorporated into the matrix of some cultures whether seeded onto fibronectin or laminin substrates.

**DISCUSSION**

Previous studies have shown that fibronectin and collagen may serve as substrata for the adhesion of fibroblasts (22, 28). In the present communication, we report that laminin may also mediate the attachment and spreading of embryonic skin fibroblasts. These data do not support the idea that laminin acts as an attachment protein only for epithelial cells. It could be argued that the adhesion of embryonic fibroblasts to laminin reflects the fetal origin of these cells. However, fibroblasts derived from the skin of adult humans likewise adhered to laminin-coated petri dishes (unpublished observation). It therefore appears likely that fibroblasts possess cell surface receptors that recognize laminin. Although the presented data do not permit any conclusions about the relation between the laminin and fibronectin receptors, previous studies in our laboratory have indicated that hepatocytes use different sets of receptors in the adhesion to substrates made from the two proteins (19). These experiments (19) also showed that the two adhesion
proteins have the same relative activity in promoting rat hepatocyte attachments; 35-nm dishes coated with 5–10 μg of each protein facilitated maximal attachment during a 1-h incubation period.

A possible source of fibronectin contamination in the laminin assays would have been from residual pools within the cells themselves. However, the presence of anti-human fibronectin did not affect either cell attachment or spreading and it is therefore reasonable to assume that the fibroblasts adhered directly to the laminin molecules on the substratum. The possibility that trace amounts of mouse fibronectin in the laminin samples allowed fibroblast attachment was excluded by the addition of anti-mouse fibronectin IgG in some assays or the preadsorption of the laminin with this antibody. In both cases cell attachment proceeded to a normal degree and was reduced by antilaminin serum.

Although, at first sight, it is surprising that fibroblasts can respond to a glycoprotein which is reportedly restricted to basement membranes (8, 25), where it may facilitate epithelial cell adhesion (19, 32, 33), recent results from our laboratory (manuscript in preparation) indicate that, in newborn rat skin, laminin is also present in the dermal connective tissue as a cell surface component, seen by indirect immunofluorescence and immunoelectron microscopy. Furthermore, primary explant-derived and established cultures of rat skin fibroblasts can be shown by metabolic labeling and radioimmunoassay to synthesize laminin and can insert it into a fibrillar matrix (unpublished observations). Other studies (15) have also shown laminin synthesis in a nontransformed rat cell line of fibroblast type but in this case attachment and spreading on laminin substrates could not be demonstrated even in the absence of protein synthesis inhibitors. The reason for the apparent discrepancy between these results and ours is not clear but some preliminary observations indicate that the laminin receptor(s) but not the fibronectin receptor(s) may be rather protease-sensitive (unpublished observations). The method of preparation of the cells for assay may therefore be critically important. Such findings also provide some further basis for the hypothesis that fibronectin and laminin receptors are distinct.

Spreading of fibroblasts on laminin resulted: (a) in the formation of arrays of microfilament bundles demonstrated by immunofluorescent staining of actin and (b) in the formation of focal adhesions as demonstrated by interference reflection microscopy. Endogenous fibronectin was apparently not involved in the formation of focal adhesions, since this behavior was observed for cells arrested in protein synthesis and in a fibronectin-depleted medium containing antibodies directed against fibronectin. Consequently, fibronectin is probably not an obligatory component of the focal adhesion. Since focal adhesions are formed by fibroblasts adhering to different substrates and arrested in their protein synthesis, it appears as if focal adhesions represent specialized areas of the cell membrane containing aggregates of membrane components organized by intracellular events. Different adhesion substrata composed of any of several matrix components induce cell spreading and may thereby trigger the cellular events that lead to formation of focal adhesions through interaction with common intermediate molecules associated with the cell surface. This may be analogous to other cell-triggering phenomena such as those caused by epidermal growth factor and insulin, where the responses can be evoked by using antibodies to the appropriate receptors, showing that here, too, the specificity is a function of cellular mediators rather than the ligand itself (21, 29).

Cell-substratum adhesion has long been known to be essential for the proliferation of nontransformed fibroblasts. Studies on the details of this relationship indicate that, whereas protein synthesis may proceed after cell attachment, DNA synthesis requires cell spreading (4). Furthermore, a critical degree of spreading is required to allow cells to proliferate (9). In the present study, human embryonic skin fibroblasts are found to proliferate not only on a fibronectin substrate but also on a laminin substrate, which is compatible with our observations that these cells assume the same well-flattened morphology when adhering to laminin- or fibronectin-coated dishes. The fibroblasts adhering on a laminin substrate were also stimulated to produce a pericellular matrix that was similar to that produced on fibronectin and shown to contain fibronectin and type III procollagen.

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