



Effects of Unsaturated Side-chain Analogs of Tetrahydrocannabinol on Cytochromes P450

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ABSTRACT. The ability of unsaturated side-chain analogs of Δ^8 -tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) to selectively inactivate mouse hepatic cytochromes P450 3A11 and 2C29 was examined. THC side-chain analogs were preincubated with mouse hepatic microsomes and NADPH for various times before dilution and determination of Δ^9 -THC metabolism specific for P450s 3A11 and 2C29. THC-enyl analogs had little or no effect on P450 3A11 but inactivated P450 2C29 in a time-dependent manner, with approximately 50% inactivation observed after a 30-min preincubation. THC-ynyl analogs were less selective in their P450 inactivation but appeared to be more effective than their corresponding enyl analogs. THC-ynyl analogs inactivated P450s 3A11 and 2C29 in a time-dependent manner and could inactivate 40–80% of their activities after a 30-min preincubation. The THC-ynyl analogs were nearly as effective as cannabidiol, a well-characterized inactivator of these mouse P450s. Despite their ability to inactivate P450 *in vitro*, neither the THC-enyl nor the THC-ynyl analogs were very effective after *in vivo* administration. Unsaturated side-chain THC analogs may be useful in the development of specific P450 inactivators. *BIOCHEM PHARMACOL* 60;7:955–961, 2000. © 2000 Elsevier Science Inc.

KEY WORDS. cytochrome P450; P450 3A; P450 2C; cannabinoids; mechanism-based inactivation; tetrahydrocannabinol

Δ^9 -THC† is the major psychoactive component of marijuana, and it exerts its effects primarily through binding at cannabinoid receptors, CB1 and CB2 [1]. In an ongoing attempt to design receptor subtype-selective ligands as agonists or antagonists, recent work has focused on alterations of the side-chain moiety of THC. Pharmacophore modeling of the cannabinoid receptor has led to a three-point model demonstrating the importance of the aliphatic side-chain of THC [2]. Structural variations of this moiety yielded analogs varying up to 3 orders of magnitude in affinity for the receptor and pharmacological potency [3]. In an attempt to introduce some rigidity and conformational restraint into the side-chain, several analogs with carbon–carbon double or triple bonds have been synthesized and evaluated for receptor affinity and pharmacological activity [4–8].

The inactivation of cytochromes P450 by terminal olefins and acetylenes is a mechanism-based process that has been well characterized and usually results in the alkylation of the prosthetic heme group [9–13]. P450 inactivation by internal olefins and acetylenes is far less common but has

been reported, and typically results in P450 apoprotein modification [12–15]. Cannabinoids are metabolized extensively by P450s and dozens of metabolites have been identified [16]. The major metabolites found in most animal species are those oxidized at the 11- and 8-position (Fig. 1). In addition, minor metabolites hydroxylated at various positions in the side-chain as well as metabolites with shortened side-chains also have been reported [16, 17]. THC is oxidized in mice by P450 3A11 [18] primarily to 8 β -hydroxy- and 8-keto-THC metabolites and by P450 2C29 [19] to 8 α -hydroxy-THC, as determined by immunoinhibition and functional reconstitution studies with purified enzymes [20]. The formation of these metabolites was used as functional markers for P450s 3A and 2C in order to determine if oxidation at the double or triple bonds of several THC analogs could result in P450 inactivation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Chemicals

Δ^8 -THC unsaturated analogs were synthesized as reported [5, 8] and include 2-ene, 3-ene, 4-ene, 2-yne, and 4-yne (Fig. 1). Δ^9 -THC and CBD were supplied by the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Other chemicals and solvents were from Fisher Scientific and were of analytical or HPLC grade. Cannabinoids were dissolved in ethanol for the *in vitro* studies or suspended in Tween 80 for the *in vivo* studies as previously described [21].

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† Abbreviations: THC, tetrahydrocannabinol; CBD, cannabidiol; 2-ene, 3-(oct-2'-enyl)- Δ^8 -THC; 3-ene, 3-(oct-3'-enyl)- Δ^8 -THC; 4-ene, 3-(oct-4'-enyl)- Δ^8 -THC; 2-yne, 3-(oct-2'-ynyl)- Δ^8 -THC; and 4-yne, 3-(oct-4'-ynyl)- Δ^8 -THC.

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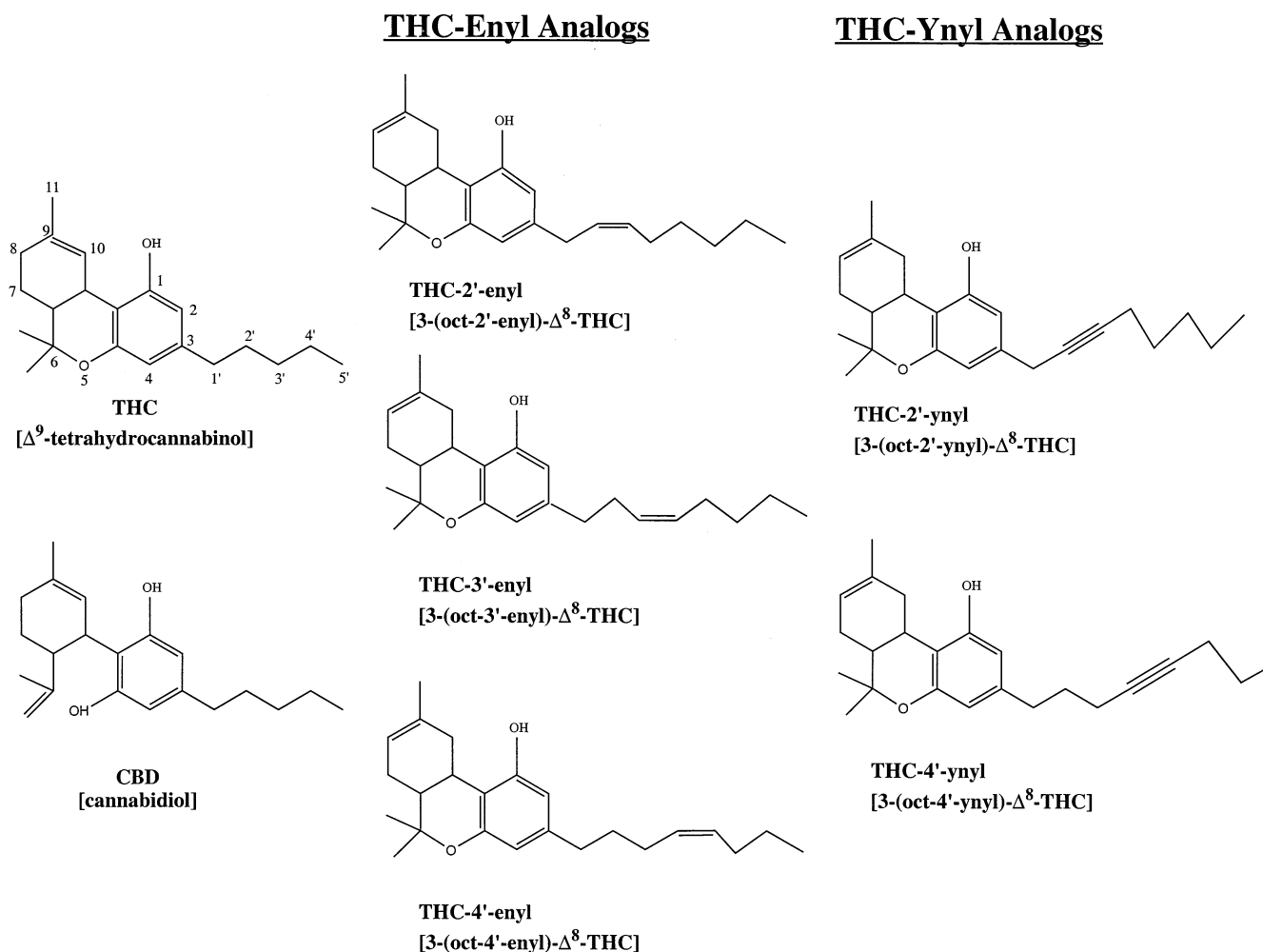


FIG. 1. Structures of Δ^9 -THC, CBD, and Δ^8 -THC side-chain analogs.

Animals

Male CF-1 mice (25–30 g; Charles River) were used for all studies.

In Vitro Studies

Mouse hepatic microsomes were prepared as described [22]. Microsomes (2 mg protein/mL) in 0.1 M phosphate buffer, pH 7.4, containing 1 mM diethylenetriaminepentaacetic acid were preincubated with ethanol (vehicle) or Δ^8 -THC analog (130 μ M in 3 μ L ethanol) and NADPH (1 mM) in a total volume of 1 mL at 37° for 0, 7.5, 15, or 30 min. In parallel, CBD also was included in these studies as a known P450 inactivator. Aliquots (0.1 mL) were removed, diluted 10-fold with 0.1 M phosphate buffer, pH 7.4, containing Δ^9 -THC (130 μ M) and NADPH (1 mM), and incubated at 37° for an additional 10 min before the reaction was terminated by the addition of ethyl acetate (2 mL) and internal standard (dihydro-CBD). After vortexing and centrifugation, the organic layer was transferred to another tube, and the aqueous layer re-extracted again with ethyl acetate. The combined organic layers were pooled, dried

under N₂, and chromatographed by reverse-phase HPLC as previously described [20] to determine THC metabolite formation. Control values (means \pm SD of microsomal preparations from 3 different animals) for 8 β -hydroxy-, 8 α -hydroxy-, and 8-keto-THC formation were 0.19 ± 0.09 , 2.90 ± 0.41 , and 0.12 ± 0.04 nmol/mg/min, respectively.

In Vivo Studies

Mice were treated with Tween 80 vehicle or THC analog (60 mg/kg) for 2 hr. Animals were killed by cervical dislocation, livers were removed, and microsomes were prepared [22]. Hepatic microsomes (0.2 mg protein/mL) were incubated with THC (130 μ M) and NADPH (1 mM) at 37° for 10 min before extraction with ethyl acetate (as described above) to determine THC metabolite formation.

RESULTS

THC-enyl and -ynyl analogs were preincubated with hepatic microsomes in order to determine their effect on subsequent THC metabolism. 8 β -Hydroxy- and 8-keto-

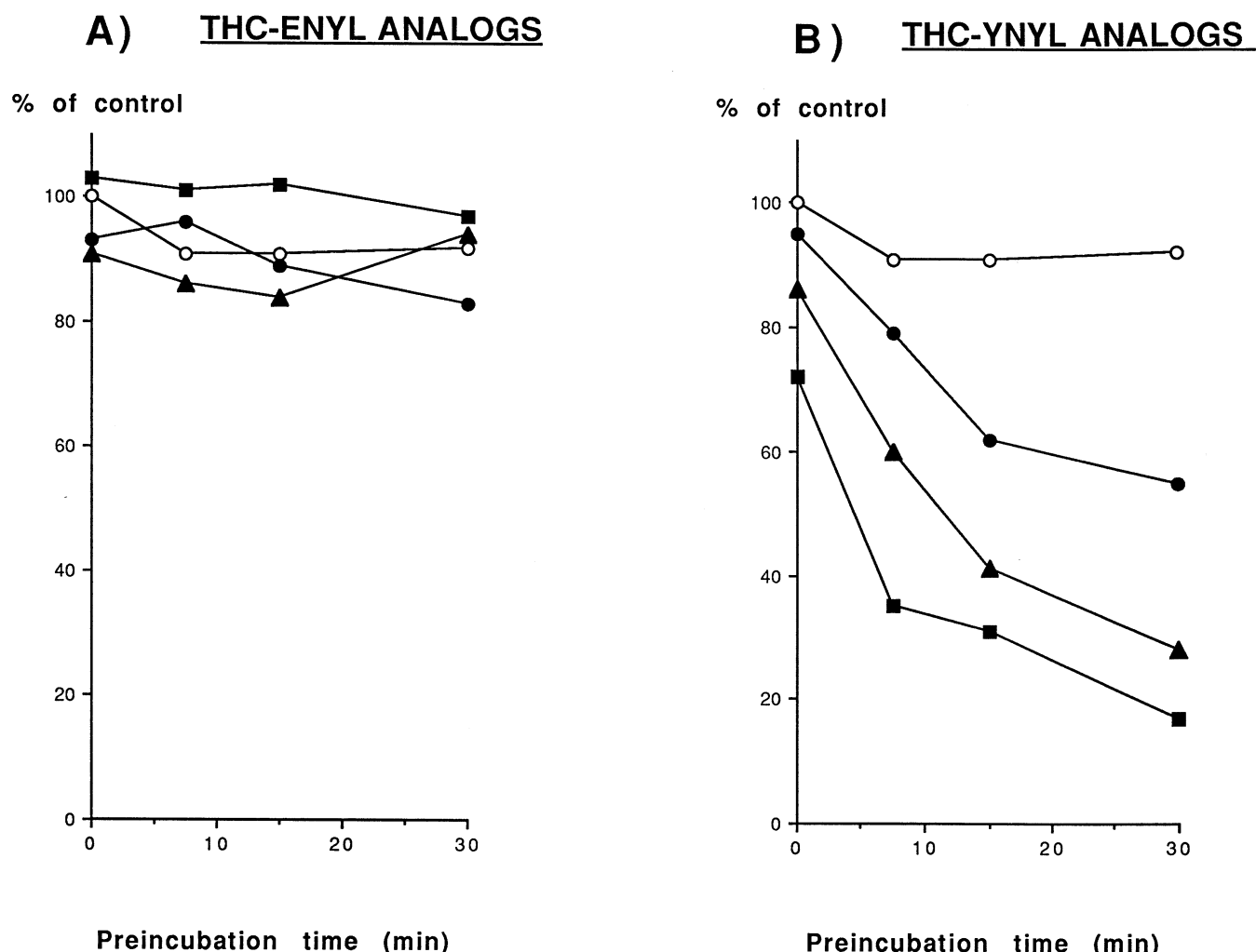


FIG. 2. Effects of THC analogs on P450 3A-mediated 8 β -hydroxy-THC formation. (A) THC-enyl analogs (130 μ M) were preincubated with hepatic microsomes (2 mg protein/mL) and NADPH (1 mM) at 37° for various times. Aliquots (0.1 mL) were diluted 10-fold with 0.1 M phosphate buffer, pH 7.4, containing THC (130 μ M) and NADPH (1 mM), and incubated at 37° for an additional 10 min before the reaction was terminated by the addition of ethyl acetate. 8 β -Hydroxy-THC formation was determined as described (see Materials and Methods). The effects of no inhibitor (open circles), 2-ene (solid circles), 3-ene (solid squares), or 4-ene (solid triangles) THC analogs on THC metabolite formation represent the average of two different experiments. Control (100%) 8 β -hydroxy-THC formation was 0.33 nmol/mg/min. (B) THC-ynyl analogs or CBD were preincubated with hepatic microsomes as described in panel A before 8 β -hydroxy-THC formation was determined. The effects of no inhibitor (open circles), 2-yne (solid circles), 4-yne (solid squares), THC analogs or CBD (solid triangles) on THC metabolite formation represent the average of two different experiments.

THC formation (catalyzed in mice by P450 3A11) and 8 α -hydroxy-THC formation (catalyzed by P450 2C29) were used as functional markers to assess their respective P450 inactivation.

THC-enyl analogs had little effect on P450 3A11 as determined by 8 β -hydroxy- (Fig. 2A) or 8-keto-THC formation (Fig. 3A). In contrast, THC-enyl analogs inactivated P450 2C29-mediated 8 α -hydroxy-THC formation in a time-dependent manner (Fig. 4A), with approximately 50% inactivation observed after a 30-min preincubation.

THC-ynyl analogs were less selective in their P450 inactivation but appeared to be more effective than their corresponding enyl analogs. THC-ynyl analogs inactivated P450 3A11 in a time-dependent manner (Figs. 2B and 3B) and could inactivate 40–80% of its activity after a 30-min

preincubation. The effect of THC-2-ynyl on 8-keto-THC formation could not be determined because of the co-elution of a presumed THC-2-ynyl metabolite with 8-keto-THC.

As observed with the THC-enyl analogs, the THC-ynyl analogs also inactivated P450 2C29 in a time-dependent manner (Fig. 4B) but were somewhat more effective, inactivating up to 80% of its activity after a 30-min preincubation. In fact, the THC-ynyl analogs were nearly as effective as CBD, a well-characterized inactivator of mouse P450s 3A11 and 2C29 [20, 23, 24].

Despite their ability to inactivate P450 *in vitro*, neither the THC-enyl nor the -ynyl analogs were very effective after *in vivo* administration (Fig. 5). In contrast, CBD was a very effective inactivator of P450s 3A11 and 2C29 after *in*

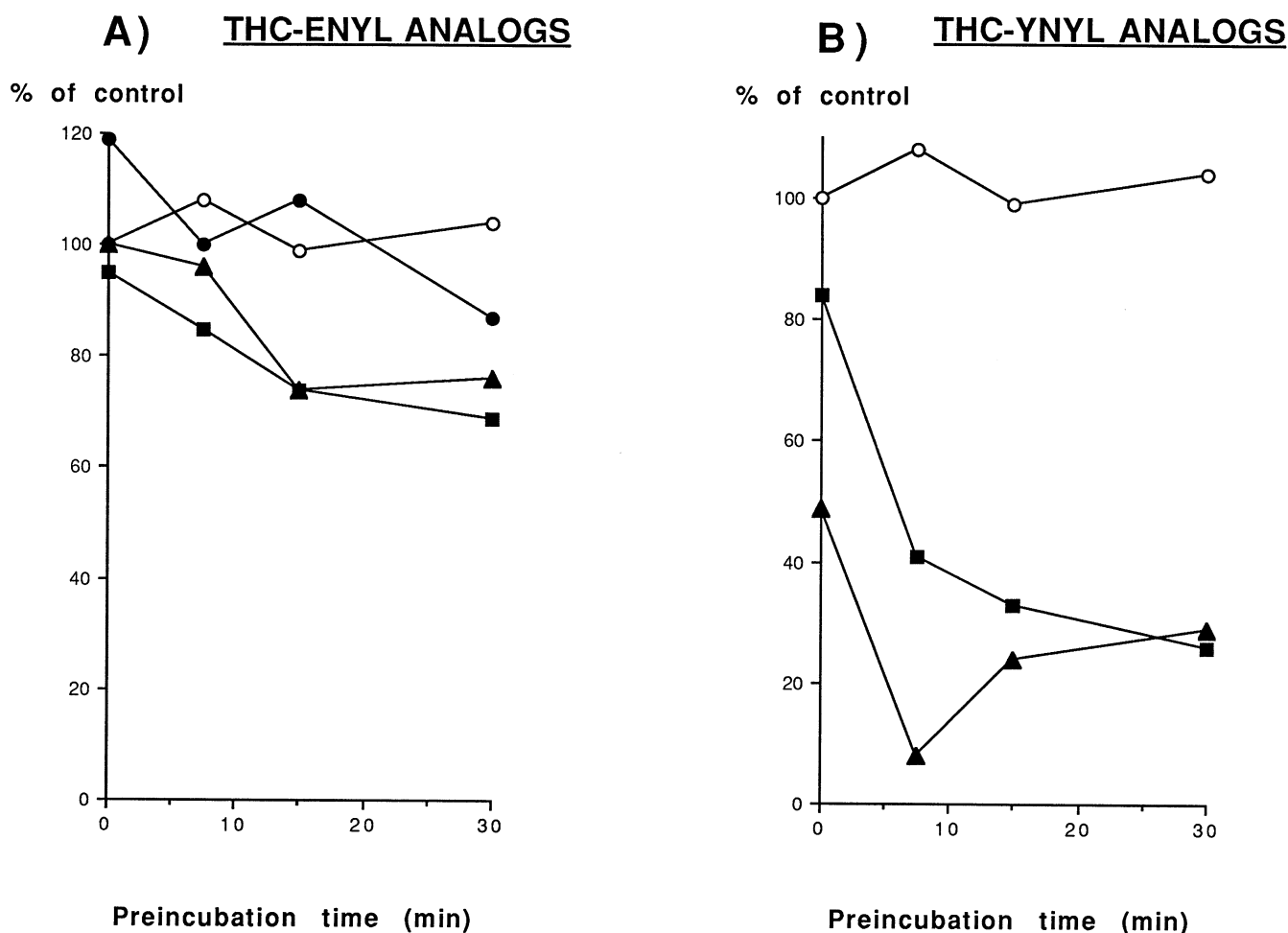


FIG. 3. Effects of THC analogs on P450 3A-mediated 8-keto-THC formation. (A) THC-enyl analogs (130 μ M) were preincubated with hepatic microsomes as described in Fig. 2A. 8-Keto-THC formation was determined as described (see Materials and Methods). Symbols used are identical to those in Fig. 2A. Control (100%) 8-keto-THC formation was 0.27 nmol/mg/min. Values represent the average of two experiments. (B) THC-ynyl analogs or CBD were preincubated with hepatic microsomes as described in panel A before 8-keto-THC formation was determined. Symbols used are identical to those in Fig. 2B. The effect of THC-2-ynyl on 8-keto-THC formation could not be determined because of the co-elution of a presumed THC-2-ynyl metabolite. Values represent the average of two experiments.

vivo administration. As reported previously [20, 23], despite the observed P450 3A11 inactivation by CBD treatment as evidenced by decreased 8-keto-THC formation and other P450 3A-catalyzed activities (testosterone 6 β -hydroxylase, erythromycin *N*-demethylase), 8 β -hydroxy-THC formation was paradoxically increased after CBD treatment.

DISCUSSION

There is much interest in developing specific P450 inactivators to treat a variety of diseases or influence the pharmacokinetics of therapeutic drugs [14, 25, 26]. We have characterized the inactivation of hepatic microsomal P450s after preincubation with several THC analogs containing double or triple bonds within their side-chain moiety to determine their selectivity for P450s 3A and 2C. Competitive inhibition by the analogs was minimized by dilution of microsomal incubates after preincubation with the inhibitors, and before the determination of THC

hydroxylase activity. In fact, competitive inhibition by the analogs (as determined by reduced activity at preincubation time = 0 min) was <20% of control activities, and therefore the observed time-dependent decreases in enzyme activity largely represent enzyme inactivation.

THC-enyl analogs could selectively inactivate P450 2C29 *in vitro*, although at a slower rate than CBD, a known P450 inactivator present in marijuana [24, 27]. In contrast to CBD, THC-enyl analogs failed to inactivate P450 3A11, indicating their relative selectivity for members of the P450 2C subfamily. In contrast to the selective P450 2C inactivation by the THC-enyl analogs, THC-ynyl analogs inactivated both P450s 3A11 and 2C29 *in vitro*, comparably to CBD. This is consistent with previous reports indicating that acetylenic compounds are more efficient P450 inactivators than olefins [13].

Neither THC-enyl nor -ynyl analogs were effective P450 inactivators *in vivo*. These analogs may possess poor bio-availability since a similar dissociation between their *in*

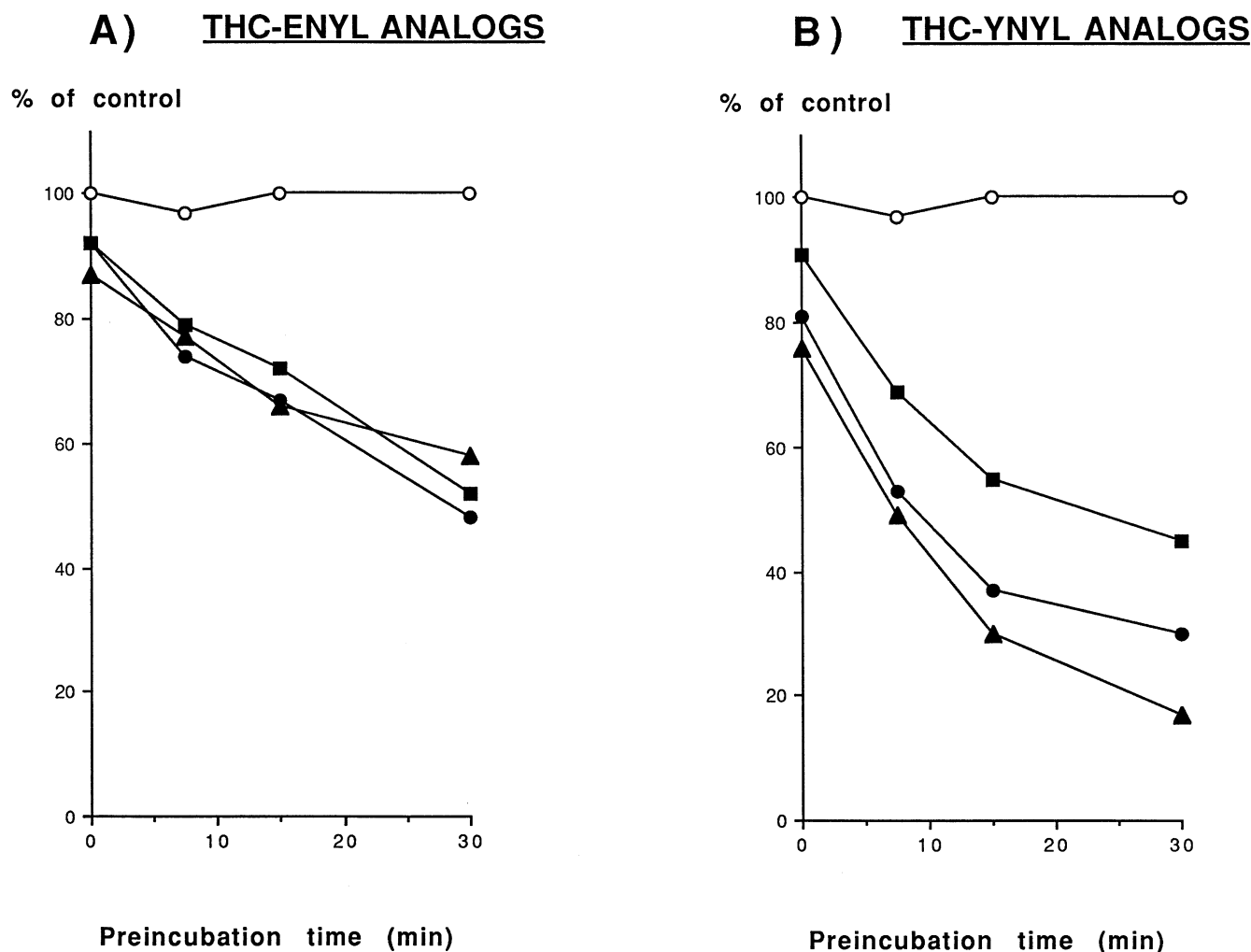


FIG. 4. Effects of THC analogs on P450 2C-mediated 8 α -hydroxy-THC formation. (A) THC-enyl analogs (130 μ M) were preincubated with hepatic microsomes as described in Fig. 2A. 8 α -Hydroxy-THC formation was determined as described (see Materials and Methods). Symbols used are identical to those in Fig. 2A. Control (100%) 8 α -hydroxy-THC formation was 3.38 nmol/mg/min. Values represent the average of two experiments. (B) THC-ynyl analogs or CBD were preincubated with hepatic microsomes as described in panel A before 8 α -hydroxy-THC formation was determined. Symbols used are identical to those in Fig. 2B. Values represent the average of two experiments.

vitro binding affinities to the CB1 receptor and their pharmacological potencies has been reported previously [5, 28]. However, it is also possible that they were actually accessible to the receptor but acted as antagonists rather than agonists [8].

Although P450 inactivation by compounds with terminal olefinic and acetylenic bonds has been well described and involves a reactive ketene intermediate, inactivation after oxidation at internal unsaturated positions is far less common [11–13]. P450_{sc} was inactivated by a pregnenolone analog containing an internal acetylenic group at the C₂₀ position presumably through an oxirene intermediate, although another analog containing an additional terminal acetylenic group was an even greater inactivator [14]. Mid-chain acetylenes were also shown to be inactivators of P450 2B4, whereas only terminal acetylenes inactivated P450s 4A or plant lauric acid ω -hydroxylases [15].

P450 inactivation with heme alkylation only occurs after

oxidative attack at terminal bonds, whereas oxidation at internal bonds results in P450 inactivation without any detectable heme adducts [12, 13]. Thus, it is conceivable that the P450 inactivation by the THC analogs used in this study resulted from protein alkylation rather than heme adduct formation.

Although several P450 3A-selective inhibitors/inactivators are known, few compounds selective for P450 2C inhibition have been reported. Sulfaphenazole is a selective inhibitor of human P450 2C9 [29, 30] and exerts its inhibition by a tight interaction between its aniline function and the P450 heme iron [31]. This interaction is selective for P450 2C9, and does not occur with human P450s 2C8, 2C18, or 2C19.

Human P450s 2C8, 2C9, 2C18, and 2C19 ring-hydroxylate THC at the 8- and 11-carbon positions at various rates [32, 33]. Although human liver microsomes support THC side-chain hydroxylation with metabolites identified at

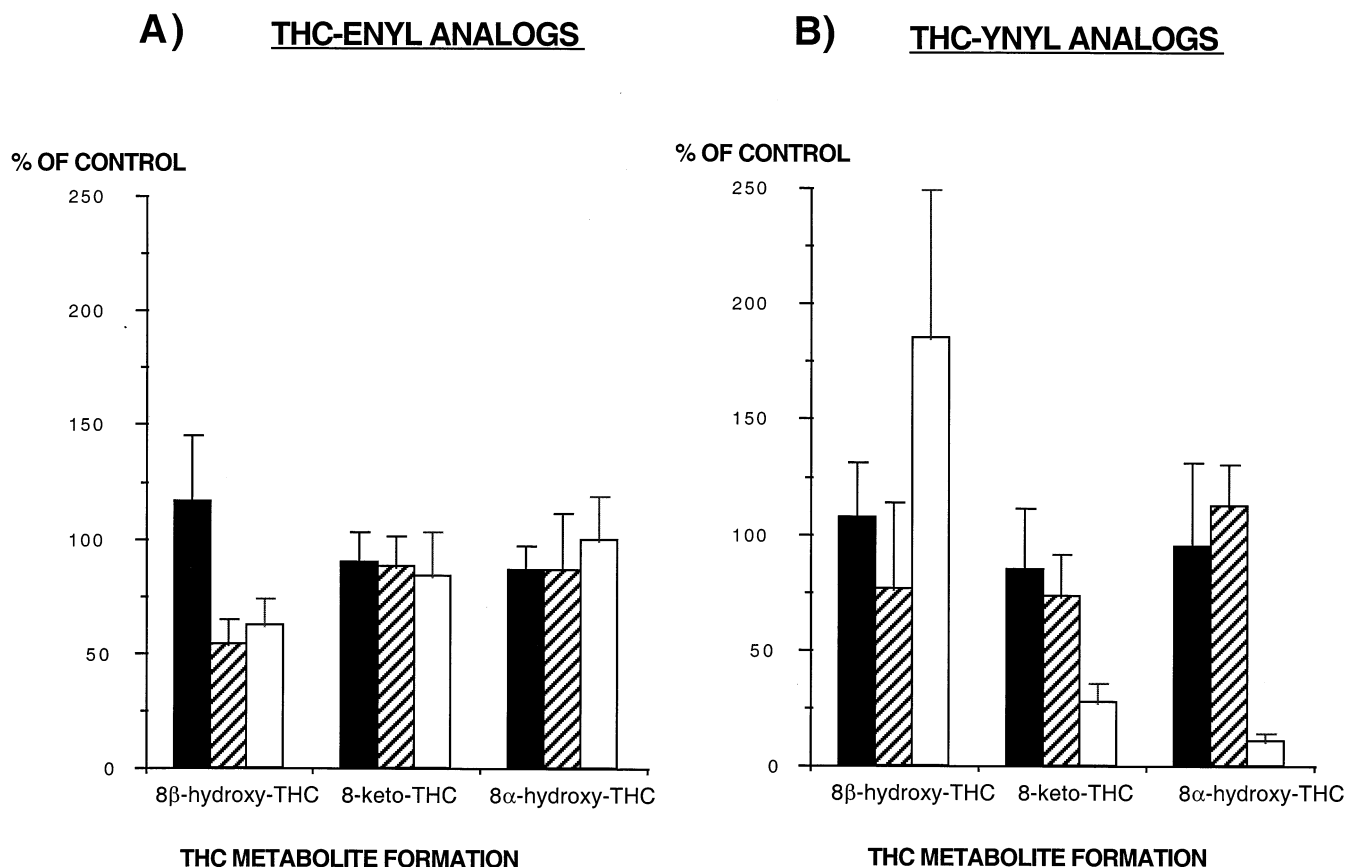


FIG. 5. *In vivo* effects of THC analogs on P450s 3A- and 2C-mediated THC metabolite formation. (A) Mice were treated with THC-enyl analogs (60 mg/kg for 2 hr) before hepatic microsomes were prepared and assayed for THC metabolite formation as described (see Materials and Methods). The effects of 2-ene (solid bars), 3-ene (striped bars), or 4-ene (open bars) THC analogs on THC metabolite formation represent the means \pm SD of microsomal preparations from 3 different animals. Control (100%) values for 8 β -hydroxy-, 8 α -hydroxy-, and 8-keto-THC formation were 0.19 ± 0.09 , 2.90 ± 0.41 , and 0.12 ± 0.04 nmol/mg/min, respectively. (B) Mice were treated with THC-ynyl analogs or CBD (60 mg/kg for 2 hr) before hepatic microsomes were prepared and assayed for THC metabolite formation as described (see Materials and Methods). The effects of 2-yne (solid bars), 4-yne (striped bars), THC analogs or CBD (open bars) on THC metabolite formation represent the means \pm SD of microsomal preparations from 3 different animals.

each carbon position of the side-chain [16, 17, 34, 35], the P450s mediating such THC side-chain hydroxylations have not been identified. Thus, the THC analogs with unsaturated side-chains used in this study may be useful in the development of specific inactivators of the various members of the human P450 2C subfamily or possibly other P450s that may oxidize these analogs at their unsaturated bonds. In addition, the possible toxicological consequences of P450 inactivation may need to be considered should these analogs become therapeutically useful.

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