



Detection of ER stress *in vivo* by Raman spectroscopy

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ABSTRACT

The endoplasmic reticulum (ER) is an organelle in which most membrane and secretory proteins are synthesized. If these proteins are not folded correctly, unfolded proteins accumulate in the ER lumen, causing a cellular situation known as ER stress. Recently, many studies on the relationship between ER stress and diseases have been reported. Thus, studies of ER stress *in vivo* should yield information that is useful in pathology. Model mice have been developed as a powerful tool to visualize ER stress *in vivo*, but this approach depends on transgenic technology. Here, we report on a method of detecting ER stress *in vivo* by Raman spectroscopy. Our experiments revealed that two specific Raman bands were reduced in both cultured cells and animal tissues in an ER stress dependent manner. This suggests that Raman spectroscopy could be a useful tool to detect ER stress *in vivo* without transgenic technology.

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1. Introduction

The endoplasmic reticulum (ER) is an organelle whose main function is to synthesize secretory and membrane proteins. These proteins are initially located in the ER as unfolded and unmodified nascent polypeptides and are then correctly folded, assembled and modified by numerous molecular chaperones and catalysts that are resident in the ER lumen [1,2]. However, in some cases, the proteins accumulate as unfolded and misfolded proteins in the ER lumen. This cellular situation is known to cause ER stress, which perturbs ER functions [3].

There have been many studies on the relationship between ER stress and diseases [4]. For example, some cancer studies have shown that ER stress is caused during tumor growth [5,6] and that cellular responses to ER stress contribute to tumor growth [7,8]. Some diabetes studies have shown that ER stress is involved in apoptotic cell death of pancreatic β cells [9] and that cellular

responses to ER stress contribute to insulin biosynthesis [10,11]. Meanwhile, in some studies of neurodegenerative diseases, ER stress was closely associated with the neuronal cell death caused by Alzheimer's disease [12], Parkinson's disease [13], and polyglutamine diseases [14]. Therefore, studies of ER stress *in vivo* should yield information that is useful in pathology.

In order to detect ER stress *in vivo*, Iwawaki et al. previously developed model mice [15,16]. These mice can emit fluorescent or luminescent signals depending on the activity of molecules that respond to ER stress, and thus facilitate the detection of ER stress: ER stress can be detected as fluorescent or luminescent signals without lysis of cells and tissues. In fact, they reported the ER stress condition of the pancreas, skeletal muscle, salivary glands, and placenta by *in vivo* imaging with living ERAI (ER stress activated indicator) mice [15–17]. However, a disadvantage of the ERAI system is that it depends on transgenic technology; ER stress cannot be detected without introducing artificially-designed reporter genes into animals or cells. Therefore, the ERAI system cannot be used for detecting ER stress in the human body.

Raman measurements with biological samples have been studied intensively in recent years, such as a cultured human lung cancer single cell [18], human stomach cancer tissues obtained during biopsy [19], *in vivo* rat upper digestive tract under endoscopic surveillance [20], and *in vivo* rat cerebral neocortex undergoing

Abbreviations: ER, endoplasmic reticulum; ERAI, ER stress activated indicator.

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craniotomy [21]. Since these studies by Raman spectroscopy are based on measurements of a specific scattering of monochromatic light that corresponds to the state of an endogenous biological molecule, Raman measurements can be used to analyze living cells and animals without requiring a staining process or introducing any exogenous reporter gene. Here, we examine the possibility of detecting ER stress in living cells and animals by Raman spectroscopy as a pilot study in order to establish methods without gene modification in the near future.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Cell culture, treatment and preparations

HeLa cells were cultured in Dulbecco's modified Eagle's medium (DMEM) (4.5 g/l glucose) supplemented with 100 U/ml penicillin, 100 µg/ml streptomycin, and 10% fetal bovine serum at 37 °C in 5% CO₂. For Raman measurement, cells were trypsinized and washed once with PBS to remove Phenol-Red, and suspended in DMEM not containing Phenol-Red and seeded on 35-mm fused-silica glass bottom dishes. After 24 h, cells were treated with 5 µg/ml tunicamycin, 800 nM thapsigargin, or 100 µg/ml etoposide, or cultured at 42 °C for the indicated time periods. After treatment, cells were rinsed twice with Hanks' balanced salt solution not containing Phenol-Red, and then subjected to Raman measurement.

2.2. Animals

Eight-week-old female C57BL/6 mice were used in this study. We intraperitoneally injected these mice with tunicamycin (500 ng/g body weight) or the same volume of saline as a control. At 18 h after drug treatment, we fixed the distal extremities of the mice under anesthesia with Nembutal (Dainippon Sumitomo Pharma), conducted an abdominal median incision, and then performed Raman measurement of tissues in a dark room. During measurement, anesthetic depth was maintained. Three mice were used for each treatment. Experimental protocols involving animals were approved by the Animal Studies Committees at RIKEN.

2.3. Raman measurement of cultured cells and animal tissues

Raman spectra for cultured cells were obtained using the Nano-finder (Tokyo Instruments) equipped with a 600 lines/mm holographic grating blazed at 750 nm. An excitation laser of 632.8 nm with power of 50 mW was focused on a single cell via a 60 X Water-immersion objective lens with numerical aperture (NA) of 1.2. Raman scattering light from the sample was collected using the same objective lens for the visible region and a 60 s exposure time. The spectral resolution was less than 2 cm⁻¹, and the diameter of the laser spot at the focal point was less than 1 µm. The number of Raman spectra randomly taken in each cell-culture dish was described in figure legends. Background spectra were obtained by focusing on a vacant region on each dish where no cell existed. A reference spectrum was obtained without laser irradiation by placing a white light source at the focal point.

Raman spectra for animal tissues were obtained using the experimental system of a micro Raman probe (Machida Endoscope) [22,23]. The micro Raman probe had a nose-mounted sapphire ball lens of 0.5 mm in diameter (Edmund Optics; NT46-117) [24] and narrow optical fiber of 0.6 mm in diameter (Machida Endoscope). The excitation light from a 785-nm diode laser (EnWave Optronics; FSL-785-400MM) with a BP filter (Semrock, Rochester; LL01-785-12.5) was focused onto the micro Raman probe excitation fiber by a lens (*f* = 20 mm). The laser was used

with power of 80 mW. Raman scattering light from animal tissues were collected for 300 s. At the detection end, the collection fibers were arrayed linearly to match the input slit of a spectrometer (Kaiser Optical Systems; HoloSpec F/1.8). The light emerging from the fibers was collimated with a lens (*f* = 15 mm, diameter = 9 mm). The light passing through an LP filter (Semrock, Rochester; LP01-785RS-25) was then focused onto the slit of the spectrometer. The light dispersed by the transmission grating was detected with a CCD detector (Andor Technology; DU401A-BR-DD) with a resolution of 8 cm⁻¹ using a 0.1-mm slit. Background spectra were obtained with an aluminum foil-wrapped micro Raman probe, but the end of the probe was not in contact with the foil. A reference spectrum was obtained without laser irradiation by placing a white light source at the focal point.

2.4. Data analysis and statistics

The pure spectrum of each sample, $Y_{\text{pure}}(\nu)$, was calculated as $\{Y_{\text{raw}}(\nu) - Y_{\text{back}}(\nu)\}/Y_{\text{ref}}(\nu)$, where $Y_{\text{raw}}(\nu)$ is a raw Raman spectrum, $Y_{\text{back}}(\nu)$ is a background spectrum and $Y_{\text{ref}}(\nu)$ is a reference spectrum. The baseline-corrected Raman spectrum of each sample was then calculated as $\{Y_{\text{pure}}(\nu) - Y_{\text{base}}(\nu)\}$, in which $Y_{\text{base}}(\nu)$ is a fitted polynomial curve constructed as follows. (i) For a spectrum truncated between the minimum Raman shift position ν_{min} and the maximum position ν_{max} , the degree of the function was selected to fit the baseline using a polynomial function. (ii) Using the least squares method, the polynomial function $Y_{\text{base}}(\nu)$ was first fitted to the pure Raman spectrum $Y_{\text{pure}}(\nu)$. (iii) The pure Raman spectrum $Y_{\text{pure}}(\nu)$ was divided into upper and lower parts, relative to the fitted baseline $Y_{\text{base}}(\nu)$. (iv) The number of data points on the upper side of $Y_{\text{pure}}(\nu)$ was designated NA, and the number in the lower part of $Y_{\text{pure}}(\nu)$ was designated NB. If $NA < NB$, the upper part of $Y_{\text{pure}}(\nu)$ was removed from the whole of $Y_{\text{pure}}(\nu)$, and the pure Raman spectrum $Y_{\text{pure}}(\nu)$ was replaced with the lower part of the pure spectrum. Then, procedure (ii) was repeated. When $NA \geq NB$, the baseline was considered the best fit and optimal. After correction for baseline, the intensity of Raman spectrum of each sample was normalized to that of Raman band of 1004 cm⁻¹. Typically, a sharply-peaked Raman band near 1004 cm⁻¹ indicated phenylalanine and was used as the internal standard. The normalized spectrum was used for statistical analysis.

3. Results

First, we measured Raman spectra of cultured cells under the ER stress condition or non-ER stress condition to examine whether ER stress has specific effects on Raman spectra detected from cultured cells. These measurements of cultured cells were performed in the ER-rich region near, but not including, the nucleus, to collect signals from ER as much as possible (Supplementary Fig. S1). In this experiment, we used tunicamycin (inhibitor of N-linked glycosylation) and thapsigargin (releaser of Ca²⁺ from the ER) as an ER stressor, and etoposide (inducer of DNA damage) and culturing cells at 42 °C (heat shock stress) as a non-ER stressor. The effect of tunicamycin and thapsigargin was confirmed by gene induction of BiP, while that of heat shock and etoposide was confirmed by gene induction of HSP70 and chromatin condensation, respectively (Supplementary Fig. S2). Fig. 1A shows the average of Raman spectra of cells under the ER stress condition or non-ER stress condition. We could detect the peaks derived from protein associated with the Raman fingerprint region (Phe: 1004 cm⁻¹, amide III: 1250–1340 cm⁻¹, CH₂: 1440–1460 cm⁻¹, amide I: 1645–1655 cm⁻¹), but not nucleic acid (G: 1320 cm⁻¹, A, G: 1342 cm⁻¹, A, G, T: 1373 cm⁻¹, A, G: 1578 cm⁻¹) [25–28], in a similar manner from all the

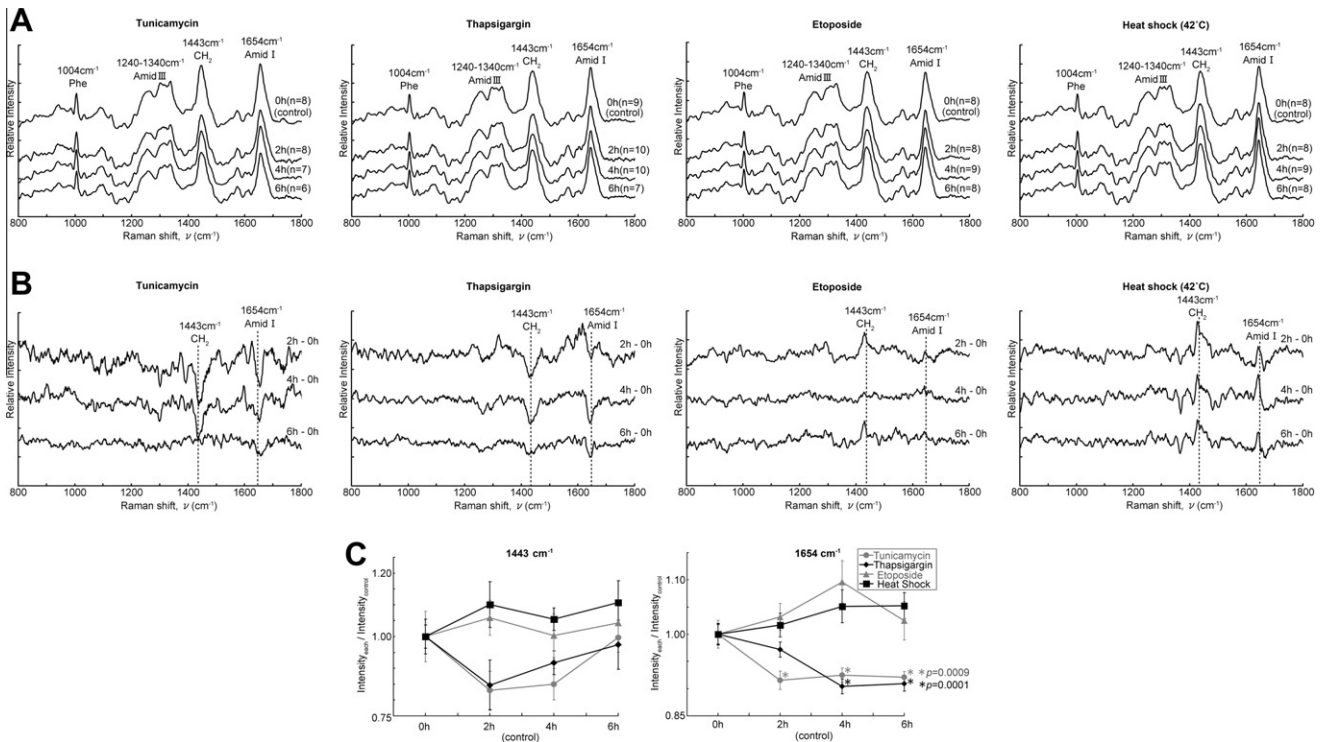


Fig. 1. An ER stress specific decrease of Raman signals in cultured cells. (A) Average Raman spectra under stress conditions. Each spectrum is derived from cells treated with tunicamycin, thapsigargin, heat (42 °C) shock, or etoposide for the indicated period. Each spectrum was normalized to its band of 1004 cm^{-1} . The number of the spectra of control, 2 h, 4 h and 6 h in each treatment are indicated. (B) Subtracted average Raman spectra of cultured cells under stress conditions. Each spectrum of control cells was subtracted from each spectrum of cells exposed to stress indicated for 2 h, 4 h, or 6 h. Each spectrum of control cells and stress-treated cells used in this analysis is derived from B. (C) Ratio of Raman bands of 1443 cm^{-1} and 1654 cm^{-1} . The plotted data are derived from B. The plots and error bars denote mean \pm s.e.m. Statistical significance of differences between control and ER stress was determined by Tukey's method.

data in Fig. 1A. This result indicates that we could collect data reproducibly. Fig. 1B shows subtracted Raman spectra between the stress and normal conditions to focus on the effects of cellular stress on Raman spectra. From this analysis, a decrease of Raman signals on 1443 cm^{-1} and 1654 cm^{-1} was observed in the cells treated with ER stressor (tunicamycin and thapsigargin), but not in those treated with non-ER stressor (etoposide and 42 °C). Interestingly, Raman signals on 1443 cm^{-1} of cells treated with ER stressors for 6 h had

the same level as those of cells under the normal condition, but we cannot explain the reason. Fig. 2C presents Raman signals on 1443 and 1654 cm^{-1} for ease of understanding.

Next, we measured Raman spectra in tissues and organs of a living animal under the ER stress condition or normal condition to examine whether the decrease of specific Raman signals can be observed even in tissues and organs of an animal similar to cultured cells. Raman spectra were measured in the rectus abdominis

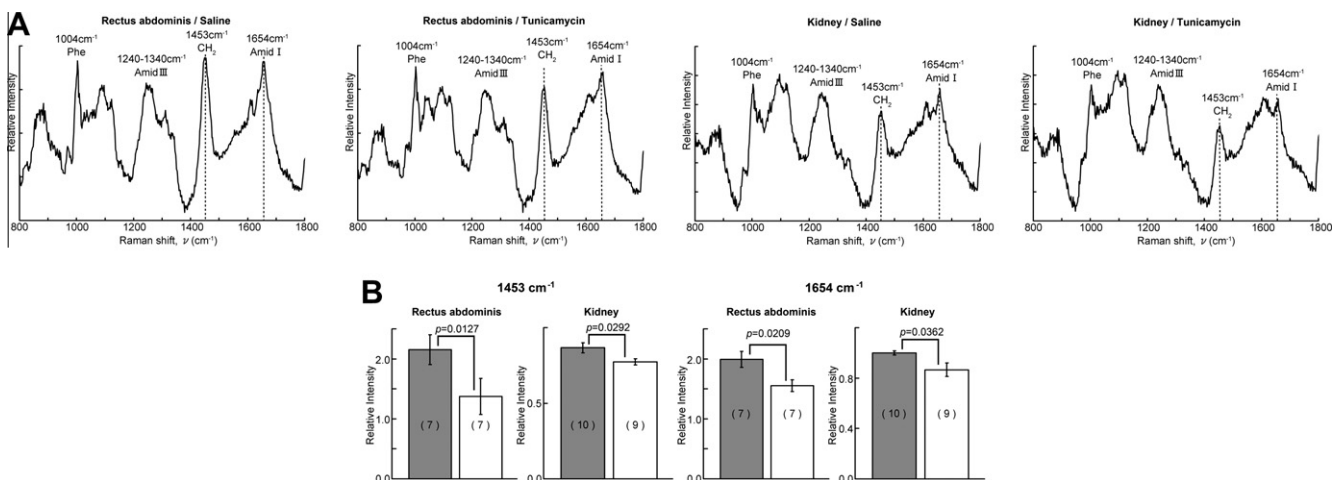


Fig. 2. An ER stress specific decrease of Raman signals in animal tissues. (A) Average Raman spectra of the rectus abdominis and the kidney under the normal (saline) or ER stress condition (tunicamycin). Each spectrum was normalized to its band of 1004 cm^{-1} . The number of the spectra of rectus abdominis/saline, rectus abdominis/tunicamycin, kidney/saline and kidney/tunicamycin are 7, 7, 10 and 9, respectively. (B) Average Raman bands of 1453 and 1654 cm^{-1} of the rectus abdominis and the kidney under the normal (gray column) or ER stress condition (white column). Each histogram and error bar denotes mean \pm s.e.m. The number of measurements for each group is indicated in parentheses in each column. Statistical significance of differences was determined by two-tailed Welch's *t*-test or Student's *t*-test.

and the kidney of 8-week-old female mice. Tunicamycin (as an ER stressor) or saline (as a control) was administered by intraperitoneal injection 18 h before measurement of Raman spectra.

Fig. 2A shows the average of Raman spectra of the rectus abdominis and the kidney under the ER stress condition or normal condition. All data were collected reproducibly. Fig. 2B presents Raman signals on 1453 and 1654 cm^{-1} to compare each signal level between under the ER stress condition and normal condition. As expected, the data revealed a decrease of Raman signals on 1453 and 1654 cm^{-1} in both the rectus abdominis and the kidney under the ER stress condition similar to cultured cells.

4. Discussion

In this study, our purpose was to examine the possibility of detecting ER stress in living cells and animals by Raman spectroscopy. Analysis by Raman spectroscopy revealed that Raman signals on 1443/1453 and 1654 cm^{-1} were decreased in an ER stress dependent manner both in living cells and in tissues of living animals (Figs. 1A and 2B). This result indicates the possibility that ER stress-induced cellular effects are detected as changes of specific Raman spectra.

Why were Raman signals on 1443/1453 and 1654 cm^{-1} decreased in cells and tissues under the ER stress condition? We do not have a clear answer to this question yet. It is believed that ER stress is caused by the accumulation of unfolded or misfolded proteins in the ER. It is also known that eukaryotic cells initiate adaptive responses during ER stress [3]. Regarding the molecular mechanism of the response to ER stress in mammalian cells, ATF6, IRE1, and PERK function as sensors for ER stress and are activated via processing or *trans*-autophosphorylation [29]. The phosphorylated IRE1 induces the unconventional splicing of XBP1 mRNA, which is then translated into a functional protein [30,31]. The phosphorylated PERK induces the phosphorylation of eIF2 α and the translational activation of ATF4 [32]. Under the ER stress condition, ATF6 is cleaved by Sites-1 and 2 proteases, and its cytoplasmic domain is translocated to the nucleus [33,34]. All of XBP1, ATF4, and cleaved ATF6 work as transcription factors to increase molecular chaperones and catalysts that are resident in the ER [35]. Considering these findings, it is possible that the decrease of Raman signals on 1443/1453 and 1654 cm^{-1} might reflect any conformational change of ER proteins and/or any qualitative or quantitative change of molecules that respond to ER stress. On the other hand, it is also possible that any structural change of the ER itself might be reflected in Raman signals on 1443/1453 and 1654 cm^{-1} , because the ER expands during ER stress [36,37].

A method for detecting ER stress in living animals without transgenic technology would be very useful, because it could be used to detect ER stress in humans. As described in the Introduction, there have been many studies on the relationship between ER stress and diseases, and so monitoring ER stress may be a useful way of diagnosing those diseases. For such diagnosis, low invasiveness is a key factor. In this regard, Raman spectroscopy has several advantages: very fine probes are available for Raman spectroscopy (the probe used in this study was 0.6 mm in diameter) and harmless near-infrared light or visible light, not harmful ultraviolet light, can be used as the irradiating laser light. Raman spectroscopy may also be beneficial for detecting other stresses such as hypoxic stress [38–45] and oxidative stress [46], because these are reported to be associated with various diseases similar to ER stress. On the other hand, this study identified one problem in Raman spectroscopy. When we tried to measure the Raman spectra of not only the rectus abdominis and kidney but also the liver, pancreas, and spleen, the change of Raman signals on 1443/1453 and 1654 cm^{-1} could not be detected in the liver, pancreas, or spleen because of high background signals. To overcome this problem, it

is necessary to improve the conditions of measuring Raman spectra in each organ.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at doi:10.1016/j.bbrc.2010.12.112.

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