

Review

Leukotrienes: Mediators that have been typecast as villains

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Received 8 May 2007; received after revision 5 June 2007; accepted 26 June 2007

Online First 19 July 2007

Abstract. As befalls many mediators that act upon the human stage, leukotrienes have become identified with their most powerful roles as villains of the immune system. They are well known for their leading roles in allergic diseases, including asthma. They also have gained recognition for their dramatic role as promoters of inflammation. As new roles for these lipid messengers are sought, it is becoming apparent that the leukotrienes have been typecast as bad guys of the immune system. As examples, their more recent roles have been in atherosclerosis, pulmonary fibrosis

and cancer. However, upon further evaluation, we can begin to see their versatility. Thus, leukotrienes stimulate innate immunity against pathogens. In addition, they promote the expression of mediators, receptors and other molecules that are important for immune defense. In these lesser known roles, they lead the fight against bacterial, fungal and viral infection. This review is intended to shed light on the leukotrienes, where they come from and what we really know about them.

Keywords. Arachidonic acid, 5-lipoxygenase, bronchoconstriction, inflammation, phagocytosis, gene expression, atherosclerosis.

Introduction

Leukotrienes (LTs) are chemical messengers that signal from cells of the immune system to essentially all other types of cells in the surrounding tissue. They are primarily produced by mature, differentiated leukocytes of either the granulocytic or mononuclear lineage, in part because these are the predominant cells that express the key proteins that are required for LT synthesis. LTs are known to have very powerful effects over short distances within the body.

Current research on LTs includes how they are synthesized and secreted, what receptors they activate on target cells and the second signals activated upon

receptor ligation, the cellular responses to activation by LTs, and the consequences in terms of health and pathophysiology. This review presents features of our current knowledge regarding LTs and also discusses some of the emerging concepts that lead to excitement in the field of LT study.

Best-known roles for LTs

LTs are the immediate products of the 5-lipoxygenase (5-LO) pathway, so-called because the enzyme 5-LO initiates their synthesis, as described below. This pathway generates several distinct species of lipid mediators. However, the best-known LTs are LTB₄, LTC₄, LTD₄ and LTE₄. The last three of these have similar effects and are commonly referred to as

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cysteinyl LTs (cysLTs), as they have a cysteine residue in common.

As noted above, the LTs are made primarily by mature leukocytes, with the types of products depending on the cell type. Thus, human neutrophils, dendritic cells and B lymphocytes produce primarily LTB_4 , human eosinophils secrete LTC_4 , human mast cells make more LTC_4 than LTB_4 , and human monocytes and macrophages synthesize more LTB_4 than LTC_4 . Surprisingly, these patterns do not necessarily persist across animal species. For example, eosinophils from guinea pigs make abundant LTB_4 [1] and mouse macrophages make much more LTC_4 than LTB_4 [2]. In general, LTs are secreted from leukocytes and are analogous to hormones that act locally. As a result, they are said to have “paracrine” actions when their effects are on neighboring cells. LTs also have “autocrine” actions, as they affect the source cell itself. They initiate their effects by activating highly selective G protein-coupled receptors. Two such receptors have been described for LTB_4 : BLT_1 and BLT_2 . BLT_1 is a high-affinity receptor for LTB_4 , responding optimally at concentrations of 1–100 nM [3]. In transfected cells overexpressing BLT_1 , LTB_4 addition can activate Gi proteins and suppress cAMP signaling [3] or activate $\text{G}\alpha$ proteins, activating phospholipase C [4]. BLT_2 responds to LTB_4 at concentrations greater than 10 nM, with maximal effect at 0.1–1.0 μM LTB_4 [5]. In addition to these two cell surface receptors, LTB_4 can bind $\text{PPAR}\alpha$ *in vitro* [6] and activate it in cells [7]. As for LTB_4 , two G protein-coupled receptors have been identified for the cysLTs and have been named the CysLT_1 and CysLT_2 . The CysLT_1 receptor binds LTD_4 with high affinity (1–10 nM) and binds LTC_4 and LTE_4 with progressively lower affinities, whereas the CysLT_2 receptor binds LTC_4 and LTD_4 with equal affinity ($K_d \sim 10$ nM). In transfected cells overexpressing either CysLT_1 or the CysLT_2 receptor, ligand addition initiates calcium flux through PTX-resistant Gq proteins [8, 9]. More recently, the orphan receptor GPR17 has been shown to be activated by CysLTs as well as uracil nucleotides [10]; in cells overexpressing GPR17 , but not CysLT_1 or CysLT_2 , either LTC_4 or LTD_4 increased calcium influx and inhibited adenylyl cyclase. Activation of this receptor, as well as resulting brain injury in a rat focal ischemia model, were blocked by receptor blockers, suggesting roles for CysLTs and GPR17 in ischemic injury [10].

LTB_4 is best known for its role in initiating the inflammatory response. Produced by leukocytes (*e.g.*, macrophages) residing in the tissue in response to stimuli like infection or stress, LTB_4 potently promotes the adherence to endothelium [11], chemotaxis [12], and activation of neutrophils and other leukocytes [13, 14]. In this way, LTB_4 drives the recruitment

of leukocytes from the bloodstream into tissues. Concomitant activation of the recruited leukocytes by LTB_4 triggers many important functions, including additional synthesis of LTB_4 by the recruited cells. One result is the dramatic increase in tissue cellularity, a hallmark of inflammation.

Because of its potent pro-inflammatory actions, LTB_4 has been considered to contribute to many different diseases that have inflammation as components. Thus, LTB_4 was long ago shown to be overproduced in ulcerative colitis or Crohn’s disease [15, 16], inflammatory bowel disease [17], collagen-induced arthritis [18], rheumatoid arthritis [19], psoriasis [20] and cystic fibrosis [21]. While LTB_4 appears to be abundantly produced in these diseases, interest in understanding its role or the therapeutic benefits of blocking its synthesis or action has waned in recent years.

The cysLTs, LTC_4 , LTD_4 and LTE_4 , are best known for their potent bronchoconstricting effects, resulting from the contraction of airway smooth muscle [22]. Through this effect, cysLTs cause the airway constriction that is central to some forms of asthma. CysLTs also induce mucus secretion by bronchial mucosa [23], which is also a feature of asthma. In addition, cysLTs can also promote the constriction of both venous and arterial vascular smooth muscle [24, 25], playing a role in regulating vasoconstriction. CysLTs also directly affect endothelial cells to produce vascular leak of plasma into tissues [26, 27], resulting in edema that is characteristic of skin allergic reactions, allergic asthma and allergic rhinitis. Finally, cysLTs can attract and activate some leukocytes, especially eosinophils and monocytes, and in this way contribute to inflammation.

Many of the pathological effects of LTs are associated with their over-production. Thus, the difference between asthmatic individuals and non-asthmatics may be as simple as how much LTs are produced at a given time. For example, most non-asthmatics are familiar with a noticeable constriction of the airway following an extended period of intense exercise or after entering a smoke-filled room. This normal airway constriction may be compared with the much stronger response that can be incapacitating and perhaps life-threatening in an asthmatic. Because of the significance of LT over-production in disease, there remains much interest in understanding the regulation of LT synthesis.

LT synthesis: The 5-LO pathway

LTs, as well as other eicosanoids, can be produced rapidly from substrate, arachidonic acid (AA), that is stored in membrane phospholipids. This distinguishes

them from pre-formed mediators, like histamine or myeloperoxidase, which are retained in granules for immediate release upon cell stimulation, and cytokines, which typically require gene transcription and mRNA translation for production. This difference in method of production is a central reason to focus on the LT synthetic pathway, as opposed to, *e.g.*, degranulation or gene regulation, as a key point of regulation.

LT synthesis, of course, depends on AA availability. AA is an ω -6 polyunsaturated (20:4) fatty acid. AA derived from the diet is rapidly incorporated into the membranes of all cells in the body. The bulky size of this fatty acid may be one reason it is found predominantly in the sn-2 position of membrane phospholipids. Interestingly, upon arrival at the cell, AA is moved first to the nucleus and acylated into membranes of the nuclear envelope [28, 29]. Over several hours, with membrane remodeling, AA becomes dispersed throughout all the membranes of the cell. In the healthy individual, therefore, there exists a large pool of AA in the vast membrane system of all the cells of the body.

The release of stored AA is mediated by phospholipases (PLA), primarily by PLA₂ enzymes, which release fatty acids from the sn-2 phospholipid position. There are many PLA₂ isoforms with different properties and cell distributions that can release AA. The type IV PLA₂s, also known as cytosolic PLA₂ (cPLA₂s), play a major role in releasing AA for LT production [30]. Their activity is augmented by phosphorylation [31–33] and can be altered by changes in expression [34–37]. The low molecular weight PLA₂s, also known as secretory PLA₂s (sPLA₂s), can also be a primary source of AA [38]. They may be regulated by rate of secretion [39] or synthesis [39, 40].

Importantly, these PLA₂s can act in cells that lack the other enzymes that are necessary for LT synthesis. It is clear that AA released from these neighboring cells can be an important source of substrate for LT production [41]. Thus, AA that is stored in non-leukocytes (*e.g.*, epithelial cells) can be used in a transcellular fashion by leukocytes to produce LTs.

Free AA, derived from either internal stores or from neighboring cells, is first modified by the enzyme 5-lipoxygenase (5-LO), with the assistance of the 5-LO-activating protein FLAP (Fig. 1). 5-LO catalyzes two reactions, the insertion of molecular oxygen into AA to form 5-hydroperoxyeicosatetraenoic acid (5-HpETE) as well as its subsequent dehydration to LTA₄ [42, 43]. The intermediate 5-HpETE is often made in significant amounts. 5-HpETE is rapidly modified to 5-hydroxyeicosatetraenoic acid (5-HETE) by peroxidases, and 5-HETE can be further

metabolized to 5-oxo-eicosatetraenoic acid (5-oxo-ETE) by 5-hydroxyeicosanoid dehydrogenase (5-HEDH). The end product of 5-LO action, LTA₄, can be either hydrolyzed by the enzyme LTA₄ hydrolase to give LTB₄ or conjugated with glutathione by the enzyme LTC₄ synthase to produce LTC₄. LTC₄ may be further metabolized to LTD₄ by the removal of the glutamate residue, which is mediated by peptidases including γ -glutamyl transferase. LTE₄ is produced from LTD₄ by the removal of glycine by peptidases. An important feature of the 5-LO pathway to LT synthesis is its activation. The 5-LO enzyme has a resting and activated state, so that there is no LT synthesis in normal leukocytes without stimulation. Many different factors can stimulate the cells and activate 5-LO, leading to LT synthesis. More importantly, different cues can lead to changes in the 5-LO pathway in the “resting” leukocytes, dramatically changing the amounts of LTs produced when 5-LO becomes activated (reviewed in [44, 45]). Also, there appear to be diseases where the 5-LO pathway is constitutively activated and LTs are constantly produced, as in aspirin-sensitive asthma [46] and in pulmonary fibrosis [47].

Additional roles for LTs as villains

Repeatedly over the last decade, LTs have easily been cast into roles as bad guys. A series of studies have given central roles to LTs in that most evil of diseases, cancer. A short list of several hundred of these studies includes cancers of the lung [48, 49], pancreas [50], bladder [51], prostate [52], kidney [53], esophagus [54], and colorectal region [55]. It remains to be seen whether any of these roles will be viewed as significant.

The development of LT-deficient mice, produced by disruption of the 5-LO gene to generate 5-LO^{-/-} mice, was achieved by two groups (by Funk and colleagues [56] and by Koller and colleagues [57]) independently in 1994. Studies using these mice, lacking 5-LO activity, again suggested deleterious roles for LTs. The 5-LO^{-/-} mice provided evidence that LTs contributed to inflammatory diseases, including zymosan-induced peritonitis [58], collagen- and autoantibody-induced arthritis [59, 60], pulmonary inflammation induced by IL-13 [61], and cerulein-induced pancreatitis [62]. Additionally, the 5-LO-deficient mice indicated that LTs were involved in the development of hypoxia-induced chronic pulmonary hypertension [63], airway hyperresponsiveness [64], lupus [65], allograft rejection [66], bleomycin-induced pulmonary fibrosis [67], and ischemia-reperfusion injuries [68, 69].

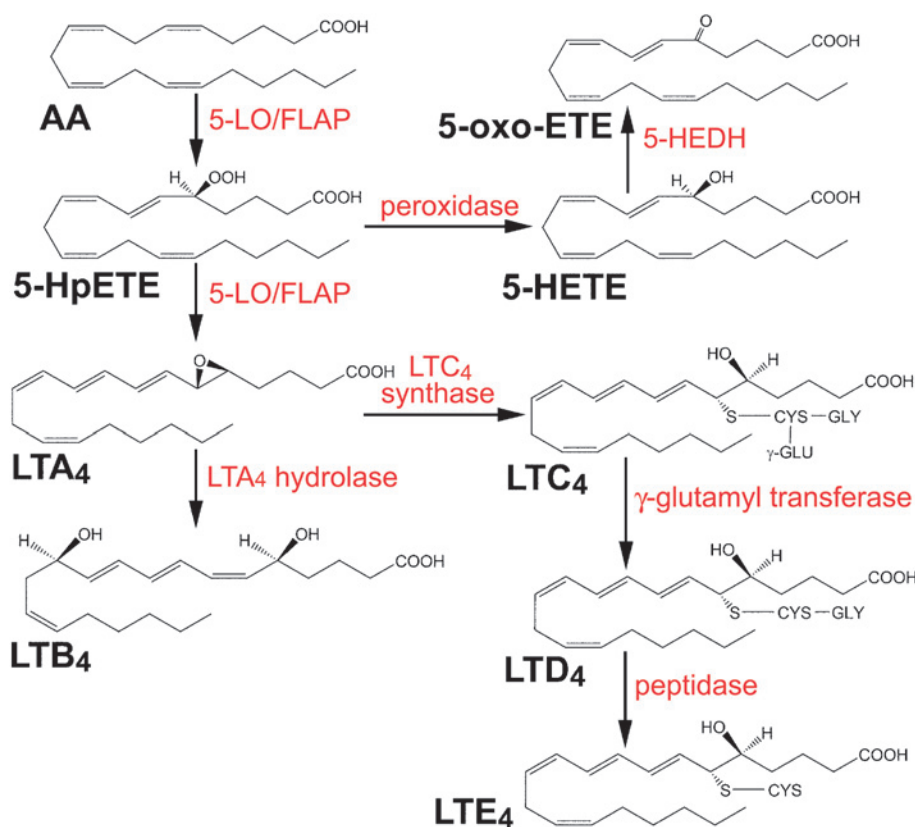


Figure 1. Biosynthesis of leukotrienes (LTs) via the 5-lipoxygenase (5-LO) pathway.

Obviously, studies using 5-LO^{-/-} mice do not delineate the individual roles of LTB₄ or cysLTs. However, LTC₄ hydrolase^{-/-} mice, which cannot produce LTB₄, have less inflammation in zymosan-induced peritonitis and are resistant to platelet-activating factor (PAF) signaling [70], showing a role for LTB₄. This resistance to PAF in LTC₄ hydrolase^{-/-} mice further suggested a role for LTB₄ as an intermediary in PAF-induced systemic shock [70] as well as endotoxemia induced by PAF but not LPS-induced endotoxemia [56, 57]. Both LTB₄ and its BLT₁ receptor are necessary for the development of inflammatory arthritis in a mouse model [71, 72]. Apparently, both cysLTs and LTB₄ are involved in bleomycin-induced pulmonary fibrosis: while 5-LO^{-/-} mice are totally protected, CysLT₁^{-/-} mice develop a more severe fibrosis (associated with increased cysLT production) and both LTC₄ synthase^{-/-} and CysLT₂^{-/-} mice are only protected by ~50% [73, 74]. These studies suggest that LTB₄ and the cysLTs act in distinct and perhaps complementary roles in these mouse models.

Currently getting the greatest buzz in the research community is the villainous role for LTs in cardiovascular disease. Initial studies, examining a mouse strain that was resistant to atherosclerosis, identified the 5-LO gene as being important [75]. Human atherosclerotic tissues were found to show abundant 5-LO

protein [76], suggesting that LTB₄ or cysLTs, or both, may contribute to pathogenesis. Studies in mice suggested that LTB₄ was important for smooth muscle remodeling in the context of atherogenesis [77, 78] and co-expression of 5-LO and LTC₄ hydrolase correlated with plaque instability in human lesions [79]. Moreover, the potent effects on cysLTs on gene expression in human endothelial cells [80], discussed below, suggest that cysLTs may be important in vascular disease. In particular, the up-regulation of the early growth response (egr) transcription factors induced in endothelial cell by cysLTs [80, 81] is recognized as a key step in angiogenesis and parallels the action of VEGF. Excellent reviews of the roles of LTs in cardiovascular disease are available [82–84].

LTs: Now starring as heroes in host defense

In a departure from their roles in allergen-induced inflammation and asthma, LTs are gaining recognition for their performances in host defense against infection. One way to illustrate the importance of LTs in host defense is to examine states of LT deficiency. Attenuated LT synthesis is correlated with an increased susceptibility to infectious disease in conditions including malnutrition [85–88], cigarette smok-

ing [89, 90], vitamin D deficiency [91], HIV infection [92, 93], cirrhosis of the liver [94], and type II diabetes [95]. While the underlying cause of increased susceptibility to infectious disease in these conditions is complex and likely to involve innate immune response impairments that are independent of the LT synthetic pathway, studies using 5-LO-deficient mice and pharmacological LT synthesis inhibitors support the involvement of LTs in host defense against infectious agents (reviewed in [96]). However, there are as yet no reports, to our knowledge, indicating that the therapeutic use of anti-LT drugs increases one's susceptibility to infectious disease.

LT deficiency associated with increased susceptibility to infectious disease has been described in a number of murine models of pulmonary infection. Bailie and co-workers [97] were the first to show that 5-LO^{-/-} mice exhibit increased susceptibility to gram-negative pneumonia. In this report, 5-LO^{-/-} mice demonstrated increased mortality and impaired pulmonary bacterial clearance following *Klebsiella pneumoniae* challenge. This cast LTs in the role of heroes in the fight against bacteria. Additional roles for LTs in fighting infection followed. Pharmacological inhibition of LT synthesis *in vivo*, using A-63162, impaired peritoneal clearance of *E. coli* in a murine model of infectious peritonitis [98]. Similarly, higher levels of bacteria were found in the peritoneal cavities of 5-LO^{-/-} mice, compared with wild-type controls, in the cecal ligation and puncture model of peritonitis and sepsis [99]. Interestingly, 5-LO^{-/-} mice were protected against *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* when infected with 50 or 300 CFU [100], while another recent study, involving inhibitors of the 5-LO pathway and performed with a much bigger bolus (10⁵ CFU), suggested that the 5-LO pathway promoted host defense against this pathogen [101]. This suggested that LTs may be particularly important in larger infections.

LTs have also been found to have hero roles against other pathogens. Medeiros et al. [102] reported that survival and pulmonary clearance of the fungus *Histoplasma capsulatum* were reduced in mice treated with MK-886, a LT synthesis inhibitor. Also, intravenous injection of LTB₄ reduced viral loads and enhanced survival of mice given cytomegalovirus, whereas 5-LO^{-/-} mice or mice treated with MK-886 had increased viral loads compared to wild-type, untreated mice [103], indicating that LTB₄ has anti-viral activity. LT deficiency induced by the 5-LO inhibitor zileuton or by genetic means (5-LO^{-/-} mice) suppressed the innate immune response of mice during the pathogenesis of vesicular stomatitis virus encephalitis [104]. Finally, it has been shown that LTB₄ synthesis influences resistance and susceptibility patterns to *Leishmania amazonensis* infection [105].

Resident macrophages and recruited leukocytes produce LTs following interaction with microbes *via* cell surface receptors for opsonins or pathogen-associated molecular patterns [96]. Organisms that are opsonized with IgG will interact with the Fcγ receptor expressed on the surface of leukocytes and activate the liberation of AA from tissue phospholipids and subsequent LT synthesis [106, 107]. LT synthesis can also be activated *via* the toll-like receptor 2 (TLR2) [108], by CD14/TLR4 agonists [109], *via* TLR8 [110] and through the β-glucan receptor [111].

The rapid recruitment of leukocytes to the site of infection is critical for mounting an effective host defense. Upon interacting with bacteria, macrophages elaborate LTB₄, the most abundant 5-LO product in cells from humans and rats, cysLTs, 5-HETE, and other metabolites but in much lower quantities [106, 112]. Other microorganisms, such as mycobacterial species [113], *Pneumocystis carinii* [114], *Histoplasma capsulatum* [115], and Epstein-Barr virus [116], activate macrophages or monocytes to produce different profiles of 5-LO products than what would be observed for cells stimulated with bacteria or zymosan [107, 110]. The LTs facilitate leukocyte recruitment through a number of different mechanisms. First, LTB₄ is a potent chemoattractant that recruits neutrophils and monocytes to the site of infection presumably by activating the leukocyte BLT₁ receptors that trigger actin polymerization [12, 71, 117]. Second, LTB₄ also contributes to leukocyte recruitment by up-regulating the expression of integrins on the surface of leukocytes enhancing their adherence to endothelial cells within the vasculature of infected tissues [118]. Third, the cysLTs may also facilitate leukocyte recruitment by enhancing microvascular permeability allowing the movement of leukocytes through the vascular endothelium and into tissues. Fourth, LTs contribute to effector T cell recruitment and dendritic cell trafficking following antigen stimulation and may play an essential role in directing the adaptive immune response [119–123]. Finally, LTB₄ may effectively enhance the number of leukocytes at a focus of infection by delaying leukocyte apoptosis [124, 125].

In addition to leukocyte recruitment, the LTs contribute to host defense by augmenting the ability of macrophages and neutrophils to phagocytose microorganisms. Culturing macrophages with exogenous LTB₄ or LTC₄ enhances phagocytosis of *Trypanosoma cruzi* [126, 127], *Salmonella typhimurium* (LTB₄ only) [128], and *Klebsiella pneumoniae* [107]. Conversely, inhibiting LT synthesis reduces phagocytosis of bacteria [107] as well as opsonized particles (Fig. 2). Pharmacological inhibition of LT synthesis reduced both the percent of macrophages that had captured

beads and the number of beads per macrophage, which has been quantitated as a 50% decrease in phagocytic index [107]. This effect of LT inhibition on phagocytosis is completely reversed by the concomitant addition of LTs and can be mimicked by selective LT receptor blockers [107].

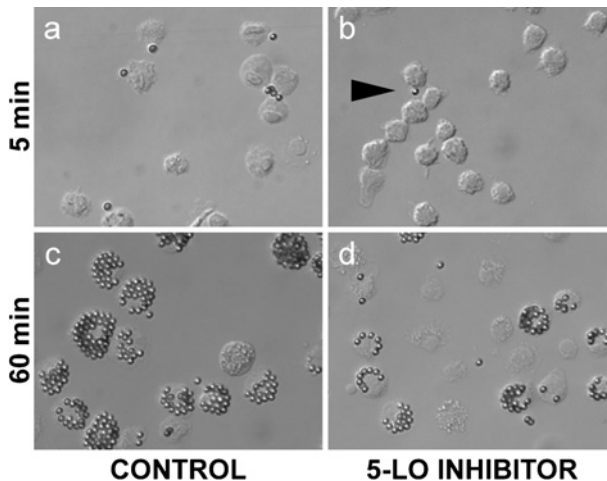


Figure 2. The effect of the 5-LO inhibitor AA-861 on phagocytosis of IgG-opsonized beads by rat alveolar macrophages. Macrophages (2×10^5 /well) were untreated (a, c) or pretreated with AA-861 (10 μ M) for 20 min (b, d) before addition of beads. After 5- or 60-min challenge, wells were washed to remove free beads, fixed with 4% paraformaldehyde and imaged. Arrowhead in (b) indicates lone bead in field.

The means by which the LTs facilitate phagocytosis include the enhancement of opsonin (Fc γ R) receptor- and complement (CR) receptor-mediated phagocytosis. For instance, phagocytosis of IgG-opsonized targets is increased with both LTB₄ and cysLTs [129, 130]. LTB₄ enhances phagocytosis of IgG-opsonized targets by enhancing the activation of the tyrosine kinase, syk, during ligation of the Fc γ receptor [131]. In addition, LTB₄, but not the cysLTs, can also enhance CR-mediated phagocytosis in neutrophils by enhancing binding of complement opsonized targets due to the increased expression of the CR3 receptor [130, 132].

A role for LTs in microbial killing has been demonstrated in a number of animal models of infectious disease and in monocytes, macrophages, and neutrophils cultured *in vitro* [96]. Using 5-LO^{-/-} mice, Bailie et al. [97] demonstrated that alveolar macrophages (AMs) from 5-LO^{-/-} mice exhibit an impaired ability to kill *K. pneumoniae in vitro*. Subsequent studies revealed that the impairment in the killing of bacteria in AMs from 5-LO^{-/-} mice could be reconstituted with the addition of exogenous LTB₄ and that the provision of LTB₄ or cysLTs to AMs from normal animals augments bacterial killing *in vitro* [133]. Others have

also demonstrated that the exogenous administration of LTB₄ or LTC₄ to macrophages enhances killing of many different types of microorganisms, including *Trypanosoma cruzi* [126, 127, 134], *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* and *Salmonella typhimurium* (LTB₄ only) [128], *Toxoplasma gondii* [135], and *Leishmania amazonensis* [105]. In addition, the exogenous administration of LTB₄, the most abundantly produced 5-LO product in neutrophils, enhances neutrophil-mediated killing of *Mycobacterium bovis* [113], *Cryptococcus neoformans* [136], and *Schistosoma mansoni* [137]. The mechanisms by which LTs enhance microbial killing include the augmentation of leukocyte antimicrobial functions. For example, LTB₄ increases lysosomal enzyme release [138], induces nitric oxide synthesis [105, 134], enhances the release of α -defensins from neutrophils [139], and augments reactive oxygen intermediate production in macrophages by activating the assembly of proteins that form the NADPH oxidase complex [133, 140, 141]. Exogenous cysLTs also possess antimicrobial properties, since they induce nitric oxide generation from neutrophils [141] and activate the production of reactive oxygen intermediates in macrophages [133]. Finally, the LTs also indirectly enhance host defense by inducing gene expression. For example, LTs increase the synthesis of other proinflammatory mediators that augment host defense mechanisms. These effects on gene expression, and others, are of growing interest.

LTs modulate gene expression: Deciphering the good and the bad roles

The diversity of roles for LTB₄ and cysLTs in disease suggest that these mediators have a variety of effects. For example, the different LTs promote the generation of soluble pro-inflammatory mediators. One mechanism is the triggered release of preformed mediators (e.g., cysLT-mediated release of IL-4 in human eosinophils [142, 143], LTB₄-induced release of α -defensins [139] and the anti-microbial peptide LL-37 [144]). Another important action of LTs is through induced gene expression of soluble intercellular messengers (e.g., IL-6 [145, 146], IL-8 [147]) and/or the enzymes involved in the biosynthesis of pro-inflammatory mediators (e.g., COX-2 [148]). In fact, LTB₄ and CysLTs have been shown to induce many other soluble mediators of inflammation *ex vivo* (Tables 1 and 2) by cellular mechanisms that are, as yet, poorly defined. These roles for LTs may be positive, in that they drive important components of host defense. Of course, the persistent over-production of pro-inflammatory mediators would be less desirable.

Table 1. Up-regulation of gene expression by LTB₄ *ex vivo*.

Gene	Cell type	Co-stimulus	Receptor	Signaling	Ref.
BLT₁	HUVEC	LPS	BLT ₁		[153]
CCR7	Mouse dendritic cells	–	–		[149]
CD11b	Human monocytes	–	–		[154]
CD11c	Human monocytes	–	–		[154]
CD18	Human monocytes	–	–		[154]
CD23	B-CLL	–	–		[155]
	Human monocytes	IL-4	–		[156, 157]
CD54	B-CLL	CD40L	–		[155]
CD150	B-CLL	CD40L	–		[155]
	Mouse splenocytes	Con A	–		[158]
c-fos^a, c-jun^a	Human monocytes	–	–		[152, 159]
IFN-γ	Mouse lymphocytes	–	–		[160]
IgE	Human PBMC	IL-4	–		[157]
IL-2	Mouse lymphocytes	–	–		[161]
	Mouse splenocytes	Con A	–		[158]
IL-2Rβ	Human lymphocytes	–	–		[162]
	Human monocytes	–	–		[163]
IL-4	Mouse splenocytes	Con A	–		[158]
	Human lymphocytes	–	–		[160]
IL-5	Human lymphocytes	–	–		[164]
IL-6	Human monocytes	–	–	NF-κB, NF-IL6,	[145, 146]
IL-8	Human dendritic cells	–	–		[147]
	Human neutrophils	Fibrinogen	–	Gαi	[165]
	16HBEC	–	–	NF-κB	[166]
IL-10	Mouse splenocytes	Con A	–		[158]
iNOS	Mouse peritoneal macrophages	–	–		[105]
MCP-1	Human monocytes	–	BLT ₁	ERK, JNK, NF-κB	[167]
	HUVEC	LPS	BLT ₁		[153]
MIP-1β	Human neutrophils	–	–		[165]
TNF-α	Human monocytes	IL-2	–		[163]

^a Only investigated at the mRNA level.

HUVEC, human umbilical vascular endothelial cells; B-CLL, B cell chronic lymphoid leukemia cells; PBMC, peripheral blood mononuclear cells; HBEC, human bronchial epithelial cells.

Although the LT receptors are differentially expressed and regulated, they may also act in a redundant manner and promote the expression of similar gene products. For example, LTB₄ has recently been shown to activate dendritic cells and increase their surface expression of the chemokine receptor CCR7 and their response to the specific CCR7 ligand CCL19 [149]. Interestingly, a similar increase of CCL19 sensitivity data was also observed when dendritic cells were activated with LTC₄, indicating that CysLTs are likely to up-regulate CCR7 as well [150]. Similar redundancy was also observed between CysLTs and thrombin in activated endothelial cells, although the induction of some transcription factors was unique to CysLTs [80]. Redundancy is a hallmark of essential biological systems, serving the same role as an under-study in a stage performance.

In some cases, LTs serve to amplify gene expression that is driven by a co-stimulus. For example, LTC₄ and LTD₄ increased MMP-9 mRNA expression induced by TNF-α, and the CysLT₁ inhibitor pranlukast completely inhibited this enhancement [151]. However, many of the effects of LTs on gene expression did not require a co-stimulus. Interestingly, LTD₄, acting through CysLT₂, induces several transcription factors, including c-fos and c-jun [147, 152], as well as members of the early growth response (egr) and the nuclear receptor subfamily group A (NR4A) families [80]. As a result, these changes may alter signaling by other mediators.

Table 2. Up-regulation of gene expression by cysLTs *ex vivo*.

Gene	Cell type	Co-stimulus	Receptor	Signaling	Ref.
Aquaporin 4	Rat astrocytes	–	CysLT ₂		[168]
c-fos^a, c-jun^a	HEK-293L1 ^b	–	CysLT ₁	NF-κB, AP-1	[147]
COX-2	HUVEC	–	CysLT ₂	PLC, NFAT	[148]
cPLA₂α	Int 407 ^c	–	–	Gai, p38, MEK-1, PKC	[169]
	Caco-2 ^d	–	–		
CysLT₁^a	Murine tracheal epithelial cells	–	–		[170]
CysLT₂^a	Murine tracheal epithelial cells	–	–		[170]
	Rat astrocytes	–			[168]
Egr-1	HUVEC	–	CysLT ₂		[80, 81]
Egr-2	HUVEC	–	CysLT ₂		[80, 81]
Egr-3	HUVEC	–	CysLT ₂	PLCβ	[80, 81]
IgE	Human B lymphocytes	CD40L	CysLT ₁		[171]
IL-5	Human mast cells	–	CysLT ₁	ERK, NFAT, p38	[172, 173]
IL-8	THP-1 ^e	–	CysLT ₁		[147]
	HEK-293L1	–	CysLT ₁	NF-κB, AP-1	[147]
	HUVEC	–	CysLT ₂		[80]
	Human mast cells	–	CysLT ₂	Gai, p38	[173]
IL-10	Mouse BMDC	<i>D. farinae</i>			[174]
IL-11	Murine tracheal epithelial cells	–	CysLT ₁		[170]
MIP-1α	Rat alveolar macrophages	LPS	CysLT ₁		[175]
MIP-1β	Human mast cells	–	CysLT ₂	ERK, NFAT	[176]
MMP-9	THP-1, human monocytes	TNF-α	CysLT ₁		[151]
NR4A1^a	HUVEC	–	CysLT ₂		[80]
NR4A2^a	HUVEC	–	CysLT ₂		[80]
NR4A3^a	HUVEC	–	CysLT ₂		[80]
PCKα^a	αT3-1 ^f	–	–		[177]
PKCβ^a	αT3-1	–	–		[177]
RANTES	Mouse lung mononuclear cells	–	–	NF-κB	[178]
Tissue factor	HUVEC	–	CysLT ₂		[80]
TGF-β1	Human airway epithelial cells	–	CysLT ₁	p38, ATF-2	[179]
TNF-α	Human mast cells	–	CysLT ₁	ERK, NFAT	[176]
	Rat alveolar macrophages	LPS	CysLT ₁		[175]

^a Only investigated at the mRNA level.^b Human Embryonic Kidney Cells Stably transfected with the CysLT₁.^c Human embryonic intestinal cells.^d Human colon adenocarcinoma cells.^e Human acute monocytic leukemia cells.^f Pituitary gonadotroph cells.

BMDC, bone marrow-derived dendritic cells.

Summary

The best-known roles for LTB₄ and the cysLTs are in asthma, allergic responses and inflammatory diseases. Current research also places LTs in major pathologies, including various cancers and cardiovascular diseases. However, numerous studies also indicate that LTs play critical, positive roles in host defense against bacterial, fungal and viral infections. With the development of novel approaches to suppress LT synthesis and action, these positive roles must be kept in mind.

Acknowledgements. Generous support for this review was provided by a Canadian Institutes of Health Research Fellowship (N.F.) and by National Institutes of Health grants HL077417 (P.M.) and AI43955 (T.G.B.).

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