

Evidence for the existence of a mutated enkephalin sequence in preproenkephalin

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Preproenkephalin

Nucleotide sequence

Molecular evolution

Computer simulation

Precursor processing

A number of papers have recently appeared presenting the mRNA sequence for bovine [1,2] and human [3] preproenkephalin. The mRNA codes for a precursor protein containing four copies of Met-enkephalin, one of Leu-enkephalin and one copy each of two different carboxyl extended Met-enkephalins (Met-enkephalin-Arg⁶-Phe⁷ and Met-enkephalin-Arg⁶-Gly⁷-Leu⁸). These seven regions of the sequence are all flanked on both side by paired basic residues (except at the carboxyl terminus of preproenkephalin). The relative positions of the enkephalin peptides in the bovine precursor sequence are shown in fig.1.

There is a rather large region coding for no visible enkephalin-like sequence between residue 140 in the bovine sequence (equivalent to position 143 in the human sequence) and 180 (184 in man). However the nucleotide sequence in part of this region — that between residues 163 (166 in man) and 171 (174 in man) — shows a striking similarity with those coding for the enkephalin regions (fig.2).

There are 7 (9 in man) nucleotide differences between this sequence and that coding for a Met-enkephalin and only 5 (7 in man) when compared to that for a Leu-enkephalin. In addition there are 3 (4 in man) differences in the region analogous to that of the flanking basic residues. Overall the region in question is closer to an enkephalin peptide sequence in the bovine than in the human precursor. Compared with a Leu-enkephalin this region shows 70% identity in the bovine molecule and 59% in the human molecule. A computer simulation of 10 000 random nucleotide sequences of 27 residues, taking into account the codon usage in the molecule, indicates that the random occurrence of a fit as good as or better than the one actually observed is 4.7% for the human and 0.2% for the bovine molecule.

I propose that originally this part of the molecule probably coded for an active enkephalin peptide. The divergence of the sequence could have had its origin in a mutation in one of the flanking

	10	20	30	40
1	M A R F L G L C T W L L A L G P G L L A T V R A E C S Q D C A T C S Y R L A R P			
41	T D L N P L A C T L E C E G K L P S L K T W E T C K E L L Q L T K L E L P P D A			
81	T S A L S K Q E E S H L L A K K <u>Y G G F M</u> K R <u>Y G G F M</u> K K M D E L Y P L E V E			
121	E E A N G G E V L G K R <u>Y G G F M</u> K K D A E E D D G L G N S S N L L K E L L G A			
161	G D Q R E G S L H Q E G S D A E D V S K R <u>Y G G F M R G L</u> K R S P H L E D E T K			
201	E L Q K R <u>Y G G F M</u> R R V G R P E W M D Y Q K R <u>Y G G F I</u> K R F A E P L P S E			
241	E E G E S Y S K E V P E M E K R <u>Y G G F M R F</u>			

Fig.1. Amino-acid sequence of bovine preproenkephalin. The enkephalin sequences are boxed and the flanking basic residues are underlined.

Met-enkephalin.	95 - Lys Lys Tyr Gly Gly Phe Met - 101	
	283 - AAG AAG UAG GGG GGC UUC AUG - 303	
	Arg	
Met-enkephalin.	102 - Lys Arg Tyr Gly Gly Phe Met Lys Lys - 110	
	304 - AAG CGG UAU GGG GGC UUC AUG AAG AAA - 330	
	Arg	
Met-enkephalin.	131 - Lys Arg Tyr Gly Gly Phe Met Lys Lys - 139	
	391 - AAG CGG UAU GGG GGC UUC AUG AAG AAG - 417	
	Arg	
Met-enkephalin-R ⁶ -G ⁷ -L ⁸ .	180 - Lys Arg Tyr Gly Gly Phe Met Arg Gly Leu Lys Arg - 191	
	538 - AAG AGA UAG GGG GGC UUC AUG AGA GGC UUA AAG AGA - 573	
	Arg	
Met-enkephalin.	204 - Lys Arg Tyr Gly Gly Phe Met Arg Arg - 212	
	610 - AAG CGA UAG GGG GGU UUC AUG AGA AGA - 636	
	Arg	
Leu-enkephalin.	224 - Lys Arg Tyr Gly Gly Phe Leu Lys Arg - 232	
	670 - AAA AGG UAG GGU GGC UUC CUC AAG CGC - 696	
	Arg	
Met-enkephalin-R ⁶ -F ⁷ .	255 - Lys Arg Tyr Gly Gly Phe Met Arg Phe - TER	
	763 - AAA AGA UAU GGA GGA UUU AUG AGA UUU UAA	
	Arg	
Putative mutated enkephalin sequence.	163 - Gln Arg Glu Gly Ser Leu His Gln Glu - 171)	
	487 - CAG CGA GAG GGG AGC CUC CAC CAG GAG - 513 (Bovine.	
	** *** * *** ** ** ^ ^ ** **)	
	166 - Asn Arg Glu Arg Ser His His Gln Asp - 174)	
	496 - AAC CGA GAG CGU AGC CAC CAC CAG GAU - 522 (Human.	
	** *** * ** ** * ^ ^ ** *)	

Fig.2. Comparison of the nucleotide sequences of the enkephalin regions and of the putative mutated enkephalin sequence. (*): Nucleotide common to a Met and a Leu-enkephalin. (^): Nucleotide common to only a Leu-enkephalin. For the enkephalin sequences the first two lines represent the amino-acid and the nucleotide sequence of bovine pre-proenkephalin. The substitutions in the human molecule are shown underneath.

basic residues, which would have prevented the peptide from undergoing normal processing. The peptide sequence was then free to mutate to its present structure.

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