

Induction of chymase that forms angiotensin II in the monkey atherosclerotic aorta

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Abstract Chymase shows a catalytic efficiency in the formation of angiotensin (Ang) II. In the present study, the characterization and primary structure of monkey chymase were determined, and the pathophysiological role of chymase was investigated on the atherosclerotic monkey aorta. Monkey chymase was purified from cheek pouch vascular tissue using heparin affinity and gel filtration columns. The enzyme rapidly converted Ang I to Ang II ($K_m = 98 \mu\text{M}$, $k_{\text{cat}} = 6203/\text{min}$) but did not degrade several peptide hormones such as Ang II, substance P, vasoactive intestinal peptide and bradykinin. The primary structure, which was deduced from monkey chymase cDNA, showed a high homology to that of human chymase (98%). The mRNA levels of the aorta chymase were significantly increased in the atherosclerotic aorta of monkeys fed a high-cholesterol diet. These results indicate that monkey chymase has a highly specific Ang II-forming activity and may be related to the pathogenesis of atherosclerosis.

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Chymase; Monkey; Angiotensin II; Purification; Cloning; Atherosclerosis

1. Introduction

Angiotensin (Ang) II, a potent pressor substance, is known to be generated from Ang I by angiotensin converting enzyme (ACE; EC 3. 4. 15. 1) in blood and several tissues. However, the Ang II-forming pathways in human do not always follow the classical renin-angiotensin system. Our previous study demonstrated that only 30% of the Ang I-induced vasoconstriction of the isolated human gastroepiploic artery is inhibited by ACE inhibitors and the rest by chymostatin [1]. Human chymase efficiently generates Ang II [1–3], but some non-human chymases do not generate Ang II; for example, rat chymase hydrolyzes the Tyr⁴-Ile⁵ bond of Ang I to yield inactive fragments [4,5], and the chymase-dependent Ang II-forming pathway does not exist in rabbit vascular tissues [1]. Therefore, human tissues have two Ang II-forming pathways, whereas rats and rabbits have only the ACE pathway. The species difference in chymase's Ang II-forming ability should be considered in selecting experimental models for studying the pathogenesis of human disease where Ang II is involved.

Recently, it has been emphasized that Ang II play a crucial role in the promotion of vascular tissue remodeling. ACE inhibitors suppressed the development of atherosclerosis in rabbit [6,7]. These results suggest that the activation of Ang II formation in vascular tissues has an important role in the pathogenesis of atherosclerosis. However, human vascular tis-

ues contain Ang II-forming chymase in addition to ACE, and it is not clear whether vascular chymase is related to atherosclerosis.

To establish animal models for exploring the role of the chymase-dependent Ang II-forming pathway in humans, we purified and cloned monkey chymase from vascular tissues, and investigated the pathophysiological roles of vascular chymase in atherosclerosis.

2. Materials and methods

Twelve male monkeys () were obtained from Japan SLC (Shizuoka, Japan). In atherosclerotic models, monkeys were assigned to normal or high-cholesterol (4% cholesterol and 6% corn oil, Oriental Yeast Co. Ltd., Osaka, Japan) diets for 6 months. The monkeys were sacrificed by bleeding under pentobarbital anesthesia, and their cheek pouch vascular tissues and thoracic aorta were excised. The experimental procedures for animals were in accordance with the Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals (Animal Research Laboratory, Osaka Medical College).

The tissue extract was obtained from cheek pouch vascular tissues by the procedure described previously [8]. The tissue extract was applied to a heparin affinity column (5 ml; HiTrap Heparin packed column, Pharmacia, Tokyo, Japan) which was pre-equilibrated with 20 mM Tris-HCl buffer, pH 8.0, containing 0.1 M KCl. The column was eluted with a linear gradient (0–100%) of 20 mM Tris-HCl buffer, pH 8.0, containing 1.8 M KCl and 0.1% (v/v) Triton X-100. The active fractions with Ang II-forming activity were applied to a gel filtration column (2.6×40 cm; Toyopearl HW-55, Tohsok, Tokyo, Japan) and eluted with 20 mM KCl, pH 8.0, containing 0.5 M KCl and 0.1% (v/v) Triton X-100. Ang II-forming activity was assayed according to Okunishi et al. [9]. One unit of chymase activity was defined as 1 μmol of Ang II formed/minute. The protein concentration was measured by bicinchoninic acid protein assay reagent (Pierce Chemical, Rockford, IL).

SDS-PAGE was performed on the purified enzyme of 0.5 μg and the gel was silver-stained. The optimum pH for Ang II formation was determined with Britton-Robinson's wide range buffer of pH 6.0–10.0. The susceptibility of the purified enzyme to various inhibitors was examined. These inhibitors included ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid (EDTA), phosphoramidon, pepstatin, ACE inhibitors (captopril and lisinopril), soybean trypsin inhibitor (SBTI), phenylmethylsulfonyl fluoride (PMSF), chymostatin, and aprotinin. To determine the substrate specificities and the kinetic parameters of the purified enzyme for Ang II-processing, 12 ng of the purified enzyme were incubated in 20 mM Tris-HCl buffer, pH 8.0, containing 0.5 M KCl and 0.1% (v/v) Triton X-100 at 37°C. Amino-terminal sequencing of the purified enzyme was performed on an Applied Biosystems model 477A protein sequencer (Foster City, CA).

Monkey chymase cDNA was cloned using a polymerase chain reaction (PCR). Total RNA was isolated from monkey cheek pouch vascular tissues [10]. The single-stranded cDNA was synthesized from 1 μg of the total RNA using a cDNA synthesis kit (Gibco

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	1	10	20	30	40	50	60
Monkey	I	I	G	T	E	C	K
Human	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Dog	---	S	---	H	---	L	R
RMCP I	---	V	S	R	---	H	---
RMCP II	---	V	S	I	---	H	---
	70	80	90	100	110	120	
Monkey	T	E	K	E	D	T	W
Human	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Dog	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
RMCP I	S	K	T	S	---	---	---
RMCP II	R	K	R	---	---	---	---
	130	140	150	160	170	180	
Monkey	R	M	C	R	V	A	G
Human	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Dog	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
RMCP I	K	---	---	---	---	---	---
RMCP II	A	---	---	---	---	---	---
	190	200	210	220			
Monkey	D	S	G	G	F	L	L
Human	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Dog	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
RMCP I	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
RMCP II	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Fig. 2. Comparison of deduced amino-acid sequence of between monkey chymase with those of other chymases. The deduced amino-acid sequence of monkey chymase compared with those of human chymase [16,17], dog chymase [25], RMCP I [26] and RMCP II [20].

its. The atheromatic area was calculated as the ratio of the oil-red stained area to all of the intima area.

3. Results and discussion

The membrane extract of monkey cheek pouch vascular tissues on a heparin affinity column yielded a single peak at 1.6 M KCl. After the active fractions were concentrated and applied on a gel filtration column, a 1319-fold purification was achieved with a recovery rate of 17.4% and a specific activity of 4341 mU/mg (Table 1). The purified enzyme has a single band at 30 kDa on SDS-PAGE. The optimum pH of the Ang II-forming activity of the purified enzyme was between 7.5 and 8.5. The enzyme activity was inhibited by 10 μ M SBTI, 1 mM PMSF and 100 μ M chymostatin, but not by 1 mM EDTA, 1 mM phosphoramidon, 1 mM pepstatin, 10 mM captopril, 10 mM lisinopril and 1 mM aprotinin; therefore, the possibility that this activity was cathepsin G [14] or tonin [15] was ruled out. The sequence of the first 24 amino acids of the purified enzyme exhibited a high homology to that of human chymase (100%), dog chymase (78%), rat chymases (RMCP I, 71%; RMCP II, 71%), and hamster chymase (78%). We identified this Ang II-forming protease as monkey chymase.

Chymase is a chymotrypsin-like endopeptidase that hydrolyzes the carboxy-terminal side of aromatic amino acids such as Phe, Tyr, and Trp. Chymases isolated from human [3,16,17], dog [18,19] and rat [20–22] show similar substrate-binding profiles when 4-nitroanilide substrates are used [23]; however, they behave differently when hormonal peptides are used. RMCP I [4,5] and dog chymase [24] hydrolyze the Phe⁷-Phe⁸ bond of substance P and the Tyr²²-Leu²³ bond of vasoactive intestinal peptide (VIP), and RMCP I [4,5] cleaves the Tyr⁴-Ile⁵ bond of Ang II, while human chymase hydrolyzes none of these bonds [3]. The monkey chymase isolated in this study rapidly converted Ang I to Ang II (K_m =98 μ M, V_{max} =2.48 nmol/min, k_{cat} =6203/min) but did not degrade several peptide hormones including substance P, VIP, and Ang II (Table 2). These results indicate that primate chymases may have a higher substrate specificity than non-primate chymases.

The sequence of 247 amino acids deduced from the cDNA open reading frame includes peptides identical to the amino-terminal sequence of the purified monkey chymase (Fig. 1). The first 19 residues of monkey prepro chymase represent the hydrophobic signal peptide, and the next prosequence of 2 amino acids is removed to give a mature enzyme of 226 amino acids. Based on the number of basic (Arg+Lys=29)

Table 2
Comparison of substrate specificities of monkey chymase with human chymase and RMCP I

Peptide substrates	Monkey chymase	Human chymase	RMCP I
Ang I	C	C	C
Ang II	N	N	C
Bradykinin	N	N	N
LH-RH	T	N	—
Met-Enkephalin	N	T	—
α -MSH	T	N	—
Somatostatin	N	—	C
Substance P	N	T	C
VIP	N	N	C

C, complete, T, trace, N, none.

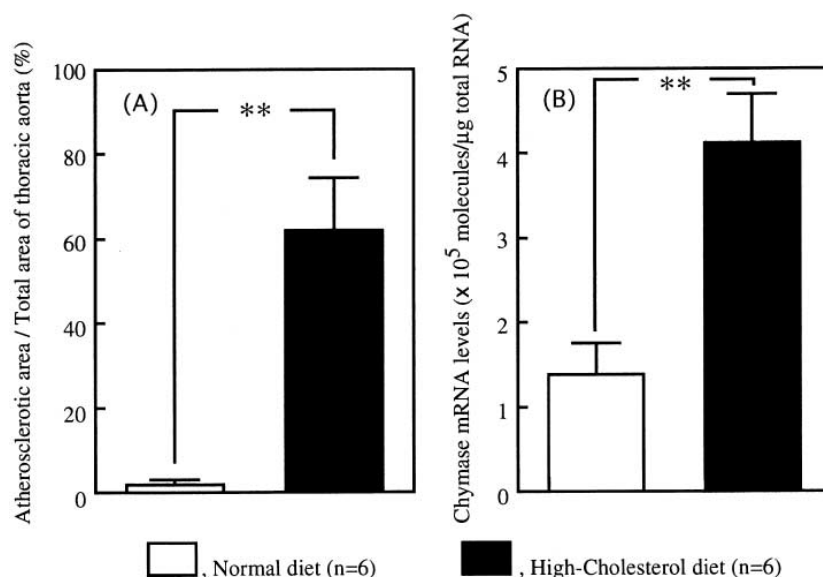


Fig. 3. (A) The atherosclerotic area of the thoracic aorta of monkeys fed a normal or a high-cholesterol diet. (B) The aortic chymase mRNA levels of monkeys fed a normal or a high-cholesterol diet. Vertical bars represent S.E.M. ** $P < 0.01$ vs. respective monkeys fed a normal diet.

and acidic (Asp+Glu = 14) amino acids, the monkey chymase catalytic domain has a predicted net charge of +15 (Fig. 1), and that of human chymase [16,17], dog chymase [25] and RMCP I [26] are +13, +16 and +18, respectively. Despite the differences in net charges, chymases are reported to bind to heparin glycosaminoglycan [27–29]; therefore, it is reasonable to assume that monkey chymase will bind in the same manner. Like human chymase, monkey chymase has two consensus N-linked glycosylation sites (Asn-X-Ser/Thr) at Asn⁵⁹ and Asn⁸² (Fig. 1). Dog chymase also has two sites, but at Asn¹⁰⁰ and Asn¹³⁴ [25], and no such sites are found in RMCP I [26] and RMCP II [20]. The predicted N-linked glycosylation sites in monkey chymase, as deduced from the crystallography of RMCP II [22], are some distance away from the active-site binding cleft, which coincides with our observation that the substrate specificity of the native monkey chymase for hormonal peptides did not change after deglycosylation (unpublished data). The deduced primary structure of monkey chymase is more homologous to that of human chymase (98%) than dog chymase (84%) and rat chymases (RMCP I, 61%; RMCP II, 59%) (Fig. 2).

In the present study, we further investigated the pathophysiological role of vascular chymase in the atherosclerotic aorta. After loading with a high-cholesterol diet for 6 months, remarkable atherosclerotic degeneration was observed in the thoracic aorta and the chymase mRNA levels of monkeys fed the atherogenic diet were triple the levels of monkeys fed the normal diet (Fig. 3). Recently, we reported that an Ang II receptor antagonist significantly prevented the formation of atherosclerotic lesions in monkeys fed a high-cholesterol diet [30]. Chymase is considered to be derived from mast cells [31,32]. Kaartinen et al. demonstrated that the number of activated mast cells was increased in human atherosclerotic lesions [33]. These findings suggest that the chymase-dependent Ang II-forming pathway may be related to the pathogenesis of atherosclerosis.

In conclusion, the primary structure of monkey chymase is highly homologous to human chymase and has a higher spe-

cificity of Ang II-formation than do non-primate chymases. In the present study, we first demonstrated that vascular chymase mRNA is remarkably increased in the monkey aorta concurrently with the development of atherosclerosis.

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