

The immediate-early gene product MAD-3/EDG-3/IkBa is an endogenous modulator of fibroblast growth factor-1 (FGF-1) dependent human endothelial cell growth

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Abstract The tumor promoter phorbol 12-myristic 13-acetate inhibits the growth of human endothelial cells and induces the formation of capillary-like, tubular structures. We report the novel growth regulatory function of the immediate-early gene, *edg-3*, which is identical to the *IkBa*/MAD-3 gene. We employed phosphothioate oligonucleotides (PTO) directed against the translation initiation site of *IkBa* to inhibit its expression. The antisense *IkBa* PTO-treated cells exhibited an exaggerated growth response to fibroblast growth factor-1 (FGF-1). In contrast, IL-1-induced growth arrest response was not modulated. These data suggest that the early response gene *IkBa* is an endogenous regulator of endothelial cell growth in vitro.

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Key words: Angiogenesis; NFkB; IkB; Fibroblast growth factor; Endothelium

1. Introduction

The vascular endothelium is a monolayer of cells that are quiescent under normal physiological conditions and carry out a diverse array of functions such as the control of vascular tone [1], regulation of hemostasis [2], hemopoietic cell extravasation [3] and immune reactions [4]. Endothelial cell migration, proliferation and differentiation are part of the angiogenic program that occurs in normal wound healing processes as well as in pathological states such as tumor angiogenesis [5] and rheumatoid arthritis [6]. Endothelial cells grown in vitro are widely used as a model system for angiogenesis since almost all of the steps involved in angiogenesis can be recapitulated under defined conditions [7]. Furthermore, regulators of angiogenesis, namely the fibroblast growth factors [8] and vascular endothelial cell growth factor [9] as proliferative modulators and interleukin-1 (IL-1 α), tumor necrosis factor (TNF α), transforming growth factor- β (TGF- β) and the tumor promoter phorbol myristic acetate (PMA) as non-proliferative modulators of angiogenesis were discovered based on the in vitro properties of endothelial cells [10]. The cytokines and PMA rapidly inhibit the FGF-1-induced mitogenesis of endothelial cells and promote a phenotypic change into a

elongated, fibroblast-like shape [11]. Prolonged treatment of endothelial cells grown on type-I collagen matrix with PMA results in the formation of capillary-like structures containing lumens and anastomoses [12]. This has been defined as the phenotypic differentiation of endothelial cells in vitro [10,12]. It is, however a reversible process because proteolytic degradation of the capillary-like, tubular structures and exposure to FGF-1 results in the reversion into a cobblestone-shaped, highly proliferative phenotype [13].

Molecular mechanisms involved in the processes of angiogenesis have been the subject of intensive investigation. It has been recognized that proteolytic modifications of the extracellular matrix are involved in the phenotypic differentiation [13]. In addition, the plasminogen activator activity in endothelial cells was induced by angiogenic preparations and the active principle was shown to be FGF-2 [14]. Furthermore, collagenase inhibitors blocked the phenotypic differentiation of endothelial cells into capillary-like tubules [15]. More recently, Montesano and colleagues have proposed that the protease and protease inhibitor gene expression by the endothelial cells is modulated by extracellular cytokines and that this balance may influence the phenotype of endothelial cell differentiation [16]. That extracellular matrix modification is important in endothelial cell differentiation is illustrated by several studies which demonstrated the differential gene regulation of collagen type I [17], the proteoglycan decorin [18], and the secreted, extracellular protein SPARC [19] in differentiating endothelial cells. Indeed, rapid formation of endothelial cell networks that resemble tubules is achieved by plating the cells onto Matrigel, an extracellular matrix secreted by EHS sarcoma cells which is enriched in laminin and several growth factors and cytokines [20].

Early signal transduction and transcriptional events induced in differentiating endothelial cells are not well understood. The FGF family of polypeptides are thought to transduce the mitogenic signal via the tyrosine phosphorylation of intracellular substrates [8]. The tumor promoter PMA, however, is a potent inducer of the protein kinase C family of isoenzymes, which induce the serine and threonine phosphorylation of cellular substrates [21]. We have focused our attention on the PMA-inducible immediate-early (IE) genes in human umbilical vein endothelial cells (HUVEC). In growth factor induction of mitogenesis in fibroblasts, the IE genes encode critical, regulatory proteins that are necessary for the cell-cycle traverse [22]. We and others have characterized IE genes induced in endothelial cells in response to PMA [23], TNF α [24] and IL-1 α [25]. We reported the cloning and characterization of an abundant PMA-inducible IE gene termed *edg-1* that encoded a novel G-protein-coupled receptor [26].

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Abbreviations: PMA, phorbol myristic acetate; HUVEC, human umbilical vein endothelial cells; IE, immediate-early; PTO, phosphothioate oligonucleotides; FGF, fibroblast growth factor; TNF, tumor necrosis factor; IL-1, interleukin-1; PCR-ASH, polymerase chain reaction-amplified subtractive hybridization

Dixit et al. have reported the cloning of several IE genes induced in response to $\text{TNF}\alpha$, including c-jun, adhesion molecules of the selection family, a novel Zinc finger protein implicated in apoptosis [27] and the *ecf* ligand B61 [28]. Recently, an IL-1-inducible IE gene encoding an amyloid-like protein was isolated from HUVEC [25]. In this report, we describe the identification of the $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}\alpha$ protein, an inhibitor of the $\text{NF}\kappa\text{B}$ transcription factor as an IE gene product induced during the early phases of PMA-induced differentiation of HUVEC.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Cell culture

HUVEC were grown on fibronectin-coated dishes in medium-199 containing 10% fetal bovine serum and 150 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$ of crude endothelial cell growth factor and 5 units/ml of heparin [13]. Cells were subcultured at the ratio of 1:5 and used between the passages of 3 and 12. At confluence, cells were maintained in medium without growth factor and heparin for 2 days to achieve quiescence. For growth assays, cells were grown in medium containing purified recombinant human FGF-1 and heparin and cell numbers were determined in a Coulter counter. The following 18mer phosphothioate oligonucleotides against $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}\alpha$ were synthesized and used: sense=5'-ATG TTC CAG GCG GCC GAG-3'; antisense=5'-CTC GGC CGC CTG GAA CAT-3'. After synthesis, the PTOs were washed in ethanol and dissolved in sterile water, heated at 95°C for 5 min and frozen in aliquots. The PTOs at indicated concentrations were added directly to cell culture medium every other day.

2.2. RNA preparation and Northern blot analysis

Total RNA was purified by the guanidinium isothiocyanate procedure [30]. RNA was electrophoresed on a 1% agarose gel containing 2.2 M formaldehyde and Northern blot analysis was conducted using the buffer system described by Church and Gilbert [30]. Hybridizations and washes were done at 65°C in 20% formamide.

2.3. PCR-ASH cloning and sequencing procedures

Cloning of PMA/CHX-induced cDNAs from HUVEC were done by PCR-ASH procedures as described previously [23]. The inducibility of the cDNA cloned were confirmed by Northern blot analysis. Sequence analysis of the deletion subclones of the *edg-3* cDNA were conducted using the automated DNA sequencer. Sequence homology searches were conducted against the Genbank and EMBL databases using the BLAST algorithm [31].

2.4. In vitro translation

Transcripts for $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}$ were prepared using the T7 RNA polymerase transcription system (Promega Biotec). Capped mRNAs were translated in [^{35}S]-methionine supplemented rabbit reticulocyte lysates, separated on a 10% SDS-PAGE and autoradiographed. In some experiments, 1 μg each of either sense or antisense PTOs were added to the translation mixes.

2.5. Metabolic labelling and immunoprecipitation

Confluent HUVEC were treated with the sense and antisense $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}\alpha$ PTO for 2 days. Cells were then metabolically labelled with 100 μCi /ml of [^{35}S]-methionine/cysteine labelling mix (New England Nuclear)

for 4 h. Some cultures received 1 ng/ml of IL-1 α during the labelling period. Cells were then lysed with ice cold phosphate buffered saline (pH 7.4) containing 0.5% Triton X-100, 10 μM of pyrrolidine dithiocarbamate, 10 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$ of chymosin, 10 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$ of aprotinin and 1 mM PMSF. Cell lysates were cleared by centrifugation, pre-cleared with protein-A Sepharose and immunoprecipitated with the polyclonal antibody raised against the recombinant human $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}\alpha$ protein. Immunoprecipitates were resolved on a 12% SDS-PAGE, incubated in a fluorographic solution and autoradiographed.

3. Results

3.1. Characterization of the *edg-3* cDNA

In order to clone low-abundance IE transcripts that are induced during the differentiation of HUVEC, we utilized the PCR-ASH procedure [23] and isolated several cDNA probes from PMA and cycloheximide-treated (4 h) mRNA population. One such clone, initially termed *edg-3*, hybridized to a PMA-inducible transcript of 1.8 kb. In quiescent cells the

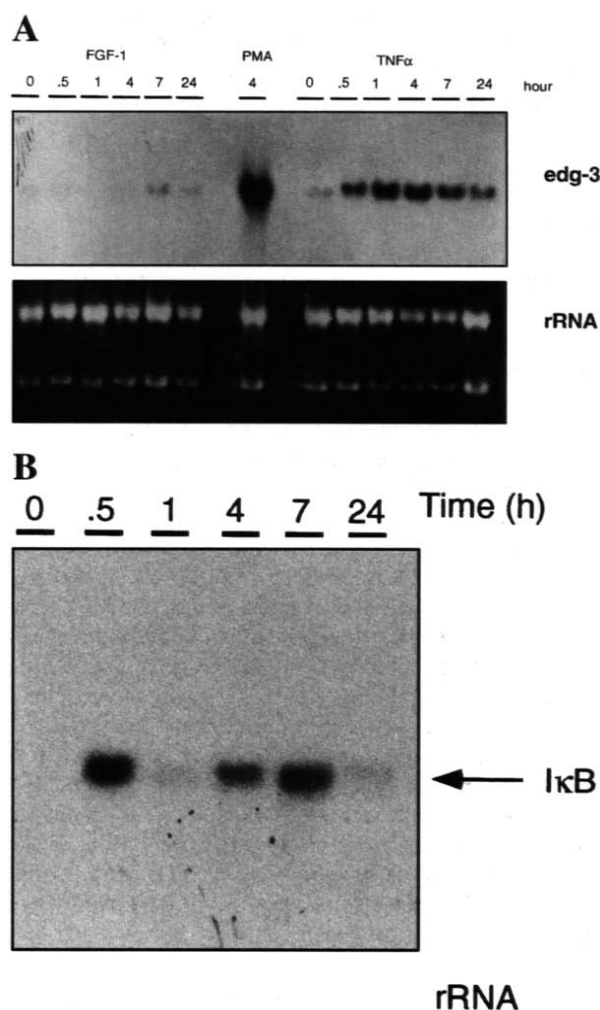


Fig. 1. A: Quiescent HUVEC were treated with either 10 ng/ml FGF-1 containing 5 units/ml heparin or 20 ng/ml PMA or 10 units/ml $\text{TNF}\alpha$ for indicated periods of time and Northern blot analysis was conducted using the *edg-3* cDNA probe. The ethidium bromide-stained gel (rRNA) is shown to indicate the relative equivalence of RNA load. Data indicate a representative experiment which was repeated twice. B: Quiescent HUVEC were treated with 1 ng/ml IL-1 α for indicated periods of time and Northern blot analysis was conducted with the *edg-3* cDNA probe. The ethidium bromide-stained gel (rRNA) is shown to indicate the relative equivalence of RNA load. Data indicate a representative experiment which was repeated twice.

edg-3 mRNA is expressed at very low levels; however, upon treatment with PMA for 2 h, elevated steady-state levels of transcript were observed followed by a decline at 24 h (data not shown) [34]. Cycloheximide alone induced the edg-3 mRNA and 'super-induced' the kinetics of induction (data not shown). These data indicated that edg-3 is a PMA-inducible IE gene in HUVEC. Both $\text{TNF}\alpha$ and $\text{IL-1}\alpha$ induced the edg-3 mRNA (Fig. 1). While FGF-1 induced the steady-state mRNA level of edg-3 in a transient manner, the kinetics of induction was different (Fig. 1).

The structure of the edg-3 cDNA was determined by DNA sequence analysis of the 900 bp cDNA fragment. Sequence analysis followed by database homology search indicated that edg-3 is identical to the human monocyte adherence-induced IE gene MAD-3/ $\text{IkB}\alpha$ [28]. Thus, the edg-3 gene is hereinafter referred to as the $\text{IkB}\alpha$ gene.

3.2. Effect of $\text{IkB}\alpha$ antisense PTO on basal and $\text{IL-1}\alpha$ -treated HUVEC growth

In order to assess the role of the IkB protein on the FGF-stimulated and cytokine-inhibited growth of HUVEC, sense and antisense phosphothioate oligonucleotides (PTO) synthesized against the translation initiation site of the $\text{IkB}\alpha$ transcript were utilized to block its expression. HUVEC were grown in complete growth media in the presence of increasing concentrations of the antisense $\text{IkB}\alpha$ PTO which were added to the medium every two days. As shown in Fig. 2A, the ability of the cytokine $\text{IL-1}\alpha$ to block the growth of HUVEC was not affected by the $\text{IkB}\alpha$ antisense PTO; however, increased cell numbers were obtained in the presence of the $\text{IkB}\alpha$ antisense PTO and FGF-1. The ability of both sense and antisense $\text{IkB}\alpha$ PTO to modulate the growth-inhibitory effect of $\text{IL-1}\alpha$ was investigated in detail. As shown in Fig. 2B, dose-dependent inhibition of HUVEC growth by $\text{IL-1}\alpha$ was not modulated by either sense or antisense $\text{IkB}\alpha$ PTO. In contrast, the effect of FGF-1 to increase HUVEC cell number was greatly potentiated in the presence of antisense $\text{IkB}\alpha$ PTO but not the sense counterpart (Fig. 2C).

The effect of cell density on the potentiation of the $\text{IkB}\alpha$ PTO was investigated next. Different number of HUVEC were seeded at day 1 and the cells were grown in complete growth medium containing either sense or antisense $\text{IkB}\alpha$ PTO. The cell number was then determined at day 7. When cells were seeded at low density (5×10^4 cells/well), normal proliferation occurred and yielded 8×10^5 cells per well at

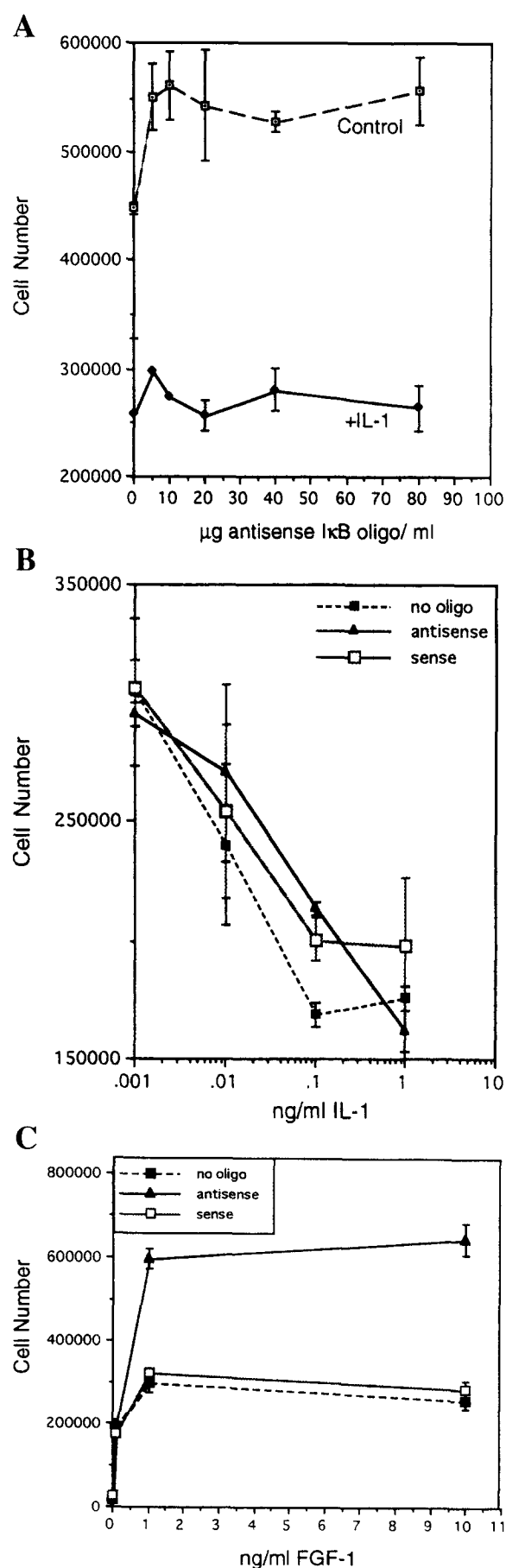


Fig. 2. A: Effect of antisense PTO against $\text{IkB}\alpha$ on basal and $\text{IL-1}\alpha$ -inhibited HUVEC cell growth. HUVEC were seeded on fibronectin coated dishes at the density of 10^4 cells/well at day 1. Control cells received the complete growth medium (10% FBS+endothelial cell growth supplement in M199+heparin). Some wells were treated with 10 ng/ml of human IL-1 alpha in complete growth medium. Indicated amounts of the antisense PTO were added every two days and the cell number at day 10 was determined. B: Effect of $\text{IkB}\alpha$ PTO on the $\text{IL-1}\alpha$ inhibition of HUVEC cell growth. HUVEC were allowed to grow as above with 10 ng/ml of FGF-1 for 10 days. Some cultures were treated with either sense or antisense $\text{IkB}\alpha$ PTO in the presence of indicated concentrations of $\text{IL-1}\alpha$. Cell number was determined at day 10. C: Effect of sense and antisense $\text{IkB}\alpha$ PTO on FGF-1-induced HUVEC growth. HUVEC were seeded at 10^4 cells/well at day 1 in medium 199+10% FBS+5 units/ml of heparin+indicated concentrations of purified FGF-1. Sense and antisense $\text{IkB}\alpha$ PTO (40 mg/ml; 6.7 mM) were added every 2 days. Cell number at day 10 was determined.

day 7. Antisense but not sense $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}\alpha$ PTO-treated cells however, reached a higher saturation density of 1.25×10^6 cells per well. Independent of initial inoculum, the antisense $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}\alpha$ PTO-treated cells achieved significantly higher saturation density than the sense-treated or control cells. The morphology of antisense-treated cells confirmed that inhibition of $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}\alpha$ re-

sulted in higher saturation density without grossly altering cell shape or phenotypic differentiation.

We next determined the effect of the PTO synthesized against the translation initiation site of the RelA polypeptide which constitutes the p65 subunit of the NF κB protein on HUVEC growth. The RelA PTOs were used previously to show the requirement of RelA in the adhesion molecule expression of a variety of cells [32]. In addition, we have previously shown that this PTO blocks the NF κB -dependent induction of cyclooxygenase-2 in synovial fibroblasts [47]. Neither the sense nor antisense RelA PTO modulated FGF-1-induced HUVEC cell growth (data not shown). This suggests that the function of $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}$ independent of RelA is involved in the growth regulation phenomenon in endothelial cells.

3.3. Effect of $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}\alpha$ PTO on $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}\alpha$ polypeptide expression

In order to confirm the effect of the antisense and sense $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}\alpha$ PTO on the synthesis of the $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}\alpha$ protein, we tested the ability of the PTO to influence the *in vitro* translation of the $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}\alpha$ mRNA in [^{35}S]-methionine supplemented rabbit reticulocyte lysates. As shown in Fig. 3, addition of 1 μg of the $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}\alpha$ transcript directed the synthesis of the radiolabelled polypeptide of approximately 40 kd molecular weight. Immunoprecipitation of the reticulocyte lysates with the polyclonal $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}\alpha$ antiserum specifically precipitated the polypeptide band. Addition of the antisense PTO strongly inhibited (14% of control) the translation of the 40 kd $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}$ polypeptide. While the sense PTO also suppressed the translation somewhat (57% of control), the efficacy of the antisense PTO was quantitatively stronger. The addition of irrelevant PTOs at similar concentrations also inhibited the $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}\alpha$ synthesis approximately 40% (data not shown). This may be related to the non-specific inhibition of translation induced by high concentrations of PTOs in the reticulocyte translation system. Nevertheless, these data demonstrate that the antisense $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}\alpha$ PTO is able to potently suppress the translation of the $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}\alpha$ polypeptide.

We next tested the effect of the $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}\alpha$ PTO on the synthesis of basal and stimulated $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}\alpha$ polypeptide synthesis in HUVEC. Cells were treated with either sense or antisense $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}\alpha$ PTO for 2 days and stimulated with 1 ng/ml of IL-1 α for 5 h. During the stimulation period, the cells were metabolically labelled with [^{35}S]-methionine and -cysteine. Cell lysates were then immunoprecipitated with the polyclonal $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}\alpha$ antiserum and analyzed by polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis and autoradiography. As shown in Fig. 3B, the 40 kd polypeptide which is of similar molecular weight as the *in vitro* translated

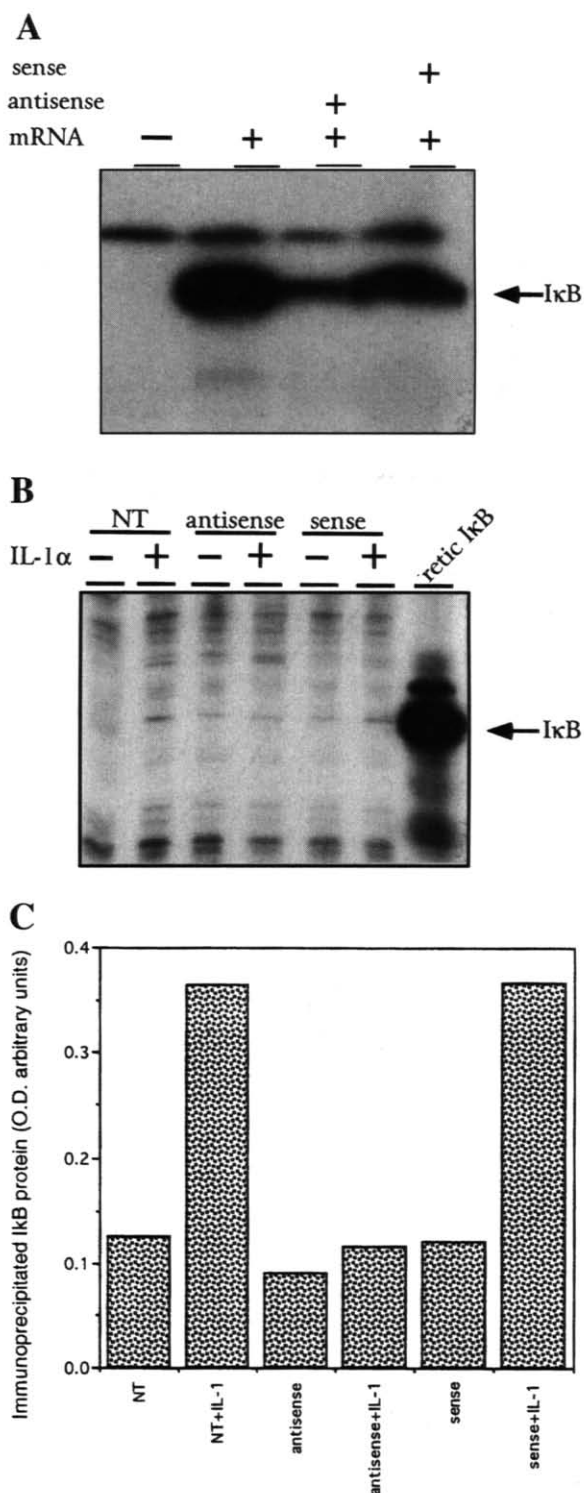


Fig. 3. A: Effect of $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}\alpha$ PTO on *in vitro* translation of the $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}\alpha$ transcript. One μg of capped $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}\alpha$ transcript was translated in the rabbit reticulocyte lysates supplemented with [^{35}S]-methionine either in the presence or absence of 1 μg of PTO. Samples were separated on 12% SDS-PAGE and autoradiographed. Data indicate a representative experiment which was repeated twice. B: Effect of $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}$ PTO on *de novo* synthesis of $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}\alpha$ protein. HUVEC were treated with PTO for 2 days and stimulated with IL-1 α for 4 h during which time the cells were metabolically labelled with [^{35}S]-methionine/cysteine mixture. Cell lysates were immunoprecipitated with a polyclonal antibody raised against the recombinant human $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}\alpha$ protein, separated on a 12% SDS-PAGE and autoradiographed. Note that the IL-1 α induction of $\text{I}\kappa\text{B}\alpha$ is selectively blocked by the antisense PTO. The densitometric scan of this autoradiograph is shown in (C).

I κ B α protein was immunoprecipitated. The radiolabelling of the 40 kd band was induced approximately 3-fold by IL-1 treatment in control and sense I κ B α PTO-treated cells but not in the antisense I κ B α PTO-treated cells. This further provides evidence that the antisense I κ B α PTO is able to repress the expression of the I κ B polypeptide in HUVEC.

4. Discussion

Using differential hybridization [26] as well as the PCR-ASH techniques [23], we have isolated from HUVEC, several PMA-inducible IE genes such as an orphan G-protein-coupled receptor *edg-1* [26], collagenase type I [23] and cyclooxygenase-2 [33]. In this communication, we describe the characterization of *edg-3* which is identical to the I κ B α gene product. The *edg-3* cDNA is strongly and transiently induced by PMA in HUVEC. Recent studies on the regulation of the I κ B α gene indicate that the tandem repeats of the cis-acting NF κ B enhancer elements control the transcription of the I κ B α gene itself [35]. Thus, the transcription of the inhibitor is under tight regulation by the transcription factor itself, constituting a mutual autoregulatory loop [36]. Because of the extreme lability of the I κ B α protein [37] and the transcriptional autoregulatory loop, the I κ B α protein is being recognized as a major conduit of extracellular signals in inflammatory gene transcription [29,36,46].

In addition to its well-established role as a regulator of transcription of inducible genes, the Rel family of proteins also regulate cell growth, oncogenesis and apoptosis [38]. In that respect, the I κ B α polypeptide can interact with multiple members of the Rel family, including the c-Rel, Rel-A and Rel-B polypeptides [39,40]. It was recently shown that the protooncogene c-Rel is found associated with I κ B α in the cytoplasm and in contrast to the Rel-A/I κ B α complex, inflammatory cytokine treatment did not result in the nuclear translocation of the c-Rel polypeptide in HUVEC [41]. This indicated that there may be additional I κ B α -mediated signalling pathways distinct from the well-known transcriptional regulatory function of NF κ B. Indeed, ankyrin repeat-containing polypeptides that are structurally related to I κ B are known regulators of mating-type switching in *S. cerevisiae* (SWI4 and SWI6) [42] and leukemogenesis in humans (*bcl3*) [43]. While the c-Rel polypeptide was originally characterized as a protooncogene involved in growth regulation [44], recent studies have indicated that c-Rel may also regulate the process of apoptosis during development [45]. It is generally thought that different combinatorial Rel complexes are involved in the mediation of diverse nuclear signalling events; however, specific biological role of distinct Rel complexes are not well understood. In addition, cytoplasmic regulation (retention) of distinct complexes by the I κ B family members and the corresponding signalling pathways are not well defined.

Our data indicate that the antisense I κ B α PTO specifically enhances the fibroblast growth factor-dependent cell growth of HUVEC. In contrast, the antisense I κ B α PTO does not modulate the IL-1-induced growth arrest in HUVEC. The sense I κ B α PTO, however, did not have appreciable effects on protein synthesis or HUVEC growth. Because the antisense I κ B α PTO inhibited the *in vitro* translation of the I κ B α transcript and suppressed the *de novo* synthesis of the polypeptide in IL-1 α -treated HUVEC, perturbation of the

normal turnover of the I κ B α protein results in the enhanced endothelial cell density upon reaching confluence.

Data presented in this report suggest that the I κ B α protein is involved in a signalling pathway that limits the growth of HUVEC. The increase in saturation density of HUVEC can result from either increased cell growth due to the loss of contact inhibition or decreased cell death due to apoptosis. Alternatively, both of these mechanisms may be operative. Further understanding of the I κ B α -mediated growth regulatory pathway in vascular endothelial cells may yield insights into mechanisms of angiogenesis.

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