

Glycation, Oxidation, and Lipoxidation in the Development of Diabetic Complications

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THE RISK OF MORTALITY from ischemic heart disease is about two to four times higher in people with non-insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus (NIDDM) than in the general population, so ischemic heart disease accounts for approximately 40% of deaths in NIDDM.¹ There are similar increases in the risk of stroke and lower-limb arterial disease in NIDDM,^{2,3} and it is reasonable to suggest that some common factor(s) may be at play in increasing macrovascular disease at each of these sites. Hyperglycemia is the defining abnormality in diabetes mellitus, and it is natural to speculate that increased levels of glucose are in some way responsible for the excess morbidity and mortality that diabetic patients suffer. Glycation, the nonenzymatic adduction of glucose to proteins, represents one possible mechanism by which excessive levels of glucose in plasma, in interstitial fluid, and within cells could lead to pathophysiological change.⁴ However, all diabetologists know patients who, despite prolonged periods of poor glycemic control, have escaped the worst of vascular complications, and others who quickly develop complications even when glycemic control is good. Therefore, one must invoke additional modifying factors if the "glycation hypothesis" is to be credible. One such additional modifying factor is 'oxidative stress', defined by Baynes⁵ as "the steady state level of reactive oxygen or oxygen radicals in a biologic system." Oxidation reactions are closely associated with glycation, and together they cause permanent and irreversible modification of proteins ("glycooxidation"). Oxidation reactions may also damage both glucose and lipids directly, generating reactive carbonyl-containing compounds (a carbonyl group consists of a carbon and an oxygen atom linked by a double bond). These reactive fragments can then cause irreversible modification of proteins. The term glycooxidation is used to cover this type of protein modification if the reactive fragments are derived from carbohydrate, but if they are derived from lipids, the term "lipoxidation" is used.

Since modification of proteins by all of these processes involves reactions with carbonyl-containing compounds, a "carbonyl stress hypothesis" for the pathogenesis of diabetic complications has been proposed.^{6,7} This states that the extent of damage to macromolecules is a function of cumulative exposure to reactive carbonyl compounds and determines the risk for development of diabetic complications. This hypothesis represents a modification of the glycation hypothesis, taking

into account the modulating effects of oxidative stress, including oxidation of lipids. In this brief review, we will outline the basic processes involved in glycation and the closely linked processes of free radical oxidation, glycooxidation, and lipoxidation, with particular reference to the development of macrovascular disease.

GLYCATION, GLYCOXIDATION, LIPOXIDATION, AND CARBONYL STRESS

Figure 1 illustrates the reactions involved in early and advanced glycation. Covalent bonds formed between aldehyde groups of glucose molecules and reactive-amino groups of proteins, usually located on lysine side-chains and *N*-terminal amino acid residues, constitute the early part of the process. The aldimine-linked Schiff base is unstable and its formation is readily reversible, whereas the fructoselysine (FL) compound yielded by an Amadori rearrangement of the Schiff base is relatively stable. Even so, FL can partake in further reactions yielding advanced glycation end products (AGEs). Stable end products that have been unequivocally identified include *N*^ε-carboxymethyllysine⁸ ([CML] formed in several ways described later) and a fluorescent cross-link, pentosidine.^{9,10} Some others have been identified in model systems and by immunologic techniques in vivo, eg, pyrraline¹¹ and "crosslines."¹²⁻¹⁴ Pyrraline has recently been identified in skin collagen in vivo by chromatographic methods¹⁵: it is a glucose-lysine adduct that may form cross-links by interaction with other amino acids.¹⁶

AGE formation from FL involves either oxidative modification of FL or nonoxidative dissociation of FL to form new reactive intermediates that again modify proteins. For this reason, in long-lived proteins such as insoluble collagen or lens crystallins, FL does not accumulate over time beyond a few weeks, and there is a good correlation between FL levels in such tissues and glycated hemoglobin.¹⁷ FL levels in collagen respond over several weeks of improved glycemic control (AGE levels do not),¹⁸ and it is logical to expect that the effects of increased levels of FL, as opposed to AGEs, are most likely to predominate in short-lived circulating proteins in which there is insufficient time for high levels of AGEs to accumulate.

As mentioned, AGEs may be formed from FL not only by direct oxidative damage to FL, but also nonoxidatively by interactions between proteins and dissociation products of FL.^{19,20} Instead of regenerating glucose, FL dissociation yields other more reactive carbonyl-containing intermediaries such as 3-deoxyglucosone,¹⁹ a potent modifier of lysine residues. An additional pathway for AGE formation is through direct oxidative damage (autooxidation) to glucose and other sugars, bypassing FL altogether.^{21,22} Reactive fragments of the sugar, such as glyoxal, are formed, which then bind to proteins. As already detailed, the term glycooxidation is again used to describe this reaction sequence, even though in this case oxidation precedes "glycation." Thus, CML may be formed either from oxidative

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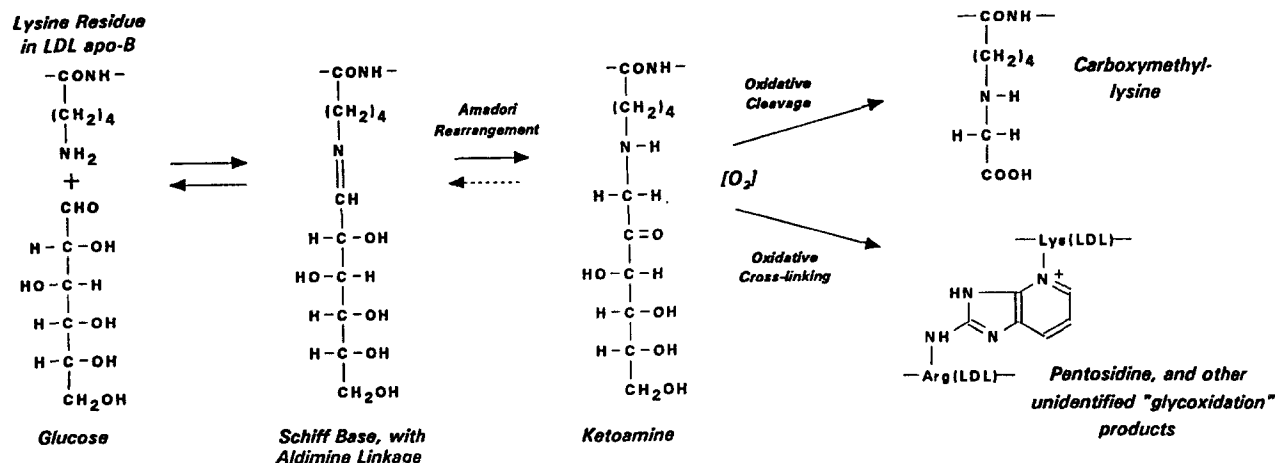


Fig 1. Early and advanced stages of glycation involving a lysine residue in LDL. The initial reaction results in formation of a Schiff base. An Amadori rearrangement leads to formation of the first stable product, FL, a compound containing a ketoamine link. Subsequently, oxidative reactions result in formation of the AGEs CML and pentosidine.

decomposition of FL or from reactions of glyoxal, the main dicarbonyl-containing autooxidation product of glucose, with protein.²²

Yet another source of reactive carbonyl-containing species is (per)oxidation of lipoproteins. Compounds generated in this way include glyoxal,²³ malondialdehyde, and 4-hydroxynonenal,²⁴ and lipoxidation adducts formed by these compounds on lysine residues in low-density lipoprotein (LDL) have recently been demonstrated.²⁴ Since glyoxal can be derived from oxidation of either glucose or lipids, CML may be either a glycoxidation or lipoxidation product.²³

To encompass all of these related processes, the term "carbonyl stress" has been introduced.^{6,7} This describes potentially pathogenic reactions of reactive carbonyl-containing species with macromolecules. The reactive carbonyl groups may be (1) located on glucose itself, (2) generated oxidatively by free radical damage to carbohydrates or lipids, or (3) generated nonoxidatively during FL dissociation. Carbonyl stress may affect both short- and long-lived proteins as reviewed herein. Many issues remain to be clarified, including (1) the identity and relative importance of the final reaction products, (2) the relative contributions of the various glycoxidation and lipoxidation pathways to the formation of these products, (3) the question of whether oxidative stress is increased in diabetes per se (glycation stress clearly is) or only as a function of vascular disease, and (4) the role of the various products in the pathogenesis of diabetic complications.

LIPOPROTEINS

In NIDDM, plasma lipoprotein levels may be normal, although modest elevations of LDL cholesterol and triglycerides accompanied by reduced high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol are not uncommon.²⁵ Qualitative changes in lipoproteins, including modification by glycation and oxidation, may be as important as quantitative abnormalities in determining atherogenicity.

LDL

Studies of glycoxidation and lipoxidation of LDL are facilitated by the fact that each particle has only one apoprotein, apoB100. LDL isolated from diabetic patients exhibits a twofold increase in apoB glycation compared with levels in nondiabetic subjects,²⁶⁻²⁸ and LDL glycation correlates with other indices of glycemic control.²⁸ In vitro glycation of LDL impairs its binding and degradation by human fibroblasts in proportion to the extent of glycation, and severe modification (> 6% to 8% lysine residues) may completely abolish recognition by the classic LDL receptor.²⁹⁻³¹ In vivo³² and in vitro³³ glycation of LDL in insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus (IDDM) patients correlated with cholesteryl ester accumulation in human monocyte-derived macrophages. Using boronate affinity chromatography, LDL from both diabetic and nondiabetic subjects can be separated into two fractions, one "bound" and highly glycated, the other "unbound" and much less glycated.³⁴ Degradation of the bound LDL fraction via the classic LDL receptor pathway is, as one might predict, greatly impaired in fibroblasts in comparison to the unbound fraction.³⁵ However, with human monocyte-macrophages (the main precursors of the foam cells characteristic of atherosclerotic plaques) marked increases in the accumulation and degradation of highly glycated LDL occur, along with increased accumulation of cholesteryl ester.³⁵ When LDL is glycated in vitro under antioxidant conditions, facilitating even higher levels of glycation (but not lipoxidation), proportionately greater effects on macrophage cholesteryl ester synthesis, accumulation, and degradation are observed together with decreased recognition by the classic LDL receptor.³³ Competition studies with acetylated LDL have ruled out the scavenger pathway receptor as the conduit for increased uptake of glycated LDL. These observations suggest the existence of a separate low-affinity, high-capacity receptor on human monocyte-macrophages that is specific for glycated LDL and accelerates foam cell formation and atherosclerosis.

It has been shown recently by Bucala et al^{36,37} that modifica-

tion of LDL by exposure to AGE-containing peptides reduces its clearance from plasma, and the site of modification of apoB that determines impaired recognition by the classic LDL receptor has been identified.^{36,37}

Lipoproteins contain varying amounts of unsaturated fatty acids at their core that are vulnerable to oxidative damage. Oxidized LDL is a potent stimulator of foam cell formation by macrophages,³⁸⁻⁴⁰ and in the vascular wall it is chemotactic to monocytes.^{41,42} Oxidized LDL also inhibits endothelial cell migration into areas of endothelial injury⁴³ and is cytotoxic to nearby cells.^{44,45} As stated earlier, the processes of glycation and oxidation are closely linked. Autooxidation of both FL and simple monosaccharides under physiological conditions in the presence of trace amounts of metal ions generates superoxide radicals, in turn promoting oxidative damage to lipoprotein core lipids.⁴⁶ However, there is at present no definite evidence that uncomplicated diabetes per se increases plasma lipoprotein oxidation. The situation may be different once vascular damage has become established, with extravasated lipoproteins sequestered in vessel walls or outside capillaries. Then, concomitant glycoxidation of connective tissue proteins may encourage further glucose-mediated binding of lipoproteins, permitting greater generation of free radicals and the establishment of vicious cycles of vascular injury.^{47,48}

Immunologic consequences of LDL modification. Enhanced modification of LDL in diabetes may provoke an immune response.⁴⁹⁻⁵⁵ The existence of antibodies against glycated LDL, even at low levels, may be important because LDL immune complexes (LDL-ICs) can stimulate foam cell formation and are potentially atherogenic, as previously reviewed.^{51,53,54} This atherogenicity of LDL-ICs is mediated by altered behavior of vascular cells, including altered cytokine release, coagulant activity, vascular permeability, and expression of vascular growth factors.

In diabetes, the formation of LDL-ICs in situ in vessel walls is probably enhanced by the presence of sequestered glycoxidized lipoproteins.⁵⁶ However, it is unclear whether significant formation of LDL-ICs occurs before or only after vascular disease has developed. Higher titers of antibodies against oxidized LDL have been observed in patients with NIDDM,⁵¹ but in this particular study, it is unclear whether the nondiabetic control group had vascular disease. Recent study from Baynes' group suggests that CML may be the dominant epitope for antibody formation against glycoxidation products,⁵⁷ and it is therefore conceivable that CML may also be an important epitope on modified LDL.

Very-low-density lipoprotein, HDL, and Lipoprotein(a)

Increased glycation of very-low-density lipoprotein (VLDL) and HDL apoproteins has been demonstrated in diabetes,⁵⁸ and may affect the cellular interactions, function, and metabolism of the particles so as to promote atherogenesis. VLDL from normolipemic NIDDM and IDDM patients stimulates increased cholesteryl ester synthesis and accumulation in cultured human monocyte-macrophages.^{59,60} However, subtle alterations in VLDL composition occur in diabetes,⁶¹ so these effects cannot be confidently attributed to increased glycation. In vivo, the various VLDL apoproteins undergo differing degrees of glycation because of differing plasma residence times. This issue

complicates assessment of the effects of glycation, and unfortunately, the differential glycation cannot be readily reproduced in vitro. Increased glycation of VLDL may therefore have important atherogenic consequences, but this has not yet been convincingly proven.

Similar problems afflict studies of glycated HDL. Mild glycation of HDL in vitro accelerates its clearance from plasma in guinea pigs,⁶² an effect possibly contributing to low plasma levels of HDL in diabetic patients. Glycation of HDL may also compromise its reverse cholesterol transport function: impaired high-affinity binding to fibroblasts⁶³ and ability to remove cholesterol from peripheral cells has been demonstrated.⁶⁴

The unusual apoprotein of lipoprotein(a) [Lp(a)], apo(a), has structural homology with plasminogen. Lp(a) may contribute to macrovascular disease both by an antifibrinolytic effect (competitive inhibition of plasminogen activation) and because it is a cholesterol-rich particle.⁶⁵ However, apo(a) has relatively few lysine residues, and a recent study investigating the effects of in vitro glycation showed no evidence of increased atherogenicity, at least in terms of interactions with macrophages.⁶⁶

GLYCATION OF OTHER PLASMA CONSTITUENTS

Glycated Albumin

Glycation of albumin has been implicated in the pathogenesis of vascular disease, especially glomerular damage, in diabetes. In vitro-glycated albumin inhibited proliferation of aortic endothelial cells in culture, and the effect could be blocked by antibodies reacting specifically with Amadori products in albumin.⁶⁷ Similar effects were observed in renal mesangial cells,⁶⁸ and these cells also exhibited abnormal collagen gene expression. Again, these effects could be inhibited by the specific antibody against glycated albumin.⁶⁹ Indeed, administration of this antibody to diabetic mice was found to prevent the development of nephropathy⁷⁰ and to inhibit retinal capillary basement membrane thickening.⁷¹

Glycation of Antithrombin III

Glycation of antithrombin III may impair its thrombin-inhibiting activity,⁷² thereby enhancing thrombosis. Suggesting that this effect may be relevant in vivo, an inverse correlation of antithrombin III activity with both hemoglobin A_{1c} and plasma glucose independent of plasma concentrations of antithrombin III has been described.⁷³ In contrast, glycation of fibrinogen has no effect on its function, and is therefore unlikely to promote thrombosis.⁷⁴

COLLAGEN AND VASCULAR TISSUE

Increased early glycation (FL content) of collagen in many tissues, including the aorta, has been observed in diabetes.^{17,75,76} As discussed, this is reversible (at least in skin) by a relatively short period of improved glycemic control, and is less likely to have pathological effects than the more advanced modifications involving glycoxidation and lipoxidation.^{18,76}

With advancing age and the progressive formation of stable cross-links,⁷⁷ collagen becomes more insoluble, thermally stable, and resistant to enzymatic digestion. This biochemical "aging" of collagen is greatly increased in people with diabetes,⁷⁸ and is accompanied by an accelerated accumulation of AGEs includ-

ing CML and pentosidine.⁷⁹ Once formed, these products are essentially permanent, and unlike FL, the levels do not decrease in response to improved glycemic control. Note that in vitro in the presence of glucose, antioxidant conditions inhibit the formation of CML, pentosidine, and collagen fluorescence, but not FL.⁸⁰

There is now much evidence demonstrating associations between collagen AGE formation and the presence and severity of diabetic microvascular complications.⁸¹⁻⁸³ For macrovascular disease, there are several possible mechanisms by which glycoxidation and lipoxidation of vascular wall structural proteins may be implicated. Glycoxidation products in collagen have been shown to damp the activity of nitric oxide (endothelium-derived relaxing factor), which could in turn cause abnormal vascular tone and perfusion and conceivably contribute to hypertension.⁸⁴ Both in vivo⁸¹ and autopsy⁸⁵ studies have shown increased aortic stiffness in diabetic subjects that may be associated with increased cross-linking of connective tissue proteins. Brownlee et al⁴⁷ found that glycated collagen binds more LDL than control collagen, and in diabetic animals, cross-linking of LDL to aortic collagen is increased 2.5-fold. AGEs in vessel walls have been localized immunologically to intracellular sites in macrophages, smooth muscle cells, and foam cells,⁸⁶ and there are specific receptors for AGEs on monocyte/macrophages.⁸⁷ Macrophages expressing such receptors can phagocytose protein molecules and even entire cells with AGEs on their surface.⁸⁸ Receptors for AGEs have also been identified and characterized on endothelial cells.⁸⁹ Reaction of AGE products with these various receptors can (1) induce prothrombotic tissue factor⁹⁰ and (2) stimulate release of cytokines that may accelerate the atherosclerotic process⁹¹ and promote collagen production mediated by platelet-derived growth factor and transforming growth factor beta.⁹² In animals, infusion of AGEs caused increased expression of vascular cell adhesion molecule-1 and intercellular adhesion molecule-1 in endothelial cells, associated with accelerated atherogenesis.⁹³

CONCLUSIONS, AND MEANS TO REDUCE CARBONYL STRESS

In conclusion, there is evidence that enhanced modification of proteins by carbonyl-containing species, in the course of glycation, glycoxidation, and lipoxidation reactions, is implicated in diabetic vascular disease. Atherogenesis may be accelerated by damage both to short-lived plasma constituents such as LDL and to long-lived structural proteins in the arterial wall. Reduction of carbonyl stress could slow disease progression by mitigating damage to successive generations of short-lived species and cumulative damage to long-lived species. Measures to inhibit the glucose-mediated, lipid-mediated, and "oxidative" components of carbonyl stress may be considered separately.

Glucose-Mediated Stress

This may be minimized by optimizing glycemic control, thus minimizing FL formation and the quantity of glucose vulnerable to autooxidation. Existing FL levels in structural proteins may be reduced.¹⁸ Optimal glycemic control is already an established goal in the management of diabetic patients.

Lipid-Mediated Stress

This may be mitigated by treatment of hyperlipidemia, if present (using dietary and/or pharmacologic measures), and by improving the "quality" of lipoproteins, ie, making them more resistant to oxidation. The latter goal may be addressed by dietary measures to minimize the oxidizability of fatty acid constituents of lipoproteins and cell membranes. Substitution of monounsaturated for polyunsaturated or saturated fats results in LDL that is less susceptible to oxidative damage,⁹⁴ and consumption of fruits and vegetables containing natural antioxidants may be beneficial.

Oxidative Stress

There is little direct evidence concerning the efficacy of antioxidant supplementation in diabetes. Vitamins C and E are the most important aqueous and fat-soluble antioxidants, respectively, and plasma levels of both tend to be abnormally low in diabetic patients.⁹⁵⁻⁹⁷ Supplements of these vitamins therefore appear to provide a cheap, low-risk intervention. However, under some circumstances, vitamin C may act as a pro-oxidant,⁹⁸ and there are insufficient grounds to recommend its routine use. For vitamin E, there is significant circumstantial but no direct evidence that it may be beneficial. Like vitamin C, vitamin E may have pro-oxidant effects under some circumstances.⁹⁹ Probucol may also reduce lipid peroxidation¹⁰⁰ and have vasoprotective effects,¹⁰¹⁻¹⁰³ but it seems to have few advantages over vitamin E. Similar considerations apply to butylated hydroxytoluene.^{104,105} Coenzyme Q (ubiquinone) detoxifies the oxidation product of vitamin E (tocopheroxyl radical), but any beneficial effect as a dietary supplement has yet to be clearly defined.¹⁰⁶ New agents to inhibit lipid peroxidation or its consequences are likely to be developed as the understanding of the chemistry involved improves.¹⁰⁷

Scavenging Reactive Carbonyls

Aminoguanidine scavenges reactive carbonyl groups, and especially dicarbonyl compounds (eg, glyoxal formed by oxidative decomposition of FL, Schiff base, or fatty acids, or 3-deoxyglucosone formed by decomposition of FL). It can therefore block the formation of glycoxidation and lipoxidation products and interrupt vicious cycles of vascular damage. In vitro, it inhibits both collagen cross-linking¹⁰⁸ and lipid peroxidation,^{109,110} and in cell culture, we have shown that at concentrations as low as 1 $\mu\text{mol/L}$ it can inhibit cytotoxicity development in LDL exposed to glycoxidative stress.¹¹¹ Similar concentrations inhibit the toxicity of simulated hyperglycemia (25 mmol/L glucose) for retinal vascular cells (T.J. Lyons, unpublished observations, March 1997). Thus, the observed toxicities of both modified LDL and glucose may be mediated by their oxidation products at very low concentrations. In vivo, aminoguanidine inhibits the development^{112,113} and progression¹¹⁴ of diabetic retinopathy in streptozotocin-diabetic rats and the development of diabetic nephropathy^{115,116} and neuropathy.^{117,118} A multicenter phase III study is in process assessing its efficacy in diabetic nephropathy in humans, and other similar agents with greater potency are under development.¹¹⁹

Possibilities for Direct Removal of AGEs From Serum or Dialysis Fluid

AGEs are not effectively removed during hemodialysis, but studies investigating the AGE receptor have demonstrated that they bind to lysozyme.¹²⁰ Matrix-bound lysozyme is being assessed as a means of clearing AGEs from serum and dialysis

fluid, and the initial results are encouraging.¹²¹ Finally, compounds that may cleave existing AGE-mediated cross-links are under investigation.¹²²

Some or all of these measures may, in the future, contribute to preventive strategies to abolish the increased risk for macrovascular disease in NIDDM.

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