Obesity-Related Upregulation of Monocyte Chemotactic Factors in Adipocytes

Involvement of Nuclear Factor-κB and c-Jun NH₂-Terminal Kinase Pathways

Ping Jiao,1,2 Qiu Chen,1,3 Suketu Shah,1 Jing Du,1 Bo Tao,1 Iphigenia Tzameli,4 Weiqun Yan,2 and Haiyan Xu1

OBJECTIVE—We sought to evaluate the entire picture of all monocyte chemotactic factors that potentially contribute to adipose tissue macrophage accumulation in obesity.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS—Expression and regulation of members in the entire chemokine superfamily were evaluated in adipose tissue and isolated adipocytes of obese versus lean mice. Kinetics of adipose tissue macrophage infiltration was characterized by fluorescence-activated cell sorting. The effects of fatty acids on stimulation of chemokine expression in adipocytes and underlying mechanisms were investigated.

RESULTS—Six monocyte chemotactic factors were found to be predominantly upregulated in isolated adipocytes versus stromal vascular cells in obese mice for the first time, although most of them were previously reported to be upregulated in whole adipose tissue. In diet-induced obese mice, adipose tissue enlargement, increase of adipocyte number, and elevation of multiple chemokine expression precede the initiation of macrophage infiltration. Free fatty acids (FFAs) are found to be inducers for upregulating these chemokines in 3T3-L1 adipocytes, and this effect can be partially blunted by reducing Toll-like receptor 4 expression. FFAs induce expression of monocyte chemotactic factors in adipocytes via both transcription-dependent and -independent mechanisms. In contrast to the reported role of JNK as the exclusive mediator of FFA-induced monocyte chemoattractant protein-1 (MCP-1) expression in macrophages, we show a novel role of inhibitor of κB kinase-β (IKKβ) in mediating FFA-induced upregulation of all six chemokines and a role of JNK in FFA-induced upregulation of MCP-1 and MCP-3.

CONCLUSIONS—Multiple chemokines derived from adipocytes might contribute to obesity-related WAT macrophage infiltration with FFAs as potential triggers and involvement of both IKKβ and JNK pathways. Diabetes 58:104–115, 2009
interfering RNA (siRNA) was purchased from Dharmacon. JNK2 and IKK
America. MRP-2 ELISA kit was purchased from R&D Systems. JNK1 small
protein (MRP)-1 ELISA construction kits were purchased from Antigenix
antibodies were purchased from Santa Cruz Biotechnology. Phospho-JNK
siRNAs were purchased from Santa Cruz Biotechnology. JNK1 and IKK
determined by fluorescence-activated cell sorting using anti-F4/80 and CD11C antibodies (detailed methods are in the supplementary
were isolated, weighed, and digested for isolation of stromal vascular fraction. Percentage of macrophage in stromal vascular fraction was
data are means ± SE. Metabolic parameters of ob/ob and DIO mice and lean controls, ob/ob mice and controls were 9 weeks old. DIO mice and controls were 24 weeks old. High-fat diet was initiated at the age of 4 weeks and continued for 20 weeks. Body weight and blood glucose levels were measured in the fed state. Mice were then killed in the fed state for plasma collection to measure insulin. Epididymal fat pads were isolated, weighed, and digested for isolation of stromal vascular fraction. Percentage of macrophage in stromal vascular fraction was determined by fluorescence-activated cell sorting using anti-F4/80 and CD11C antibodies (detailed methods are in the supplementary materials available in the online appendix). *P < 0.05, obese vs. lean mice.
their expression and regulation in adipose tissue of obese
mice. Six chemokines were found to be significantly increased in obese adipose tissue. We revealed for the first time that elevation of chemokines in obese adipose tissue is predominantly in adipocytes and that FFAs are inducers for specific upregulation of the aforementioned six chemokines in cultured adipocytes. Although JNK has been demonstrated to mediate FFA-induced MCP-1 expression in macrophages (23), inhibitor of IkB (IkB) kinase-ß; (IKKß) is the main mediator of FFA-induced upregulation of multiple chemokines in adipocytes.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Cells, reagents, and treatments. 3T3-L1 cells were obtained from American
Type Tissue Culture Collection. 3T3-L1 cell sublines stably expressing short
hairpin interfering RNA (shRNA) against Toll-like receptor 4 (shTLR4) or scramble shRNA were established as described previously (24). 3T3-L1 CAR cells, a 3T3-L1 subline stably expressing the truncated adenovirus receptor, were provided by Dr. David Ottley (University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, Denver, CO). 3T3-L1 CAR cells have dramatically improved adenovi-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metabolic parameters of ob/ob and DIO mice</th>
<th>Lean</th>
<th>ob/ob</th>
<th>Chow</th>
<th>High-fat diet</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>n</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body weight (g)</td>
<td>27.5 ± 0.4</td>
<td>48.5 ± 1.1*</td>
<td>31.2 ± 0.73</td>
<td>51.6 ± 1.14*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fed plasma glucose (mg/dl)</td>
<td>221 ± 18.84</td>
<td>477 ± 2.81*</td>
<td>282 ± 14.37</td>
<td>375 ± 18.88*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fed plasma insulin (ng/ml)</td>
<td>0.76 ± 0.15</td>
<td>7.99 ± 0.1*</td>
<td>1.61 ± 0.67</td>
<td>7.47 ± 0.59*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epididymal fat (g)</td>
<td>0.75 ± 0.04</td>
<td>4.1 ± 0.1*</td>
<td>1.12 ± 0.05</td>
<td>2.06 ± 0.20*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total adipocytes per mouse x 10⁵</td>
<td>8.74 ± 0.70</td>
<td>21.2 ± 3.9</td>
<td>18.7 ± 0.68</td>
<td>29.7 ± 6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total stromal-vascular cells per mouse</td>
<td>7.75 ± 0.59</td>
<td>58.5 ± 5.12*</td>
<td>6.99 ± 0.49</td>
<td>100.9 ± 20.5*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F4/80 CD11C+ cells (%)</td>
<td>8.09 ± 0.32</td>
<td>28.9 ± 0.32*</td>
<td>11.99 ± 2.39</td>
<td>28.99 ± 2.98*</td>
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RESULTS

Obesity is associated with upregulation of multiple monocyte chemotactic factors in adipose tissue and adipocytes. To date, 46 chemokines have been identified and 38 murine orthologs have been found, including a pseudogene. We analyzed the expression and regulation of murine chemokines in adipose tissue from both ob/ob and DIO mice by transcriptional profiling and real-time PCR analysis. We selected 9-week-old ob/ob mice and 24-week-old DIO mice fed on a high-fat diet for 20 weeks because of their comparable adiposity. The metabolic parameters...
of these mice are listed in Table 1. Six CC and one CXC chemokines were found to be significantly upregulated in WAT of both \( \text{ob/ob} \) and DIO mice. These CC chemokines include \( \text{MCP-1} \), \( \text{MCP-2} \), \( \text{MCP-3} \), \( \text{MIP-1}^\alpha \), \( \text{MRP-1} \), and \( \text{MRP-2} \) (Fig. 1). CXC chemokine \( \text{MIP-2} \) was also significantly upregulated in WAT of both \( \text{ob/ob} \) and DIO mice; \( \text{MIP-1}^\beta \) was significantly upregulated in WAT of \( \text{ob/ob} \) but not DIO mice; \( \text{MIP-2}^\gamma \) was significantly upregulated in WAT of DIO but not \( \text{ob/ob} \) mice. Interestingly, all six upregulated CC chemokines have monocyte chemotactic capabilities. Separation of adipocytes and stromal vascular cells indicate that these CC chemokines are mainly

![Fig. 1](https://example.com/fig1.png)
increased in primary adipocytes (Fig. 1). MCP-1, MCP-2, MCP-3, MIP-1α, and MRP-2 have been previously reported to increase at the mRNA level in whole adipose tissue (4,7,9,26). Our study not only adds MRP-1 to the list but also points out that elevation of chemokine expression mainly occurs in adipocytes. The protein levels of MCP-1, MCP-3, MIP-1α, MRP-1, and MRP-2 were significantly increased by 402, 213, 604, 92, and 190%, respectively, in WAT of DIO mice with the protein level of MCP-2 unchanged (Fig. 1B). The protein levels of MCP-1, MCP-2, MCP-3, MIP-1α, MRP-1, and MRP-2 were significantly increased by 85, 16, 134, 134, 21, and 60%, respectively, in WAT of ob/ob mice (Fig. 1B). The circulating levels of MCP-1, MCP-3, MRP-1, and MRP-2 were significantly increased by 160, 254, 41, and 17%, respectively, in plasma of DIO mice (Fig. 1C). The circulating levels of MCP-1 and MCP-3 were also significantly increased by 345 and 71%, respectively, in plasma of ob/ob mice (Fig. 1C). Circulating levels of MCP-2 did not change in either DIO mice or ob/ob mice. Circulating levels of MRP-1 and MRP-2 only increased in DIO mice but remained unchanged in ob/ob mice. Circulating level of MIP-1α was undetectable in either ob/ob or DIO mice. To understand when these chemokines start to increase, a high-fat diet was applied to 4-week-old C57BL/6J mice for a short period of time. The protein level of MCP-1 rapidly increased 1 day after high-fat diet and continued to increase at 3 and 7 days on high-fat diet (Fig. 1D). The protein levels of MCP-2 and MCP-3 trended up 1 day on high-fat diet and the elevation became significant at 3 and 7 days on high-fat diet. The protein level of MRP-2 significantly increased at 7 days on high-fat diet. However, MIP-1α and MRP-1 protein levels did not significantly increase within 1 week of high-fat diet. These results indicate that MCP-1, MCP-2, MCP-3, and MRP-2 might be more important in the initial macrophage extravasation into adipose tissue compared with MIP-1α and MRP-1, which probably play a role in attracting macrophage into adipose tissue in a later stage of obesity.
To determine whether elevation of chemokine expression in adipose tissue occurs before macrophage infiltration, we evaluated the kinetics of macrophage infiltration by comparing adiposity and macrophage number in DIO mice versus lean controls 1, 4, 8, 12, 16, and 20 weeks on high-fat diet (supplementary Table 1, available in an online appendix at http://dx.doi.org/10.2337/db07-1344). Our results clearly show that fat pad enlargement, increase of adipocyte number, and elevation of expression of monocyte chemotactic factors occur as early as 1 week on high-fat diet, but adipose macrophage content did not significantly increase until 12 weeks on high-fat diet. A recent study reported that F4/80 and CD11C double positive cells are mainly responsible for macrophage-mediated inflammatory activities (23). We therefore analyzed the adipose macrophage content by counting F4/80 and CD11C double positive cells.

FFAs are potent inducers for chemokine expression. Massive expansion of adipose tissue reflects the need for the body to store excessive amount of energy in the form of triglyceride, which is synthesized using FFAs and glycerol as substrates. The effects of FFAs and glycerol on chemokine production in adipocytes have not been documented. To determine whether a surplus of FFAs and/or glycerol could be the stimuli for increased chemokine production, 3T3-L1 adipocytes were stimulated with a mixture of either 0.5 mmol/l FFA/BSA or 0.5 mmol/l glycerol. We chose to use a mixture of 0.5 mmol/l saturated (lauric and myristic acid) and unsaturated (oleic, linoleic, and arachidonic acid) FFAs for stimulation. FFAs dramatically upregulated MCP-1 expression, whereas glycerol had no effect (Fig. 2A). Further experiments indicated that FFAs are also able to upregulate MCP-2, MCP-3, MIP-1α, MRP-1, and MRP-2 in 3T3-L1 adipocytes.

**FIG. 2.** FFAs stimulate chemokine production in 3T3-L1 adipocytes. A: FFAs upregulate monocyte chemotactic factors at mRNA level in 3T3-L1 adipocytes. Left: FFAs, not glycerol, are capable of inducing MCP-1 expression in cultured 3T3-L1 adipocytes. RNAs were extracted from fully differentiated 3T3-L1 adipocytes treated with 0.5 mmol/l FFA/BSA, 0.5 mmol/l glycerol, 1 μg/ml insulin, or respective vehicles (Veh) for 3 h after overnight incubation with serum-free medium. Right: FFAs are capable of inducing expression of multiple chemokines in cultured 3T3-L1 adipocytes. For comparison, the expression level of these genes in vehicle-treated 3T3-L1 adipocytes was arbitrarily set at 1. B: FFAs upregulate monocyte chemotactic factors in 3T3-L1 adipocytes at protein level. Conditioned medium was collected from adipocytes treated with ethanol/BSA or FFA/BSA for 3 h after overnight incubation with serum-free medium and used for enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) analysis. Error bars represent ± SE. *P < 0.05, treated vs. vehicle. Results shown here are representative of three independent experiments.
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FIG. 3. Time course of FFA-induced upregulation of monocyte chemotactic factors in 3T3-L1 adipocytes. After overnight incubation with serum-free medium, 3T3-L1 adipocytes were treated with ethanol/BSA or FFA/BSA for 1, 3, 5, 7, or 9 h before RNA extraction. Expression of chemokines were evaluated by real-time PCR analysis. Error bars represent ±SE. *P < 0.05, treated vs. vehicle. Results shown here are representative of three independent experiments.

(Fig. 2A). As a negative control, expression of *eotaxin 2*, which is not upregulated in obese adipose tissue, was examined in 3T3-L1 adipocytes and was found not to be increased by FFA treatment (Fig. 2A). The upregulation of mRNA level of the above chemokines by FFA treatment is accompanied by increased protein secretion into conditioned medium (Fig. 2B). FFA-stimulated chemokine production in 3T3-L1 adipocytes is dose (data not shown) and time dependent (Fig. 3). Detailed chemokine expression time course revealed that the peak expression of *MCP-1*, *MCP-2*, *MCP-3*, and *MIP-1α* is ~3 h after treatment (Fig. 3). Interestingly, FFA-stimulated upregulation of *MRP-1* and *MRP-2* is due to delayed decrease rather than increase of the actual mRNA levels compared with vehicle-treated cells (Fig. 3). Experiments using individual FFAs indicate that the effect is most likely attributed to unsaturated FFAs (supplementary Fig. 1, available in the online appendix).

**Role of TLR4 in FFA-induced chemokine expression.** TLR4 plays an important role in innate immunity. Recently, TLR4 has been demonstrated to mediate fatty acid–induced activation of inflammatory pathways and

FIG. 4. TLR4 is involved in FFA-induced upregulation of chemokine expression. 3T3-L1 preadipocytes stably expressing shRNA against TLR4 (L1-shTLR4) or scramble shRNA (L1-scramble) were differentiated into adipocytes, treated with ethanol/BSA, or 0.5 mmol/l FFAs/BSA for 3 h after overnight incubation with serum-free medium before RNA extraction. For comparison, the expression level of chemokines in vehicle-treated 3T3-L1 adipocytes expressing scramble shRNA was arbitrarily set at 1. *P < 0.05, L1-shTLR4 vs. L1-scramble. Results shown here are representative of three independent experiments.
attenuation of insulin signaling (24, 27). To investigate whether TLR4 plays a role in FFA-induced chemokine expression in adipocytes, we treated 3T3-L1 adipocytes stably expressing scramble shRNA or shTLR4 with FFAs. Consistent with a previous report, reduction of TLR4 expression in adipocytes significantly reduced FFA-induced IL-6 expression (Fig. 4). FFA-induced expression of MCP-1, MCP-2, MCP-3, MIP-1α, MRP-1, and MRP-2 was also reduced (Fig. 4). In addition, the basal levels of MCP-1, MRP-1, and MRP-2 were also decreased (Fig. 4). However, TLR4 knockdown did not have any effect on MCP-2 expression in either basal or FFA-stimulated condition. These results indicate that TLR4 is partially responsible for FFA-induced chemokine expression and that an alternative pathway(s) also exists.

**Mechanism of FFA-induced chemokine expression.** To further explore the mechanism of FFA-induced chemokine expression in 3T3-L1 adipocytes, we tested whether the regulation is dependent on transcription and/or protein synthesis. The upregulation of MCP-1, MCP-2, MCP-3, and MIP-1α mRNA in response to FFAs is transcription dependent because the effect can be blocked by actinomycin D treatment (Fig. 5A). In contrast, the upregulation of MRP-1 and MRP-2 mRNA is posttranscriptional (Fig. 5A). Only FFA-stimulated MIP-1α expression requires protein synthesis because it is blocked by cycloheximide treatment (Fig. 5B). In contrast, blockage of protein synthesis significantly further increased expression of MCP-1 and MCP-3 (Fig. 5B).

FFAs have been reported to induce production of hydrogen peroxide in 3T3-L1 adipocytes (28). Despite the
fact that high concentration of hydrogen peroxide (0.5 mmol/l) can mildly induce MCP-1 mRNA in 3T3-L1 adipocytes 3 h after treatment, we found that 0.5 mmol/l hydrogen peroxide did not significantly upregulate these six chemokines in 3T3-L1 adipocytes 3 h after treatment (data not shown). In addition, treatment with 500 µmol/l NADPH oxidase inhibitor apocynin could not repress FFA-induced chemokine production but did effectively abolish production of hydrogen peroxide caused by FFA treatment (Fig. 6A). FFAs are also known to activate both NF-κB and JNK pathways (29,30). Therefore, we tested the possibility of whether FFA-induced chemokine expression is due to activation of NF-κB and/or JNK pathways. NF-κB transcriptional activation inhibitor was used to treat 3T3-L1 adipocytes at 200 µmol/l, which inhibited FFA-induced NF-κB activation by 99.8% (Fig. 6B). Significant repression on FFA-induced chemokine expression by NF-κB inhibitor was observed for all six chemokines (Fig. 6B). JNK inhibitor II (SP600125) was applied to assess the role of JNK in FFA-induced expression of chemokines in 3T3-L1 adipocytes. FFA-induced expression of MCP-1 and MCP-3 was significantly reduced in SP600125-treated 3T3-L1 adipocytes (Fig. 6C). The efficacy of SP600125 in 3T3-L1 adipocytes was confirmed by reduction of JNK phosphorylation (Fig. 6C). To confirm the role of NF-κB in FFA-induced chemokine expression by a biological approach, we reduced the expression of IKKβ by RNA interference (Fig. 7A). Consistent with our results with
NF-κB inhibitor, reduction of IKKβ expression in 3T3-L1 adipocytes by RNA interference also reduced FFA-induced upregulation of all six CC chemokines (Fig. 7A). The inhibitory effect of JNK inhibitor on FFA-induced MCP-1 and MCP-3 expression was also confirmed by RNA interference (Fig. 7B). In addition, overexpression of both wild type and the constitutively active form of IKKβ in 3T3-L1 CAR adipocytes via adenovirus-mediated gene transfer can significantly increase expression of MCP-1, MCP-2, MCP-3, MIP-1α, and MRP-2 (Fig. 8) but, surprisingly, not MRP-1 (data not shown).

Effects of rosiglitazone on expression of monocyte chemotactic factors in vitro and in vivo. Thiazolidinediones have been reported to have potent anti-inflammatory activity and suppress NF-κB activity in MNCs and lower plasma MCP-1 level (15,20). To address whether thiazolidinediones can repress FFA-induced expression of chemokines in adipocytes, 3T3-L1 adipocytes were treated with rosiglitazone for 24 h before stimulation with FFAs. Pretreatment with rosiglitazone significantly and dose dependently reduced expression of MCP-1, MCP-3, MIP-1α, MRP-1, and MRP-2, but not MCP-2, in 3T3-L1 adipocytes (supplementary Fig. 2, available in the online appendix). Obese mice treated with thiazolidinediones have been reported to have reduced expression of MCP-1, MCP-3, and MIP-1α but unchanged MCP-2 expression in adipose tissue; and obese humans treated with pioglitazone have reduced expression of MCP-1 in adipose tissue (4,9,31). However, potential regulation of MRP-1 and MRP-2 in adipose tissue by thiazolidinediones has never been examined. We treated ob/ob mice with rosiglitazone for 4 weeks and evaluated the expression of all six chemokines upregulated in obese fat. Consistent with previous reports, expression of MCP-1, MCP-3, and MIP-1α was repressed but MCP-2 remains unchanged (Fig. 8B). Surprisingly, rosiglitazone can only reduce expression of MRP-1 and MRP-2 in vitro but not in vivo, suggesting that these two chemokines might be regulated by an additional mechanism in vivo compared with in vitro.

DISCUSSION

Obesity-related adipose tissue macrophage accumulation has been demonstrated to contribute to systemic insulin resistance (9–11). To understand the responsible chemotactic factors in addition to MCP-1, we systematically analyzed the expression and regulation of murine chemokines in adipose tissue of male ob/ob and DIO mice. Totally, five additional monocyte chemokines were found to be upregulated at both mRNA and protein level in WAT of ob/ob and DIO mice, indicating that macrophage extravasation into adipose tissue in the obese state might be very complicated. A recent publication showed that another monocyte chemokine MIP-2γ is upregulated at the mRNA level in WAT of both ob/ob and DIO mice, whereas we only detected mild upregulation in WAT of DIO but not ob/ob mice (32). The discrepancy is likely due to gender difference. In that report, MIP-2γ has been shown to play an important role in WAT macrophage infiltration in female but not male DIO mice (32). In our study, we only followed by RNA interference. Bottom, expression of chemokines in 3T3-L1 adipocytes with JNK knockdown. For comparison, the expression level of chemokines in scrambled siRNA-electroporated and ethanol/BSA-treated 3T3-L1 adipocytes was arbitrarily set at 1. Results shown here are representative of three independent experiments.
up on the six CC chemokines that are upregulated in WAT of both ob/ob and DIO male mice. Isolation of primary adipocytes proves that aforementioned chemokines are predominantly increased in adipocytes, supporting the hypothesis that adipocyte-derived chemokines might play important roles in initial macrophage infiltration. Acute high-fat diet study showed rapid increase of MCP-1, MCP-2, MCP-3, and MRP-2 in fat within a week, at which time point circulating levels of these chemokines did not change. Our kinetic study with DIO mice indicates that fat mass enlargement precedes increase of macrophage content and further supports that adipocytes may play an important role in initiating macrophage infiltration by secreting chemokines.

Elevated level of FFAs, a well-known factor contributing to systemic insulin resistance and inflammation in MNCs in obesity (8), was found to potently induce expression of monocyte chemotactic factors in cultured 3T3-L1 adipocytes, accompanied by increased protein secretion into conditioned medium. FFA-stimulated expression of these chemokines starts to elevate in adipocytes, accompanied by increased protein secretion into conditioned medium. FFA-stimulated expression of monocyte chemotactic factors in cultured 3T3-L1 adipocytes, accompanied by increased protein secretion into conditioned medium. FFA-stimulated expression of monocyte chemotactic factors in cultured 3T3-L1 adipocytes, accompanied by increased protein secretion into conditioned medium. FFA-stimulated expression of monocyte chemotactic factors in cultured 3T3-L1 adipocytes, accompanied by increased protein secretion into conditioned medium. FFA-stimulated expression of monocyte chemotactic factors in cultured 3T3-L1 adipocytes, accompanied by increased protein secretion into conditioned medium. FFA-stimulated expression of monocyte chemotactic factors in cultured 3T3-L1 adipocytes, accompanied by increased protein secretion into conditioned medium. FFA-stimulated expression of monocyte chemotactic factors in cultured 3T3-L1 adipocytes, accompanied by increased protein secretion into conditioned medium. FFA-stimulated expression of monocyte chemotactic factors in cultured 3T3-L1 adipocytes, accompanied by increased protein secretion into conditioned medium. FFA-stimulated expression of monocyte chemotactic factors in cultured 3T3-L1 adipocytes, accompanied by increased protein secretion into conditioned medium. FFA-stimulated expression of monocyte chemotactic factors in cultured 3T3-L1 adipocytes, accompanied by increased protein secretion into conditioned medium. FFA-stimulated expression of monocyte chemotactic factors in cultured 3T3-L1 adipocytes, accompanied by increased protein secretion into conditioned medium. FFA-stimulated expression of monocyte chemotactic factors in cultured 3T3-L1 adipocytes, accompanied by increased protein secretion into conditioned medium. FFA-stimulated expression of monocyte chemotactic factors in cultured 3T3-L1 adipocytes, accompanied by increased protein secretion into conditioned medium. FFA-stimulated expression of monocyte chemotactic factors in cultured 3T3-L1 adipocytes, accompanied by increased protein secretion into conditioned medium.

Why so many monocyte chemotactic factors increase in the obese state is not clear. Genetic models deficient in these chemokines individually or in combination will provide more information regarding their relative importance for adipose tissue macrophage attraction. In addition to potential macrophage recruiting capability, whether these chemokines have other biological functions, such as impairing insulin sensitivity in insulin target cells, like MCP-1 (7), remains to be investigated.

Interestingly, not all of the upregulated chemokines are due to the actual increase of mRNA. In the cases of MRP-1 and MRP-2, the mRNA levels decreased rapidly in vehicle-treated 3T3-L1 adipocytes, whereas delayed reduction of mRNA was observed in FFA-treated cells, suggesting that FFAs might protect mRNA stability of MRP-1 and MRP-2. For MCP-1, MCP-2, MCP-3, and MIP-1α, mRNA levels were induced by FFA treatment via a transcription-dependent mechanism. TLR4 has been recently demonstrated to be an important receptor for mediating the effects of FFAs on activation of inflammatory pathways. We found that TLR4 is also partially responsible for FFA-induced upregulation of MCP-1, MCP-3, MIP-1α, MIP-1β, and MIP-2. FFAs are known to activate both NF-κB and JNK pathways, the important intracellular pathways that are activated by inflammatory stimuli. The IKKβ/NF-κB axis has been demonstrated to be the molecular target for the hypoglycemic actions of salicylates (33,34). IKKβ selectively phosphorylates the IκB protein inhibitor of NF-κB, which triggers degradation of IκB and releases NF-κB for translocation into the nucleus to transcribe many target genes that are related to insulin resistance (35). By application of the NF-κB activation inhibitor, reduction of IKKβ expression via RNA interference, and IKKβ overexpression, we showed that the IKK/NF-κB pathway has a broad effect on FFA-induced chemokine expression. JNK is a stress kinase that is involved in insulin resistance (36–38). Animals deficient in JNK-1 are protected from developing insulin resistance on a high-fat diet (39). In addition, JNK has also been demonstrated to be a major contributor to FFA-

FIG. 8. Effect of IKKβ overexpression on chemokine production. Wild-type, inactive, and constitutively active human IKKβ (named hIKK WT, hIKK KM, and hIKK SE, respectively) were overexpressed in 3T3-L1 CAR cells. A: Overexpression of hIKKβ in 3T3-L1 CAR cells at protein level. B: Expression of chemokine genes in 3T3-L1 CAR adipocytes overexpressing hIKKβ. Fully differentiated 3T3-L1 CAR adipocytes were infected with adenoviruses overexpressing green fluorescent protein (GFP), hIKKβ WT, hIKK β KM, or hIKK β SE at the dose of 1 × 10⁶ plaque-forming units/ml for 6 h. Cells were then incubated in fresh medium for 48 h. Forty-eight hours after infection, cells were incubated in serum-free medium overnight. Seventy-two hours after infection, cells were harvested for RNA extraction to examine expression of chemokine genes by real-time PCR analysis. C: Expression of chemokine protein in conditioned supernatant. Conditioned supernatant collected from the experiment described in B was used to measure secreted chemokine protein by ELISA. Error bars represent means ± SE. Methods for construction of adenovirus constructs are in supplementary materials available in the online appendix. *P < 0.05, IKKβ-overexpressing cells vs. GFP-overexpressing cells. Results shown here are representative of three independent experiments.
induced cellular insulin resistance using 3T3-L1 adipocytes as a model system (29). In our study, inhibition of the JNK pathway partially reduced FFA-induced upregulation of MCP-1 and MCP-3. Because upregulation of MCP-1 and MCP-3 by FFA treatment is due to increased transcription, JNK-involved chemokine expression is most likely through activation of c-Jun. AP-1 sites have been reported to exist in the promoters of MCP-1 and MCP-3. Our data provide further evidence to demonstrate that JNK is not only important for mediating FFA-induced insulin resistance but also involved in FFA-induced expression of monocyte chemotactic factors in adipocytes.

Among the current therapeutic agents for treating type 2 diabetes, thiazolidinediones mainly improve adipose insulin sensitivity. Existing evidence indicates that thiazolidinediones have a potent anti-inflammation effect through repressing NF-κB activity at least in MNCs, suggesting that improved insulin sensitivity might be partially through its anti-inflammatory effect (15,20,22). Rosiglitazone not only significantly reduced MCP-1, MCP-3, and MIP-1α expression in adipose tissue, it can also repress FFA-induced expression of the aforementioned chemokines around the peak expression time in adipocytes. These results suggest that the anti-inflammatory effect of thiazolidinediones is likely through both macrophages and adipocytes. Surprisingly, rosiglitazone only represses FFA-induced expression of MRP-1 and MRP-2 in vitro but not in vivo. Whether expression of MRP-1 and MRP-2 in vivo is under a different control mechanism compared with in vitro remains to be studied. Upregulation of multiple monocyte chemotactic factors via different mechanisms in obesity may render it difficult to completely deplete adipose macrophages through targeting an individual chemokine or receptor. It is noteworthy to point out that improvement of systemic insulin resistance has been observed in MCP-1, MIP-2γ, and CCR2-deficient mice and in mice treated with a CCR2 antagonist, although adipose tissue macrophage content was only partially reduced. These results not only demonstrate that adipose tissue–infiltrated macrophages play an important role for the development of obesity-related insulin resistance but also imply that reduction of adipose macrophage to a higher extent might be more beneficial.

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