Hypercholesterolemia and effects of high cholesterol diet in type IIa sodium-dependent phosphate co-transporter (Npt2a) deficient mice

Sarasa Tanaka1††, Hironori Yamamoto1†††, Otoki Nakahashi1, Mariko Ishiguro1††, Yuichiro Takei1††, Masashi Masuda1††, Mina Kozai1, Shoko Ikeda1, Yutaka Taketani1, Ken-ichi Miyamoto‡, and Eiji Takeda1

1Department of Clinical Nutrition and 2Department of Molecular Nutrition, Institute of Health Biosciences, the University of Tokushima Graduate School, Tokushima, Japan, 3Department of Health and Nutrition, Faculty of Human Life, the Jin-ai University, Echizen, Japan

Abstract: The type IIa sodium-dependent phosphate co-transporter (Npt2a) is important to maintain renal inorganic phosphate (Pi) homeostasis and the plasma Pi levels. It has been reported that disorder of Pi metabolism in kidney can be risk factors for cardiovascular disease as well as hypercholesterolemia. However, the relationship between Pi and cholesterol metabolism has not been clarified. The current study investigated the effects of Npt2a gene ablation that is known as hypophosphatemia model on cholesterol metabolism in mice. Npt2a deficient (Npt2a-/-) mice and wild type mice were fed diets with or without 2% cholesterol for 12 days. Plasma lipid and lipoprotein profile analysis revealed that plasma lipid levels (total, LDL and HDL cholesterol) were significantly higher in Npt2a-/- mice than wild type (WT) mice. Interestingly, high cholesterol diet markedly increased plasma levels of total, LDL and HDL cholesterol in WT mice, but not Npt2a-/- mice. On the other hand, there were no differences in body and liver weight, intake and hepatic lipid accumulation between WT and Npt2a-/- mice. These results suggest that ablation of Npt2a gene induces hypercholesterolemia and affects the ability to respond normally to dietary cholesterol. J. Med. Invest. 60: 191-196, August, 2013

Keywords: Npt2a, cholesterol, hyperlipidemia, hypophosphatemia, mice

1. INTRODUCTION

The type IIa renal sodium-dependent phosphate (Na/Pi) co-transporter Npt2a is the most important regulator of inorganic phosphate (Pi) homeostasis through reabsorption of Pi in renal brush border membrane (1). Beck et al. reported that Npt2a gene ablation leads not only to hypophosphatemia but also to hypercalciuria and high levels of 1,25-dihydroxyvitamin D3 [1,25(OH)2D3] and skeletal abnormalities. Also it is reported that renal Npt2a gene ablation induces renal calcification due to abnormalities of mineral metabolism (2, 3). Moreover, it is known that renal Npt2a expression is regulated by

† Authors contributed equally to this work.
† Present address: Sarasa Tanaka (Department of Food Science and Nutrition, School of Human Science and Environment, University of Hyogo, Hyogo, Japan), Mariko Ishiguro (Department of Health and Nutrition, Faculty of Human Life Studies, the University of Niigata Prefecture, Niigata 950-8680, Japan), Yuichiro Takei (Department of Oral Growth and Developmental Biology, Hiroshima University, Hiroshima 743-8553, Japan), Masashi Masuda (Dept. of Medicine, Division of Renal Diseases and Hypertension, the University of Colorado Denver, CO 80045, USA).

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Address correspondence and reprint requests to Hironori Yamamoto, Ph.D., Department of Health and Nutrition, Faculty of Human Life, the Jin-ai University, Ohde-cho 3-1-1, Echizen City, 915-8586, Japan and Fax: +81-778-27-2010.

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dietary Pi and hormones such as 1,25(OH)2D3, parathyroid hormone (PTH), fibroblast growth factor-23 (FGF-23), dopamine, thyroid hormones, and glucocorticoids (2, 3). In addition, we have reported that 3,3',5-tri-iodothyronine (T3), a known regulatory factor for hepatic cholesterol metabolism, induces hypocholesterolemia and hyperphosphatemia, and we revealed that T3 transcriptionally up-regulates the Npt2a gene in renal proximal tubular cells (4). In contrast, hyperphosphatemia has emerged as a risk factor for vascular calcification and cardiovascular mortality (5). It has been also reported that hyperphosphatemia is associated with left ventricular hypertrophy and progression of chronic kidney disease (CKD) (6, 7).

Cholesterol is an important component of hormones and cell membranes in tissues and organs of the human body (8). On the other hand, it is also well known that an excessive cholesterol intake induces fatty liver, hypercholesterolemia and atherosclerosis (9, 10). In blood, cholesterol is carried by lipoproteins, chylomicrons (CM), very low density lipoprotein (VLDL), low density lipoprotein (LDL) and high density lipoprotein (HDL). These lipoproteins vary not only in density but also in their functions. After dietary cholesterol was absorbed by the small intestine, it is then incorporated into the CM particle and delivered to the liver. VLDL cholesterol is formed in the liver and transported to the blood stream where it converted to LDL cholesterol and utilized in certain organs through LDL receptor. Excess cholesterol is then returned to the liver with HDL to be eliminated later in bile as bile acid. An elevated plasma LDL cholesterol level induces atherosclerosis, while high HDL cholesterol reduces risk of atherosclerosis (11-13). To get to understand these functions, it is necessary to measure plasma concentration of lipoproteins. In addition, it has been shown that abnormalities in lipid metabolism, especially cholesterol, are the major contributing factor in the induction of atherosclerosis (14, 15). It has been reported that higher serum Pi levels are associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease (CVD) in individuals free of CKD and CVD (16). Our recent studies also showed that dietary and serum Pi influence the progression of atherosclerosis in vivo and in vitro (17, 18). However, the effect of Pi on cholesterol metabolism remains to be elucidated.

In this study, we investigated the effects of Npt2a gene ablation on cholesterol metabolism in mice, and revealed that Npt2a gene ablation increased plasma total, LDL and HDL cholesterol levels and lose the responses to high cholesterol diet.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Animals

Male and female Npt2a−/− mice were purchased from The Jackson Laboratory (Bar Harbor, ME, USA) and crossing male and female Npt2a−/− yielded the Npt2a−/− mice, as described previously (2). Wild-type mice and Npt2a−/− mice were genotyped by PCR amplification of genomic DNA. PCR genotyping to confirm the Npt2a gene ablation was performed by using a thermal cycler (SHIMAZU, Kyoto, Japan) with a sense primer (5′-TGCCAGTTGACCAG-AAGC-3′) located in exon 4 of Npt2a and either antisense primer 1 (5′-AGTCCTGTCCCTGCTGCA-3′) located in exon 6 of Npt2a or antisense primer 2 (5′-TGCTACTTCCATGCTACGTCA-3′) located in the introduced neo’ gene cassette (2). Mice were maintained on 12 h light-12 h dark cycles (8 : 00-20 : 00) with free access to water and food. Mice were maintained under pathogen-free conditions and handled in accordance with the Guidelines for Animal Experimentation of the Tokushima University School of Medicine.

2.2. Diets

The experimental diets were based on the AIN-93G diet (Oriental, Osaka, Japan), with or without 2% cholesterol were prepared. The mice were randomly divided into two experimental groups of five mice each and were fed one of the two different diets for 12 days. The animals were allowed to eat ad libitum and given free access to distilled water. At the end of the experiment, all mice were sacrificed, and blood and liver samples were collected for analysis.

2.3. Quantification of hepatic total cholesterol and triglyceride (TG)

0.6-1.0 gram of frozen liver tissue from each animal was homogenized in a mixture of chloroform and methanol (2 : 1), and used for lipid extraction as described previously (19). Hepatic total cholesterol and TG levels were determined using the T-cholesterol E-test Wako and Triglyceride E-test Wako kits, respectively (Wako Pure Chemical Industries, Osaka, Japan).
2.4. Biochemical analysis

Plasma levels of Pi and calcium were determined using the Phospho C-test Wako, Calcium test Wako, respectively (Wako Pure Chemical Industries, Osaka, Japan). Plasma levels of TG and total cholesterol, CM, VLDL, LDL, and HDL cholesterol were determined using LipoSEARCH®, a high-sensitivity lipoprotein profiling system (Skylight Biotech, Akita, Japan).

2.5. Statistical analysis

Data are presented as means± S.E.M. To assess the effect of genotype or diet, data were compared using student’s t test. Statistical significance was determined by ANOVA followed by post-hoc testing using the Tukey-Kramer procedure for multiple comparisons and the Student’s t test for effect of diet in hepatic cholesterol accumulation. Differences were considered significant for P value less than 0.05. Statistical tests were performed using Statcel2 (OMS Ltd., Saitama, Japan).

3. RESULTS

3.1. Effects of high cholesterol diet in Npt2a−/− mice

We elucidated whether Npt2a gene ablation and dietary cholesterol affect plasma lipid and lipoprotein profiles in mice. In Npt2a−/− mice, plasma total, LDL and HDL cholesterol significantly increased than in WT mice. In WT mice, high cholesterol diet markedly increased plasma levels of total cholesterol, CM, VLDL, LDL and HDL cholesterol. However, in Npt2a−/− mice, high cholesterol diet increased only plasma VLDL cholesterol levels. Moreover, high cholesterol diet-fed Npt2a−/− mice showed significant decrease of plasma CM and VLDL cholesterol levels when compared with high cholesterol diet-fed WT mice (Fig. 1). These data suggest that Npt2a gene ablation induces hypercholesterolemia and loses response to a high-cholesterol diet.

3.2. Liver weight and hepatic cholesterol accumulation in Npt2a−/− mice

We found that plasma Pi levels in Npt2a−/− mice were significantly lower than in WT mice, but were not lower in Npt2a−/− mice with high cholesterol diet (Table 1). As well as previous report (2), we also confirmed that plasma 1,25(OH)2D levels were significantly increased in Npt2a−/− mice (data not shown). There were no differences in body weight, total chow consumption or plasma calcium and TG levels, between any of the groups (Table 1, 2). Although we could not find any differences in liver weight and hepatic lipid accumulation between WT and Npt2a−/− mice, high cholesterol diet increased significantly liver weight in WT mice, but not in Npt2a−/− mice. Furthermore, the quantification of hepatic total cholesterol and TG levels revealed that high cholesterol diet significantly induced hepatic cholesterol accumulation in Npt2a−/− mice, but its hepatic cholesterol levels tended to be lower than that of WT mice. In addition, high cholesterol diet-induced hepatic TG accumulations also tended to be lower in Npt2a−/− mice than WT mice (Table 2).
4. DISCUSSION

In the present study, we examined the effects of Npt2a gene ablation on plasma lipid and lipoprotein profiles and response to a high cholesterol diet. We first observed that Npt2a−/− mice had hypophosphatemia and hypercholesterolemia. Indeed, it has been previously reported that plasma Pi levels and total cholesterol levels have negative correlation in the black sea bream Sparus Macrocephalus (20). This may indicate that plasma levels of Pi can affect plasma total cholesterol levels. In Npt2a−/− mice, high cholesterol diet did not increase plasma levels of total, LDL and HDL cholesterol. Reversely, high cholesterol diet-induced plasma levels of CM and VLDL cholesterol were lower in Npt2a−/− mice than WT mice. These lipoproteins that contain apolipoprotein, cholesterol, TG and phospholipid are synthesized and metabolized in the intestine and liver (8, 21). Pi deficiency in Npt2a−/− mice might affect the synthesis of lipoproteins and maintain their metabolism. Therefore, our findings could indicate that Npt2a gene ablation induces hypercholesterolemia and inhibits the ability of response to a high cholesterol diet.

Our results showed no significant differences in hepatic lipid accumulation, within all groups. However, in Npt2a−/− mice, the hepatic cholesterol and TG accumulation was decreased to lower levels than in WT mice with or without high cholesterol diet. We previously reported that renal Pi homeostasis is regulated by thyroid hormones (4). In fact, hypercholesterolemia is found in patients with hypothyroidism and resistance to thyroid hormone (22). However, it has not been clarified whether hypophosphatemia and high cholesterol diet affect on plasma levels of thyroid hormones. Liver X receptor (LXR) is known as a nuclear receptor to regulate cholesterol metabolism and lipid biosynthesis (23). In Npt2a−/− mice, LXR mRNA expressions were suppressed significantly by 70% than in WT mice (data not shown). Interestingly, recent study showed that LXR-activating ligands decreased plasma Pi levels and renal and intestinal NaPi transporters including Npt2a, Npt2c and Npt2b (24). These data might suggest that dietary cholesterol can regulate renal and intestinal Pi homeostasis through LXR, and hypophosphatemia by Npt2a gene ablation induce imbalance of cholesterol and lipid metabolism through suppression of hepatic LXR alpha gene expression. Moreover, Xie et al. reported Pi restriction diet could change glucose metabolism in liver (25, 26). It has been reported that the Npt2b known as intestinal NaPi transporter is highly expressed in the intestine, lung and liver (27). Indeed, we demonstrated real-time quantitative PCR analysis and observed a higher hepatic Npt2b mRNA expression in Npt2a−/− mice (data not shown). These data suggest that hepatic Pi levels might be changed in Npt2a−/− mice to regulate the cholesterol metabolism. However,

### Table 1  Plasma levels of Pi, Ca and TG.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>WT</th>
<th>+Chol</th>
<th>Npt2a−/−</th>
<th>+Chol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pi</td>
<td>8.01 ± 0.30</td>
<td>6.47 ± 0.25</td>
<td>5.72 ± 0.44</td>
<td>6.19 ± 0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calcium</td>
<td>8.05 ± 0.27</td>
<td>7.97 ± 0.15</td>
<td>7.25 ± 0.15</td>
<td>7.68 ± 0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TG</td>
<td>26.11 ± 7.00</td>
<td>17.32 ± 2.69</td>
<td>23.85 ± 4.68</td>
<td>14.56 ± 2.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Values are means ± SEM. n = 5 mice per group, p < 0.05. a effect of diet, b effect of genotype

### Table 2  Body and hepatic weights, total chow consumption, and hepatic lipid accumulation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>WT</th>
<th>+Chol</th>
<th>Npt2a−/−</th>
<th>+Chol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Final body weight (g)</td>
<td>23.03 ± 0.15</td>
<td>23.31 ± 0.32</td>
<td>22.91 ± 1.30</td>
<td>22.90 ± 1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total chow consumption (g)</td>
<td>41.79 ± 0.09</td>
<td>46.16 ± 0.09</td>
<td>42.55 ± 0.11</td>
<td>44.51 ± 0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liver weight (g)</td>
<td>0.95 ± 0.01</td>
<td>1.25 ± 0.07</td>
<td>1.07 ± 0.06</td>
<td>1.08 ± 0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hepatic total cholesterol (mg/g liver)</td>
<td>1.78 ± 0.40</td>
<td>3.93 ± 0.78</td>
<td>0.95 ± 0.16</td>
<td>2.98 ± 0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hepatic TG (mg/g liver)</td>
<td>7.51 ± 1.90</td>
<td>12.40 ± 2.35</td>
<td>4.79 ± 1.43</td>
<td>8.01 ± 1.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Values are means ± SEM. n = 5 mice per group, p < 0.05. a effect of diet, b effect of genotype
further study is required to clarify the relationship of Pi and cholesterol metabolism in liver.

FGF-23 is known as a critical regulator of Pi homeostasis and renal Npt2a gene expression. Shimada et al. reported that FGF-23 deficient mice had abnormalities of mineral metabolism including hyperphosphatemia, increased plasma 1,25(OH)₂D levels, hypercholesterolemia and decreased plasma TG levels (28). Therefore, these results also suggest that the abnormality of Pi metabolism affects lipid homeostasis. As the relationship between the plasma levels of Pi and FGF-23 is well reported previously (1-3) ; the effects of high cholesterol diet on plasma FGF-23 levels should be considered in the further studies to understand the mechanism of hypercholesterolemia induced by Npt2a gene ablation.

In conclusion, we firstly reported hypercholesterolemia and the response to a high cholesterol diet in Npt2a⁻/⁻ mice, and suggest that Npt2a gene ablation plays an important role in the control of cholesterol homeostasis.

5. REFERENCES
Relations of serum phosphorus and calcium levels to the incidence of cardiovascular disease in the community. In Arch Intern Med United States, 2007, pp. 879-885


