

Protein Tyrosine Phosphatase Pez:



Its role in the regulation of cell-cell adhesions

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Abstract

The balance of tyrosine phosphorylation in the cell is maintained by the opposing actions of protein tyrosine kinases (PTKs) and protein tyrosine phosphatases (PTPs). Investigation into tyrosine phosphorylation was initially focused on the action of PTKs. However, research over the past decade has revealed that PTPs also play a key role in signal transduction.

The multi-protein complexes that constitute the cell-cell adhesions in endothelial and epithelial tissues are dynamically restructured in response to extracellular and intracellular signalling. Tyrosine phosphorylation is involved in the regulation of both adherens junctions and tight junctions. Inhibitors of PTPs have been shown to disrupt cell-cell adhesions indicating that PTPs are important in maintaining adhesion integrity.

The maintenance of a selectively permeable barrier is an essential function of endothelial cells, which are the cells that line the lumen of blood vessels. Therefore, it is important to understand the normal functioning of the proteins in the cell-cell adhesion complexes. The aims of this research were to ascertain which members of the PTP family are expressed in human umbilical vein endothelial cells (HUVEC) and to characterise a PTP that may potentially be involved in the regulation of cell-cell adhesions.

A homology screen identified a cytosolic phosphatase, PTP-Pez, to be highly expressed in HUVEC. The presence of the protein-protein interaction FERM domain (band 4.1, ezrin, radixin and moesin) at the N-terminus of Pez predicted its localisation to the plasma membrane. Specific antibodies showed that in confluent monolayers Pez is cytoplasmic and concentrated at intercellular junctions but the protein is nuclear in sub-confluent cells. The adherens junction protein β -catenin and the tight junction protein occludin were both identified as potential substrates of Pez using a "substrate-trapping" approach. Data showing that Pez bound to and dephosphorylated β -catenin *in vivo* further substantiated this. A truncated form of Pez lacking the catalytic domain acted as a dominant negative mutant inhibiting the dephosphorylation of its

substrates at intercellular junctions and enhancing cell motility. Canine epithelial cells overexpressing Pez underwent an apparent epithelial to mesenchymal transition (EMT), a process typified by downregulation of cell-cell contacts. These findings indicate that Pez plays a role in the regulation of cell-cell adhesion.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THESIS DECLARATION	II
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	III
PUBLICATIONS ARISING FROM THIS THESIS	IV
ABSTRACT	V
LIST OF FIGURES	XI
LIST OF TABLES	XII
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	2
1.1 Tyrosine phosphorylation	2
1.2 Protein tyrosine kinases	2
1.2.1 Receptor tyrosine kinases	2
1.2.1.1 Phosphotyrosine binding proteins	3
1.2.2 Non-receptor tyrosine kinases	4
1.2.2.1 Non-receptor tyrosine kinase signalling pathways	4
1.3 Protein tyrosine phosphatases	5
1.3.1 PTP superfamily	5
1.3.2 Catalytic mechanism	6
1.4 The classical PTP family	7
1.4.1 Receptor-like PTPs	10
1.4.1.1 RPTP extracellular domains	10
1.4.2 Cytosolic PTPs	11
1.4.2.1 Non-catalytic domains of cytosolic PTPs	11
1.5 PTP substrate specificity	12
1.5.1 Substrate Specificity of SHP-1 and SHP-2	12
1.5.2 Substrate specificity of PTP1B and TC-PTP	13
1.6 PTP knockouts	14
1.6.1 SHP-1 deficient “motheaten” mice	14
1.6.2 CD45 deficient mice	15
1.6.3 PTP1B deficient mice	15
1.6.4 PTP LAR deficient mice	16
1.6.5 PTP delta deficient mice	16
1.6.6 PTPβ/ζ deficient mice	16
1.6.7 Analysis of knockout phenotypes	17
1.7 Identification of PTP substrates	18
1.7.1 Two-hybrid screens	18
1.7.2 Substrate-trapping	20
1.8 Regulation of PTPs	21
1.8.1 Transcriptional regulation	21

1.8.2 Regulation by alternative-splicing	21
1.8.3 Regulation by phosphorylation	22
1.8.4 Regulation by subcellular localisation	24
1.8.5 Regulation by oxidation	25
1.9 Regulation of cellular functions by PTPs	26
1.9.1 PTP regulation of cytokine signalling	26
1.9.2 PTP regulation of cell adhesion	29
1.9.2.1 Cell-matrix adhesion	29
1.9.2.2 Cell-cell adhesion	30
1.9.2.2.1 Adherens Junctions	30
1.9.2.2.1.1 Strength of adhesion	32
1.9.2.2.1.2 Tyrosine phosphorylation and cell-cell adhesion	33
1.9.2.2.1.3 PTPs and adherens junctions	33
1.9.2.2.2 Tight Junctions	34
1.9.2.2.2.1 Assembly of the tight junction complex	35
1.9.2.2.2.2 Tyrosine phosphorylation and tight junction regulation	36
1.10 Tyrosine phosphorylation and human disease	37
1.10.1 Adherens junctions and cancer	37
1.10.2 Tyrosine phosphorylation of adherens junction proteins and cancer	38
1.10.3 PTPs and cancer	38
1.10.4 PTPs and diabetes	39
1.10.5 PTPs and other diseases	42
1.11 Concluding remarks and objectives	42
CHAPTER 2: MATERIALS AND METHODS	46
2.1 Reagents	46
2.1.1 Antibodies	46
2.1.2 Solutions and buffers	46
2.1.3 Tissue culture reagents	48
2.1.4 Transfection of cells	48
2.2 Tissue Culture	49
2.2.1 Cell Lines	49
2.2.2 Cryopreservation of cells	49
2.2.3 Isolation and culture of human umbilical vein endothelial cells	50
2.2.4 Culturing stable cell lines	50
2.3 RNA isolation	52
2.3.1 Cell lysis	52
2.3.2 Phase separation	52
2.3.3 RNA precipitation	52
2.4 Northern blotting	53
2.4.1 Formaldehyde agarose gel for RNA	53
2.4.2 Sample preparation	53
2.4.3 Gel staining	53
2.4.4 Radioactive labelling of cDNA probes	54
2.4.5 Hybridisation	54
2.4.5.1 SSC hybridisation method	54
2.4.5.2 ExpressHyb™ method	55
2.5 cDNA synthesis and sequencing by reverse transcription and PCR amplification	55
2.5.1 First strand cDNA synthesis	55
2.5.2 PCR reaction	56
2.5.3 Specific amplification of PTP sequences from first strand cDNA	57

2.5.4 Ligation of PCR product into pGEM –T easy vector (Promega)	57
2.5.5 Transformation of competent JM109	57
2.6 cDNA probes	58
2.7 Pez DNA constructs	58
2.8 SDS-PAGE and Western blotting	62
2.8.1 Cell lysis	62
2.8.2 Subcellular fractionation	63
2.8.3 Determination of protein concentration of cell lysates	63
2.8.4 SDS-PAGE	63
2.8.5 Western blotting	64
2.9 Tyrosine-phosphatase assay	66
2.10 Enriching for tyrosine phosphorylated proteins	67
2.11 Substrate-trapping <i>in vitro</i>	68
2.11.1 PTP-Pez-coupled protein A-sepharose	68
2.11.2 Substrate-trapping	68
2.11.3. Scale Up for Identification of Substrate by Mass-Spectrometry	68
2.12 Co-immunoprecipitations	69
2.12.1 Co-immunoprecipitation with Pez	69
2.13 <i>In vivo</i> tyrosine phosphorylation in transiently transfected A431 cells	69
2.14 <i>In vivo</i> tyrosine phosphorylation	70
2.14.1 <i>In vivo</i> tyrosine phosphorylation in stable MDCK cell lines	70
2.14.2 <i>In vivo</i> tyrosine phosphorylation in stable HEK293 cell lines	70
2.15 Microscopy	70
2.15.1 Confocal microscopy	70
2.15.2 Immunofluorescence	71
2.16 Permeability assays	72
2.17 Luciferase reporter assays	72
2.18 Wounding assay	73
CHAPTER 3: RT-PCR ANALYSIS OF PTPS EXPRESSED IN AN ENDOTHELIAL CELL LINE	75
3.1 Introduction	75
3.1.1 Protein tyrosine phosphatases in endothelial cells	76
3.1.1.1 Approach:	78
3.1.1.2. Criteria used for the selection of PTPs for further characterisation:	78
3.2 Results	79
3.2.1 PTP homology screen of HUVEC mRNA	79
3.2.2 Analysis of the PTP clones	79
3.2.3 Selecting a PTP to characterise	80
3.2.3.1 PTP-Pez	82
3.2.4 Confirmation of high PTP-Pez expression in HUVEC	86
3.2.4.1 Selection of sequence as a probe for Northern analysis	86
3.2.4.2 Analysis of regulation of PTP mRNA expression by growth factors and cytokines	88

3.3 Conclusions	90
CHAPTER 4: SUBCELLULAR LOCALISATION OF PTP-PEZ	92
4.1 Subcellular localisation of Pez	92
4.2 Methods	93
4.2.1 Generation of antibodies	93
4.2.1.1 Coupling of peptides	93
4.2.1.2 Immunisation of rabbits	93
4.2.1.3 Assay of the test-bleeds by ELISA	94
4.2.2 Affinity purification of antibodies	95
4.2.2.1 Coupling peptides to BSA	95
4.2.2.2 Dialysis	95
4.2.2.3 Coupling peptides-BSA to affigel	96
4.3 Results	97
4.3.1 Generation of antibodies against PTP-Pez peptides	97
4.3.2 Characterisation of the antisera against Pez	97
4.3.2.1 The antisera bind specifically to the peptides used for immunisation	97
4.3.2.2 The antisera bind to the whole Pez protein.	99
4.3.3 Determination of the subcellular localisation of Pez	102
4.3.3.1 Pez subcellular localisation is cell-density dependent	102
4.3.3.2 Nuclear localisation of Pez is serum dependent	108
4.3.3.3 Pez translocates into the nucleus in cells at a 'wound edge': Inhibition by TGF β .	110
4.3.4 Mechanism of nuclear localisation of Pez	112
4.3.4.1 Background	112
4.3.4.2 Deletion of the FERM domain reduces nuclear accumulation of Ectopic Pez	113
4.3.4.3 Serine threonine phosphorylation regulates Pez translocation	115
4.4 Conclusions	117
CHAPTER 5: IDENTIFICATION OF POTENTIAL SUBSTRATES OF PTP-PEZ USING A SUBSTRATE-TRAPPING STRATEGY	123
5.1 Introduction	123
5.2 Results	125
5.2.1 PTP-Pez phosphatase activity	125
5.2.2 Trapping substrates of PTP-Pez	129
5.2.3 Identification of substrates	130
5.3 Discussion	134
CHAPTER 6: PTP-PEZ LOCALISES WITH THE ADHERENS JUNCTION COMPLEXES	137
6.1 Introduction	137
6.1.1 Cell-cell adhesion	137
6.1.2 Tyrosine Phosphorylation and the Cell-Cell Adhesion Complexes	139
6.1.3 Minimum essential criteria to establish that β -catenin is a Pez substrate	139
6.2 Results	140
6.2.1 PTP-Pez Interacts With β -catenin <i>In Vivo</i>	140
6.2.1.1 Co-immunoprecipitation of endogenous Pez with β -catenin	140
6.2.1.2 Truncation mutants of Pez co-immunoprecipitate with β -catenin	142
6.2.1.2 wt-Pez and deletion mutants of Pez localise to the cell-cell junctions in MDCK cells	144

6.2.2 Functions of Pez elucidated by ectopic expression of dominant negative mutants	147
6.2.2.1 Δ PTP-Pez acts as a dominant negative mutant and results in increased tyrosine phosphorylation.	147
6.2.2.2 Western analysis shows an increase in tyrosine phosphorylation of specific proteins by Δ PTP-Pez in MDCK cells	149
6.2.2.3 Expression of Δ PTP-Pez in A431 cells	151
6.2.3 Overexpression of the dominant negative mutant (Δ PTP-Pez) enhances cell migration	153
6.3 Discussion	153
CHAPTER SEVEN: PTP-PEZ AND THE TIGHT JUNCTION COMPLEXES	161
7.1 Introduction	161
7.1.2 Composition of the tight junctions	161
7.1.3 The MAGUK family	162
7.1.4 Occludin	163
7.1.5 Claudins	164
7.1.6 Junctional adhesion molecule (JAM) proteins	165
7.1.7 Other tight junction proteins	166
7.1.8 Tyrosine phosphorylation and tight junction permeability	166
7.2 Results	167
7.2.1 Association of Pez and occludin <i>in vivo</i>	167
7.2.2 ZO-1 Co-immunoprecipitates with Pez	168
7.3 Discussion	168
CHAPTER 8: OVEREXPRESSION OF PTP-PEZ INDUCES AN APPARENT EPITHELIAL TO MESENCHYMAL TRANSITION	175
8.1: Introduction	175
8.2 Results	176
8.2.1 Pez induces an EMT in MDCK cells	176
8.2.2 Expression of Pez in MDCK cells	180
8.2.3 Downregulation of cell-cell adhesion proteins following EMT	180
8.2.4 No evidence of the activation of β -catenin/TCF/LEF signalling by Pez expression	182
8.3 Discussion	185
8.3.1 Background	185
8.3.1.1 Epithelial to Mesenchymal Transition	185
8.3.1.2 Activators of EMT	185
8.3.1.3 Loss of cell-cell adhesion	186
8.3.1.4 Transcriptional control of EMT	187
8.3.1.4.1 The Slug/snail transcription factor family	187
8.3.1.4.2 The β -catenin/TCF/LEF pathway.	188
8.3.2 Summary and conclusions from this study	189
CHAPTER 9:GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION	193
9.1 Conclusions	193
9.2 Future Directions	201
REFERENCES	205