PTEN Suppression on RHEB Expression through Inhibition of mTORC1/S6K1-Dependent Protein Translation in Prostate Cancer Cells

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Abstract

Purpose: PTEN loss-of-expression and increase of the RHEB protein are frequent oncogenic events in prostate cancer cells. The aim of this study was to elucidate if loss of PTEN leads to the amplification of the RHEB protein in prostate cancer cells.

Materials and Methods: The expression levels of PTEN and RHEB in 2 cell lines (PC-3, and DU 145) 5 pairs of normal prostatic epithelia and prostate tumor samples by real-time quantitative PCR and western blot hybridization.

Results: The RHEB protein level was high in the PC-3 cell line (PTEN-null) and low in the DU 145-cell line (PTEN-expressed). The protein level, but not the mRNA level, of RHEB was up-regulated by PTEN knockdown in DU 145 cells. The increased protein level of RHEB was observed in 5 tumor sample accompanied by decreased protein level of PTEN in 4 paired normal tissues. Inhibitors of PI3K or mTORC1 interrupting the PI3K/AKT1/mTORC1/S6K1 kinase cascade lowered the RHEB protein level in PC-3 cells. The upregulation of the RHEB protein in PTEN-knockdown DU 145 cells was neutralized by inhibition of the PI3K/AKT1/mTORC1/S6K1 kinase cascade or the subsequent protein translation.

Conclusions: These data suggested that the antagonism of PTEN to the PI3K/AKT1 axis leads to the inhibition of the mTORC1/S6K1-mediated protein translation, resulting in the decrease in the RHEB protein level in prostate cancer cells. Our finding provided a new explanation for the aberrant amplification of the RHEB protein in prostate cancer cells.

Keywords: mTORC1 Complex Human; Prostate Cancer; PTEN Protein Human; Protein Translation RHEB Protein Human

Background

PTEN (phosphatase and tensin homolog deleted on chromosome 10) is a tumor suppressive lipid phosphatase. It is frequently hypo expressed or dysfunctional during prostate carcinogenesis due to genetic deletion, mutations, or epigenetic regulatory mechanisms [1-3]. PTEN functions as an antagonist of PI3K (phosphatidylinositol-4,5-bisphosphate 3-kinase), converting PIP3 (phosphatidylinositol-3,4,5-trisphosphate) to PIP2 (phosphatidylinositol-4,5-bisphosphate) and consequently interrupting the PDK1 (phosphoinositide-dependent kinase-1)-mediated activation of AKT1 [4,5]. The currently known approaches by which PTEN regulates the expression of other genes include the function of FOXO (forkhead box O class) transcription
Inhibitors

LY294002 (PI3K inhibitor), rapamycin (mTORC1 inhibitor) and cycloheximide (protein translation inhibitor) were acquired from Sigma-Aldrich (St. Louis, MO, USA) and were dissolved in Dimethyl Sulfoxide (DMSO).

RNA Extraction and Real-Time Quantitative PCR

Total RNA was extracted by Direct-zol RNA Miniprep Kit (Zymo Research, Irvine, CA, USA) and was subjected to cDNA synthesis by ToolScript MMLV RT Kit (Biotools). Real-time PCR was performed with LightCycler 480 SYBR Green I Master (Roche Applied Science, Mannheim, Germany) reagent in LightCycler 480 Instrument (Roche Applied Science) following the manual. Primers specific to RHEB mRNA were customized by Protech Technology (Taipei, Taiwan). Forward primer: 5'-CAATTGTGGACTCCTAC-3'; reverse primer: 5'-ATATCTATGGAGTATGTC-3'.

Protein Extraction and Western Blot

Homogenized tissues or harvested cells were incubated with RIPA Lysis Buffer (Merck Millipore, Billerica, MA, USA) to prepare protein samples. Electrophoresis was conducted with SDS-containing 12% polyacrylamide gel. Antibodies specific to PTEN (EnoGene, New York, NY, USA), p-AKT1 on T308 (Cell Signaling Technology, Danvers, MA, USA), p-AKT1 on S473 (Cell Signaling Technology), AKT1 (Origene, Rockville, MD, USA), p-S6K1 on T389 (Merck Millipore), S6K1 (Merck Millipore), RHEB (Bioss, Woburn, MA, USA), RICTOR (Merck Millipore) and β-actin (EnoGene) were applied during primary antibody hybridization. Protein levels detected by western blot were quantified by Image J software.

Statistical Analysis

The differences in expression levels of mRNA and protein between samples were analyzed with student’s t-test. The significance of differential expression levels was denoted when p-value < 0.05.

Results

Protein levels of PTEN and RHEB were analyzed in 5 pairs of normal prostatic epithelia and prostatic tumors. Loss of PTEN and RHEB overexpression occurred in tumor no. 1 to no. 4 when compared with corresponding normal tissues. However, tumor no. 5 exhibited RHEB amplification without PTEN loss (Figure 1A). To validate the linkage between loss of PTEN and RHEB overexpression, the protein levels of PTEN and RHEB in PC-3 and DU 145 prostate cancer cell lines were analyzed. The PTEN protein was null in PC-3 cells and functionally expressed in DU 145 cells, which was confirmed by the AKT1 phosphorylation levels. In comparison between two cell lines, the RHEB protein displayed a higher level in PC-3 cells and a lower level in DU 145 cells (Figure 1B). PTEN knockdown in DU 145 cells increased the phosphorylated AKT1 and RHEB protein (Figure 1C). The
mRNA level of RHEB was similar in PC-3 and DU 145 cells, and PTEN-knockdown in DU 145 cells did not apparently enhance the expression of the RHEB mRNA (Figure 1D). These data indicated that the expression of PTEN and RHEB were negatively associated in only protein level.

As the major target of PTEN, the PI3K/AKT1 signaling was likely associated with the negative relationship between PTEN and RHEB. The PTEN inhibition on the PI3K/AKT1 signaling was simulated by the effect of LY294002. The level of p-AKT1 on S473 was lowered in the PC-3 cells treated with LY294002. Concomitantly with the inactivated AKT1, the RHEB protein level was deceased in the treatments for 6 and 9 hours (Figure 2A). DU 145 cells were transfected with PTEN-specific siRNA and then treated with LY294002. The upregulated AKT1 phosphorylation and RHEB protein responding to PTEN-knockdown (Figure 2B, lane 1-2) were neutralized by LY294002 (Figure 2B, lane 3-6). The RHEB protein levels responding to PTEN knockdown and LY294002 treatment revealed that PTEN antagonizes the PI3K/AKT1 signaling to suppress the expression of the RHEB protein.

The negative association between PTEN and RHEB was identified only in protein level, and therefore we focused on the post-transcriptional control to elucidate the regulatory mechanism of PTEN on the RHEB expression. The expression of the RICTOR (rapamycin-insensitive companion of mTOR) protein is upregulated by the mTORC1/S6K1 (ribosomal protein S6 kinase 1)-mediated protein translation. Similar changes of the RHEB and RICTOR protein levels responding to PTEN-knockdown and PI3K inhibition were noticed (Figure 1C and 2A-B). It was speculated that the expression of RHEB and RICTOR was controlled by PTEN through the identical mechanism. The mTORC1/S6K1 signaling was inhibited by rapamycin and manifested by the decreased level of p-S6K1(T389). As a validation of our speculation, inhibition of mTORC1 by rapamycin reduced the protein levels of RHEB and RICTOR in PC-3 cells. It was noticed that the p-AKT1(S473) level, but not the p-AKT1(T308) level, was diminished by rapamycin (Figure 2C). The increased levels of p-S6K1, RHEB, RICTOR and p-AKT1(S473) caused by PTEN-knockdown (Figure 2D, lane 1-2) were counteracted by rapamycin in DU 145 cells (Figure 2D, lane 3-6). Consistently, the elevated protein levels of RHEB and RICTOR resulting from PTEN knockdown in DU 145 cells (Figure 2E, lane 1-2) was abrogated by cycloheximide-induced restriction of protein translation (Figure 2E, lane 3-6). These results demonstrated that PTEN suppresses RHEB expression through inhibiting mTORC1/S6K1-mediated protein translation.

Figures 1(A-D): Relationship between the expression levels of PTEN and RHEB. (A) PTEN and RHEB protein levels in 5 pairs of normal prostatic epithelia (N) and prostate tumors (T) were detected. GADPH served as the loading control.

Quantified protein expressions were exhibited as levels relative to that in cells transfected with non-specific siRNA. (D) The RHEB mRNA levels in PC-3 and DU 145 cells (left panel) and in DU 145 cells transfected with or without siPTEN (right panel) were detected. The RHEB mRNA levels were normalized by the β-actin mRNA levels. Columns and error bars indicated mean ± standard deviation.
Figures 2(A-E): Signal pathways involved in the PTEN suppression on the RHEB protein expression. Protein levels in the following cells were detected. (A) PC-3 cells were treated with 1% DMSO or 25 μM of LY294002 for 3, 6 or 9 hours. (B) DU 145 cells were transfected with non-specific siRNA or PTEN-specific siRNA (siPTEN) for 48 hrs followed by incubation with 1% DMSO or 25 μM of LY294002 for another 6 or 9 hrs. (C) PC-3 cells were incubated with 1% DMSO or 50 μM of rapamycin for 3, 6 or 9 hrs. (D) DU 145 cells were transfected with non-specific siRNA or siPTEN for 48 hrs with following treatment with 1% DMSO or 50 μM of rapamycin for another 6 or 9 hrs. (E) DU 145 cells were transfected with non-specific siRNA or siPTEN for 48 hrs and then treated with 1% DMSO or 100 μg/ml cycloheximide for another 6 or 9 hrs. β-actin served as the loading control. Quantified protein expressions were displayed as levels relative to column 1. Columns and error bars indicated mean ± standard deviation.
Discussion

The overexpression of the RHEB protein in prostate cancer cells is the consequence of multiple events. The importance of the amplified RHEB during carcinogenesis has been noticed and emphasized for years [8,9,12]. However, little breakthrough has been made on the mechanism leading to this phenomenon. In this study, loss-of-PTEN, which is a well-known abnormality in prostate cancer, was linked for the first time to the increased RHEB protein in prostate cancer cells.

The higher rate of the PTEN loss and RHEB increase in more aggressive prostate tumors implies that the PTEN expression is likely involved in the RHEB expression [1,8]. PTEN was demonstrated to downregulate the expression of the RHEB protein in cell model. Consistently, we found that the PTEN protein decline is accompanied with the RHEB protein accumulation in prostate tumors. However, the upregulation of the RHEB expression also results from the genomic abnormalities and is unlikely associated with the function of PTEN [9]. It explained the observation that the RHEB protein increases in a tumor sample with regular protein level of PTEN.

PTEN inhibits the translation of oncprotein in prostate cancer cells. The precursor synthesis of the IGF-1R (type 1 insulin-like growth factor receptor) protein is decreased in PTEN-overexpressing cells without the influence on the IGF-1R mRNA [7]. However, the PTEN downregulation on the IGF-1R protein synthesis is delineated as an AKT1-independent mechanism [7]. Our findings supported the AKT1-based pathway of PTEN on protein translation. It remains unknown that how does PTEN make the choice.

The mTORC1/S6K1-activated protein translation accounts for several positive feedback pathways [20]. The mTORC1/S6K1 pathway is stimulated by α2-Macroglobulin in prostate cancer cells to elevate the protein levels of RAPTOR (regulatory-associated protein of mTOR) and RICTOR20. They are components of the mTORC1 [21] and mTORC222 complexes, respectively. The α2-Macroglobulin-facilitated expression of RAPTOR reveals an mTORC1-mediated positive feedback regulation on itself [20]. In this study, the mTORC1/S6K1-enhanced RHEB expression is a positive feedback as well. The mTORC2 complex activates AKT1 through inducing the phosphorylation on S473 [23]. The diminished RICTOR protein level led by rapamycin or cycloheximide in both cell lines attenuates the level of p-AKT1(S473) instead of p-AKT1(T308). The PTEN suppression on protein translation interrupts the positive feedback on the RHEB protein expression and the AKT1 activity.

Conclusions

We demonstrated that the expression of the RHEB protein is downregulated by PTEN through suppressing the protein translation mediated by the PI3K/AKT1/mTORC1/S6K1 kinase cascade. The loss of PTEN, which frequently occurs in prostate cancer cells, could therefore benefit the upregulation of the RHEB protein level. This study reported for the first time a PTEN-involved post-transcriptional control on the RHEB expression and provided an explanation for the prostate cancers expressing the elevated RHEB expression in only protein level. However, there might be other post-transcriptional mechanisms for regulating the RHEB expression in prostate cancer, and further investigations are needed to explore them.

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References


