Interaction of rat plasma very low density lipoprotein with lipoprotein lipase-rich (postheparin) plasma

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Abstract Incubation of $^{125}$I-labeled very low density lipoprotein (VLDL) with lipoprotein lipase-rich (postheparin) plasma obtained from intact or supradiaphragmatic rats resulted in the transfer of more than 80% of apoprotein C from VLDL to high density lipoprotein (HDL), whereas apoprotein B was associated with lipoprotein of density less than 1.019 g/ml (intermediate lipoprotein). The transfer of $^{125}$I-labeled apoprotein C from VLDL to HDL increased with time and decreased in proportion to the amount of VLDL in the incubation system. A relationship was established between the content of triglycerides and apoprotein C in VLDL, whereas the amount of apoprotein C in VLDL was independent of that of other apoproteins, especially apoprotein B.

The injection of heparin to rats preinjected with $^{125}$I-labeled VLDL caused apoprotein interconversions similar to those observed in vitro. The intermediate lipoprotein was relatively rich in apoprotein B, apoprotein VS-2, cholesterol, and phospholipids and poor in triglycerides and apoprotein C. The mean diameter of intermediate lipoprotein was 269 Å (compared with 427 Å), the mean Sf rate was 30.5 (compared with 115), and the mean weight was 7.0 x 10$^6$ daltons (compared with 23.1 x 10$^6$). From these data it was possible to calculate the mass of lipids and apoproteins in single lipoprotein particles. The content of apoprotein B in both particles was virtually identical, 0.7 x 10$^6$ daltons. The relative amount of all other constituents in intermediate lipoprotein was lower than in VLDL: triglycerides, 22%; free cholesterol, 37%; esterified cholesterol, 68%; phospholipids, 41%; apoprotein C, 7%; and VS-2 apoprotein, 60%. The data indicate that (a) one and only one intermediate lipoprotein is formed from each VLDL particle, and (b) during the formation of the intermediate lipoprotein all lipid and apoprotein components other than apoprotein B leave the density range of VLDL to a varying degree. Whether these same changes occur during the clearance of VLDL in vivo is yet to be established.

Supplementary key words intermediate lipoprotein - apolipoproteins - iodinated lipoproteins - lipoprotein lipids - gel filtration - electron microscopy - postheparin lipolytic activity

VLDL is the major transport vehicle of triglycerides of endogenous origin in plasma. It is composed of triglycerides (60–70% of total mass), cholesterol and phospholipids (20–30%), and several specific and well-characterized apoproteins (1–7). Similar to chylomicrons, the metabolism of VLDL occurs in close proximity to the plasma compartment and is dependent on triglyceride hydrolysis through the activity of the enzyme system lipoprotein lipase (8–9). The immediate product of triglyceride hydrolysis in vivo is a short-lived lipoprotein of intermediate density ($d = 1.006$–$1.019$ g/ml). This lipoprotein, designated “intermediate lipoprotein” (10–11), occupies the density range $S_f$ 12–60 (12, 13), is poor in triglycerides and rich in cholesterol, phospholipid, and apoprotein, and is probably analogous to chylomicron “remnants” (14) or “skeletons” (15).

Recent studies in man (10, 11, 16, 17) and rats (18–22) have indicated that most or all of the protein moiety of plasma LDL originates from VLDL through a stage in formation of the intermediate lipoprotein. LDL particles, however, differ from VLDL not only in triglyceride content but also in protein, cholesterol, and phospholipid content and composition (1, 11). These observations suggest that, concomitantly with triglyceride hydrolysis, VLDL particles undergo additional metabolic changes. The aim of the present investigation was to define the biochemical changes that occur during degradation of VLDL particles in vitro and in vivo. In particular, we aimed at better characterization of the protein and lipid moieties of the intermediate lipoprotein produced after the interaction of VLDL with lipoprotein lipase-rich (postheparin) plasma.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Preparation of lipoproteins and iodination

Lipoproteins were isolated from 200–300 ml of plasma (containing 0.1% EDTA) from nonfasting rats by prepar-
tive ultracentrifugation in a Beckman L2-65B ultracentrifuge and a 50.1 rotor as described previously (18, 19). Isolation of VLDL was performed following slight modifications (10, 23) of the McFarlane iodine monochloride method (24). Lipoproteins of S_{i} > 400 (chylomicrons) were removed by a single spin of the 125I-labeled VLDL (18, 19). The chemical, radiochemical, immunological, and physical characteristics of the 125I-labeled VLDL thus obtained were identical with those reported elsewhere (18). All procedures were carried out at 4°C.

Delipidation, polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis, and gel filtration

Prior to delipidation, lipoproteins were dialyzed for 24–48 hr against several changes of 4 l of 0.9% NaCl, 0.01% EDTA (pH 7.45). Delipidation, solubilization of apoproteins, and polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis were performed as described previously (19). Apoproteins were designated according to the A, B, C nomenclature. To determine the distribution of radioactivity among apoproteins, the stained gels were sliced by hand (as demonstrated in Figs. 1 and 2) and assayed for radioactivity. The adequacy of this method for separation of 125I-labeled apoproteins has been discussed previously (19). Apoprotein fractions were separated by gel filtration on Sephadex G-150 and determined according to the A, B, C nomenclature. To determine the distribution of radioactivity among apoprotein fractions, the stained gels were sliced by hand (as demonstrated in Figs. 1 and 2) and assayed for radioactivity. The values thus obtained were within 10% of those calculated from absorbancy and radioactivity determined on individual tubes. The mean of the two values was used to determine the distribution of protein and radioactivity among apoprotein fractions.

Analytical ultracentrifugation and electron microscopy

Analytical ultracentrifugation was performed in a Spinco model E ultracentrifuge with schlieren optics and double-sectorized analytical cells. The runs were made at 20°C at 30,000 rpm. Sodium chloride solution of density 1.063 g/ml prepared as described by Ewing, Freeman, and Lindgren (27) was used. Standard equations (28) were used to calculate sedimentation values at salt density of 1.063 g/ml (S_{i} rates).

Negative staining of lipoproteins for electron microscopy was performed as described previously (29). Electron micrographs were obtained with a Philips 300 electron microscope at 60 kV and instrument magnification of 58,000.

Analytical procedures and determination of radioactivity

Lipoprotein protein was determined by the method of Lowry et al. (26). Phospholipids were determined following the procedure of Bartlett (30), and triglycerides by the AutoAnalyzer method (31). Free and esterified cholesterol were separated by thin-layer chromatography on silica gel G using a solvent system of light petroleum ether-diethyl ether-acetic acid 90:10:1; the lipid spots were made visible by iodine vapor. The lipid-containing areas were scraped off the plate, and cholesterol was determined as described by Chiamori and Henry (32). Lipoprotein lipids were extracted with chloroform–methanol 2:1 (v/v) (33). Radioactivity was determined using an Auto-Gamma scintillation spectrometer (Packard, La Grange, Ill.). Radioactive iodine (Na^{125I}, carrier free) was obtained from the Radiochemical Centre, Amersham, England. Sodium heparin (Pularin) was purchased from Evans Medical Ltd., Liverpool, England.

Experimental procedures

The rats used throughout the study were of the Hebrew University strain. This strain of rats has been characterized previously (18, 19).

To prepare lipoprotein lipase-rich (postheparin) plasma, rats under ether anesthesia were injected intravenously with 0.2–0.3 ml of sodium heparin solution (100 units/kg body wt) and were exsanguinated through the abdominal aorta 10 min later. Control (normal) plasma was collected likewise from noninjected rats. Plasma was separated using a Sorval SS-3 centrifuge at 15,000 rpm, 4°C, for 20 min and was used within 60 min of exsanguination. Incubations were carried out in either 6.5-ml or 13.5-ml Beckman ultracentrifuge polyallomer tubes placed in a thermostated bath at 37°C with frequent shaking. This incubation mixtures contained 4 ml of plasma, 0.5–1.0 ml of 20% fatty acid-poor bovine serum albumin, and aliquots of 125I-labeled VLDL. In some experiments these amounts were doubled. Incubations were terminated by the addition of concentrated NaCl solution (density 1.114 g/ml), necessary to bring the density of the incubation mixture to 1.019 g/ml, and the tubes were immediately placed on crushed ice.
Lipoprotein lipase-rich plasma of extrahepatic origin was prepared by the method of Bezman-Tarcher and Robinson (34). Male rats (250 g) were anesthetized, the aorta was ligated at the level of the diaphragm, and a polyethylene cannula was placed in the inferior vena cava and introduced into the right heart. The inferior vena cava was then ligated proximal to the orifices of the hepatic veins and distal to the diaphragm. Heparin solution (100 units/kg body wt) was introduced through the cannula in the inferior vena cava and the rats were exsanguinated 5 min later through the aorta.

To determine the effect of activation of lipoprotein lipase on the metabolism of 125I-labeled VLDL in vivo, rats were injected intravenously with 125I-labeled VLDL and 10 min later with sodium heparin (100 units/kg body wt). Control injected intravenously with 125I-labeled VLDL and 10 min on the metabolism of 125I-labeled VLDL in vivo, rats were of heparin rats were administered the radioactive VLDL and an equivalent volume of 0.9% NaCl solution without heparin. EDTA, and 1 mg of protamine sulfate was added to each 5-7 ml of blood prior to the separation of plasma.

**RESULTS**

A. Incubation of 125I-labeled VLDL with lipoprotein lipase-rich plasma in vitro

The distribution of radioactivity among lipoproteins was determined after incubation of trace amounts of 125I-labeled VLDL (0.1 mg of protein, 0.5-0.6 mg of triglyceride) with 4 ml of 0.9% NaCl, normal rat plasma, or postheparin plasma. More than 78% of the radioactivity was recovered with lipoproteins of density less than 1.019 g/ml (predominantly VLDL) after incubation of 125I-labeled VLDL with 0.9% NaCl, normal rat plasma, or postheparin plasma. The main effect of postheparin (lipoprotein lipase-rich) plasma on the distribution of radioactivity among lipoproteins was a pronounced decrease of lipid- and protein-bound radioactivity associated with lipoproteins of density less than 1.019 g/ml. Polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis of apoproteins isolated from lipoproteins of density less than 1.019 g/ml revealed a complete absence of apoprotein C (zone 7) from samples incubated with postheparin plasma (Fig. 1).

A ratio of 1.0 mg of VLDL protein to 10 ml of incubation mixture and 60 min of incubation were chosen for further characterization of the labeled proteins in plasma lipoproteins. Four lipoprotein families were isolated: lipoproteins of density less than 1.019 (predominantly VLDL) and lipoproteins of densities 1.019-1.040 g/ml, 1.040-1.085 g/ml, and 1.085-1.21 g/ml. Apoproteins were separated by polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis and sliced into zones as shown in Fig. 2. The distribution of radioactivity among apoproteins is presented in Table 2. In VLDL (d < 1.019 g/ml) incubated with postheparin plasma, the relative contribution of 125I-labeled apoprotein B to the total radioactivity increased and that of 125I-labeled apoprotein C decreased. Apoprotein C constituted the major labeled apoprotein of lipoproteins of densities 1.04-1.085 and 1.085-1.21 g/ml after incubation of 125I-labeled VLDL with either normal or postheparin plasma. The 125I-labeled apoprotein pattern of low density lipoprotein (d =

![Fig. 1. Polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis of apoproteins of lipoproteins of density less than 1.019 g/ml (VLDL) isolated after incubation of 125I-labeled VLDL with either normal plasma (left) or plasma obtained from rats injected with heparin (right). Conditions of incubation as described in Table 1.](image-url)

![Table 1. Radioactivity of plasma lipoproteins after incubation of 125I-labeled VLDL with plasma obtained from normal rats and from rats injected with heparin](table-url)
1.019–1.04 g/ml) resembled that of lipoproteins of density less than 1.019 g/ml (Table 2).

Because postheparin plasma contains lipoprotein lipase of hepatic and extrahepatic origin, an attempt was made to isolate lipoprotein lipase-rich plasma free from the hepatic enzyme. The supradiaphragmatic rat was used for this purpose. Table 3 shows the results of an experiment in which comparisons were made of the effects of postheparin plasma obtained from supradiaphragmatic rats and of plasma from intact rats on the apoprotein composition of 125I-labeled VLDL and its distribution among lipoproteins. The difference between the two plasma samples was rather small, especially in the composition of 125I-labeled apoprotein of VLDL. Hence, lipoprotein lipase-rich plasma obtained from intact rats was used in all subsequent experiments.

The disappearance of 125I-labeled apoprotein C from lipoproteins of density less than 1.019 g/ml after incubation of 1 mg of 125I-labeled VLDL with 4 ml of postheparin plasma was graded. The 125I-labeled apoprotein C content in lipoproteins of density less than 1.019 g/ml decreased with time of incubation from 35.0% of total protein-bound radioactivity at time zero (unincubated sample) to 26.8%, 18.9%, 11.2%, and 8.0% at the end of 2, 10, 30, and 60 min of incubation, respectively. During these periods of incubation, 4.5%, 23.6%, 44.4%, and 79.9%, respectively, of the VLDL triglyceride was hydrolyzed. Similar data were recorded when the amounts of VLDL introduced to the incubation mixture (10 min) were 0.1, 0.2, 0.4, 1.0, and 2.0 mg. Labeled apoprotein C constituted 5.7%, 7.5%, 9.9%, 18.9%, and 27.6%, respectively, of the protein-bound radioactivity of these samples when 67.6%, 57.5%, 44.9%, 23.6%, and 19.5%, respectively, of the triglycerides was hydrolyzed. The data from these two experiments were used to determine the relationship between the amount of triglyceride hydrolyzed and the percentage of 125I-labeled apoprotein C leaving the VLDL density range (d < 1.019 g/ml).

B. Effects of heparin injection on labeled apoproteins of 125I-labeled VLDL in vivo

Groups of three or four rats were injected with 125I-labeled VLDL, and 10 min later they were injected with either heparin (100 units/kg) or an equivalent volume of 0.9% NaCl. Rats were killed 5 and 20 min after the injection of heparin (15 and 30 min after the injection of 125I-labeled VLDL), and their plasma was used for lipoprotein

### Table 2. Distribution of radioactivity among lipoproteins and apoproteins after incubation of 125I-labeled VLDL with normal and postheparin plasma

| Incubation Mixture | Lipoprotein Density | 125I-labeled Lipoprotein | 125I-labeled Lipid | 125I-labeled Apoproteins
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>g/ml</td>
<td>% of dose</td>
<td>% of 125I-labeled</td>
<td>% of protein-bound radioactivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal plasma</td>
<td>&lt;1.019</td>
<td>84.1 ± 1.2</td>
<td>26.7 ± 2.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.019–1.040</td>
<td>3.7 ± 0.6</td>
<td>7.5 ± 0.9</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.040–1.085</td>
<td>3.9 ± 0.6</td>
<td>9.4 ± 0.4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.085–1.21</td>
<td>4.0 ± 0.5</td>
<td>8.8 ± 0.4</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt;1.21</td>
<td>4.3 ± 0.7</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postheparin plasma</td>
<td>&lt;1.019</td>
<td>52.7 ± 1.3</td>
<td>29.1 ± 2.5</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.019–1.040</td>
<td>8.7 ± 1.3</td>
<td>23.3 ± 1.2</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.040–1.085</td>
<td>14.2 ± 1.6</td>
<td>17.2 ± 1.4</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.085–1.21</td>
<td>18.4 ± 0.9</td>
<td>12.6 ± 0.6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Values are means ± SE of six experiments. 1 mg of 125I-labeled VLDL (6–9 mg of triglyceride, [20–50] × 10⁶ cpm) was incubated for 60 min at 37°C with either normal or postheparin rat plasma. The distribution of radioactivity among lipoproteins and apoproteins and the percentages of 125I-labeled lipids (chloroform–methanol-extractable radioactivity) were determined after lipoprotein isolation, lipid extraction, and polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis as described in Materials and Methods.

a Zones 1–8 from polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis.

b Means of six experiments. Standard error of the mean ranged between 5% and 15% of the mean for all values.
isolation and determination of labeled lipids and labeled apoproteins. Compared with saline-treated animals, heparin caused a reduction of the plasma triglyceride levels from 61.6 ± 7.9 to 20.3 ± 7.5 and from 53.7 ± 7.9 to 11.3 ± 3.7 mg/100 ml, respectively. Concomitantly, radioactivity associated with VLDL (d < 1.019 g/ml) decreased from 59.4 ± 2.9 to 47.6 ± 3.2% and from 48.8 ± 1.9 to 37.5 ± 2.4% of plasma radioactivity, and that associated with HDL (d = 1.063-1.21) increased from 23.7 ± 1.9 to 31.7 ± 2.8% and from 31.7 ± 2.1 to 39.9 ± 2.1%, respectively. The two groups of animals did not differ in plasma cholesterol levels, in percentage of injected radioactivity remaining in the plasma or recovered in the liver, or in percentage of labeled lipids in lipoproteins.

The pattern of labeled apoproteins in lipoproteins of density less than 1.019 g/ml isolated from heparin-injected rats (Table 4) was indistinguishable from that observed after in vitro incubation of 125I-labeled VLDL with postheparin plasma (as shown in Tables 2 and 3). After heparin administration, the VLDL was rich in labeled apoprotein B and poor in apoprotein C content (Table 4). Most of the apoprotein C that disappeared from lipoproteins of density less than 1.019 g/ml was recovered in circulation together with HDL.

C. Characterization of the intermediate lipoprotein

The protein content and lipid composition of lipoproteins of density less than 1.019 g/ml isolated after incubation of 125I-labeled VLDL with postheparin plasma (as shown in Tables 2 and 3). After heparin administration, the VLDL was rich in labeled apoprotein B and poor in apoprotein C content (Table 4). Most of the apoprotein C that disappeared from lipoproteins of density less than 1.019 g/ml was recovered in circulation together with HDL.

3.5-ml samples of plasma obtained from intact normal rats, intact rats injected with heparin, and supradiaphragmatic rats injected with heparin were incubated with 125I-labeled VLDL (0.4 mg of protein, 16 × 10⁶ cpm) at 37°C for 30 min. Lipoproteins were isolated by flotation and delipidated, and apoproteins were separated by polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis. To determine the distribution of radioactivity among apoproteins, stained protein bands were sliced off the gels (as shown in Figs. 1 and 2) and counted. Values are means ± SE of three to five experiments.

### TABLE 3. 125I-labeled apoproteins of lipoproteins isolated after incubation of 125I-labeled VLDL with normal and postheparin plasma obtained from intact or supradiaphragmatic rats

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Plasma</th>
<th>Lipoprotein Density</th>
<th>125I-labeled Apoproteins</th>
<th>Distribution of 125I-labeled Apoproteins</th>
<th>% of Protein-bound 125I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VLDL, original</td>
<td>860 ± 1.24</td>
<td>0.7 ± 0.22</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intact rats, normal</td>
<td>&lt;1.019</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intact rats, post-heparin</td>
<td>53.0 ± 5.47</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supradiaphragmatic rats, postheparin</td>
<td>11.6 ± 2.10</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 3. Relationship between the percentage of triglyceride hydrolyzed and the percentage decrease of 125I-labeled apoprotein C of lipoproteins of density less than 1.019 g/ml after incubation of 125I-labeled VLDL with postheparin plasma. Individual values were compiled from the data presented in the text. Triglyceride and 125I-labeled apoprotein C contents of lipoproteins of density less than 1.019 g/ml immediately after mixing 125I-labeled VLDL with postheparin plasma were taken as the 100% values.

Cholesterol, and phospholipids. The molar ratio of free to esterified cholesterol in this lipoprotein was found to decrease from 2.5 to 1.3.

3-6 mg of protein obtained after delipidation of VLDL incubated with normal or postheparin plasma was further fractionated by gel filtration on Sephadex G-150. Three fractions were obtained. Fraction I contained only the apoprotein B band (see Fig. 1); fraction II contained the VS-2 apoprotein, and fraction III, apoprotein C. About 90% of the total gel radioactivity was found in association with the stained bands in fractions I (apoprotein B, slice 2) and III (apoprotein C, slice 7). Fraction II was more heterogeneous, 82% of the gel radioactivity being associated with gel...
of postheparin samples. Apoprotein fraction 1 contained less radioactivity relative to all other fractions and apoprotein fraction I contained more radioactivity than other fractions when comparing VLDL incubated with normal plasma with that of the nonincubated sample and that incubated with postheparin with that incubated with normal plasma (Table 6). In view of the changes in both protein and radioactivity content of each fraction in the various samples, the specific activity of apoprotein fraction III relative to that of fraction I (determined independently, and on samples at the peak height of protein and radioactivity) was about one-half in incubated compared with nonincubated samples (Table 6).

The electron microscopic appearance of particles isolated at density less than 1.019 g/ml from VLDL incubated with either normal or postheparin plasma and their diameters are shown in Fig. 4. In general, the particles isolated after incubation with normal plasma were of larger diameter and more heterogeneous with regard to their diameters than those isolated after incubation with postheparin plasma (Fig. 4). The mean diameter of the former particles was 427 Å and of the latter particles 269 Å. Assuming that

TABLE 4. 125I-labeled apoproteins of plasma lipoproteins of rats injected with 125I-labeled VLDL and heparin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lipoprotein Fraction</th>
<th>Injected Solution</th>
<th>Time after Injection</th>
<th>125I in Apoproteins</th>
<th>Distribution of 125I among Apoproteinsa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>% injected dose/ml plasma</td>
<td>% of total 125I</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VLDL, original</td>
<td>0.9% NaCl</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.543</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heparin</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.074</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.9% NaCl</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.618</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heparin</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.163</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d = 1.019–1.063</td>
<td>0.9% NaCl</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.383</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heparin</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.569</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.9% NaCl</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.380</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heparin</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.500</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d = 1.063–1.21</td>
<td>0.9% NaCl</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.152</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heparin</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.572</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.9% NaCl</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.159</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heparin</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.465</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Distribution of radioactivity among apoproteins was determined after isolation of lipoproteins, delipidation, and polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis as described in Materials and Methods. Values are means of the experiments described in the text. SEM ranged between 5% and 20% of the mean for all values.

a Zones 1–8 from polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis.

TABLE 5. Lipid and protein composition of VLDL after incubation with normal and postheparin plasma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incubation Mixture</th>
<th>Protein (mg/100 mg lipoprotein)c</th>
<th>Triglyceride (mg/100 mg lipoprotein)c</th>
<th>Phospholipids (mg/100 mg lipoprotein)c</th>
<th>Cholesterolb (mg/100 mg lipoprotein)c</th>
<th>Ratio of Free to Esterified Cholesterolb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>16.2 ± 0.3</td>
<td>60.5 ± 3.1</td>
<td>14.5 ± 2.1</td>
<td>8.7 ± 0.3</td>
<td>Not determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal plasma</td>
<td>14.3 ± 1.4</td>
<td>62.0 ± 1.0</td>
<td>14.5 ± 1.2</td>
<td>9.2 ± 0.7</td>
<td>2.45 ± 0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postheparin plasma</td>
<td>19.0 ± 2.4</td>
<td>46.4 ± 3.6</td>
<td>20.1 ± 3.8</td>
<td>14.5 ± 1.2</td>
<td>1.34 ± 0.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

c Free and esterified cholesterol determined as cholesterol (mol wt, 400).

b Means ±SE of three determinations.

c Means ±SE of six determinations.
both particles are spherical, their volumes are 40.1 and $10.0 \times 10^6 \, \text{Å}^3$, or the volume of normal VLDL is four times greater than that of postheparin VLDL.

The $S_t$ rates of VLDL and the intermediate lipoprotein were determined by analytical ultracentrifugation. The mean $S_t$ rate of VLDL incubated with normal plasma was 115 and that of VLDL incubated with postheparin plasma was 30.5. Using Dr. Lindgren's nomogram on the relationship of $S_t$ rates to molecular weights (35), the molecular weights of the two lipoproteins are estimated to be 23.1 and $7.0 \times 10^6$ daltons, respectively. The ratio of these molecular weights is 3.3, not unlike the ratio of the calculated volumes of the two lipoproteins. Using molecular weights derived from $S_t$ rates (which take into account differences in density between the two lipoproteins) and knowing the relative contributions of lipids and apoproteins to each lipoprotein, the relative proportions of apolipoprotein in the intermediate lipoprotein were determined. Apolipoprotein was eluted with 0.2 M Tris-6 M urea-2 mM sodium decyl sulfate buffer (pH 8.2). The three protein fractions obtained (I, II, and III) were assessed for protein and radioactivity content as described in Materials and Methods.

### Table 6. Protein and radioactivity content of apoprotein fractions obtained by gel filtration on Sephadex G-150

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incubation Medium</th>
<th>Protein</th>
<th>Radioactivity</th>
<th>Relative Specific Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of total</td>
<td>% of total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>21.0 ± 4.0</td>
<td>22.4 ± 4.6</td>
<td>56.6 ± 8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal plasma</td>
<td>21.5 ± 2.0</td>
<td>22.7 ± 3.9</td>
<td>55.7 ± 4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postheparin plasma</td>
<td>57.0 ± 4.1</td>
<td>33.8 ± 4.6</td>
<td>9.2 ± 2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Means ± SE of three experiments. 2–4 mg of apoproteins obtained from nonincubated VLDL and VLDL incubated with either normal or lipoprotein lipase-rich (postheparin) plasma was applied to 90 x 1.5 cm columns. Apoproteins were eluted with 0.2 M Tris-6 M urea-2 mM sodium decyl sulfate buffer (pH 8.2). The three protein fractions obtained (I, II, and III) were assessed for protein and radioactivity content as described in Materials and Methods.
protein mass (Tables 5 and 6), it was possible to calculate the actual mass of each component in a single lipoprotein particle2 (Table 7). The data demonstrate that the content of all lipids and apoproteins in an intermediate lipoprotein particle is decreased compared with a VLDL particle. The only exception is apoprotein B, the absolute contributions of which to single VLDL and intermediate lipoprotein particles were almost identical, 0.7 × 10^6 daltons.

DISCUSSION

The pathways of catabolism of chylomicrons and VLDL, the two triglyceride-rich lipoproteins, have been partially elucidated during the last decade. The first stage of degradation is lipoprotein lipase-mediated triglyceride hydrolysis resulting in the formation of a triglyceride-poor, cholesterol-rich particle (12, 13). The nature and fate of this particle, designated variously as "remnant" (14), "intermediate lipoprotein" (10, 11), or "skeleton" (15), are obscure. Yet, in both humans (10, 11) and rats (18-22), some or most of plasma LDL originates in the circulation from VLDL through an intermediate lipoprotein stage. LDL particles, however, differ markedly from VLDL in apoprotein and lipid content and composition (1, 11). Thus, mechanisms responsible for these changes must operate concomitantly with triglyceride hydrolysis. The present investigation was undertaken to study the fate of apoprotein and lipid constituents of VLDL during its interaction with the lipoprotein lipase system. The use of lipoprotein lipase-rich plasma obtained from rats injected with heparin was found to be a highly reproducible system for these studies. This system has advantages over that of isolated enzymes in that it contains the two major lipoprotein lipase species (of hepatic and extrahepatic origin [36-41]) and is carried in the natural milieu of VLDL catabolism, i.e., whole plasma. To further validate the system, we have compared the apoprotein composition of 125I-labeled VLDL incubated with postheparin plasma (containing both the hepatic and the extrahepatic enzymes) with samples incubated with postheparin plasma obtained from supradiaphragmatic rats (containing only the extrahepatic enzyme [38]), and VLDL isolated from rats injected with 125I-labeled VLDL and heparin (Tables 1-4). The patterns of 125I-labeled apoproteins in VLDL isolated in the three experiments were almost identical, as were the protein and lipid compositions of the first two samples.

The protein moiety of rat plasma VLDL is composed of at least three apoprotein fractions (5, 6). Analogous to human VLDL, the fractions may be designated apoprotein B (VS-1, P-I), apoprotein C (VS-3, P-III), and apoprotein VS-2 or P-II. The metabolism of apoprotein B and apoprotein C in human (10, 11, 23) and rat (18-22) plasma VLDL is heterogeneous. Apoprotein B is the precursor of the protein moiety of plasma LDL. Apoprotein C, present predominantly in VLDL and HDL (2, 5, 6), represents a discernible pool of apoproteins that are distributed among lipoproteins in proportion to their concentration in plasma (23). During steady-state conditions, it has been hypothesized (but never proved) that the bidirectional transfer of apoprotein C between lipoproteins represents an exchange reaction. In the present study we were able to show that after incubation of 125I-labeled VLDL with normal plasma no change occurred in the content of apoproteins in VLDL, whereas the specific activity of apoprotein C decreased by about 30-50%. Thus, this type of transfer of apoprotein C between lipoproteins must represent an exchange phenomenon.

A transfer of apoprotein C from VLDL and chylomicrons to HDL has also been observed after the injection of heparin to humans (11, 42) and during clearance of alimentary chylomicronemia (43). These observations were extended here to the heparin-injected rat and were further evaluated in vitro. After the incubation of 125I-labeled VLDL with postheparin plasma, more than 80% of the 125I-labeled apoprotein C introduced as part of the labeled VLDL was recovered with HDL. This marked change of

### TABLE 7. Lipid and apoprotein mass in VLDL and intermediate lipoprotein particles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lipoprotein</th>
<th>Apoprotein</th>
<th>Apoprotein</th>
<th>TG</th>
<th>PL</th>
<th>FC</th>
<th>EC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>VS-2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VLDL</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>14.10</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate lipoprotein</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TG, triglyceride; PL, phospholipid; FC, free cholesterol; EC, esterified cholesterol.

2 An example to illustrate this calculation is the content of apoprotein B in VLDL. The weight of a VLDL particle is 23.1 × 10^6 daltons. Protein constituted 14.3% of total mass, and apoprotein B 21.5% of total protein. Apoprotein B thus constitutes 3.07% of 23.1 × 10^6 daltons, or 0.71 × 10^6 daltons.
distribution of apoprotein C among lipoproteins occurred without further decrease of the specific activity of 125I-labeled apoprotein C in VLDL and hence must represent a net transfer reaction. Whether similar changes occur in VLDL particles interacting with lipoprotein lipase attached to capillary endothelial cells is yet to be established.

The mechanisms of association of apoprotein C with various lipoproteins are poorly understood. Our results demonstrate clearly that the content of apoprotein C in VLDL is related to the content of triglycerides in the VLDL particles and is independent of all other apoproteins, in particular apoprotein B. The graded transfer of apoprotein C from VLDL to HDL observed during the course of the incubation may therefore be explained as a “disintegration” of a complex particle. According to this view, concomitant with triglyceride hydrolysis, apoprotein C units become loosely associated (or dissociated) with the partially degraded VLDL and are then transferred to HDL. In sharp contrast, the association of apoprotein B with VLDL is independent of the degree of lipolysis, and apoprotein B constitutes a major protein moiety of the intermediate lipoprotein.

Compared with VLDL, the intermediate lipoprotein produced in vitro was almost devoid of apoprotein C; it was enriched with apoprotein B and contained some of the VS-2 proteins. The lipid and apoprotein composition of the intermediate lipoprotein more closely resembled a “triglyceride-rich” LDL than a “triglyceride-poor” VLDL. In only one previous study was the composition of an in vitro-produced postlipolysis VLDL reported (12). The study, carried out with human plasma, demonstrated a lipoprotein form similar to that described here. The reasons for the slow hydrolysis of triglycerides in the intermediate lipoprotein produced in vitro (12) or in vivo (13) are unknown. It may be speculated, however, that the removal of one of the components of apoprotein C (C-II, apo-LP-Glu), a documented activator of the lipoprotein lipase system (44–47), may have contributed to this observation.

Based on analysis of lipoprotein composition of VLDL and LDL density subfractions isolated from two hyperlipemic patients, it was previously deduced that during the metabolic conversion of VLDL to LDL one and only one LDL particle is formed from each VLDL particle (11). A similar analysis was carried out here for VLDL and the intermediate lipoprotein isolated after the incubation of VLDL with normal or postheparin plasma. The data demonstrated that the weight contributions of apoprotein B to VLDL and intermediate particles were virtually identical, about 0.7 × 10^6 daltons. An analysis of data published by Koga et al. (6, 48) and by Bersot et al. (5) on the characteristics of rat plasma LDL enabled us to calculate the weight contribution of apoprotein B to one LDL particle, about 0.6 × 10^6 daltons, a value similar to that calculated here for apoprotein B mass in one VLDL and intermediate lipoprotein particle. Thus, one single mechanism of formation of intermediate lipoprotein and LDL seems to operate in humans and rats either in vivo or in vitro.

The number of protein units of apoprotein B in one lipoprotein (of any density) is unknown. Estimates have been published for human LDL and they range from 2 (49) to 20–60 (50–52). Our results are obviously consistent with the possibility that apoprotein B represents a single unit. They indicate that if more than one unit of apoprotein B is present in lipoproteins, most or all of these units are linked together either structurally or functionally. Of the other components in VLDL, about 60–70% of the protein of the second Sephadex fraction (VS-2, P-II) was associated with the intermediate lipoprotein. This fraction may contain predominantly the recently described “arginine-rich” apoprotein (53–55). The fate of phospholipids and cholesterol (especially unesterified cholesterol), 40–60% of which disappears from VLDL during its interaction with lipoprotein lipase-rich plasma, is currently under investigation.

The biological significance of the intermediate lipoprotein is yet to be determined. We have shown previously (18, 19) that about 80% of the 125I-labeled apoprotein B injected into rats as part of 125I-labeled VLDL disappears from circulation within 1–2 hr of the injection, presumably at an intermediate lipoprotein stage. A similar conclusion was reported recently by Faergeman et al. (20, 21) and by Mjøs et al. (22). It is thus possible that the intermediate lipoprotein represents an unstable lipoprotein form that is either removed from circulation (predominantly by the liver) or converted into LDL. With regard to this suggestion, it is interesting to note that intermediate lipoprotein (“remnant”) is catabolized by arterial smooth muscle cells in tissue cultures more efficiently than VLDL (56).

This investigation was supported in part by a grant from the United States–Israel Binational Science Foundation and by grants from the Myra Kurland Heart Fund, Chicago, Ill., and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, no. FG-Is-285.

The authors are grateful to Dr. Olga Stein (Department of Experimental Medicine and Cancer Research, The Hebrew University-Hadassah Medical School, Jerusalem, Israel) for the electron microscopy of lipoproteins and to Dr. Frank T. Lindgren (Donner Laboratory, University of California, Berkeley, Calif.) for calculating the molecular weights of the lipoproteins.

The excellent technical help of Mrs. Lea Mor (Friedman) is also acknowledged.

Manuscript received 31 July 1974 and in revised form 23 January 1975; accepted 24 April 1975.

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