Homing commitment of lymphocytes activated in the human gastric and intestinal mucosa

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Abstract

Background—Gastric infection with the human pathogen Helicobacter pylori results in a large accumulation of IgA and IgM secreting cells in the gastric mucosa. The molecular mechanisms resulting in B cell migration to the gastric mucosa in H pylori infection are however not known.

Aims—To examine expression of the mucosal homing receptor integrin α4β7 and the homing receptor for secondary lymphoid tissues, L-selectin, on lymphocytes activated by gastric, intestinal, or systemic antigens. Furthermore, to examine gastric expression of the mucosal adhesion cellular adhesion molecule 1 (MAdCAM-1), the endothelial counter-receptor to integrin α4β7.

Subjects and methods—H pylori infected individuals were immunised by either gastric (n=8) or intestinal (n=8) delivery of an inactivated cholera vaccine. The resulting circulating vaccine specific B cells were sorted according to α4β7 and L-selectin expression and assayed for production of IgA and IgG using an enzyme linked immunospot assay. In addition, circulating CD4+ T cells from seven H pylori infected individuals were fractionated according to α4β7 and L-selectin expression. The resulting T cell fractions were then assayed for specific proliferation against H pylori or the systemic antigen tetanus toxoid. Finally, gastric expression of MAdCAM-1 was determined by immunohistochemistry in H pylori infected (n=16) and uninfected (n=8) individuals.

Results—Virtually all B cells induced by both gastric and intestinal antigen delivery expressed α4β7 whereas less then half coexpressed L-selectin. Furthermore, H pylori reactive T cells were mainly found in the α4β7+L-selectin+ T cell fraction whereas tetanus specific T cells were largely α4β7−L-selectin+. MAdCAM-1 was present in similar amounts in gastric mucosa from H pylori infected and uninfected individuals.

Conclusions—B cells and T cells activated by antigens delivered to the gastric mucosa express the mucosal homing receptor integrin α4β7, as do cells activated in the intestine. Together with the observation that gastric endothelial cells express MAdCAM-1, this may partly explain the homing of lymphocytes activated in the stomach or in the small intestine to the gastric mucosa.

Keywords: lymphocyte trafficking; integrin α4β7; L-selectin; stomach; Helicobacter pylori

Helicobacter pylori infection of the human stomach results in active chronic gastritis in almost all infected subjects, with a characteristic infiltration of large numbers of lymphocytes and neutrophils, and formation of organised lymphoid follicles with discrete B and T cell areas. In a previous study, we also noted a very large increase in the frequencies of IgA and IgM secreting cells in the gastric mucosa of H pylori infected individuals compared with uninfected subjects. Furthermore, following mucosal immunisations with an inactivated cholera vaccine, vaccine specific IgA responses could only be detected in the gastric mucosa of H pylori infected subjects and not in uninfected subjects, even though both groups of volunteers had similar frequencies of IgA secreting cells in the intestinal mucosa. Taken together, these observations strongly indicate that H pylori infection increases the capacity of the gastric mucosa to recruit lymphocytes.

Tissue recruitment of leucocytes from the circulation is regarded as a multistep process involving several distinct phases. Loose interactions between integrins and their carbohydrate ligands result in the characteristic rolling along the vessel wall and this, together with chemotactic signals from the tissue, activate integrins to confer strong binding to their endothelial ligands and arrest of the cell, followed by flattening and extravasation. Presumably, this process can be controlled at any of these steps. Thus far, expression of adhesion molecules by the migrating leucocytes and by endothelial cells in their target organs has received most of the attention, and some of the tissue specific lymphocyte trafficking can be explained by expression of certain adhesion molecules. Thus homing to secondary lymphoid tissues is dependent on expression of the peripheral lymph node addressin (PNAd) on the endothelium which binds to L-selectin expressed on circulating cells. In addition, mucosal endothelium in the intestinal tract express the mucosal address cellular adhesion molecule 1 (MAdCAM-1) which binds to integrin α4β7 on circulating lymphocytes. Circulating B and T cells induced

Abbreviations used in this paper: ASC, antibody secreting cell; ELISPOT, enzyme linked immunospot assay; CTB, cholera toxin B subunit; MAdCAM-1, mucosal address cellular adhesion molecule 1; MNC, mononuclear cells; MP, membrane protein; PNAd, peripheral lymph node addressin; TT, tetanus toxoid; PBS, phosphate buffered saline; SI, stimulation index; cpm, counts per minute.
by intestinal immunisation or infection all carry α4β7 whereas L-selectin is only expressed on a minority of such cells.8-11 Recently, it has also been revealed that circulating lymphocytes with different homing commitments respond differently to chemokines14-15 and this is probably an important component of tissue specific lymphocyte migration.

The homing receptor usage of cells homing to gastric tissues is however still unknown. It has recently been demonstrated that the venules in the human stomach mucosa express MAdCAM-1,16 and the lymphoid follicles that develop in response to H pylori infection have endothelial cells expressing both PNAδ and MAdCAM.16 17 To what extent this expression correlates with recruitment of circulating lymphocytes has not been examined. To better define the molecular recognition events resulting in lymphocyte trafficking to the H pylori infected gastric mucosa, we have taken several different approaches. Homing receptor expression on B cells induced by gastric immunisation was determined by immunomagnetic cell sorting followed by enzyme linked immunospot assay (ELISPOT) assays. Expression of homing receptors by H pylori specific circulating CD4+ T cells was also examined by magnetic cell sorting followed by in vitro stimulation. In addition, expression of MAdCAM-1 on gastric endothelial cells from H pylori infected and uninfected individuals was examined using immunohistochemistry.

Material and methods

VOLUNTEERS AND IMMUNISATIONS

Volunteers

This study was performed following approval from the human research ethics committee of the Medical Faculty, Göteborg University, and all volunteers gave informed consent to participate. Twenty three H pylori infected individuals were recruited among patients attending the gastroenterology unit at Sahlgrenska University Hospital, Göteborg, or by serological screening of healthy blood donors.18 Before enrolment, H pylori infection was demonstrated by positive serology or urea breath test.18 None of the infected volunteers had an active ulcer or was on any medication for at least one week preceding the study. Sixteen H pylori infected volunteers received two doses of an oral cholera vaccine (Dukoral; SBL Vaccin, Stockholm, Sweden)15 two weeks apart. Each dose of the cholera vaccine consisted of 1011 killed Vibrio cholerae organisms and 1 mg of recombinant cholera toxin B subunit (CTB), given either on the gastric mucosa or in the small intestine. Eight of the volunteers (aged 36–61 years; six males and two females; four asymptomatic carriers, three with dyspeptic symptoms, and one duodenal ulcer patient) were immunised twice intragastrically, as described in our accompanying paper in this issue of Gut.20 Briefly, 4 ml of vaccine were directly distributed as small droplets through the endoscope over the antral mucosa, with the patient in the left lateral position. Another group of eight volunteers (aged 33–58 years; four males and four females; five asymptomatic carriers, two with dyspeptic symptoms, and one duodenal ulcer patient) received the vaccine in the small intestine as previously described.20 A gastroduodenoscopy was performed and the endoscope was introduced down to the level of the ligament of Treitz—that is, approximately 30 cm distal to the pylorus sphincter—and the vaccine was delivered via an endoscope in a total volume of 20 ml.

Seven additional H pylori infected volunteers (aged 22–50 years; four males and three females; all asymptomatic carriers) were recruited to determine MAdCAM-1 expression in healthy volunteers.

SPECIMEN COLLECTION

Heparinised venous blood was collected before and one week after the last immunisation from the immunised volunteers, and used for analysis of antibody secreting cells (ASC). On the first occasion, four antral biopsies 2 mm in diameter and encompassing the epithelium and lamina propria were collected from each volunteer under local anaesthesia. Gastric biopsies were also collected from the eight uninfected individuals. The biopsies were immediately embedded in OCT compound, frozen in liquid nitrogen, and subsequently used for immunohistochemical detection of MAdCAM-1. One additional biopsy from each volunteer was fixed in formalin, and gastritis was graded from 0 to 3 (none, mild, moderate, or severe), according to the upgraded Sydney system.21

Seven H pylori infected volunteers were bled once for collection of venous blood, used for T cell activation studies.

ISOLATION OF MONONUCLEAR CELLS (MNC)

MNC were isolated from heparinised blood by gradient centrifugation on Ficoll-Hypaque (Pharmacia, Uppsala, Sweden). Interface MNC were collected, washed three times with cold phosphate buffered saline (PBS), and resuspended in cold PBS supplemented with 1% (v/v) fetal calf serum or in Iscove’s medium (complete medium). Cell suspensions were kept on ice prior to being further fractionated or assayed for ASC numbers.

DETECTION OF ADHESION MOLECULES ON CIRCULATING ASC

Cell surface expression of integrin α4β7 and L-selectin by isolated ASC was determined using a combination of immunomagnetic cell sorting and ELISPOT techniques.27 Briefly, paramagnetic beads (Dynabeads; Dynal, Oslo, Norway) were coated with monoclonal antibody clone ACT-1 (a kind gift from Dr DJ Ringler, Leukosite Inc., Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA) or Dreg-56 (Pharmingen, San Diego, California, USA), specifying integrin α4β7.

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Cell cultures were stimulated with 10 µg/ml of a 10^4 accessory cells in round bottomed 96 well plates (Nunc, Roskilde, Denmark). The plates were supplemented with 5% human AB+ serum, 3 µg/ml of anti-CD3, and 1 µg/ml of anti-CD28 (Dynal). The isolated T cell subpopulations were cultured in triplicate at 1.5x10^6 cells per well together with 1.5x10^5 accessory cells in round bottomed 96 well plates (Nunc, Roskilde, Denmark). The medium used was Iscove's medium supplemented with 5% human AB+ serum, 3 µg/ml of l-glutamine, and 100 µg/ml of gentamicin. T cell cultures were stimulated with 10 µg/ml of a H pylori membrane protein (MP) preparation, prepared as previously described, and pretreated with 1 µg/ml of polymyxin B for one hour to inhibit any residual lipopolysaccharide activity. Parallel cultures were stimulated with 50 µg/ml of tetanus toxoid (TT; a vaccine with which virtually all Swedes have been parenterally immunised several times) or 10 µg/ml of phytohaemagglutinin (Murex Diagnostics Ltd, Temple Hill, UK), which was used as a positive control. T cells were cultured for five days, and 1 µCi of ^3H labelled thymidine (Amersham International plc, Little Chalfont, UK) was added to each well during the last 8–14 hours of culture. The amount of incorporated radioactivity was determined in a β-scintillation counter, and the stimulation index (SI) was calculated by dividing the counts per minute (cpm) value obtained after stimulation with the cpm value in corresponding cultures without antigen.

IMMUNOHISTOCHEMICAL DETECTION OF MADCAM-1

 Cryosections (8 µm thick) from antral and duodenal biopsies were mounted on SuperFrost Plus-glasses (Menzel-Gläser, Braunschweig, Germany), air dried, and fixed in ice cold acetone for 10 minutes. The sections were incubated with a mouse IgG1 monoclonal antibody specific for human MADCAM-1 (clone 1AØ3, kindly provided by Dr M Briskin, Leukosite Inc.), used undiluted, or a von Willebrand factor specific mouse IgG1 monoclonal antibody (Dako, Glostrup, Denmark), diluted 1:25 in PBS for 20 minutes at room temperature. An isotype matched irrelevant mouse antibody (Dako) was included in each experiment as a negative control. After two washings with PBS the sections were incubated with horseradish peroxidase conjugated antimouse IgG (Dako) diluted 1:40 in PBS with 5% human AB serum. Bound antibodies were visualised by incubation with 3,3′-diaminobenzidine (Vector Laboratories Inc., Burlingame, California, USA) for 5–10 minutes at room temperature in the dark. Finally, the sections were counterstained with Mayer's haematoxylin for 10 seconds, dehydrated, and mounted with Mountex (Histolab, Göteborg, Sweden). The entire tissue sections were examined in a Leica microscope at 200x magnification and the tissue areas were determined with Leica Qwin software (Leica, Germany). Cross sectioned MADCAM-1 positive and von Willebrand positive vessels were counted and expressed as number of respective vessels per mm².

STATISTICAL EVALUATIONS

Differences between T cell subsets were evaluated using the Wilcoxon signed rank test.

Results

HOMING RECEPTOR EXPRESSION ON B CELLS

ACTIVATED BY GASTRIC OR INTESTINAL IMMUNISATION

Expression of L-selectin and integrin α4β7 was determined on circulating cells induced by gastric or intestinal administration of CTB and
whole V. cholerae organisms, using a combination of immunomagnetic cell sorting and ELISPOT techniques. We have previously used this technique to demonstrate substantial differences in homing receptor expression between circulating ASC induced by peroral and systemic immunisations.11 The volunteers participating in this part of the study were analysed for intestinal, gastric, and peripheral blood ASC frequencies, as reported in our accompanying paper.12 The two immunisation regimens induced ASC responses of similar magnitude comprising both IgA and IgG secreting cells. In this study, the vaccine specific ASC were used to examine homing receptor expression on B cells after activation by gastric and intestinal antigen delivery, respectively. Expression of L-selectin and α4β7 was similar on cells induced by both immunisation routes. Thus the mucosal homing receptor integrin α4β7 was expressed by almost all IgA and IgG ASC induced by intestinal immunisation whereas about half of these ASC coexpressed L-selectin (fig 1). Similarly, virtually all of the circulating CTB specific IgA and IgG ASC induced by gastric immunisation expressed α4β7, with only a smaller fraction of the ASC coexpressing L-selectin (fig 1).

Immunisations also induced circulating IgA and IgM secreting cells reacting with the whole cell component of the vaccine. The responder frequency was however much lower than with CTB specific ASC, and the frequencies of whole cell specific ASC were also lower than the frequencies of CTB specific ASC. Nevertheless, homing receptor expression was very similar on whole cell specific ASC induced by gastric and intestinal immunisation, regardless of the isotype produced, in that the majority of whole cell specific ASC resulting from both immunisation regimens were α4β7+ and L-selectin− (data not shown).

**HOMING RECEPTOR EXPRESSION ON CIRCULATING H. PYLORI SPECIFIC T CELLS**

Circulating specific T cells are difficult to detect following mucosal immunisation, and we therefore decided to study T cell responses to the gastric antigen H. pylori MP and the systemic antigen TT in H. pylori infected cells. The proliferative response of CD4+ and CD8+ cells positive or negative for L-selectin or α4β7 was determined, after magnetic separation of the respective cell subsets and culture for five days with either H. pylori MP or TT. All of the different populations of CD8+ T cells proliferated poorly (SI <3 in all volunteers) when stimulated with either MP or TT, and no conclusive comparisons could be made between the populations. The CD4+ cell populations on the other hand responded to the different stimulations in a characteristic way. SI values obtained when stimulating CD4+α4β7+ cells with H. pylori MP were always higher then those obtained when stimulating the same number of CD4+α4β7− cells (p<0.02). Conversely, higher responses to TT were found in the CD4+α4β7− cells than in the CD4+α4β7+ cells (p<0.05) (fig 2A). When expression of

![Figure 1](http://www.gutjnl.com/)

**Figure 1** Homing receptor expression on cholera toxin B subunit (CTB) specific antibody secreting cells (ASC) induced by intestinal or gastric immunisations. Circulating lymphocytes were collected seven days after either intestinal or gastric immunisations and separated with regard to expression of α4β7 (A) and L-selectin (B), respectively. The frequencies of CTB specific IgA and IgG secreting cells in the resulting cell populations were determined in ELISPOT assays, and expressed as the arithmetic mean (SEM) percentage of ASC expressing the respective markers.

![Figure 2](http://www.gutjnl.com/)

**Figure 2** Homing receptor expression on Helicobacter pylori membrane protein (MP) and tetanus toxoid (TT) specific circulating CD4+ T cells. Circulating T cells were collected from H pylori infected individuals and CD4+ cells isolated by incubation with CD4 specific magnetic beads. They were then further separated with regard to integrin α4β7 (A) or L-selectin (B). Each of the cell subsets was stimulated with H pylori MP or TT, and proliferation assayed five days later. Data are expressed as arithmetic mean (SEM) of proliferative index in α4β7− cells in (A), and L-selectin+ and L-selectin− cells in (B). *p<0.05, **p<0.02 for comparison between positive and negative cells stimulated with the respective antigens.
endothelial cells was determined by immunohistochemistry. Original magnification ×200.

**Figure 3** Mucosal addressin cellular adhesion molecule 1 (MAdCAM-1) expression in gastric mucosa. Gastric biopsies were collected from the antrum mucosa of uninfected (A) and *Helicobacter pylori* infected (B) individuals, and MADCAM-1 expression on endothelial cells was determined by immunohistochemistry. Original magnification ×200.

L-selectin was analysed, both *H pylori* MP and TT reactive cells were found mainly in the CD4+L-selectin+ cells, and responses in the CD4+L-selectin− populations were much lower (fig 2B). Thus CD4+ T cells responding to *H pylori* MP were found to be preferentially α4β7+ and L-selectin+, and those responding to TT were mainly α4β7− and L-selectin+.

**Discussion**

In this study, we showed that both B and T lymphocytes activated by antigens present on the gastric mucosa expressed the mucosal homing receptor integrin α4β7. Furthermore, expression of L-selectin, which mediates homing to organised lymphoid tissues, was seen on most *H pylori* reactive T cells and on about half of B cells induced by gastric immunisation. The endothelial ligand to α4β7, MAdCAM-1, was detected on gastric endothelial cells from both infected and uninfected individuals.

The existence of a common mucosal immune system has been convincingly demonstrated by studying migration of intestinally activated B cells to their final effector sites in the intestinal lamina propria and mucosa associated exocrine glands. Several studies have indicated that mucosally activated T cells also migrate from their inductive site via the circulation to their final effector sites at mucosal surfaces. Nevertheless, there is a substantial degree of compartmentalisation within the mucosal immune system. Even within the intestinal tract, B cell responses induced by peroral and rectal antigen delivery are differentially distributed throughout the intestinal mucosa, and are strongest close to the site of the initial antigen encounter. As a prerequisite for the development of a vaccine against *H pylori* infection, we have recently examined which immunisations can induce gastric immune responses.

These studies showed that only *H pylori* infected individuals had the capacity to mount gastric B cell responses after mucosal immunisations, and that both gastric and intestinal immunisations induced gastric as well as duodenal responses in these individuals. Thus *H pylori* infected mucosa appears to be linked to the small intestine with regard to lymphocyte homing. In these experiments, we cannot rule out the possibility that some antigens from the gastric immunisations may have reached intestinal inductive sites. However, this is unlikely as vaccine administration through an endoscope made it possible to accurately deliver small droplets and ensure by inspection that the fluid was spread over the mucosa and absorbed almost instantly. Furthermore, the high binding capacity of CTB to ganglioside GM1, which is present on all nucleated cells, probably resulted in rapid capture of all CTB in the vaccine to the gastric mucosa.

To better understand the mechanisms behind gastric lymphocyte recruitment, we examined homing receptor expression by human B cells activated by antigens present in the stomach. Chronic *H pylori* infection does not give rise to detectable numbers of circulating B cells spontaneously secreting antibodies to *H pylori* antigens, and there is currently no *H pylori* vaccine licenced for human use. Therefore, we
chose to study B cell responses to two different types of well characterised mucosal antigens, the potent protein immunogen CTB as well as whole inactivated V cholerae organisms. These studies showed that circulating ASC induced by gastric immunisations carry the same set of homing receptors as cells induced by intestinal immunisations, in that almost all cells express αβ7 and less than half coexpress L-selectin. The same set of homing receptors has previously been detected on B cells induced by peroral or rectal immunisation with the same cholera vaccine. These results suggest that B cells induced at any site along the gastrointestinal tract express the same set of homing receptors and therefore a putative human therapeutic vaccine against H pylori infection could potentially be delivered to the small intestine and not directly to the gastric mucosa.

In contrast with B cells, circulating T cells specific for H pylori antigens can be detected in the circulation of the majority of infected individuals. Circulating T cells specific for H pylori MP were found in the αβ7+ subpopulation. In previous studies, T cells induced by the intestinal pathogen rotavirus or orally delivered antigens have also been shown to reside in the αβ7+ T cell fraction. Our results in the present study therefore reinforce the similarities in homing receptor usage between cells activated by intestinal or gastric antigens. Earlier studies have also shown that T cells induced by parenteral tetanus or mumps vaccination preferentially are αβ7 negative. These results were confirmed in the present study, showing that TT specific T cells resulting from subcutaneous immunisations were mainly found in the αβ7− subset. However, we also showed for the first time that parental immunisation with TT gave rise to specific T cells expressing L-selectin. Somewhat unexpectedly, most H pylori reactive T cells were also found in the L-selectin+ fraction. Therefore, expression of L-selectin differs between B and T cells activated by gastric antigen delivery, in that H pylori specific T cells were preferentially detected in the L-selectin+ fraction whereas B cells induced by gastric cholera vaccination were either L-selectin+ or L-selectin−. This may be explained by the assumption that H pylori reactive T cells detected were probably memory cells whereas the vaccine specific ASC detected were effector cells. Different expression of L-selectin has been detected on so called central memory and effector memory T cells, in the sense that central memory cells express L-selectin while effector memory cells are L-selectin negative.

In a recent study, Michetti and colleagues demonstrated that antibodies against integrin αβ7 blocked protection against H felis infection, previously induced by oral immunisation with H felis sonicate. Based on these findings, we examined if the increased lymphocyte migration to the H pylori infected human mucosa was caused by increased expression of the mucosal homing receptor MAdCAM-1, the endothelial ligand to αβ7. This however was not the case as gastric mucosa from infected and uninfected individuals had almost identical expression of MAdCAM-1. Therefore, other mechanisms must be responsible for the increased lymphocyte migration to the human stomach in H pylori infection. These could involve previously detected increased gastric expression of intercellular adhesion molecule 1 in H pylori infected individuals. Increased local production of B cell attracting chemokine 1 (BCA-1), as well as interleukin 8, RANTES, and growth related oncogene a (GRO-α) has also been detected during H pylori infection, and may also contribute to gastric lymphocyte accumulation.

In conclusion, in this study we have demonstrated that both B cells and T cells activated by antigens delivered to the gastric mucosa carry mucosal homing receptors, similar to those on cells activated in the intestine. This, together with the observation that gastric endothelial cells express MAdCAM-1, may partly explain the similar homing behaviour of cells activated in the stomach and small intestine. These observations also suggest that a potential future vaccine against H pylori may not have to be targeted directly to the gastric mucosa but might be delivered to the small intestine.

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