Grape epicatechin conjugates prevent erythrocyte membrane protein oxidation

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1 Abstract

Epicatechin conjugates obtained from grape have shown antioxidant activity in 2 various systems. However, how these conjugates exert their antioxidant 3 benefits has not been widely studied. We assessed the activity of epicatechin 4 and epicatechin conjugates on erythrocyte membrane in presence and absence 5 of a peroxyl radical initiator, to increase our understanding of their mechanisms. 6 Thus, we studied cell membrane fluidity by fluorescence anisotropy 7 measurements, morphology of erythrocytes by scanning electron microscopy 8 and, finally, red cell membrane proteins by SDS-PAGE electrophoresis. Our 9 data showed that incubation of red cells in presence of epicatechin derivatives 10 altered membrane fluidity and erythrocyte morphology, but not the membrane 11 protein pattern. The presence in the medium of the peroxyl radical initiator 12 AAPH resulted in membrane disruptions at all levels analysed, causing changes 13 14 in membrane fluidity, cell morphology and protein degradation. The presence of antioxidants avoided protein oxidation, indicating that the interaction of 15 epicatechin conjugates with the lipid bilayer might reduce the accessibility of 16 AAPH to membranes, which could explain in part the inhibitory ability of these 17 compounds against haemolysis induced by peroxidative insult. 18

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20 Keywords: erythrocytes, membrane fluidity, cell morphology, band-3, AAPH,

21 epicatechin, membrane protein

22 Introduction

Polyphenols are products of the secondary metabolism of plants and constitute 23 one of the most numerous and widely distributed groups of natural antioxidants 24 in the plant kingdom. Out of a wide range of natural compounds, polyphenols 25 function as antioxidants by virtue of their hydrogen-donating properties (1,2). 26 Epicatechins are monomeric members of the flavanol family of polyphenols, 27 components of green tea and red grapes, with powerful antioxidant properties in 28 vitro (3). It has been demonstrated that flavanols such as epicatechin, 29 epigallocatechin and their gallate esters scavenge both aqueous and lipophilic 30 radicals and act as chain-breaking antioxidants (4). 31

Cysteinyl-epicatechin (Cys-Ec) and cysteinyl-epicatechin gallate (Cys-EcG) 32 33 were obtained by depolymerization of grape polymeric flavanols in the presence of cysteine in our lab (5). We demonstrated their antioxidant activity in various 34 systems and models, such as, for example, the prevention of haemolysis 35 induced by hydrogen peroxide (H_2O_2) (5,6) and 2,2'-Azobis(amidinopropane) 36 dihydrochloride (AAPH) (7). However, the mechanism by which they perform 37 their protective effect is still under discussion. Free radical attack decreases 38 membrane fluidity by modifying lipids via lipid peroxidation, which may 39 significantly alter membrane properties and possibly disrupt the function of 40 membrane-associated proteins (8). Membrane-active flavonoids are believed to 41 42 cause antioxidant activity by rigidifying membranes cooperatively, with an effect on reactive oxygen species. Along these lines, Sato et al. (9) modelled 43 44 haemolysis induced by free radicals by competitive reaction between lipid

45 peroxidation and protein oxidation, including the redistribution of oxidized band46 3 proteins to form haemolytic holes.

The aim of this study was to assess the effect of epicatechin and epicatechin 47 conjugates on erythrocyte membrane in presence and absence of AAPH, a 48 peroxyl radical initiator, because we are interested in their possible applications 49 in the fields of food preservation and skin protection Thus, we studied cell 50 membrane fluidity by fluorescence anisotropy measurements using 1,6-51 (1-(4-trimethylammoniumphenyl)-6-52 diphenyl-1,3,5-hexatriene (DPH) and phenyl-1,3,4-hexatriene p-toluenesulfonate) (TMA-DPH) as fluorescent probes. 53 We also studied by scanning electron microscopy (SEM) the morphology of 54 erythrocytes when incubated in the presence of antioxidants alone and with 55 AAPH. Finally, red cell membrane proteins were evaluated by SDS-PAGE 56 electrophoresis. 57

58 Material and Methods

Chemicals. Conjugates were prepared by acidic depolymerisation of 59 proanthocyanidins obtained from grape (Vitis Vinifera) pomace and from hazel 60 (Hamamelis virginiana) bark, essentially as described in Torres and Bobet 61 (2001) (5) and Lozano et al. (2006) (10). We aimed to generate bio-based 62 antioxidants with modified physicochemical and biological properties. The 63 following compounds studied: (-)-epicatechin (1), 4β-(S-64 were cysteinyl)epicatechin (2) and 4β -(S-cysteinyl)epicatechin 3-O-gallate (3) (Figure 65 1). 2,2'-Azobis(amidinopropane) dihydrochloride (AAPH) was purchased from 66 Sigma (St. Louis, MO). Fluorescent probes DPH (1,6-diphenyl-1,3,5-hexatriene) 67 and TMA-DPH (1-(4-trimethylammoniumphenyl)-6-phenyl-1,3,4-hexatriene p-68

toluenesulfonate) were purchased from Molecular Probes (Eugene, OR, USA).
Acrylamide 40%, bisacrylamide 2%, Tetramethylethylenediamine (TEMED),
ammonium persulphate, β-mercaptoethanol and blue bromophenol used for
SDS-PAGE were supplied by GE Healthcare Bio-Sciences AB (Uppsala,
Sweden). Finally, Precision plus Unstained Standard was purchased at BioRad
(Spain).

Blood Samples and Preparation of Red Blood Cells. Blood samples were 75 obtained from healthy donors by venipuncture (Tissue and Blood Bank of 76 Hospital Vall d'Hebron, Barcelona, Spain), following the ethical guidelines of the 77 hospital, and were collected in citrated tubes. Red blood cells (RBCs) were 78 separated from the plasma and buffy coat by centrifugation at 1,000 q for 10 79 min. The erythrocyte layer was washed three times in phosphate-buffered 80 isotonic saline (PBS) containing 22.2 mM Na₂HPO₄, 5.6 mM KH₂PO₄, 123.3 81 82 mM NaCl, and 10.0 mM glucose in distilled water (pH 7.4). The cells were then suspended in an isotonic saline solution at a density of 8x10⁹ cells/ml. 83

Erythrocyte treatments. Aliquots of 250 µl of the red cell suspension were 84 treated with AAPH (100 mM, 90 minutes) in constant agitation at 37°C. Samples 85 were also studied in presence of 75 µM of Ec and cysteinyl conjugates in 86 presence and absence of the oxidant product. Untreated controls were included 87 in all experiments to monitor spontaneous haemolysis. To avoid potential 88 interferences attributed to tonicity fluctuations, this variable was previously 89 monitored when treatments were added and subsequently corrected with the 90 91 solvent, if necessary.

Fluorescence emission anisotropy measurements. To determine cell 92 93 membrane fluidity, DPH and TMA-DPH fluorescent probes were selected. To carry out the steady-state fluorescence anisotropy measurements of the probes 94 in treated and untreated red blood cells, the erythrocyte suspensions 95 (hematocrit of 0.01%) in PBS were labelled with the fluorescent dyes (final 96 concentration in samples 10⁻⁶ M) at room temperature for 1 hour in dark 97 98 conditions. Steady-state anisotropy measurements were carried out with an AB-2 spectrofluorometer SLM-Aminco using polarizers in the L configuration in a 99 quartz cuvette under constant stirring at room temperature. Samples were lit 100 with linearly (vertically or horizontally) polarized monochromatic light (λ_{ex} = 365 101 nm); and the fluorescence intensities (λ_{em} = 425 nm), emitted parallel or 102 perpendicular to the direction of the excitation beam (slit-widths: 8 nm), were 103 104 recorded. Fluorescence anisotropy (r) was calculated automatically by software provided with the instrument, according to: 105

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$$r = (I_{vv} - I_{vh}G) / (I_{vv} + 2I_{vh}G),$$

where I_{vv} and I_{vh} represent the components of the light intensity emitted in parallel and in perpendicular, respectively, to the direction of the vertically polarized excitation light. A factor G = I_{hv} / I_{hh} was used to correct the inequality of the detection beam to horizontally and vertically polarized emission (11).

Scanning electron microscopy (SEM). At the end of incubation, samples without previous wash were immersed in glutaraldehyde 5% in 0.1 mol/l phosphate buffer (pH 7.4, 4°C) for 1 hour and, after centrifuging, a solution of glutaraldehyde 2.5% (PBS, pH 7.4 0.1 M) was added for another hour. Then samples were washed in 0.1 mol/l phosphate buffer and post-fixed in OsO_4 (1%

in 0.1 M PBS, 4°C 1 h). Then cells were dehydrated in a graded series of
ethanol. Finally, the samples were transferred into isoamyl acetate for critical
point drying with liquid CO₂ and coated with gold. Specimens were examined in
a Hitachi 2300 electron microscope, operating at 15 kV. Samples were
processed and examined at the Serveis Cientificotècnics of the Universitat de
Barcelona.

Erythrocyte ghost preparation. Human erythrocyte ghost membranes were prepared after treatments, following the procedure of Fairbanks et al. (12). The packed erythrocytes were haemolysed by hypotonic lysis and the pellet obtained by centrifugation subsequent to haemolysis was resuspended and washed several times until white ghost membranes were obtained.

127 SDS-PAGE. Membrane protein oxidation was evaluated by polyacrylamide electrophoresis (SDS-PAGE), following Fairbanks et al. (1971) (12). After 128 treatment, the protein content of the erythrocyte ghost samples was measured, 129 using a commercial kit (Bio-Rad) and BSA as a protein standard. 15 µg of 130 extracted proteins were electrophoresed in parallel into a 7.5% SDS-131 132 polyacrylamide gel under reducing conditions. The proteins were viewed with Coomassie Blue staining. Densitometric analysis was performed using software 133 developed in our laboratory. Actin (band 5) was used as the "internal" standard 134 135 for quantitative calculations.

Statistical analysis. All experiments were run at least three times. Anisotropy fluorescence values were expressed as the mean ± standard error (SEM) of at least 3 independent experiments. Data were analyzed by one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), followed by Dunnett's *post hoc* test for multiple comparisons

between compounds in relation to the untreated and oxidant controls, all using the SPSS software (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). Differences were considered significant for p < 0.05.

143 **Results and discussion**

144 There is increasing public awareness of the fact that natural resources are limited and of the need to rationalize their exploitation (5). Therefore, 145 sustainability must be economically viable, apart from being environmentally 146 advantageous. An interesting approach is the recovery of high added-value 147 chemicals from residues and byproducts which still contain a variety of 148 biologically active species. In this sense, grape pomace (skin, seeds, and 149 stems) obtained after pressing in the wine industry, is a rich source of 150 151 catechins, namely monomeric and oligomeric flavan-3-ols (proanthocyanidins), and glycosylated flavonols. These products may be used as starting materials 152 for the preparation of novel compounds with antioxidant properties. Our 153 laboratory adopted the strategy to obtain biobased antioxidant compounds by 154 depolymerizing polymeric flavanols in the presence of cysteine (13). The new 155 156 conjugates appeared to be promising products since they were more potent than their underivatized counterparts and they include ionic groups, which may 157 be used to modulate their action within different physicochemical and biological 158 environments (6). Therefore, agricultural byproducts evidence the suitability of 159 using raw materials for the production of novel antioxidative compounds of 160 possible relevance in biological, pharmacological, and nutritional fields. 161

162 In the present study, we investigated the interactions of epicatechin and 163 epicatechin conjugates with erythrocyte membrane in order to clarify the

mechanisms of their antioxidant activity, and consequently strengthen the use
 of agricultural by-products as source of antioxidant material.

Because of their susceptibility to peroxidation, erythrocytes are used as a model to assess oxidative damage in biomembranes. Erythrocytes are considered a prime target for free radical attack due to the presence of high contents of polyunsaturated fatty acid in their membrane and their oxygen transport, which are potent promoters of reactive oxygen species (ROS). Exposure of erythrocytes to oxidative conditions results in successive free radical-mediated reactions that ultimately lead to cell lysis (14).

One of the important parameters relating to the structure and functional state of 173 the cell membrane is membrane fluidity (11). Membrane-active flavonoids are 174 175 believed to show antioxidant activity by rigidifying membranes (15). To determine whether membrane fluidity was modified by epicatechin and its 176 conjugates in presence or absence of the oxidant agent, the fluorescent probes 177 DPH and TMA-DPH were incorporated into the membranes of erythrocytes. 178 DPH is a hydrophobic molecule that is incorporated into the region near the 179 180 centre of the bilayer. Differences in the fluorescence polarization of this probe may reflect a direct effect on the motion of the lipid molecules in the core region 181 of the bilayer (16). The TMA-DPH molecules are believed to accumulate and 182 183 remain almost exclusively in the outer leaflet of the cell membrane, since their 184 polar heads (trimethylammonium groups) are anchored at the lipid-water interface, while hydrocarbon moieties enter the lipid part of the membrane. 185 186 Therefore, fluidity assessed by steady-state fluorescence with both probes

reveals the arrangement and mobility of membrane components in differentregions of the bilayer (17).

Figure 2 shows the anisotropy values for both probes. An increase in the 189 anisotropy parameter (r) of a probe is indicative of a decrease in the fluidity of 190 the membrane. The baseline fluorescence for TMA-DPH and DPH was $0.308 \pm$ 191 192 0.012 and 0.306 ± 0.016, respectively. Epicatechin and its conjugates reduced fluidity in the outer and inner parts of membranes, as shown by the increase in 193 anisotropy values for both probes. An exception should be noted in the case of 194 Cys-Ec, in which the anisotropy value increased but did not reach statistical 195 significance for DPH. In agreement with our previous study with liposomes and 196 thermal analysis (18), the current data suggests that epicatechin and its 197 derivatives distribute in the core of the bilayer, but also that they may interact 198 with its external part. This effect on membrane fluidity is important because, as 199 200 previously reported, changes in membrane fluidity can markedly affect the rate of lipid oxidation (15,19). Previous studies suggest that the increase in 201 membrane rigidity hinders the diffusion of free radicals, reduces the kinetics of 202 oxidative reactions and thus inhibits lipid peroxidation (20). 203

The capacity of flavanols and procyanidins to protein-binding and interact with the polar head groups of membrane phospholipids, suggests that these compounds maintain membranes' integrity by preventing the access of deleterious molecules to the hydrophobic region of the bilayer by accumulation at the membranes' surface, both outside and inside the cells (15). In this way, Arora et al., (20) described that genistein and other flavonoids and isoflavonoids partitioned preferentially into the hydrophobic core of the model membrane,

where they modified the lipid packing order. Consequently, the increased 211 membrane rigidity would result in inhibition of lipid peroxidation due to a 212 slowdown of free radical reactions. In addition, a flavonoid-rich environment is 213 214 created that could limit the access of oxidants to the bilayer and control the rate of propagation of free radical chain reactions occurring in the hydrophobic core 215 of membrane (6). Therefore, among the antioxidant mechanisms that could 216 explain the protective effects of epicatechin and its thio derivatives their ability 217 to alter membrane fluidity besides to their membrane location should be taken 218 219 into account.

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221 Interestingly, the presence of AAPH also increased anisotropy values, indicating 222 a decrease in membrane fluidity and an effect of the oxidant agent on the lipid components of the bilayer. However, the effect of epicatechin and its derivatives 223 on anisotropy values were not affected by the presence of AAPH. In AAPH-224 induced peroxidation, free radicals are formed in the solution and attack the 225 membranes from the external medium. The lack of effect of AAPH in presence 226 227 of the antioxidants, combined with the decrease in membrane fluidity that they produced, may suggest that the antioxidant activity of these flavonoids could 228 also be explained by their capacity to prevent the access of free radicals to the 229 bilayer, although contribution of radical trapping can be also considered. 230

The incorporation of antioxidants in ordered membrane lipid bilayers determines great disordering of acyl chains, increasing membrane fluidity. In contrast, an increase in membrane lipid packing is detected by the incorporation of flavonoids between the acyl chains of the phospholiplids in disordered lipid

bilayers, resulting in rigidifying of the membrane. The effects exerted by several
antioxidants on membrane fluidity resemble those of cholesterol, suggesting a
positive correlation between rigidifying effects of the antioxidant in membrane
lipid bilayers and its antioxidant capacity (21).

Oxidative damage in cell membranes also leads to alterations in shape. The 239 240 effect of AAPH and epicatechin and its derivatives on cell morphology was studied by scanning electron microscopy. Untreated erythrocytes appeared as 241 typical biconcave shapes (Fig. 3a), while exposure to AAPH resulted in a 242 significant change to echinocytic or acanthocytic shapes (Fig. 3b). Epicatechin 243 and its conjugates did not restore normal erythrocyte morphology after AAPH 244 treatment (Fig. 3d). On the contrary, erythrocytes incubated with epicatechin 245 and its conjugates also showed abnormal shapes, mainly echinocytic ones, as 246 observed in the case of Cys-EcG, confirming their interaction with the cell 247 248 membrane (Fig. 3c). According to the bilayer-couple hypothesis, the changes induced by foreign molecules are due to differential expansions of the two 249 leaflets of the plasma membrane (22). Echinocytic and acanthocytic shapes 250 would appear when molecules are inserted in the outer leaflet, causing surface 251 expansion. Therefore, our observation that epicatechin and its conjugates 252 induced the formation of echinocytic and acanthocytic shapes probably 253 indicates that the antioxidants studied are mainly located at the outer leaflet of 254 the membrane. 255

Given the membrane fluidity changes and the induction of altered erythrocyte shapes due to AAPH and antioxidant products, the next step was to analyze membrane proteins from erythrocytes. Erythrocytes exposed to oxidative stress

show altered transport capacity through the anion exchange band 3 protein. 259 260 Peroxyl radicals derived from AAPH decrease erythrocyte anion transport capacity (23). Results of SDS-PAGE electrophoresis of erythrocyte ghosts are 261 shown in Figure 3. The well-established normal distribution of the major 262 membrane cytoskeletal proteins is shown in lane 1, which contains untreated 263 erythrocyte ghosts. AAPH treatment produced changes in the protein pattern, 264 leading to a remarkable protein loss of band-3 proteins, as seen in lane 2, 265 confirming previous results from other authors (24,25). However, the 266 antioxidants did not alter the protein pattern (lanes 4, 6 and 8), as has been 267 recently observed for epicatechin (26). Moreover, epicatechin and epicatechin 268 conjugates protected proteins from AAPH oxidative insult, as band 3 is fully 269 recovered (lanes 5, 7 and 9). These results are confirmed by densitometry 270 271 analysis, as shown in Table 2. After AAPH treatment, the amount of band-3 proteins dropped to 33% of that of untreated ghosts, but the co-treatment of 272 273 erythrocytes with AAPH and the flavanols avoid the effects of the oxidant agent 274 on that protein. These data suggest that antioxidants prevent the access of peroxyl radicals to band-3 proteins located in the lipid bilayer. 275

It has been reported that epicatechin conjugates with sulfur-containing moieties are strong free radical scavengers with cell-protecting activities, which may be in part modulated by their capacity to bind to biological membranes (18). Moreover, interaction of the conjugates with model membranes pointed out that the nonpolyphenolic moiety significantly influenced the membrane behavior of the whole molecules. We have previously demonstrated that Ec derivatives are better antioxidants against AAPH-induced hemolysis (7) than the former

compound, but only a direct relationship between the protection against lipid peroxidation and the degree of galloylation of compounds was proven (7). In this sense, distinctive membrane interaction was expected due to the presence of both the cysteinyl group and galloil acid. However, no impact was registered here not for membrane fluidity, morphology and/or protein profile_that could be related with differences emerging from their antioxidant protective effect both in front of AAPH and H2O2 (6,7).

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291 In summary, our results demonstrate that epicatechin and its conjugates spread out in the core of the bilayer, but might also interact with its external part. They 292 stabilize the membrane through a decrease in lipid fluidity blocking the access 293 294 of the peroxyl radical to erythrocyte membranes, which may contribute to their ability to inhibit oxidative haemolysis. These observations may enhance our 295 understanding of how these substances develop their antioxidant protective 296 activity over biological membranes. Taken together with our previously reported 297 data (6,7), which showed that these epicatechin derivatives are safe for normal 298 299 cells, this study reinforces the notion that the use of agricultural wastes as a 300 source of high value-added products confers potential health benefits.

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- **Figure 1**. Chemical structure of epicatechin and cysteinyl conjugates. (1)
- epicatechin; (2) 4β -(S-cysteinyl)epicatechin; (3) 4β -(S-cysteinyl)epicatechin 3-
- 398 O-gallate.



Figure 2. Steady-state anisotropy of the fluorescence probes, DPH and TMA DPH, incorporated into erythrocyte membranes. Results are expressed as

402 mean \pm SEM of at least three independent experiments. Anisotropy 403 measurements are represented by *r* values. *Significantly different when 404 compared to values obtained for untreated cells (Dunnett's *post hoc* test, 405 *p*<0.05).





Figure 3. Effects of AAPH and Cys-epicatechin on the morphology of human erythrocytes. Human erythrocytes observed by SEM: (a) untreated erythrocytes, (b) erythrocytes treated with 100 mM of AAPH, (c) erythrocytes treated with 75 μ M of Cys-EcG, (d) erythrocytes treated with 100 mM of AAPH and 75 μ M of Cys-EcG.



Figure 4. Effect of epicatechin and its conjugates and AAPPH in human 415 416 erythrocyte membrane proteins analyzed using SDS-PAGE. Lane 1: untreated erythrocytes; lane 2: erythrocytes treated with 100 mM of AAPH; lane 3: 417 molecular weight marker; lane 4: erythrocytes treated with 75 µM of Cys-EcG; 418 419 lane 5: treated with 100 mM of AAPH and 75 µM of Cys-EcG; lane 6: erythrocytes treated with 75 µM of Ec; lane 7: erythrocytes treated with 100 mM 420 of AAPH and 75 µM of Ec; lane 8: erythrocytes treated with 75 µM of Cys-Ec; 421 422 lane 9: erythrocytes treated with 100 mM of AAPH and 75 µM of Cys-Ec. The arrow shows the location of band-3 proteins. 423

Table 1. Effect of AAPH and epicatechin and its derivatives on band-3 protein
of erythrocyte membranes. The amount of band-3 protein in the SDS-PAGE gel
was determined by densitometry and the percentage was calculated from the
amount of control cells (untreated erythrocytes), using actin as the "internal
standard".

Condition	Band 3*
Ec	114.8
Cys-Ec	144.1
Cys-EcG	123.9
ААРН	33.4
AAPH + Ec	95.9
AAPH + Cys-Ec	104.5
AAPH + Cys-EcG	137.9

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* Expressed as percentage of untreated

