

Review

A New Pathogenesis of Albuminuria: Role of Transcytosis

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Key Words

Transcytosis • Albuminuria • Glomerular filtration barrier • Proximal tubular cell

Abstract

Transcytosis is an important intracellular transport process by which multicellular organisms selectively move cargoes from apical to basolateral membranes without disrupting cellular homeostasis. In kidney, macromolecular components in the serum, such as albumin, low-density lipoprotein and immunoglobulins, pass through the glomerular filtration barrier (GFB) and proximal tubular cells (PTCs) by transcytosis. Protein transcytosis plays a vital role in the pathology of albuminuria, which causes progressive destruction of the GFB structure and function. However, the pathophysiological consequences of protein transcytosis in the kidney remain largely unknown. This article summarizes recent researches on the regulation of albumin transcytosis across the GFB and PTCs in both physiological and pathological conditions. Understanding the mechanism of albumin transcytosis may reveal potential therapeutic targets for prevention or alleviation of the pathological consequences of albuminuria.

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Introduction

Transcytosis was firstly described in capillary permeability by Palade in the 1950s [1]. Subsequently, in 1979, Simionescu et al. [2] used the term “transcytosis” to describe the vectorial transport of macromolecules within plasmalemmal vesicles across capillary endothelial cells. Transcytosis is most commonly observed in epithelial cells [3-6], but also occurs in other cell types, including neurons [7], osteoclasts [8], intestinal membraneous (M) cells [9] and endothelial cells of capillaries or arteries. Cargoes reported to be transcytosed including albumin [10], immunoglobulin (Ig)A [11], low-density lipoprotein (LDL) [12], IgG [4, 13, 14], insulin [15], transferrin [16, 17], and tumor necrosis factor (TNF)- α [18, 19]. These macromolecular proteins can be endocytosed, trafficked across the cell (intracellular trafficking), and finally exocytosed intactly by plasmalemmal vesicles (caveolae), without

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entering the cellular cytoplasm. In different types of cells, protein transcytosis can be mediated by different receptors. For instance, albumin transport is mainly mediated by caveolae in endothelial cells [20-22], but in epithelial cells such as proximal tubular cells, it is mainly mediated by clathrin [21].

A crucial function of the transcytotic pathway is to regulate delivery of different proteins to maintain balanced tissue oncotic pressure and facilitate host-defense [23]. In addition, transcytosis is involved in the pathogenesis of a variety of diseases through different transcellular mechanisms. Previous studies reported that increased LDL transcytosis across arterial endothelial cells mediated by the LDL receptor-1 (Lox-1) promoted early atherosclerosis [24-26]. Recently, Buggia et al. [27] reported that abnormalities of β -site converting enzyme 1 (BACE1) transcytosis were involved in the pathogenesis of Alzheimer's disease (AD) and other neurodegenerative diseases. Transcytosis is also implicated in other pathological conditions such as stroke [18], cancer [28], inflammation [29], immunodeficiency [30] and kidney disease [31].

Recent studies have implicated that abnormal albumin transcytosis preceded kidney structural impairment in the early proteinuric renal diseases. Pascariu M et al. [32] reviewed the formation of nephrotic proteinuria during early stage of diabetes due to capillary hyperpermeability to plasma macromolecules. This process could be explained by intensification of transendothelial vesicular transport, rather than destabilization of the interendothelia junction. In this review, we summarize recent researches on albumin transcytosis across the glomerular filtration barrier (GFB) and proximal tubular cells (PTCs) in both physiological and pathological conditions, focusing on several regulatory factors and signaling pathways.

The role of transcytosis in albuminuria

Albuminuria is not only a hallmark of kidney damage, but also a factor contributing to the development and progression of glomerulosclerosis and tubulointerstitial fibrosis, which impairs kidney function [33]. In recent decades, numerous studies have explored the pathogenesis of albuminuria. The traditional view considered albuminuria to be largely caused by loss of the integrity of the GFB and defective reabsorption in the proximal tubule.

Three adjacent physiological layers that comprise the GFB, termed the fenestrated endothelium, glomerular basement membrane (GBM), and podocytes, sequentially aligned from the luminal aspect to the urinary space. Glomerular endothelia cells (GECs) with negatively charged glycocalyx covered on the luminal surface, GBM comprised with highly ordered extracellular matrix, podocytes with their interdigitating foot processes and the slit diaphragms that span the gaps between them, all of which form a size- and charge-selective filtration barrier. Under physiological conditions, only micromolecules and some small solutes such as water, ions and glucose can cross the GFB, but macromolecules are restricted. Under special pathological conditions or genetic defects, the integrity of the GFB is damaged, and then leads to increased permeability to macromolecules and resultant albuminuria. However, recent data has revealed that transcellular transport of plasma albumin across GECs and podocytes may constitute a new glomerular albumin filtration pathway [34-36]. Furthermore, insufficient transcytosis by dysfunctional PTCs also contributes to albuminuria. Under physiological conditions PTCs can reabsorb, transcytose

Table 1. Proteins transcytosis by glomerular endothelial cells (GECs), podocytes and proximal tubular cells (PTCs)

Cell types	Basic roles	Ref
GECs	Receptor-mediated albumin transcytosis in GECs has been proven to be involved in the formation of albuminuria	[34]
Podocytes	Podocytes have the ability of albumin endocytosis and transcytosis	[35,36,44,45,47,50,51,53]
PTCs	Defects of rat PTCs in endocytosis and transcytosis are involved in the pathogenesis of albuminuria	[37,46,57]

and process filtered albumin. Albumin is internalized to PTCs via megalin-cubilin-mediated, clathrin-dependent endocytosis. Defects in PTCs such as loss of megalin and cubilin result in albuminuria and proteinuria [37]. Both glomerular permeability and PTCs play fundamental, physiologic, synergistic, interactive and dynamic roles in the renal handling of albumin (Table 1).

Transcytosis by GECs

As the first line of the GFB, GECs play a crucial role in albumin filtration [38, 39]. GECs are a special endothelial phenotype with fenestrated transcellular pores, which are covered by abundant negatively charged glycocalyx. Since albumin is negatively charged, it can be restricted by GECs. A previous study demonstrated that albumin trafficked across the endothelial barrier through a caveolae-mediated transcytosis pathway [34]. Recent evidence indicates that glomerular charge and size selectivity is not impaired during the early phase of diabetic nephropathy [40-42], and albumin transendothelial transport may be responsible for the formation of albuminuria at the early stage of diabetic nephropathy. Thus, the conventional theory of "impairment of the size- and/or charge-selective filtration barrier" is insufficient to explain the pathogenesis of albuminuria during early stage diabetic nephropathy. This viewpoint provides innovative insight into the formation of albuminuria.

The transcellular transport of macromolecules is involved in many physiological processes, including protein catabolism and drug delivery. Receptor-mediated albumin transcytosis in GECs has been reported to be involved in the formation of albuminuria in a murine model of early stage diabetic nephropathy [34]. However, the precise mechanism by which pathological transcytosis in GECs underlies albuminuria remains unknown.

Transcytosis by podocytes

Glomerular podocytes, highly specialized epithelial cells, play an important role in glomerular permeability. Podocytes and slit diaphragms between their foot processes have the function to clear filtered proteins. Without clearance by podocytes, a significant amount of albumin and IgG would be trapped at the subpodocyte space. In pathologic conditions, a large amount of proteins accumulate under the foot processes of the podocyte [43]. Thus, it seems that podocytes may play a crucial role in cleaning the glomerular filter.

Increasing evidence has shown that podocytes are able to endocytose and transcytose proteins [35, 36, 44, 45]. Previous studies showed that cultured podocytes internalized albumin via transcytosis [36, 46-48]. Human, rat and murine experiments indicate that plasma proteins, such as ferritin, albumin and IgG, are found in the vacuoles of podocytes [49-53]. Kinugase et al. [51] found that endocytosis of albumin in podocyte vesicles and on the apical membrane enhanced in a puromycin-induced proteinuric rat model, which mimicked minimal change nephritic lesions. In addition, they also used real-time confocal microscopy to record a delayed appearance of Evans Blue (EB)-labeled human albumin in the tubular lumen after injection, suggesting transcellular transport. On the contrary, after blocking transcytosis, albuminuria was decreased obviously. Another study revealed a tracer protein ferritin in podocyte lysosomes, suggesting an endocytic uptake of ferritin by podocytes from the GBM [52].

Podocytes are thought to clear proteins such as albumin and immunoglobulins accumulated at the GFB via the transport receptor neonatal Fc receptor (FcRn) [50]. In the kidneys, FcRn is expressed on podocytes and the brush border of the proximal tubular epithelium. FcRn mediates albumin transport in podocytes and preserves its function and lifespan [37]. Prominent, extensive protein vacuolation has been found in the podocytes of patients with heavy proteinuria [54]. In the early stage of diabetic nephropathy, podocytes exhibit enhanced endocytosis and degradation of IgG without increased urinary protein excretion [53].

By using intravital imaging, Schiessl et al. [35] first reported that in healthy young Munich Wistar Froemter (MWF) rats, acute angiotensin (Ang) II infusion promoted accumulation of albumin in the subpodocyte space, and enhanced endocytosis and transcytosis of plasma

albumin by podocytes in a dose-dependent manner. Multi-photon microscopy showed that 86% of the endocytosed albumin was transported via transcytosis to the urinary space. This Ang II-induced albumin endocytosis by podocytes was megalin-dependent. Although structural impairment of podocytes is absent at the time of acute Ang II injection in healthy rats, increased albumin uptake by podocytes induces a proinflammatory response, which may cause podocyte injury in the long run [55]. Thus, release of endocytosed albumin by podocytes may be an early sign predicting subsequent podocyte injury [52]. In another experimental study, caveolae-dependent endocytosis of albumin was observed in cultured immortalized human podocytes [36]. In addition, albumin-containing vesicles were detected by electron microscopy in mouse, rat and human glomerular podocytes [56].

Taken together, podocyte clearance works to prevent glomerular diseases. The transcellular transport of proteins by endocytosis and transcytosis in the podocyte forms a new pathway of glomerular protein filtration, which differs from the classic pathway of paracellular transport through the slit diaphragm. Therefore, abnormal endocytic activity of podocytes under pathological conditions may be involved in nephritic albuminuria and long-term deterioration of podocyte function.

Transcytosis by PTCs

Transcytosis by PTCs is considered important under both physiologic and pathologic conditions. Transcytosis moves albumin across the PTCs from the apical to basolateral membrane, and into the extracellular fluid (reclamation pathway). This transport process is mediated by FcRn [57], which may work in concert with the megalin-cubilin complex located at the brush-border. PTCs take up albumin through receptor-mediated, clathrin-dependent and fluid-phase endocytosis. This process begins when an endocytic receptor (e.g. megalin-cubilin complex) binds albumin in the clathrin-coated pits. Then the pH of fluid-phase endocytosis vesicles reduces in the endosome to approximately 5.0, causing handoff of albumin to the FcRn receptor. The FcRn pathway facilitates reabsorption and protects proteins from degradation, and mediates transcytosis in endosomal compartments. Some endocytosed proteins are catabolized into amino acids through the lysosomal degradation pathway, whereas the majority are recycled through the FcRn-mediated transcytotic pathway [37, 58]. Hypoalbuminaemia has been observed in FcRn-defective mice or humans [59, 60].

PTCs play an important role in urinary albumin reabsorption and transcytosis. This reclamation process can minimize urinary albumin loss. Filtrated albumin from the glomerular filtrate can be resorbed by the PTCs, particularly in the S1 segment [37]. Selective PTC defects may disturb glomerular filtration and protein absorption in PTCs, thereby leading to nephrotic proteinuria or albuminuria [37]. Tojo et al. [46] reported that lipid peroxidation production was increased in the proximal tubules of diabetic rats. Albuminuria in early diabetic rats may be partially attributed to a decrease in albumin endocytosis, accompanied by reduced megalin expression and increased lipid peroxidation in PTCs. Taken together, defects of PTCs in endocytosis and transcytosis are involved in the pathogenesis of albuminuria.

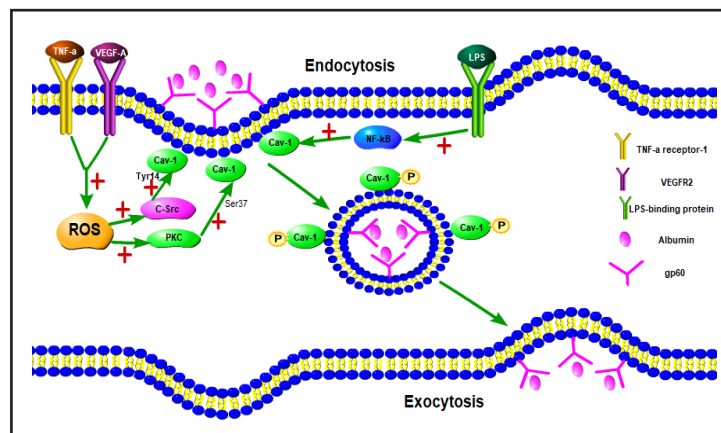
Regulatory factors and signaling pathways involved in albumin transcytosis

The regulatory mechanisms underlying albumin transcytosis are only partially understood. Several regulatory factors involved in albumin transcytosis, such as Ang II, vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF), C-reactive protein (CRP) are attracting attention (Table 2), and relevant signaling pathways, including caveolin-1 (Cav-1), mitochondrial reactive oxygen species (ROS)/Src, AMPK/cav-1, NF- κ B/cav-1 pathway are under investigation (Fig. 1). Understanding the mechanism of albumin transcytosis may highlight therapeutic targets for the prevention or retard pathological albuminuria.

Table 2. Summary of regulatory factors for proteins transcytosis. GECs, glomerular endothelial cells; ECs, endothelial cells; LDL, low density lipoprotein; VEGF, vascular endothelial growth factor; GFB, glomerular filtration barrier; CRP, C-react protein; TNF- α , tumor necrosis factor- α ; ESL, endothelia surface layer

Factors	Basic roles	Role during transcytosis	Ref
Ang II	One of the strongest vasoconstrictor substance; Regulates blood pressure and protects renal function by binding with its receptor	Ang II enhances the endocytosis and transcytosis of plasma albumin by podocytes, and increases LDL transcytosis across ECs	[35, 61]
VEGF	Mediators of podocyte and GECs; Regulates development and function of the GFB in the kidney; Regulates endothelial cell migration, proliferation and differentiation.	Upregulated VEGF could increase the expression of Cav-1 and impact the transport of large molecules across endothelium	[67, 68, 69, 70]
CRP	An acute phase protein; Stimulates ROS production, activates NF- κ B signaling	CRP stimulates retention of LDL in human umbilical venous walls, increases PKC and Src kinase activity, and promotes transcytosis of LDL.	[25, 73, 74]
TNF- α	Induces changes in glomerular endothelial fenestrate and ESL during severe experimental endotoxemia through TNFR1 signaling.	TNF- α promotes early atherosclerosis by increasing transcytosis of LDL across endothelial cells.	[24]

Fig. 1. The relevant ROS/Cav-1 signaling pathways involved in albumin transcytosis in endothelial cells. TNF- α , tumor necrosis factor- α ; VEGF-A, vascular endothelial growth factor A; LPS, lipopolysaccharide; VEGFR2, vascular endothelial growth factor receptor 2; Cav-1, caveolin-1; p-Cav-1, phosphorylated caveolin-1; ROS, reactive oxygen species.



Ang II

Recently, Schiessl et al. [35] reported that Ang II infusion enhanced the endocytosis of albumin across rat podocytes. This process was mediated by the type 1 Ang II receptor (AT1 receptor) in a megalin-dependent manner, and was facilitated by increased albumin concentration in the subpodocyte space. Using an intravital multiphoton microscopy and electron microscopy, Schiessl et al. found that Ang II could acutely increase the filtration of albumin in the healthy kidney in a dose-dependent manner. The albumin-containing vesicles were colocalized with megalin in podocytes. These results revealed that acute Ang II infusion increased the concentration of albumin in the subpodocyte space, which could subsequently facilitate endocytosis of albumin by podocytes and finally lead to albuminuria. In contrast, gentamicin, a competitive inhibitor of megalin-dependent endocytosis, attenuated the uptake of albumin by podocytes. The majority of endocytosed albumin (86%) was released into the urinary space via the transcellular pathway, and only 14% was acidified and degraded by lysosomes. Notably, no apoptosis or necrosis was observed during Ang II-induced albumin transcytosis in the healthy kidney.

The precise mechanism underlying Ang II-induced protein transcytosis in podocytes is largely unknown. In a previous study, Bian et al. [61] reported that Ang II upregulated intracellular ROS in endothelial cells. ROS could facilitate Ang II-induced transcytosis of LDL across endothelial cells, leading to the development of atherosclerosis. Ang II also remarkably increased the levels of LDL receptor, caveolin-1 and cavin-1. Given that podocytes can generate ROS in response to Ang II, the increased production of ROS may be one of the possible mechanisms. In addition, Ang II can induce VEGF synthesis in podocytes by activating the p38 MAP kinase pathway [62, 63]. Thus, local changes in VEGF concentration are potentially associated with Ang II-induced protein transcytosis in podocytes [64].

Therefore, albumin transcytosis could be inhibited by blocking the Ang II/AT1 receptor pathway in the treatment of albuminuria.

VEGF

In the kidney, podocytes produce a variety of endothelial factors, including angiopoietin 1 and VEGF; whereas glomerular endothelial cells express their corresponding receptors Tie2 and VEGF receptor 2 *in vivo* [65]. VEGF widens endothelial cell-cell adhesive junctions and increases fenestrations of the cells. VEGF also induces formation of caveolae, enabling vesicle-based intracellular transport across the cytoplasm [66]. In 1999, Feng et al. [67] found that VEGF increased the permeability of retinal endothelial cells in a NOS-dependent transcytotic transport process mediated by caveolae. Recently, exposure to high glucose was reported to increase permeability of monolayer endothelial cells and up-regulate the expression of Cav-1, accompanied by the increased expression of VEGF [68]. Moreover, inhibition of the VEGF/kinase insert domain receptor (KDR) pathway using a selective inhibitor SU5416 could alleviate endothelial hyperpermeability and reverse the high glucose induced-expression of Cav-1. VEGF is a strong inducer of hyperpermeability in both physiological and pathological conditions [69]. It promotes the fission and fusion of caveolae, increases the caveolae number, and up-regulates Cav-1 expression [70]. As mentioned above, caveolae-mediated changes in permeability impact transport of large molecules across the endothelium [71]. Thus, VEGF-induced hyperpermeability may be implicated in albuminuria. However, the precise mechanism still needs further study.

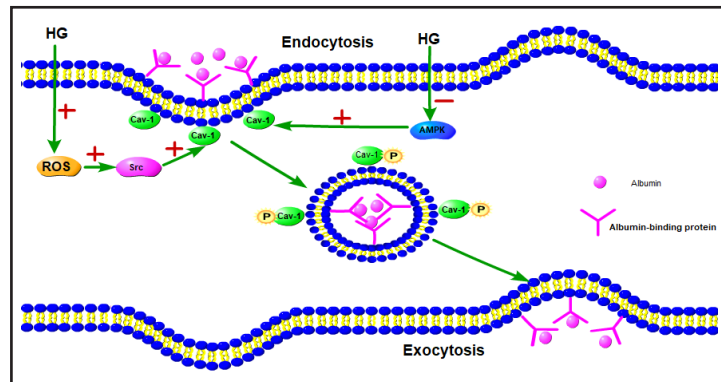
CRP

CRP displays a pro-inflammatory phenotype, and it has been found to stimulate ROS production, activate NF- κ B signaling in endothelial cells, and up-regulate adhesion molecules and chemokines [72]. Bian et al. [25] found that CRP could directly enhance LDL transcytosis across endothelial cells and promote accumulation of LDL in the subendothelial space of the human umbilical vein wall, via stimulating ROS production and activating protein kinase C (PKC) and Src kinase [73]. PKC phosphorylates Cav-1 at Ser [37], and Src phosphorylates Cav-1 at Tyr [14, 74]. CRP remarkably increases the expression of Cav-1 and cavin-1 (also known as polymerase I and transcript release factors/PTRF) in membrane raft domains when the caveolae/Cav-1/cavin-1 system participates in the transcellular transport of LDL [25]. These findings suggest that CRP plays an important role in PKC or Src kinase-stimulated transcytosis of LDL and the resultant development of early atherogenesis. We therefore infer the involvement of CRP in the albumin transcytosis across podocytes or endothelial cells through a similar mechanism. However, convincing evidence explaining the exact role of CRP in the formation of albuminuria via the albumin transcytosis is lacking.

Cav-1

Albumin internalization by endothelial cells is mediated by caveolae, small bulb-shaped invaginations of the plasma membrane, of about 50–100 nm in diameter [20, 21, 75]. Caveolae are abundant in the endothelia, smooth muscle cells, and adipocytes. A variety of receptors, including LDL receptor, high-density lipoprotein receptor, albumin receptor, transferrin receptor, insulin receptor, and multiple channels and enzyme systems, are located in caveolae microdomains [22]. Cav-1 is a 20–22 kDa integral membrane protein enriched in caveolae [74, 76, 77]. In the kidney, Cav-1 is distinctly expressed on the renal cortex of mice and humans [34]. Cav-1 has been found to be significantly increased in the glomeruli of patients with primary and secondary glomerular diseases, such as IgA nephropathy, membranous nephropathy, crescent glomerulonephritis, minimal change disease and diabetic nephropathy [78]. Cav-1 is also associated with urinary albumin excretion [78, 79]. Caveolae-mediated transcytosis is the primary route of albumin trafficking across the intact endothelium [74, 80]. Albuminuria is not found in Cav1-knockout diabetic mice, and Cav-1 deficiency *in vitro* and *in vivo* protects against diabetic glomerulosclerosis, while intervention in the Cav-1/caveolae in kidneys prevents development of diabetic nephropathy

Fig. 2. The signaling pathways involved in albumin transcytosis across glomerular endothelial cells in HG. HG, High glucose; AMPK, adenosine monophosphate activated protein kinase; Cav-1, caveolin-1; p-Cav-1, phosphorylated caveolin-1; ROS, reactive oxygen species.



[34, 46, 81]. *In vitro*, the methyl beta cyclodextrin (M β CD) disturbs caveolae trafficking and thus albumin endocytosis [34, 79]. These results reveal that in addition to the intercellular pathway, Cav-1 may play an important role in the pathogenesis of diabetic nephropathy by transcytosis in GECs (Fig. 2). In summary, transcytosis across GECs is a highly regulated, caveolae-dependent, selective process. Specific abnormalities in transcytosis processes may contribute to the genesis and development of albuminuria.

Mitochondrial ROS signaling/Src

ROS production promotes the phosphorylation of Cav-1 on Tyr¹⁴ during hyperosmotic shock and oxidative stress [82, 83]. The superoxide anion ROS is capable of enhancing endothelial permeability and activating Src kinase. Src family tyrosine kinases (SFKs) are nonreceptor cytoplasmic protein tyrosine kinases, which actively participate in the regulation of endothelial barrier function, for instance, interfering with hyperpermeability induced by proinflammatory mediators [84]. Low levels of basal SFK activity are required to maintain the integrity of the endothelial barrier in physiological states [84]. Nevertheless, the Src activity induced by a variety of inflammatory mediators can significantly increase endothelial permeability [85, 86]. SFKs have also been reported to initiate and regulate transcellular transport by transcytosis [74], a process dependent on the modulation of caveolar dynamics. Src kinase is activated by phosphorylation at Tyr⁴¹⁶ and/or dephosphorylation at Tyr⁵²⁷ [74]. Activated Src kinase can activate Cav-1 through direct phosphorylation or indirectly by inhibiting AMPK [34]. SFK signaling is required for activation of vesicle shuttling between apical and basal surfaces in transendothelial transport, increasing the numbers of assembled caveolae at the cell surface.

In a previous study, Coelho-Santos et al. [87] found that methylphenidate (MPH) promoted ROS production in human brain endothelial cells by activating Rac1-dependent NADPH oxidase (NOX) and c-Src at the plasma membrane. c-Src in return can phosphorylate Cav-1 on Tyr¹⁴, enhancing caveolae formation and transendothelial transport by transcytosis [88]. Therefore, methylphenidate increased the permeability of human brain endothelial cells via caveolae-dependent transcytosis, and Rac1/NOX-mediated ROS production is a key contributor to methylphenidate-induced vesicular transport. Similarly, diabetes is associated with significantly increased transcytosis of albumin in the heart, kidney and aorta [22]. High glucose levels enhance ROS production and activate Src kinase and Cav-1, thereby increase albumin transcytosis across GECs, and finally lead to albuminuria [34, 89]. Wu et al. [34] reported that high glucose increased albumin transcytosis in GECs via upregulation of the ROS/Src/Cav-1 pathway. Polyethylene glycol superoxide dismutase (PEG-SOD) or antioxidant N-acetylcysteine (NAC), an ROS scavenger, reduced albumin transcytosis in GECs. These observations raise the possibility that the ROS/Src/cav-1 signaling pathway plays a crucial role in albumin transcytosis and albuminuria.

AMPK/cav-1 pathway

AMPK is a negative regulator of Cav-1 [90]. Previous studies demonstrated that oxidative stress-induced Cav-1 phosphorylation and albumin endocytosis were inhibited by the activation of AMPK, via suppressing the dissociation of an upstream kinase of Cav-1, c-Abl, and its antioxidant enzyme, Prdx1 [81, 91]. Moreover, inhibition of AMPK was found to activate Cav-1 indicating crosstalk between AMPK and the Src family kinase activity, whereby reduced Src kinase activity enhanced AMPK activity [34]. Wu et al. [34] reported that high glucose could downregulate the AMPK/Cav-1 pathway in GECs. Activation of AMPK by the activator 5-amino-4-imidazole carboxamide riboside (AICAR) could reduce glucose-stimulated albumin transcytosis. While knockdown of AMPK by siRNA in GECs led to an increased phosphorylation of Cav-1 and enhanced albumin transcytosis. Thus, AMPK negatively regulates caveolea-mediated albumin transcytosis. These results reveal that AMPK plays an indispensable role in the albumin transport pathway, and inhibition of AMPK may be a potential cause of albuminuria.

NF-κB/cav-1 pathway

Activation of NF-κB has been reported to be associated with elevated caveolin-1 expression and increased endothelial permeability induced by certain inflammatory mediators. Recently, Zhang et al. reported that the pro-inflammatory cytokine tumor necrosis factor-α (TNF-α) increased LDL transcytosis across human umbilical vein endothelial cells, which promoted LDL accumulation in the vascular wall and resultant early atherosclerosis [24]. This study confirmed that TNF-α transcription factors, NF-κB and peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor gamma (PPAR-γ) participated in the LDL intraendothelial transcytosis. Inhibition of NF-κB or PPAR-γ could decrease over-expression of transcytosis-related proteins stimulated by TNF-α, including LDL receptor and Cav-1, -2, suggesting that inhibition of either NF-κB or PPAR-γ substantially blocked the development of atherosclerosis. These findings provide a potential strategy for preventing and alleviating atherosclerosis.

The bacterial product lipopolysaccharide (LPS) is another important pro-inflammatory factor. LPS can increase Cav-1 expression and the number of caveolea in endothelial cells [92] and murine macrophages [93, 94], although the mechanism responsible remains unknown. In another study, the intronic region of Cav-1 was found to contain NF-κB consensus sites, and LPS-mediated Cav-1 expression was NF-κB dependent, leading to increased caveolae number [95]. These findings partially explained the phenomenon of increased transendothelial albumin permeability induced by LPS in human lung microvascular endothelial cells. However, the extent to which these pro-inflammatory factors affect albumin transcytosis across GECs and podocytes has not been reported and deserves further attention.

Conclusions

Receptor-mediated transcytosis, a transportation of macromolecules between the apical and basolateral sides of various cell types, plays an essential role in the maintenance of cellular and body homeostasis. Albumin transcytosis across GECs, podocytes and PTCs has been implicated in chronic proteinuric nephropathy including diabetic nephropathy. The underlying etiology and pathogenesis of these diseases are complex and diverse, as manifested by the involvement of different regulators and signaling pathways in protein transcytosis under different circumstances. In order to further define and explore the role of protein trafficking in both physiological and pathological conditions, more profound studies will be needed to characterize the molecules and signaling pathways that regulate receptor-mediated endocytosis and transcytosis. Abnormalities in plasma protein transcytosis in GECs and podocytes may initiate deleterious inflammatory responses and cause deterioration of glomerular cell function. These changes in glomeruli increase the glomerular permeability of albumin. Inhibiting protein transcytosis across these cells may represent a novel therapeutic target for albuminuria and proteinuria. Future researches will be required to characterize the mechanisms underlying albumin transcytosis and outline therapeutic targets.

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Disclosure Statement

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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