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Publication date
1997

Published in
Human Mutation

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Foubert, L., Bruin, T., de Gennes, J. L., Ehrenborg, E., Furioli, J., Kastelein, J. J. P., Benlian, P., & Hayden, M. R. (1997). A single Ser 259Arg mutation in the gene for lipoprotein lipase causes chylomicronemia in Moroccans of Berber ancestry. *Human Mutation*, 10, 179-185.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Single Ser259Arg Mutation in the Gene for Lipoprotein Lipase Causes Chylomicronemia in Moroccans of Berber Ancestry

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Communicated by Ronald G. Worton

Lipoprotein lipase (LPL) is the rate-limiting enzyme for the hydrolysis of triglyceride-rich lipoproteins. Numerous LPL gene mutations have been described as a cause of familial chylomicronemia in various populations. In general, allelic heterogeneity is observed in LPL deficiency in different populations. However, a founder effect has been reported in certain populations, such as French Canadians. Although familial chylomicronemia is observed in Morocco, the molecular basis for the disease remains unknown. Here, we report two unrelated Moroccan families of Berber ancestry, ascertained independently in Holland and France. In both probands, familial chylomicronemia manifested in infancy and was complicated with acute pancreatitis at age 2 years. Both probands were homozygous for a Ser259Arg mutation, which results in the absence of LPL catalytic activity both *in vivo* and *in vitro*. In heterozygous relatives, a partial decrease in plasma LPL activity was observed, sometimes associated with combined hyperlipidemia. This mutation previously unreported in other populations segregated on an identical haplotype, rarely observed in Caucasians, in both families. Therefore, LPL deficiency is a cause of familial chylomicronemia in Morocco and may result from a founder effect in patients of Berber ancestry. *Hum Mutat* 10:179-185, 1997. © 1997 Wiley-Liss, Inc.

KEY WORDS: lipoprotein lipase; mutation; Morocco; chylomicronemia; genetics

INTRODUCTION

Lipoprotein lipase (LPL), functions as a dimer bound to heparan sulfate proteoglycans at the surface of capillary endothelium to hydrolyse triglycerides, using apolipoprotein CII (ApoC-II) as a cofactor (Olivecrona and Bengtsson-Olivecrona, 1993). When lipolysis is defective, this results in an accumulation of large triglyceride-rich lipoproteins, namely chylomicrons, in plasma. Familial chylomicronemia is a recessive disorder usually manifesting in childhood (Brunzell, 1995). On a normal diet, patients often present with abdominal pain, hepatosplenomegaly, lipemia retinalis, eruptive xanthomata, and massive hypertriglyceridemia, sometimes complicated with acute pancreatitis.

Familial chylomicronemia has been reported in Asians, Blacks, and Caucasians with a prevalence of 1/10⁶. Molecular heterogeneity of causative mutations

is the general rule in the genes for LPL or ApoC-II (Hayden et al., 1991; Fojo, 1992; Brunzell, 1995). Moreover, recurrent mutations that result in the same nucleotide or codon substitution, have been reported in patients of different ancestries (Monsalve et al., 1990). However, in populations with a high frequency of inbreeding, a few mutations may account for most cases with LPL deficiency. For example, in French Canadians, three founder mutations (Gly188Glu,

Received 12 August 1996; accepted 17 November 1996.

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Contract grant sponsor: INSERM; Contract grant number: 91CN45; Contract grant sponsor: Medical Research Council of Canada; Contract grant sponsor: ARCOL; Contract grant sponsor: French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Bourse Lavoisier); Contract grant sponsor: International Atherosclerosis Society; Contract grant sponsor: Swedish Society of Medicine.

Pro207Leu, Asp250Asn) cause more than 90% of cases with LPL deficiency (Ma et al., 1991; Wood et al., 1993). To our knowledge, there have been no reports of LPL deficiency in Morocco.

Here, we report two unrelated Moroccan families of Berber ancestry, with probands diagnosed independently with early-onset familial chylomicronemia, in Holland and France. In both probands, a homozygous Ser259Arg mutation resulted in an absence of LPL catalytic activity, both in vivo and in vitro. An identical haplotype, rarely observed in Caucasians, segregated with the mutation in these families. Therefore, LPL deficiency is a cause of familial chylomicronemia in Morocco and may result from a founder effect in patients of Berber ancestry.

SUBJECTS AND METHODS

Subjects

Proband 1, the youngest of a sibship of four, was born in October 1985. His parents were first cousins and of Berber ancestry. Both originated from Taroudannt (South Morocco) and had emigrated to France in 1980. At age 6 months, the proband was discovered with asymptomatic chylomicronemia (triglycerides (TG) = 2,000 mg/dl) when a blood sample was taken as part of a routine assessment prior to ear surgery. Further investigations revealed a decreased post-heparin lipolytic activity and a normal ApoC-II in plasma, suggesting that LPL deficiency was the cause for chylomicronemia in this patient. A diet restricted in fat (10–15% daily fat intake, supplemented with medium-chain fatty acids) resulted in a significant decrease in plasma triglycerides at discharge from hospital (TG = 370 mg/dl). At age 18 months, after a normal diet, abdominal pain ensued. On examination, hepatosplenomegaly, eruptive xanthomata, lipemia retinalis, and severe hypertriglyceridemia (TG = 2,900 mg/dl) were evident. At age 24 months, the same clinical manifestations were complicated this time with acute pancreatitis (TG = 6,000 mg/dl), necessitating hospital care for 2 months. A second episode of acute pancreatitis occurred 6 months later. Until the present age of 10 years, the patient has remained free of acute pancreatitis on a very-low-fat diet (< 5% of total kcal/day). Growth and development have been normal.

Proband 2 was the third offspring of a sibship of four and was born in December 1978. Her parents were first cousins and of Berber ancestry. The family originated from Agadir (South Morocco) and had emigrated to Holland in 1975. The proband was ascertained in May 1985, with a diagnosis of acute pancreatitis, from which she died 2 weeks later.

Biochemical Studies

Fasting lipid and lipoprotein profiles were determined by standard procedures previously described (Benlian et al., 1996). LPL enzymatic mass and activity were measured on fasting plasma before and 10 min after an intravenous injection of heparin, using previously described procedures (Benlian et al., 1996). The presence of ApoC-II was assessed by isoelectric focusing. ApoC-II activator function was analysed in proband 1's serum by the measure of lipolytic activity in the presence of exogenous LPL.

DNA Analysis

Genomic DNA was extracted from blood leukocytes by a phenol chloroform method in both families. When a gene variant was detected by single-strand conformation polymorphism (SSCP) on an exon of the *LPL* gene (Gagné et al., 1994), the corresponding polymerase chain reaction (PCR) product was sequenced directly after subcloning using previously reported procedures (Monsalve et al., 1990). Once the missense mutation was identified as novel, its functional effects were tested in vitro by site-directed mutagenesis (Bruin et al., 1993). Briefly, a 2.4-kb *PstI/XbaI* fragment from an *LPL*-cDNA clone (a gift from Dr. R. Lawn, Stanford University, CA) containing the entire *LPL* coding sequence, was cloned into the pSelect-I phagemid vector (Promega, Madison, WI) and was used as a template for site-directed mutagenesis. Mutant and wild-type *LPL* cDNA clones were subcloned in the expression vector pcDNA-1 (Invitrogen, San Diego, CA) and used to transfect COS-B cells. Four separate transfections were performed using mutant and wild-type clones. *LPL* mass and activity were assayed on cell culture media (Babirak et al., 1989; Iverius et al., 1985). Four *LPL* gene polymorphisms were used for haplotyping. The VNTR in intron 6 was detected after radiolabeling (Zuliani and Hobbs, 1990) and intragenic RFLPs (*PvuII*, *HindIII*, *MnlI*) after enzymatic cleavage of PCR products (Hata et al., 1990; Gotoda et al., 1992).

RESULTS

Plasma lipids and lipoproteins in members from both families are shown in Table 1. In family 1, the father had combined hyperlipidemia, while the mother had a normal lipid profile. In family 2, the father and the proband's sibs had a normal lipid profile, while the mother proved to exhibit a high-triglyceride/low high-density lipoprotein (HDL) phenotype.

In proband 1, plasma ApoCII was present and functional. Plasma *LPL* activity was undetectable. *LPL* mass was normal in plasma; however, the *LPL*

TABLE 1. Clinical and Biological Data Observed in Probands (A) and Their Families (B)

A	Age (yr)	BMI	TC (mg/dl)	TG (mg/dl)	HDL (mg/dl)	Age of presentation (mo)	With pancreatitis (mo)	LPL in vivo		LPL in vitro	
								Mass (ng/ml)	Activity (IU/L)	Mass (ng/ml)	Activity (IU/L)
Proband 1	6	15.4	137 ± 25 (105-165)	474 ± 337 (170-795)	22 ± 5 (15-27)	6	24, 30	308.6	1	466 ± 56 mt	17.6 ± 3.1 mt
Proband 2	†6.5	—	—	—	—	12	24, 77	—	—	639 ± 49 wt	832 ± 41 wt
B	Age (yr)	BMI	TC (mg/dl)	TG (mg/dl)	HDL (mg/dl)	Age of presentation (mo)	With pancreatitis (mo)	HDL (mg/dl)	ApoB (g/L)	ApoA-I (g/L)	
Family 1											
I-1	47	26.8	226 ± 16 (205-245)	285 ± 115 (140-415)	38 ± 3 (35-43)	—	—	38 ± 3 (35-43)	1.67 ± 0.15 (1.55-1.90)	1.36 ± 0.08 (1.25-1.45)	
I-2	35	28.0	167 ± 28 (140-205)	62 ± 3 (59-65)	63 ± 8 (55-74)	—	—	63 ± 8 (55-74)	0.77 ± 0.07 (0.70-0.85)	1.68 ± 0.09 (1.58-1.80)	
II-1	15	23.6	130	85	47	—	—	47	0.67	1.21	
II-2	12	20.2	210	75	59	—	—	59	0.95	1.46	
II-3	9	17.7	190	95	60	—	—	60	1.00	1.55	
Family 2											
I-1	49	—	273	159	40	—	—	40	1.69	1.42	
I-2	41	—	203	227	31	—	—	31	1.31	1.25	
II-1	22	—	196	109	44	—	—	44	1.32	1.44	
II-2	6	—	172	88	40	—	—	40	1.05	1.24	
II-4	8	—	200	58	46	—	—	46	1.15	1.45	

†: died at the age 6 years and 5 months

mt indicates mutant

wt indicates wild-type

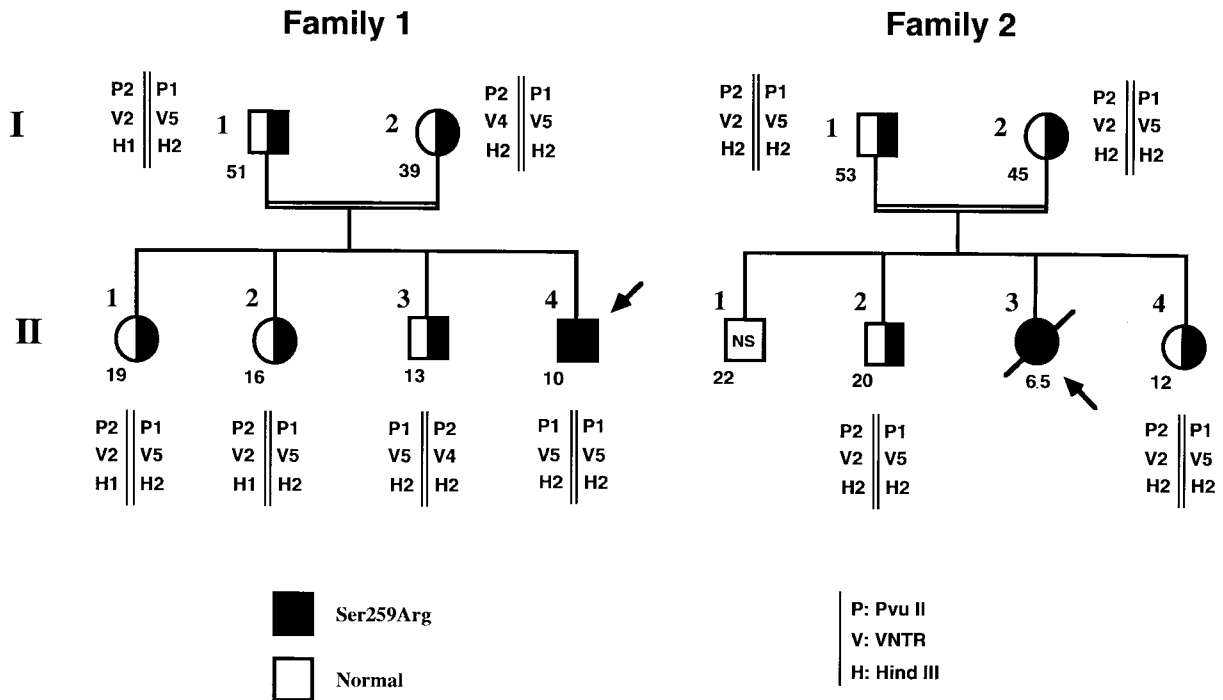


FIGURE 2. Pedigrees of families 1 and 2. Age is given in years below symbols. Arrows, probands. Only informative polymorphic markers are shown. Alleles are numbered according to decreasing band size. *PvuII* is located in intron 6. *VNTR* is a

TTTA tandem repeat sequence in intron 6 (V2 = 12 repeats; V3 = 11 repeats; V4 = 10 repeats; V5 = 9 repeats). *HindIII* is localised in intron 8. NS, not studied.

pase (Kirchgesner et al., 1989). Exon encodes His241 of the Ser132–His241–Asp156 catalytic triad, a triad surrounded by a hydrophobic domain with a unique and highly conserved three-dimensional structure among the gene family of lipases (Van Tilbeurgh et al., 1994). In addition, part of the lipid-recognition loop (Cys216–Cys239), as well as a heparin binding site (Arg263–Arg282), are encoded by exon 6 (Dugi et al., 1992; Henderson et al., 1993). Therefore, the introduction of a charged residue such as Arg at this position is predicted to profoundly alter the overall catalytic properties of LPL.

Computer modeling of the three-dimensional structure of the region that includes Ser259, using a molecular model of human LPL (T. Bruin, personal communication) has shown that the Ser259 residue is located inside a hydrophobic loop, between α -helix-7 and α -helix-8. This loop is stabilised by hydrogen bonds Asn254–257 and Asn257–Ser259. The substitution of an Arg-residue for Ser259 would be predicted to disrupt LPL conformation significantly. A conformational change (as well as a change of charge) appears as the most plausible explanation for the complete loss of catalytic activity induced by the Ser259Arg mutation.

Both families came from rural areas of South Morocco, near Agadir and Taroudannt, towns located

about 50 km apart, and had immigrated to France (family 1) and to Holland (family 2) a decade earlier. In both instances, parents were first cousins of Berber ancestry. In rural populations from North Africa, specific traditions encourage marriage between first cousins in order to preserve the patrimony (mainly land and cattle) within the family. As a consequence, consanguineous marriages are particularly common in rural populations of North Africa. In addition, Berbers constitute a unique subgroup in Arabic populations, with specific customs and traditions that limit admixture with neighbouring populations. The mutation was novel and segregated with a unique haplotype, rarely observed in Caucasians. Therefore, one could anticipate that other families of Berber ancestry in South Morocco may also carry this mutation, suggesting that a founder effect may underlie LPL deficiency in Moroccan Berbers.

The finding that a specific mutation causes LPL deficiency in Berber families from Morocco, has interesting implications. As described for the Pro207Leu in French Canadians, a simple and nonradioactive PCR-based genetic screening can be designed to detect this variant (Bijvoet and Hayden, 1992). Such an analysis may further determine if this mutation is present in Berbers from other parts of North Africa. Finally,

it has been shown that heterozygotes for LPL deficiency have an altered lipoprotein profile (Babirak et al., 1989; Wilson et al., 1990; Bijvoet et al., 1996), which may be aggravated by environmental (Miesenböck et al., 1993; Wilson et al., 1993) or other genetic factors (Zhang et al., 1995) in subjects of Northern European origin. It would be interesting to evaluate whether these variants have the same phenotypic consequences in populations with a different lifestyle.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work was supported by grant 91CN45 from INSERM (to P.B.) and by grants from MRC Canada (to M.R.H.) L.F. was the recipient of a grant from ARCOL. P.B. was the recipient of a grant from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Bourse Lavoisier) and of a Fellowship from the International Atherosclerosis Society. E.E. was supported by a grant from the Swedish Society of Medicine. We are indebted to Jean Pierre Lagarde, Leila Zekraoui, and Alain Raisonnier for helpful contributions.

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