



## Review

## Nitric oxide and lipid peroxidation

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**Abstract**

Nitric oxide can both promote and inhibit lipid peroxidation. By itself, nitric oxide acts as a potent inhibitor of the lipid peroxidation chain reaction by scavenging propagatory lipid peroxy radicals. In addition, nitric oxide can also inhibit many potential initiators of lipid peroxidation, such as peroxidase enzymes. However, in the presence of superoxide, nitric oxide forms peroxynitrite, a powerful oxidant capable of initiating lipid peroxidation and oxidizing lipid soluble antioxidants. The role of nitric oxide in vascular pathology is discussed. © 1999 Elsevier Science B.V. All rights reserved.

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**1. Introduction**

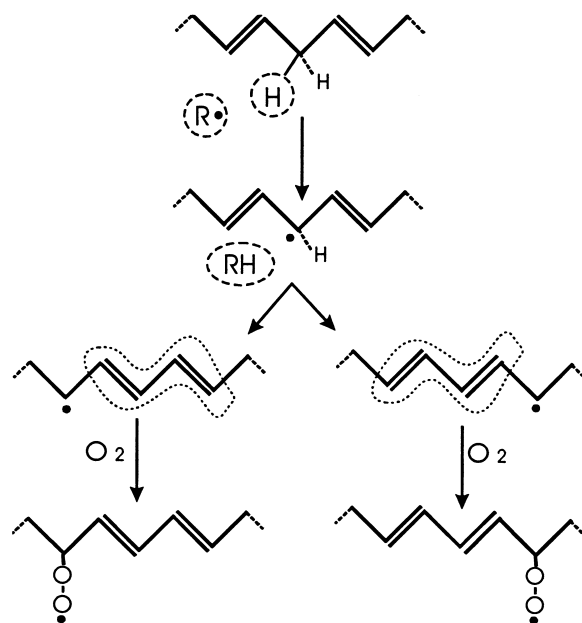
Oxidative stress can be considered to occur when the flux of partially reduced forms of oxygen is great-

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er than the ability of the biological system to cope with their production. Under stressed conditions, biological molecules are exposed to pro-oxidant species resulting in irreversible oxidation reactions. Such reactions result in chemical modification of biological molecules that can lead to cellular dysfunction. Oxidative damage to nuclear DNA can result in gene mutation and is thought to be one cause of carcinogenesis [1,2]. Protein oxidative damage is generally less of a concern as most proteins turn over rapidly. However, in situations such as the lens, where the crystallins have a slow turnover rate, oxidative damage will be cumulative and is thought to lead to cataract development [3]. In addition, the 'redox status' of a cell, which refers to the ratio of the reduced and oxidized forms of certain cellular components (e.g., glutathione), is an important signaling device in cellular homeostasis [4]. It follows that any additional oxidative insult that changes the redox-status of the cell will consequently alter the expression and activity of cellular metabolic pathways.

Lipid bilayer membranes define the extent of cells and organelles. The permeability characteristics of the bilayer allow gradients of metabolite and electrolyte concentrations to exist between the intra- and extracellular spaces. Any loss in membrane integrity due to lipid damage will rapidly dissipate these gradients and compromise cellular function. For example, the loss and the inner mitochondrial membrane permeability barrier would preclude the establishment of a proton gradient and prevent ATP synthesis. Lipids are also subject to turnover under normal conditions, and damaged lipids can be reprocessed and repaired. However, many of the products of lipid oxidation, such as hydroperoxides, alcohols, aldehydes and F2-isoprostanes, have biological activities beyond concerns about barrier function [5,6]. In addition, lipid oxidation is a chain reaction. A single oxidative event can oxidize many lipid molecules. In the presence of iron or copper ions, the chain reaction can become a cascade and the oxidation process can rapidly become unstoppable [7]. Biological strategies against lipid peroxidation involve both preventing the initial oxidation and breaking the chain before much damage is done.

This review will focus on the role of nitric oxide in promoting and inhibiting lipid oxidation reactions.

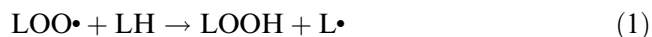


Scheme 1. Lipid peroxidation. Abstraction of an allylic hydrogen and conjugated diene formation.

## 2. Mechanism of lipid oxidation

Polyunsaturated fatty acids have a propensity to oxidize, resulting in the formation of alkanes, aldehydes, alcohols, and hydroperoxides among other products. This propensity arises from the fact that bis-allylic methylene hydrogens are more susceptible to hydrogen abstraction by oxidizing radicals than are the methylene hydrogens from fully saturated lipids. This is partially due to the fact that the resulting free radical has multiple resonance structures that increase its stability (Scheme 1). In the more heavily populated of these structures the double bonds are conjugated and the radical resides on an adjacent methylene carbon. The rapid reaction of these resonance forms with oxygen 'fixes' the double bonds in a conjugated arrangement to form peroxy radicals at positions +2 and -2 with respect to the carbon atom from which the original abstraction occurred (Scheme 1). For example, oxidation of linolenic acid by hydrogen abstraction at carbon-11 can result in peroxy radicals at both the 9- and 13-position. The conjugation of the double bond results in a red-shift of the UV absorbance spectrum to give a maximum at 234 nm. This change is often employed *in vitro* and *in vivo* to detect and quantify lipid oxidation.

The lipid peroxy radical is the central species of the lipid peroxidation chain reaction. This radical can abstract a bis-allylic hydrogen from an adjacent fatty acid to form a lipid hydroperoxide and a second lipid radical (Eq. 1), which subsequently reacts with oxygen to regenerate a peroxy radical (Eq. 2).



These reactions are the chain-propagation steps of lipid peroxidation. Eq. 1 is rate limiting and so the rate of the propagation reaction is proportional to the concentration of lipid peroxy radicals. Consequently any reaction that alters the concentration of peroxy radicals will affect the rate of lipid peroxidation.

### 3. Factors affecting lipid peroxy radical concentration

Lipid peroxy radical concentration can be altered by a number of factors.

#### 3.1. Transition metal ions

A few ions of transition metal elements have redox transitions with potentials of a magnitude that allows the catalytic decomposition of hydroperoxides. The redox couples of most importance to biological systems are  $\text{Cu}^+/\text{Cu}^{2+}$  and  $\text{Fe}^{2+}/\text{Fe}^{3+}$ . The one electron redox cycle results in the formation of peroxy and alkoxy radicals [8], the latter of which rearrange and react with oxygen to form peroxy radicals [9]. By this mechanism, transition metal ions increase the concentration of peroxy radicals and accelerate lipid peroxidation. As lipid peroxidation generates lipid hydroperoxides, the effect of transition metal ions is autocatalytic. This behavior is observed during copper catalyzed oxidation of low-density lipoprotein [10,11].

#### 3.2. Termination reactions

In the absence of any additional reactions, the lipid peroxidation chain reaction will terminate when two lipid radicals react to form non-radical products. These reactions decrease the level of peroxy radicals

and slow the rate of lipid oxidation. The mechanism and products of such reactions are complex and only partially understood. It has been reported that endogenous chemiluminescence is associated with such reactions, perhaps indicating the formation of singlet state oxygen [12].

#### 3.3. Antioxidants

As demonstrated in Eq. 1, lipid peroxy radicals propagate the chain reaction of lipid peroxidation by abstracting a hydrogen atom from an unsaturated fatty acid. It follows that any compound that can donate a hydrogen atom to the peroxy radical should be able to break, or at least divert, the chain of reaction. Compounds that donate a hydrogen to leave a relatively inert radical product are referred to as chain-breaking antioxidants. The most well known and well-studied chain-breaking antioxidants are phenolic compounds, such as the natural tocopherols [13].

## 4. The role of nitric oxide in lipid oxidation

As discussed above, the rate of lipid peroxidation depends strongly on the concentration of peroxy radicals. Consequently, any discussion of the role of nitric oxide in lipid peroxidation can be simplified by asking the question ‘how does nitric oxide affect lipid peroxy radical concentration?’ This question can be addressed at several levels.

#### 4.1. Nitric oxide and the initiation of lipid peroxidation

The mechanisms by which the initiation of lipid peroxidation occurs *in vivo* are not well defined but are likely to be a subset of the mechanisms that have been carefully studied *in vitro* [10,14,15]. In addition, some clearly non-physiological models for the initiation of lipid peroxidation have given invaluable insights into this process [16]. Nitric oxide is not a strong oxidant and cannot extract a bis allylic hydrogen from an unsaturated fatty acid to begin the peroxidation chain reaction [14]. However, in combination with other agents nitric oxide can both promote and inhibit the initiation of lipid oxidation. The role

of nitric oxide in the initiation of lipid peroxidation can be subdivided as follows.

#### 4.1.1. Nitric oxide and pro-oxidant enzymes and proteins

Several enzymes have the ability to oxidize unsaturated fatty acids. The complex pathways of arachidonate metabolism to form prostaglandins, leukotrienes and related species contain enzymes that catalyze the introduction of dioxygen, either as an endoperoxide (in the case of cyclooxygenase) or as a hydroperoxide (in the case of lipoxygenases). In addition, several cytochrome P450 type enzymes are also involved in arachidonate oxidation. Nitric oxide has been suggested to inhibit these enzymes by reduction of active site heme or non-heme iron to an inactive ferrous form [17]. These observations suggest interplay between the nitric oxide pathway and arachidonate metabolism.

Lipid oxidation can also be initiated by ferryl hemoglobin, formed from the interaction of hemoglobin with peroxides. Nitric oxide has been shown to reduce the ferryl heme and so prevent lipid oxidation by this mechanism [18,19].

#### 4.1.2. Nitric oxide and glutathione peroxidase

Glutathione peroxidases are glutathione-dependent seleno peroxidases that catalyze the reduction of hydroperoxides to the respective alcohols. It has been reported that glutathione peroxidase can be inhibited by the putative nitric oxide donor *S*-nitroso-*N*-acetyl penicillamine (SNAP) in U937 cells and that this inhibition leads to an increased level of lipid peroxidation [20]. The mechanism for this effect was determined to be oxidation of the selenocysteine of the peroxidase to a selenocystine–cystine bridge [21]. Nitric oxide may thus interfere with the detoxification of hydroperoxides once formed.

#### 4.1.3. Nitric oxide and chemical initiators

The hydroxyl radical ( $\bullet\text{OH}$ ) is a highly oxidizing free radical and will initiate lipid peroxidation by hydrogen abstraction. Hydroxyl radicals are thought to be generated *in vivo* from the combination of iron ions (or copper ions), hydrogen peroxide and a reducing agent (e.g., ascorbate) by the Fenton reaction. This mixture is an aggressive oxidant and will oxidize many biological molecules, including unsaturated

fatty acids. The high reactivity of the hydroxyl radical makes it a relatively unselective oxidant and reacts with many biomolecules at rates approaching the diffusion limit. This means that in order for any scavenger to have a competitive advantage as a hydroxyl radical scavenger it has to be present in millimolar concentrations. Nitric oxide will react with the hydroxyl radical at diffusion limited rates to generate nitrite, but it clearly cannot exist *in vivo* at a high enough concentration to be an effective scavenger. Nitric oxide has been shown to inhibit the Fenton reaction by binding to ferrous iron and thus preventing the formation of hydroxyl radical [22]. The relevance of this mechanism to *in vivo* conditions has not been established.

#### 4.1.4. Peroxynitrite

In addition to inhibiting the initiation of lipid peroxidation, nitric oxide may also enhance this process. The reaction between nitric oxide and superoxide generates peroxynitrite [23]. This molecule is a powerful oxidant that exhibits complex chemistry with biological molecules. Reaction of peroxynitrite with unsaturated fatty acid-containing liposomes results in the initiation of lipid peroxidation [14,24]. In addition, exposure of low-density lipoprotein to either peroxynitrite [25] or SIN-1 [14] (a compound that generates nitric oxide and superoxide simultaneously [26]) results in the oxidation of unsaturated fatty acids. The mechanism of initiation is unclear but may involve either abstraction of a bis-allylic hydrogen by the ‘the hydroxyl radical-like’ activity peroxynitrite, or induced homolysis of peroxynitrite by the unsaturated fatty acid.

Peroxynitrite will also rapidly oxidize tocopherols. Consequently, in a lipid membrane, one of the first actions of peroxynitrite is to remove the endogenous low molecular mass antioxidant protection mechanism.  $\alpha$ -Tocopherol is oxidized by two electrons to  $\alpha$ -tocopheryl quinone, a form that is not easily repaired by cellular reductants [27].

#### 4.1.5. Nitrogen dioxide

The reaction between nitric oxide and molecular oxygen generates nitrogen dioxide ( $\bullet\text{NO}_2$ ), in combination with radical–radical combination products, dinitrogen trioxide and dinitrogen tetroxide. It has been known for some time the nitrogen dioxide is

able to initiate lipid peroxidation [28]. The question of whether the reaction of nitric oxide with oxygen is biologically relevant is an ongoing debate.

#### 4.2. Nitric oxide and the propagation of lipid peroxidation

As mentioned above, the rate of propagation of lipid peroxidation depends strongly on the steady state concentration of lipid peroxy radicals. It has been demonstrated that the radical–radical reaction between nitric oxide and organic peroxy radicals is almost diffusion limited and generates a transient ROONO species. This species is thought to undergo homolytic cleavage to give an alkoxy radical (RO•) and nitrogen dioxide [29]. The rate constant for this reaction in aqueous solution has been determined to be  $1\text{--}3 \times 10^9$  [30]. It may be thought, therefore, that nitric oxide would enhance lipid peroxidation as both the alkoxy radical and nitrogen dioxide are able to oxidize unsaturated lipid. However, experiment has demonstrated that nitric oxide is a potent inhibitor of the propagation reaction [31] [32–36]. The most likely explanation for this observation is peroxy radical scavenging. It was recently demonstrated that the stoichiometry of the reaction between nitric oxide and peroxy radical is approximately 2:1 [37]. It was suggested that ROONO has two fates; (i) internal rearrangement to give the more stable RONO<sub>2</sub> (a 1:1 stoichiometry) and (ii) homolytic cleavage of the O–O bond to give RO• and nitrogen dioxide. Either the alkoxy radical, or a product of this radical (such as an epoxyallylic–peroxy radical) would be expected to propagate lipid peroxidation. However these species may further react with nitric oxide to prevent propagation. Nitrogen dioxide is also known to react with nitric oxide to generate dinitrogen trioxide which, in the absence of any other target, will hydrolyze to nitrite anion. This second pathway has a stoichiometry of 3:1 or 4:1. A combination of the above pathways was suggested to be responsible for the observed 2:1 stoichiometry [37].

### 5. Nitric oxide and lipid oxidation in pathophysiology

In light of the potent inhibitory effect of nitric

oxide on the propagation of lipid peroxidation, it is not certain that the lipid peroxidation chain reaction could ever proceed in the presence of physiological concentrations of nitric oxide. Kinetic considerations imply that nitric oxide is a  $10^4\text{--}10^5$  times more potent peroxy radical scavenger than is  $\alpha$ -tocopherol, and it has been demonstrated that the slow generation of nitric oxide is able to inhibit the oxidation of  $\alpha$ -tocopherol upon exposure to oxidants [36].

Although lipid peroxidation has been implicated to be a deleterious component of many oxidative inflammatory disorders, in most cases lipid oxidation has not been regarded as a causative step in the progression of the disease. One exception to this is atherosclerosis, where lipid oxidation has been suggested to be a mechanistic component of the formation of fatty streaks and atheroma [38]. It follows, therefore, that nitric oxide should play a protective role in atherosclerosis. All available evidence to date suggests that compromised endothelial nitric oxide formation is an early lesion in atherosclerosis and that the disease can be ameliorated by restoration of nitric oxide synthesis [39–41]. In addition, chronic inhibition of nitric oxide formation is pro-atherogenic in cholesterol fed rabbits [42,43]. Although nitric oxide may work at several levels during atherosclerosis, it is possible that its initial protective effect is the suppression of lipid oxidation. It has been demonstrated that nitric oxide is a potent inhibitor of LDL oxidation when initiated by both cellular and chemical systems [31,44,45]. In addition, nitric oxide can protect cells against the toxic effects of oxidized LDL on endothelial cells [46].

Elevation of endothelial superoxide generation, by several mechanisms, is thought to be an initial component of the atherosclerotic process [47]. In addition, a substantial body of evidence suggests that nitric oxide and superoxide react rapidly in biological systems. It follows that superoxide elevation will result in a decrease in nitric oxide levels. Reduction in available nitric oxide will reduce any beneficial effects in the suppression of lipid peroxidation. In addition, the peroxynitrite that is formed from the reaction between nitric oxide and superoxide may add to the oxidative stress in the vessel wall. Elevation of endothelial superoxide is consequently a double-edged sword [48].

## 6. Conclusions

The multiple effects of nitric oxide on the process of lipid peroxidation imply that the net result will depend on the balance of competing factors. The rate and location of nitric oxide formation, and also the rate of formation of superoxide, or other mitigating factors, will all contribute to the degree of lipid oxidation in a particular system. It is highly likely, however, that the basal activity of endothelial nitric oxide synthase represents an antioxidant mechanism to suppress lipid peroxidation and any consequent cardiovascular dysfunction.

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