

***In vivo* and *in vitro* effects of doxycycline on leucocyte membrane receptors**

A. NÆSS, J. GLETTE, A. I. HALSTENSEN, S. SANDBERG & C. O. SOLBERG
Medical Department B and Laboratory of Clinical Biochemistry, Haukeland Hospital, University
of Bergen, Norway

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SUMMARY

Tetracyclines, particularly doxycycline, have adverse effects on granulocyte function *in vitro*. We have examined the effects of doxycycline on membrane receptors for IgG (Fc γ -R) and C3b (C3b-R) on granulocytes and lymphocytes, as well as on the sheep erythrocyte receptor (E-R) on T lymphocytes. Acne patients given doxycycline orally had a lower percentage of Fc γ -R positive granulocytes (57%) than before treatment (80%) or compared to healthy controls (81%). Following *in vitro* doxycycline incubation, normal granulocytes showed decreased levels of Fc γ -R positive cells. This effect was counteracted by the addition of magnesium during incubation. The deleterious effect of doxycycline on granulocyte functions may be due to decreased levels of Fc γ -R bearing granulocytes. Doxycycline *in vivo* or *in vitro* had no significant effect on the proportion of C3b-R bearing granulocytes or lymphocytes or the T lymphocyte percentage. After *in vitro* irradiation with light at 340-380 nm, however, both granulocytes and lymphocytes preincubated with doxycycline showed up to 50% decrease in Fc γ -R bearing cells, while control cells without doxycycline were unaffected.

Keywords doxycycline Fc receptor C3b receptor leucocytes

INTRODUCTION

The effects of tetracyclines, and in particular doxycycline, on polymorphonuclear leucocyte (PMN) functions have been extensively studied. *In vitro* studies have shown that doxycycline has deleterious effects on PMN migration (Belsheim, Gnarpe & Løfberg, 1979; Glette *et al.*, 1982), phagocytosis (Forsgren, Schmeling & Quie, 1974; Gnarpe & Leslie, 1974), chemiluminescence and glucose oxidation (Glette *et al.*, 1982). The results of some, but not all, *in vivo* studies also indicate a deleterious effect (Glette *et al.*, 1982). In addition, Forsgren & Gnarpe (1973) found doxycycline to inactivate the complement system and interfere with the bactericidal effect of serum. Little is known about the mechanisms underlying these various effects of doxycycline. In the present study doxycycline *in vivo* and *in vitro* is shown to depress rosette formation between PMNs and antibody-coated erythrocytes, thus implying interference with the receptor for the Fc portion of immunoglobulin G.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Peripheral blood was obtained from eight patients with acne, and from 25 healthy controls. Samples from the patients were taken immediately before and 1 week after institution of 200 mg doxycycline orally per day. PMNs and lymphocytes were separated as described by Talstad (1981). Briefly, 2 ml

Correspondence: Dr A. Næss, Medical Department B, N-5016 Haukeland, Sykehus, Norway.

of heparinized (18 u/ml) blood was mixed with 2 ml of phosphate-buffered saline (PBS) and carefully layered on top of a two-layer mixture of Ficoll (Pharmacia, Stockholm, Sweden) and Isopaque (Nyegaard & Co., Oslo, Norway) in a plastic tube. After centrifugation at 600 g for 30 min the PMNs and lymphocytes, forming separate layers, were harvested, washed three times in PBS and resuspended in PBS to a concentration of 4×10^6 /ml.

Rosette techniques. 'Active' E-rosette-forming cells (active E-RFC) were enumerated by adding 0.2 ml of 1% sheep erythrocytes (E) to 0.2 ml of lymphocyte suspension, centrifuging at 200 g for 5 min, resuspending, and counting (Smith *et al.*, 1975). The active E-RFC population is considered to represent the immunologically active T lymphocytes (Wybran & Fudenberg, 1973).

E-rosette-forming cells (E-RFC) were determined as described previously (Næss & Nyland, 1978). A lymphocyte suspension of 0.2 ml was mixed with an equal volume of 0.5 E, incubated for 5 min at 37°C, centrifuged for 5 min at 200 g, and stored in ice water overnight before being counted.

PMN suspensions did not form active E-RFC or E-RFC.

EA-rosette-forming cells (EA-RFC) were enumerated by an assay with ox E sensitized with $\frac{1}{2}$ agglutinating unit of rabbit IgG antibodies (A). By this technique the presence on the cell of receptors for the Fc portion of IgG (Fc γ -R) is demonstrated (Hallberg, Gurner & Coombs, 1973). Lymphocytes or PMN were mixed with an equal volume (0.2 ml) of indicator cells, and incubated at room temperature for 20 min.

EAC-rosette-forming cells (EAC-RFC) were determined using sheep E sensitized with rabbit IgM antibodies (A). Human serum absorbed with zymosan was used as the source of complement (C). A mixture of 0.2 ml of lymphocyte or PMN suspension and 0.2 ml of EAC was incubated at 37°C for 20 min. Cells having receptors for the C3b fraction of complement (C3b-R) form rosettes by this method (Matre & Tønder, 1976).

All rosette preparations were counted by the same person, at a magnification of $\times 600$. A minimum of 200 cells were counted and those with four or more adhering E were counted as RFC.

Incubation studies. Samples of 0.2 ml of PMN or lymphocytes were incubated at 37°C for 30 min in PBS, or PBS with doxycycline at the concentration of 6.25, 12.5, 25, 50 and 100 μ g/ml. After incubation, cells were washed three times in PBS, and resuspended to 4×10^6 /ml. Rosette studies were then performed as described above. In an additional experiment, 4 mM of Mg²⁺ was added to incubation tubes containing 50 μ g doxycycline/ml. Similar experiments using Ca²⁺ were abandoned because of excessive clumping of cells.

Irradiation. Contaminating erythrocytes in the granulocyte suspension were first lysed with ammonium chloride (Weening, Roos & Loos, 1974). The cells were then resuspended in PBS, pH 7.3, to a concentration of 7×10^6 cells/ml. Granulocytes and lymphocytes were incubated for 15 min at 37°C in PBS or PBS with 10 μ g/ml of doxycycline. Irradiation was carried out at 20°C in 10-mm diameter test tubes, using a photochemotherapy unit PUVA (H. Haldmann, D-722 Schwenningen, FRG) containing 14 fluorescent tubes (F8T5/BL PUVA, Sylvania) in a bank. About 70% of the emission energy of these lamps is between 340 and 380 nm. The light intensity is 66 W/m² at sample level as measured with a UDT model $\times 80$ optometer equipped with a radiometric filter (United Detector Technology, Inc., Santa Monica, California, USA). After 30 min irradiation the cells were centrifuged, resuspended in PBS to a concentration of 4×10^6 cells/ml, and the EA-RFC test was performed.

Statistics. The statistical significance of the observed differences was established by Wilcoxon tests on unpaired and paired samples as appropriate.

RESULTS

The pre-treatment levels of Fc γ -R and C3b-R bearing PMN or lymphocytes from acne patients were not significantly different from those of the controls (Table 1). During treatment, however, PMN Fc γ -R percentages decreased to a mean of 57% ($P < 0.05$). Lymphocyte Fc γ -R levels were not significantly affected, nor were the proportions of T lymphocytes (E-RFC). The percentage of C3b-R bearing cells did not differ from controls.

Incubation of PMN in increasing concentrations of doxycycline resulted in a significant decrease in PMN Fc γ -R bearing cell percentage (Fig. 1). The levels of Fc γ -R bearing lymphocytes also decreased during incubation, but less markedly.

Table 1. Effect of oral doxycycline treatment on leucocyte membrane receptors

	No.	Receptor-bearing granulocytes (%)		Receptor-bearing lymphocytes (%)			
		Fcγ	C3b	E active	E	Fcγ	C3b
Acne patients before treatment	8	80 ± 7	69 ± 28	34 ± 12	67 ± 14	32 ± 17	38 ± 12
Acne patients during treatment	8	57 ± 30*	80 ± 6	39 ± 13	61 ± 17	28 ± 18	43 ± 9
Controls	25	81 ± 12	74 ± 17	39 ± 12	66 ± 11	29 ± 9	35 ± 12

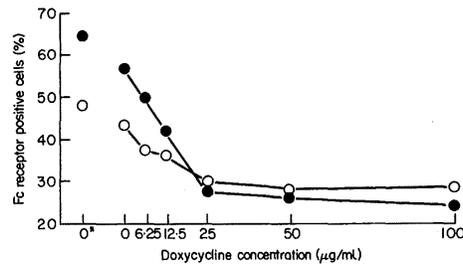
Results are mean values ± s.d.

**P* < 0.05

When PMN or lymphocytes were incubated in 50 µg doxycycline/ml there was a significant decrease of Fcγ-R bearing PMN which was counteracted when 4 mM Mg²⁺ was included in the medium (Table 2).

Incubation in 50 µg doxycycline/ml with or without 4 mM Mg²⁺ had no significant effect on the Fcγ-R bearing lymphocyte levels.

After PUVA irradiation, granulocytes and lymphocytes preincubated in 10 µg doxycycline/ml showed a significant decrease in Fcγ-R bearing cell percentage, which was not observed in cells not pre-incubated with doxycycline (Table 3).

**Fig. 1.** Percentage of Fc receptor positive cells after incubation of granulocytes (●) and lymphocytes (○) in PBS with and without doxycycline. * = No incubation.**Table 2.** *In vitro* effect of doxycycline on leucocyte Fcγ receptors

Incubation	Fcγ receptor bearing	
	Granulocytes (%)	Lymphocytes (%)
None	74 ± 9	44 ± 18
PBS	65 ± 13*	39 ± 14
Doxycycline 50 µg/ml	45 ± 16*†	37 ± 10
Doxycycline 50 µg/ml with 4 mmol Mg ²⁺	65 ± 13†	47 ± 16

Results are mean of six experiments ± s.d.

**P* < 0.01†*P* < 0.01

Table 3. Percentages of Fc γ -R bearing cells before and after exposure to PUVA light

	Before irradiation	After irradiation (30 min)	
		Doxycycline ⁺	Doxycycline ⁻
Granulocytes	57 \pm 8	30 \pm 10	64 \pm 17
Lymphocytes	33 \pm 9	20 \pm 15	30 \pm 6

Doxycycline⁺ after 15 min preincubation at 37°C in doxycycline (10 μ g/ml) in PBS.

Doxycycline⁻ after 15 min preincubation at 37°C in PBS without doxycycline.

Results are mean \pm s.d. (five experiments).

DISCUSSION

We have shown that doxycycline *in vitro* or *in vivo* is associated with a decrease in the proportion of Fc γ -R bearing PMN. Untreated acne patients had normal levels of C3b-R and Fc γ -R bearing cells, which is consistent with the findings of Rebora, Dallegrì & Patrone (1979) of normal neutrophil functions in such patients. Previous studies by several authors have documented a deleterious effect of tetracyclines on several PMN functions (Belsheim *et al.*, 1979; Forsgren *et al.*, 1974; Glette *et al.*, 1982). The Fc γ -R is important in the process of phagocytosis (Kelpner & Gallin, 1978), and interference with this receptor may explain the impaired capacity of doxycycline-incubated PMN to phagocytize (Forsgren *et al.*, 1974). One would expect the effect of doxycycline on the Fc γ -R of the PMN to be paralleled by similar results regarding the lymphocyte Fc γ -R. However, these receptors are not necessarily identical, and Colombatti, Heumann & Moretta (1981) found PMN Fc γ -R to be resistant to very high concentrations of pronase, in contrast to lymphocyte Fc γ -R. The mechanism by which the Fc γ -R levels are reduced by doxycycline is not clear, but the divalent cation chelating effect of the tetracyclines (Gnarpe & Leslie, 1974) may be of importance as the addition of 4 mM Mg²⁺ reversed the Fc γ -R decrease caused by 50 μ g/ml of doxycycline.

The decreased percentage of Fc γ -R bearing cells after doxycycline incubation combined with PUVA irradiation (Table 3) suggests photo damage to the cell membrane as one possible mechanism. This combined treatment reduced the levels of Fc γ -R positive granulocytes to about one-half of the pre-treatment levels, whereas irradiation alone had no significant effect.

Tetracyclines are potent photosensitizers and patients taking tetracyclines often develop skin lesions when exposed to sunshine (Harber, Kochevar & Shalita, 1982). Which subcellular structures are damaged during irradiation of granulocytes in the presence of doxycycline is not known, but both the photodamage to the Fc γ -R receptor and the photodamage to granulocyte locomotion and phagocytosis (Sandberg *et al.*, 1984) can be explained by deterioration of the plasma membrane. Tetracyclines have also been shown to influence lymphocyte functions. Banck & Forsgren (1979) found low concentrations of doxycycline *in vitro* to have an inhibiting effect on the mitogenic responses of T and B lymphocytes, as well as on *in vitro* antibody production, and protein synthesis in unstimulated lymphocytes. Mice treated with tetracycline have been shown to have a reduced capacity to mount delayed-type hypersensitivity to sheep E (Thong & Ferrante, 1980). The present study has not, however, demonstrated any significant difference in the proportion of Fc γ -R, C3b-R or E-R bearing lymphocytes during doxycycline treatment. Neither had our patients low proportions of Fc γ -R bearing lymphocytes, as was found by Valmin, Halberg & Hedström (1982) in patients with severe staphylococcal furunculosis. The essentially unchanged percentage of E-RFC during doxycycline treatment does not support the claim of Pudifin *et al.* (1978) that tetracycline treatment causes an increase in lymphocytes bearing both E-R and surface immunoglobulins.

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