

(spp.), *L. reuteri*, *L. oris*, *L. johnsonii*, *L. gasseri* and *L. rhamnosus*, attenuated lupus-like clinical signs, including splenomegaly and lymphadenopathy. However, our understanding of the mechanism was limited. In this study, we used the lupus-prone MRL/lpr mouse model to delineate the mechanisms through which *Lactobacillus* spp. modulate lupus pathogenesis. We first investigated the effects of individual species. Surprisingly, none of the species individually recapitulated the benefits of the mix. Instead, *Lactobacillus* spp. acted synergistically to attenuate splenomegaly and renal lymphadenopathy through secreted factors and a CX₃CR1-dependent mechanism. Interestingly, oral administration of MRS broth exerted the same benefits likely through increasing the relative abundance of endogenous *Lactobacillus* spp. Mechanistically, we found increased percentages of FOXP3-negative type 1 regulatory T cells with administration of the mix in both spleen and mesenteric lymph nodes. In addition, oral gavage of *Lactobacillus* spp. decreased the percentage of central memory T cells while increasing that of effector memory T cells in the lymphoid organs. Furthermore, a decreased percentage of double negative T cells was observed in the spleen with the mix. These results suggest that *Lactobacillus* spp. might act on T cells to attenuate splenomegaly and lymphadenopathy. Together, this study advances our understanding of how *Lactobacillus* spp. attenuate lupus in MRL/lpr mice. The synergistic action of these bacteria suggests that multiple probiotic bacteria in combination may dampen systemic autoimmunity and benefit lupus patients.

Microbiome

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THE THERAPEUTIC EFFECT OF GLYCOLYSIS INHIBITION IN LUPUS-PRONE MICE IS TRANSFERABLE THROUGH THE FECAL MICROBIOME

¹Ahmed S Elshikha, ²Yong Ge, ¹Josephine Brown, ²Nathalie Kanda, ¹Georges Abboud, ²Seung-Chul Choi, ¹Timothy J Garrett, ¹William Clapp, ²Mansour Zadeh, ²Laurence Morel*. ¹Department of Pathology, Immunology, and Laboratory Medicine, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, USA; ²Department of Microbiology, Immunology, and Molecular Genetics, University of Texas Health San Antonio, Tx, USA

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Gut microbial dysbiosis has been reported in patients with lupus. Results obtained with mouse models suggest that dysbiosis contributes to lupus pathogenesis through the pathogens that induce inflammation by translocating out of the gut and/or producing proinflammatory metabolites. We and others have shown that fecal microbiota transfers (FMT) from lupus-prone mice induced autoantibodies and immune activation in non-autoimmune mice. On the other hand, we have shown that the production of autoantibodies and associated expansion of follicular T (T_{fh}) cells and germinal center (GC) B cells can be eliminated by treating lupus-prone mice with 2-deoxy-D-glucose (2DG), a glycolysis inhibitor. Here, we investigated the effect of 2DG on the fecal microbiome in two models of lupus with different etiologies, the (NZB × NZW) F1 and (NZW × BXSB)F1 mice.

Anti-dsDNA IgG-positive (NZB × NZW)F1 and (NZW × BXSB)F1 mice were treated with 2DG. The composition of their fecal microbiome was determined by 16S rDNA sequencing and their metabolome by LC-MS analysis, and compared to age-matched controls. Fecal samples from these mice were used for FMT 3 times per week in pre-autoimmune lupus-prone mice of the same strain that were pre-treated with antibiotics for 2 weeks. FMT lasted for 26 weeks in (NZB × NZW)F1 mice and 9 weeks in (NZW × BXSB)F1 mice. Age-matched controls were gavaged with PBS. Autoantibodies were measured by ELISA and indirect immunofluorescence. Immunophenotypes were assessed by flow cytometry in the spleen and mesenteric lymph nodes. Renal pathology was evaluated by light microscopy on PAS-stained sections and immunofluorescence on frozen sections with antibodies to complement C3, IgG2a, F4/80 and CD3.

We showed that a 2DG treatment started in reduced the changes in bacterial populations that occurred as disease developed in control mice in both models. 2DG also altered the distribution of fecal metabolites in these treated mice. Next, we investigated the effect of serial FMT from 2DG-treated or control mice into pre-autoimmune lupus-prone mice of the same strain that were pre-treated with antibiotics. In both models, FMT from 2DG-treated mice was protective, with a reduction of anti-dsDNA IgG production, immune cell activation, and renal pathology as compared to FMT from control mice.

Overall, our results demonstrated for the first time that the therapeutic effect of glucose inhibition in lupus is transferable through the gut microbiota. These results suggest that the enhanced glucose metabolism in lupus-prone mice promotes the expansion of pathogenic gut bacteria either directly or indirectly through the immune system that normalized by glucose inhibition.

Lay summary High glucose metabolism sustains the activation of the immune system in lupus. Inhibition of glucose metabolism with a drug called 2DG reverses the production of pathogenic autoantibodies in mice. Here we showed that 2DG also changes the gut microbiome in lupus-prone mice. Further, transfers of fecal bacteria from 2DG-treated lupus mice protected younger mice to develop lupus. The results showed that the gut microbiome contributes significantly to the pathogenic effects of glucose metabolism in lupus, and suggest that the beneficial effect of reducing glucose metabolism includes the restoration of a healthy gut microbiome.

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BACTERIAL DNA INDUCES REGULATORY B CELLS AND ATTENUATES LUPUS THROUGH A B CELL-EXTRINSIC, TLR9-DEPENDENT MECHANISM

¹Michael G Appiah, ²David N Oakland, ¹Jing Zhu, ¹Xavier Cabana-Puig, ¹Ran Lu, ¹Razan Alajoleen, ¹Caitlin Armstrong, ¹Dao Xu, ³Christopher M Reilly, ⁴Amrie C Grammer, ⁵Mark J Shlomchik, ⁴Peter E Lipsky, ¹Xin M Luo. ¹Department of Biomedical Sciences and Pathobiology, Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia, USA; ²Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine, Roanoke, Virginia, USA; ³Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine, Blacksburg, Virginia, USA; ⁴AMPEL BioSolutions, LLC., Charlottesville, Virginia, USA; ⁵Department of Immunology, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

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Our recent study has demonstrated induction of regulatory B cells (Bregs) by bacterial DNA in MRL/lpr mice leading to attenuation of SLE. This suggests a regulatory role for the gut bacteria in SLE development. However, the mechanism by which bacterial DNA induces Breg cell differentiation remains to be elucidated. Bacterial DNA contains unmethylated CpG motifs which are recognized by the innate immune molecule, toll-like receptor 9 (TLR9). We therefore hypothesize that gut bacteria-derived DNA induces Bregs in a TLR9-dependent manner, which in turn protects against lupus initiation. To test our hypothesis, TLR9 global knockout (*Tlr9*^{-/-}) MRL/lpr mice and their heterozygous (*Tlr9*^{+/-}) littermates were randomized into 2 groups per genotype. Beginning at 4 weeks of age, one group in each genotype received 80 µg *E. coli* double-stranded DNA (dsDNA) once a week by oral gavage for 4 consecutive weeks, whereas the other group received phosphate buffered saline (PBS) as control. Urine samples were collected before euthanasia whereas blood, spleen, lymph nodes, and kidneys were collected and processed following euthanasia at 15 weeks of age. *In vitro* culture treatment with bacterial DNA was used to investigate a TLR9-dependent, B cell-intrinsic or -extrinsic mechanism in Breg cell induction. Our data showed a trend in decrease of proteinuria, as well as sizes of spleen and lymph nodes, with bacterial DNA treatment in *Tlr9*^{+/-} mice. Interestingly, serum levels of anti-dsDNA IgM, which has been shown to be protective against lupus, were significantly increased in bacterial DNA-treated *Tlr9*^{+/-} mice, although the pathogenic anti-dsDNA IgG remained unchanged. Additionally, flow cytometry analysis of splenocytes showed an increasing trend in the percentage of interleukin-10 positive (IL-10⁺) Bregs in bacterial DNA-treated *Tlr9*^{+/-} mice and a concomitant decrease in double negative (DN, or CD4⁻CD8⁻) T cells. In the kidney, bacterial DNA treatment also decreased the percentage of CD45⁺ cells in *Tlr9*^{+/-} mice. Importantly, all bacterial DNA-induced changes observed in *Tlr9*^{+/-} MRL/lpr mice, including those of proteinuria, organ weight, anti-dsDNA IgM, splenic Bregs, splenic DN T cells and renal CD45⁺ cells, were abrogated in *Tlr9*^{-/-} MRL/lpr mice. Bacterial DNA treatment of cocultures of B and non-B cells from *Tlr9*^{+/+} and *Tlr9*^{-/-} MRL/lpr mice revealed a TLR9-dependent, but B cell-extrinsic, induction of Bregs mediated by IL-6 produced most likely from myeloid cells. Altogether, our study suggests possible attenuation of SLE by gut bacteria-derived DNA through a B cell-extrinsic, TLR9-dependent mechanism that involves the induction of IL-10⁺ Bregs and secretion of potentially protective anti-dsDNA IgM.

SLE Genetics

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A GENOME WIDE ASSOCIATION SCAN OF SLE GENETIC RISK IN A COHORT OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN PERSONS

^{1,2,3}Isaac TW Harley, ¹Celi Sun, ⁴Adrienne H Williams, ⁴Julie T Ziegler, ⁴Mary E Comeau, ⁴Miranda C Marion, ⁵Stuart B Glenn, ⁵Adam Adler, ⁶Summer G Frank-Pearce, ⁷Nan Shen, ⁸Jennifer A Kelly, ^{9,10}Bahram Namjou-Khales, ¹¹Michelle Petri, ^{12,13}Marta Alarcon-Riquelme, ¹⁴W Joseph McCune, ⁸Patrick Gaffney, ¹⁵Kathy Sivils, ¹⁶Jane E Salmon, ¹⁷Michael H Weisman, ¹⁸Jeffrey C Edberg, ^{19,20}Elizabeth E Brown, ²¹Tammy Utset, ²²Lindsey A Criswell, ²³Chaim O Jacob, ²⁴Betty Tsao, ²⁵Timothy J Vyse, ^{5,26,27}Judith A James, ²⁴Gary S Gilkeson, ²⁴Diane L Kamen, ^{8,28}Courtney Montgomery, ^{5,28}Joan T Merrill, ⁵Swapan K Nath, ⁹Viktoryia Laurynenka, ²⁹Iouri Chepelev, ^{5,30,31}Valerie Harris-Lewis, ^{5,30,31}R Hal Scofield, ¹⁸Robert P Kimberly, ⁴Carl D Langefeld, ²⁹John B Harley, ^{9,10,29}Kenneth M Kaufman. ¹Division of Rheumatology, Department of Medicine, University of Colorado School of Medicine, Aurora, CO, USA; ²Human Immunology and Immunotherapy Initiative (HI3), Department of Immunology, University of Colorado School of Medicine, Aurora, CO, USA; ³Rocky Mountain Regional Veteran's Administration Medical Center (VAMC), Medicine Service, Rheumatology Section, Aurora, CO, USA; ⁴Center for Public Health Genomics and the Department of Biostatistical Sciences, Wake Forest School of Medicine, Winston-Salem, NC 27157, USA; ⁵Arthritis and Clinical Immunology Research Program, Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation, Oklahoma City, OK 73104, USA; ⁶Department of Biostatistics and Epidemiology, Hudson College of Public Health, The University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, Oklahoma City, OK, USA; ⁷Shanghai Institute of Rheumatology, Renji Hospital, School of Medicine, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Shanghai 200001, P.R. China; ⁸Genes and Human Disease Research Program, Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation, Oklahoma City, OK 73104, USA; ⁹Center for Autoimmune Genomics and Etiology, Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, Cincinnati, OH 45229, USA; ¹⁰Department of Pediatrics, University of Cincinnati College of Medicine, Cincinnati, OH 45220, USA; ¹¹Department of Medicine, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Baltimore, MD 21224, USA; ¹²Unit of Chronic Inflammatory Diseases, Institute of Environmental Medicine, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm 17167, Sweden; ¹³Center for Genomics and Oncological Research, Pfizer-University of Granada-Junta de Andalucia, Parque Tecnológico de la Salud, Granada 18016, Spain; ¹⁴Division of Rheumatology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA; ¹⁵Translational Science Division of The Janssen Pharmaceutical Companies of Johnson and Johnson, Spring House, Pennsylvania, 19002, USA; ¹⁶Hospital for Special Surgery, New York, NY 10021, USA; ¹⁷Division of Rheumatology, Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, Los Angeles, CA 90048, USA; ¹⁸Department of Medicine, University of Alabama at Birmingham, Birmingham, AL 35294, USA; ¹⁹Division of Molecular and Cellular Pathology, Department of Pathology, University of Alabama at Birmingham, Birmingham, AL, 35294, USA; ²⁰Division of Molecular and Cellular Pathology, Department of Pathology, University of Alabama at Birmingham, Birmingham, AL, 35294, USA; ²¹University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine, Chicago, IL, USA; ²²National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI), NIH, Bethesda, MD 20892, USA; ²³Keck School of Medicine of USC, Los Angeles, CA, USA; ²⁴Division of Rheumatology and Immunology, Medical University of South Carolina, Charleston, SC 29425, USA; ²⁵Divisions of Genetics/Molecular Medicine and Immunology, King's College London, Guy's Hospital, London SE1 9RT, UK; ²⁶Department of Medicine, University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, Oklahoma City, OK, 73104, USA; ²⁷Department of Pathology, University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, Oklahoma City, OK 73104, USA; ²⁸Clinical Pharmacology Program, Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation, Oklahoma City, OK 73104, USA; ²⁹US Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Cincinnati, Ohio 45229, USA; ³⁰University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, Oklahoma City; ³¹US Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Oklahoma City

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