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CXXC FINGER PROTEIN 1 UPREGULATES MAINTENANCE
DNA METHYLATION

Jill Sergesketter Butler

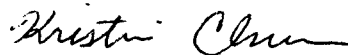
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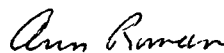


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Abstract

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CXXC FINGER PROTEIN 1 UPREGULATES MAINTENANCE DNA METHYLATION

This dissertation describes the role of CXXC finger protein 1 (CFP1) in maintaining global cytosine methylation. CFP1 is required for embryogenesis. Murine embryonic stem (ES) cells lacking the *CXXCI* gene (*CXXCI*^{-/-}) fail to differentiate and exhibit a ~70% reduction in global cytosine methylation. Maintenance DNA methyltransferase (Dnmt) activity is reduced by 60% in the absence of CFP1 and Dnmt1 protein expression is reduced by 50%. *De novo* Dnmt activity is not decreased in *CXXCI*^{-/-} ES cells. Analysis of steady state Dnmt1 mRNA in ES cells lacking CFP1 revealed that the level of Dnmt1 transcript is elevated 50% compared to wild-type ES cells, in spite of reduced Dnmt1 protein levels. Pulse chase analysis demonstrated a 17% decrease in Dnmt1 protein stability in *CXXCI*^{-/-} ES cells, suggesting that an additional mechanism is required to explain the 50% reduction in steady state protein levels. Global protein synthesis is decreased 15% and Dnmt1 protein synthesis is decreased 23% in *CXXCI*^{-/-} ES cells. Further analysis of polysome profiles in *CXXCI*^{-/-} ES cells revealed that the abundance of ribosomes is decreased compared to wild-type ES cells. The involvement of CFP1 in global protein synthesis provides a novel function for this epigenetic regulator.

Immunoprecipitation and immunofluorescence analyses revealed that CFP1 and Dnmt1 proteins interact and partially co-localize in the nucleus. The minimal regions of Dnmt1 that interact with CFP1 are found in the N- and C-terminus. The N-terminal region of Dnmt1 sufficient for interaction with CFP1 is required for targeting to

chromatin following DNA replication. The minimal regions of CFP1 sufficient for interaction with Dnmt1 also contain domains such as the CXXC domain or PHD domains, which are involved in chromatin association. These results suggest that CFP1 influences global cytosine methylation through several mechanisms involving Dnmt1. A combinatorial mechanism of decreased Dnmt1 protein stability and deficient Dnmt1 protein synthesis leads to decreased steady state Dnmt1 protein levels in *CXXCI*^{-/-} ES cells. Additionally, the interaction between CFP1 and Dnmt1 may affect global cytosine methylation by directly affecting Dnmt1 activity or by influencing the chromatin targeting of Dnmt1.

David G. Skalnik, Ph.D. - Chair

Table of Contents

LIST OF TABLES	xi
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xii
ABBREVIATIONS.....	xv
INTRODUCTION.....	1
I. Chromatin Structure and Epigenetics	1
II. Cytosine Methylation.....	2
III. DNA Methyltransferases.....	6
1. Dnmt1.....	8
2. Dnmt2.....	11
3. Dnmt3 family.....	12
4. Dnmt interaction	15
IV. Methyl CpG Binding Proteins.....	15
V. Histone Proteins.....	17
1. Post-translational modifications	18
i. Phosphorylation	18
ii. Ubiquitination	21
iii. SUMOylation.....	22
iv. Acetylation.....	23
v. Methylation.....	25
2. Histone code	31
VI. Epigenetic Regulation of Gene Expression.....	34
VII. CXXC Finger Protein 1.....	35

VIII.	Focus of Dissertation	42
METHODS		43
I.	Cell Culture	43
II.	Transient Transfection	43
III.	Stable Transfection	44
IV.	Construction of Plasmids	45
	1. Construction of mDnmt1 and mCFP1/pcDNA3.1/Hygro constructs	45
	2. Construction of mDnmt1 and mDnmt3a/pEGFPC3 constructs	46
	3. Construction of hDnmt1/pBAD-M constructs	51
	4. Construction of mDnmt1 and hCFP1/pGEX-4T1 constructs.....	51
	5. Construction of hCFP1/pcDNA3-Myc constructs.....	54
	6. Construction of hDnmt1/pcDNA3-FLAG constructs.....	54
V.	Site-Directed Mutagenesis	56
VI.	Plasmid Purification.....	64
	1. Minipreps.....	64
	2. Maxipreps.....	64
VII.	Recombinant Protein Expression and Purification.....	65
	1. Expression and purification of GST-fusion proteins	65
	2. Expression and purification of 6-histidine fusion proteins	66
VIII.	<i>In vitro</i> Pull-Down Assay	67
IX.	Murine Dnmt1 Antibody Production.....	68
X.	Nuclear Extract Preparation	71
XI.	Co-Immunoprecipitation.....	71

XII.	Western Blot Analysis	72
XIII.	RNA Isolation.....	73
XIV.	Northern Blot Analysis	73
XV.	Real-Time PCR Analysis.....	75
XVI.	Metabolic Labeling.....	75
	1. Half-life determination.....	75
	2. Analysis of protein synthesis.....	76
XVII.	Confocal Microscopy.....	77
XVIII.	Preparation of DNA Probes for Binding and Enzyme Activity Assays	78
	1. Annealing of complementary oligonucleotides.....	78
	2. Labeling and purification of oligonucleotide probes.....	78
XIX.	Analysis of Total DNA Methyltransferase Activity.....	79
XX.	Analysis of <i>De novo</i> and Maintenance DNA Methyltransferase Activity.....	79
XXI.	Electrophoretic Mobility Shift Assay (EMSA).....	80
XXII.	Statistical Analysis.....	81
	RESULTS	84
I.	Analysis of CFPI Function in Global Cytosine Methylation	84
	1. Maintenance Dnmt activity is reduced in <i>CXXCI</i> ^{-/-} ES cells	84
	2. Dnmt1 protein level is decreased in the absence of CFPI	90
	3. Reduced Dnmt1 protein expression in the absence of CFPI is not due to decreased Dnmt1 transcription.....	97
	4. Dnmt1 protein stability is slightly reduced in the absence of CFPI.....	97
	5. Global protein synthesis is reduced in CFPI-deficient ES cells	101

6.	The abundance of ribosomes is decreased in <i>CXXCI</i> ^{-/-} ES cells	107
7.	Dnmt1 protein synthesis is decreased in the absence of CFP1	107
8.	Summary	111
II.	Characterization of the Interaction Between CFP1 and Dnmt1	112
1.	Full length CFP1 and Dnmt1 interact <i>in vivo</i>	112
2.	CFP1 contains three independent Dnmt1-interaction regions.....	114
3.	The N- and C-termini of Dnmt1 interact with CFP1	117
4.	Endogenous Dnmt1 and CFP1 interact and co-localize in the nucleus ..	121
5.	CFP1 and Dnmt1 do not directly interact <i>in vitro</i>	123
6.	Functional significance associated with the interaction between CFP1 and Dnmt1	129
i.	Site-directed mutagenesis within the N-terminus of Dnmt1 does not disrupt the interaction between Dnmt1 and CFP1	129
ii.	RNase treatment abolishes the interaction between Dnmt1 and CFP1	132
7.	Summary	139
III.	Analysis of CFP1 Binding to Hemi-Methylated DNA	141
	DISCUSSION	144
I.	CFP1 Is Required for Appropriate Dnmt1 Protein Expression and Activity	144
1.	Dnmt1 protein expression and activity is decreased in ES cells lacking CFP1	144
2.	CFP1 is required for global protein synthesis	147

3.	Chromatin structure regulates rRNA gene expression.....	148
4.	The relationship between apoptosis and inhibition of protein synthesis is complex.....	150
5.	Appropriate Dnmt1 protein expression is essential and is regulated by multiple mechanisms.....	152
II.	CFP1 and Dnmt1 Interact in the Nucleus	154
1.	Endogenous Dnmt1 and CFP1 interact in the nucleus.....	154
2.	Association with chromatin may be involved in the interaction between Dnmt1 and CFP1	155
3.	The functional significance of the interaction between Dnmt1 and CFP1 remains elusive	157
4.	Dnmt1 and CFP1 may not directly interact.....	158
5.	RNA is necessary for the interaction between Dnmt1 and CFP1.....	159
6.	CFP1 may be involved in establishing bivalent chromatin domains.....	160
III.	Analysis of CFP1 Binding to Hemi-Methylated DNA.....	162
IV.	Future Directions	163
V.	Summary	168
	REFERENCES.....	169

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