Tumor necrosis factor-α and interleukin-4 gene polymorphisms in Chinese patients with gout

M.-L. Chen¹, F.-J. Tsai¹,4, C.-H. Tsai¹,3, C.-M. Huang²,4

¹Department of Medical Genetics, Division of Immunology and Rheumatology, ²Department of Internal Medicine, and ³Graduate Institute of Bioinformatics, Asia University, China Medical University Hospital, Taichung, Taiwan; ⁴College of Chinese Medicine, China Medical University, Taichung, Taiwan.

Abstract
The purpose of this study was to examine whether polymorphisms of interleukin-4 (IL-4) (promoter-590 and intron 3) and tumor necrosis factor-α (TNF-α) promoter-308 genes are markers of susceptibility to or clinical manifestations of gout in Taiwanese patients.

Methods
The study included 196 Taiwanese patients with gout and 103 unrelated healthy control subjects living in central Taiwan. Polymorphisms of the IL-4 (promoter-590 and intron 3) and TNF-α (promoter-308) genes were typed from genomic DNA. Allelic frequencies and carriage rates were then compared between gout patients and control subjects. The correlation between allelic frequencies, carriage rates and clinical manifestations of gout were evaluated.

Results
No significant differences were observed in the allelic frequencies and carriage rates of the IL-4 (promoter-590 and intron 3) and TNF-α gene polymorphisms between patients with gout and healthy control subjects. Furthermore, the IL-4 (promoter-590 and intron 3) and TNF-α genotypes were not found to be associated with the clinical and laboratory profiles in gout patients. However, there was a significant difference in the TNF-α polymorphism genotype between patients with and without hypertriglyceridemia (P=0.001, χ²=11.47, OR=10.3, 95%CI=3.57–29.7).

Conclusions
The results of our study suggest that polymorphisms of the IL-4 (promoter-590 and intron 3) and TNF-α promoter-308 genes are not related to gout in Chinese patients in Taiwan.

Key words
IL-4, TNF-α, gout, gene polymorphism.
Man-Ling Chen, MD; Fuu-Jen Tsai, MD; Chang-Hai Tsai, MD; Chung-Ming Huang, MD.

This study was supported by a grant (DMR-90-107) from China Medical University Hospital of Taiwan.

Please address correspondence to: Chung-Ming Huang, MD, Division of Immunology and Rheumatology, Department of Internal Medicine, China Medical University Hospital, No. 2 Yuh Der Road, Taichung, Taiwan.

E-mail: hcm.jeffrey@msa.hinet.net

Received on July 18, 2006; accepted in revised form on December 15, 2006.

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Introduction

Gout is one of the oldest known forms of arthritis (joint inflammation) and holds a unique place in the history of medicine. The most specific clinical manifestation is the appearance of monosodium urate (MSU) crystals in the joints that induce acute attacks of gouty arthritis. However, we are unable to explain why these crystals are present in the synovial fluid of asymptomatic uninflamed joints (1). MSU crystals in the joint are most probably macrophage-like synovial cells that induce the release of vasoactive prostaglandins, proteases, and proinflammatory cytokines including interleukin 1 (IL-1), TNF-α, IL-6, and IL-8, which in turn initiate a vigorous inflammatory response (2).

Cytokine is the general term for a large group of molecules involved in signaling between cells during immune responses. Among the cytokines, IL-4 has anti-inflammatory properties, but its production is decreased or absent in rheumatoid synovial tissue (3). The IL-4 gene has been mapped to the q arm (q23-31) of chromosome 5 in a cluster of cytokine genes (IL-3, IL-5, IL-9, IL-13, IL-15, GM-CSF, and interferon regulatory factor). Different polymorphisms of the IL-4 gene have been described, and at least two of them may influence protein production. One of these is a C to T change upstream of all previously described control elements of IL-4 at position –590 from the first ATG codon (4). The other is located in the third intron, and is composed of a variable number of tandem repeats (VNTR) of a 70-bp sequence (5).

IL-4 is a key cytokine that induces the activation and differentiation of B cells as well as development of the Th2 subset of lymphocytes. Th2 cytokines such as IL-4, IL-6, and IL-10 primarily support antibody production and many studies have confirmed that rheumatoid arthritis synovial fluids (RA SF) contain either no (< 15 pg/ml) or very low amounts (< 25 pg/ml) of IL-4 (3). The gene encoding TNF-α is located in the major histocompatibility complex (MHC) class III region of chromosome 6 and is highly polymorphic. Previous studies have demonstrated consider-
Polymorphism analysis

**IL-4 intron 3 polymorphism.** PCR was performed in a total reaction volume of 25 μl with 2.5~10 pmole of each primer containing 10 mM Tris-HCl, pH 8.3, 50 mM KCl, 2.0 mM MgCl₂, 0.2 mM of each deoxyribonucleotide triphosphate, and 1 unit of AmpliTaq DNA polymerase (Perkin Elmer, Forster City, CA, USA). The cycling conditions were as follows: one cycle at 94°C for 5 minutes; 35 cycles at 94°C for 20 seconds, 35 cycles at 58°C for 20 seconds, 35 cycles at 72°C for 20 seconds, and one final extension cycle at 72°C for 10 minutes. The cycles were performed in a Perkin-Elmer 2400 thermal cycler. Primers were upstream 5'-AGGCTGAAAGGGAAAGCG-3' and downstream 5'-CTGTTCACCTCAACTGCTCC-3'. The IL-4 intron 3 polymorphism PCR products, including 70-bp VNTR, were directly sequenced. Two fragments of 97-bp and 20-bp were present if the product was digestible. The reaction was incubated for 3 hours at 37°C. Then, 10 μl of the product was loaded onto 3% agarose gel for electrophoresis. The polymorphism was subdivided into AA homozygote (digestible), GG homozygote (undigestible) and A/G heterozygote.

**Statistical analysis**

Allelic frequency was expressed as a percentage of the total number of alleles. Results from control subjects and gout patients were compared by the χ² test (2x2 contingency tables) for statistical significance. P values < 0.05 were considered statistically significant. Odds ratios (OR) were calculated from allelic frequencies with 95% confidence intervals (95% CI).

**Results**

The distribution of the TNF-α genotypes, allelic frequencies and carriage rates among the control subjects and the patients with gouty arthritis is shown in Table I. The distribution of the G/G homozygote in the control group was 86.4%, and the distribution of the G/A homozygote was 13.6%. In gout patients, the distribution of G/G was 83.7%, and that of G/A was 16.3%. Using the chi-square test, we compared the distribution of the TNF-α genotypes, allelic frequencies and carriage rates by the χ² test and found no significant differences between the patients with gout and the healthy control subjects (p = 0.53, 0.55, and 0.59, respectively). Similarly, we detected no significant differences in genotype, allelic frequency or carriage rate, including those of the IL-4 promoter and IL-4 intron 3 regions, between the patients with gout and the healthy control subjects (Table II). The related clinical symptoms and laboratory findings, such as hypertension, tophi, alcohol drinking, hyperuricemia, hyperlipidemia, diabetic mellitus (DM), and gout family history are shown in Table III. Except for hypertriglyceridemia, we did not find any relationship between the TNF-α promoter genotype and the clinical symptoms and findings in patients with gout. The A/G genotype was significantly more common than the G/G in gout patients with hypertriglyceridemia (χ² = 11.47, p = 0.001), (OR = 10.3, 95% confidence interval 3.57–29.7). There was no significant association between the IL-4 intron 3 gene polymorphism and clinical symptoms and findings. We observed increased frequencies of tophi and hypercholesterolemia among patients with the C

**Table I. Distribution of TNF-α genotypes, allelic frequencies and carriage rates among gout patients and healthy control subjects.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genotype</th>
<th>Goat patients (%)</th>
<th>Controls (%)</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G/G</td>
<td>164 (83.7)</td>
<td>89 (86.4)</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G/A</td>
<td>32 (16.3)</td>
<td>14 (13.6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A/A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Allelic frequency</th>
<th>Goat patients (%)</th>
<th>Controls (%)</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TNF-α</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allele G</td>
<td>360 (91.8)</td>
<td>192 (93.2)</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allele A</td>
<td>32 (8.2)</td>
<td>14 (6.8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Allelic carriage</th>
<th>Goat patients (%)</th>
<th>Controls (%)</th>
<th>P</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TNF-α</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allele G</td>
<td>196 (86.0)</td>
<td>103 (88.0)</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allele A</td>
<td>32 (14.0)</td>
<td>14 (12.0)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table II. Distribution of IL-4 genotypes, allelic frequencies and carriage rates among gout patients and healthy control subjects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genotype</th>
<th>Gout patients (%)</th>
<th>Controls (%)</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IL-4 promoter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-590°C/C-590°C</td>
<td>10 (5.1)</td>
<td>6 (5.8)</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-590°C/C-590°T</td>
<td>65 (33.2)</td>
<td>34 (33.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-590°T/-590°T</td>
<td>121 (61.7)</td>
<td>63 (61.2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IL-4 intron 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP1/RP1</td>
<td>126 (64.3)</td>
<td>66 (64.1)</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP1/RP2</td>
<td>61 (31.1)</td>
<td>33 (32.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP2/RP2</td>
<td>9 (4.6)</td>
<td>4 (3.9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allelic frequency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IL-4 promoter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allele C</td>
<td>85 (21.7)</td>
<td>46 (22.3)</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allele T</td>
<td>307 (78.3)</td>
<td>160 (77.7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IL-4 intron 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP1</td>
<td>313 (79.8)</td>
<td>165 (80.1)</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP2</td>
<td>79 (20.2)</td>
<td>41 (19.9)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allelic carriage rate</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IL-4 promoter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allele C</td>
<td>75 (28.7)</td>
<td>40 (29.2)</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allele T</td>
<td>186 (71.3)</td>
<td>97 (70.8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IL-4 intron 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP1</td>
<td>187 (72.8)</td>
<td>99 (72.8)</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP2</td>
<td>70 (27.2)</td>
<td>37 (27.2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table III. Relationship between TNF-α genotypes and clinical symptoms and findings in patients with gout.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TNF-alpha</th>
<th>G/G (%)</th>
<th>A/G (%)</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hypertension</td>
<td>47 (28.9)</td>
<td>8 (25.0)</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tophi</td>
<td>32 (19.6)</td>
<td>10 (31.3)</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol drinking</td>
<td>40 (24.5)</td>
<td>8 (25.0)</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyperuricemia</td>
<td>127 (78.4)</td>
<td>22 (68.8)</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypertriglyceridemia</td>
<td>33 (28.2)</td>
<td>8 (80.0)</td>
<td>0.001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypercholesterolemia</td>
<td>62 (57.4)</td>
<td>8 (40.0)</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diabetic mellitus</td>
<td>19 (12.3)</td>
<td>5 (17.9)</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family history of gout</td>
<td>58 (37.7)</td>
<td>13 (46.4)</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Statistical analysis represents the results of hypertriglyceridemia compared with the subgroup with hypertriglyceridemia. P = 0.001, χ²-test = 11.47, OR = 10.3, 95%CI = 3.57–29.7.

Discussion

Gout is not a single disease but a term used to describe a group of metabolic disorders characterized by deposition in the tissue of MSU monohydrate crystals from hyperuricaemic body fluids. Acute gouty paroxysm is triggered by precipitation of MSU in the joints or neighboring tissues (1). MSU crystals in the joint are most probably macrophage-like synovial cells that induce the release of vasoactive prostaglandins, proteases, and proinflammatory cytokines including IL-1, TNF-α, IL-6, and IL-8, which in turn initiate vigorous inflammatory responses (2). TNF-α is a pluripotent cytokine that has been implicated in the pathogenesis of several chronic inflammatory diseases with an autoimmune component. TNF-α is a proinflammatory cytokine that regulates the acute-phase response, vascular adhesion, bone marrow progenitor differentiation, and apoptosis (11). Mice transgenic for the overexpression of TNF-α develop systemic or organ-specific inflammation. An increase in the spontaneous release of TNF-α from the monocytes of gout patients has been reported by several researchers (12).

IL-4 is a cytokine with anti-inflammatory properties and is a specific and major defining product of Th2 cells. IL-4 has been shown to inhibit IL-1β, IL-6, and TNFα as well as IgM and IgG production by human synovial tissue cultures, and IL-1β, IL-6, and IL-8 by freshly isolated adherent synovial cells (13). The self-limitation of acute gout inflammation has been known for a long time. Although many mechanisms can partly explain the spontaneous resolution in acute gout, the etiology of the disorder is still unknown. IL-4 may play an important role in the anti-inflammation effect of acute gout. Nucleotide variations in the human genome include single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNP), variable number tandem repeat (VNTR) polymorphisms, microsatellite polymorphisms and nucleotide deletions and insertions. The activity of individual genes may be regulated by certain nucleotide variations in the coding or non-coding region, which might influence gene transcription or alter the function of the gene product. Variations in the genome contribute to the genetic basis of human traits or disease. Both genetic and environmental factors contribute to the severity of susceptibility to gout. Gout and genetic polymorphisms of the genes responsible for immunity were not traditionally perceived as being causally related, but their relationship is being increasingly investigated. Some studies of the TNF-α gene polymorphism in rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) patients have shown conflicting results between patients and controls. Additionally, our previous studies demonstrated that IL-4 promoter and IL-4 intron 3 gene polymorphisms cannot serve as candidate gene markers for screening RA and SLE patients (14, 15). Gouty arthritis, like RA and
SLE, is an inflammatory arthritis. In the present study we chose to screen two polymorphisms in the IL-4 gene (promoter and intron 3), and one in the TNF-α (-308) gene. No statistically significant differences in the IL-4 (promoter and intron 3) and TNF-α genotypes or allelic frequencies between gout patients and normal individuals were found. However, there was a significant difference in TNF-α-308 polymorphism between gout patients with and without hypertriglyceridemia. This suggests that TNF-α (promoter-308) is correlated with the hypertriglyceridemia in gout, but not with gout itself.

Hyperuricemia is the most important direct risk factor for gout; other risk factors include male gender, age, hypertension, DM, renal insufficiency, alcohol abuse, family history, and coronary artery disease (16). Gout is also associated with hypertriglyceridemia. The association between gout and coronary artery disease is somewhat controversial. Gout may be associated with atherosclerosis only because of the high prevalence of obesity and hypertension (17) in patients with gout. In our study, the IL-4 (promoter and intron 3) and TNF-α genotypes and clinical signs, including hyperuricemia, tophus, hypertriglyceridemia, and alcohol drinking, family history and cholesterol, did not differ significantly between gout patients and controls. However, hypertriglyceridemia was statistically correlated to TNF-α (-308) gene polymorphism (p = 0.001). Inflammation, which is thought to be mediated by cytokines, is associated with hypertriglyceridemia. In fact, TNF-α was shown to increase serum triglyceride levels primarily by stimulating hepatic lipid synthesis and secretion (18). The association between TNF-α (-308) gene polymorphism and gout needs further confirmation.

In conclusion, the results from our present study suggest that the TNF-α promoter –308 polymorphism is correlated with the hypertriglyceridemia in gout but not with gout itself.

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