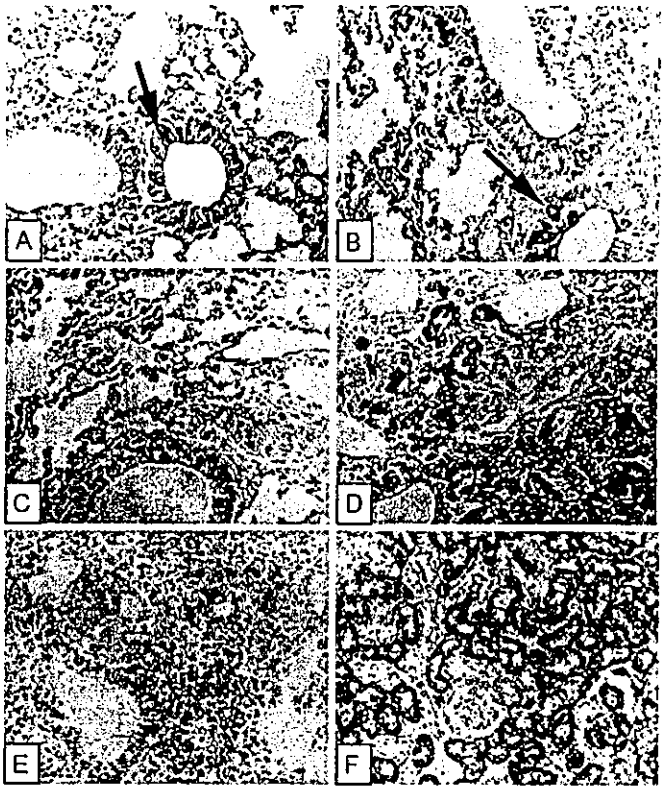

Fig. 6. Immunohistochemistry for P450 CYP2E1 in the lungs of WT and Cx32 KO mice exposed to 300 ppm benzene for 26 weeks. (A) Sham-control WT mice, (B) benzene-exposed WT mice, (C) sham-control Cx32 KO mice, (D) benzene-exposed Cx32 KO mice, and (E and F) negative and positive control, respectively. A few bronchiolar epithelial cells of sham-control WT and Cx32 KO mice were positive for CYP2E1 (arrows). Benzene exposure induced increases in the numbers of the CYP2E1-producing bronchial/bronchiolar and alveolar epithelial cells in WT and Cx32 KO mice. Note the proliferating basophilic alveolar epithelial cells positive for CYP2E1 in the benzene-exposed Cx32 KO mice (D). Original magnification: (A) ×200; (B) ×200; (C) ×200; (D) ×400; (E) ×200; (F) ×200.

died were immediately autopsied, whenever possible, and histopathological examinations were performed.

3.6. Tumor incidence and recovery of pulmonary lesions

Results of histopathological observation are shown in Table 2. No pulmonary tumors were observed in WT and Cx32 KO C57BL/6 mice sacrificed after the 26th week of exposure to 300 ppm benzene. Pulmonary adenoma developed in one Cx32 sham-control mouse. Pulmonary adenoma and adenocarcinoma developed only in two out of the seven benzene-exposed WT

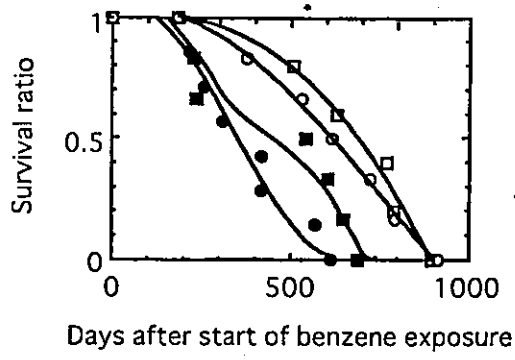

Fig. 7. Survival curves of groups for lifetime observation. The number of mice was limited about five to seven mice per group. There was no intermittent death during the exposure time up to 182 days (26 weeks). The sham-exposed group, indicated by open symbols, circles for wild-type mice and squares for Cx32 KO mice, show a longer life span than the 300-ppm benzene-exposed group indicated by closed symbols, circles for wild-type mice and squares for Cx32 KO mice.

mice, at 59.7 weeks and 87.3 weeks of the study, respectively (Table 2). The pulmonary lesions observed in the WT and Cx32 KO mice exposed to benzene for 26 weeks were considerably attenuated and regressed with time after cessation of the exposure (data not shown).

Most of the benzene-exposed WT and Cx32 KO mice, which were allowed to live out their lives after termination of benzene exposure, died far earlier than the sham-control mice of each genotype due to malignant lymphomas, squamous cell carcinomas, spindle cell sarcoma and hepatomas or a combination of these tumors (Table 2).

The incidence of hemopoietic neoplasia in C57BL/6 mice was enhanced by 300 ppm benzene exposure as previously reported elsewhere (Snyder et al., 1980; Cronkite et al., 1985; Kawasaki et al., unpublished observation). In the Cx32 KO group, incidences of hemopoietic neoplasia were identical for both the benzene-exposed and sham-exposed control mice, although peak incidences were earlier in the benzene-exposed mice than in the sham-exposed control mice. (see Fig. 7).

4. Discussion

Benzene has been suspected for years as an agent that induces human pulmonary cancer (Aksoy, 1989)

Table 2
Tumor development in the wild-type (WT) and Cx32 knockout (KO) mice that were allowed to live out their life span after termination of 26-week exposure to 300 ppm benzene

Tumor/group (with or without benzene treatment)	Genotype			
	WT		Cx32 KO	
	Sham-exposed	300 ppm	Sham-exposed	300 ppm
No. of animals examined	6	7	5	6
Animals bearing tumor(s)	3 (50.0)	6 (85.7)	4 (80.0)	6 (100.0)
Pulmonary adenoma/adenocarcinoma	0 (0.00)	2 (28.6)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Hemopoietic neoplasia	2 (33.3)	5 (71.4)	4 (80.0)	5 (83.3)
Hepatoma	2 (33.3)[a]	0 (0.0)	1 (20.0)[a]	1 (16.7)
Squamous cell carcinoma	0 (0.0)	2 (28.6)[b]	0 (0.0)	4 (66.7)[c]
Spindle cell sarcoma	0 (0.0)	1 (14.3)	0 (0.0)	1 (16.7)
Animals without tumor(s)[d]	3 (50.0)	1 (14.3)	1 (20.0)	0 (0.0)

Number in parentheses represents the percentage (%) of the lesions.
[a] Concomitant with malignant lymphomas.
[b] Concomitant with pulmonary adenocarcinoma and spindle cell sarcoma.
[c] Concomitant with spindle cell sarcoma for one mouse, granulocytic leukemia for two mice and hepatoma for one mouse.
[d] Mice without tumor in the WT sham-control and the 300-ppm benzene-exposed groups had auricular thrombosis and one mouse without tumor in the Cx32 KO-control group died of ascending nephritis and renal infarction.

and the long-term exposure of mice to benzene had been shown to notably increase the incidence of pulmonary adenoma and adenocarcinoma (Huff et al., 1989; Maltoni et al., 1989; Farris et al., 1993). However, little information is available on the mechanism by which benzene exerts its pneumotoxicity and induces lung cancer.

Experimental conditions of benzene exposure and the incidence of hemopoietic neoplasia occurring in groups for lifetime observation were identical to those previously reported by Snyder et al. (1980, Fig. 4, p. 326 in their article) and also to our separate large-scale study (Kawasaki et al., unpublished observation). In the present study, we specifically focused on a possible role of Cx32 in benzene-induced pneumotoxicity and the pathogenesis of pulmonary tumor using bioengineered Cx32 KO and the WT mice.

Although Cx32-deficient mice have a late-onset peripheral neuropathy, a condition with features similar to those of Charcot–Marie–Tooth disease in humans, their gross morphology had been reported to be normal independent of age (7–28 weeks) and gender, except for a slightly lower body weight than the wild-type mice of the same genetic background (Nelles et al., 1996; Anzini et al., 1997). In agreement with a previous report, the body weight of Cx32 KO mice was lower than that of WT mice at the late stage of this study, although this difference was not significantly different (Fig. 1). The organ weight and histological findings consistently indicated that the decrease in body weight observed during long-term exposure to benzene closely correlated with the development of pulmonary lesions, characterized by diffuse granulomatous interstitial pneumonia, regenerating alveolar epithelial cell proliferation, and increased mucus secretion (Table 1, Figs. 2–5). The pulmonary lesions were far severer in Cx32 KO mice than in WT mice, strongly suggesting that Cx32 prevents the benzene-induced lung pathogenesis.

It has generally been accepted that the metabolism of benzene by the CYP2E1 enzyme to phenolic metabolites is a critical event in its toxic and carcinogenic mechanisms. A noteworthy finding of our study was the active proliferation of bronchiolar–alveolar epithelial cells expressing the CYP2E1 enzyme in the lungs of benzene-exposed Cx32 KO mice (Figs. 4D and 6F). This suggests that benzene exposure stimulates CYP2E1-producing epithelial cells in the lungs through a pathway that is regulated by the Cx32 gap junction protein. The activation of CYP2E1-producing epithelial cells may enhance the metabolism of benzene to metabolites that are potentially pneumotoxic such as benzene oxide, phenol and hydroquinone, resulting in exacerbation of

benzene-induced pneumotoxicity. CYP2E1 has been detected in the lungs of humans and rats (Tindberg and Ingelman-Sundberg, 1989; Carlson and Day, 1992; Wheeler et al., 1992). Moreover, recent studies have shown the important role of the enzyme in benzene metabolism resulting in its pneumotoxicity (Powley and Carlson, 2000, 2001), which is also supported by the finding of benzene metabolism inhibition by a CYP2E1 inhibitor, diethyldithiocarbamate (Chaney and Carlson, 1995). The metabolic level of benzene in the pulmonary tissue has not been evaluated yet. However, a previous study showed that pulmonary microsomes can metabolize benzene at similar rates to those of hepatic microsomes, and that they are likely more efficient in generating hydroquinone (Chaney and Carlson, 1995). Recently, with regards to CYP2E1-mediated 1,1-dichlroethylene-induced lung toxicity, Forkert et al. (2001) reported good correlations among the amount of the enzyme, metabolism of 1,1-dichlroethylene to a toxic metabolite, and lung cytotoxicity.

Activation of alveolar pneumocytes by benzene was considered to be another possible important event for the pneumotoxicity of benzene observed in the present study, as shown in the lungs of benzene-exposed groups of WT and Cx32 KO mice (Fig. 3). Alveolar epithelial cells, containing a large amount of peroxidase, are capable of metabolizing phenolic compounds to genotoxic reactive species that can induce DNA adducts and generate oxygen-free radicals (Brieland et al., 1987; Schlosser et al., 1989; Smith et al., 1989) and of producing nitric oxide by themselves (Laskin et al., 1995). The production of reactive oxygen intermediates has been implicated in cytotoxicity and carcinogenesis, by inhibiting GJICs as well as causing DNA damage (Kuo et al., 1998; Upham et al., 1997, 1998). Several investigators have shown that oxygen radicals from benzene-activated alveolar epithelial cells play an important role in the genotoxic and nongenotoxic mechanisms of benzene-target organs (Subrahmanyam et al., 1991; Kolachana et al., 1993; Laskin et al., 1995). In the lung, Suleiman (1987) showed that benzene induces lipid peroxidation and increases the amount of the lysosomal enzyme released by activating alveolar epithelial cells, contributing to the pathological changes. The formation of oxygen radicals and related reactive oxygen species is highly controlled in a biological system by physiological antioxidant defense mechanisms. In a study by Kojima et al. (1996), a potential role of Cx32 in the regulation of oxygen radical production in cultured hepatocytes has been suggested based on the correlation found between the expression of Cx32 and the effect of oxygen radical scavengers. Therefore, it can also be hypothesized in our present study that the disregulation of reactive oxygen species production by benzene in lung tissues due to a dysfunction of GJICs caused by Cx32 might contribute to the exacerbation of pulmonary lesions in Cx32 KO mice. Further studies will be required to prove this hypothesis.

Despite the finding that the Cx32-mediated disruption of GJICs enhanced the pneumotoxicity of benzene, our present study, though with a small number of animals did not indicate any enhancement of the development of pulmonary tumor in the Cx32 KO mice (Table 2).

Therefore, the pathological lesions exacerbated in Cx32 KO mice may not seem to be critical changes for pulmonary carcinogenesis of benzene. This was supported by their recovery from the pulmonary lesions after removal of benzene and the absence of tumor incidence in benzene-exposed Cx32 KO mice.

In conclusion, our present study indicates that Cx32 attenuates the pneumotoxicity of benzene, particularly in the case of chronic exposure in vivo, most likely by regulating proliferation of CYP2E1-producing lung cells population. However, the role of Cx32 in benzene-induced pulmonary tumorigenesis was not clarified in the present study.

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Intrauterine position and postnatal growth in Sprague–Dawley rats and ICR mice

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Abstract

In rodents, steroid hormones are thought to be transported between adjacent fetuses, and male or female fetuses that develop in utero between female fetuses may have higher serum levels of estradiol, and lower serum levels of testosterone, relative to siblings of the same sex that develop between two male fetuses. The consequence in the variation of postnatal growth, development, and function in the intrauterine position, using various parameters such as anogenital distance, preputial separation and vaginal opening, estrous cycle, locomotor activity, and growth of reproductive organs, were examined in Sprague–Dawley rats. ICR mice were treated with 17β-estradiol before copulation and during pregnancy to address the interaction with endogenous estradiol during pregnancy. In rats, no evidence of effects of prior intrauterine position was observed for any of the parameters examined. Mouse fetal exposure via the mother to low-dose 17β-estradiol revealed no changes in the rate of postnatal growth in males and females that developed in any intrauterine position in utero. The results of this study suggested that the intrauterine position of the embryos/fetuses did not affect the postnatal growth of the reproductive organs, sexual maturation, or behavior in rats and mice.

Keywords: Intrauterine position; Postnatal growth; Sexual maturation; Behavior; Anogenital distance; Rats; Mice

1. Introduction

The development of sexually differentiated phenotypes depends upon the hormonal environment during a critical period of growth [1]. Testosterone secretion by the fetal testis causes a longer anogenital distance (AGD), seen in neonatal males, relative to females. The AGD of newborn rats, mice, and gerbils is longer in males than in females and varies as a function of the intrauterine position of the animals [1–4]. A longer AGD is associated with the presence of males on either side of the developing fetus in utero, and a shorter AGD is associated with the absence of males on either side of the developing female fetus. Females with a male fetus on only one side are immediate [4].

In all litter-bearing species that have been examined to date, the intrauterine position that a fetus occupies relative to fetuses of the same or opposite sex has profound effects on its reproductive, behavioral, and morphological traits measured during adult life [4–7]. Gerbil males and females that developed in utero between two female fetuses or two male fetuses, respectively, did not differ in relative hippocampal size [8].

The effects of intrauterine position are apparently not the result of the position itself, but rather of the movement of steroid hormones between the fetuses, and variations in the hormonal environment relative to the proximity of an individual fetus to other fetuses of the same or opposite sex [9]. Male rats located between two females had elevated serum estradiol and larger prostates than males located between two males, which had elevated serum testosterone and larger seminal vesicles [10]. The effect of intrauterine position in mice has been correlated with concentrations of steroid hormones in amniotic fluid and subsequent sexual activity [11,12].

Recently, intrauterine position has been the focus of discussions in the toxicology community because of its potential to alter the susceptibility of fetuses to endogenous hormones and endocrine disrupting chemicals [13,14]. In this regard, failure to account for intrauterine position in endocrine disrupting chemical toxicology studies could lead to false negative results, especially when adverse alterations

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are produced by low doses in fetuses from only one intrauterine position [14,15]. This possibility has been raised because of investigations into estrogenic compounds in mice. In rats, consistent effects due to intrauterine position on testosterone concentrations, and therefore potential interactions with endocrine disrupting chemicals, have not been found. Howdeshell and vom Saal [16] demonstrated that the greatest response to the estrogenic chemical, bisphenol A, occurred in males and females with the highest background levels of endogenous estradiol during fetal life, due to their intrauterine position, while fetuses with the lowest endogenous levels of estradiol showed no response to maternal bisphenol A within the range of human exposure, suggesting that estrogen-mimicking chemicals interact with endogenous estrogen in altering the course of development. It has been demonstrated that 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-*p*-dioxin interacted with endogenous estradiol to disrupt prostate gland morphogenesis in male rat fetuses [17].

The objectives of this study were to determine the effects of intrauterine position, under normal physiological conditions, on the development of rat offspring, as well as sexual maturation, estrous cycle, behavior, and reproductive organ development. Another objective of this study was to determine whether the intrauterine position of mouse fetuses, which is related to background levels of estradiol and testosterone, would influence the response of the postnatal growth of gonads, including sexual maturation, to low dose 17β-estradiol.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Animals

Sprague–Dawley rats (Crj:CD, IGS), and ICR mice (Crj:CD-1) were purchased from Charles River, Laboratories, Inc. (Atsugi, Japan). Twenty-seven male rats (9 weeks of age), 84 female rats (8 weeks of age), 130 male mice (9 weeks of age), and 130 female mice (8 weeks of age), were used. The rats and mice arrived with mean weights of 301.1 ± 7.9 g for males and 216.2 ± 8.1 g for females, and 37.2 ± 1.2 g for males and 29.1 ± 0.9 g for females (mean ± S.D.), respectively. The animals were acclimated to the laboratory for 7–14 days prior to the start of the experiments to evaluate weight gain and any gross signs of disease or injury. The animals were housed individually in stainless steel, wire-mesh cages in a room with controlled temperature (22–25 °C) and humidity (50–65%), with lights on from 07:00 to 19:00 h daily. The animals were given access to food (NIH-07-PLD: phytoestrogen low diet, Oriental Yeast Co., Japan) and tap water through metal pipes (distilled water, Wako Pure Chem., Japan) ad libitum. In a few instances, the temperature and humidity were outside the standard ranges, but the magnitude and duration of these incidents were minimal and judged to be of no consequence. The contents of genistein and daidzein in the diet and wood bedding (ALPHA-dri, Shepherd Specialty Paper, USA) used in the present study were determined. Neither genistein nor daidzein were not detected in the diet or wood bedding (detection limit: 0.5 mg/100 g in each individual phytoestrogen, by HPLC).

Animal care and use conformed to published guidelines [18].

2.2. Experiment 1 (examination of intrauterine position effect on postnatal growth in rats)

2.2.1. Cesarean delivery and fostering

Estrous female rats at 10–11 weeks of age were cohabited overnight with a single male to obtain 66 pregnant females within 4 days. The next morning, females with sperm in their vaginal smears were regarded as pregnant, and this day was designated as day 0 of gestation. Thirty-three pregnant females were killed by CO_2 asphyxiation and cervical dislocation, and subjected to cesarean sectioning on day 21 of gestation. The fetuses were rapidly collected, and their intrauterine position was recorded, identified by tattoo, weighed, and sexed. Anogenital distance (AGD) was measured with a digital micrometer (reproductive precision of 0.01 mm, Digimatic caliper CD-15C, Mitutoyo Co., Kanagawa, Japan) under an Olympus dissecting microscope for each fetus, and the average was taken. The subject was held steady and in the same position during measurement. Measurements were made without knowledge of intrauterine position by one person. The AGD was measured from the center of the phallus to the center of the anus. The fetuses obtained by cesarean delivery were fostered to 33 dams that had just given birth naturally (one litter to each female). The original littermates remained together when cross-fostered. The litter sizes were similar for each cross-fostered dam. The day of cesarean section was considered as postnatal day (PND) 0. Pup body weights were recorded on PND 21 (day of weaning). Following weaning, and until 10 weeks of age, offspring were weighed once a week.

Neonates from 33 pregnant females were categorized as occupying six different intrauterine positions: 2M (male fetus located between two male fetuses; number of pups and litters on PND 0 = 36 and 19); 1M (male fetus that located between a male fetus and a female fetus; $n = 73$ and 27); 0M (male fetus located between two female fetuses; $n = 45$ and 24); 2F (female fetus located between two female fetuses; $n = 38$ and 18); 1F (female fetus located between a female fetus and a male fetus; $n = 83$ and 29); 0F (female fetus located between two male fetuses; $n = 41$ and 27). Fetuses adjacent to dead embryos (resorptions or macerated fetuses), and fetuses that were closest to each ovary or the cervix, were discarded from further analyses.

2.2.2. Observations of postnatal growth

2.2.2.1. Measurement of AGD and reproductive organ weights, and evaluation of sexual maturation. On PND

4, the AGD was measured for pups in each group using calipers with a reproductive precision of 0.01 mm. On PND 21, all pups were weaned and half of the pups in each group (2M = 13, 1M = 37, 0M = 11, 2F = 14, 1F = 43, 0F = 12) were subjected to necropsy, and the testes, epididymides, and prostates with seminal vesicles (fluid was not removed and all lobes were included) in males, and uteri and ovaries in females, were weighed. For the remaining male and female pups in each litter (2M = 21, 1M = 32, 0M = 30, 2F = 23, 1F = 36, 0F = 26), as criteria for sexual maturation, the day of vaginal opening for females (beginning on PND 28), and preputial separation for males (beginning on PND 35), were assessed, and each rat was weighed when these criteria were achieved.

2.2.2.2. Postweaning tests of behavior, evaluation of estrous cycle, and histological observation of reproductive organs. One male and one female were randomly selected from each litter in each group (number of rats examined: 2M = 18; 1M = 27; 0M = 25; 2F = 17; 1F = 27; 0F = 25), and were subjected to an open field test and wheel cage activity test to assess the emotionality and regulatory running activity, respectively. At 4 weeks of age, the rats were placed into a circular area (140 cm in diameter) surrounded by a wall (40 cm in height). The light and noise levels averaged 500 lx and 50 dB, respectively, at the center of the circular area. Rearing, grooming, defecation, and urination were counted, and ambulation was recorded automatically on a computer (Unicom, Inc., Japan), during a 3-min trial between 13:00 and 16:00 h on one day. At 7 weeks of age, the rats were placed into a wheel cage (Nippon Cage, Inc., Japan), 32 cm in diameter and 10 cm in width, as a measure of spontaneous activity. Each rat was kept within the wheel for 24 h with free access to food (NIH-07-PLD) and distilled water in the same animal room. The number of revolutions was automatically recorded with a 20-channel digital counter (Seiko Denki, Inc., Japan).

Each morning (9:00–10:00 h), from 6 to 10 weeks of age, all females in each group were subjected to vaginal lavage. The lavage fluid was applied to a glass slide, air-dried, and stained with Wright–Giemsa stain. Cytology was evaluated and the stage of the estrous cycle was determined using the method of Everett [19].

At 10 weeks of age, 3–5 males in each group were weighed, and anesthetized. Transcardial perfusions were carried out with a mixture of 0.1 M phosphate-buffered 1.25% glutaraldehyde and 2% paraformaldehyde. Following fixation, the prostate gland was sampled, rinsed three times in phosphate buffer, postfixed for 2 h at 4 °C in 2% osmium tetroxide, and dehydrated in alcohol; the prostate gland was embedded in epoxy resin. Ultrathin sections of the prostates were stained with uranyl acetate and lead citrate, and observed with an electron microscope (H-7100, Hitachi, Japan). The remaining males in each group (2M = 18, 1M = 27, 0M = 25) were weighed and subjected to necropsy, and the testes, epididymides, ventral prostate, and dorsal prostates with seminal vesicles, were weighed and fixed in 0.1 M phosphate-buffered 10% formalin solution. All females (2F = 17, 1F = 27, 0F = 25) were weighed and subjected to necropsy when the stage of the estrous cycle was diestrus. The ovaries and uteri were then weighed and fixed in 0.1 M phosphate-buffered 10% formalin solution. These reproductive organs were embedded in paraffin, and tissue sections were stained with H&E for light microscopy.

2.3. Experiment II (examination of low-dose in utero effects of 17β-estradiol in mice)

The objective of this experiment was to determine whether the intrauterine position of male fetuses, which is related to background levels of estradiol (elevated in males located between two female fetuses) and testosterone (elevated in males located between two male fetuses), would influence the response of the developing prostate to low dose 17β-estradiol. In addition, we examined whether the intrauterine position of male and female fetuses would affect the postnatal growth of other reproductive organs and sexual maturation.

2.3.1. Administration, cesarean delivery and fostering

Thirty female mice at 9 weeks of age were administered 17β-estradiol (Sigma Chem. Co., MO, USA) subcutaneously at a dose of 0.05 μg/kg per day for 7 days before mating, during a mating period of 7 days at the longest, and on day 0 through 17 of gestation. In a preliminary study, the offspring of the ICR pregnant females exposed to 17β-estradiol at 0.05 μg/kg per day on day 0 through 17 of gestation showed no changes in weight and histological morphology of reproductive organs in adulthood. However, the offspring of dams exposed to 17β-estradiol at 0.1 μg/kg per day on these gestational days showed changes in the parameters in adulthood (data not shown). In the present study, 30 control females were administered corn oil (Nacalai Tesque, Co., Tokyo). After the administration for 7 days before mating, female mice were caged with untreated males overnight and examined for a vaginal plug the next morning. The day on which a plug was found was termed day 0 of gestation. In this study, 30 female mice in the 17β-estradiol exposed group and the control group copulated and became pregnant. On day 18 of gestation, pregnant females were killed by CO_2 asphyxiation, and subjected to cesarean sectioning. The fetuses were rapidly collected, and their intrauterine position was recorded, identified by tattoo, weighed, and sexed, and then the AGD was measured. The fetuses obtained by cesarean delivery were fostered to 60 dams that had just given birth naturally (one litter to each female). The day of cesarean section was considered as PND 0. Pup body weights were recorded on PND 21 (day of weaning), and at 5, 7, and 10 weeks of age.

Neonates from 30 pregnant females exposed to corn oil and 30 pregnant females exposed to 17β-estradiol were categorized as occupying four different intrauterine positions:

2M (the number of neonates in the 17β-estradiol exposed group and the control group: 38 and 41) and 0M (33 and 32), and 2F (41 and 32) and 0F (28 and 37). Fetuses adjacent to dead embryos, and fetuses that were closest to each ovary or the cervix, were discarded. In this experiment, fetuses of two intrauterine positions, 1M and 1F, were also discarded.

2.3.2. Observations of postnatal growth

2.3.2.1. Evaluation of sexual maturation. On PND 21, all male and female pups (2M, 0M, 2F, 0F) in each litter were weaned. For all male and female mice in each litter, as criteria for sexual maturation, the day of vaginal opening for females (beginning on PND 25), and preputial separation for males (beginning on PND 30), were assessed, and each pup was weighed when these criteria were achieved.

At 10 weeks of age, five males in each group were weighed and processed to the transcardial perfusion to observe the histological alteration of the prostate by electron microscope. The remaining males in each group were weighed and subjected to necropsy, and the testes, epididymides and seminal vesicles, were weighed. All females were weighed and subjected to necropsy. The ovaries were then weighed. These reproductive organs including prostates and uteri were fixed in 0.1 M phosphate-buffered 10% formalin solution and embedded in paraffin, and tissue sections were stained with H&E for light microscopy.

2.4. Data analyses

Statistical analysis of the data for the offspring (AGD, body weight and organ weight, organ/body weight ratios, timing of vaginal opening and preputial separation) was performed using the litter as the unit [20,21]. The AGD, body weight and organ weight, organ/body weight ratios (relative organ weight), timing of vaginal opening and preputial separation, were analyzed using Bartlett's test. When homogeneity of variance was confirmed, one-way analysis of variance was applied to detect the significances among the groups. If a significant difference was detected among the groups, Dunnett's test was applied for multiple comparisons. When variance was not homogeneous, or there was a group whose variance was zero, Kruskal–Wallis analysis of ranks was applied. If a significant effect was detected among the groups, Dunnett's test was applied for multiple comparisons. Comparisons between groups were made using $P \leq 0.05$ as the level of significance.

3. Results

3.1. Experiment I

3.1.1. AGD and body weights of fetuses at cesarean section and pups at PND 4

Table 1 shows the AGD, body weight, AGD/body weight (AGDI: anogenital distance index), and AGD/$\sqrt[3]{\text{body weight}}$ of fetuses at various intrauterine positions and pups at PND 4. It is reasonable to anticipate that the AGD might vary with body weight of fetus or pup. It has been proposed that the relationship between AGD and body weight should be more properly evaluated using the cube root of the body weight [22–25]. If it is desirable to normalize AGD to body weight, the AGD/$\sqrt[3]{\text{body weight}}$ seems to provide a more appropriate adjustment.

There were no statistically significant differences in any parameter evaluated at cesarean section (PND 0) or PND 4

Table 1
Effects of prior intrauterine position on anogenital distance in Sprague–Dawley rats

	Group					
	2M	1M	0M	2F	1F	0F
AGD of fetuses at cesarean section						
No. of litters	19	27	24	18	29	27
No. of pups	36	73	43	38	83	41
Body weight (g)	5.6 ± 0.4[a]	5.6 ± 0.3	5.7 ± 0.4	5.2 ± 0.3	5.4 ± 0.3	5.3 ± 0.4
AGD	2.43 ± 0.22	2.42 ± 0.22	2.42 ± 0.28	1.21 ± 0.20	1.23 ± 0.19	1.22 ± 0.24
AGD/body weight	0.43 ± 0.04	0.42 ± 0.04	0.42 ± 0.05	0.23 ± 0.02	0.22 ± 0.02	0.23 ± 0.02
AGD/$\sqrt[3]{\text{body weight}}$	1.36 ± 0.12	1.36 ± 0.14	1.35 ± 0.18	0.69 ± 0.08	0.70 ± 0.07	0.70 ± 0.08
AGD of pups on PND 4						
No. of litters	19	27	24	18	29	27
No. of pups	34	69	41	37	79	38
Body weight (g)	10.9 ± 1.5	11.2 ± 1.5	10.8 ± 1.1	10.4 ± 1.4	10.3 ± 1.1	10.4 ± 1.3
AGD	4.57 ± 0.54	4.41 ± 0.48	4.43 ± 0.51	2.00 ± 0.22	1.99 ± 0.19	2.00 ± 0.21
AGD/body weight	0.42 ± 0.06	0.40 ± 0.05	0.41 ± 0.03	0.19 ± 0.04	0.19 ± 0.03	0.19 ± 0.04
AGD/$\sqrt[3]{\text{body weight}}$	2.06 ± 0.22	1.99 ± 0.19	1.99 ± 0.19	0.92 ± 0.12	0.91 ± 0.11	0.92 ± 0.13

2M, male fetus between two male fetuses; 1M, male fetus between a male fetus and a female fetus; 0M, male fetus between two female fetuses; 2F, female fetus between two female fetuses; 1F, female fetus between a male fetus and a female fetus; 0F, female fetus between two male fetuses.
No significant differences were observed between groups.
[a] Mean ± S.D.

Table 2
Effects of prior intrauterine position on reproductive organs before maturation in Sprague–Dawley rats

	Group					
	2M	1M	0M	2F	1F	0F
Organ weight on PND 21						
No. of litters	18	27	24	17	27	25
No. of offspring	13	37	11	14	43	12
Body weight (g)	40.9 ± 6.3[a]	40.5 ± 6.5	40.2 ± 9.6	38.8 ± 6.3	38.2 ± 7.0	40.7 ± 7.0
Testes (mg)[b]	169.3 ± 27.5	172.2 ± 22.2	164.9 ± 26.1			
Testes[c]	416.3 ± 48.4	429.2 ± 40.3	418.2 ± 46.7			
Epididymides (mg)[b]	23.3 ± 3.1	23.5 ± 4.8	21.9 ± 4.4			
Epididymides[c]	60.5 ± 10.8	58.2 ± 7.8	55.2 ± 7.0			
Prostate + SV (mg)[b,d]	47.2 ± 9.9	46.7 ± 10.3	45.9 ± 7.9			
Prostate + SV[c,d]	115.6 ± 18.0	115.7 ± 19.0	117.2 ± 19.5			
Ovaries (mg)[b]				24.3 ± 4.0	22.9 ± 3.9	24.8 ± 3.6
Ovaries[c]				63.5 ± 10.1	60.8 ± 9.5	61.5 ± 7.3
Uterus (mg)[b]				10.2 ± 2.0	11.2 ± 3.7	11.8 ± 2.9
Uterus[c]				26.4 ± 4.5	28.8 ± 6.8	29.1 ± 6.0

2M, male fetus between two male fetuses; 1M, male fetus between a male fetus and a female fetus; 0M, male fetus between two female fetuses; 2F, female fetus between two female fetuses; 1F, female fetus between a male fetus and a female fetus; 0F, female fetus between two male fetuses.
No significant differences were observed between groups.
[a] Mean ± S.D.
[b] Absolute weight.
[c] Relative weight (g or mg per 100 g body weight).
[d] Seminal vesicle.

between groups 2M, 1M and 0M in males, or groups 2F, 1F and 0F in females.

No significant differences in viability of fetuses at cesarean section (PND 0), or that from PND 0 to PND 4 (the number of pups died; 2M = 2, 1M = 4, 0M = 2, 2F = 1, 1F = 4, 0F = 3), were detected between the groups. In addition, there were no statistically significant differences in body weight at PND 0 and 4.

3.1.2. Body weight and reproductive organ weight of offspring at PND 21

The absolute and relative weights of testes, epididymides, and prostates with seminal vesicles in males, and ovaries and uteri in females, as well as body weight of offspring at PND 21 are shown in Table 2. Irrespective of the intrauterine position, no significant differences were detected between the groups in absolute or relative reproductive organ weights, or body weights of male and female weanlings, suggesting that the intrauterine position did not affect postnatal growth before weaning in rats.

3.1.3. Sexual maturation and estrous cycle of offspring

Table 3 shows the days of preputial separation in males, and of vaginal opening in females. There were no significant differences in these endpoints of sexual maturation or body weight at which these criteria were achieved between the groups. The estrous cycle of female offspring from 6 to 10 weeks of age is shown in Table 4. No significant differences were detected between the groups in mean estrous cycle length, or the frequency of females showing each stage of estrous cycle.

Table 3
Effects of prior intrauterine position on sexual maturation in Sprague–Dawley rats

	Group					
	2M	1M	0M	2F	1F	0F
No. of litters	18	27	24	17	27	25
No. of offspring	21	32	30	23	36	26
Day of preputial separation	43.3 ± 1.3[a]	43.4 ± 1.2	44.0 ± 1.8			
Body weight (g)[b]	211.8 ± 5.5	212.1 ± 4.3	212.9 ± 5.2			
Day of vaginal opening				33.8 ± 2.2	33.8 ± 1.8	34.1 ± 1.7
Body weight (g)[b]				125.6 ± 4.1	124.6 ± 4.4	126.1 ± 3.9

2M, male fetus between two male fetuses; 1M, male fetus between a male fetus and a female fetus; 0M, male fetus between two female fetuses; 2F, female fetus between two female fetuses; 1F, female fetus between a male fetus and a female fetus; 0F, female fetus between two male fetuses.
No significant differences were observed between groups.
[a] Mean ± S.D.
[b] Body weight when the criterion was achieved.

Table 4
Effects of prior intrauterine position on estrous cycle in Sprague–Dawley rats

	Group		
	2F	1F	0F
No. of litters	17	27	25
No. of female offspring	23	36	26
Mean estrous cycle length (day)[a]	4.16 ± 0.29[a]	4.08 ± 0.30	4.20 ± 0.42
No. of females showing Regular cycle (%)	18 (78.3)	28 (77.8)	21 (80.8)
No. of females showing Irregular cycle (%)	5 (21.7)	8 (22.2)	5 (19.2)

2F, female fetus between two female fetuses; 1F, female fetus between a male fetus and a female fetus; 0F, female fetus between two male fetuses. No significant differences were observed between groups.
[a] Mean ± S.D.

3.1.4. Behavior and locomotor activity of offspring

Table 5 shows the results of an open field test at 4 weeks of age, and spontaneous activity within the wheel for 24 h at 7 weeks of age, for male and female offspring. There were no significant differences between groups 2M, 1M and 0M in latency, ambulation, rearing, grooming, defecation and urination, or number of revolutions for 24 h in a wheel cage. In the females, urination in group 0F was significantly increased as compared with that in group 2F, whereas other behavioral parameters, including the number of revolutions in a wheel cage were comparable between groups 2F, 1F and 0F.

3.1.5. Weights and histology of reproductive organs of offspring in adulthood

Table 6 shows the terminal body weights and reproductive organ weights of male and female offspring at 10 weeks of age. No significant differences were observed in the body weights, or the absolute and relative organ weights, between the groups. In the histological observation of the prostates by electron microscope, and reproductive organs of males and females by light microscope, no changes were observed in any of the reproductive organs, including the prostates, of the offspring.

3.2. Experiment II

3.2.1. AGD and body weights of fetuses at cesarean section

Table 7 shows the body weight, AGD, AGD/body weight, and AGD/$\sqrt[3]{\text{body weight}}$, of embryonic day 18 (PND 0) fetuses exposed to corn oil or 17β-estradiol. There were no significant differences in any of the parameters between the groups. No significant differences in viability of fetuses at cesarean section, or that from PND 0 to PND 21 were detected between the groups (the number of pups died from PND 0 to PND 21: see Tables 7 and 8).

3.2.2. Sexual maturation of offspring

Table 8 shows the days of preputial separation in males, and of vaginal opening in females. There were no significant differences in these endpoints of sexual maturation or body weight at which these criteria were achieved between the groups.

Table 5
Effects of prior intrauterine position on postnatal behavior in Sprague–Dawley rats

	Group					
	2M	1M	0M	2F	1F	0F
Open field						
No. of litters	18	27	24	17	27	25
No. of offspring	18	27	25	17	27	25
Latency (s)	20.4 ± 40.8[a]	17.9 ± 16.9	15.3 ± 16.2	12.0 ± 9.4	13.8 ± 12.3	16.9 ± 36.1
Ambulation (cm)	676.3 ± 411.3	627.1 ± 417.2	659.0 ± 501.9	940.6 ± 538.1	1039.8 ± 436.3	970.7 ± 449.8
No. of rearing	2.3 ± 3.1	3.0 ± 3.2	1.5 ± 1.4	3.5 ± 2.1	4.5 ± 3.4	3.8 ± 2.3
No. of grooming	0.6 ± 0.9	0.7 ± 0.7	1.1 ± 1.2	0.8 ± 0.9	0.4 ± 0.5	0.8 ± 0.8
No. of defecation	2.8 ± 1.9	2.1 ± 1.5	3.3 ± 2.2	1.9 ± 1.9	1.7 ± 1.8	1.8 ± 1.9
No. of urination	0.4 ± 0.6	0.4 ± 0.6	0.5 ± 0.5	0.2 ± 0.4	0.5 ± 0.5	0.7 ± 0.6**
Spontaneous activity						
Count/24 h	1547 ± 467	1789 ± 697	1559 ± 638	4107 ± 1140	4429 ± 1501	4746 ± 1831

2M, male fetus between two male fetuses; 1M, male fetus between a male fetus and a female fetus; 0M, male fetus between two female fetuses; 2F, female fetus between two female fetuses; 1F, female fetus between a male fetus and a female fetus; 0F, female fetus between two male fetuses.
**Significantly different from group 2F, $P < 0.01$ (by multiple comparison and Student t-test).
[a] Mean ± S.D.

Table 6
Effects of prior intrauterine position on reproductive organs after maturation in Sprague–Dawley rats

	Group					
	2M	1M	0M	2F	1F	0F
Organ weight at 10 weeks old						
No. of litters	18	27	24	17	27	25
No. of offspring	18	27	25	17	27	25
Body weight (g)	417.2 ± 31.6[a]	416.1 ± 34.4	413.6 ± 36.9	270.0 ± 23.2	271.8 ± 28.9	273.6 ± 29.1
Testes (mg)[b]	3.00 ± 0.20	2.98 ± 0.15	3.00 ± 0.17			–
Testes[c]	0.72 ± 0.05	0.72 ± 0.06	0.73 ± 0.07			–
Epididymides (mg)[b]	0.77 ± 0.05	0.78 ± 0.07	0.76 ± 0.06			–
Epididymides[c]	0.19 ± 0.01	0.19 ± 0.02	0.18 ± 0.02			–
Ventral prostate (g)[b]	0.46 ± 0.08	0.44 ± 0.08	0.43 ± 0.10			–
Ventral prostate[c]	0.11 ± 0.02	0.11 ± 0.02	0.11 ± 0.03			–
Dorsal prostate (g) + SV[b,d]	1.53 ± 0.28	1.56 ± 0.24	1.52 ± 0.27			–
Dorsal prostate + SV[c,d]	0.37 ± 0.07	0.38 ± 0.05	0.37 ± 0.07			–
Ovaries (mg)[b]				92.6 ± 13.3	91.8 ± 13.7	95.4 ± 16.9
Ovaries[c]				34.3 ± 3.6	33.8 ± 3.4	35.0 ± 5.8
Uterus (g)[b]				0.36 ± 0.06	0.38 ± 0.06	0.38 ± 0.05
Uterus[c]				0.13 ± 0.02	0.14 ± 0.03	0.14 ± 0.02

2M, male fetus between two male fetuses; 1M, male fetus between a male fetus and a female fetus; 0M, male fetus between two female fetuses; 2F, female fetus between two female fetuses; 1F, female fetus between a male fetus and a female fetus; 0F, female fetus between two male fetuses.
No significant differences were observed between groups.
[a] Mean ± S.D.
[b] Absolute weight.
[c] Relative weight (g or mg per 100 g body weight).
[d] Seminal vesicle.

Table 7
Effects of prior intrauterine position on anogenital distance in ICR mice exposed to 17β-estradiol

Treatment and intrauterine position	Corn oil				17β-Estradiol			
	2M	0M	2F	0F	2M	0M	2F	0F
No. of litters	28	30	29	27	24	28	30	27
No. of pups	41	32	32	37	38	33	41	28
Body weight (g)	1.41 ± 0.08[a]	1.42 ± 0.05	1.32 ± 0.05	1.33 ± 0.04	1.42 ± 0.09	1.41 ± 0.10	1.32 ± 0.07	1.30 ± 0.11
AGD	1.92 ± 0.07	1.90 ± 0.06	0.95 ± 0.02	0.95 ± 0.03	1.92 ± 0.08	1.93 ± 0.06	0.93 ± 0.09	0.95 ± 0.05
AGD/body weight	1.36 ± 0.09	1.35 ± 0.10	0.75 ± 0.03	0.73 ± 0.05	1.40 ± 0.09	1.38 ± 0.10	0.75 ± 0.05	0.74 ± 0.07
AGD/$\sqrt[3]{\text{body weight}}$	1.71 ± 0.07	1.70 ± 0.10	0.88 ± 0.03	0.89 ± 0.05	1.70 ± 0.09	1.72 ± 0.11	0.89 ± 0.07	0.88 ± 0.08

2M, male fetus between two male fetuses; 0M, male fetus between two female fetuses; 2F, female fetus between two female fetuses; 0F, female fetus between two male fetuses.
No significant differences were observed between groups.
[a] Mean ± S.D.

Table 8
Effects of prior intrauterine position on sexual maturation in ICR mice exposed to 17β-estradiol

Treatment and intrauterine position	Corn oil				17β-Estradiol			
	2M	0M	2F	0F	2M	0M	2F	0F
No. of litters	28	30	29	27	24	28	30	27
No. of pups	39	30	31	35	37	31	39	28
Day of preputial separation	27.2 ± 1.5[a]	27.3 ± 1.3			27.0 ± 1.8	26.9 ± 2.0		
Body weight (g)	30.3 ± 1.9	31.1 ± 1.5			30.0 ± 2.1	31.3 ± 1.8		
Day of vaginal opening			24.5 ± 1.6	25.1 ± 1.5			24.4 ± 1.7	24.9 ± 1.6
Body weight (g)			21.5 ± 0.9	21.6 ± 1.2			21.6 ± 1.1	22.0 ± 1.5

2M, male fetus between two male fetuses; 0M, male fetus between two female fetuses; 2F, female fetus between two female fetuses; 0F, female fetus between two male fetuses.
No significant differences were observed between groups.
[a] Mean ± S.D.

Table 9
Effects of prior intrauterine position on reproductive organs after maturation in ICR mice exposed to 17β-estradiol

Treatment and intrauterine position	Corn oil				17β-Estradiol			
	2M	0M	2F	0F	2M	0M	2F	0F
No. of litters	28	30	29	27	24	28	30	27
No. of pups	34	25	26	30	32	26	34	23
Terminal body weight (g)	51.5 ± 4.2[a]	53.6 ± 4.4	40.3 ± 2.7	41.2 ± 3.4	55.1 ± 5.1	53.1 ± 6.2	41.8 ± 2.1	42.1 ± 3.1
Testes (g)	257.9 ± 28.4[b]	266.5 ± 23.5			259.3 ± 25.5	260.3 ± 19.9		
	486.3 ± 76.3[c]	484.2 ± 71.3			488.3 ± 62.3	479.1 ± 60.9		
Epididymides (mg)	89.5 ± 8.7	92.2 ± 9.3			94.6 ± 7.1	93.1 ± 7.1		
	175.2 ± 21.5	161.9 ± 16.9			161.2 ± 13.6	173.6 ± 4.9		
Seminal vesicle (mg)	413.9 ± 30.6	452.2 ± 13.9			431.3 ± 18.2	454.8 ± 21.0		
	812.8 ± 56.9	802.6 ± 44.2			811.5 ± 42.3	809.3 ± 33.5		
Ovary (mg)			15.3 ± 3.3	14.6 ± 4.2			15.5 ± 3.9	15.3 ± 4.5
			35.6 ± 7.5	33.2 ± 4.6			34.1 ± 6.9	33.6 ± 5.1

2M, male fetus between two male fetuses; 0M, male fetus between two female fetuses; 2F, female fetus between two female fetuses; 0F, female fetus between two male fetuses.
Five males in each group were processed to the transcardial perfusion. Male pups shown here were subjected to necropsy.
No significant differences were observed between groups.
[a] Mean ± S.D.
[b] Absolute weight.
[c] Relative weight (mg per 100 g body weight).

3.2.3. *Weights and histology of reproductive organs of offspring in adulthood*

Table 9 shows the terminal body weights and reproductive organ weights of male and female offspring at 10 weeks of age. No significant differences were observed in the body weights, or the absolute and relative organ weights, between the groups. In the histological observation of the prostates by electron microscope, and reproductive organs of males and females by light microscope, no changes were observed.

4. Discussion

4.1. *Anogenital distance*

The AGD of newborn rats and mice is longer in males than in females, and it has been demonstrated that the AGD varies as a function of the intrauterine position of the animals [1–4]. The AGD is commonly regarded as a hormonally sensitive developmental measure in rodents [26], and it has been reported that a longer AGD is associated with the presence of males on either side of the developing fetus in utero, and a shorter AGD is associated with the absence of males on either side of the developing female fetus [27,28]. Evidence supports the hypothesis that exposure to testosterone and estrogen in utero are critical components of the intrauterine position effect [29]. Female mouse fetuses located between two males have significantly higher serum testosterone levels and lower estradiol levels than their sisters that were located between two females. Male mice located between two females have significantly higher levels of estradiol and lower levels of testosterone than males located between two males [4,12]. The mechanism for these intrauterine position effects can be traced to amniotic fluid transport between adjacent fetuses in uterus [30,31]. However, our data were not consistent with previous reports showing a significant effect of intrauterine position on AGD in rats and mice [2,32–34].

A failure to replicate the effects of intrauterine position on AGD may have potentially arisen for a number of methodological reasons. A set of potential problems revolves around possible errors in the measurement of the AGD. One possibility was that our calipers were not accurate enough to detect small mean differences between females located in various positions in the uterus, found by other investigators [2,32–34]. However, as the calipers could be read to an accuracy of 0.01 mm, they were clearly accurate enough to detect differences of this magnitude. Another possibility is that of human error. Given the short distances being measured, it was absolutely essential that all fetuses or pups be oriented in exactly the same fashion, as even a slight arching of the animal's back could significantly distort the AGD measurements. Two attempts were made to minimize these sorts of errors: (i) efforts were made to orient all fetuses or pups in exactly the same fashion when measuring, and (ii) two independent measurements were taken for each fetus or pup and averaged to obtain the value used. In most cases, the different measurements were highly similar for the same animal.

Simon and Cologer-Clifford [35] reported an absence of an intrauterine position effect on AGD in CF-1 mice. Their finding is only the second study to examine AGD in CF-1 mice, and the original report was more than 10 years old [2]. Therefore, it is possible that either genetic drift, or differences in the source of the CF-1 breeding stock, may

underlie the discrepant findings. In this context, Jubilan and Nyby [6] also found no effect of intrauterine position on the AGD/body weight (AGDI) in CF-1 offspring, using stock from the same supplier employed by the Simon and Cologer-Clifford [35] report.

4.2. Sexual maturation and estrous cycle

Since prenatal exposure of females to testosterone delays vaginal opening [36,37], it was predicted that females situated proximate to males in utero would display vaginal opening later than females not proximate to males during gestation. However, in the present study in rats and mice, there were no significant differences in days of vaginal opening or preputial separation between the groups (see Tables 3 and 8), suggesting that intrauterine position did not influence the sexual maturation in males and females. vom Saal [4] reported that 2F and 0F mice did not differ significantly in the age at vaginal opening, although 2F tended to exhibit vaginal opening at a slightly younger age than 0F (see categorization of the different intrauterine positions shown in Section 2).

Female mouse fetuses occupying an intrauterine position between male fetuses exhibit longer estrous cycles in adulthood than females formerly residing in utero next to other female fetuses [11,27]. Prior intrauterine position is therefore a source of individual variation in the production of, and sensitivity to, cues that modulate the timing of puberty and the length of subsequent estrous cycles in female mice, suggesting that prenatally androgenized females occupying an intrauterine position between male fetuses may have a reproductive advantage over other females at high population densities [4]. In the present study of rats, however, 0F and 2F did not differ significantly in the estrous cycle length, although the estrous cycle length of 2F (4.16 ± 0.29) tended to be shorter than that of 0F (4.20 ± 0.42). Prior studies have shown that, in the absence of males, vaginal estrus does not correlate with ovulation in peripubertal CF-1 female mice [38,39]. Further studies in which ovulation is confirmed by the presence of corpora lutea and tubal ova is thus required.

4.3. Behavior

Kinsley et al. [40] demonstrated that female mice located in utero between two female fetuses exhibited higher levels of regulatory running activity (locomotor activity) in adulthood than females located between two male fetuses. Male mice, which were less active than females, were also influenced by intrauterine contiguity, indicating that intrauterine position influences the behaviors involved in the maintenance of metabolic homeostasis. Previous work has shown that female rats and mice display higher levels of regulatory running activity than males, and that perinatal testosterone is responsible for this sex difference [41–43]. The present study also showed female rats displayed higher levels of running activity than males.

In the present study of rats, however, there were no significant differences in spontaneous activity in the wheel cage, or in ambulation in the circular area, as well as the frequency of rearing, grooming and defecation between the groups in both sexes, suggesting no intrauterine position effects on locomotor activity in rats. Interestingly, the frequency of urination for females that developed in utero between male fetuses was significantly increased, more than in females that developed in utero between female fetuses (see Table 5). Females that were located between female fetuses in utero were found to urine mark at higher rates than females that were located between male fetuses, in adulthood in CF-1 mice [2]. The frequency of urination in the circular area, observed in the present study, would relate to the emotionality of the animals when placed in a novel environment, and differ from urine marking. Female urine marking may play an important role in communication between female mice, as well as in inter-sexual communication. It has been suggested that in natural populations of mice, females urine mark to advertise their dominant breeding status to other females; urine-marking appears to be dependent on female social/reproductive status [44]. Taken together, these observations suggest that the intrauterine position did not affect behavior as evaluated by the open field test and the wheel cage.

4.4. Prostate development

Growth and differentiation of the prostate is primarily under the control of androgen. Expression of the androgen metabolizing enzyme, 5α-reductase, within prostatic mesenchyme cells is also necessary for normal development of the prostate [45]. The possibility that estrogen might be involved in modulating the effects of androgen on prostatic development during early life has been the subject of speculation for over 60 years [46–49]. Timms et al. [50] demonstrated that development of the urogenital system in male and female rat fetuses is influenced by their intrauterine proximity to fetuses of the same or opposite sex, and suggested that exposure to supplemental estradiol (due to being positioned between two female fetuses) induces prostatic bud development in females, and enhances the growth of prostatic buds in both males and females. An enlarged prostate in males located between two female fetuses was hypothesized to be mediated by an elevated level of serum estradiol, relative to males located between two males, due to the transport of estradiol from adjacent female fetuses [4,30]. This hypothesis was confirmed in a study in which estradiol was experimentally elevated by 50% in male mouse fetuses (via maternal administration), and the estrogen-treated males showed both a significant increase in prostatic glandular buds and significantly larger buds during fetal life, as well as enlarged prostates in adulthood [46].

In the present study, however, the weights of the prostates (with seminal vesicles) of the rats at PND 21, and the ventral and dorsal prostates (with seminal vesicles) of the rats at 10

weeks of age, were not significantly different between the groups. In addition, morphological observation of prostates in the rats and mice, in weanlings or adulthood, by light and electron microscope revealed no alteration in males located in any uterine position.

4.5. Developmental exposure to 17β-estradiol: interaction with endogenous estradiol during pregnancy in mice

In the present study we examined the effect of 17β-estradiol administration to pregnant mice on the early development of the prostate in male mouse fetuses, with attention being paid to the intrauterine position of the males. Timms et al. [17] reported that exposure to 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-*p*-dioxin (TCDD) significantly reduced serum estradiol in males located between two females, but not males located between two males, and also significantly interfered with initial budding and subsequent growth of the prostate in males located between two females or two males. In sharp contrast, the seminal vesicles were larger in the control males located between two males than in control males located between two females, similar to prior findings in mice [29], and TCDD only decreased the size of the seminal vesicles in males located between two males. Taken together, the findings of Timms et al. [17] demonstrate that in utero exposure to TCDD disrupts the development of the prostate, but this disruption depends on an interaction with background levels of estradiol. Howdeshell and vom Saal [16] reported that fetal mouse exposure via the mother to an estrogen-mimicking chemical, bisphenol A, increased the rate of postnatal growth in males and females, and also advanced the timing of puberty in females. They also demonstrated that the greatest response to bisphenol A occurred in males and females with the highest background levels of endogenous estradiol during fetal life, due to their intrauterine position, while fetuses with the lowest endogenous levels of estradiol showed no response to maternal bisphenol A treatment, suggesting that estrogen-mimicking chemicals interact with endogenous estrogen in altering the course of development.

In the present study, however, mouse fetal exposure via the mother to low-dose 17β-estradiol revealed no changes in the rate of postnatal growth in males and females that developed in any intrauterine position in utero. Therefore, we concluded that exposure to low-dose estrogenic endocrine disrupting chemicals during fetal life does not contribute to the intrauterine position.

5. General discussion

We are at a loss to explain why we were unable to replicate the effects of intrauterine position on AGD, or to find intrauterine position effects upon sexual maturation, and the estrous cycle. However, we know the difficulty in demonstrating intrauterine position effects upon morphology and behavior [35]. In addition, in contrast to earlier work [11] which examined blood androgen titers in mouse fetuses, Baum et al. [51] reported that whole-body androgen levels in female rat fetuses did not vary as a function of intrauterine position, and suggested that intrauterine position effects upon rodent morphology and behavior may not have the robust generality that is generally assumed.

Howdeshell and vom Saal [16] demonstrated that one source of variability in the response of both male and female mouse fetuses to an estrogen-mimicking chemical, bisphenol A, is their background levels of endogenous sex hormones. They suggested that a very small increase in the level of endogenous estradiol may substantially increase the susceptibility of fetuses to endocrine disrupting chemicals consumed or absorbed through the skin or lungs by pregnant animals and humans.

Contiguous [1,52], caudal [53,54], and no effect [51,55–57], due to intrauterine position, have been reported. Hotchkiss et al. [55] in a study with Sprague–Dawley rats examined the effect of intrauterine position on concentrations of testosterone in several different tissues. No effect of either contiguous or caudal intrauterine position on testosterone concentration was detected in fetal carcasses, reproductive tracts, or amniotic fluid. Furthermore, no correlation was found between masculinization due to intrauterine position and increasing anogenital distance. It is unclear at this time why there is such a discrepancy between the previous findings and the present results in rats and mice. However, varied strains of rats and mice, multiple uncontrolled variables, and different criteria for defining the effects of intrauterine positioning, may all contribute to this uncertainty. In addition, the discrepancies in the data may be attributed to such factors as the dietary influences (such as background levels of phytoestrogens and caloric intake), caging (steel versus polycarbonate), bedding, housing (group versus individual), and seasonal variation, as well as differences among the studies in control body and prostate weights [58,59].

The results of the present study clearly showed that intrauterine position of embryos/fetuses did not influence postnatal development, including sexual maturation and behavior.

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Workshop 6.2

Hormonally active agents and plausible relationships to adverse effects on human health*

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Abstract: A hormonally active compound was first identified in the book *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson in 1962, implicating the effect of pesticides such as DDT and the derivatives. Nearly four decades later, the book *Our Stolen Future* by Theo Colborn et al., and other pertinent publications have revisited and broadened the issue regarding a variety of possible chemicals and the area exposed. Translation and publication became available in Japan within the last four years. Since then, Japan joined the member countries involved in the global issue of endocrine disruptors, the "environmental hormone".

Although a significant number of chemicals possessing a hormone-like action have been recognized for many years, and the action of their biological plausibility related to the receptor-mediated effects strongly suggests possible human effects comparable to hormonal changes in wildlife, little is known about evidences or adversities in experimental animals and humans. The most essential key to resolving these dilemmas may be to understand the mechanism of actions (i.e., a possible low-dose issue). In other words, the mechanism at the low-dose effect may be resolved simultaneously by the mechanism of three major questions linked to the low-dose issue; namely, threshold, possible oscillation, and additive and/or synergistic action.

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this paper is to summarize all currently available information on hormonally active agents and plausible relationships to adverse effects on human health from the standpoints of the mechanisms of action of these chemicals.

It is not uncommon to come across agrochemicals and industrial chemicals that have hormone-mimic effects. These chemicals, the so-called "environmental hormones", often accumulate at detectable levels in the environment, and it has been feared that they may have adverse effects not only on wildlife but also on human beings. Following reports of feminization and decreased colony size of wild creatures, and reports suggesting a possible association of these chemicals with abnormalities of reproductive organs and oncogenesis in humans, attention has focused on the possibility that these occurrences may be associated with exposure to endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs). In this connection, we would like to draw the attention of the reader to a Japanese translation of the book *Our Stolen Future*, written by Theo Colborn et al.

*Report from a SCOPE/IUPAC project: Implication of Endocrine Active Substances for Human and Wildlife (J. Miyamoto and J. Burger, editors). Other reports are published in this issue, *Pure Appl. Chem.* 75, 1617–2615 (2003).

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This paper will review the subjects related to EDCs, the courses of arguments regarding the possible hazards of these chemicals, and current medical subjects pertaining to them.

CHEMICALS WITH HORMONE-MIMIC ACTIONS

Substances with hormone-mimic effects can be divided into four groups:

- hormones found in vivo;
- medicines with hormone-mimic actions manufactured for use in hormonal therapy, etc.;
- plant hormones known to exert phytoestrogen-like actions; and
- chemicals found in environments that can interact with hormone receptors.

In addition, substances that do not interact with hormone receptors but exert effects on gonads by their modifying effects on steroid metabolism may be deemed as hormone-mimics in the broader sense of the term. In this paper, however, emphasis shall be placed on the hormone-mimic actions mediated by receptors that play essential roles in the mechanism of actions of hormone-mimics.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RECEPTOR-MEDIATED ACTIONS OF HORMONE-MIMICS

The receptor-mediated actions of hormone-mimics are fundamentally characterized by the similarity in structures of the receptors involved, crossing the barrier of animal species. These characteristics allow us to speculate the possibility that the actions of these chemicals exerted in nature may also occur in humans.

Second, since similarities in the structure of various sex steroids and hormones are also known, it is possible that each individual hormone-mimic exerts diverse effects by acting on male hormone receptors, female hormone receptors, and nuclear receptors (including many orphan receptors), etc.

Third, many of these chemicals are excreted from the living body in the form of conjugated inactive substances instead of as degraded metabolites. They may also be eliminated in the unchanged form. Therefore, if feces and urine containing these substances are eliminated into river water, it is plausible to imagine that even inactivated hormones can sometimes become active and exert hormone-mimic actions in the environment. This is one of the characteristics unique to this class of chemicals.

Receptor-mediated responses involve many unresolved questions. Various undefined elements may be involved, including the relationship between receptor binding and signals, the relationship between receptor-ligand binding (ligand: substances that can bind to receptors) and the dissociation of ligands from receptors, signal cross-talks, involvement of unknown nuclear receptors, etc.

The actions of these chemicals add to the effects of intrinsic hormones. For this reason, these chemicals may exert their actions in a way different from that known for other chemicals that do not have structural or functional counterparts in vivo. For example, stimulation of hormone receptors by these extrinsic chemicals may modify homeostasis in vivo, leading to down-modulation of the physiological stimulation of these receptors by the intrinsic ligands. Therefore, the influence of the continued effects of environmental hormones needs special study.

PITFALL IN THE EFFECTS OF HORMONE-MIMICS

We must distinguish the interactions of endocrine hormone-mimics with hormone receptors from the hazards caused to endocrine tissue. Bearing this in mind, let us now summarize the problems related to the effects of hormone-mimics.

Antagonistic effects maintaining homeostasis

The endocrine system is regulated by homeostatic mechanisms. It is not uncommon for the effects of small amounts of hormone-mimics to interfere slightly with these mechanisms, often with no adverse influence; this is well known. However, this is not always the case. There seems to be a group of genes that act antagonistically to each other in the maintenance of homeostasis.

With the uterotrophic assay, which is used to check for estrogenic activity, the ovary is removed in advance and the blood level of the intrinsic female hormone is reduced to the minimum. Under the thus-created extremely shrinking state of the uterus, the test substance (a chemical or hormone) is administered to evaluate for its effects on the inflation of the uterus. This test (checking for growth of the uterus in ovariectomized animals) is designed to evaluate the hormone activity and effects of hormone-mimics under conditions of blockade of homeostasis.

This test method itself is valid. However, there is no sufficient rational evidence that indicates that the responses observed under such indirect control conditions of the living body can serve as an indicator of the health hazards of hormone-mimics. Although the ovo-testes seen in lower vertebrates may be used if the effects observed were to be valid as such an indicator, there is no consensus on what is valid as an indicator of the health hazards of EDCs when mammals are used as experimental animals.

Down-regulation of the expression of receptors

It is known that the expression of gene-encoding receptors is down-regulated by continuous stimuli, leading to reduced receptor activity. This can lead to a paradoxical outcome wherein the effects observed in the presence of low levels of a substance are not seen at high levels of the same substance. If this phenomenon occurred in individual organisms, the dose–response relationship will be nonlinear.

This means that extrapolation of results obtained at high levels of the chemicals, to conditions where low levels of the same substance are present, would be difficult. It is needed to test the validity of this hypothesis; analysis of the mechanisms underlying this phenomenon if the hypothesis were indeed valid, are thus important. Studies to resolve these questions are now under way.

Data gap concerning the effects of female hormones

In mature women, there are high levels of physiological hormones in vivo, and these are subject to cyclic control. It has been proposed that girls with inadequate physical growth begin menstruation at lower ages and undergo sexual maturation earlier than usual, and that hormone-mimics in these subjects can precipitate breast cancer.

The weak links in this hypothesis have been pointed out, and it has been shown experimentally that estrogen by itself may be teratogenic, although this tendency has been shown to be weak. It is known that organisms are programmed such that excessive exposure to estrogens during the intrauterine period or other developmental stages is avoided.

There are many open questions as to the mechanism by which mature females remain physiologically stable, even when exposed daily to high levels of estrogen (400 pM/l). Some additional dramatic effects may be needed to disturb this homeostatic physiology.

Multigeneration tests and effects on fetuses

It has been shown that exposure to hormones or hormone-mimics during intrauterine or early neonatal periods can lead to irreversible changes in the pattern of development. This susceptibility period is short, extending from the 13th gestational day to about one week after birth. These effects are the so-called "intrauterine window effects."