receptor (GPCR) undergoes considerable internalization and desensitization to agonists [32], raising the possibility of intermittent administration in human clinics.

A recent work involving murine models demonstrated that the hypothalamic melanocortin activation caused parallel metabolically-beneficial effects in multiple tissues (e.g. skeletal muscle, liver, brown adipose tissue and white adipose tissue) via the sympathetic nervous system (Fig. 3). Agonistic agents for MC4R provoke substrate shift and nutrient partitioning without elevating level of circulating triglyceride or FFA, thereby reducing ectopic lipid overload [23]. From the standpoint of therapeutic application, recent research has highlighted an array of leptin sensitizing peptides, chemical chaperones or chemical agents, including amylin, 4-phenyl butyric acid (PBA), tauroursodeoxycholic acid (TUDCA) and metformin [15,25,27]. Further investigation to explore the possible involvement of such leptin sensitizers in hypothalamic melanocortin signaling pathways would be extremely intriguing.

In summary, the chemical activation of MC4R in a safe manner can ameliorate hyperphagia as well as fuel dyshomeostasis in multiple metabolic organs, achieving "ideal" oligo- or monopharmacy [11] for the treatment of obesity-diabetes syndrome in humans.

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Adipogenic differentiation of human induced pluripotent stem cells: Comparison with that of human embryonic stem cells

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ABSTRACT

Induced pluripotent stem (iPS) cells were recently established from human fibroblasts. In the present study we investigated the adipogenic differentiation properties of four human iPS cell lines and compared them with those of two human embryonic stem (ES) cell lines. After 12 days of embryoid body formation and an additional 10 days of differentiation on Poly-L-ornithine and fibronectin-coated dishes with adipogenic differentiation medium, human iPS cells exhibited lipid accumulation and transcription of adipogenesis-related molecules such as C/EBPα, PPARγ2, leptin and aP2. These results demonstrate that human iPS cells have an adipogenic potential comparable to human ES cells.

1. Introduction

Pluripotent embryonic stem (ES) cells have been considered potent candidates for regenerative medicine as an unlimited source of cells for the transplantation therapy and a useful tool for the investigation of cell development/differentiation, especially after establishment of human ES cells [1]. We previously clarified the differentiation process of mouse, monkey and human ES cells into vascular cells [2–4] and demonstrated that transplantation of vascular cells derived from human ES cells may constitute a novel strategy for vascular regeneration [4,5]. A number of immunological and ethical problems remain to be overcome before clinical application of the ES cells, however. Recently, novel ES cell-like pluripotent cells, termed induced pluripotent stem (iPS) cells, were generated by introducing four transcription factors (Oct3/4, Sox2, Klf4 and c-Myc) into mouse skin fibroblasts [6], and soon thereafter iPS cells were also generated from human skin fibroblasts [7,8]. Since then, a new generation of human iPS cells has been generated by introducing into fibroblasts just three of the aforementioned transcription factors (c-Myc was omitted) [9]. By overcoming the immunological and ethical problems associated with ES cells, iPS cells open a new avenue for cell transplantation-based regenerative medicine and provide a powerful new tool with which to investigate organ development/differentiation in specific disease states, especially in inherited diseases.

Generalized lipodystrophy consists of congenital and acquired types characterized by the lack of the whole adipose tissue, which leads to severe insulin-resistant diabetes, hypertriglyceridemia and fatty liver. We previously analyzed genes and phenotypes of congenital generalized lipodystrophic Japanese [10] and also demonstrated the long-lasting efficacy and safety of the leptin-replacement therapy in these patients [11–13]. Since metabolic abnormality in the mouse model is known to be cured by mature

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adipocytes transplantation, the regeneration therapy of the adipose tissue with human iPS cells-derived adipocytes is the ideal goal for lipodystrophic patients. Moreover, in vitro adipogenic differentiation system of human iPS cells will contribute to elucidate the pathogenesis of congenital generalized lipodystrophy when iPS cell lines are established from patients with lipodystrophy. In the present study we have investigated the adipogenic differentiation of human iPS cells and compared with that of human ES cells.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Cells and culture

Four human iPS cell lines (201B6, 201B7, 253G1 and 253G4) were investigated. The 201B6 (B6) and 201B7 (B7) lines were generated by introducing four transcription factors (Oct3/4, Sox2, Klf4 and c-Myc) into human skin fibroblasts while the 253G1 (G1) and 253G4 (G4) lines were generated using only three factors (c-Myc was omitted) [9]. These iPS cell lines were maintained as previously described [7]. Two human ES cell lines (H9 and KhES-1) were used and maintained as previously described [1,14].

2.2. Adipogenic differentiation

For embryoid body (EB) formation, iPS and ES colonies were digested with 1 mg/ml collagenase type IV (GIBCO, CA, USA) and plated onto non-adherent bacterial culture dishes, where they were allowed to aggregate in maintenance medium without bFGF. Retinoic acid (Sigma–Aldrich, Japan) was added to the medium to a concentration of 100 nM from day 2 to day 5. After 12 days, EBs were transferred to 6-well plates coated with a combination of 30 μg/ml Poly-L-ornithine (Sigma–Aldrich) and 2 μg/ml fibronectin (Sigma–Aldrich). To induce adipocyte differentiation from iPS and ES cells, we applied a modification of a procedure described previously for use with mouse and human ES cells (Fig. 1) [15–19]. Differentiation was induced for 10 days using medium consisting of DMEM-F12, 10% KSR, and an adipogenic cocktail (0.5 mM IBMX, 0.25 μM dexamethasone, 1 μg/ml insulin, 0.2 mM indomethacin and 1 μM pioglitazone).

2.3. Immunocytochemistry

Immunocytochemistry was carried out as previously described [7]. The anti-human primary antibodies included Nanog (R&D Systems, MN, USA) and Alexa 488-conjugated SSEA-4 (Santa Cruz Biotechnology Inc., CA, USA) and TRA1-60 (CHEMICON, LA, USA). The TRA1-60 antibody was labeled using an Alexa Fluor 488 Monoclonal Antibody Labeling Kit (Molecular Probes, OR, USA). Alexa 546-conjugated donkey anti-sheep IgG (Molecular Probes, OR, USA) served as the secondary antibody. Alkaline phosphatase activity was detected using a BCIP/NBT substrate system (Dakocytomation, CA, USA).

2.4. Oil Red O staining and microscopic analysis of adipocytes

Cells were washed with phosphate-buffered saline (PBS) twice, fixed in 3.7% formaldehyde for 1 h and then stained with 0.6% (w/v) Oil Red O (Nacalai Tesque, Japan) solution (60% isopropanol, 40% water) for 2 h at room temperature. The cells were then washed with water to remove unbound dye. Subsequently, the bound Oil Red O was eluted with isopropanol.

After staining with Oil Red O, each EB was examined microscopically for the presence of adipocyte colonies, and the percentage of EBs with outgrowths showing adipocyte positivity was determined as previously described [15]. EBs in which adipocytes accounted for more than half of their circumference were considered adipocyte-positive. The percent area of Oil Red O staining (+) was determined at 20× magnification by counting the number of pixels exhibiting Oil Red O positivity in selected microscope fields (449 × 338 pixels). Four randomly selected fields were examined in each well of a 6-well plate, and the percent area was calculated as the average for the four fields. Six independent experiments were performed for each cell line.

Table 1
Primers for reverse-transcription polymerase chain reaction.

Gene		Sequence
Nanog	Sense	CAGCCCCGATTCTTCCACCAGTCCC
	Antisense	CGGAAGATTCCCAGTCGGGTTCACC
PPARγ2	Sense	ATTGACCCAGAAAGCGATTC
	Antisense	CAAAGGAGTGGGAGTGGTCT
C/EBPα	Sense	GCAAACTCACCGCTCCAATG
	Antisense	TTAGGTTCCAAGCCCCAAGTC
aP2	Sense	AAGCTTAGATGGGGGTGTCCTG
	Antisense	TCGTGGAAGTGACGCCTTTC
Leptin	Sense	GAACCCTGTGCGGATTCTTGTG
	Antisense	CGTTTCTTFAAGGCATACTGGTGAG
GAPDH	Sense	ACCACAGTCCATGCCATCAC
	Antisense	TCCACCACCCTGTTGCTGT
PPARγ2 (real-time RT-PCR)	Sense	GATACACTGTCTGCAAACATATCACAA
	Antisense	CCACGGAGCTGATCCCAA
	Probe	AGAGATGCCATTCTGGCCCACCAACTT

2.5. Reverse-transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) and quantitative real-time PCR

Total RNA was extracted using TRizol Reagent (Invitrogen, CA, USA) and treated with RNase-Free DNase Set (QIAGEN, Germany) to remove any contaminating genomic DNA. For RT-PCR, cDNA was synthesized using a PrimeScript RT reagent Kit (Takara Bio Inc., Japan), after which RT-PCR was run using ExTaq (Takara Bio Inc.). For quantitative real-time PCR, TaqMan PCR was carried out using a Step One Plus Real-Time PCR System as instructed by the manufacturer (Applied Biosystems, CA, USA). Levels of mRNA were normalized to those of 18S mRNA. The primers used are listed in Table 1.

2.6. Statistical analysis

Data are expressed as means ± S.E.M. Statistical significance was evaluated using ANOVA for comparison among six groups. Values of $P < 0.05$ were considered significant.

3. Results

3.1. Adipogenic differentiation of human iPS and ES cells

Morphological phenotypes, immunoreactivities of Nanog, SSEA-4 and TRA-1-60, and ALP activity of human iPS cells did not differ

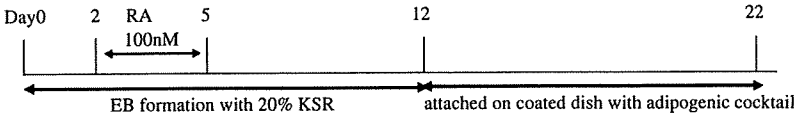

Fig. 1. Schematic diagram of the experimental protocol used for adipocyte differentiation from human ES and human iPS cells. EB: embryoid body. Adipogenic cocktail: 0.5 mM IBMX, 0.25 μM dexamethasone, 1 μg/ml insulin, 0.2 mM indomethacin and 1 μM pioglitazone.

from those of human ES cells (Fig. 2). In order to assess their potential for adipogenic differentiation, the human iPS cells were subjected to adipogenic induction culture. After 12 days of EB formation, EBs derived from human iPS cells were attached to coated dishes to induce differentiation. Several kinds of coating for the dishes, including gelatin, collagen IV and fibronectin were compared, and the efficiency of EB attachment and adipogenic differentiation were the best on dishes coated with a combination of Poly-L-ornithine and fibronectin. On day 15, after 3 days of adipogenic differentiation following the EB formation, differentiated cells containing small cytoplasmic lipid droplets were observed spreading outward from the attached EBs. On day 22, the lipid accumulation was evaluated by staining the cells with Oil Red O.

To evaluate the adipogenic potential of individual iPS cell lines, the percentage of EB outgrowths having adipocyte colonies and the percent area of Oil Red O staining (+) were determined. For each of iPS and ES cell lines tested, 40–60% of EBs formed adipocyte colonies (Table 2). In all of the iPS cell lines, lipid accumulation was similar to that seen in human ES cell lines (Fig. 3), though the B7 line showed stronger lipid accumulation than the other cell lines.

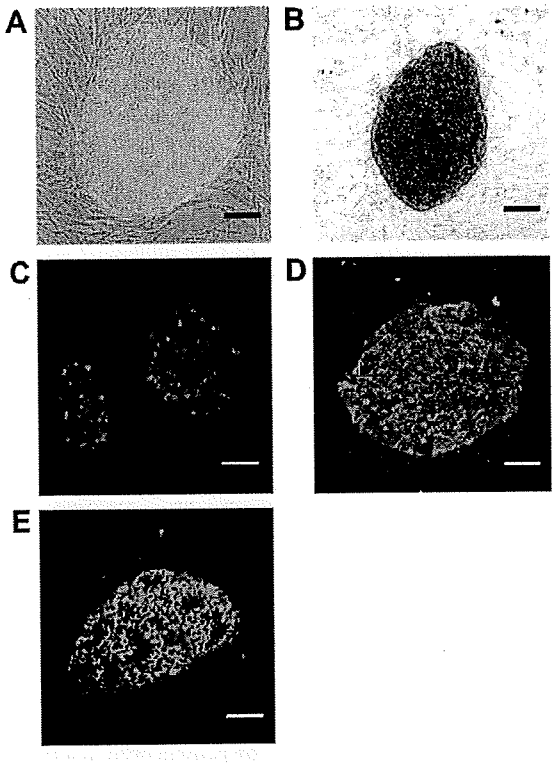

Fig. 2. Morphology of undifferentiated human iPS cells (G4). (A) Phase-contrast photomicrograph of an undifferentiated colony. (B) Alkaline phosphatase activity. (C) Immunofluorescent staining with Nanog. (D) Immunofluorescent staining with SSEA-4. (E) Immunofluorescent staining with TRA1-60. Scale bar = 100 μM.

Table 2
% of EBs with adipocyte colonies.

Cell line	[Number of EBs with adipocytecolonies/total number of EBs]
201B6	54.1% [40/74]
201B7	59.7% [46/77]
253G1	50.0% [35/70]
253G4	56.4% [44/78]
H9	48.8% [39/80]
KhES-1	45.5% [35/77]

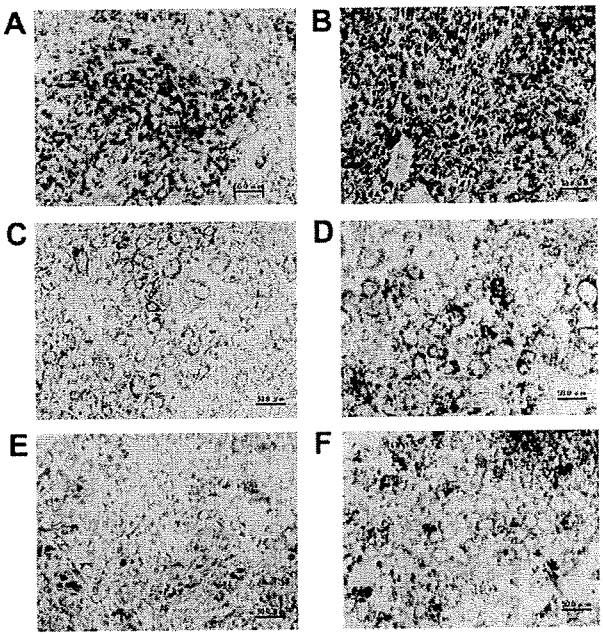

Fig. 3. Oil Red O staining of adipocytes derived from human iPS cells (A–D) and ES cells (E, F) on day 22. B6 (B) B7 (C) G1 (D) G4 (E) H9 (F) KhES-1. Scale bar = 50 μM.

Statistical analysis of the percent area of Oil Red O staining (+) showed no significant differences among the cell lines (Fig. 4).

3.2. Expression of adipogenesis-related molecules

Using RT-PCR, transcription of adipogenic markers was investigated on days 0 and 22 of differentiation (Fig. 5A). Though not detected at day 0, mRNAs encoding the adipogenic transcription factors C/EBPα (CCAAT/enhancer binding protein α) and PPARγ2 (peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor γ2) were detected on day 22. In contrast, expression of Nanog mRNA was strongly suppressed on day 22, as compared with its expression on day 0. Expression of the mature adipocyte markers leptin and aP2 (adipocyte fatty acid binding protein) was also clearly detected on day 22. All of the human iPS cell lines expressed mRNAs encoding adipogenesis-related molecules at levels that were comparable to the levels seen in human ES cell lines (Fig. 5A). In Quantitative real-time PCR analysis, expression of PPARγ2 mRNA differed somewhat among the iPS and ES cell lines. The differences between the B7 line and the two ES cell lines were significant, but other differences were not significant (Fig. 5B).

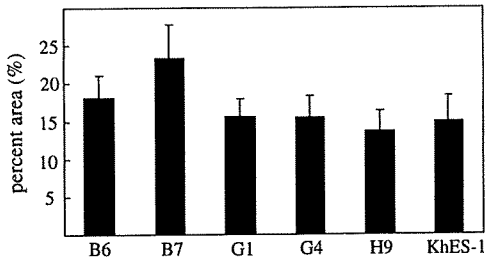

Fig. 4. Percent area of Oil Red O staining. Results are means of six independent experiments. No significant differences were observed among the iPS and ES cell lines.

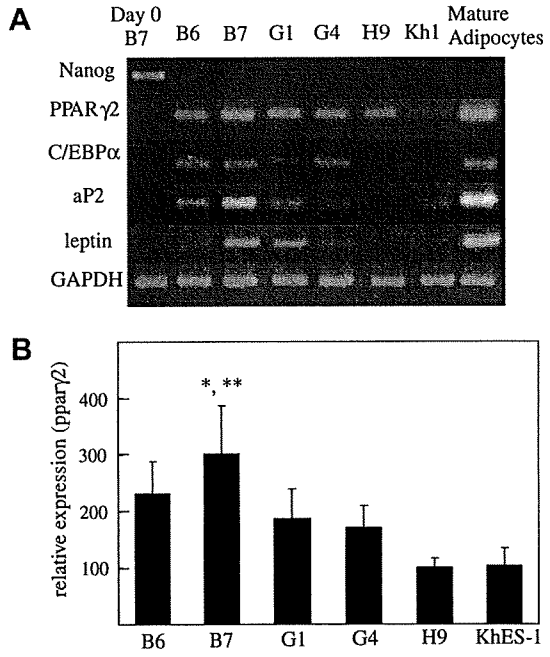

Fig. 5. (A) Transcription of the adipocyte-specific markers PPARγ2, CEBP/α, aP2 and leptin. RNA samples from undifferentiated human iPS cells (B7, day 0) and differentiated stage iPS cells (B6, B7, G1, G4) and human ES cells (H9, KhES-1), as well as mature human adipocytes differentiated from human adipose-derived mesenchymal stem cells (positive control), were analyzed by RT-PCR. Nanog is an undifferentiated human ES cell marker. GAPDH served as an internal standard for RT-PCR. Kh1: KhES-1. Adipose: human mature adipocytes differentiated from human adipose-derived mesenchymal stem cells. (B) Relative levels of PPARγ2 mRNA expression are shown as means ± S.E.M. of 4–6 independent experiments and normalized to those of 18S. The levels are expressed as percentages of the expression in the H9 cell line. $^{*}P < 0.05$ vs. H9. $^{**}P < 0.05$ vs. KhES-1.

4. Discussion

The present study demonstrates that human iPS cells have adipogenic potential comparable to human ES cells. Four human iPS cell lines of two generations were investigated. The B6 and B7 were generated by introducing four transcription factors (Oct3/4, Sox2, Klf4 and c-Myc) into human skin fibroblasts while the G1 and G4 were generated using only three factors (c-Myc was omitted) [9]. After 12 days of embryoid body formation and an additional 10 days of differentiation on Poly-L-ornithine and fibronectin-coated dishes with adipogenic differentiation medium, all human iPS cell lines of both generations exhibited lipid accumulation and transcription of such adipogenesis-related molecules as C/EBPα, PPARγ2, leptin and aP2. We also compared differentiation efficiency between human iPS and ES cells using two lines of human ES cells and found no apparent difference between human iPS and ES cells in properties of adipogenic differentiation including the time course and potential. In terms of lipid accumulation and transcription of adipogenesis-related molecules, human iPS-derived adipocytes appear to reach at least the same level of maturity as those derived from human ES cells. The B7 line tended to show stronger adipogenic potential than the other five iPS lines and the ES cell lines, but the difference in terms of percent area of Oil Red O staining (+) was not significant. The B7 line also showed significantly stronger expression of PPARγ2 than the two ES cell lines tested, but PPARγ2 expression varied among the different iPS cell lines, despite their having the same genetic background. We conclude that the adipogenic potential of iPS cells did not essentially differ from ES cells, though their adipogenic potentials were rather varied in each line.

Despite the prevalence of obesity, systems for research into human adipocyte biology remain underdeveloped, in part because of a lack of available human adipocyte cell lines. There are significant differences between adipocyte development in humans and mice [20]. The established in vitro adipocyte differentiation system using human iPS cells in the present study should make it possible to dissect out the cellular mechanisms underlying human adipocyte differentiation. It should also contribute to the better understanding of adipocyte biology and serve as a basis for advances in research into obesity and adipotoxicity, which has been proposed as the sum of the negative effects associated with obesity [21].

Adipogenesis is largely divided into two phases: the early phase consisting of the lineage commitment of adipocytes from pluripotent stem cells and the late phase consisting of the terminal differentiation of preadipocytes into adipocytes [22]. The molecular mechanism underlying the terminal adipocyte differentiation has been identified through analysis of the differentiation process in immortalized mouse preadipocyte cell lines (e.g., 3T3-L1 and 3T3-F442A cells) [22–24], but the differentiation from pluripotent stem cells during the early stage of adipogenesis must await further clarification. The establishment of adipocyte differentiation system with human iPS cells should facilitate that line of research.

In contrast to human ES cells, iPS cells can be induced from any human being irrespective of their genetic make-up. Consequently, the study of iPS cells should contribute to the identification of new susceptibility genes associated with obesity and metabolic syndrome, and to the clarification of the functions of those genes. The establishment of iPS cell lines from patients with inherited diseases presenting adipocyte abnormality should enable clarification of their pathogenesis. And because they overcome the immunological and ethical problems associated with human ES cells, iPS cell systems should also contribute to the development of novel regenerative therapies for reconstruction of soft tissue defects after tumor resections, extensive deep burns and lipodystrophy. The induced cells obtained with our protocol are not a homogeneous population. Consequently, at this stage human iPS cells may not yet have as much adipogenic potential as adipose-derived stem cells (ADSCs), which are derived from the stromal vascular fraction of human adipose tissue and are thought to be a safe and useful tool in adipose regenerative medicine [25]. About 80% of ADSCs differentiate into adipocytes under suitable conditions [26]. The next issue we plan to address will be the establishment of an improved differentiation protocol that includes a purification process such as cell sorting.

In conclusion, the present study demonstrates that human iPS cells have adipogenic potential that is generally equal to that of human ES cells. The use of iPS cells will contribute to the development of regenerative therapies of adipose tissue for lipodystrophy. This work should also contribute to our understanding of human adipogenesis and to the clarification of the pathogenesis and pathophysiology of obesity and metabolic syndrome, potentially leading to the development of new drug therapies.

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Orexins increase mRNA expressions of neurotrophin-3 in rat primary cortical neuron cultures

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ABSTRACT

Orexins and melanin-concentrating hormone (MCH) as orexigenic neuropeptides are present in the lateral hypothalamus, and their receptors are distributed in the cerebral cortex and hippocampus. In the present study, the regulatory effects of orexin-A, orexin-B and MCH on neurotrophin-3 (NT-3) and brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) expressions were examined in primary cortical neuron cultures using quantitative real-time PCR. Both orexin-A and orexin-B on 6-day exposure significantly increased the NT-3 mRNA at concentrations of 0.01, 0.1 and 1 μM. Orexin-A and B at 1 μM led to an increase of twofold or more over the control. However, no such NT-s mRNA increase occurred with exposure to MCH at the same concentrations as orexins. The mRNA expression of BDNF was significantly increased only by orexin-B at 1 μM. These findings suggest that orexins, but not MCH, may be an inducer of NT-3 in the cerebral cortex.

Orexins (orexin-A, orexin-B) and melanin-concentrating hormone (MCH) are orexigenic neuropeptides predominantly present in the lateral hypothalamus [23]. The orexin receptors (OX1R, OX2R) and MCH receptors (MCHR1) are distributed at high concentrations in the cerebral cortex and hippocampus [12]. These areas are postulated to play an important role in regulating the higher functions of the central nervous system, such as learning and memory, based on neuronal plasticity. In this regard, orexin has been reported to play a critical role in neuronal plasticity relevant to addiction in the ventral tegmental area and in long-term potentiation of synaptic transmission in the hippocampus [4,24]. MCH was also found to increase hippocampal synaptic transmission via increased synaptic efficacy [29]. Recently, we demonstrated that in rat primary cortical neuron cultures orexins and MCH decreased the expression of subunits of the NMDA (*N*-methyl-d-aspartate) receptor and the AMPA (α-amino-3-hydroxy-5-methyl-4-isoxazole propionic acid) receptor [31]. These findings suggest that orexin and MCH may regulate the higher functions, such as cognition and emotion, of the central nervous system as well as energy regulation. Moreover, neurotrophic factors also play an important role in regulating neuronal plasticity in the brain. The neurotrophin family includes brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), nerve growth factor (NGF), neurotrophin-3 (NT-3), neurotrophin-4 (NT-4) and neurotrophin-5 (NT-5) [15]. They exert their biological functions via each of the specific tyrosine kinase receptors (Trk) [2,5]. In the mature nervous system, neurotrophic factors, especially BDNF and NT-3, are demonstrated to be widely distributed in the brain, where they regulate the activity-dependent synaptic plasticity which is involved in the learning and memory regulation [22,27].

In this study, to explore the functions of orexin and MCH in the cerebral cortex, we examined the effects of chronic application of orexin and MCH on NT-3 and BDNF mRNA expressions using primary cortical neuron cultures.

For preparing rat cultured primary cortical neurons timed pregnant Sprague–Dawley rats were obtained from Japan SLC, Inc. (Japan) on gestational day 18. The animals were anesthetized with pentobarbital sodium (50 mg/kg, ip; Abbott, Abbott Park, IL, USA) and sacrificed by cervical dislocation. The fetuses were delivered and decapitated. In each experiment, fetuses were extracted from four maternal rats. All experiments were performed in accordance with the guideline established by the Institutional Animal Investigation Committee at Kyoto University (Med Kyo 06514), Chiba

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University (2006362). Every effort was made to optimize the comfort and to minimize the use of animals. According to our previous report [31], the cultured primary cortical neurons were prepared. Briefly, the cerebral cortex was dissected and cut into small pieces in Hanks' balanced salt solution (HBSS: Ca^{2+} and Mg^{2+} free) (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA, USA). The tissue was then dispersed with 0.025% trypsin-EDTA solutions (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA USA). The cell suspension was centrifuged at 800 × g for 5 min. The cells were suspended in Neurobasal Medium (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA, USA) supplemented with 2% of B27 containing antioxidants (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA, USA), L-glutamine (final concentration 0.5 mM) and antibiotic–antimycotic solution (final concentration 1%) (Nacalai tesque, Kyoto, Japan). The cell suspension was centrifuged at 800 × g for 5 min. Live cells were counted using a hemocytometer, and the cell suspension was then diluted with Neurobasal Medium at 2×10^6 cells/ml. Cells were seeded onto poly-D-lysine-coated 6-well plates (BD Bioscience, Discovery Labware, Bedford, MA, USA) in 2×10^6 cells/ml well. All cultures were maintained in Neurobasal Medium at 37 °C in 95% humidified air and 5% CO_2. At the 3rd day of culture, cytosine β-D-arabino-furanoside hydrochloride (final concentration 10 μM) (Sigma, St. Louis, MO, USA), a selective inhibitor of DNA synthesis, was added for 72 h in culture to prevent further proliferation of non-neuronal cells.

Orexin-A, orexin-B and MCH (0.01, 0.1 and 1 μM) were applied to cultured wells on the 6th day of culture, and the cultured cells were incubated for 6 days. Cultured medium which contained neuropeptides was changed every 3 days. On the 12th day of culture, the total cellular RNA was extracted from two cultured wells as one RNA sample using an RNeasy Mini Kit (Quiagen Sciences, MA, USA). The samples were stored at −20 °C until assay. All experiments consisted of three to six repetitive runs. For each experiment, two to six mRNA were obtained. Orexin-A, orexin-B and MCH were purchased from Peptide Institute Inc. (Osaka, Japan). Neuronal degeneration was assessed every 3 days after neuropeptide application using the efflux of lactate dehydrogenase by CytoTox 96® Non-Radioactive Cytotoxicity Assay (Promega Co., Madison, WI, USA) [31].

Quantitative real-time RT-PCR was conducted according to our previous report [31]. Quantitative real-time RT-PCR was performed with the ABI PRISM 7500 instrument (Applied Biosystems, Foster City, CA, USA) using SYBR green dye. Quantitative PCR was conducted in duplicate with 50 μl of reaction mixture in MicroAmp optical 96-well reaction plates. Each reaction well contained 12.5 μl of RNA sample, 25 μl of SYBR Green PCR Master Mix, 0.5 μl of RT Mix (Quiagen Sciences, MA, USA), 7 μl RNAase free water, and 25 pmol each of forward and reverse primers. Primers for glyceraldehyde-3-phosphate dehydrogenase (GAPDH) were as follows: [sense 5′-TGCACCACCAACTGCTTAGC-3′, antisense 5′-GGATGCAGGGATGATGTTCTG-3′], for OX1R, [sense 5′-GCATATCCACCTGGCCTGAA-3′, antisense 5′-CCACCATGCCAACGAGATCC-3′] [28], for OX2R, [sense 5′-CTACGCTCTTCTGCTATTGA-3′, antisense 5′-ACTGGCATGCTGATACATAC-3′] [28], for MCHR1, [sense 5′-TCA GCT TGG GCT ATG CTA ACA G-3′, antisense 5′-CAA CAC CAA GCG TTT TCG AA-3′ [8], for BDNF, [sense 5′-GGTCACAGTCCTGGAGAAAG-3′, antisense 5′-GCTTATCCTTATGAACCGCC-3] [30], and for NT-3, [sense 5′-TGCAGAGCATAAGAGTCACC-3′, antisense 5′-AAGTCAGTGCTCGGACGTAG-3′] [30]. All gene-specific mRNA expression values were normalized against the internal housekeeping gene GAPDH.

The results are presented as the mean ± S.E.M. of 8–31 RNA samples per group. Statistical analysis of the data was carried out by analysis of variance (ANOVA) followed by Dunnett's multiple range test. Statistical significance was defined as $p < 0.05$.

Quantitative RT-PCR analysis showed the presence of mRNAs of orexin receptors (OXR1, OXR2) and MCH receptor (MCHR1) in rat primary cortical neuron cultures used in this study (Fig. 1). Moreover, the basal expressions of NT-3 and BDNF mRNAs were also detected in the cultured cortical neurons (Fig. 2).

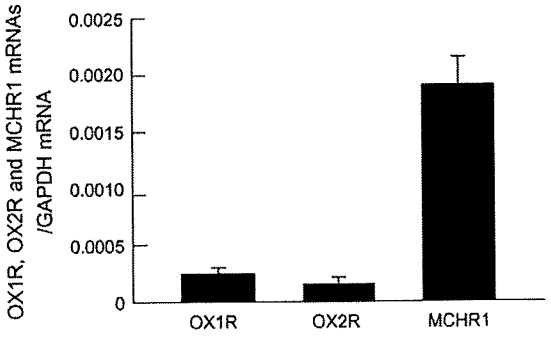

Fig. 1. mRNA expressions of orexin receptors (OX1R, OX2R) and MCHR1 in rat cultured cortical neurons. The values are mean ± S.E.M. from 9 to 10 RNA samples.

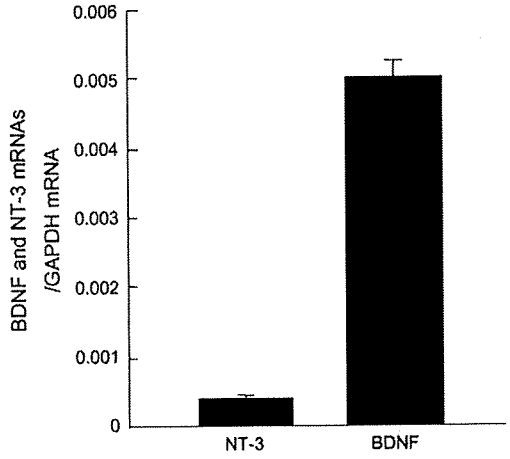

Fig. 2. mRNA expressions of BDNF and NT-3 in rat cultured cortical neurons. The values are mean ± S.E.M. from 8 to 31 RNA samples.

The mRNA expression of NT-3 following 6-day exposure to orexin-A at 0.01, 0.1 and 1 μM markedly increased to 1.57, 1.84 and 2.31 of control levels, respectively (Fig. 3). In a similar manner, orexin-B at 0.01, 0.1 and 1 μM also led to significant increases to 1.55, 1.63 and 2.49-fold of the control levels, respectively (Fig. 3).

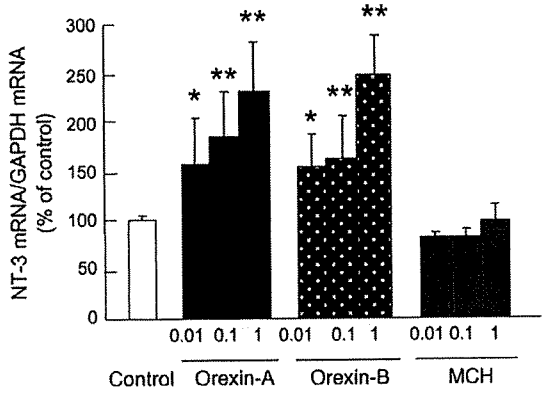

Fig. 3. Changes of mRNA expression of NT-3 induced by incubation for 6 days with orexin-A, orexin-B and MCH (0.01, 0.1, and 1 μM). Data are presented as a percentage of the control. The values are mean ± S.E.M. from 11 RNA samples. *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$ vs. control group.

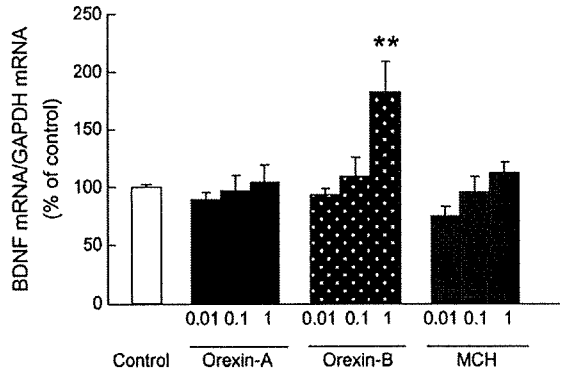

Fig. 4. Changes of mRNA expression of BDNF induced by incubation for 6 days with orexin-A, orexin-B and MCH (0.01, 0.1, and 1 μM). Data are presented as a percentage of the control. The values are mean ± S.E.M. from 11 RNA samples. $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$ vs. control group.

On the other hand, no change in the mRNA expression of NT-3 occurred on exposure to MCH (Fig. 3). The effects of these neuropeptides on BDNF mRNA expression were examined with the same RNA samples. Orexin-B at 1 μM significantly increased BDNF mRNA to 1.82-fold the control level, but its lower concentrations did not affect the mRNA expression of BDNF (Fig. 4). Neither orexin-A nor MCH changed the BDNF mRNA expression (Fig. 4).

In the present study, neuronal degeneration was not detected at 3 or 6 days after the application of neuropeptides (data not shown).

In the present study, the mRNA expression of NT-3 in primary cortical neuron cultures was markedly increased at 6 days after application of orexin-A and B, but not MCH. Moreover, only a high concentration of orexin-B significantly increased the expression of BDNF mRNA, while orexin-A and MCH did not. These findings suggest that orexins may be potent inducers of NT-3 in the cerebral cortex. Orexin and MCH are restrictedly present in the lateral hypothalamus and their neurons project to the cerebral cortex and hippocampus which contain their receptors. The radioimmunoreactive contents of orexins and MCH in the lateral hypothalamus have been shown to significantly increase in obese rodent models [19].

In the adult brain, especially in the cerebral cortex and hippocampus, BDNF and NT-3 act as neurotransmitter and neuromodulator in the central nervous system, and they act on TrkB and TrkC [5,25], respectively. Both BDNF and NT-3 have been implicated in the genesis of new synapses, which may be important for structural aspects of neuronal plasticity [18]. Neurotrophin expression in neurons is mainly regulated by neuronal depolarization [10,13], which may be an important mechanism in neuronal plasticity and may influence neuronal susceptibility to excitotoxicity. Chronic depolarization induced by K^+ (25 mM) in primary cultures of rat cerebellar neurons sustained a persistent increase of BDNF expression which is accompanied by a drastic decrease in NT-3 expression [7,10]. In contrast to the up-regulation of BDNF mRNA, the level of NT-3 mRNA does not change either after injection of kainic acid [1] or after kindled seizures [9]. Moreover, Rocamora et al. [21] have shown with an experimental model of limbic seizures that the dramatic increase of NGF and BDNF expression is accompanied by a fivefold decrease of NT-3 mRNA in dentate gyrus granule cells [21]. The reciprocal regulation of BDNF and NT-3 has also been observed in the dentate gyrus granule cells following cerebral ischemia [16,26]. Reduction of NT-3 mRNA in the hippocampal dentate gyrus was also demonstrated after long-term potentiation [6] and status epileptitus [3,20].

Several lines of evidence demonstrate the involvement of the glutamate nervous system in BDNF expression. Activation of the NMDA receptor, an ionotrophic glutamate receptor, increases BDNF gene expression in cortical neuron cultures [11]. Continuous culture exposure to non-toxic concentrations of NMDA resulted in a prolonged increase in BDNF mRNA expression in primary cultures of rat cerebellar granule neurons. In addition, AMPA also induced a concentration-dependent increase in BDNF mRNA and protein expression [17]. Moreover, an AMPA receptor potentiator (LY392098) was reported to increase BDNF mRNA levels, while it did not change in either NT-3 or NT-4 mRNA. Activation of both L-type Ca^{2+} channels and mitogen-activated protein (MAP) kinases contribute to AMPA receptor-mediated increases in BDNF mRNA [14]. AMPA antagonist CNQX, but not MK-801, suppresses kinase-induced increases in BDNF mRNA in hippocampal neuron cultures [32], while the activation of GABAergic transmission reduces the mRNA levels of BDNF [33]. These findings indicate that the neural depolarization induced by the activation of glutamate receptors increases BDNF expression.

These above-mentioned observations clearly demonstrate that NT-3 expression is suppressed by neuronal depolarization and, moreover, reciprocally regulated in contrast to BDNF expression in the brain. However, in the present experiment using primary cultured cortical neurons, orexin-A and B significantly up-regulated NT-3 mRNA expression, and orexin-B, to a lesser but significant extent, up-regulated the expression of BDNF mRNA. Although the mechanisms leading to reduced NT-3 mRNA expression induced by orexins has not yet been elucidated, orexins may be potent inducers of NT-3 in the cerebral cortex.

As above mentioned NT-3 as well as BDNF plays an important role in neurotransmission and neuronal plasticity in the brain, and its synthesis and release are regulated by neuronal depolarization. The present study demonstrated that orexins, but not MCH, increased the expression of NT-3 mRNA. It seems likely orexin might act on some neurons which was different from neurons containing MCH receptors. Orexin is well known as orexigenic neuropeptide in the hypothalamus and is regulated by hunger status. Orexin released in response to the peripheral metabolic signals may increase NT-3 mRNA in the cerebral cortex, resulting in the modulation of neuronal transmission in the cerebral cortex.

The findings in the present study indicate that these neuropeptides involved in energy regulation may regulate the expressions of NT-3 and BDNF in the cerebral cortex, indicating that these neuropeptides can regulate the activity of the cerebral cortex via changes in neuronal plasticity. These findings offer information for understanding the functional significance of NT-3 in obese animals and a new insight into the bidirectional interaction between energy regulation and higher functions of the limbic system, such as learning/memory and emotion.

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A mouse model of ghrelinoma exhibited activated growth hormone-insulin-like growth factor I axis and glucose intolerance

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[1]*Ghrelin Research Project, Translational Research Center, Kyoto University Hospital, Kyoto University Graduate School of Medicine;* [2]*Department of Medicine and Clinical Science, Endocrinology, and Metabolism, Kyoto University Graduate School of Medicine;* [3]*Clinical Research Institute for Endocrine Metabolic Diseases, National Hospital Organization, Kyoto Medical Center, Kyoto; and* [4]*Department of Biochemistry, National Cardiovascular Center Research Institute, Osaka, Japan*

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Iwakura H, Ariyasu H, Li Y, Kanamoto N, Bando M, Yamada G, Hosoda H, Hosoda K, Shimatsu A, Nakao K, Kangawa K, Akamizu T. A mouse model of ghrelinoma exhibited activated growth hormone-insulin-like growth factor I axis and glucose intolerance. *Am J Physiol Endocrinol Metab* 297: E802–E811, 2009. First published July 14, 2009; doi:10.1152/ajpendo.00205.2009.—Ghrelin is a stomach-derived peptide that has growth hormone-stimulating and orexigenic activities. Although there have been several reports of ghrelinoma cases, only a few cases have elevated circulating ghrelin levels, hampering the investigation of pathophysiological features of ghrelinoma and chronic effects of ghrelin excess. Furthermore, standard transgenic technique has resulted in desacyl ghrelin production only because of the limited tissue expression of ghrelin *O*-acyltransferase, which mediates acylation of ghrelin. Accordingly, we attempted to create ghrelin promoter SV40 T-antigen transgenic (GP-Tag Tg) mice, in which ghrelin-producing cells continued to proliferate and finally developed into ghrelinoma. Adult GP-Tag Tg mice showed elevated plasma ghrelin levels with preserved physiological regulation. Adult GP-Tag Tg mice with increased plasma ghrelin levels exhibited elevated IGF-I levels despite poor nutrition. Although basal growth hormone levels were not changed, those after growth hormone-releasing hormone injection tended to be higher. These results indicate that chronic elevation of ghrelin activates GH-IGF-I axis. In addition, GP-Tag Tg mice demonstrated glucose intolerance. Insulin secretion by glucose tolerance tests was significantly attenuated in GP-Tag Tg, whereas insulin sensitivity determined by insulin tolerance tests was preserved, indicating that chronic elevation of ghrelin suppresses insulin secretion and leads to glucose intorelance. Thus, we successfully generated a Tg model of ghrelinoma, which is a good tool to investigate chronic effects of ghrelin excess. Moreover, their characteristic features could be a hint on ghrelinoma.

ghrelin; glucose metabolism

GHRELIN is a stomach-derived 28-amino acid (AA) peptide hormone with octanoyl modification of third Ser residue, which is essential for its binding to growth hormone (GH) secretagogue receptor (GHS-R) (20). There have been several reports regarding ghrelin-producing tumors (9, 17, 36, 37). As far as we know, only two cases have elevated plasma ghrelin level (9, 36). However, the ghrelin-producing cells in the stomach, known as X/A-like cells, account for about 20% of the endocrine cell population in the oxyntic glands (10). It may be reasonable to estimate that far more ghrelinoma cases have been overlooked and diagnosed as nonfunctioning tumors. Hormone-producing tumors demonstrate their characteristic symptoms by chronic effects of each hormone, which may be a key symptom to making a correct diagnosis. Conversely, the characteristic symptom often tells us the chronic effects of each responsible hormone. Acute effects of ghrelin have been studied extensively by many researchers, and a wide variety of acute effects of ghrelin have been discovered, such as the regulation of growth hormone (GH) release, food intake, gastric acid secretion, gastric motility, blood pressure, and cardiac output (23, 25, 26, 31, 33, 34). However, chronic effects of ghrelin have not been fully understood.

To understand the chronic effects of ghrelin, genetically engineered mouse models would be useful. Several groups, including ours, have developed transgenic animals in which ghrelin transgenes are driven by several different promoters (2, 4, 18, 29, 38, 41). All of these animals except for one line created by Reed et al. (29) using the neuron-specific enolase (NSE) promoter and another line recently reported by Bewick et al. (5) using the bacterial artificial chromosome produced only desacyl ghrelin rather than acylated ghrelin. Until the recent identification of ghrelin *O*-acyltransferase (GOAT), which mediates ghrelin octanoylation (40), it had been unclear how acylation of ghrelin takes place. GOAT is expressed mainly in stomach and intestine, and a small amount of GOAT is also present in pancreas (12). This limited expression area of GOAT made it impossible to create ghrelin-overproducing transgenic animals by standard procedures. When we started this study, GOAT had not yet been identified. Accordingly, we choose an approach in which an increase in the number of ghrelin-producing cells in mice would result in increased levels of circulating ghrelin. By taking this approach, we successfully obtained ghrelin promoter-SV40 T-antigen transgenic (GP-Tag Tg) mice. In these mice, ghrelin concentration elevates with age in concordance with the proliferation of ghrelin cells. The aim of this study was to elucidate the pathophysiological features of ghrelinoma and the chronic effects of ghrelin elevation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Animals. Two types of fusion genes comprising the 5′-flanking region of human ghrelin gene (4,085 or 1,479 bp) (19) and SV40 T-antigen were designed (Fig. 1*A*). The purified fragments (10 μg/ml) were microinjected into the pronucleus of fertilized C57/B6 mouse (SLC, Shizuoka, Japan) eggs. The viable eggs were transferred into the oviducts of pseudopregnant female ICR mice (SLC) by using standard techniques. Transgenic founder mice were identified by

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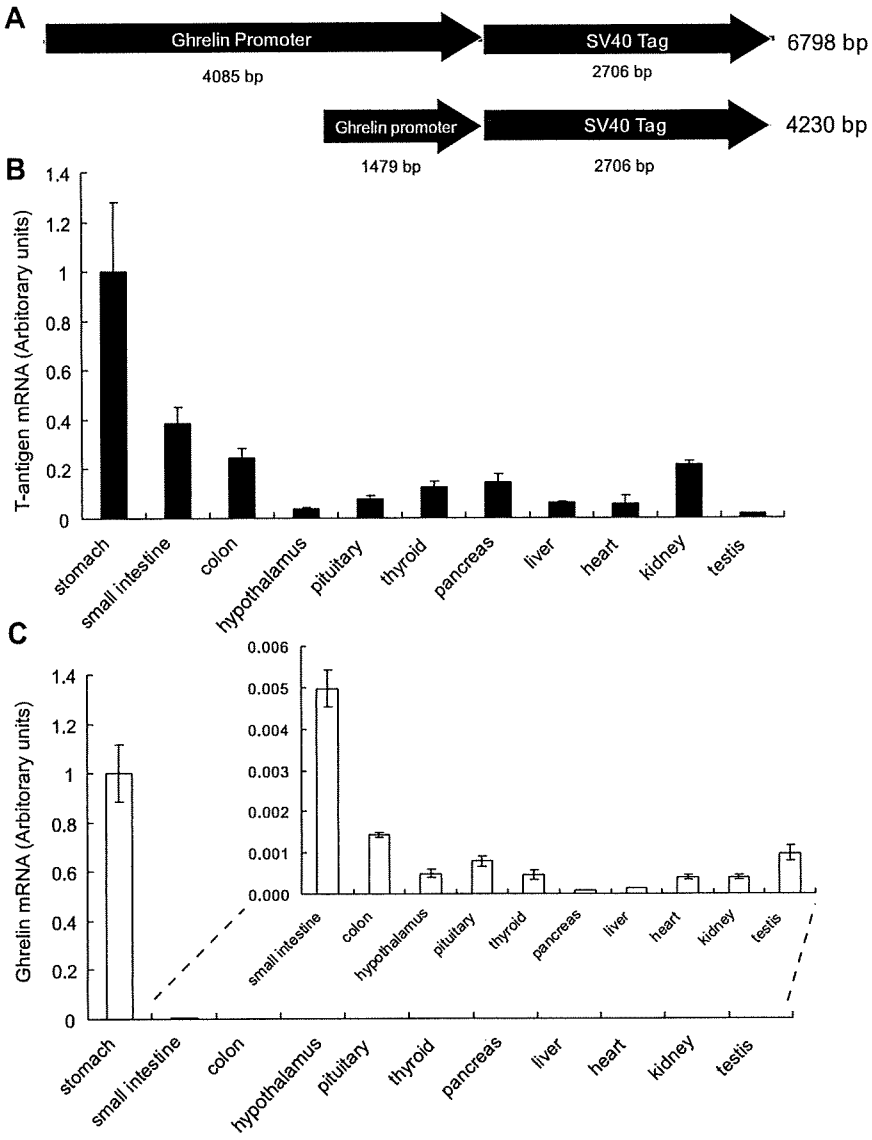


Fig. 1. Constructs of ghrelin promoter-SV40 T-antigen transgenic (GP-Tag Tg) mice and the expression levels of SV40 T-antigen mRNA in various tissues. *A*: 2 types of fusion genes comprising 5′-flanking region of human ghrelin gene (4,085 or 1,479 bp) and SV40 Tag were designed. *B*: the expression levels of SV40 T-antigen mRNA in various tissues of GP-Tag Tg mice at 6 wk of age (n = 8). SV40 T-antigen mRNA was most abundant in the stomachs of GP-Tag Tg mice. *C*: the expression levels of ghrelin mRNA in various tissues of nontransgenic littermates at 6 wk of age (n = 4).

Southern blot analysis of tail DNAs. Transgenic mice were used as heterozygotes. Animals were maintained on standard rodent food (CE-2, 352 kcal/100 g; Japan CLEA, Tokyo, Japan) on a 12:12-h light-dark cycle unless otherwise indicated. All experimental procedures were approved by the Kyoto University Graduate School of Medicine Committee on Animal Research.

RT-PCR and real-time quantitative RT-PCR. Total RNA was extracted using a Sepasol RNA kit (Nacalai Tesque, Kyoto, Japan). Reverse transcription was performed with a high-capacity cDNA reverse transcription kit (Applied Biosystems, Foster City, CA). RT-PCR was carried out with a GeneAmp 9700 using primers in Table 1 with AmpliTaq Gold PCR master mix (Applied Biosystems). Real-time quantitative PCR was performed using an ABI PRISM 7500 Sequence Detection System (Applied Biosystems) with primers and TaqMan probes or with Power SybrGreen (presented in Table 1). The mRNA expression in each gene was normalized to levels of 18S ribosomal RNA.

Immunohistochemistry. Formalin-fixed, paraffin-embedded tissue sections were immunostained using the avidin-biotin peroxidase complex method (Vectastain "ABC" Elite kit; Vector Laboratories, Burlingame, CA), as described previously (18). Sections were incubated with anti-COOH-terminal ghrelin (AA 13-28) (1:2,000 at final dilution), anti-NH_2-terminal ghrelin (14) that recognizes the n-octanoylated portion of ghrelin (AA 1-11) (1:5,000), anti-glucagon (1:500; DAKO, Glostrup, Denmark), anti-somatostatin (1:500; DAKO), anti-gastrin (1:500; DAKO), and anti-GH (1:500; DAKO). The cell number of ghrelin-immunopositive cells was analyzed by WinRoof visual analysis software (Mitani, Fukui, Japan).

Measurements of plasma and tissue ghrelin concentrations. Collection of plasma samples was performed as reported previously (18). Plasma ghrelin and desacyl ghrelin concentrations were determined using two separate ELISA kits, an active ghrelin ELISA kit that recognizes n-octanoylated ghrelin and a desacyl ghrelin ELISA kit (both from Mitsubishi Kagaku Iatron, Tokyo, Japan) (1). Tissue ghrelin concentration was determined by radioimmunoassay (RIA) using anti-ghrelin (AA 13-28) antiserum (C-RIA) and anti-ghrelin (AA 1-11) antiserum (N-RIA), as described previously (18).

Western blot. Stomachs were boiled for 5 min in the 10-fold vol/wt of water. Acetic acid was added to each solution so that the final concentration was adjusted to 1 M, and the tissues were homogenized.

Table 1. *PCR primers and TaqMan probes*

Gene	Primer Sequence
Ghrelin	
Sense	5′-GCATGCTCTGGATGGACATG-3′
Antisense	5′-TGGTGGCTTCTTGGATTCCT-3′
TaqMan probe	5′-AGCCCAGAGCACCAGAAAGCCCA-3′
NPY	
Sense	5′-TCCGCTCTGCGACACTACAT-3′
Antisense	5′-GGAAGGGTCTTCAAGCCTTGT-3′
TaqMan probe	5′-CAAGGGCTGGATCTCTTGCCATATCTCTG-3′
AgRP	
Sense	5′-GCTCCACTGAAGGGCATCA-3′
Antisense	5′-TAGCACCTCCGCCAAAGCT-3′
TaqMan probe	5′-TTCCCAGGTCTAAGTCTGAATGGCCTCA-3′
GHRH	
Sense	5′-AGGATGCAGCGACACGTAGA-3′
Antisense	5′-TCTCCCCTTGCTTGTTCATGA-3′
TaqMan probe	5′-CCACCAACTACAGGAAACTCCTGAGCCA-3′
Somatostatin	
Sense	5′-AGCTGAGCAGGACGAGATGAG-3′
Antisense	5′-ACAGGATGTGAATGTCTTCCAGTT-3′
TaqMan probe	5′-CGAACCCAGCAATGGCACCCC-3′
GHS-R	
Sense	5′-CACCAACCTCTACCTATCCAGCAT-3′
Antisense	5′-CTGACAAACTGGAAGAGTTTGCA-3′
TaqMan probe	5′-TCCGATCTGCTCATCTTCCTGTGCATG-3′
GH	
Sense	5′-AAGAGTTCGAGCGTGCCTACA-3′
Antisense	5′-GAAGCAATTCCATGTCGGTTC-3′
TaqMan probe	5′-CCATTCAGAATGCCCAGGCTGCTTTC-3′
GHRH-R	
Sense	5′-GCCCTTGGAACTGTTAACCA-3′
Antisense	5′-GCAACCAGGATGGCAATAGC-3′
TaqMan probe	5′-AGCATCTCCATTGTAGCCCTCTGCGTG-3′
SV40 Tag	
Sense	5′-AAACACTGCAGGCCAGATTT-3′
Antisense with power SYBR Green	5′-AAATGAGCCTTGGGACTGTG-3′
PC1/3	
Sense	5′-AGTGGAAAAGATGGTGAATG-3′
Antisense	5′-CTCCTCATTTAGGATGTCCA-3′

NPY, neuropeptide Y; AgRP, agouti-related protein; GHRH, growth hormone (GH)-releasing hormone; GHS-R, GH secretagogue receptor; GHRH-R, GHRH receptor; PC1/3, prohormone convertase 1/3.

The supernatant was loaded onto a Sep-Pak C18 cartridge (Waters, Milford, MA) preequilibrated with 0.9% NaCl after centrifugation. The cartridge was washed with 2.5 ml of 5% CH_3CN-0.1% trifluoroacetic acid and eluted with 2.5 ml 60% CH_3CN-0.1% trifluoroacetic acid. The eluate was evaporated, lyophilized, and dissolved in Novex Tricine SDS Sample Buffer (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA). After being heated at 85°C for 2 min, 20 mg of samples of initial weight were subjected to tricine-SDS PAGE and electroblotted to polyvinylidene fluoride membranes (Invitrogen). Transferred membranes were blocked with Immunoblock (Dainippon Seiyaku, Osaka, Japan) and then incubated with anti-COOH-terminal ghrelin antibody (1:5,000). After being washed with PBS-0.1% Tween-20, membranes were reacted with secondary antibodies and developed with ECL plus (GE Healthcare, Buckinghamshire, UK) as instructed by the manufacturer. The signal on the blot was detected with Lumino-Image Analyzer LAS-3000 mini system (Fuji Photo Film, Tokyo, Japan).

Measurement of food intake. Mice were housed individually with continuous access to chow and water. Food intakes were measured by subtracting the remaining weight of the chow from that originally presented. As for measuring the food intake by ghrelin, ad libitum-fed mice were injected with ghrelin (120 or 360 μg/kg) or saline subcutaneously. Food intakes were measured for 2 h after injection.

Measurements of lean body mass, fat mass, and bone mass. Mice were anesthetized with pentobarbital sodium. Lean body mass, fat mass, and bone mass of mice were measured by an animal computed tomography system (Latheta LTC-100; Aloka, Tokyo, Japan).

Measurements of hormones and blood glucose levels. Serum GH levels were determined by a rat GH EIA kit (SPI Bio, Massy Cedex, France). Serum insulin-like growth factor I (IGF-I) levels were measured using a mouse IGF-I immunoassay kit (R & D Systems, Minneapolis, MN). Blood glucose levels were determined by glucose oxidase method using Glutest Sensor Neo (Sanwa Kagaku, Kyoto, Japan). Measurement of serum insulin concentrations was performed by ELISA using an ultrasensitive rat insulin kit (Morinaga, Yokohama, Japan).

GH-provocative test. GH-provocative test was carried out as described previously (16). Serum samples were collected at 15 min after subcutaneous injection of 180 μg/kg of GH-releasing hormone (GHRH) or 120 μg/kg of ghrelin. We choose these doses according to the results of our previous study (16).

Glucose and insulin tolerance tests. For the glucose tolerance test, after overnight fast, the mice were injected with 1.5 g/kg glucose intraperitoneally. For the insulin tolerance test, after a 4-h fast, mice were injected with 1.0 mU/g human regular insulin (Novolin R; Novo Nordisk, Bagsvaerd, Denmark) intraperitoneally. Blood was sampled from the tail vein before and 30, 60, 90, and 120 min after the injection.

Insulin release. After overnight fast, the mice were injected with 3.0 g/kg glucose intraperitoneally. Blood was sampled from the retroorbital vein at 2 and 30 min after the injection using a glass tube.

Statistical analysis. All values were expressed as means ± SE. The statistical significance of the differences in mean values was assessed by repeated-measures ANOVA or Student's *t*-test. The statistical difference in the changes of plasma ghrelin levels by feeding were assessed by paired *t*-test. Pearson's correlation coefficient analysis and simple regression were used to assess the relations between plasma ghrelin level and body weight. Difference of correlation coefficients of the regression lines obtained from GP-Tag Tg mice and nontransgenic littermates was determined by testing the *t* value.

RESULTS

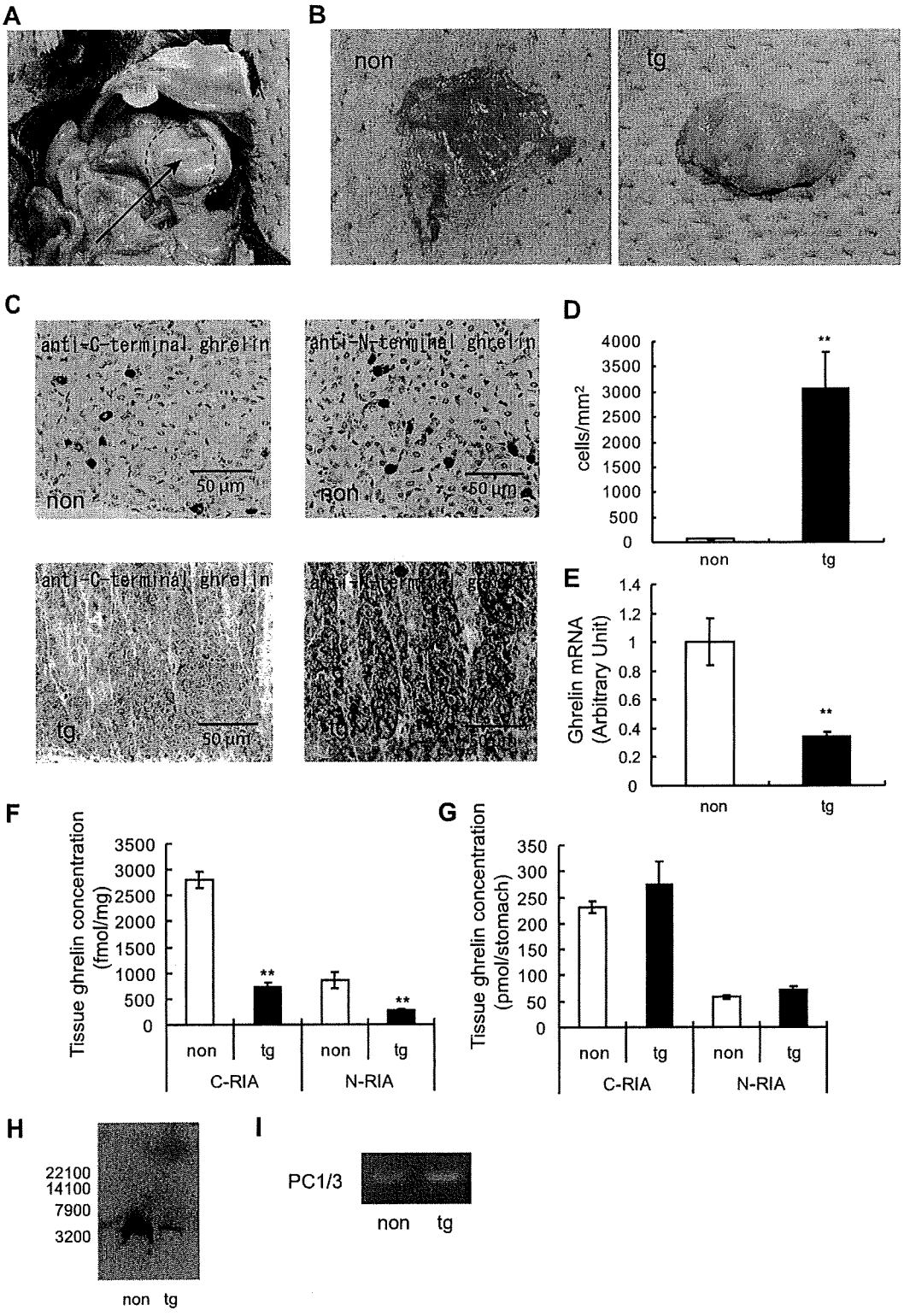
Generation of GP-Tag Tg mice. By injecting transgenes into 846 eggs, we obtained 11 lines of GP (4.85) Tag Tg mouse. We succeeded in breeding three of these lines (1-5, 3-1, and 4-3). Among these three lines, mice of the 3-1 line developed gastric tumor and showed elevated plasma ghrelin levels, as described below. Mice of the 1-5 line showed very aggressive tumor development and died at ~13 wk of age because of thyroid, pancreatic, and gastric tumors. Mice of the 4-3 line showed very slow tumor development. The proliferation of ghrelin cells was

Fig. 2. Pathological findings and tissue ghrelin concentrations of stomachs in GP-Tag Tg mice. *A–C*: macro findings of stomachs in GP-Tag Tg mice (*A*: arrow, dotted area; *B*: Tg) and nontransgenic littermates (non; *B*) at 12 wk of age. Stomach walls of GP-Tag Tg mice were hypertrophic. *C*: immunohistochemical analysis of ghrelin peptide expression in tissue sections of stomachs of GP-Tag Tg mice (Tg) and nontransgenic littermates (non) using anti-COOH-terminal and anti-NH_2-terminal ghrelin antibodies. *D*: the cell number of ghrelin-immunopositive cells in Tg and non littermates. *E*: the mRNA levels of ghrelin in 12-wk-old male Tg mice and non littermates; $n = 5$, $^{**}P < 0.01$ compared with nontransgenic littermates. *F* and *G*: tissue concentration per milligram (*F*) and per stomach (*G*) of ghrelin peptide in 12-wk-old male Tg mice (black bars) and non littermates (open bars); $n = 6$, $^{**}P < 0.01$ compared with non littermates. C-RIA, total ghrelin (ghrelin and desacyl ghrelin); N-RIA, ghrelin. *H*: Western blot analysis of stomach samples of Tg and non littermates using anti COOH-terminal ghrelin antibody. *I*: RT-PCR analysis of prohormone convertase 1/3 (PC1/3) mRNA expression in the stomach of Tg.

modest even at 50 wk of age in the 4-3 line. Accordingly, we analyzed mainly GP-Tag Tg mice of the 3-1 line.

We could not get a transgene-positive mouse of GP (1479) Tag Tg mouse by injecting transgenes into 631 eggs.

The expression levels of SV40-Tag mRNA among various tissues. We first examined the expression levels of SV40-Tag mRNA in various tissues of GP-Tag Tg mice, including stomach, small intestine, colon, hypothalamus, pituitary, thyroid,



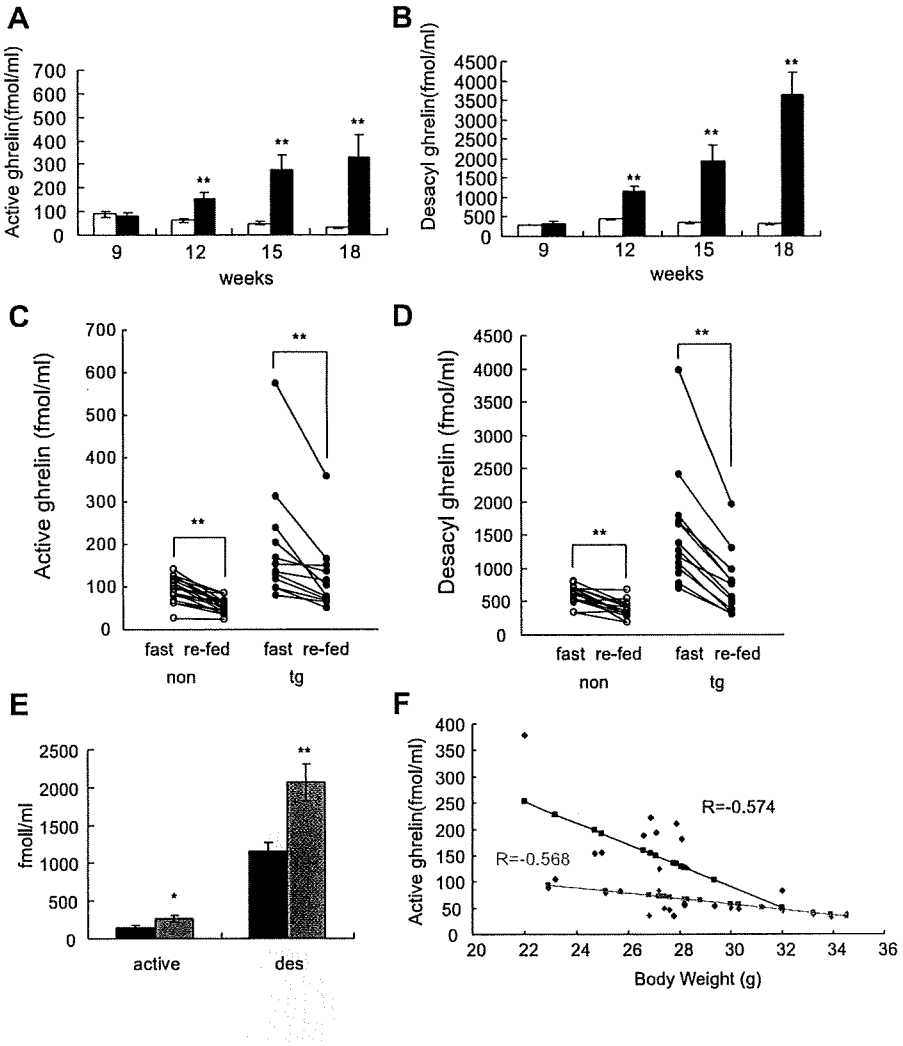


Fig. 3. Plasma ghrelin and desacyl ghrelin levels in GP-Tag Tg mice. *A* and *B*: plasma ghrelin (*A*) and desacyl ghrelin (*B*) levels in male GP-Tag Tg mice (black bars) and nontransgenic littermates (open bars); $n = 3$–17. $^{**}P < 0.01$ compared with non littermates. *C* and *D*: plasma ghrelin (*C*) and desacyl ghrelin (*D*) levels after overnight fasting (fast) and after refeeding (refed) in 15-wk-old male Tg and non mice. $^{**}P < 0.01$; $n = 12$–18. *E*: plasma ghrelin (active) and desacyl ghrelin (des) levels in 12-wk-old male (black bars) and female (gray bars) GP-Tag Tg mice; $n = 7$–13, $^{*}P < 0.05$, $^{**}P < 0.01$ compared with male GP-Tag Tg mice. *F*: plasma ghrelin levels were correlated with body weights in 12-wk-old male GP-Tag Tg mice (black bars; $r = -0.574$, $P < 0.01$) and in nontransgenic littermates (gray bars; $r = -0.568$, $P < 0.05$). The regression coefficient of the regression line of GP-Tag Tg mice was bigger than that of nontransgenic littermates ($t = 2.08$, $P < 0.05$).

pancreas, liver, heart, kidney, and testis (Fig. 1*B*). The highest expression levels were observed in stomach, and the second-highest levels were observed in small intestine. The expression pattern of SV40-Tag mRNA was almost similar to that of ghrelin (Fig. 1*C*).

Pathological feature and tissue ghrelin concentration of stomach of GP-Tag Tg mice. Stomach walls of GP-Tag Tg mice became hypertrophic with age (Fig. 2, *A* and *B*). Immunohistochemical analysis by both anti-COOH-terminal and anti-NH_2-terminal ghrelin antibodies revealed hyperplasia of ghrelin-immunopositive cells (Fig. 2, *C* and *D*), although the staining in GP-Tag Tg mice was paler than that in nontransgenic littermates (Fig. 2*C*). These hyperproliferating cells were not immunostained with anti-glucagon, somatostatin, or gastrin antibodies (data not shown).

The mRNA levels of ghrelin in the stomachs of 12-wk-old male GP-Tag Tg mice were significantly lower than those of nontransgenic littermates ($P < 0.01$, $n = 6$; Fig. 2*E*). Consistent with this observation, tissue concentrations of ghrelin (N-RIA; fmol/mg tissue) and total ghrelin (desacyl ghrelin plus ghrelin) (C-RIA) of 12-wk-old male GP-Tag Tg mice were significantly lower than those of nontransgenic littermates ($P < 0.01$, $n = 6$; Fig. 2*F*). However, since the weights of the stomach of GP-Tag Tg mice were significantly higher than controls (non-Tg vs. Tg, 83.4 vs. 362.0 mg, $P < 0.01$) due to the hypertrophy of the stomach wall, the tissue ghrelin concentration per whole stomach tended to be higher in GP-Tag Tg mice [not significant (NS), $n = 6$; Fig. 2*G*]. The size of ghrelin content of GP-Tag Tg mice was similar to that of nontransgenic littermates when analyzed by tricine-SDS PAGE and Western blot analysis (Fig. 2*H*), indicating that processing of preproghrelin to ghrelin occurred in hyperproliferaing ghrelin cells in GP-Tag Tg mice. The mRNA of prohormone convertase 1/3, which processes preproghrelin to ghrelin, was detected in the stomachs of GP-Tag Tg mice (Fig. 2*I*).

Plasma ghrelin levels of GP-Tag Tg mice. Plasma ghrelin and desacyl ghrelin levels of GP-Tag Tg mice were almost equal to those of nontransgenic littermates at 9 wk of age and then increased with age ($n = 3$–17; Fig. 3, *A* and *B*), with some variations in the levels among animals.

We next examined whether physiological regulation of ghrelin secretion is preserved in GP-Tag Tg mice. Plasma ghrelin and desacyl ghrelin levels of GP-Tag Tg mice were increased by fasting and decreased by refeeding $P < 0.01$, ($n = 7$–13; Fig. 3, *C* and *D*). Plasma ghrelin and desacyl ghrelin levels of female GP-Tag Tg mice were significantly higher than those of

male GP-Tag Tg mice at 12 wk of age (Fig. 3*E*). Plasma ghrelin levels of 12-wk-old male GP-Tag Tg mice correlated to body weight ($r = 0.574$, $P < 0.05$, $n = 13$; Fig. 3*F*). The regression coefficient of the regression line of GP-Tag Tg mice was bigger than that of nontransgenic littermates ($t = 2.08$, $P < 0.05$) These results indicate that regulation of plasma ghrelin and desacyl ghrelin levels of GP-Tag Tg mice were preserved, at least with regard to feeding status, body weight, and sex difference.

Body weights, body composition, and food intake of GP-Tag Tg mice. There was no difference in body weights between male GP-Tag Tg mice and controls until 12 wk of age ($n = 22$–34; Fig. 4*A*). After 13 wk of age, the body weights of the male GP-Tag Tg mice were significantly lower than those of nontransgenic littermates concomitantly with the decrease in the food intakes of male GP-Tag Tg mice after 11 wk of age (Fig. 4, *A* and *B*). When the body compositions were examined by computed tomography scan, fat masses were significantly reduced in 15-wk-old male GP-Tag Tg mice ($P < 0.05$, $n = 7$–9; Fig. 4*C*), whereas lean body masses and body lengths were not changed (NS, $n = 7$–9; Fig. 4, *D* and *E*). We also examined hypothalamic mRNA levels of neuropeptide Y (NPY), agouti-related protein (AgRP), and GHS-R in 12-wk-old male GP-Tag Tg mice. No significant changes were observed in these mRNA levels (NS, $n = 7$; Fig. 4*F*). When 15-wk-old male GP-Tag Tg mice were injected with ghrelin, the food intake was stimulated to the same extent as in controls (NS, $n = 10$–18; Fig. 4*G*). Plasma leptin levels of 15-wk-old male GP-Tag Tg mice were significantly lower than controls ($P < 0.05$, $n = 6$; Fig. 4*H*).

GH-IGF-I axis in GP-Tag Tg mice. Serum IGF-I levels of 12- and 15-wk-old male GP-Tag Tg mice were significantly higher than those of nontransgenic littermates ($P < 0.05$, $n = 7$–8, and $P < 0.05$, $n = 6$–7, respectively; Fig. 5*A*). Although basal serum GH levels of 15-wk-old male GP-Tag Tg mice were not significantly different from controls, serum GH levels after GHRH injection tended to be high ($P = 0.077$, $n = 8$–13), which was not observed after ghrelin injection (Fig. 5*B*). We then investigated the effects of chronic ghrelin elevation on hypothalamic and pituitary mRNA levels of components involved in GH regulation. There were no differences in hypothalamic mRNA levels of GHRH and somatostatin or in pituitary mRNA levels of GH and GHRH receptor (GHRH-R) between 15-wk-old male GP-Tag Tg mice and their littermates

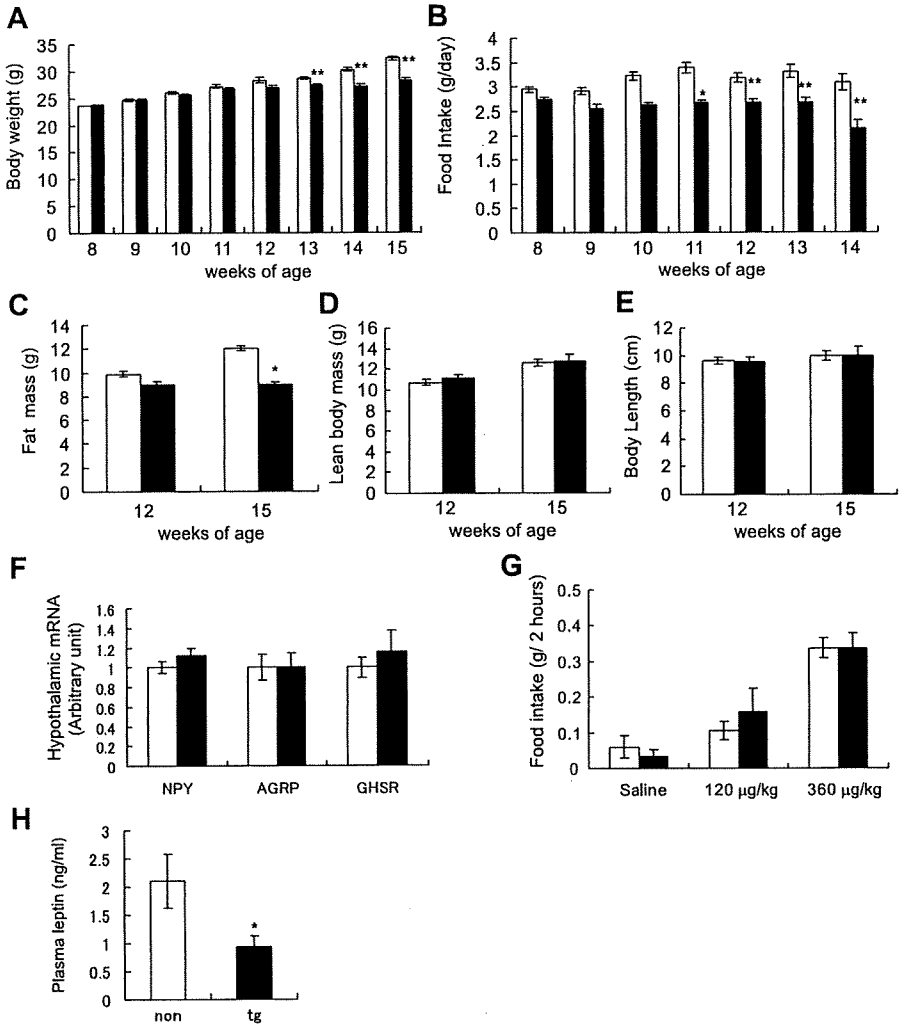


Fig. 4. Body weights, body compositions, and food intakes of GP-Tag Tg mice. *A*: body weights of male GP-Tag Tg mice (black bars) and nontransgenic littermates (open bars); $n = 22$–34. *B*: daily food intakes of male GP-Tag Tg mice (black bars) and nontransgenic littermates (open bars); $n = 19$–26. *C* and *D*: fat mass (*C*) and lean body mass (*D*) determined by animal computed tomography scan of 15-wk-old male GP-Tag Tg mice (black bars) and nontransgenic littermates (open bars). *E*: body length of 15-wk-old male GP-Tag Tg mice (black bars) and nontransgenic littermates (open bars); $n = 7$–9. *F*: hypothalamic mRNA levels of neuropeptide Y (NPY), agouti-related protein (AgRP), and growth hormone secretagogue receptor (GHS-R) in 12-wk-old male GP-Tag Tg mice (black bars) and nontransgenic littermates (open bars); $n = 7$. *G*: food intake for 2 h after injection of ghrelin (120 or 360 μg/kg or saline; $n = 10$–18). *H*: plasma leptin levels in 15-wk-old male Tg mice (black bars) and non littermates (open bars); $n = 6$–7. $^*P < 0.05$, $^{**}P < 0.01$ compared with nontransgenic littermates.

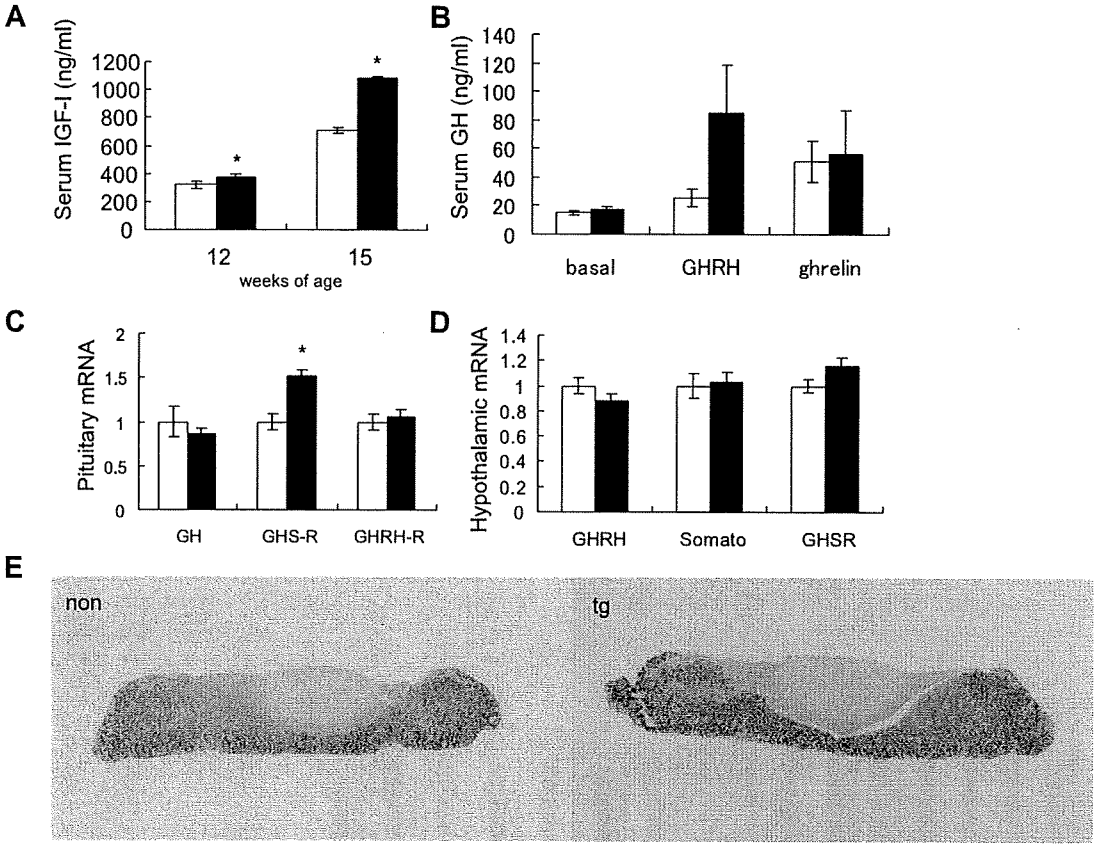


Fig. 5. GH-IGF-I axis in GP-Tag Tg mice. *A*: serum IGF-I levels in male GP-Tag Tg mice (black bars) and nontransgenic littermates (open bars); $n = 7$–8. *B*: serum GH levels at basal state and at 15 min after subcutaneous injection of GH-releasing hormone (GHRH) or ghrelin in male GP-Tag Tg mice (black bars) and nontransgenic littermates (open bars); $n = 8$–13. *C*: pituitary mRNA levels of GH, GHS-R, and GHRH-R in 15-wk-old male GP-Tag Tg mice (black bars) and nontransgenic littermates (open bars); $n = 7$. *D*: hypothalamic mRNA levels of GHRH, somatostatin (somato), and GHS-R in 15-wk-old male GP-Tag Tg mice (black bars) and nontransgenic littermates (open bars); $n = 7$. *E*: pituitary sections of 15-wk-old male Tg mice and non littermates immunostained with anti-GH antibody. $^*P < 0.05$ compared with non littermates.

(NS, $n = 7$; Fig. 5, *C* and *D*). Although plasma ghrelin level was elevated, pituitary GHS-R mRNA level was upregulated in GP-Tag Tg mice ($P < 0.05$, $n = 7$; Fig. 5*C*). We also examined pituitaries of 15-wk-old male GP-Tag Tg mice by immunohistochemical analysis. There were no obvious differences in somatotroph cell number or staining intensity of GH between GP-Tag Tg mice and nontransgenic littermates (Fig. 5*E*).

Glucose metabolism in GP-Tag Tg mice. Blood glucose levels of 15-wk-old male GP-Tag Tg mice were significantly higher than controls ($P < 0.05$, $n = 10$; Fig. 6*A*), although those of 9-wk-old male GP-Tag Tg mice were comparable with the controls (non-Tg vs. Tg: 96.0 ± 4.7 vs. 100.6 ± 4.7, $P = 0.51$, $n = 9$). Intraperitoneal glucose tolerance tests showed significantly higher blood glucose levels in 15-wk-old male GP-Tag Tg mice ($P < 0.05$, $n = 6$–11; Fig. 6*B*). To estimate the insulin sensitivity of GP-Tag Tg mice, we performed an insulin tolerance test. The blood glucose levels after insulin injection in 15-wk-old male GP-Tag Tg mice were suppressed to the same level of those in controls (NS, $n = 5$–8; Fig. 6*C*). Although basal insulin levels of 15-wk-old male GP-Tag Tg mice were not significantly different from those of control mice, those after glucose injection were significantly suppressed in GP-Tag Tg mice ($P < 0.05$, $n = 7$–8; Fig. 6*D*). Pancreatic mRNA and protein levels of insulin in GP-Tag Tg were comparable with those of nontransgenic littermates (NS, $n = 6$–8; Fig. 6, *E* and *F*).

DISCUSSION

In this study, we successfully established a mouse model of ghrelinoma, GP-Tag Tg mouse. GP-Tag Tg mice exhibited chronic elevation of circulating ghrelin with physiological regulation. The elevation of circulating ghrelin in GP-Tag Tg mice (~10-fold elevation) was much higher than that in bacterial artificial chromosome transgenic mice created by Bewick et al. (5) (only ~1.5-fold elevation). Nevertheless, the levels of circulating ghrelin in GP-Tag Tg mice can be considered to be within the physiological range since the highest level of plasma ghrelin observed in the anorexia patients is about seven times higher than those of normal controls (3). One may be confused by low ghrelin mRNA levels and low ghrelin production per milligram of tissue in the stomachs of GP-Tag Tg mice. In general, when the cell cycle progresses, endocrine cell produces far less amounts of hormone since the hormone production occurs mainly at the G_0/G_1 phase of the cell cycle. Since the hyperproliferaing ghrelin-producing cells in GP-Tag Tg mice were forced to proliferate by SV40 T-antigen, which suppresses RB protein and p53, promoting cell cycle progres-

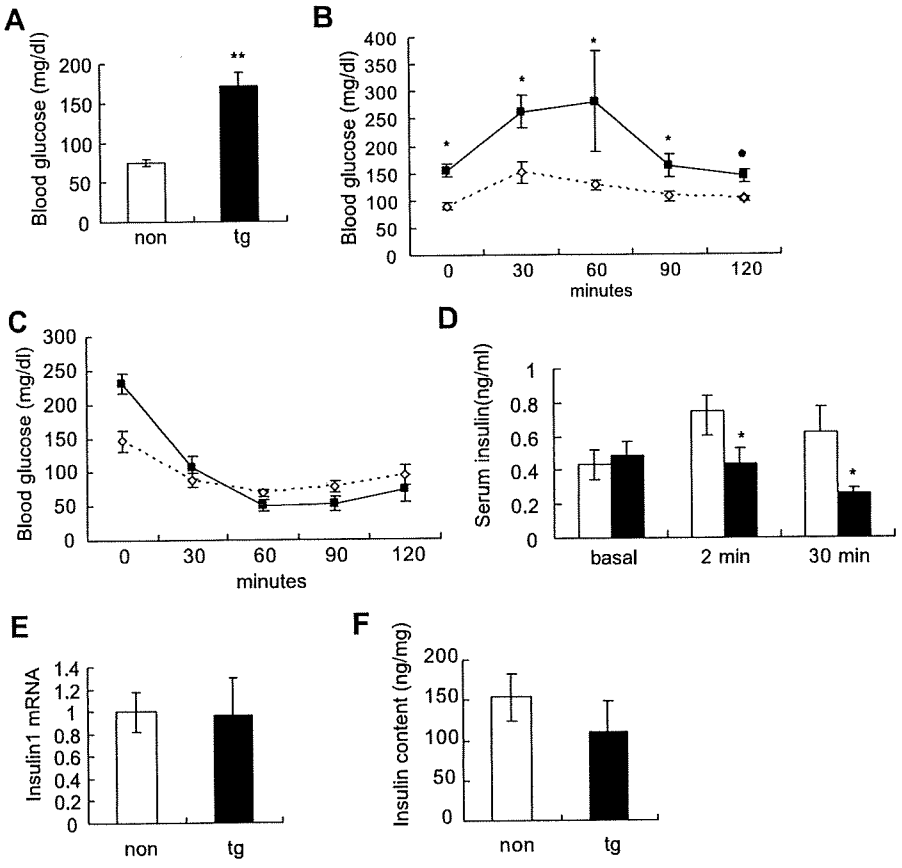


Fig. 6. Glucose metabolism in GP-Tag Tg mice. *A*: fasting blood glucose levels in 15-wk-old male Tg (black bar) and in non (open bar); n = 7–10. *B*: glucose tolerance tests in 15-wk-old male GP-Tag Tg mice (■) and in their nontransgenic littermates (◇); n = 6–11. *C*: insulin tolerance tests in male GP-Tag Tg mice (■) and in their nontransgenic littermates (◇); n = 5–8. *D*: serum insulin levels at basal, at 2 min, and at 30 min after intraperitoneal glucose injection in 15-wk-old male GP-Tag Tg mice (black bars) and in their nontransgenic littermates (open bars); n = 7–8. *E* and *F*: the mRNA (*E*) and the protein levels (*F*) of insulin in the pancreata of 15-wk-old male Tg mice (black bars) and in their non littermates (open bars); n = 6–8. $^{*}P < 0.05$, $^{**}P < 0.01$ compared with nontransgenic littermates.

sion, the amount of ghrelin production per cell was low. However, since the cell number was extremely increased, the net product by stomach was eventually elevated.

Several lines of evidence suggest that the GH-IGF-I axis is suppressed in the decreased GHS-R signaling state (28, 32). It has not yet been clear, however, whether chronic elevation of ghrelin within the physiological range could stimulate the GH-IGF-I axis. In this study, we found that adult GP-Tag Tg mice with elevated circulating ghrelin level showed elevated serum IGF-I level. Serum IGF-I level is regulated not only by GH but also by nutritional status. Malnutrition suppresses serum IGF-I level, whereas overnutrition elevates it (16). Since the nutritional state of GP-Tag Tg mice was poor because of decreased food intake, the elevated serum IGF-I levels in adult GP-Tag Tg mice are considered not to be due to overnutrition but to be due to activation of GH-IGF-I axis. Our findings indicate that chronic elevation of circulating ghrelin within the physiological range can activate the GH-IGF-I axis. As far as we know, this is the first report demonstrating that increased levels of circulating ghrelin within the physiological range can elevate serum IGF-I levels in rodent.

The GH-releasing action of ghrelin requires GHRH (11), and when coadministered, synergistic effects can be observed (13). Since GH responses to GHRH tended to be enhanced in adult GP-Tag Tg, the activation of the GH-IGF-I axis in GP-Tag Tg may be in part due to potentiation of the GH-releasing effect of GHRH. When the mRNA levels of components of GH regulation in pituitary and hypothalamus of GP-Tag Tg mice were investigated, an elevation of the pituitary GHS-R mRNA level was found. It is not clear whether this elevation of GHS-R mRNA in the pituitary contributes to the activated GH-IGF-I axis, since the GH response to ghrelin was not changed in GP-Tag Tg mice. At least these findings indicate that desensitization of GH secretion to ghrelin or downregulation of GHS-R did not occur by chronic elevation of circulating ghrelin in GP-Tag Tg mice.

Adult GP-Tag Tg mice exhibited high glucose level in the basal state and by the glucose tolerance test. Although insulin production was not decreased in the pancreata of GP-Tag Tg mice, insulin secretion after glucose load was significantly attenuated. Since the insulin sensitivity of GP-Tag Tg mice was not reduced, the glucose intorelance in GP-Tag Tg mice was due mainly to the decreased insulin secretion. Given that GP-Tag Tg mice have gastric tumors, there is a possibility that the glucose intorelance is due to the tumors. However, the glucose intolerance observed in malignancy is due mainly to insulin resistance (8, 15), which may be evoked by cytokines (22, 24, 27). Since the glucose intolerance of GP-Tag Tg mice was caused mainly by decreased insulin secretion, it seems not to be the case. It has been reported that acute injection of ghrelin induces suppression of insulin secretion in rodents and humans (6, 30). Our findings suggest that chronic elevation of circulating ghrelin within the physiological range leads to glucose intorelance by suppressing insulin secretion.

There have been several reports regarding ghrelin-producing tumors (9, 17, 36, 37). Most of the cases did not present

elevated plasma ghrelin levels except for a few cases. A malignant ghrelinoma case reported by Tsolakis et al. (36) showed elevated plasma ghrelin level. This patient maintained his weight despite progression of the tumor, a symptom that might be linked to the elevated ghrelin level. During the clinical course, he developed severe diabetes mellitus, which is consistent with the phenotype of GP-Tag Tg mice. GH and IGF-I levels were normal in this case. A pancreatic ghrelinoma case reported by Corbetta et al. (9) also showed normal GH and IGF-I levels despite elevated plasma ghrelin level. In contrast to these human ghrelinoma cases, GP-Tag Tg mice showed elevated IGF-I levels. The cause of the difference in the GH-IGF-I levels between our mice and these human ghrelinoma cases is unclear. Since the first case mentioned above was a malignant gastric ghrelinoma with liver metastasis, and the second case was of pancreatic origin, plasma ghrelin level might be elevated without any physiological regulation in these cases, although detailed plasma ghrelin level changes were not documented. Considering that the physiological regulation of ghrelin secretion was kept in GP-Tag Tg mice, the circadian rhythm may be needed for ghrelin to keep stimulating the GH-IGF-I axis. Indeed, several reports have shown that chronic treatment of ghrelin attenuates GH response both in vivo and in vitro (35, 39) and that in vitro treatment of pituitary with ghrelin results in decreased GHS-R mRNA levels (21). Further case studies will be required to reveal the relationship between plasma ghrelin levels and the GH-IGF-I axis in human ghrelinoma patients.

The limitation of this study is that the assessment of orexigenic action of ghrelin is difficult in this mouse model since stomach walls of GP-Tag Tg mice gradually become hypertrophic after 9 wk of age, which might affect the feeding behavior. Indeed, GP-Tag Tg mice exhibited decreased food intake and weight reduction despite the elevated plasma ghrelin levels. The hypothalamic mRNA levels of NPY and AgRP, which mediate the orexigenic action of ghrelin (7, 31), were not upregulated in GP-Tag Tg mice. There is a possibility that desensitization of GHS-R to chronic elevated ghrelin may be a cause of the lack of activation of these neurons besides the hypertrophy of the stomach wall. However, hypothalamic mRNA level of GHS-R was not changed. Furthermore, the food intake induced by acute ghrelin administration in GP-Tag Tg mice was comparable with control. These results may not support the idea of desensitization. Leptin and ghrelin have opposing effects on food intake. We examined whether plasma leptin levels of GP-Tag Tg mice were elevated as a compensation for the chronically elevated plasma ghrelin levels, which may cause anorexia. However, the leptin levels were decreased, provably reflecting the decreased fat mass of GP-Tag Tg mice.

In summary, we developed a mouse model of ghrelinoma, GP-Tag Tg mice, in which ghrelin concentrations were significantly elevated in adulthood. These GP-Tag Tg mice exhibited elevated IGF-I levels despite poor nutrition and glucose intolerance due to decreased insulin secretion. These characteristic features of this ghrelinoma mouse could be a guide to diagnose ghrelinoma.

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