Review

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Internal ribosome entry segment-mediated translation during apoptosis: the role of IRES-*trans*-acting factors

KA Spriggs¹, M Bushell¹, SA Mitchell¹ and AE Willis^{*,1}

 Corresponding author: AE Willis, School of Pharmacy, University of Nottingham, University Park, Nottingham NG7 2RD UK; Tel: +44 115 8467095; Fax: +44 115 8466249; E-mail: anne.willis@nottingham.ac.uk

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Abstract

During apoptosis, there is a reduction in translation initiation caused by caspase cleavage of several of the factors required for the cap-dependent scanning mechanism. Under these circumstances, many proteins that are required for apoptosis are instead translated by the alternative method of internal ribosome entry. This mechanism requires the formation of a complex RNA structural element and in the presence of internal ribosome entry segment (IRES)-trans-acting factors (ITAFs), the ribosome is recruited to the RNA. The interactions of several ITAFs with IRESs have been investigated in detail, and several mechanisms of action have been noted, including acting as chaperones, stabilising and remodelling the RNA structure. Structural remodelling by PTB in particular will be discussed, and how this protein is able to facilitate recruitment of the ribosome to several IRESs by causing previously occluded sites to become more accessible. Cell Death and Differentiation (2005) 12, 585-591.

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Abbreviations: IRES, internal ribosome entry segment; UTR, untranslated region; PTB, polypyrimidine tract-binding protein; RRM, RNA recognition motif; Apaf-1, apoptotic protease activating factor 1; eIF, eukaryotic initiation factor; TNF, tumour necrosis factor; TRADD, TNFR-associated death domain; TRAIL, TNF-related apoptosis inducing ligand; unr, upstream of N-ras

Introduction

The regulation of the balance between cell proliferation and cell death is essential for the development and maintenance of multicellular organisms. The process of programmed cell death or apoptosis is complex, highly regulated and involves many pro- and antiapoptotic factors and can be induced either via death receptors (which are homotrimeric members of the tumour necrosis factor (TNF) receptor gene superfamily), or in a nonreceptor-mediated fashion.¹

Death receptor-mediated apoptosis is initiated by the binding of a ligand, for example, the TNF-related apoptosis inducing ligand (TRAIL), to its receptor and this results in the intracellular 'death domains' associating and recruiting an adapter protein via its own death domain.¹ Some ligands are able to recruit associated death domains directly (e.g. Fas recruits FADD), whereas receptors such as DR3 (a TRAIL receptor) recruit the TNFR-associated death domain (TRADD) and use this as a platform for FADD binding.² FADD contains a death effector domain, through which it binds procaspase-8, which subsequently undergoes proteolysis such that active caspase-8 is released into the cytoplasm. In nonreceptor-mediated apoptosis, agents such as staurosporine and UV irradiation cause mitochondrial disruption resulting in the release of cytochrome c. Cytochrome *c* then associates with apoptotic protease-activating factor 1 (Apaf-1;³); Apaf-1 serves as an adapter protein since it contains a caspase recruitment domain (CARD) and a long carboxy-terminal domain rich in WD40 repeats.^{4,5} Release of cytochrome c from the mitochondria following an apoptotic stimulus drives the oligomerisation of Apaf-1 monomers into an apoptosome.^{6,7} In this conformation, the Apaf-1 oligomers are able to bind procaspase 9 enabling its autoactivatation which leads to the cleavage of procaspase 3 and the triggering of the caspase cascade.³ The targeted mutation of Apaf-1 clearly shows the importance of this protein in normal development since Apaf-1-deficient embryos (which die between e16 and postnatal day 0) exhibit malformation of the brain due to reduced apoptosis in this organ, and dramatic craniofacial and eye alterations.8,9 The proteins that are required to execute apoptosis are controlled at all levels, and there is now increasing evidence to show that many of these proteins are highly regulated at the level of translation.

During apoptosis there is a switch between cap-dependent and capindependent translation

The cap-dependent scanning mechanism of initiating protein synthesis (which requires the binding of the trimeric complex eukaryotic initiation factor (eIF)4F, comprised of eIF4G, eIF4E and eIF4A, to the 7 methyl G cap structure and scanning to the first AUG codon that is in good context¹⁰) is inhibited during apoptosis.¹¹ This inhibition is brought about via the cleavage, by caspases, of components of the translation machinery, including eIF4G, ¹² eIF4B¹³ and 4E-BP1.¹⁴ In addition, there are changes in the phosphorylation states of canonical initiation factors including eIF2 α and 4E-BP1.¹¹ All of these events are believed to be pivotal in shutting down

¹ School of Pharmacy, University of Nottingham, University Park, Nottingham, UK

cap-dependent translation. However, a large amount of mRNA degradation takes place at the same time as the modification of the canonical initiation factors and this would also have a very significant effect on the rate of translation.¹⁵

Despite the reduction in the cap-dependent scanning mechanism of translation initiation, certain mRNAs, whose protein products are essential to the apoptotic process, are still associated with the polysomes during apoptosis and the corresponding proteins are synthesised (including c-myc,¹⁶ XIAP¹⁷ and DAP5¹⁸). One of the alternative mechanisms that are used for protein synthesis under these conditions is internal ribosome entry. This process requires the direct recruitment of ribosomes to a complex RNA structural element (an internal ribosome entry segment, IRES) that is generally formed in the 5' untranslated region (UTR) of the mRNA; IRES-mediated translation requires or is facilitated by IRES trans-acting factors (ITAFs). However, to ensure that a message contains an IRES, as opposed to containing a cryptic promotor or splice site, it is essential that appropriate controls are carried out.19

An IRES that has been studied in detail in an apoptotic context is found in the 5' UTR of c-myc.¹⁶ The c-Myc protein (a transcription factor which in conjunction with its partner Max binds to E box sequences; these heterodimers are potent activators of transcription) plays a major role in apoptosis and it has been shown that in cells that constitutively express this protein, withdrawal of serum results in apoptosis, and the extent of apoptosis correlates with the levels of c-Myc protein.20 Numerous studies have since confirmed that enforced c-Myc expression sensitises various cell types to a range of apoptotic stimuli.²¹ Apoptosis induced by c-Myc is inhibited by survival factors such as insulin-like growth factor 1 (IGF-1), and by the Bcl-2 proteins.²¹ The Fas signalling pathway is necessary for c-Myc-induced apoptosis in fibroblasts, and p53 has also been implicated in this process.²² These observations have led to a model in which the c-Myc protein performs two distinct functions. One pathway results in both proliferation and sensitisation to apoptosis, whereas a second pathway is responsible for direct triggering of

apoptosis. This second pathway is blocked by cell survival signals.²³ In a study to determine the mechanisms used to maintain c-Myc expression during apoptosis, HeLa cells were treated with TRAIL and this resulted in apoptosis of 90% of the cells. In this situation, c-Myc protein levels were maintained at the same levels as untreated cells and the data strongly suggest that under these conditions recruitment of the c-*myc* message to ribosome by the c-*myc*



one cDNA microarray experiment (Figure 1). Polysome profiling has been carried out under a number of conditions when cap-dependent translation has been inhibited including following polioviral infection,^{30,31} during mitosis,³² hypoxia and apoptosis (our unpublished data). In each of these diverse conditions, it has been found that approximately 3% of the messages remain associated with the polysomes including c-mvc mRNA.³³ However, while there is some overlap between the genes found associated, many of the mRNAs identified are distinct, suggesting that up to 10% of all cellular mRNAs can be translated by an alternative mechanism from global regulation. In addition, as not all mRNAs that are selected for translation during conditions of pathophysiological stress contain IRESs, it is likely that other hitherto unidentified mechanisms exist to recruit the ribosome. Finally, it is also possible that the regions tested for IRES activity (the 5'UTR) may not contain this element and it may be present instead within the coding region of the mRNA making it very difficult to identify. For example, mRNAs that encode Notch³⁴ and PITSLRE³⁵ have been shown to contain IRESs within internal coding sequences. The truncated proteins that result from IRES-mediated translation initiation are often functionally distinct from the full-length versions.

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IRES trans-acting factors are required for ribosome recruitment

One of the central goals of those working in the field of translation is to identify the sequence motif(s) and proteins that are required for internal ribosome entry; in particular, those ITAFs that allow coordinated regulation of mRNAs during conditions of cell stress. Cellular IRESs are relatively inactive in *in vitro* reconstituted systems, but can be stimulated by the addition of exogenous proteins.^{25,36} In a similar way, IRESs can show marked differences in activity when transfected into different cell lines, and it seems likely that RNA structure alone is not sufficient to confer IRES activity to a cellular 5'UTR. A number of ITAFs have been identified (Table 1), which are required for maximal activity of specific IRESs, but to date none has been proposed as a general regulator of IRES function. Although many of the gene products produced by IRES-driven translation are involved in

 Table 1
 Trans-acting factors and the IRES elements with which they are associated. ITAFs can act as chaperones, or to stabilise or remodel the RNA structures

ITAF	Target	Reference
PTB/nPTB	Apaf-1 Bag-1	Mitchell <i>et al.</i> ⁴⁴ Pickering <i>et al.</i> ⁴⁶
	Mnt	Our unpublished data
	Myb	Our unpublished data
	MTG8a	Our unpublished data
	BIP	Kin <i>et al.</i> ⁵³
		Giraud et al. ⁵²
hnRNPK	c-myc	Evans et al 61
La	BiP	Kim <i>et al.</i> ⁵⁴
	XIAP	Holcik <i>et al.</i> ⁷³
Unr	Apaf-1	Mitchell <i>et al.</i> ⁴⁴
hnRNPC1/2	XIAP	Holcik <i>et al.</i> ⁷⁴
DAP5		Warnakulasuriyarachchi <i>et al.</i> ¹⁰
	Anaf-1	Henis-Korenblit <i>et al.</i>
	c-mvc	Henis-Korenblit <i>et al.</i> ⁵⁰
eIF4GI fragment	Apaf-1	Nevins <i>et al.</i> ⁶⁸
	DAP5	Nevins <i>et al.</i> ⁶⁸
ELAV/Hu	p27	Kullmann <i>et al.</i> ⁷⁸

apoptosis (e.g. Apaf-1,²⁵ Bag-1,³⁶ c-myc,¹⁶ XIAP¹⁷ and DAP5¹⁸), it has yet to be established how, or indeed whether, they are coordinately regulated by a subset of ITAFs. A number of these ITAFs are thought to function as chaperones, modifying or stabilising the RNA structure to allow ribosome entry. Of these, polypyrimidine tract-binding protein (PTB) appears to have the most widespread influence (Table 1). PTB (hnRNPI) was originally identified in the late 1980s as a protein that interacts with the polypyrimidine tracts of introns,³⁷ and was also independently described as p57, a protein that bound to viral IRESs.³⁸ There are three functional splicing variants of PTB: PTB-1 is comprised of 531 amino acids (57 kDa); PTB-2 and PTB-4 contain insertions of 19 and 26 residues, respectively, after amino acid 297. There is additionally a version of the protein termed nPTB that shows enhanced expression in neuronal tissue.³⁹ PTB contains four loosely conserved RNA recognition motifs (RRMs)⁴⁰ with the isoform-specific insertions being between RRMs 2 and 3, near to a linker, or hinge, region. The RRMs of PTB contain unexpected amino acids compared with the RRM family consensus, particularly in their lack of conserved aromatic residues, these being important in other RRMs for nonspecific RNA contact: most of all at position 2 of the second part of the RRM (RNP-1) where a conserved glycine is absent in all four PTB RRMs.⁴¹ It has widely been thought that only RRMs 3 and 4 are important for RNA binding, with RRMs 1 and 2 being used for interacting with other proteins, and for homodimerisation.⁴² However, recent data suggest that all four RRMs contribute to the RNA binding of PTB, and that PTB binds to its target RNA as an 'extended monomer'.43

There are two well-characterised examples of PTB affecting IRES-mediated initiation of proteins that have roles in the apoptotic process; both the Apaf-1 and BAG-1 IRESs require PTB for function.^{44–47}

In fact the Apaf-1 IRES requires two *trans*-acting factors for function. In addition to PTB, it also requires *u*pstream of *N*-*r*as (unr; a single-stranded RNA-binding protein that contains five



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metvinculin, and also interacts with PTB to regulate splicing;^{57,58} hnRNP-L, a PTB homologue that was found to bind PTB in a yeast two-hybrid screen;⁵⁹ PSF (PTB-associated splicing factor) and p54^{nrb}/NonO are related multifunctional nuclear factors that contain both RNA-binding and DNA-binding functions.⁶⁰

Other ITAFs that help to regulate IRES-mediated expression of proteins that function during apoptosis include PCBP2 and hnRNPK. In combination with PCBP1, these interact specifically with regions of the c-*myc* IRES, and increase internal translation initiation.^{61,62} Since c-*myc* translation also occurs via cap-dependent initiation, the 5'UTR needs to be sufficiently flexible to allow ribosome scanning to the initiation AUG. The ITAFs in this case may be required to hold the RNA in the correct conformation for internal recruitment of the ribosome.⁶²

Other factors that are known to affect cellular IRES function are summarised in Table 1.

Regulation of ITAFs during apoptosis

It is likely that during apoptosis the activity of cellular IRESs will be regulated by changes in the intracellular levels and in subcellular localization of their *trans*-acting factors. Indeed, many cellular IRESs are almost completely inactive when present in dicistronic mRNAs introduced directly into the cytoplasm (by RNA transfection), suggesting that a 'nuclear experience' is an essential prerequisite for internal initiation.⁶³ Certain ITAFs, including PTB, PCBP1, unr and hnRNPK, are known to able to shuttle between the nucleus and the cytoplasm^{64–66} and it is therefore possible that complexes between IRESs and ITAFs are formed in the nucleus. Cell signalling pathways that are activated in apoptosis are

probably involved in the regulation of IRES-mediated protein synthesis via modulation of the activity or localization of the trans-acting factors. For example, it has been shown recently that nucleo-cytoplasmic shuttling of PTB-1 is regulated by the 3'-5' cyclic AMP-dependent protein kinase PKA.⁶⁷ Moreover, during apoptosis in certain cell types, PTB-1 has been shown to be cleaved by caspase 3 between RRM 1 and 2 resulting in relocation of this section of the protein to the cytoplasm. although the effect that this has on cellular IRES function is at present unknown.⁶⁸ PCBP1 is induced under cell stress conditions, mediated via signalling through the MAP kinase pathway,⁶⁹ a pathway which is known to be induced during apoptosis initiated by either anti-CD95, or TNFa.^{70,71} It has been shown for the c-Myc IRES that proteins that mediate IRES-initiated expression are downstream of p38MAPK, and the p38 inhibitor SB203580 blocks both the function of the cmyc IRES and the expression of c-Myc during apoptosis.33 However, it is likely that multiple signalling events are required for ITAF activation and it has been shown recently that the cmyc-IRES-ITAF, hnRNPK, interacts with c-Src kinase, leading to c-Src activation and tyrosine phosphorylation of hnRNPK in vivo and in vitro.72 This raises the possibility that regulation of hnRNPK through changes in phosphorylation could affect c-myc IRES function.

Summary

The major challenge for this field is to address how the ribosome is recruited to cellular IRESs. It is clear that at least 10% of messages remain polysomally associated during pathophysiological conditions that mimic stress. The mechanisms through which this occurs are yet to be fully understood. In this review, we have discussed the role of ITAFs in this

context, and the data suggest that these proteins have at least two roles: those which act as chaperons to modify the RNA structure and those which provide a bridge between the IRES RNA and the ribosome.

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