
Physiology and Pathophysiology of Wound Healing in Diabetes

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Abstract

Wound healing is an evolutionary conserved process that aims to restore the damaged barrier. This complex process involves many cellular responses including inflammation, proliferation, migration, angiogenesis, and tissue remodeling. Immediately after the injury, blood components are released into the wound site, activating the clotting cascade. The resulting clot induces hemostasis and provides a matrix for the influx of inflammatory cells. Inflammation is characterized by leukocyte migration and arrival to the site of injury. Neutrophils arrive first to remove contaminating bacteria (Singer and Clark, *N Engl J Med* 341(10):738–746, 1999) and are followed by monocytes, which differentiate into macrophages. Macrophages play an important role in augmenting the inflammatory response and tissue debridement. At the same time, many different cell types respond to initial inflammatory signals and start migrating to the wound site, including keratinocytes, endothelial cells, and circulating and local progenitor cells.

Keywords

Clotting cascade • Hemostasis • Cellular responses • Keratinocytes • Fibroblasts • Endothelial cells • Neutrophils • Macrophages • Stem and progenitor cells • Angiogenesis • Wound healing

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Physiology of Wound Healing

Wound healing is an evolutionary conserved process that aims to restore the damaged barrier. This complex process involves many cellular responses including inflammation, proliferation, migration, angiogenesis, and tissue remodeling. Immediately after the injury, blood components

are released into the wound site, activating the clotting cascade. The resulting clot induces hemostasis and provides a matrix for the influx of inflammatory cells. Inflammation is characterized by leukocyte migration and arrival to the site of injury. Neutrophils arrive the first to remove contaminating bacteria [1] and are followed by monocytes, which differentiate into macrophages. Macrophages play an important role in augmenting the inflammatory response and tissue debridement. At the same time, many different cell types respond to initial inflammatory signals and start migrating to the wound site, including keratinocytes, endothelial cells (ECs), and circulating and local progenitor cells. Once they arrive they start to proliferate. Proliferation is characterized by re-epithelialization, neovascularization, and granulation tissue formation. Granulation tissue formation begins during the inflammation phase, forming a “beefy red” and highly vascular region of the healing tissue, predominantly relying on neovascularization [1]. During this phase, the immature fibrin matrix and granulation tissue are replaced by collagen and scar. Wound healing as a process does not end by wound closure, although this is the visible sign of complete healing. Upon closure, tissue is continuing with collagen deposition and cross-linking. During this remodeling phase, balance is established between collagen synthesis and destruction, whereby the scar gains its tensile strength [2]. Wound healing in adults results with a scar formation, fibrosis, and contracture. However, fetal skin, up to midway to the last trimester, heals without scar formation, using a regenerative pathway [3].

Cellular responses to injury involve direct cell–cell and cell–matrix interactions, as well as the indirect cross talk between different cell populations by soluble mediators. Thus, wound healing is orchestrated through the integration of multiple signals (growth factors, cytokines, and chemokines) released by participating cells: keratinocytes, fibroblasts, endothelial cells, macrophages, and platelets. The appropriate balance of these signaling factors as well as their spatio-temporal control is essential for successful wound healing [4–6]. Below we discuss in more detail functions of various contributing cells: keratinocytes, fibroblasts,

endothelial cells, neutrophils, macrophages, and progenitor cells.

Cellular Components of Wound Healing

Keratinocytes

Keratinocytes play several critical roles in the wound healing process and are among the most important cells that respond to injury and accelerate healing. Under normal conditions, keratinocytes main role is barrier formation of the skin. During wound healing, keratinocytes play many important roles, including the release of cytokines and growth factors, which recruit other cell types and stimulate matrix formation and angiogenesis, respectively. Keratinocytes also migrate and proliferate within the wound bed to accelerate closure in a timely fashion.

In healthy skin, keratinocytes proliferate in the basal cell layer and differentiate in the suprabasal layers. Basal keratinocytes are mitotically active and help form the basement membrane by advancing cross talk with dermal fibroblasts, melanocytes, and Langerhans cells. When keratinocytes leave the basal cell layer, they change phenotypically and begin the process of differentiation. During this process, keratinocytes stop dividing, change their keratin production from K5/K14 to K1/K10, and begin producing a number of insoluble proteins. Terminal differentiation results in loss of nuclei and protein cross-linking, giving rise to a cornified layer and forming an epidermal barrier [7, 8]. This perpetual process of keratinocyte differentiation governs the maintenance of barrier.

Keratinocytes are responsible for barrier maintenance and they are equipped for rapid response to its damage. When the epidermal barrier is disrupted upon skin injury, keratinocytes release prestored interleukin-1 (IL-1), alerting surrounding cells to barrier damage [9, 10]. The signals released by keratinocytes act in both auto- and paracrine manners. This process, termed the “keratinocyte activation cycle,” is characterized by changes in cellular behavior (migration and proliferation), induced secretion of a multitude of growth factors and cytokines and expression of

K6, K16, and K17 keratin proteins, which are often considered one of the first markers of epidermal healing [11, 12].

To close the gap in the epidermal barrier, keratinocytes at the wound edge first loosen their adhesion to each other and to the basal lamina. In addition, keratinocytes obtain the flexibility and ability to migrate over the extracellular matrix (ECM) deposited by dermal fibroblasts. This process requires rearrangement of integrin receptors and reassembly of the associated actin cytoskeleton and the keratin filament network [8]. Further, epidermal growth factor (EGF), keratinocyte growth factor (KGF), transforming growth factor alpha (TGF- α), fibroblast growth factor (FGF), IL-1, and Interleukin-6 (IL-6) have been shown to be among the important regulators of keratinocyte proliferation, migration, and re-epithelialization and communication with other cell types [5, 9].

Upon the advancement of the migrating epithelial tongue and first layer covering the wound, keratinocytes also start to proliferate to ensure an adequate supply of cells to encase the wound. Once the wound is healed, defined as being fully epithelialized with no drainage, and covered by a keratinocyte monolayer, the proliferation signals cease and a new stratification process begins. Thus, keratinocytes become “deactivated” and revert to their previous normal differentiation patterns.

Fibroblasts

Complex interactions and cross talk between fibroblasts, keratinocytes, and other cell types participating in wound healing is critical for successful wound closure. Fibroblasts play a vital role in wound healing as they migrate, proliferate, and supply an ECM during tissue repair. Under normal conditions, fibroblasts synthesize collagen and ECM, maintaining the structural integrity of the skin. Much like keratinocytes, fibroblasts’ various roles are tightly regulated by cytokine and growth factor signaling over the course of wound healing. One of the many important roles of fibroblasts is to provide contractile properties to the wound as myofibroblasts. As an early response to wounding, dermal fibroblasts at

the site of injury begin to proliferate. A few days upon wounding, fibroblasts begin migration into the provisional matrix of the wound clot to lay down their own collagen-rich matrix [13]. This ECM acts as a “scaffold” during tissue repair, providing structural support and attachment sites for cell surface receptors and it also works as a regulated “reservoir” for signaling molecules that modulate diverse processes such as angiogenesis, cell proliferation and migration, and inflammation [14]. In order to migrate into the clot, dermal fibroblasts must downregulate their collagen receptors and upregulate integrins that bind ECM proteins such as fibrin, fibronectin, and vitronectin [15]. During their migration, fibroblasts sense signals coming from both their matrix environment and from the growth factor milieu that surrounds them.

About 1 week after wounding, the wound clot will be fully invaded by activated fibroblasts. These fibroblasts are stimulated by TGF- β 1 and other growth factors to synthesize and remodel a new collagen-rich matrix [13]. At the same time, a proportion of the wound fibroblasts transforms into myofibroblasts, which express α -smooth muscle actin and resemble smooth muscle cells in their capacity for generating strong contractile forces [16].

Conversion from fibroblasts to myofibroblasts is triggered not only by growth factors such as TGF- β 1 [16] but also by mechanical tension [17, 18]. The appearance of myofibroblasts coincides with a strong induction of contractile properties so that cells align parallel to mechanical tension that is building up in the granulation tissue. The various tensile forces acting on and exerted by wound fibroblasts before, during, and after contraction have been studied in collagen-gel models. A number of growth factors at the wound site are potent stimulators of fibroblast-driven gel contraction and presumably signal granulation tissue contraction in vivo [19]. Platelet-derived growth factor (PDGF)-AA and -BB isoforms and TGF- β 1 led to efficient collagen-gel contraction [19–21]. IL-1 α was shown to cause degradation of the collagen gels at later time points, most likely due to enhanced matrix metalloproteinase (MMP) activity [22].

Contraction stop signals are also being analyzed by releasing mechanically stressed anchored gels from their substrate attachments to simulate the loss of resistance after a wound has closed. Within minutes of release from resisting forces, PDGF and EGF receptors on the cell surface become deactivated [23] and the relaxed cells return to a quiescent state similar to that existing before the injury. Programmed cell death also occurs in the granulation tissue fibroblasts, triggered by TGF- β 1 and FGF at the injury site, after wound contraction has ceased [24, 25].

Given the importance of fibroblasts and keratinocytes in proper wound healing, human skin substitutes have been developed as a wound treatment modality. Currently, a living skin equivalent, composed of living fibroblasts and keratinocytes in a native collagen matrix, is the only FDA-approved skin substitute [26]. Please see section on “Treatment for DFUs” for additional information.

Endothelial Cells

Additional responders to wound healing signals released by fibroblasts and keratinocytes are local endothelial cells. ECs are normally positioned within the vascular lumen and form the tubular structure of blood vessels. ECs act as a barrier between intraluminal blood and extravascular tissue. During angiogenesis, growth factors, cytokines, and cell–cell and cell–matrix interactions activate ECs. Activated ECs, platelets, macrophages, and fibroblasts release proangiogenic cytokines, leading to the invasion and migration of ECs into the ECM, EC proliferation, and new immature vascular formation [27].

Before ECs can begin angiogenesis, they must disrupt their interactions with neighboring ECs, digest the basement membrane and components of the ECM [27, 28]. Proteolytic enzymes, including serine proteases, urokinase plasminogen activator, and MMPs, are released by ECs to digest the basement membrane and ECM [29]. Once this is achieved, ECs are allowed to migrate to the site of new vessel formation [27]. MMPs digest the basement membrane and the ECM, ultimately allowing ECs to migrate and proliferate [29]. In a recent study, the addition of MMP synthetic

inhibitor to EC cultures significantly decreased angiogenic activity [29]. ECs migrate to the site of new vessel formation by chemotaxis [27]. Further, specific adhesion molecules, integrins, mediate their cell–matrix interactions to ensure migration to the site of new vessel formation [27]. Integrins are adhesion molecules that are highly upregulated on ECs undergoing angiogenesis [30, 31].

Neutrophils

Inflammation in normal wound healing is essential, but must be tightly regulated both temporally and spatially by a variety of cell types. Immediately after injury extravagated blood constituents form a haemostatic plug. Platelets and polymorphonuclear leukocytes (also known as neutrophils or PMNs) entrapped and aggregated in the blood clot release a wide variety of factors that amplify the aggregation response, initiate a coagulation cascade, and/or act as chemoattractants for cells involved in the inflammatory phase [32]. At the same time, rapid activation of resident skin immune cells (mast cells, $\gamma\delta$ T cells, and Langerhans cells) occurs [33–35]. The inflammatory phase continues with active recruitment of neutrophils and then macrophages from blood vessels, which is orchestrated by growth factor signals from the resident cells, mainly keratinocytes, and by foreign epitopes such as the lipopolysaccharides (LPS) of invading microorganisms [36]. Neutrophils arrive at the wound site within minutes of wounding and become the predominant cells in the wound for the first 2 days after the injury occurs, with especially high numbers on the second day. Extravasation of PMNs from blood vessels is activated by proinflammatory cytokines IL-1 β , TNF- α , and IFN γ at the wound site, leading to expression of various classes of adhesion molecules essential for cell adhesion and diapedesis. Adhesion molecules crucial for neutrophil diapedesis include endothelial P- and E-selectins as well as ICAM-1, -2 [36]. PMNs have an important bactericidal role and kill invading microorganisms through several strategies, including bursts of reactive oxygen species (ROS) [32]. Inflammatory cells also exert their influence on the surrounding tissue by generating

nitric oxide (NO) and large amounts of ROS [37]. Chemokines are also very important mediators of neutrophil recruitment during tissue repair [38–40]. Gene expression profiles of wound PMNs suggested that these cells influence many other aspects of repair, such as resolution of the fibrin clot and provisional ECM, promotion of angiogenesis, and re-epithelialization [41]. The neutrophil infiltration ceases after a few days, and expended neutrophils are themselves phagocytosed by macrophages, which are present at the wound site within 2 days after injury.

Macrophages

Release of signals from keratinocytes and fibroblasts leads to recruitment of both local resident macrophages and those from the blood. Monocytes are drawn from the circulation somewhat later than neutrophils and their numbers peak a day or so after injury [36]. Once they leave the circulation, monocytes mature into macrophages and change their expression profiles and behavior according to the surroundings and growth factor stimuli [42]. At the wound site, they clear up matrix and cell debris, including spent neutrophils by phagocytosis [36].

Macrophage infiltration into the wound site is regulated by different chemotactic factors, including growth factors, proinflammatory cytokines, and chemokines (macrophage inflammatory protein 1 α , MCP-1, RANTES) [4, 43–45]. Major sources of these chemoattractants at the wound site include platelets trapped in the fibrin clot at the wound surface, keratinocytes at the wound edge, fibroblasts, and leukocytes subsets. Both types of macrophages, classically activated (M1, proinflammatory) and alternatively activated (M2, anti-inflammatory and proangiogenic), are present in early phases of inflammation, but M2 macrophages predominate later in repair [46, 47]. In addition to their immunological functions as antigen-presenting cells and phagocytes during wound repair, macrophages also release a battery of growth factors and cytokines at the wound site, which further promotes cell proliferation and the synthesis of ECM molecules by resident skin cells [46, 47].

Inflammatory cells also exert their influence on the surrounding tissue by generating nitric

oxide (NO) and large amounts of ROS [37]. NO and ROS are known to drive certain aspects of repair [48] but at the same time affected wound cells must protect themselves by detoxifying programs [37]. NO is a very transitory molecule, whose levels together with inducible NO synthase (iNOS) activity shows a distinct time course during normal healing [49, 50]. Although the issue of whether inflammatory cells are an essential requirement for repair remains controversial [51], it is clear that these cell populations exert a profound influence on all other cells within the wound and in the surrounding tissue. One of the important roles of inflammatory cytokines is to regulate angiogenesis, which they accomplish in concert with signals from other wound cells and from serum (see section on “Angiogenesis”). However, nonhealing wounds fail to progress through the normal phases of wound repair, but instead remain in a chronic inflammatory state. Imbalances in wound proteases and their inhibitors in chronic wounds, because of sustained production of inflammatory mediators and influx of inflammatory cells, prevent matrix synthesis and remodeling, essential for progression to a healed wound [52–56].

The inflammatory phase of wound healing has been studied in detail, but most of the research efforts were focused on the onset of inflammation and little is known about inflammation resolution. Better understanding of how inflammation resolves will provide a basis for novel treatment modalities favoring the closure of chronic wounds.

Stem and Progenitor Cells in Wound Healing

In order to have sustained healing without scarring, Fu et al. suggested combining growth factors with stem cell therapy so that sweat glands, sebaceous glands, and hair follicles could be reconstituted with a more functional integument [6]. Therefore, stem and progenitor cells are of great interest to wound healing as active participants as well as potential therapeutic approach.

The ability of the skin to replenish itself and contribute to the maintenance of tissue renewal

and homeostasis relies on resident populations of stem cells (SCs) [57–59]. To date, SCs of the skin have been identified to occupy at least three distinct niches: the bulge of the hair follicle, the base of the sebaceous gland, and the basal layer of the epidermis [59–64]. Whereas the SCs of the sebaceous gland niche and the interfollicular basal layer niche have only been proven to behave unipotently exclusively maintaining homeostasis of their respective tissue, the SCs of the hair bulge have been long thought to maintain a multipotent nature: serving as a reservoir for renewal of not only hair but also sebaceous glands in conditions of hyperproliferation and interfollicular epidermis subsequent to wounding [65]. This is not surprising as it is known that the basal layer and the hair follicle outer root sheath are not only connected but also biochemically similar [66]. If stimulated adequately epidermal SCs have even the potential to develop additional cell types and tissues [67–70]. In the healthy skin, SCs are quiescent [71]. However, in response to injury, SCs niches lose their quiescence and resident SCs are recruited to replace the damaged tissue [72–74]. SCs of the hair bulge are required for regenerating the interfollicular epidermis in response to wounding [75] and the most recent studies have shown major contribution of hair follicle in anagen phase during tissue repair [76]. Importantly, in addition to the hair follicle bulge SCs, recent studies discovered other populations of epithelial SCs within distinct regions of the hair follicle [77]. Although epidermal SCs have been characterized largely by their functional properties and marker expression [78, 79], their full therapeutic capacity is still elusive.

Amnion-derived multipotent progenitor cells (AMP cells) provide another avenue for therapeutic approach to wound healing as well as diabetic foot ulcers (DFUs). AMP cells display many favorable characteristics of stem cells, including the ability to differentiate to many cell types such as skin, hair, neurons, cardiac muscle, liver, pancreas, and possibly vascular tissue [80, 81]. They are isolated from the full-term placenta, which makes them abundantly available. From a safety standpoint, the low antigenicity of amnion [82] and documented nontumorigenicity [81] is

an advantage for use as a cell replacement therapy. Amniotic membrane and human amniotic epithelial cells are used on skin wounds, burn injuries, and chronic leg ulcers and to prevent adhesions in surgical procedures [83–91]. Amniotic membrane is also used in ocular surface reconstruction to promote development of normal corneal or conjunctival epithelium [92]. Human amniotic membrane and hAEC have been shown to survive for prolonged times in immunocompetent animals, including rabbits [92], rats [93], guinea pigs [94], and bonnet monkeys [95]. In addition, long-term engraftment was observed after i.v. injection of heterogeneous human amniochorionic cells into newborn swine and rats, with human microchimerism detected in bone marrow, brain, lung, and thymus [96], suggesting active migration and integration into specific organs and indicating active tolerance of the xenogeneic cells. Amnion-derived cells have been shown to secrete many cytokines that are associated with wound healing and some have been credited with contributing to scarless healing in the fetus [97–107].

These therapies have also been important in demonstrating that local therapy is clinically effective in the treatment of DFUs and will be useful approach to implement findings from this project into future treatments. Adult bone marrow (BM) is well known source of multipotent adult progenitor cells that can differentiate into many adult tissue types in vivo and in vitro when placed in the proper cytokine environment [108, 109] and may provide a alternative for progenitor cell therapy approach. Multipotent adult progenitor cells could also home to injured tissues and participate in the repair and regeneration [110, 111]. It has been known that bone marrow (BM) provides inflammatory cells and endothelial progenitor cells (EPCs) during normal wound healing. However, recent studies strongly suggest that the BM contributes not only to inflammation and angiogenesis, but also to keratinocytes and fibroblast-like cells [112–114]. Most importantly, wounding can stimulate the engraftment of bone marrow-derived mesenchymal stem cells (BM-MSCs) to the skin promoting wound healing [115].

BM-MSCs are self-renewing SCs characterized by specific markers—CD105, CD73, and CD9 [116]. They represent about 0.001–0.01% of the nucleated BM cells, but the fact that they are expandable in culture and capable of differentiating into several cell types [117] makes them very attractive for therapeutic purposes. A number of animal studies have shown that BM-MSCs contribute to the repair/regeneration of a variety of injured tissues including the myocardium [118, 119], bone and cartilage [120], tendon [121], and most importantly skin [121, 122]. Moreover, topically applied autologous BM-MSCs have shown potential to heal human chronic wounds that are recalcitrant to other treatments [123, 124]. Many other mesenchymal tissues also contain committed lineage-directed mesenchymal precursor cells, which participate in local regeneration. MSCs from the skin and other tissues, like adipose tissue, muscles, and scalp tissue resemble BM-MSCs and express similar markers [125–127]. Skin fibroblasts are also a useful source of cells from which pluripotent SCs may be generated [128]. Another type of circulating bone marrow-derived progenitor cells, called fibrocytes, have been suggested to migrate into the wound and contribute to the formation of the myofibroblastic population of granulation tissue [129]. Fibrocytes participate in tissue remodeling by producing ECM proteins (i.e., collagen I and collagen III) and by secreting MMPs [130].

Bone marrow-derived EPCs are the essential cells for vasculogenesis [131]. Vasculogenesis likely begins when BM multipotent progenitor cells differentiate into early EPCs [109, 132], at which time the cells acquire hematopoietic endothelial lineage specific cell surface markers [133, 134]. EPCs are undifferentiated in the BM and in a quiescent state in two zones [27]. One zone, the osteoblastic zone, maintains EPCs in the G0 phase of the cell cycle and keeps the EPCs in close proximity with stromal cells [132, 135]. The second zone, the vascular zone, maintains EPCs in the S phase or G2/M phase of the cell cycle, which is readily available to differentiate into tissue-specific progenitor cells and enter the peripheral circulation [132]. EPC mobilization from the BM into the circulation is thought

to occur via cytokine-mediated pathways [133]. These cytokines include the vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF) family and stromal-cell-derived factor-1 (SDF1 α) [133]. Early EPCs that exit the bone marrow are positive for CD133, CD34, and VEGF-R2, which are specific to EPCs determined to become endothelial cells. Next, EPCs enter the peripheral circulation and migrate to areas of vasculogenesis. In the circulation, the early EPCs differentiate into late EPCs by losing CD133 and gaining other, more specific EC surface markers [136]. In the circulation, EPCs constitute 0.002% of mononuclear cell fraction of whole blood [137]. This pool of circulating EPCs is increased when vasculogenic stimuli are released for neovascularization. EPCs play an important role in normal wound healing [138–140]. Multiple studies have shown that EPCs derived from diabetic mice exhibited impaired vascularization and wound healing which could be reversed by ischemia-induced upregulation of SDF-1 α [2, 138]. Consistent with the effect of EPCs on wound healing in animal models, impaired function and reduced numbers of circulating EPCs have been described in both type 1 and type 2 diabetic patients [141, 142], suggesting that modulation of EPC numbers and function has a potential for therapy for DFUs.

In summary, there is a profound therapeutic potential of progenitor cells and a great interest in current developments of stem or progenitor cells therapy for treatment of wound healing disorders, including DFUs.

Pathophysiology of Wound Healing in Diabetes Mellitus

Over 170 million patients worldwide are affected by diabetes, with an estimated 20.8 million affected in the USA [143]. By 2030, these numbers are projected to double [144]. DFUs occur in 15% of patients with diabetes and are a leading cause of hospital admissions for people with diabetes in the developed world [145, 146]. DFUs precede 84% of all diabetes-related leg amputations [146] and lead to pain, suffering, and poor quality of life [2].

As mentioned earlier, wound healing is a dynamic process involving overlapping inflammatory, proliferating, and remodeling phases. It engages the coordinated action of both resident and migratory cell populations within the ECM environment. However, in individuals suffering from DM, wounds fail to heal in a timely and orderly manner. The pathophysiologic relationship between diabetes and impaired healing is multifactorial. Vascular, neuropathic, immune functions and biochemical abnormalities each contribute to the altered tissue repair in diabetic patients.

Extrinsic factors such as callus formation, excessive pressure, and wound infection also play a role in healing impairment. In addition, lack of glucose control impairs local leukocyte defenses and persisting hyperglycemia contributes to the metabolic pathophysiology of diabetes-related complications.

From the extensive research conducted so far, it appears that diabetes negatively affects majority of cellular processes in wound healing. Studies show that prolonged inflammatory phase in diabetic wounds causes delay in the formation of mature granulation tissue and subsequently reduction in wound tensile strength [147]. Diabetic wounds show decreased number and function of neutrophils and macrophages. Macrophage efferocytosis is dysfunctional (e.g., efficient dead cell clearance at the wound site), thus resulting in increased apoptotic cell burden and higher expression of proinflammatory and lower expression of anti-inflammatory cytokines [148–150]. For example, increased levels of tumor necrosis factor alpha (TNF- α) found in diabetic wounds may lead to decreased fibroblast proliferation and increased apoptosis by inducing caspase activity [150]. On the other hand, sustained inflammatory response and deregulated expression of cytokines may amplify caspase activity as well [151, 152].

Fibroblasts from diabetic wounds look different than healthy fibroblasts. They are usually large and inflated compared to the spindle-shaped morphology of the fibroblasts in age-matched controls. Fibroblasts from diabetic wounds show numerous vesicular bodies, dilated endoplasmic reticulum, and lack of microtubular structure

[153]. In addition to a reduced number and morphological changes, fibroblasts from diabetic wounds exhibit diminished proliferative capacity that contributes to a decreased production of ECM proteins, delayed wound contraction, and impaired wound healing [153, 154]. On the contrary, activity of some MMPs is found increased in diabetic wounds when compared to acute wound healing [155]. Increased expression of MMP8 and MMP26 was found in tissue from DFUs [156]. MMP2 and MMP9 show sustained overexpression in chronic nonhealing DFUs [157]. The latest report implicates MMP9 levels in wound fluid as a predictor of poor wound healing in DFUs [158]. The ratio of MMP and tissue inhibitor of metalloproteinases (TIMP), which in normal physiological conditions maintains the proteolytic balance, is found to be disturbed in DFUs. High MMP1/TIMP1 ratio has been shown as a predictor of wound healing in DFUs [159]. In contrast, high MMP9/TIMP1 ratio predicts poor wound healing [158] (Table 7.1). The combination of increased concentrations of MMP2, MMP9, MMP14 with decreased concentrations of TIMP2 in DFUs suggests that the increased proteolytic environment significantly reduces the formation of new connective tissue matrix and contributes to the failure of diabetic wounds to heal. Overall, these changes lead to decreased tensile strength in diabetic wounds [152, 160].

The decrease in growth factors responsible for tissue repair such as TGF- β may explain deregulation of MMPs [161]. It is known that most MMP genes have TGF- β inhibitory element in their promoter regions and thus a possible explanation for deregulation of MMPs is that reduced levels of TGF- β lower down the inhibitory regulatory effect on MMP genes and cause overexpression of MMPs [162, 163]. However, the exact mechanism responsible for increased MMP activity in diabetes is still to be elucidated. The lack of TGF- β signaling in chronic wounds could also lead to the increased iNOS activity and greater NO synthesis [164], since TGF- β 1 has been demonstrated to downregulate iNOS activity in macrophages and epithelial cells [165, 166]. Although NO can stimulate angiogenesis, excessive amounts may have an inhibitory

Table 7.1 Deregulated matrix metalloproteinase (MMPs) and their inhibitors (TIMPs) in DFUs

↑	MMP2
↑	MMP8
↑	MMP9
↑	MMP14
↑	MMP26
↓	TIMP1
↓	TIMP2
↑	MMP1/TIMP1
	Predictor of healing ulcers
↑	MMP9/TIMP1
	Predictor of poor healing

effect by decreasing endothelial cell and lymphocyte proliferation, and possibly inhibiting platelet and leukocyte activation [167–169]. In patients with diabetes, elevated levels of plasma NO have found to be associated with recurrent ulcers [170]. In addition to lower concentrations of growth factors, diabetic wounds contain fibroblasts that show diminished response to growth factors such as EGF, IGF-I, bFGF, PDGF-AB, GM-CSF, and VEGF [153, 166, 171–173]. We have shown that fibroblasts cultured from the different wound locations (e.g., nonhealing edge, wound base, and adjacent skin) show differences in the response to the various growth factors [154].

Similar to fibroblasts, epidermal keratinocytes display dysfunction in DFUs. One study found that epidermal keratinocytes at the edge of DFUs express pathogenic markers beta-catenin, and c-myc and show abnormal localization of EGF receptor (Fig. 7.1). Keratinocytes appear to be trapped between proliferation and differentiation. Epidermis comprising nonhealing edges of DFUs is acanthotic, hyper-, and para-keratotic [174, 175]. Hyperproliferative keratinocytes show an activated phenotype and are negative when stained for keratins involved in epidermal differentiation. In addition to deregulated proliferation and differentiation, there is a reduced expression of a key molecule present on migrating epithelium LM-3A32 (uncleaved, precursor of the $\alpha 3$ chain of laminin 5) contributes to impaired migratory capacity of these cells [176, 177]. Over expression of EGF, GM-CSF, and TGF- $\beta 1$ in DFU

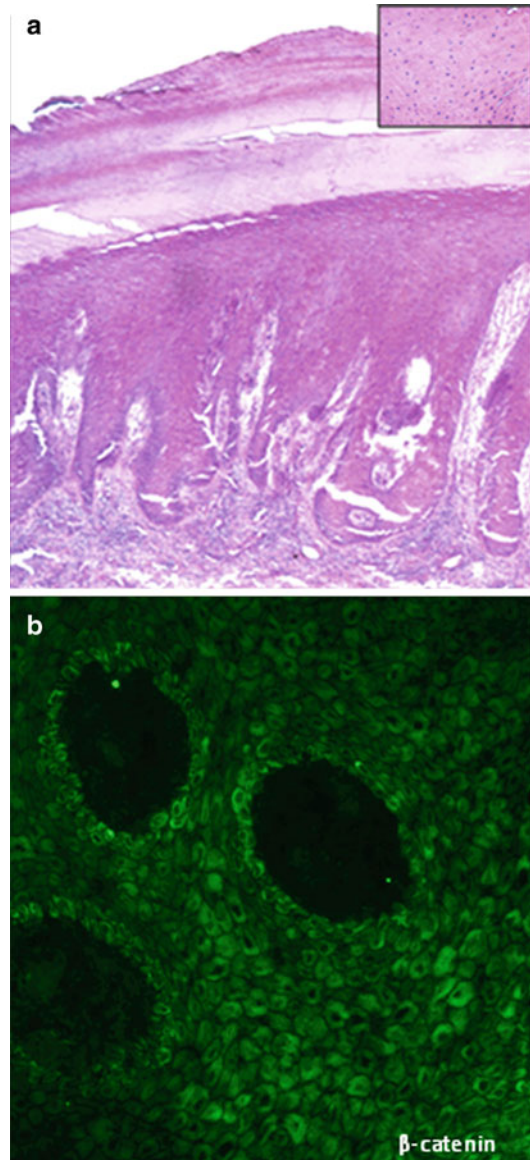


Fig. 7.1 A typical nonhealing edge of a DFU shows hyperproliferative epidermis with nuclei present in cornified layer (*inset*) (a). Immunofluorescence with a beta-catenin specific antibody. Beta-catenin is present in the nuclei of a nonhealing DFU epidermis (b)

epidermis is also postulated to play a role in deregulated keratinocyte proliferation, lack of keratinocyte apoptosis, and migration in these ulcers [161]. Tissue from DFUs show accumulation of CD1a+ Langerhans cells (LC) in epidermis compared to normal skin and insufficient upregulation of beta-defensin-2 (hBD2) [178].

Many other factors such as decrease in heat shock protein expression, decreased chemotaxis, less antioxidant synthesis, and increased oxygen free radical generation have been shown to play a role in pathogenesis of diabetic healing [179].

The local environment of the diabetic wound is healing impaired due to high bacterial burden and the barrier to diffusion of growth factors and cytokines important for healing. In addition, prolonged hypoxia correlates with healing inability [139]. Hypoxia is pathologically increased in diabetic wound healing [139]. Oxygen tension is positively correlated with collagen production [180–182] and bacterial killing [183, 184].

Diabetics are at an increased risk for infection due to high bacterial burden. It has been reported that diabetic patients have a 25% chance of developing a DFU and a greater than 50% chance of these ulcers becoming infected [185, 186]. Further, diabetic patients have a tenfold increased chance of being hospitalized with a bone or soft tissue infection than those without diabetes [185–187]. Infection and subsequent biofilm production undermines healing in DFUs. Biofilms are polymicrobial populations of cells encased in hydrated extracellular polymeric substances and attached to a surface (e.g., tissue) [188]. It has been proven that one of the greatest barriers to healing in chronic wounds is biofilm due to polymicrobial infections [189–191]. Furthermore, it has been shown that biofilms are more prevalent in chronic, nonhealing wounds, and rare in acute, healing wounds [192].

One of the most significant risk factors for the development of DFUs is diabetic neuropathy leading to amputations, infections, morbidity, and mortality. The prevalence of diabetic neuropathy ranges from 7% within 1 year of diagnosis to 50% for those with diabetes for >25 years [193]. Thus, as patients age, diabetic neuropathy prevalence increases; it is present to some degree in >50% of patients over 60 years [145, 194]. Diabetic neuropathy increases the risk of foot ulceration by sevenfold [195]. Diabetic neuropathy predisposes the diabetic foot to various complications including ulceration [195] and disabling joint deformity [196]. One of the ways diabetic neuropathy causes

damage is via altered autonomic regulation of cutaneous blood flow [197]. Further, motor neuropathy leads to atrophic changes in the foot musculature, leading to foot deformity and decreased joint mobility [196]. Ultimately, these complications further the risk for DFU. Therefore, identifying at-risk diabetic patients is crucial for the prevention of foot ulceration and various screening methods are used for this, including evaluation of vibration perception threshold [195, 198], plantar foot pressure measurements [199], and joint mobility [200].

Angiogenesis

Angiogenesis and vasculogenesis form the mature circulatory system, which is one of the first organs to form and maintains metabolic homeostasis by supplying oxygen and nutrients and removing waste products [27, 131]. An imbalance of the two interrelated processes of angiogenesis and vasculogenesis contributes to the pathogenesis of numerous malignant, inflammatory, ischemic, infectious, immune, and wound healing disorders [131]. In angiogenesis, endothelial cells develop from preexisting blood vessels and migrate and proliferate into a cord-like structure [27] (Table 7.2). Intussusceptive microvascular growth (whereby a mature vessel lumen is divided by the ingrowths of cellular columns) is another component of angiogenesis [27]. Vasculogenesis is the de novo formation of immature vascular structures from the differentiation of progenitor cells [27] (Table 7.3). These newly formed vascular structures mature into capillaries, arterioles, arteries, venules, and veins [27, 108, 109, 201, 202].

Angiogenesis is capillary formation from pre-existing ones, which first requires destabilization of the preexisting endothelial tubular structure [27, 211–213]. Often, angiogenesis is caused by tissue injury or neoplastic transformation [27, 214, 215]. During wound healing, neovascularization is new capillary formation to replace damaged capillaries and reestablish the supply of oxygen and nutrients to the wound [27]. During the proliferation phase of wound healing, angiogenesis re-establishes the supply of oxygen and

Table 7.2 Major differences between normal angiogenesis and angiogenesis seen in DFUs

Normal angiogenesis	Angiogenesis in DFU
Proangiogenic cytokines (including VEGF) are released from platelets, monocytes, and fibroblasts	Fibroblasts may become senescent in chronic wounds and lose their ability to provide angiogenic functions [27]
Endothelial cells (ECs) disrupt their interactions with neighboring ECs	Resident ECs of the chronic wound may lose their ability to support new vessel formation [27]
ECs digest the basement membrane and extracellular matrix (ECM) components (via MMPs)	Impaired balance between the accumulation of ECM components and their remodeling by MMPs [160]
ECs, fibroblasts, platelets, smooth muscle cells, and monocytes release more proangiogenic cytokines	The fluid of chronic wounds block cellular proliferation and angiogenesis [203, 204] Impairment of leukocyte function and proliferation occur in hyperglycemia [205]
ECs invade ECM and migrate/proliferate to new vessels	Disruption of new vessel formation disrupts healing at the level of the peripheral wound [27] Hypoxia impairs angiogenesis [206, 207]

Table 7.3 Major differences between normal and vasculogenesis in DFUs

Normal vasculogenesis	Vasculogenesis in DFU
Multipotent adult progenitor cells (MAPCs) differentiate into hematopoietic precursor cells or early endothelial progenitor cells (EPCs) in the bone marrow	Impaired VEGF-induced proliferation response in EPCs [208]
Increased vascular endothelial growth factor-A (VEGF-A) induces vascular endothelial growth factor receptor-1 (VEGF-R1) activation and subsequently increased matrix metalloproteinase-9 (MMP9) secretion	Hyperglycemia-mediated inhibition of VEGF [209]
Increased MMP9 mediates the conversion of membrane-bound kit ligand (mKitL) to soluble kit ligand (sKitL), which mobilizes EPCs from the bone marrow to circulation	Decreased number and function of circulating EPCs impairs healing [131]
Early EPCs in the circulation further differentiate to late EPCs and gain specific endothelial cell (EC) surface markers	Diminished blood supply to peripheral wound [131]
Late EPCs arrive to the site of the new vessel formation and further differentiate into mature ECs or act as a source of proangiogenic cytokines	EPCs demonstrate abnormal mobilization and homing mechanisms in diabetics [210]

nutrients to the wound. Vasculogenesis is the de novo formation of blood vessels from the differentiation of bone marrow-derived precursor cells. Vasculogenesis occurs during both fetal development and in the adult [27]. In the formation of fetal vasculature, primitive mesodermal cells called hemangioblasts form blood islands. These are spatially arranged with cells that differentiate into endothelial cells, or angioblasts, at the periphery. Other cells included in this process are hematopoietic stem cells [27]. An imbalance of angiogenesis or vasculogenesis contributes to numerous pathologies, including malignancies, inflammatory or ischemic, infectious, and immune diseases.

Angiogenesis in Diabetes

During the last decade, the incidence of microvascular complications in DM has rapidly increased [213]. Dysfunctional angiogenesis has been suggested as a common origin for retinopathy, nephropathy, neuropathy, and impaired wound healing [213, 216–220], although the complex pathogenesis of diabetic microvascular complications is still largely unknown [221–223].

VEGF is a key player in a number of diabetes-related pathologies [224]. In some organ systems, elevated VEGF levels act as a pathologic angiogenic stimulus (i.e., ocular neovascularization)

[225], whereas in others, low levels of VEGF activity leads to pathology (i.e., nephropathy, peripheral neuropathy, and wound healing) [140, 226, 227].

Angiogenesis-related complications are implicated in a number of diabetic complications, including diabetic retinopathy, diabetic nephropathy, diabetic neuropathy, coronary artery disease (CAD), and impaired wound healing. As the number of microvascular complications in DM continue to rise, a better understanding of dysfunctional angiogenesis becomes more critical. Further understanding of the role of angiogenesis in these pathologies could provide novel treatments and improve the lives of the millions of patients suffering with diabetes.

Diabetic retinopathy (DR) is one of the leading causes of blindness worldwide [228]. Vision loss occurs due to retinal ischemia, retinal vascular exudation, intraocular hemorrhage, and ultimately, fibrotic complications [229]. Nearly all patients with type 1 DM and over 60% of patients with type 2 DM develop retinopathy during the first two decades of the disease [229]. DR is characterized by abnormal angiogenesis, leading to new vessels that are often immature and play a pathological role in retinopathy, contributing to both vitreous hemorrhage and fibrosis [230]. Increased vascular permeability leads to plasma leakage and the development of macula edema [230]. Diabetic macular edema and retinal neovascularization represent two of the most serious pathological changes in DR [219]. Previous studies have shown that angiogenic factors, including VEGF, play a key role in the development of these two changes [225]. Elevated levels of VEGF in ocular fluids of patients with proliferative DR have been shown [231]. Chronic hyperglycemia increases the synthesis of VEGF (a normally proangiogenic cytokine), contributing to the microvascular abnormalities in DR [232]. Inhibition of VEGF diminishes the microvascular complications seen in experimental animal models [232]. Retinal hypoxia/ischemia upregulates the production of VEGF, which results in abnormal and deregulated angiogenesis [233]. The growth of new vessels from the retina or optic nerve occurs as a result of VEGF release

into the vitreous cavity [232]. Further, injection of VEGF into normal primate eyes induces the same pathologic processes seen in diabetic retinopathy, including microaneurysm formation and increased vascular permeability [232]. A key target of current clinical trials is VEGF [225]. Anti-VEGF treatments may represent an alternative adjunctive treatment for proliferative DR. Currently, there are three anti-VEGF agents available: pegaptanib, bevacizumab, and ranibizumab [219].

Diabetic nephropathy (DN) is one of the leading causes of end-stage renal disease [234]. In a pathogenesis similar to DR, abnormal angiogenesis also occurs in diabetic nephropathy [234]. VEGF-A is involved in the normal physiological processes of the kidney [234]. VEGF-A has been shown to be upregulated in the early stages of DN, likely leading to excessive blood vessel formation [235]. However, a decline of VEGF-A in the later phase of DN has also been shown [235]. Two studies have shown beneficial effects of anti-VEGF antibody treatments [236, 237]. However, some theorize that VEGF-A inhibitors could lead to endothelial injury because endothelial cells require VEGF-A in physiological conditions [234]. While anti-angiogenic treatments have prevented the progression of animal models of diabetic nephropathy, further studies are needed before these treatments can be applied to a clinical setting [234].

Diabetes mellitus is one of the greatest cardiovascular risk factors and leads to vascular dysfunction and atherosclerotic disease. The formation of coronary collateral vessels is of functional importance in patients with CAD and is a compensatory mechanism secondary to repetitive or chronic myocardial ischemia [238]. DM was recently shown to be one of the first negative predictors of collateral vessel formation [239]. This reduced collateral circulation in diabetic patients likely contributes to their increased morbidity and mortality [238]. So far, research has shown that coronary collateral vessel formation depends on monocyte function, which is impaired in diabetic patients and VEGF-related signal transduction defects may be the basis of impaired monocyte function in diabetics [240].

Thus, VEGF-A may be a potential therapeutic strategy for reduced coronary collateral circulation in diabetic patients [240].

Treatment for DFUs

Standardized treatment of DFUs includes glyce-mic control, debridement of necrotic tissue, control of infection, use of moist dressings, protection from pressure or trauma related to ambulation, and adjuvant hyperbaric oxygen (HBO) therapy [131]. In the setting of arterial insufficiency in diabetes, revascularization with return of delivery of oxygen or nutrients is essential and can be accomplished by surgical bypass or percutaneous angioplasty [27]. Unfortunately, this is only feasible at the level of large- and medium-sized arteries and not at the microvascular level [27]. Currently, the only FDA-approved growth factor and cell therapies for DFUs are not routinely used, making management very difficult [2]. Recent study documented that the sooner advanced biological therapies were used, the better the outcome of healing is achieved [241].

Surgical debridement has been a standard of therapy in the treatment of DFUs. Theoretically, surgical debridement aids wound healing by removing necrotic tissue and optimizing the healing capacity of surrounding viable tissue. Despite the fact that surgical debridement is routine practice in DFU treatment, there is incomplete evidence-based science supporting its role [242]. Debridement may work in synergy with other treatment approaches such as cell therapy or growth factors.

Growth factors are promising biological therapies for DFUs and have been useful in combination with surgical debridement. Granulocyte macrophage colony stimulating factor (GM-CSF) and VEGF-A have been considered as treatments to stimulate the bone marrow release of EPCs for wound healing but risks such as acute arterial thrombosis, angina, hypotension, sepsis, and death have complicated their development as treatment modalities [243–248]. Other recombinant angiogenic growth factors have been tested with positive results; these include EGF, FGF,

and PDGF (which is an FDA-approved topical wound ointment) [27]. Another study, a randomized placebo-controlled trial, found that granulocyte-colony stimulating factor (G-CSF) increases the release of neutrophils from the bone marrow and improves neutrophil function in DFUs [249]. VEGF-A is an endothelial cell mitogen [250–255], chemotactic agent [256, 257], and inducer of vascular permeability [258–263], and as such is a promising candidate for treatment of chronic wounds. HBO therapy is an adjunctive therapy used to stimulate wound healing when the microvasculature has become compromised but the larger vessels remain open or have been re-vascularized [131]. Tissue-level hyperoxia is the outcome of HBO treatments and it has been supported by many studies [264–269]. In an experimental model of diabetic wound healing, HBO has been shown to work in synergy with chemokines produced by keratinocytes and fibroblasts. Together, HBO and these chemokines recruit endothelial progenitors to circulation and home them to the site of the injury. Thus, adequate presence of chemokines released by keratinocytes and myofibroblasts is important component of successful of HBO therapy [2, 138]. Many current potential treatments are still under research. Gene therapy and stem cell therapy, including a gene encoding VEGF-A, has been reported to enhance healing and angiogenesis in ischemic ulcers in a mouse model of diabetes [270]. Fibroblasts are also a potential therapeutic target: augmentation of fibroblast endogenous cytokine production via transient vector transfection could activate the local angiogenic cascade and promote wound healing [27].

Cell therapy, including cryopreserved human fibroblast-derived dermal substitute, composed of fibroblasts, ECM, and a bioabsorbable scaffold or living skin equivalent composed of keratinocytes and fibroblasts in a native collagen matrix are FDA-approved for the treatment of DFUs. It has been shown that cell therapy promotes healing via the release of various cytokines and growth factors into the local wound milieu [271–273]. This approach to healing is most effective when coupled with surgical debridement of the chronic wound.

Off-loading is a treatment modality that aims to redistribute pressure away from the area of ulceration to improve wound healing in DFUs. The incorporation of pressure-relieving properties in a wound care dressing for the treatment of DFUs is another newer option for treatment [274], where the wound dressing effectively reduces pressure at individual metatarsal heads in patients at risk of diabetic foot ulceration.

Dressings of various types are useful in the management of DFUs. Among the many dressing options, three were recently tested on DFUs in a large randomized controlled trial. The four treatment options (nonadherent, knitted, viscose filament gauze, an iodine-impregnated dressing, both traditional dressings combined, or a new antimicrobial dressing) were found to be similar in efficacy [275]. Collagen-alginate topical wound dressing was found to be more effective than saline-soaked gauze in another randomized controlled trial [276]. The proper dressing modalities, when used in combination with off-loading, debridement, and/or the other more sophisticated biological therapies, are crucial to the treatment of DFUs.

In conclusion, the pathophysiology of wound healing in DM is complex and represents the deregulation and dysfunction of all the phases and cell types involved in the process. In spite of the recent advances, the most effective clinical protocols for the treatment of DFU are yet to be determined. Thus, further research in this area should yield optimization of future therapies for this devastated complication of diabetes.

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