

Transcription Factor and Kinase-mediated Signaling in Atherosclerosis and Vascular Injury

*Neeta Adhikari, PhD, Nathan Charles, BSc, Ute Lehmann, BS,
and Jennifer L. Hall, PhD*

Corresponding author

Jennifer L. Hall, PhD
University of Minnesota, Cardiovascular Division, Mayo Mail Code 508,
420 Delaware Street SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455, USA.
E-mail: jllhall@umn.edu

Current Atherosclerosis Reports 2006, **8**:252–260
Current Science Inc. ISSN 1523-3804
Copyright © 2006 by Current Science Inc.

Our understanding of the molecular signaling pathways regulating the initiation and progression of atherosclerosis or remodeling in response to injury has begun to cross the boundaries from regulation of well-described canonical pathways to the interplay between these pathways. The focus of this review is to summarize our current understanding of a finite group of transcription factors and kinases involved in vascular injury and atherosclerosis, including nuclear factor- κ B (NF- κ B), early growth response factor-1 (Egr-1), activator protein-1 (AP-1), hypoxia inducible factor-1 α (HIF-1 α), homeobox, and T cell factor/lymphoid enhancer factor (Tcf-Lef), as well as the kinases janus kinase/signal transducers and activators of transcription (JAK/STAT), protein kinase C (PKC), p38, Rho, ERK5, JNK, p44/p42, and phosphoinositide 3 (PI3) kinase/AKT.

Introduction

Our current understanding of the signaling pathways that regulate remodeling and adverse events in the context of vascular disease continues to expand. Genomic and proteomic-based strategies in humans and rodent models have been instrumental in discovering genes and proteins involved in the initiation and progression of atherosclerosis and remodeling in response to injury. In addition, multiple genome-wide approaches are underway to identify variants in the human genome that predispose to, or protect from, cardiovascular disease. The International HapMap project which began in 2002 and includes blood samples from people in Nigeria, Japan, China;

people with northern and western European ancestry; and people in the United States, as well as the identification of a panel of ancestral informative markers and admixture approaches, will likely provide a giant leap forward in sorting out the interactions of multiple genes and the environment in cardiovascular disease. Pairing this human genetic data with testing for functionality in the laboratory will be critically important to improving our understanding of the molecular pathways involved in vascular remodeling. This creates an intellectually stimulating work environment and opportunity.

The first goal of this review is to provide an overall look at our current understanding of a finite group of transcription factors and kinases involved in atherosclerosis and vascular injury including nuclear factor- κ B (NF- κ B), early growth response factor-1 (Egr-1), activator protein-1 (AP-1), hypoxia inducible factor-1 α (HIF-1 α), homeobox, and T cell factor/lymphoid enhance factor (Tcf-Lef), as well as the kinases janus kinase/signal transducers and activators of transcription (JAK/STAT), protein kinase C (PKC), p38, Rho, ERK5, JNK, p44/p42, and phosphoinositide 3 (PI3) kinase/AKT. The second goal is to present the information in a format that allows the readers to think broadly and identify potential points of convergence between pathways. Due to the wealth of publications, we have focused mainly on *in vivo* studies and regret we were unable to include a review of the phosphates, whose role is also important. We apologize to our colleagues whose primary work we were unable to include in this review. Readers are encouraged to seek out the original papers for a more thorough examination of each target.

Transcription Factors

The bulk of our understanding of transcription factors involved in the initiation and progression of atherosclerosis and the vascular response to injury is from rodent models, whose lipid profile is dissimilar to that of humans. This is a significant limitation recognized by the

field that has spurred several new approaches to understanding the transcription factors involved in human disease and remodeling. One of these approaches is to utilize an unbiased gene expression profiling strategy to look at changes in mRNA expression and/or a SNP chip platform to identify mutations in genes. The CardioGene study [1] was designed with this in mind. The goals of CardioGene are to identify the genetic determinants of restenosis and define the molecular signaling pathways involved in vascular remodeling in response to injury [1]. Another example of an ongoing human project is the Atherosclerosis Risk In Communities study (ARIC), which is designed to estimate patterns and trends of coronary heart disease incidence, fatality, and mortality in four communities. DNA was collected in these patients along with a host of phenotypic measurements. These human studies will provide an opportunity to identify mutations in genes that alter gene expression and influence initiation and progression of vascular disease. Utilizing DNA, RNA, and multiple sensitive phenotypic markers together will allow us to pinpoint critical transcription factors that may serve as regulatory nodes in the process of disease. The advent of new bioinformatics programs and application technology permits the mining of this data to identify transcription factors based on the search and rescue of common DNA binding elements in promoter regions of genes.

Nuclear factor- κ B (NF- κ B)

Nuclear factor- κ B is commonly used to denote a family of transcription factors that include p65, c-Rel, rel-B, p50, and p52. The most abundant combination is the p65p50 heterodimer. NF- κ B is a key regulator of inflammation and immune responses and is thought to be involved in multiple steps in the progression of atherosclerosis, including initiation of monocyte adhesion, foam cell formation, inflammation, cell death, and migration and proliferation [2••]. NF- κ B has been implicated as a common regulatory node induced by multiple upstream factors including low-density lipoprotein (LDL) and 12/15-lipoxygenase, which in turn increase the expression of both cellular adhesion molecules and the number of tethered monocytes to the endothelium [3,4]. A significant component of oxidized LDL, 13-hydroperoxyoctadecadienoic acid, also stimulates NF- κ B in vascular smooth muscle cells [5]. NF- κ B binds to and induces the expression of several adhesion molecules and cytokines, including P-selectin, E-selectin, intercellular adhesion molecule-1 (ICAM-1), vascular cell adhesion molecule-1 (VCAM-1), interleukin (IL)-6 and IL-10, tumor necrosis factor, IL-1 β , IL-12, interferon- γ , and monocyte chemoattractant protein-1 [2••].

Nuclear factor- κ B has been shown to be active in human lesions [6,7], as well as large and small animal models [8–10], and is localized in endothelial cells, macrophages, and smooth muscle cells within the lesion [6]. A new generation of studies has shown that statins

significantly diminish NF- κ B activation in human vascular endothelial cells [11].

To date, there are no human data linking a polymorphism in the NF- κ B family of transcription factors with risk of developing or altering the progression of vascular disease. A host of *in vitro* studies in vascular smooth muscle cells, endothelial cells, monocytes, and macrophages have been conducted in which NF- κ B has been implicated in vascular remodeling [2••].

In addition to its role in the regulation and control of both pro- and anti-inflammatory signaling pathways, NF- κ B promotes endothelial cell survival [2••,12,13]. These data resonate with work showing that NF- κ B is essential for T and B cell survival [2••].

Genetic studies have shown that compromising NF- κ B activation (50% reduction) specifically in macrophages with a macrophage-restricted deletion of I κ B kinase 2 results in more severe atherosclerosis in mice [14]. In contrast, inhibition of NF- κ B activity in hematopoietic cells (which was accomplished by reconstituting LDLR^{-/-} mice with bone marrow deficient in the NF- κ B1 gene encoding for p50) resulted in smaller atherosclerotic lesions with an inflammatory phenotype [15]. A pharmacologic approach in which pyrrolidine dithiocarbamate (a well-known inhibitor of NF- κ B) was administered to apolipoprotein E (apoE)/LDLR double-knockout mice attenuated atherogenesis [16]. In sum, the data suggest an important role for NF- κ B in the context of remodeling. It is likely that both temporal and spatial distribution of NF- κ B within the lesion is important and that a more subtle rearrangement of NF- κ B localization or timing of expression may be an important factor in governing the response to injury or progression of atherosclerosis.

Hypoxia inducible factor-1 α (HIF-1 α)

Hypoxia inducible factor-1 α also likely plays a role in atherosclerosis and vascular injury; however, our understanding is limited. HIF-1 α is perhaps best known for its ability to stimulate proangiogenic genes, including VEGF. However, recent work by our laboratory and others suggests that HIF-1 α may also stimulate expression of tyrosine kinase inhibitors that inhibit angiogenesis, including Sprouty1 [17].

Hypoxia inducible factor-1 α is induced in the microvasculature of hypercholesterolemic pigs [18,19]. Recent reviews suggest that blocking HIF-1 α may inhibit lesion formation by prohibiting angiogenesis from the vasa vasorum of the injured vessel [20]. A recently identified HIF-1 α -responsive gene is Hmox1. Hmox2 encodes the protein heme oxygenase-1, which is activated in response to inflammation and inhibits proliferation [21]. Recent work by Duckers et al. [21] utilizing gene transfer to overexpress Hmox-1 in the pig lesion as well as deletion of the Hmox-1 locus suggests that this HIF-1 α responsive target inhibits cellular proliferation and protects against vascular constriction [21].

Early growth response factor-1 (Egr-1)

Early growth response factor-1 is a zinc finger transcription factor recently implicated in atherosclerosis and restenosis [22,23]. Egr-1 is a phosphoprotein expressed in endothelial cells, smooth muscle cells, monocytes, and macrophages [22,24,25]. Shear stress, mechanical stress, hypoxia, and acute tissue injury have all been shown to induce Egr-1 expression through a variety of kinase-mediated pathways, including, but not limited to, ERK, JNK, and p38 signaling [22,24,25]. In the atherosclerotic lesion, Egr-1 appears to be expressed mainly within smooth muscle cells of the fibrous cap as well as macrophages and endothelial cells [26,27]. Expression of Egr-1 is significantly up-regulated in the atherosclerotic vessel compared to normal vessels [27].

Multiple lines of evidence suggest that blocking Egr-1 with antisense oligodeoxynucleotides inhibits smooth muscle cell proliferation in vitro, during neointima formation in rat carotid arteries, and in post-stent placement in pig coronary arteries [28–30]. Santiago et al. [31] recently confirmed these findings in a rat model of balloon injury using an alternative approach to knock down Egr-1 levels with a novel DNA enzyme that cleaved Egr-1 mRNA and demonstrated an inhibition of neointimal formation in a rat model of balloon injury. Taken together at this stage, Egr-1 appears to regulate genes that stimulate lesion formation.

Activator protein-1 (AP-1)

Activator protein-1 (AP-1) is a transcription factor implicated in vascular disease that results from the heterodimerization of Fos and Jun proteins. Mechanical stretch, like that which occurs with angioplasty, has been shown to activate PKC and mitogen-activated protein kinase (MAPK), which in turn leads to c-fos and c-Jun gene expression and activation of AP-1 [32]. Oxidative stress and cytokines stimulate JNK, which in turn regulates c-Jun and hence AP-1. Gene delivery of a vector containing a dominant negative c-Jun inhibited smooth muscle cell proliferation and neointimal hyperplasia in rats [33]. In addition, delivery of an AP-1 decoy oligodeoxynucleotide resulted in a similar response in rats [34]. Use of tissue-specific genetic models will be helpful to provide more evidence of the role for AP-1 in vascular disease.

Homeobox transcription factors (HMF)

Homeobox transcription factors (HMF) are important in the regulation of cell proliferation, migration, and differentiation. HMF proteins play a pivotal role in embryonic as well as in disease state cardiovascular remodeling [35]. Genetically deleting murine HOXA3 (a HOX cluster gene) or PrX1/PrX2 resulted in vascular anomalies [36–38]. The HOX cluster gene HOXB7 mRNA was detected in human atherosclerotic plaques at a higher level than in the normal human artery wall [39]. Overexpression of the homeobox gene Gax inhibited intimal hyperplasia in vivo in injured

rat vessels [40,41]. Little is known about the mechanisms by which these proteins regulate cellular proliferation, migration, and differentiation.

T cell factor/lymphoid enhancer factor (Tcf/Lef)

T cell factor (TCF) and lymphoid enhancer factor-1 (LEF-1) transcription factors belong to a family of high mobility group domain proteins and include LEF-1, TCF-1, TCF-3, and TCF-4. This family of transcription factors is best known for their role in cancer biology, as they regulate expression of cyclin D1 and c-myc genes involved in cell proliferation and cell death [42]. Interestingly, recent work from the field of genetics suggests that a variant in the gene that encodes Tcf-4 (TCF7L2) confers risk of type 2 diabetes [43]. These factors are known to play an important role in the Wnt/Wg signaling pathway, which controls proliferation, apoptosis, and migration. TCF factors become potent transactivators upon interaction with the WNT signaling molecule beta-catenin. Reports from our laboratory have demonstrated the involvement of the beta-catenin/TCF pathway in vascular remodeling [44–46]. We demonstrated significant temporal expression of beta-catenin in the intimal lesion following vascular injury in rats [46]. Modeling this in vitro, we demonstrated that stabilization of beta-catenin activated Tcf-4, resulting in transactivation of cyclin D1, increased vascular smooth muscle cell proliferation, and inhibition of apoptosis [46]. The potential relevancy of this Tcf/Lef pathway to lipid binding and atherosclerosis was demonstrated with data showing that LRP6, an LDL receptor-related protein, significantly potentiated Tcf/Lef transactivation [45]. Interestingly, our laboratory also demonstrated cross talk between the Tcf-4 signaling pathway and NF- κ B signaling, suggesting another role for Tcf-4 in immune- and inflammatory-mediated signaling in both atherosclerosis and restenosis.

Kinases

Janus kinase/signal transducers and activators of transcription (JAK/STAT)

The janus kinases (JAK) and signal transducers and activators of transcription (STAT) factors have been implicated in AT1-mediated vascular smooth muscle cell growth [47–49] as well as interaction of the apolipoproteins with adenosine triphosphate-binding cassette protein A1 (ABCA1), thereby regulating cholesterol metabolism and trafficking (Fig. 1) [50]. In addition, mechanical stretch activates STAT3. A review on the role of JAK/STAT signaling in the vasculature was recently published [51]. This pathway represents a series of four kinases (JAK1, JAK2, JAK3, and TYK2) linked to a family of transcription factors (STAT, with seven family members identified to date). Activation of JAK signaling occurs through the multimerization of two JAKs permitting trans-phosphorylation [51]. The JAKs then phosphorylate a conserved tyrosine residue near the C-terminus that permits dimer-

specific knockout models of p38 α and β will be helpful in furthering our understanding of the role of p38 in inflammation and vascular remodeling.

Rho

The Rho family of small GTPases consists of RhoA, RhoB, and RhoC. For a more thorough review the reader is directed toward a recent review by Seasholtz and Brown [65]. RhoA is the most widely studied of the family and most of the work strongly supports a role for RhoA in vascular smooth muscle cell migration, growth, and lesion formation [3,65–77]. Work done in vivo with both gene transfer of a dominant negative Rho kinase following balloon injury in pigs [73] and pharmacologic inhibitors of Rho kinase [65,68–72] suggests that blocking Rho kinase inhibits lesion formation. Mallat et al. [74] also demonstrated that long-term inhibition of Rho kinase with the inhibitor Y-27632 led to decreased lesion formation in LDLR^{-/-} mice.

ERK5

The role of ERK5 (or Big MAPK) in atherosclerosis and vascular injury is not well understood. ERK5 is induced by growth factors, shear stress, and oxidative stress [78,79]. The ERK5 signaling pathway is thought to be activated by Mekk3 and Mek5 [78]. Activation of ERK5 has been shown to protect endothelial cells from survival while stimulating migration and proliferation of vascular smooth muscle cell [78]. Interestingly, mice deficient in the upstream modulators of ERK5-Mek3 or ERK5 exhibited severe defects in vascular development [80,81]. Global deletion of ERK5 resulted in defective blood vessel and cardiac development [80]. Vasculogenesis occurred in these animals but vessels exhibited a disorganized pattern, with many lacking appropriate density of vascular smooth muscle cells [80]. Recent work has shown that ERK5 regulates angiogenesis in part through HIF-1 α -dependent regulation [82]. Splice variants of ERK5 have also been identified [83]. However, the regulation and role of these spliced variants is not entirely clear. Hayashi et al. [84] generated a conditional deletion of ERK5 that succumbed to death 2 to 3 weeks after induction of the gene that correlated with leaky and disrupted vessels. An endothelial-specific knockout of ERK5 had similar vascular and heart disruptions to that seen in the ERK5 knockout [84], whereas the mouse harboring cardiac myocyte specific deletion of ERK5 did not exhibit the heart defects [84]. To our knowledge, a genetic model lacking ERK5 in smooth muscle has not been published. An identified downstream transcription factor of ERK5 is myocyte enhancer factor 2c (MEF2c), and mice deficient in this gene harbor severe defects in cardiovascular development and vascular organization [78,85]. Components of the disorganized vascular phenotype in the MEF2c-null animals closely match those seen in the ERK5^{-/-} mouse, further suggesting that ERK5 signals through MEF2c. Other substrates of ERK5 that are less understood include

Sap1a (Ets domain transcription factor), SGF (serum and glucocorticoid inducible kinase), connexin43, and Bad [78]. ERK5 stimulation also stimulates transcriptional activation of cyclin D1, similar to p42/p44 MAPKs [78].

JNK

In general, the JNK family of kinases responds to oxidative stress and inflammatory cytokines [86]. JNK protein kinases are encoded by three genes: JNK1, JNK2, and JNK3. JNK1 and JNK2 are expressed ubiquitously whereas JNK3 expression appears restricted to heart, brain, and testes [86]. Evidence to date suggests that four spliced isoforms exist for both JNK1 and JNK2 [86]. Activation of JNK is mediated through cytokine and/or stress-mediated stimulation of MAPK kinase kinase that activate MKK4 and MKK7, which in turn phosphorylate tyrosine and threonine residues within the activation domain of JNK. The best known factor downstream of JNK is c-Jun, which is part of the AP-1 transcription factor complex [86].

Mice deficient in either JNK1 or JNK2 are immunocompromised with specific defects in T-cell differentiation and cytokine production [87]. A murine model deficient in both JNK1 and JNK2 dies at embryonic day 11 with neural tube defects [88]. Ricci et al. [89] crossed the JNK2^{-/-} mouse with an ApoE^{-/-} mouse and demonstrated a deletion of atherosclerotic burden compared with ApoE^{-/-} mice. Ricci et al. [89] then established mice with a targeted deletion of JNK2 specifically in macrophages and demonstrated a specific defect in foam cell formation that was linked to defective uptake and degradation of modified lipoproteins. Collectively, these genetic models have been instrumental in identifying a role for JNK2 in adaptive immunity and lipid metabolism. In turn, these findings have led to a better understanding of a role for adaptive immunity in the incidence and progression of atherosclerosis. Of all the kinases studied to date in the field of vascular remodeling, the JNKs are one of the best characterized.

p42/p44

p42/p44 Kinases have been shown to be activated in response to oxidative stress, growth factors, lipids, oxidative stress, and chemokines. It has been widely shown in vitro that stimulation of p42/p44 promotes proliferation, migration, and cell survival of vascular smooth muscle cell as well as endothelial cells. Activation of p42/p44 is regulated generally through binding of ligands to transmembrane receptors, with intrinsic protein tyrosine kinase activity leading to autophosphorylation and the association of adapter proteins such as Grb2 and Shc, which provide the molecular scaffolding and interactions for Ras, Raf, and MEK. Mice deficient in p44 (ERK1) do not display any defects in vascular development [90]. Deficiency in p42 (ERK2), however, is lethal and harbors placental defects [91]. To better understand the role of

p42 and p44 in vascular remodeling, we will need mice harboring conditional targeted deletions of these kinases. Deletions in the kinases K-Ras, A-Raf, MEK1^{-/-} upstream of p42 and p44 result in lethality [91], whereas deletion of N-Ras, H-ras, and MEK2^{-/-} are not lethal and do not possess any gross vascular defect. New areas of research likely to be relevant to vascular remodeling are oxidized LDL-mediated proliferation of macrophages through a p42/p44-dependent mechanism [92] as well as a link between cytokines NF-κB and ERK via a tumor progression locus 2 (TPL2; MAP3K8)-dependent link [93–95].

Phosphoinositide 3 (PI3) kinase/AKT

Phosphoinositide 3-kinases have been implicated in the regulation of cell proliferation, survival, metabolism, and differentiation. These kinases generate inositol phospholipids that act as second messengers on multiple targets, the best defined of which in vascular biology may be AKT. PI3K activates AKT through recruitment to the plasma membrane and phosphorylation by phosphoinositide-dependent kinase-1 (PDK1). Maximal activation of AKT requires phosphorylation at two regulatory sites (threonine 308/309/305) and serine 473/474/472. To date, three mammalian isoforms have been discovered: Akt1, 2, and 3 [96–98]. AKT is activated by multiple factors, including oxidative stress and growth factors [52]. New data suggest a role for statin therapy in promoting endothelial nitric oxide synthase (eNOS) activity through a PI3kinase/Akt-dependent signaling pathway [99,100].

Mice deficient in Akt1 exhibit enhanced angiogenesis, impaired vascular maturation, and impaired vascular permeability [101], whereas those deficient in Akt2 exhibit a severe diabetic phenotype [102]. Daly et al. [103] recently showed that Akt signals through the forkhead transcription factor [103]. Activation of forkhead has been shown to inhibit neointimal formation [104]. Recent findings suggest that Akt and forkhead may regulate an interface between longevity and tumor suppression [105••]. The surprisingly tumor suppression function of Akt is linked to its ability to activate the E3 ubiquitin ligase HDM2, resulting in degradation of nuclear factor of activated T cells (NFAT), an invasion promoting factor [105••]. More work will be needed to define the role of Akt and forkhead as well as other downstream factors (including NFAT) in vascular disease.

Conclusions

The use of tissue-specific and conditional genetic murine models to understand the role of transcription factors and kinases in vascular remodeling and initiation and progression or regression of disease has helped identify how each of these molecular signaling pathways influences vascular disease. As genome-wide scans become more routine in large-scale cardiovascular studies in humans, these data will be a tremendous resource in identify-

ing new pathways and highlighting novel interactions between pathways. A better understanding of the targets involved will aid in the identification of early biomarkers in the serum and/or genetic screens in patients based on genetic variation that may allow us to move towards preventive medicine-focused approaches to inhibit the initiation and progression of cardiovascular disease.

References and Recommended Reading

Papers of particular interest, published recently, have been highlighted as:

- Of importance
 - Of major importance
1. Ganesh SK, Skelding KA, Mehta L, et al.: **Rationale and study design of the CardioGene Study: genomics of in-stent restenosis.** *Pharmacogenomics* 2004, 5:952–1004.
 2. •• de Winther MP, Kanters E, Kraal G, Hofker MH: **Nuclear factor kappaB signaling in atherogenesis.** *Arterioscler Thromb Vasc Biol* 2005, 25:904–914.
- This article provides and up-to-date overview of NF-κB signaling in the vessel wall.
3. Bolick DT, Orr AW, Whetzel A, et al.: **12/15-lipoxygenase regulates intercellular adhesion molecule-1 expression and monocyte adhesion to endothelium through activation of RhoA and nuclear factor-kappaB.** *Arterioscler Thromb Vasc Biol* 2005, 25:2301–2307.
 4. Lotzer K, Funk CD, Habenicht AJ: **The 5-lipoxygenase pathway in arterial wall biology and atherosclerosis.** *Biochim Biophys Acta* 2005, 1736:30–37.
 5. Natarajan R, Reddy MA, Malik KU, et al.: **Signaling mechanisms of nuclear factor-kappaB-mediated activation of inflammatory genes by 13-hydroperoxyoctadecadienoic acid in cultured vascular smooth muscle cells.** *Arterioscler Thromb Vasc Biol* 2001, 21:1408–1413.
 6. Brand K, Page S, Rogler G, et al.: **Activated transcription factor nuclear factor-kappa B is present in the atherosclerotic lesion.** *J Clin Invest* 1996, 97:1715–1722.
 7. Wilson SH, Best PJ, Edwards WD, et al.: **Nuclear factor-kappaB immunoreactivity is present in human coronary plaque and enhanced in patients with unstable angina pectoris.** *Atherosclerosis* 2002, 160:147–153.
 8. Landry DB, Couper LL, Bryant SR, Lindner V: **Activation of the NF-kappa B and I kappa B system in smooth muscle cells after rat arterial injury. Induction of vascular cell adhesion molecule-1 and monocyte chemoattractant protein-1.** *Am J Pathol* 1997, 151:1085–1095.
 9. Lindner V: **The NF-kappaB and IkappaB system in injured arteries.** *Pathobiology* 1998, 66:311–320.
 10. Rodriguez-Porcel M, Lerman LO, Holmes DR Jr, et al.: **Chronic antioxidant supplementation attenuates nuclear factor-kappa B activation and preserves endothelial function in hypercholesterolemic pigs.** *Cardiovasc Res* 2002, 53:1010–1018.
 11. Lin R, Liu J, Peng N, et al.: **Lovastatin reduces nuclear factor kappaB activation induced by C-reactive protein in human vascular endothelial cells.** *Biol Pharm Bull* 2005, 28:1630–1634.
 12. Guan Z, Basi D, Li Q, et al.: **Loss of redox factor 1 decreases NF-kappaB activity and increases susceptibility of endothelial cells to apoptosis.** *Arterioscler Thromb Vasc Biol* 2005, 25:96–101.
 13. Hall JL, Wang X, Van A, et al.: **Overexpression of Ref-1 inhibits hypoxia and tumor necrosis factor-induced endothelial cell apoptosis through nuclear factor-kappaB-independent and -dependent pathways.** *Circ Res* 2001, 88:1247–1253.

14. Kanters E, Pasparakis M, Gijbels MJ, et al.: **Inhibition of NF-kappaB activation in macrophages increases atherosclerosis in LDL receptor-deficient mice.** *J Clin Invest* 2003, 112:1176–1185.
15. Kanters E, Gijbels MJ, van der Made I, et al.: **Hematopoietic NF-kappaB1 deficiency results in small atherosclerotic lesions with an inflammatory phenotype.** *Blood* 2004, 103:934–940.
16. Jawien J, Gajda M, Mateuszuk L, et al.: **Inhibition of nuclear factor-kappaB attenuates atherosclerosis in apoE/LDLR-double knockout mice.** *J Physiol Pharmacol* 2005, 56:483–489.
17. Lee SH, Schloss DJ, Jarvis L, et al.: **Inhibition of angiogenesis by a mouse sprouty protein.** *J Biol Chem* 2001, 276:4128–4133.
18. Zhu XY, Rodriguez-Porcel M, Bentley MD, et al.: **Antioxidant intervention attenuates myocardial neovascularization in hypercholesterolemia.** *Circulation* 2004, 109:2109–2115.
19. Wilson SH, Herrmann J, Lerman LO, et al.: **Simvastatin preserves the structure of coronary adventitial vasa vasorum in experimental hypercholesterolemia independent of lipid lowering.** *Circulation* 2002, 105:415–418.
20. Fuchs S, Kornowski R, Leon MB, Epstein SE: **Anti-angiogenesis: a new potential strategy to inhibit restenosis.** *Int J Cardiovasc Intervent* 2001, 4:3–6.
21. Duckers HJ, Boehm M, True AL, et al.: **Heme oxygenase-1 protects against vascular constriction and proliferation.** *Nat Med* 2001, 7:693–698.
22. Blaschke F, Bruemmer D, Law RE: **Egr-1 is a major vascular pathogenic transcription factor in atherosclerosis and restenosis.** *Rev Endocr Metab Disord* 2004, 5:249–254.
23. Santiago FS, Lowe HC, Day FL, et al.: **Early growth response factor-1 induction by injury is triggered by release and paracrine activation by fibroblast growth factor-2.** *Am J Pathol* 1999, 154:937–944.
24. Silverman ES, Khachigian LM, Santiago FS, et al.: **Vascular smooth muscle cells express the transcriptional corepressor NAB2 in response to injury.** *Am J Pathol* 1999, 155:1311–1317.
25. Silverman ES, Collins T: **Pathways of Egr-1-mediated gene transcription in vascular biology.** *Am J Pathol* 1999, 154:665–670.
26. Du B, Fu C, Kent KC, et al.: **Elevated Egr-1 in human atherosclerotic cells transcriptionally represses the transforming growth factor-beta type II receptor.** *J Biol Chem* 2000, 275:39039–39047.
27. McCaffrey TA, Fu C, Du B, et al.: **High-level expression of Egr-1 and Egr-1-inducible genes in mouse and human atherosclerosis.** *J Clin Invest* 2000, 105:653–662.
28. Fahmy RG, Khachigian LM: **Antisense Egr-1 RNA driven by the CMV promoter is an inhibitor of vascular smooth muscle cell proliferation and regrowth after injury.** *J Cell Biochem* 2002, 84:575–582.
29. Lowe HC, Fahmy RG, Kavurma MM, et al.: **Catalytic oligodeoxynucleotides define a key regulatory role for early growth response factor-1 in the porcine model of coronary in-stent restenosis.** *Circ Res* 2001, 89:670–677.
30. Santiago FS, Atkins DG, Khachigian LM: **Vascular smooth muscle cell proliferation and regrowth after mechanical injury in vitro are Egr-1/NGFI-A-dependent.** *Am J Pathol* 1999, 155:897–905.
31. Santiago FS, Lowe HC, Kavurma MM, et al.: **New DNA enzyme targeting Egr-1 mRNA inhibits vascular smooth muscle proliferation and regrowth after injury.** *Nat Med* 1999, 5:1264–1269.
32. Li C, Xu Q: **Mechanical stress-initiated signal transductions in vascular smooth muscle cells.** *Cell Signal* 2000, 12:435–445.
33. Yasumoto H, Kim S, Zhan Y, et al.: **Dominant negative c-jun gene transfer inhibits vascular smooth muscle cell proliferation and neointimal hyperplasia in rats.** *Gene Ther* 2001, 8:1682–1689.
34. Ahn JD, Morishita R, Kaneda Y, et al.: **Inhibitory effects of novel AP-1 decoy oligodeoxynucleotides on vascular smooth muscle cell proliferation in vitro and neointimal formation in vivo.** *Circ Res* 2002, 90:1325–1332.
35. Gorski DH, Walsh K: **Control of vascular cell differentiation by homeobox transcription factors.** *Trends Cardiovasc Med* 2003, 13:213–220.
36. Bergwerff M, Gittenberger-de Groot AC, Wisse LJ, et al.: **Loss of function of the Prx1 and Prx2 homeobox genes alters architecture of the great elastic arteries and ductus arteriosus.** *Virchows Arch* 2000, 436:12–19.
37. Chisaka O: **Functional analysis of mouse Hox genes by gene targeting.** *Tanpakushitsu Kakusan Koso* 1991, 36:2409–2417.
38. Kirby ML, Hunt P, Wallis K, Thorogood P: **Abnormal patterning of the aortic arch arteries does not evoke cardiac malformations.** *Dev Dyn* 1997, 208:34–47.
39. Bostrom K, Tintut Y, Kao SC, et al.: **HOXB7 overexpression promotes differentiation of C3H10T1/2 cells to smooth muscle cells.** *J Cell Biochem* 2000, 78:210–221.
40. Perlman H, Luo Z, Krasinski K, et al.: **Adenovirus-mediated delivery of the Gax transcription factor to rat carotid arteries inhibits smooth muscle proliferation and induces apoptosis.** *Gene Ther* 1999, 6:758–763.
41. Smith RC, Branellec D, Gorski DH, et al.: **p21CIP1-mediated inhibition of cell proliferation by overexpression of the gax homeodomain gene.** *Genes Dev* 1997, 11:1674–1689.
42. Fuchs SY, Ougolkov AV, Spiegelman VS, Minamoto T: **Oncogenic beta-catenin signaling networks in colorectal cancer.** *Cell Cycle* 2005, 4:1522–1539.
43. Grant SF, Thorleifsson G, Reynisdottir I, et al.: **Variant of transcription factor 7-like 2 (TCF7L2) gene confers risk of type 2 diabetes.** *Nat Genet* 2006, In press.
44. Wang X, Adhikari N, Li Q, et al.: **The role of [beta]-transducin repeat-containing protein ([beta]-TrCP) in the regulation of NF-[kappa]B in vascular smooth muscle cells.** *Arterioscler Thromb Vasc Biol* 2004, 24:85–90.
45. Wang X, Adhikari N, Li Q, Hall JL: **LDL receptor-related protein LRP6 regulates proliferation and survival through the Wnt cascade in vascular smooth muscle cells.** *Am J Physiol Heart Circ Physiol* 2004, 287:H2376–H2383.
46. Wang X, Xiao Y, Mou Y, et al.: **A role for the beta-catenin/T-cell factor signaling cascade in vascular remodeling.** *Circ Res* 2002, 90:340–347.
47. Griendling KK, Ushio-Fukai M, Lassegue B, Alexander RW: **Angiotensin II signaling in vascular smooth muscle. New concepts.** *Hypertension* 1997, 29:366–373.
48. Marrero MB, Schieffer B, Li B, et al.: **Role of Janus kinase/signal transducer and activator of transcription and mitogen-activated protein kinase cascades in angiotensin II- and platelet-derived growth factor-induced vascular smooth muscle cell proliferation.** *J Biol Chem* 1997, 272:24684–24690.
49. Schieffer B, Luchtefeld M, Braun S, et al.: **Role of NAD(P)H oxidase in angiotensin II-induced JAK/STAT signaling and cytokine induction.** *Circ Res* 2000, 87:1195–1201.
50. Tang C, Vaughan AM, Oram JF: **Janus kinase 2 modulates the apolipoprotein interactions with ABCA1 required for removing cellular cholesterol.** *J Biol Chem* 2004, 279:7622–7628.
51. Grote K, Luchtefeld M, Schieffer B: **JANUS under stress—role of JAK/STAT signaling pathway in vascular diseases.** *Vascul Pharmacol* 2005, 43:357–363.
52. Griendling KK, Sorescu D, Lassegue B, Ushio-Fukai M: **Modulation of protein kinase activity and gene expression by reactive oxygen species and their role in vascular physiology and pathophysiology.** *Arterioscler Thromb Vasc Biol* 2000, 20:2175–2183.
53. Griendling KK, Ushio-Fukai M: **Reactive oxygen species as mediators of angiotensin II signaling.** *Regul Pept* 2000, 91:21–27.
54. Griendling KK, Ushio-Fukai M: **Redox control of vascular smooth muscle proliferation.** *J Lab Clin Med* 1998, 132:9–15.

55. Schieffer B, Schieffer E, Hilfiker-Kleiner D, et al.: Expression of angiotensin II and interleukin 6 in human coronary atherosclerotic plaques: potential implications for inflammation and plaque instability. *Circulation* 2000, 101:1372–1378.
56. Kakisis JD, Pradhan S, Cordova A, et al.: The role of STAT-3 in the mediation of smooth muscle cell response to cyclic strain. *Int J Biochem Cell Biol* 2005, 37:1396–1406.
57. Chida K, Hara T, Hirai T, et al.: Disruption of protein kinase Ceta results in impairment of wound healing and enhancement of tumor formation in mouse skin carcinogenesis. *Cancer Res* 2003, 63:2404–2408.
58. Mayr M, Chung YL, Mayr U, et al.: Loss of PKC-delta alters cardiac metabolism. *Am J Physiol Heart Circ Physiol* 2004, 287:H937–H945.
59. Andrassy M, Belov D, Harja E, et al.: Central role of PKCbeta in neointimal expansion triggered by acute arterial injury. *Circ Res* 2005, 96:476–483.
60. Leitges M, Mayr M, Braun U, et al.: Exacerbated vein graft arteriosclerosis in protein kinase Cdelta-null mice. *J Clin Invest* 2001, 108:1505–1512.
61. Ju H, Nerurkar S, Sauermelch CF, et al.: Sustained activation of p38 mitogen-activated protein kinase contributes to the vascular response to injury. *J Pharmacol Exp Ther* 2002, 301:15–20.
62. Ohashi N, Matsumori A, Furukawa Y, et al.: Role of p38 mitogen-activated protein kinase in neointimal hyperplasia after vascular injury. *Arterioscler Thromb Vasc Biol* 2000, 20:2521–2526.
63. Mudgett JS, Ding J, Guh-Siesel L, et al.: Essential role for p38alpha mitogen-activated protein kinase in placental angiogenesis. *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A* 2000, 97:10454–10459.
64. Beardmore VA, Hinton HJ, Eftychi C, et al.: Generation and characterization of p38beta (MAPK11) gene-targeted mice. *Mol Cell Biol* 2005, 25:10454–10464.
65. Seasholtz TM, Brown JH: RHO Signaling in vascular diseases. *Mol Interv* 2004, 4:348–357.
66. von Ballmoos MW, Dubler D, Mirlacher M, et al.: Increased apolipoprotein deposits in early atherosclerotic lesions distinguish symptomatic from asymptomatic patients. *Arterioscler Thromb Vasc Biol* 2005, In press.
67. Archacki SR, Angheloiu G, Tian XL, et al.: Identification of new genes differentially expressed in coronary artery disease by expression profiling. *Physiol Genomics* 2003, 15:65–74.
68. Negoro N, Hoshiga M, Seto M, et al.: The kinase inhibitor fasudil (HA-1077) reduces intimal hyperplasia through inhibiting migration and enhancing cell loss of vascular smooth muscle cells. *Biochem Biophys Res Commun* 1999, 262:211–215.
69. Sawada N, Itoh H, Ueyama K, et al.: Inhibition of rho-associated kinase results in suppression of neointimal formation of balloon-injured arteries. *Circulation* 2000, 101:2030–2033.
70. Shibata R, Kai H, Seki Y, et al.: Role of Rho-associated kinase in neointima formation after vascular injury. *Circulation* 2001, 103:284–289.
71. Matsumoto Y, Uwatoku T, Oi K, et al.: Long-term inhibition of Rho-kinase suppresses neointimal formation after stent implantation in porcine coronary arteries: involvement of multiple mechanisms. *Arterioscler Thromb Vasc Biol* 2004, 24:181–186.
72. Miyata K, Shimokawa H, Kandabashi T, et al.: Rho-kinase is involved in macrophage-mediated formation of coronary vascular lesions in pigs in vivo. *Arterioscler Thromb Vasc Biol* 2000, 20:2351–2358.
73. Eto Y, Shimokawa H, Hiroki J, et al.: Gene transfer of dominant negative Rho kinase suppresses neointimal formation after balloon injury in pigs. *Am J Physiol Heart Circ Physiol* 2000, 278:H1744–H1750.
74. Mallat Z, Gojova A, Sauzeau V, et al.: Rho-associated protein kinase contributes to early atherosclerotic lesion formation in mice. *Circ Res* 2003, 93:884–888.
75. Kataoka C, Egashira K, Inoue S, et al.: Important role of Rho-kinase in the pathogenesis of cardiovascular inflammation and remodeling induced by long-term blockade of nitric oxide synthesis in rats. *Hypertension* 2002, 39:245–250.
76. Herdeg C, Fitzke M, Oberhoff M, et al.: Effects of atorvastatin on in-stent stenosis in normo- and hypercholesterolemic rabbits. *Int J Cardiol* 2003, 91:59–69.
77. Ni W, Egashira K, Kataoka C, et al.: Antiinflammatory and antiarteriosclerotic actions of HMG-CoA reductase inhibitors in a rat model of chronic inhibition of nitric oxide synthesis. *Circ Res* 2001, 89:415–421.
78. Hayashi M, Lee JD: Role of the BMK1/ERK5 signaling pathway: lessons from knockout mice. *J Mol Med* 2004, 82:800–808.
79. Abe J, Kusuhara M, Ulevitch RJ, et al.: Big mitogen-activated protein kinase 1 (BMK1) is a redox-sensitive kinase. *J Biol Chem* 1996, 271:16586–16590.
80. Regan CP, Li W, Boucher DM, et al.: Erk5 null mice display multiple extraembryonic vascular and embryonic cardiovascular defects. *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A* 2002, 99:9248–9253.
81. Yang J, Boerm M, McCarty M, et al.: Mekk3 is essential for early embryonic cardiovascular development. *Nat Genet* 2000, 24:309–313.
82. Pi X, Garin G, Xie L, et al.: BMK1/ERK5 is a novel regulator of angiogenesis by destabilizing hypoxia inducible factor 1alpha. *Circ Res* 2005, 96:1145–1151.
83. Yan C, Luo H, Lee JD, et al.: Molecular cloning of mouse ERK5/BMK1 splice variants and characterization of ERK5 functional domains. *J Biol Chem* 2001, 276:10870–10878.
84. Hayashi M, Kim SW, Imanaka-Yoshida K, et al.: Targeted deletion of BMK1/ERK5 in adult mice perturbs vascular integrity and leads to endothelial failure. *J Clin Invest* 2004, 113:1138–1148.
85. Lin Q, Schwarz J, Bucana C, Olson EN: Control of mouse cardiac morphogenesis and myogenesis by transcription factor MEF2C. *Science* 1997, 276:1404–1407.
86. Sumara G, Belwal M, Ricci R: "Jnking" atherosclerosis. *Cell Mol Life Sci* 2005, 62:2487–2494.
87. Kuan CY, Yang DD, Samanta Roy DR, et al.: The Jnk1 and Jnk2 protein kinases are required for regional specific apoptosis during early brain development. *Neuron* 1999, 22:667–676.
88. Sabapathy K, Jochum W, Hochedlinger K, et al.: Defective neural tube morphogenesis and altered apoptosis in the absence of both JNK1 and JNK2. *Mech Dev* 1999, 89:115–124.
89. Ricci R, Sumara G, Sumara I, et al.: Requirement of JNK2 for scavenger receptor A-mediated foam cell formation in atherogenesis. *Science* 2004, 306:1558–1561.
90. Pages G, Guerin S, Grall D, et al.: Defective thymocyte maturation in p44 MAP kinase (Erk 1) knockout mice. *Science* 1999, 286:1374–1377.
91. Kuida K, Boucher DM: Functions of MAP kinases: insights from gene-targeting studies. *J Biochem (Tokyo)* 2004, 135:653–656.
92. Senokuchi T, Matsumura T, Sakai M, et al.: Extracellular signal-regulated kinase and p38 mitogen-activated protein kinase mediate macrophage proliferation induced by oxidized low-density lipoprotein. *Atherosclerosis* 2004, 176:233–245.
93. Dumitru CD, Ceci JD, Tsatsanis C, et al.: TNF-alpha induction by LPS is regulated posttranscriptionally via a Tpl2/ERK-dependent pathway. *Cell* 2000, 103:1071–1083.
94. Eliopoulos AG, Dumitru CD, Wang CC, et al.: Induction of COX-2 by LPS in macrophages is regulated by Tpl2-dependent CREB activation signals. *EMBO J* 2002, 21:4831–4840.
95. Eliopoulos AG, Wang CC, Dumitru CD, Tschlis PN: Tpl2 transduces CD40 and TNF signals that activate ERK and regulates IgE induction by CD40. *EMBO J* 2003, 22:3855–3864.
96. Chan TO, Rittenhouse SE, Tschlis PN: AKT/PKB and other D3 phosphoinositide-regulated kinases: kinase activation by phosphoinositide-dependent phosphorylation. *Annu Rev Biochem* 1999, 68:965–1014.

97. Brodbeck D, Cron P, Hemmings BA: **A human protein kinase Bgamma with regulatory phosphorylation sites in the activation loop and in the C-terminal hydrophobic domain.** *J Biol Chem* 1999, 274:9133–9136.
98. Brodbeck D, Hill MM, Hemmings BA: **Two splice variants of protein kinase B gamma have different regulatory capacity depending on the presence or absence of the regulatory phosphorylation site serine 472 in the carboxyl-terminal hydrophobic domain.** *J Biol Chem* 2001, 276:29550–29558.
99. Walter DH, Dimmeler S, Zeiher AM: **Effects of statins on endothelium and endothelial progenitor cell recruitment.** *Semin Vasc Med* 2004, 4:385–393.
100. Walter DH, Zeiher AM, Dimmeler S: **Effects of statins on endothelium and their contribution to neovascularization by mobilization of endothelial progenitor cells.** *Coronary Artery Dis* 2004, 15:235–242.
101. Chen WS, Xu PZ, Gottlob K, et al.: **Growth retardation and increased apoptosis in mice with homozygous disruption of the Akt1 gene.** *Genes Dev* 2001, 15:2203–2208.
102. Cho H, Mu J, Kim JK, et al.: **Insulin resistance and a diabetes mellitus-like syndrome in mice lacking the protein kinase Akt2 (PKB beta).** *Science* 2001, 292:1728–1731.
103. Daly C, Wong V, Burova E, et al.: **Angiopoietin-1 modulates endothelial cell function and gene expression via the transcription factor FKHR (FOXO1).** *Genes Dev* 2004, 18:1060–1071.
104. Park KW, Kim DH, You HJ, et al.: **Activated forkhead transcription factor inhibits neointimal hyperplasia after angioplasty through induction of p27.** *Arterioscler Thromb Vasc Biol* 2005, 25:742–747.
105. ●● Greer EL, Brunet A: **FOXO transcription factors at the interface between longevity and tumor suppression.** *Oncogene* 2005, 24:7410–7425.

This is an excellent review highlighting a role for FOXO transcription factors in longevity and tumor suppression.