

Biochemical Actions of Hormones

Edited by GERALD LITWACK

VOLUME XII

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Preface

This volume emphasizes aspects of molecular biology with respect to hormone action. The first part of the book contains a number of chapters dealing with gene expression, transcription, RNA stabilization, and protein synthesis. E. Herbert and collaborators describe the opioid peptides. Prolactin gene expression is a system described from the point of view of gene regulation by G. H. Murdoch, R. M. Evans, and M. G. Rosenfeld, and also by C. Bancroft *et al.* The control by estrogen is detailed in a chapter by P. S. Dannies. Gene regulation by glucocorticoids is the subject of work by K. E. Mayo and R. D. Palmiter with the metallothionein gene and by D. K. Granner and E. G. Beale with tyrosine aminotransferase and phosphoenolpyruvate carboxykinase expression. D. J. Shapiro and M. L. Brock report on the roles of estrogen in the transcription and stabilization of vitellogenin mRNA. P. F. Blackmore and J. H. Exton describe mechanisms involved in the actions of calcium-dependent hormones. M. R. Banerjee and M. Antoniou narrate the multiple hormonal controls of milk-protein gene expression. S. Bourgeois and J. C. Gasson describe the genetic basis of glucocorticoid resistance in cell cultures. The remainder of the volume is dedicated to the description of various receptors: J. H. Clark's laboratory reports on estrogen and antiestrogen binding sites; D. Marver describes the mineralocorticoid receptor; G. L. Johnson's laboratory summarizes its findings regarding the nerve growth factor receptor; and L. D. Kohn's laboratory describes the thyrotropin receptor. This volume, then, stresses modern molecular biology as it pertains to hormone action as well as basic work with hormone receptors. Consequently, it should appeal both to endocrinologists and to workers in the field of molecular biology.

Gerald Litwack

Contents

Contributors	xi
Preface	xv

1. Generation of Diversity of Opioid Peptides

*Edward Herbert, Olivier Civelli, James Douglass,
Gerard Martens, and Haim Rosen*

I. Introduction	2
II. Approaches and Strategies Used in Characterizing the Opioid Peptide Precursor Proteins	6
III. Structure of Opioid Peptide Genes	11
IV. Transcriptional and Posttranscriptional Regulation of Opioid Peptide Gene Expression	16
V. Regulation of POMC Gene Expression	18
VI. Proenkephalin Gene Regulation	22
VII. Translational and Posttranslational Control of Production of Opioid Peptides	23
References	31

2. Polypeptide Hormone Regulation of Prolactin Gene Transcription

*Geoffrey H. Murdoch, Ronald M. Evans, and
Michael G. Rosenfeld*

I. Introduction	38
II. Regulation of Prolactin Synthesis by Peptide Hormones	39
III. Transduction Mechanisms of TRH-Stimulated Prolactin Gene Transcription	52
IV. The Potential Significance of Transcriptional Regulation by Peptide Hormones	63
References	65

3. Glucocorticoid Regulation of Metallothionein Gene Expression

Kelly E. Mayo and Richard D. Palmiter

I. Introduction.....	70
II. Regulation of the Mouse MT-I Gene by Glucocorticoids	71
III. Comparisons to Heavy Metal Regulation	75
IV. Regulation of the Mouse MT-I Gene in New Environments.....	78
V. Summary	86
References	87

4. Regulation of the Synthesis of Tyrosine Aminotransferase and Phosphoenolpyruvate Carboxykinase by Glucocorticoid Hormones

Daryl K. Granner and Elmus G. Beale

I. Introduction and Historical Perspective	90
II. Regulation of Tyrosine Aminotransferase by Glucocorticoid Hormones ...	97
III. Glucocorticoid Regulation of Phosphoenolpyruvate Carboxykinase ...	114
IV. Conclusions and Perspectives	130
References	133

5. Messenger RNA Stabilization and Gene Transcription in the Estrogen Induction of Vitellogenin mRNA

David J. Shapiro and Martin L. Brock

I. Introduction: The <i>Xenopus</i> Vitellogenin System.....	140
II. Nuclear Actions of Estrogen in Vitellogenin mRNA Induction.....	142
III. Estrogen Stabilizes Cytoplasmic Vitellogenin mRNA.....	149
IV. Methods for Determination of Rates of Gene Transcription and mRNA Degradation.....	163
V. Potential Mechanisms for the Regulation of mRNA Degradation	165
VI. Estrogen Action in <i>Xenopus</i> Liver.....	168
VII. Summary	169
References	170

6. Regulation of Growth Hormone and Prolactin Gene Expression by Hormones and Calcium

*Carter Bancroft, Gregory G. Gick,
Marcia E. Johnson, and Bruce A. White*

I. Introduction.....	174
II. Cell Lines Currently Employed to Study Regulation of Growth Hormone and Prolactin	174

III. Development of a Cytoplasmic Dot Hybridization Technique for Studies of mRNA Regulation	175
IV. Regulation by Glucocorticoid and Thyroid Hormones of Growth Hormone Gene Expression	179
V. Regulation and Mediation by Calcium of Specific Gene Expression	188
VI. Summary	210
References	211

7. Mechanisms Involved in the Actions of Calcium-Dependent Hormones

Peter F. Blackmore and John H. Exton

I. Introduction	215
II. Changes in Cytosolic Ca^{2+} Induced by Calcium-Dependent Hormones	216
III. Mobilization of Intracellular Ca^{2+} by Calcium-Dependent Hormones	218
IV. Stimulation of Ca^{2+} Influx or Inhibition of Ca^{2+} Efflux by Calcium-Dependent Hormones	219
V. Role of Cytosolic Ca^{2+} in the Physiological Responses to Calcium-Dependent Hormones	224
VI. Intracellular Signaling Mechanisms of Calcium-Dependent Hormones	227
VII. Effects of Calcium-Dependent Hormones on Phosphoinositide Metabolism	228
VIII. Summary	231
References	232

8. Steroid and Polypeptide Hormone Interaction in Milk-Protein Gene Expression

Mihir R. Banerjee and Michael Antoniou

I. Introduction	238
II. Hormonal Stimulation of Milk-Protein Synthesis in Mammary Tissue in Vitro	239
III. Studies in Explants of Mammary Tissue in Vitro	241
IV. Advances in Molecular and Cell Biology of Protein Synthesis	242
V. Measurements of Casein-mRNA Activity	243
VI. Hormone Responses of Mammary Cell Polysomes Active in Casein Synthesis	244
VII. Specific Transcription of Casein mRNAs	247
VIII. Quantitative Measurement of Hormonal Influence on Casein Gene Expression in Murine Mammary Gland in Vivo	251
IX. Milk-Protein Gene Expression in Mammary Tissue in Vitro	254
X. Dissociation of Mammogenesis and Lactogenesis in a Two-Step Culture Model	257

XI. Simultaneous Occurrence of Morphogenesis and Casein Gene Expression	262
XII. Glucocorticoid and Prolactin Interaction in Milk-Protein Gene Expression	264
XIII. Role of Progesterone in Casein Gene Expression	268
XIV. Nuclear Binding of Glucocorticoid Receptor and Milk-Protein Gene Expression	271
XV. Hormonal Regulation of Milk-Protein Gene Expression in Rats and Rabbits	274
XVI. Possible Mechanisms of Prolactin Action	277
XVII. Action of Insulin	277
XVIII. Milk-Protein cDNA Clones and Concluding Remarks	278
References	284

9. Control of Prolactin Production by Estrogen

Priscilla S. Dannies

I. Introduction	289
II. Estrogen Stimulates the Growth of Prolactin-Producing Cells	290
III. Estrogen Affects the Morphology of Prolactin-Producing Cells	292
IV. Estrogen Induces Pituitary Tumors	292
V. Estrogen Stimulates Synthesis of Prolactin	297
VI. Estrogen Increases Prolactin Storage	299
VII. Estrogen Changes the Response of Prolactin Cells to Agents That Affect Prolactin Release	301
VIII. Rapid Effects of Estrogen	302
IX. Effects of Antiestrogens	303
X. Conclusion	306
References	307

10. Genetic and Epigenetic Bases of Glucocorticoid Resistance in Lymphoid Cell Lines

Suzanne Bourgeois and Judith C. Gasson

I. Introduction	312
II. Genetic Defects in Glucocorticoid Receptor	313
III. Epigenetic Control of "Lysis" Function	324
IV. Membrane Permeability and Dexamethasone Resistance	334
V. Unidentified Determinants of Glucocorticoid Sensitivity	337
VI. Role of Growth Factors in Glucocorticoid Sensitivity	343
VII. Conclusions	347
References	348

11. Estrogen and Antiestrogen Binding Sites: Relation to the Estrogen Receptor and Biological Response

*J. H. Clark, R. C. Winneker, and
B. M. Markaverich*

I. Introduction.....	354
II. Type II Estrogen Binding Sites and an Endogenous Ligand	354
III. Antiestrogen Binding Sites and an Endogenous Ligand	374
References	381

12. The Mineralocorticoid Receptor

Diana Marver

I. Introduction.....	386
II. Methods	388
III. Characteristics of the Mineralocorticoid Receptor.....	397
IV. Mineralocorticoid Antagonists.....	401
V. Target Tissue Evaluation by Receptor Analyses.....	408
VI. Relationship of Steroid-Receptor Interactions to the Physiological Role of Aldosterone.....	416
VII. New Concepts and Unresolved Issues	425
References	426

13. Purification and Properties of the Nerve Growth Factor Receptor

*Stephen E. Buxser, Patricia Puma, and
Gary L. Johnson*

I. Introduction.....	434
II. NGF-Receptor Properties on Intact Cells	434
III. Purification of the NGF Receptor.....	439
IV. States of the NGF Receptor.....	447
V. Conclusions and Perspectives	454
References	455

14. The Thyrotropin Receptor

*Leonard D. Kohn, Salvatore M. Aloj,
Donatella Tombaccini, Carlo M. Rotella,
Roberto Toccafondi, Claudio Marcocci,
Daniela Corda, and Evelyn F. Grollman*

I. Introduction.....	458
II. Autoimmune Thyroid Disease and the Thyrotropin Receptor	460

III. The Thyrotropin Receptor: A Functional Complex of More Than One Membrane Component.....	462
IV. TSH Receptor Structure	467
V. TSH Receptor Structure and TSH-Related Growth Activity	486
VI. TSH Receptor Regulation of the Adenylate Cyclase Signal	488
VII. Thyrotropin Receptor-Mediated Signal Processes Involving Phospholipid Modulation	498
VIII. TSH Receptor-Mediated Growth Related to Multiple Signal Coupling Mechanisms	502
IX. TSH Receptors on Nonthyroid Tissue	504
X. Summary	507
References	508
Index	513
Contents of Previous Volumes.....	523

CHAPTER 1

Generation of Diversity of Opioid Peptides

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I. Introduction	2
II. Approaches and Strategies Used in Characterizing the Opioid Peptide Precursor Proteins	6
A. The Peptide Chemistry Approach	6
B. The Nucleic Acid Approach	7
III. Structure of Opioid Peptide Genes	11
A. Isolation of Genomic Clones	11
B. Opioid Peptide Gene Structure	12
C. Comparative Aspects of Proenkephalin Genes in the Human, Rat, and Amphibian	14
IV. Transcriptional and Posttranscriptional Regulation of Opioid Peptide Gene Expression	16
A. Detection of mRNA Coding for Various Polyproteins	16
B. Characteristics of Transcriptionally Active Polyprotein Genes	17
C. Regulation of Expression of Transcriptionally Active Polyprotein Genes	18
V. Regulation of POMC Gene Expression	18
A. Factors Affecting Secretion of POMC Peptides from the Pituitary	18
B. POMC Gene Regulation in the Anterior Lobe	19
C. POMC Gene Regulation in the Neurointermediate Lobe	21
D. Differential Regulation of the POMC Gene	22
VI. Proenkephalin Gene Regulation	22
VII. Translational and Posttranslational Control of Production of Opioid Peptides	23

A. Introduction.....	23
B. Approaches to the Study of Processing of Opioid Peptide Precursors	24
C. Tissue-Specific Processing of POMC, Proenkephalin, and Gastrin	24
References	31

I. INTRODUCTION

During the past two decades, a great variety of small peptides that mediate specific physiological responses in animals have been discovered. These peptides, called *neuroendocrine peptides*, are the messenger molecules that convert neural signals into physiological responses and may serve both as neurotransmitters or neuromodulators in the nervous system and as hormones in the circulatory system. It is, therefore, not surprising to find them in a wide variety of tissues. For example, the adrenocorticotropin (ACTH) endorphin family of peptides is found in the anterior and neurointermediate lobes of the pituitary, in several sites in the brain, and in the intestine, the placenta, and the immune system.

The structures of neuroendocrine peptides have been determined largely by classic amino acid sequencing techniques. However, their mode of synthesis could not be studied in detail until recombinant DNA techniques were developed. As a result, it was shown that the small neuroendocrine peptides are synthesized in the form of large polypeptide precursors. Determination of amino acid sequences of these precursors culminated in the discovery of an important new class of proteins, called polyproteins (or polyfunctional proteins) because they serve as precursors to more than one biologically active peptide. Indeed, one of these precursors, proenkephalin, is the source of as many as eight different bioactive peptides that must be excised from the precursors to become active. These peptides then may act in concert to coordinate complex behavioral responses.

The domains of the biologically active peptides in the precursors are usually flanked by pairs of basic amino acid residues, indicating that trypsin-like enzymes and carboxypeptidases are involved in producing bioactive peptides from precursors, as in the case of conversion of proinsulin to insulin (Steiner *et al.*, 1980). The proteolytic cleavages are often not the only events necessary to obtain a bioactive peptide from a precursor; specific amino acid residue modifications are also involved. For example, the precursors contain sequences that can specify attachment of oligosaccharides. Other forms of modification may include phosphorylation, amidation, acetylation, sulfation, and methylation of particular amino acids.

Hence, polyproteins can give rise to the variety of peptides necessary to mediate complex behavioral responses. However, this is not the only mechanism used to create diversity in the production of bioactive peptides. All steps that mediate the expression of a gene coding for a polyprotein can be involved in generating this type of diversity. Expression of a polyprotein gene can be regulated differently in different tissues. For example, glucocorticoids affect pro-opiomelanocortin (POMC) gene expression in the anterior but not in the neurointermediate lobe of the pituitary. Tissue-specific expression of neuroendocrine peptide genes can result from alternate modes of splicing of a pre-mRNA copied from a single gene. This diversity-generating mechanism leads to the formation of different mRNAs and, therefore, of different precursors in different tissues, as in the case of expression of the calcitonin gene (Amara *et al.*, 1982). Also, regulation of a complex behavior can be controlled by a family of genes producing related sets of bioactive peptides. These genes may be expressed selectively in different cells involved in the behavior pattern such as occurs in egg-laying behavior in the marine invertebrate *Aplysia californica* (Scheller *et al.*, 1983). In some instances it is the polypeptide precursor itself that is processed to different bioactive products in different tissues. This type of tissue-specific processing appears to be related to different sets of processing enzymes in each tissue. Finally, diversity of expression also occurs during the last step in the production of bioactive peptides, their secretion into the extracellular space. The secretion of bioactive peptides may be controlled by neural signals in one tissue and by hormones in another tissue, as in the secretion of POMC peptides from the anterior and neurointermediate lobes of the pituitary. Thus, diversity in the production of neuroendocrine peptides can occur at almost all levels of gene expression.

Diversification of neuroendocrine peptides is perhaps best illustrated by the opioid peptide family. More than 16 different endogenous peptides have been identified that exhibit opioid activity in various bioassays. The first of these peptides to be isolated were the pentapeptides Met- and Leu-enkephalin (Hughes *et al.*, 1975). The other opioid peptides are C-terminal extensions of either Met- or Leu-enkephalin as shown in Fig. 1. β -Endorphin, for example, is a C-terminal extension of Met-enkephalin, whereas dynorphin and the neo-endorphin are C-terminal extensions of Leu-enkephalin.

During the past 4 years it has been shown through the use of recombinant DNA technology and protein chemistry that all of the known opioid peptides are derived from three different precursor proteins (Fig. 2). The first opioid precursor protein to be characterized was pro-opiomelanocortin (POMC), which gives rise to the opioid, β -endorphin, and a variety of other peptides