IJIMM, Volume 2, Issue 11, 2024 ISSN: 2995-5319
http://medicaljournals.eu/index.php/IJIMM/issue/view/3
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF INTEGRATIVE AND MODERN MEDICINE

The Role of Ferritin in the Body

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Annotation: Ferritin, a crucial iron-storage protein, plays a vital role in controlling iron homeostasis, safeguarding cells from iron-induced oxidative damage, and facilitating cellular metabolism. Iron equilibrium is essential for various biological processes, including oxygen transport, DNA synthesis, and electron transfer. Abnormal ferritin levels, whether increased or decreased, are linked to various conditions, including anaemia, neurodegenerative diseases, cardiovascular disease, and cancer, underscoring the necessity for a more profound comprehension of ferritin's regulatory processes. Nonetheless, despite ferritin's essential function, the mechanisms by which it regulates iron availability in various tissues and in reaction to fluctuating iron levels remain little understood.This work utilised biochemical assays, cell culture models, and high-resolution imaging techniques to examine the cellular and molecular roles of ferritin. We evaluated ferritin expression and iron-binding capacity under scenarios of iron surplus and deficit, and investigated its relationships with other proteins associated with iron transport and storage. Our findings indicate that ferritin operates dynamically within a network of iron regulatory proteins, enabling iron buffering and redistribution across cellular compartments to enhance mitochondrial performance and safeguard against oxidative stress.This discovery expands our comprehension of ferritin, revealing it as an active participant in cellular iron transport rather than only a storage molecule. These results may possess therapeutic implications, presenting prospective targets for addressing disorders associated with iron imbalance, and provide a basis for future investigations into ferritin's function in systemic and cellular iron regulation.

Keywords: Ferritin, iron homeostasis, oxidative stress, ferroptosis, iron overload, neurodegeneration, mitochondria, iron metabolism, iron chelation, cellular iron regulation, iron deficiency, neurodegenerative diseases, ferroportin.

Introduction:

Iron, an essential micronutrient, is crucial for various physiological functions, such as oxygen transport, cellular respiration, and DNA synthesis. Nonetheless, its reactive properties necessitate meticulous regulation; iron deficiency may cause compromised cellular function, whilst iron surplus can induce oxidative stress and cellular injury. Ferritin, a protein complex responsible for iron storage, is crucial in regulating iron availability and mitigating both deficiency and toxicity. Ferritin consists of a 24-subunit protein shell that stores iron in a soluble, non-toxic form and releases it when required, hence regulating iron availability within cells and across various tissues.The control of ferritin and its influence on cellular iron metabolism has been crucial to comprehending iron homeostasis. Fluctuations in ferritin levels are associated with several diseases, including neurological disorders like Parkinson's and Alzheimer's, where iron-induced oxidative stress plays a role, as well as haematological ailments such as anaemia, where iron availability is essential. Increased ferritin levels are frequently noted in inflammatory conditions and some malignancies, indicating its extensive role in immunological and metabolic reactions. Notwithstanding these relationships, the processes by which ferritin regulates iron dynamics and its interactions with cellular and mitochondrial iron reservoirs are still little comprehended.Our study examines ferritin's extensive role in cellular iron management beyond mere storage, thereby addressing this knowledge gap. Through a combination of biochemical tests, cellular models, and advanced imaging techniques, we investigate the response of ferritin to

variations in iron levels and its interactions with other iron-regulatory proteins. This research seeks to elucidate ferritin's impact on intracellular iron transport, thereby clarifying its function in cellular metabolism and identifying possible treatment targets for iron imbalance-related illnesses. Comprehending the regulatory pathways of ferritin is essential for enhancing therapy for disorders associated with iron overload and insufficiency.

Literature Review:

The role of ferritin in iron homeostasis and its association with disease has been well investigated because of its essential function in cellular metabolism. The structure of ferritin, with 24 subunits in a spherical configuration, allows it to sequester up to 4,500 iron atoms, facilitating the storage of iron in a non-toxic, bioavailable state. This preventive mechanism is crucial to avert iron-induced oxidative stress, which may result in cellular damage if free iron accumulates in cells.Dysregulation, encompassing both iron deficiency and overload, is associated with numerous clinical disorders. Research indicates that ferritin levels are associated with inflammatory conditions and oxidative stress indicators in disorders including neurological diseases (Alzheimer's and Parkinson's), cardiovascular diseases, and malignancies. In neurodegenerative illnesses, iron accumulation in brain areas correlates with oxidative neuronal damage, indicating that ferritin's management of iron availability in neural tissues may be essential for moderating disease progression. Increased ferritin has been seen in cancer cells, potentially facilitating tumour progression by assuring iron availability for rapidly reproducing cells.Furthermore, ferritin's pathways entail intricate interactions with other iron transport and storage proteins, such as transferrin and ferroportin, to regulate iron absorption, storage, and release. The transcription factor nuclear factor erythroid 2–related factor 2 (Nrf2) is implicated in the regulation of ferritin, especially under oxidative stress, when Nrf2 activation increases ferritin expression to sequester surplus iron. Nonetheless, the exact cellular mechanisms regulating ferritin's response to variations in iron levels are not fully comprehended, especially concerning its connections with mitochondrial iron reserves and cytosolic iron dynamics.Recent research has emphasised the potential implications of targeting ferritin in iron-related diseases. Ferritin modulators and iron chelators are being investigated as therapeutic alternatives for neurodegenerative illnesses to inhibit iron accumulation and oxidative stress in the brain. Likewise, approaches to downregulate ferritin in cerebrospinal fluid are being explored to obstruct iron availability and impede tumour proliferation.Despite considerable progress, a gap persists in understanding how ferritin regulates iron homeostasis across diverse cell types and under changing physiological situations. Subsequent research aimed at clarifying these mechanisms may yield insights into the therapeutic potential of ferritin regulation in iron-related disorders.

Methodology

This study aimed to investigate the role of ferritin in cellular iron homeostasis and its wider implications for diseases associated with iron dysregulation. We conducted in vitro tests to quantify ferritin's reaction to fluctuations in iron, examine its cellular localisation, and evaluate its effect on oxidative stress levels. The methodology was meticulously designed to clarify ferritin's functioning pathways in iron homeostasis, utilising biochemical assays, imaging techniques, and oxidative stress detection, which are outlined as follows.

1. Cell Culture and Treatment Procedures

Human cell lines, specifically HEK293 and HepG2, were selected to exemplify general and liver-specific cellular models, given that ferritin exhibits significant activity in hepatic tissues where iron metabolism is notably dynamic. Cells were cultured in standard DMEM enriched with 10% foetal bovine serum and 1% penicillin-streptomycin at 37°C in a humidified incubator containing 5% CO_2. Iron modulation was accomplished via regulated exposure to circumstances of iron overload and iron deficit. To produce iron overload, cells were exposed to ferric ammonium citrate (FAC) at concentrations of 10, 50, and 100 μM, simulating different levels of iron excess. Conversely, deferoxamine (DFO) at concentrations of 50, 100, and 200 μM was employed to create iron deficiency through the chelation of intracellular iron.Each treatment was administered for a duration of 24-48

hours to assess both acute and prolonged ferritin responses, with untreated cells utilised as controls. We evaluated ferritin's dynamic response and its regulatory threshold under diverse iron stress levels by manipulating exposure durations and iron concentrations.

2. Quantitative Assessment of Ferritin Expression and Iron Sequestration

Ferritin expression levels were assessed by Western blotting and enzyme-linked immunosorbent assays (ELISA), concentrating on both heavy (H) and light (L) ferritin subunits. Cell lysates were generated by lysing treated cells, and protein contents were quantified using the Bradford assay to ensure uniform loading across samples. Western blotting yielded information on ferritin subunit expression, whereas ELISA measured total ferritin concentrations. The analyses were supplemented by a ferrozine-based iron quantification assay, in which intracellular iron was liberated from ferritin under acidic conditions and interacted with ferrozine to yield a quantifiable colorimetric change. This enabled us to monitor iron storage capacity in response to both FAC and DFO treatments, offering insights into the regulatory role of ferritin in iron sequestration under varying iron levels.

3. Immunofluorescence and Subcellular Localisation Using Confocal Microscopy

Immunofluorescence labelling was performed to investigate the localisation of ferritin within cells after treatments. Cells were fixed with paraformaldehyde, permeabilized with Triton X-100, then treated with primary antibodies targeting ferritin H and L chains. Secondary antibodies coupled with Alexa Fluor dyes were employed to elucidate ferritin distribution. Mitochondria were co-stained with MitoTracker to evaluate potential interactions with ferritin, given ferritin's proposed function in regulating mitochondrial iron concentrations.Confocal microscopy was utilised to get high-resolution pictures of ferritin's subcellular localisation, focussing on its distribution within cytosolic and mitochondrial compartments. The image processing program measured fluorescence intensity and co-localization indices, enabling us to assess the degree of ferritin's interaction with mitochondria, which has ramifications for its function in cellular iron transport and mitochondrial defence against oxidative stress.

4. Evaluation of Oxidative Stress using Reactive Oxygen Species Detection Assays

The function of ferritin in the regulation of oxidative stress was evaluated by quantifying reactive oxygen species (ROS) levels in treated cells. The DCFDA test was utilised for its ability to sensitively detect reactive oxygen species (ROS) by converting non-fluorescent DCFDA into fluorescent DCF in the presence of ROS.Treated cells were treated with DCFDA, and fluorescence was quantified using a microplate reader, yielding data on ROS generation under situations of iron overload and deficiency. This experiment aimed to assess the antioxidant protective impact of ferritin, as it sequesters excess iron that would otherwise catalyse the generation of reactive oxygen species (ROS) through the Fenton reaction, hence contributing to cellular oxidative stress and possible damage.

5. Data Analysis and Statistical Evaluation

Statistical analyses were used to identify significant differences between the treatment and control groups. One-way ANOVA with Tukey’s post hoc test was utilised to evaluate ferritin levels, iron concentrations, and reactive oxygen species levels among treatment groups. Co-localization statistics were calculated using imaging data to evaluate the distribution of ferritin within mitochondrial and cytosolic areas. Results are expressed as means ± standard deviations, with significance established at $p < 0.05$ to validate the observed trends.This extensive methodology combines cellular, molecular, and imaging techniques to assess ferritin's complex involvement in iron management and its protective effects against oxidative stress. This study offers a comprehensive characterisation of ferritin's response to iron variations and its interaction with cellular structures by assessing ferritin expression, iron-binding capability, and localisation. The results of this study may guide future investigations into ferritin's role in disorders associated with iron dysregulation and could establish a basis for treatment strategies aimed at regulating iron homeostasis and oxidative stress in diverse clinicalscenarios.

Results

Our research uncovers substantial insights on ferritin's function in cellular iron regulation and its protective role against oxidative stress. Biochemical studies indicated that ferritin expression augmented in response to iron overload conditions (up to 100 μM FAC), as evidenced by the increased levels of both ferritin H and L chains identified using Western blot and ELISA. In contrast, ferritin expression decreased in iron-deficient conditions generated by DFO therapy, underscoring ferritin's regulatory sensitivity to variations in iron availability. Quantitative iron analysis demonstrated that cells treated with FAC exhibited elevated intracellular iron levels, while iron-deficient cells displayed markedly decreased iron content, aligning with ferritin's function in sequestering and releasing iron based on physiological requirements.Immunofluorescence imaging demonstrated that ferritin mostly localised in the cytosol, with limited co-localization with mitochondria under iron overload circumstances, indicating a potential interaction between ferritin and mitochondrial iron pools. The co-localization index elevated with FAC administration, suggesting a possible function of ferritin in regulating mitochondrial iron concentrations, presumably to avert mitochondrial damage caused by surplus iron. ROS experiments indicated that cells experiencing iron overload had markedly raised ROS levels relative to controls; conversely, cells with increased ferritin expression displayed decreased ROS, implying ferritin's protective role against iron-induced oxidative stress.

Discussion

These findings confirm ferritin's essential role as an iron buffer that dynamically regulates cellular iron equilibrium. The overexpression of ferritin in response to excess iron underscores its function in sequestering iron to avert hazardous buildup, whereas downregulation under iron-deficient settings indicates a regulated release of stored iron. Our findings regarding the partial mitochondrial localisation of ferritin under high-iron conditions corroborate emerging hypotheses concerning ferritin's role in mitochondrial iron regulation, potentially mitigating iron-dependent reactive oxygen species production within mitochondria, which are particularly susceptible to iron-induced oxidative damage.The relationship between ferritin and mitochondrial iron reserves necessitates additional investigation. Our observations suggest enhanced co-localization in iron-rich environments; however, the exact mechanisms of this relationship and the channels through which ferritin may transfer or sequester iron in mitochondria are not well understood. Future research should examine the molecular regulators of ferritin localisation and their effects on mitochondrial function, particularly in the context of iron dysregulation observed in neurodegenerative disorders, where iron-induced oxidative stress plays a role in pathogenesis.This study underscores a deficiency in comprehending ferritin's interaction with other iron regulating proteins, including transferrin and ferroportin, which are essential for iron import and export. Clarifying the function of ferritin within this network could elucidate its significance in systemic iron control. The practical applications of these results may involve targeting ferritin or related pathways for therapeutic interventions in conditions of iron overload or deficiency, such hereditary hemochromatosis or anaemia of chronic illness. Iron chelators that regulate ferritin's storage or release functions may possess therapeutic promise in situations characterised by excessive iron accumulation.In summary, our findings elucidate ferritin's function in cellular iron homeostasis and the alleviation of oxidative stress, especially regarding iron surplus. This study elucidates ferritin's regulatory response to iron and its connections with mitochondrial iron pools, establishing a platform for ongoing research into ferritin-targeted treatments. Future research should focus on creating targeted ferritin modulators and assessing their effectiveness in preclinical models of iron-related disorders, which may result in innovative strategies for addressing iron dysregulation in clinical environments.

Conclusion

This study offers essential insights into ferritin's pivotal function in regulating cellular iron homeostasis and safeguarding against oxidative stress. Our findings demonstrate that ferritin functions as a major iron-buffering protein, upregulating in iron-overload circumstances and downregulating in iron deficiency to maintain safe cellular iron levels. The partial localisation of ferritin to mitochondria under iron-rich circumstances indicates its possible role in mitochondrial iron control, possibly

mitigating oxidative damage and facilitating cellular metabolism. The findings have considerable implications for comprehending iron dysregulation in numerous diseases, including neurodegenerative disorders, anaemia of chronic disease, and iron-overload conditions like hemochromatosis, where ferritin's capacity to alleviate iron-induced damage may be utilised for therapeutic applications.Notwithstanding these improvements, the exact methods of ferritin's interaction with other iron-regulatory proteins, such as transferrin, ferroportin, and mitochondrial transporters, remain inadequately elucidated. Subsequent study should examine the interaction between ferritin and these proteins in regulating iron distribution among cellular compartments and governing iron transport to and from the mitochondria. Moreover, there exists an urgent want for research investigating the therapeutic potential of ferritin modulation, encompassing the creation of small compounds or biologics capable of regulating ferritin's iron storage or release capabilities to address disorders associated with iron imbalance. These improvements may present innovative methods for targeting ferritin and associated pathways, yielding new techniques for the management of iron-related disorders.

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