Modeling Long-term Host Cell-Giardia lamblia Interactions in an in vitro 3D Cell Culture System

Bridget S. Fisher, Carlos Estrano, Judith A. Cole
Department of Biological Sciences, University of Memphis, Memphis, TN 38152

BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS

The flagellated protozoan parasite, Giardia lamblia, is the most common cause of diarrheal disease in a humans, wildlife, and domestic animals. Parasite transmission typically occurs following ingestion of infectious cysts in contaminated food and/or water. Trophozoites preferentially colonize the small intestine by attaching to the gastrointestinal epithelial barrier (Figure 1). Infected hosts can display a wide range of symptom presentation. The majority are asymptomatic and exhibit few signs and symptoms of infection. Other infected individuals display abdominal cramping, nausea, bloating, vomiting, and diarrhea.

Epithelial cells exposed to Giardia in vitro exhibit actin rearrangement, tight junction disruption, increased intestinal permeability, apoptosis, and secrete chemoketic cytokines. However, these monolayer environments do not accurately reflect the three-dimensional nature of the gastrointestinal tract (Figure 1). Few studies have assessed how innate immune cells, such as macrophages, potentially contribute to disease pathology and parasite control or clearance. Additionally, long-term culturing of Giardia trophozoites with epithelial cells in vitro is problematic due to the microaerophilic nature of the parasite. Since Giardia infections can span several days to long months, establishing an in vitro model that allows for co-incubation of host epithelial and immune cells with Giardia trophozoites over several days would greatly contribute to the understanding of infection interactions.

Our model utilizes transwell inserts to co-culture a human epithelial cell line (Caco-2) and a murine peritoneal macrophage cell line (IC-21) in a manner that represents the apical-basolateral orientation of the small intestine (Figure 2). This model allows for assessment of cell-cell interactions between the epithelial and immune cells of the lamina propria through cytokine secretion, isolation of individual cell populations for signaling studies, and long-term Giardia effects spanning 21 days.

Figure 1. Giardia life cycle. Trophozoites colonize the small intestine where they attach to epithelial cells inducing apoptosis. In the gastrointestinal tract, enterocytes and macrophages communicate with each other through cytokine secretion.

METHODS

Cell culture: IC-21 macrophages were plated on the bottom of 24-well inserts. After 24 hours, the inserts were placed in a 24-well plate containing RPMI. Caco-2 cells were plated on top of the insert in DMEM. After 3 days, Giardia trophozoites (WB05; 100,000 total parasites) were added to the insert in 90% DMEM/10% Giardia media. The cells were fed by removing half of the media and then adding fresh media to the well every other day until 5 days post infection. After 5 days, unattached parasites were eliminated by completely removing all the media and replenishing with fresh media every day.

Cytokine array: Conditioned medium was collected from the co-culture at 5 days and analyzed using the RayBio® Human Cytokine Antibody Array (AAH-CYT-1-2).

Cell number assay: Following 5 days of incubation in the co-culture, Caco-2 cells were stained with methylene blue. The eluted color was read at 655nm.

Caspase 3 activity: At 5 days, Caco-2 cell lysates were analyzed using the Abcam caspase-3 assay kit (ab39401) according to the manufacturer’s instructions.

RESULTS

Figure 2. Experimental design of the co-culture system. Caco-2 cells are grown inside 24-well inserts in DMEM/IC-21 macrophages are plated at the bottom of the inserts in RPMI media. After 72 hours, Giardia trophozoites are added to the inserts in 90% DMEM/10% Giardia media. Inserts are fixed to the top with media and sealed with a round cover slip. Cultures were extended for 21 days.

Figure 3. Cytokine profile of the co-culture at 5 days. Macrophages secreted the chemoketic cytokines MCP-1, IL-8, and GRO in both the presence and absence of Giardia trophozoites. The presence of macrophages in the co-culture induced secretion of IL-8 and GRO from Caco-2 cells. Giardia abolished the secretion of cytokines from Caco-2 cells indicating the parasite can potentially modulate the host immune response.

Figure 4. Cell number assay of Caco-2 cells following 5-day incubation with Giardia. Macrophages did not induce Caco-2 cell proliferation. Giardia significantly decreased Caco-2 cell number following 5 days of incubation. (p<0.0001) n=3

Figure 5. Caspase-3 activity of Caco-2 cells exposed to Giardia in plate and insert culture conditions. Caspase-3 is a marker for apoptosis. Giardia did not increase caspase-3 activation at 24 hours in either the plate or insert conditions. At 5 days, the presence of trophozoites significantly induced apoptoisis in Caco-2 cells through the activation of caspase-3 in the insert culture, but not the plate conditions. (p<0.05) n=3

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- Giardia trophozoites were successfully cultured in the co-culture model for 21 days.
- Caco-2 cells display a differential cytokine profile when co-cultured with macrophages.
- Giardia trophozoites can abolish the secretion of pro-inflammatory cytokines from gastrointestinal epithelial cells.
- Giardia decreases Caco-2 cell number at 5 days in both the absence and presence of macrophages.
- Giardia induces apoptosis of Caco-2 cells through caspase-3 activation in a time dependent manner.
- Caspase-3 activation in Caco-2 cells was higher in the insert culture when compared to the plate environment.

Estrano Lab
Cole Lab