

Bioconversion of C-6 Sulfidopeptide Leukotrienes by the Responding Guinea Pig Ileum Determines the Time Course of its Contraction

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ABSTRACT The naturally occurring sulfidopeptide leukotrienes, leukotriene (LT) C₄ (LTC₄) [5(S)-hydroxy-6(R)-S-glutathionyl-7,9-*trans*,11,14-*cis*-eicosatetraenoic acid] and its cysteinylglycine (LTD₄) and cysteinyl (LTE₄) analogs, which are derived by peptide cleavage, differ in the concentrations required to elicit comparable contractions of the guinea pig ileum, with respective potencies of 1.2:5:1. The effect of the ongoing bioconversion of LTC₄ and LTD₄ on the contractile response of the guinea pig ileum to each was determined by recording the pattern of the contraction and quantitating the initial agonist and its metabolic products. The contraction was elicited by radiolabeled agonist, and its conversion products were sampled at defined intervals and resolved by their retention times on reverse-phase high performance liquid chromatography. After a latent period of 60 s, LTC₄ initiated a linear response, followed by a slower, progressive response to a maximum level that was maintained without relaxation. The metabolic conversion of LTC₄ was <5% during the linear phase of contraction and complete inhibition of bioconversion of LTC₄ to LTD₄ by the presence of serine-borate complex did not alter the pattern of the spasmogenic response. As the maximum response in the presence of serine-borate complex was three-quarters of that obtained without the inhibitor of bioconversion, the pre-

dominant response was to LTC₄ itself. The spasmogenic response of the ileum to LTD₄ was immediate, linear to a maximum level, and immediately followed by a marked relaxation. That the failure of LTD₄ to sustain a contraction was due to its immediate, rapid, and quantitative conversion to the less potent LTE₄ was established by pharmacologically inhibiting and anatomically deleting the converting activity. In the presence of L-cysteine the conversion of LTD₄ to LTE₄ was largely inhibited and the maximum contractile response was well maintained. After anatomic removal of the mucosa that contained the LTD₄ dipeptidase activity, the longitudinal smooth muscle preparation gave a maximal response to LTD₄ that was fully maintained. Thus, bioconversion is not a prerequisite for the spasmogenic activity of LTC₄ and accounts for the transient response of the ileum to LTD₄.

INTRODUCTION

The C-6 sulfidopeptide leukotrienes (LT)¹ LTC₄, LTD₄, and LTE₄ together constitute the biological activity ascribed to slow reacting substance of anaphylaxis (1-5). Their biosynthesis is initiated by the oxidative metabolism of arachidonic acid by 5-lipoxygenase to yield 5-hydroperoxyeicosatetraenoic acid, which is converted enzymatically to LTA₄, 5-6-oxido-7,9-*trans*,11,14-*cis*-eicosatetraenoic acid (6). LTC₄, 5(S)-hydroxy-6(R)-S-glutathionyl-7,9-*trans*,11,14-*cis*-eicosatetraenoic acid is formed via conjugation of

Dr. Krilis is the recipient of a Fogarty Center International Postdoctoral Research Fellowship and an Applied Health Science Fellowship from the National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia. Dr. Lewis is the recipient of an Allergic Diseases Academic Award (AI-00399) from the National Institutes of Health.

Received for publication 23 August 1982 and in revised form 8 December 1982.

¹ Abbreviations used in this paper: LT, leukotriene; RPHPLC, reverse-phase high performance liquid chromatography.

LTA₄ with glutathione by a glutathionyl-S-transferase (7). Glutamic acid and glycine are sequentially cleaved from the glutathionyl domain at the C-6 to yield LTD₄, 5(S)-hydroxy-6(R)-S-cysteinyl-glycine-7,9-*trans*,11,14-*cis*-eicosatetraenoic acid; and LTE₄, 5(S)-hydroxy-6(R)-S-cysteinyl-7,9-*trans*,11,14-*cis*-eicosatetraenoic acid, respectively (2-5). Formation of the eicosatetraenoic acid metabolite, LTD₄, and the eicosatrienoic acid metabolite, LTD₃, by cleavage of glutamic acid from LTC₄ and LTC₃, respectively, has been demonstrated with partially purified γ -glutamyl transpeptidase (8, 9), and more recently with a homogeneous preparation of this enzyme (10). Conversion of LTD₄ to LTE₄ by cleavage of the carboxy terminal glycine has been separately achieved with highly purified rat kidney dipeptidase and aminopeptidase (10). LTC₄ is also converted to LTD₄ and to LTE₄ in vitro by a number of cell types and tissue extracts (11-16) and these bioconversions are suppressed by agents capable of inhibiting γ -glutamyl transpeptidase and dipeptidases, respectively (9, 12, 17).

In vitro studies of the amounts of agonist that are equally potent in eliciting spasmogenic activity have yielded molar ratios of LTC₄/LTD₄/LTE₄ for guinea pig ileum of 4.2:1:5, for guinea pig parenchymal lung strips of 100:1:30 (18), and of LTC₄/LTD₄ for human bronchial tissues of ~1:1 (19, 20). The molar ratio of LTC₄/LTD₄/LTE₄ for amounts that are equally potent in decreasing human and guinea pig myocardial contractility are 25:1:265 and 10:1:2,000, respectively (21). Thus, in in vitro studies, LTD₄ is generally the most potent and LTE₄ the least potent, but there is as much as a 2-log variation in the molar ratios of equal potencies with different tissues.

Possible explanations for these differences in relative potencies for the sulfidopeptide leukotrienes could relate to both receptor-determined and non-receptor-determined muscle functions. Receptor-determined differences could result from a separate receptor for each sulfidopeptide leukotriene; a single receptor with different affinities for each; or a single receptor that recognizes only LTD₄ and LTE₄, so that LTC₄ must be converted to LTD₄ to elicit a biological response. Substantially different rates of bioconversion and/or inactivation for each sulfidopeptide leukotriene by the responding tissue(s) would represent a second major variable. Functional inactivation of LTC₄ occurs during the respiratory burst of stimulated human polymorphonuclear leukocytes and is mediated by the action of hypochlorous acid to generate chiral LTC₄ sulf-oxides and 6-*t*-LTB₄ diastereoisomers (22). However, there is no information on the metabolic conversion or inactivation of the sulfidopeptide leukotrienes during an elicited spasmogenic response or on the effect

of such metabolism on the apparent spasmogenic potencies of these sulfidopeptide leukotrienes. To evaluate the effects of bioconversion and inactivation, a model was developed in which the metabolic processing of radiolabeled LTC₄ and LTD₄ was assessed quantitatively during the period when the nonvascular smooth muscle contractile response was initiated and maintained. These studies demonstrate that differences in rates of bioconversion represent one important variable in determining the intensity and time course of the elicited contractile response. In addition, the enzyme converting LTD₄ to LTE₄ is shown to reside in the mucosa rather than in the muscle layer of the guinea pig ileum.

METHODS

Materials. L-cysteine, L-serine, atropine sulfate, histamine diphosphate (Sigma Chemical Co., St. Louis, MO), and high performance liquid chromatography-grade methanol (Burdick & Jackson Laboratories, Muskegon, WI) were purchased from the manufacturers. LTC₄, LTD₄, and LTE₄ were prepared as previously described (5, 23, 24) and stored in 10 mM phosphate buffer (pH 6.8)/ethanol, 4:1 (vol/vol) at -70°C under argon until use. [³H]LTC₄ (25 Ci/mmol) and [³H]LTD₄ (25 Ci/mmol) were prepared as described (25) and provided by New England Nuclear (Boston, MA).

Assay of biological activity. A 4- to 6-cm segment of distal guinea pig ileum or ileal longitudinal muscle strip was placed in an organ bath at 37°C for recording isotonic contractions in response to the sulfidopeptide leukotrienes (26). Longitudinal muscle strips were prepared from the distal 10-cm segment of the ileum (27) by mechanically removing the outer layer of the longitudinal muscle.

Measurement of [³H]LTC₄ and [³H]LTD₄ bioconversion. 5 ng of [³H]LTC₄ (1 × 10⁵ cpm) or 3.6 ng of [³H]LTD₄ (1 × 10⁵ cpm) were added to an organ bath containing the smooth muscle preparation. At defined time intervals, 200- μ l samples of the suspension medium were removed and added to 300 μ l of methanol at -20°C. 25 μ l of 0.5 N acetic acid were added, and the samples were centrifuged at 8,000 *g* for 2 min in a model B microfuge (Beckman Instruments, Inc., Spinco Div., Palo Alto, CA). Each of the supernatants was mixed with 0.5-1.0 μ g of leukotriene standards and reverse-phase high performance liquid chromatography (RPHPLC) was performed with a C₁₈ column and an isocratic solvent of methanol/water/acetic acid (65:34.9:0.1, vol/vol) pH 5.6, at a flow rate of 1 ml/min (2). Absorbance at 280 nm (A₂₈₀) was continuously monitored with an on-line Hitachi spectrophotometer. 1-ml fractions were collected and assessed for radioactivity after addition of Hydrofluor (National Diagnostics, Inc., Somerville, NJ). In selected experiments, the functional and biochemical responses to a radiolabeled leukotriene were determined a second time on the same ileal tissue after it had been thoroughly washed and preincubated for 10 min with 10 mM of either L-cysteine or serine-borate complex. The radiolabeled leukotrienes associated with the smooth muscle preparation were analyzed both after extensive washing and after extraction of the tissue. Washing was carried out with 2 ml of RPHPLC buffer (65% methanol, 34.9% water, and 0.1% acetic acid) at 37°C for 30 min and then overnight at -20°C followed by pooling of the wash buffers. The tissue was then homogenized in 80% ethanol by using a TRI-R STIR-R homogenizer (TRI-R Instruments, Inc., Rockville Centre, NY) at room temperature

for 5 min. The ethanol extract was cleared by centrifugation and the sediment washed with 10 ml of 80% ethanol. The particulate debris was again sedimented and the ethanolic solutions combined, dried in a rotary evaporator, and dissolved in the RPHPLC buffer. The ethanol-extracted debris was solubilized in 80% ethanol and one-third was counted in 10 ml of Aquasol (New England Nuclear). The pooled, wash-buffers and the ethanol extract were each analyzed and quantitated for their content of radiolabeled leukotrienes by RPHPLC and scintillation counting.

RESULTS

Bioconversion of LTC₄ and LTD₄ by responding guinea pig terminal ileum. In each of four experiments with 5 ng of [³H]LTC₄ (1×10^5 cpm), the contractile response was delayed 60 s in onset. The contraction was then linear to 2 min, progressed to a plateau at 30 min, and maintained this maximum for the remainder of the 50-min observation period (Fig. 1). Minimal conversion, <5%, of [³H]LTC₄ to [³H]LTD₄ and [³H]LTE₄ was apparent at 5 min. By 30 min, the time of maximum contraction, 24% of the [³H]LTC₄ had been converted. At 50 min, with the maximal contraction still being maintained, conversion of [³H]LTC₄ was 35%, with 8% appearing as LTD₄ and 27% as LTE₄. LTE₄ was detectable at 10 min and increased linearly up to 50 min at a rate of 8 fmol/cm segment per min. The recoveries of radiolabeled leukotrienes from the organ bath diffusate at each time point for

the four experiments averaged $70 \pm 5\%$ (mean \pm SD), and $72 \pm 10\%$ of this activity was recovered from RPHPLC; no products other than LTC₄, LTD₄, and LTE₄ were identified. In a separate experiment, the C-6 sulfidopeptide leukotrienes that were in the diffusate and associated with the tissue were analyzed 12 min after introduction of the radiolabeled LTC₄. The ratio of LTC₄/LTD₄/LTE₄ in the diffusate that contained 52% of the recovered counts was 6.0:0.7:3.3; the leukotrienes that were associated with the tissue and releasable by washing were present in a similar ratio and represented 0.1% of the counts recovered. The ethanol extract of the tissue and the residual tissue debris contained no measurable counts.

In four experiments with 3.6 ng of [³H]LTD₄ (1×10^5 cpm), the contractile response was virtually immediate and progressed linearly to a maximum amplitude within 40 s (Fig. 2). The maximum was not maintained and the response declined almost linearly from 1 to 6 min and then progressively until 11 min, at which point the response plateaued at $\sim 20\%$ of maximum. The [³H]LTD₄ declined in a linear fashion with time, with the conversion to [³H]LTE₄ reaching 82% by 25 min. The recoveries of radiolabeled leukotrienes from the organ bath diffusate at each time point for the four experiments averaged $90 \pm 7\%$, and $76 \pm 10\%$ of this activity was recovered after RPHPLC; no products other than LTD₄ and LTE₄ were detected.

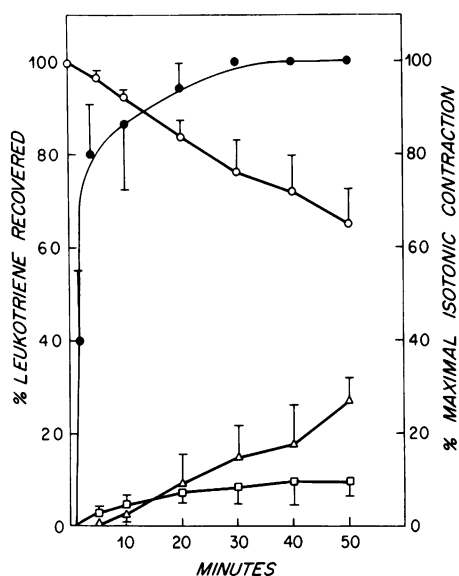


FIGURE 1 Time course of contractile response to 5 ng of [³H]LTC₄ from guinea pig ileum, expressed as percentage of maximal response (●—●), and of the metabolism of [³H]LTC₄ (○) to [³H]LTD₄ (□) and [³H]LTE₄ (△), expressed as percentage of leukotriene recovered. Data represent the mean \pm SD of four experiments in which the maximal contractions were 0.75, 0.05, 7.5, and 0.3 V.

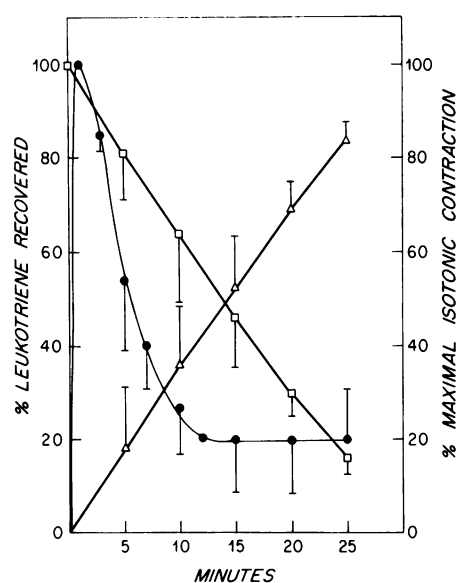


FIGURE 2 Time course of contractile response to 3.6 ng of [³H]LTD₄ from guinea pig ileum, expressed as percentage of maximal response (●—●), and of the metabolism of [³H]LTD₄ (□) to [³H]LTE₄ (△), expressed as percentage of leukotriene recovered. Data represent the mean \pm SD of four experiments in which the maximal contractions were 1.2, 0.9, 0.6, and 1.0 V.

Inhibition of bioconversion of LTC₄ to LTD₄ by L-serine-borate complex and of LTD₄ to LTE₄ by L-cysteine. Because L-serine-borate complex and L-cysteine both contract the muscle preparation, a 15-min period was allowed after addition of either agent during which the muscle tension returned to base line. In two similar experiments with 5 ng of [³H]LTC₄, the time course of response without and with L-serine-borate complex included a 1-min lag time, a linear brisk contraction from 1 to 2 min, a slower progressive contraction to a maximum, and a plateau with a slight decline out to 40 min (Fig. 3). In the presence of L-serine-borate complex, the rate of contraction was lower and the maximum achieved was less than in its absence. Without the serine-borate complex, 20 and 30% of the [³H]LTC₄ in the two experiments was converted to [³H]LTD₄ and [³H]LTE₄ at 40 min, whereas in the presence of inhibitor there was no apparent conversion in either experiment. The overall recoveries without and with serine-borate complex averaged 54 and 50% for the two experiments. In a separate experiment conducted in the presence of 1 mM serine-borate complex, C-6 sulfidopeptide leukotrienes that were in the diffusate and associated with the tissue were separately analyzed 5 min after introduction of the radiolabeled LTC₄. The diffusate contained 53.8% of the recovered counts, all of which were LTC₄. The wash-buffer and the ethanolic extract of the tissue each contained <0.3% of the recovered counts and >90% of these counts eluted as LTC₄; the residual tissue debris contained no measurable counts.

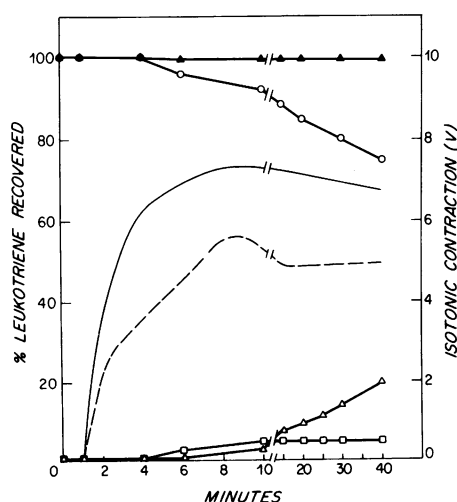


FIGURE 3 Time course of contractile response to 5 ng of [³H]LTC₄ from guinea pig ileum (in volts) in the presence (—○—) and absence (—●—) of 10 mM serine-borate complex and of the metabolism of [³H]LTC₄ in the presence of serine-borate complex (▲) and in its absence (○), which allowed conversion to [³H]LTD₄ (□) and [³H]LTE₄ (Δ).

After the contractile effect of the serine-borate complex had subsided, the presence of this inhibitor (10 mM) did not alter the contractile response of the smooth muscle to 50 ng of histamine or to 2 ng of LTD₄.

The rates of the immediate linear contraction and the maximum amplitude evoked by 3.6 ng of [³H]LTD₄ were not altered by the presence of 10 mM L-cysteine in three experiments. In the presence of L-cysteine, the maximum contraction was maintained for 4 min and declined to a plateau at two-thirds of the maximal response, whereas without cysteine the contraction was not maintained and declined rapidly to a plateau of one-sixth maximum. In the absence of the L-cysteine, the [³H]LTD₄ was linearly and quantitatively converted to [³H]LTE₄, whereas in the presence of L-cysteine, [³H]LTD₄ metabolism was <20%. The capacity of L-cysteine to minimize metabolism of [³H]LTD₄, to prolong the maximum response, and to augment the plateau response as shown for one experiment (Fig. 4), was similar in the two additional experiments. The overall recoveries without and with cysteine averaged 65 and 56.5%, respectively, for the three experiments.

Bioconversion of LTC₄ and LTD₄ by guinea pig ileum longitudinal muscle strips. The contractile response of a longitudinal muscle strip to 5 ng of [³H]LTC₄ included a 1-min delay, a linear contraction from 1 to 2 min, progression to a plateau at 25 min, and maintenance of this maximum contraction for the duration of observation to 45 min (Fig. 5). There was

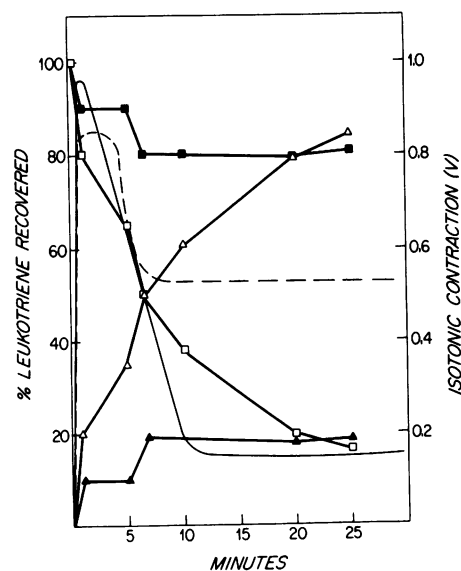


FIGURE 4 Time course of contractile response to 3.6 ng of [³H]LTD₄ from guinea pig ileum (in volts) in the presence (—□—) and absence (—●—) of 10 mM L-cysteine and of the metabolism of [³H]LTD₄ (□) to [³H]LTE₄ (Δ) in the presence (filled) and absence (open) of L-cysteine.

a gradual decline in [^3H]LTC $_4$ and at 40 min, 15% had been converted to [^3H]LTD $_4$ without further processing to [^3H]LTE $_4$. In the second experiment, the spasmogenic response was similar in form, and 20% of [^3H]LTC $_4$ was metabolized to [^3H]LTD $_4$ at 50 min. The recoveries of radiolabeled leukotriene from the diffusate at each time point averaged 75% for the two experiments and 72% of this activity was recovered after RPHPLC; no products other than LTC $_4$ and LTD $_4$ were detected.

In four experiments with 3.6 ng of [^3H]LTD $_4$ (1×10^5 cpm), each contractile response of the longitudinal muscle strips was immediate and linear in progression to 2 min, followed by a progressively slower contraction to maximum at 20 min with persistence to 50 min (Fig. 6). Bioconversion of [^3H]LTD $_4$ was minimal at 30 min, reflecting the lack of the converting enzyme in the mucosa-free muscle preparations. The recoveries of radiolabeled leukotriene from the diffusates at each time point averaged 82.5% for the four experiments and 86% of this activity was recovered after RPHPLC; no products other than LTD $_4$ and LTE $_4$ were detected.

DISCUSSION

In order to characterize the effects of the associated bioconversion of LTC $_4$ and LTD $_4$ during the spas-

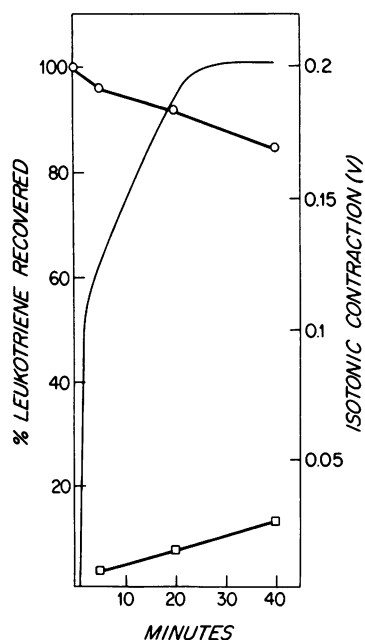


FIGURE 5 Time course of contractile response to 5 ng [^3H]LTC $_4$ of a longitudinal muscle strip of guinea pig ileum, expressed in volts (—), and of the metabolism of [^3H]LTC $_4$ (○) to [^3H]LTD $_4$ (□).

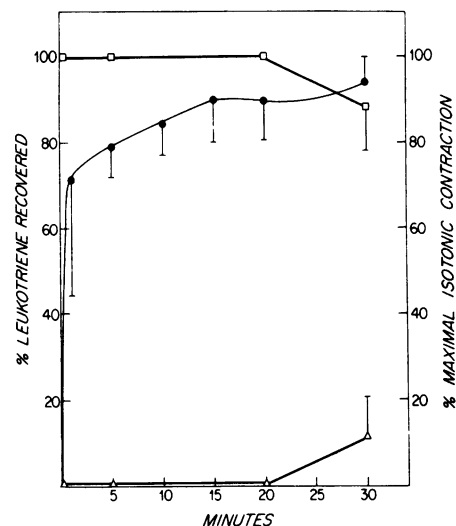


FIGURE 6 Time course of contractile response to 3.6 ng of [^3H]LTD $_4$ from longitudinal muscle strips of guinea pig ileum, expressed as percentage of maximal response (●—●), and of the metabolism of [^3H]LTD $_4$ (□) to [^3H]LTE $_4$ (Δ), expressed as percentage of leukotriene recovered. Data represent the mean \pm SD of three experiments in which the maximal contractions were 0.97, 0.5, and 2.5 V.

mogenic response of guinea pig ileum elicited by each agonist, the contraction and the conversion products in the diffusate were recorded simultaneously over time. The contraction was initiated with radiolabeled C-6 sulfidopeptide leukotriene, and at fixed intervals the labeled leukotrienes in the diffusate were resolved by their respective retention times on RPHPLC. The recoveries of radiolabeled products from the organ bath diffusate were 70 and 90% for [^3H]LTC $_4$ and [^3H]LTD $_4$ inputs, respectively, and 72 and 76% of these activities were recovered after RPHPLC (Figs. 1 and 2). The losses in the diffusate are attributed to binding by the glass, and those occurring during chromatography are comparable with other studies with unlabeled and labeled leukotrienes (16, 22). No products other than the sulfidopeptide leukotrienes were identified. That the bioconversions were not epiphenomena but were related to the muscle response was established by attenuating the metabolism of the C-6 sulfidopeptide leukotrienes with enzyme inhibitors and with anatomic deletion of the LTD $_4$ dipeptidase activity from the responding muscle preparation. With these interventions it was possible to distinguish the time course of the onset of the intrinsic activity of LTC $_4$ from that of LTD $_4$ and to define the effect of metabolism on the persistence of the spasmogenic effect of each agonist.

The response of the guinea pig ileum to [^3H]LTC $_4$ included a 60-s lag phase, a linear contraction to about two-thirds maximum over 60 s, and a slow further contraction to maximum, which was then maintained

(Fig. 1). As the metabolic conversion was <5% at 5 min, and was only 35% (8% LTD₄ and 27% LTE₄) at 50 min, the pattern of the response was attributed to LTC₄ rather than to its conversion products. The introduction of serine-borate complex (28) completely prevented the bioconversion of LTC₄ and reduced the maximum response to three-quarters of that observed without the inhibitor (Fig. 3). Thus, on the guinea pig ileum, LTC₄ has an inherent spasmogenic activity that is predominantly independent of its bioconversion to LTD₄.

The spasmogenic response of the guinea pig ileum to LTD₄ was immediate and progressed to a maximum at 60 s, which was maintained only briefly (Fig. 2). A period of rapid relaxation was then followed by a plateau at ~20% of the maximal contractile response. As the plot of the metabolic conversion of LTD₄ to LTE₄ was linear and passed through the origin, the conversion rate of 46.6 fmol/cm segment per min accounts for the transient nature of the maximal response to LTD₄. The apparent lower rate of conversion of LTD₄ to LTE₄, as compared with the rate of muscle relaxation (Fig. 2), most likely reflects the lag between tissue events and their presentation in the surrounding diffusate. Nonetheless, because of an equilibrium between association and dissociation of agonists, the contractile response observed does reflect the bioconversion and distribution of the agonists available for reassociation. This interpretation is supported by the finding of a more sustained contraction when the conversion of LTD₄ to LTE₄ was almost completely inhibited by the introduction of L-cysteine to the organ bath (Fig. 4). With anatomical deletion of the LTD₄ dipeptidase activity by removing the mucosa, the longitudinal smooth muscle preparation gave a contractile response to LTD₄ that maintained its maximum (Fig. 6).

The spasmogenic response of the guinea pig ileum and that of the longitudinal smooth muscle preparation to LTC₄ are delayed in onset by 1 min and are much more persistent than those occurring in response to LTD₄. The different latency for initiation of the contractile response distinguishes the inherent activities of these leukotrienes and is not, as previously postulated, due to the requirement for the bioconversion of LTC₄ to an active principle LTD₄ (29, 30), because the latent period for initiation of contraction was not altered by inhibition of this conversion. Further, the persistence of the LTC₄ contraction at its maximum, as compared with the transient maximal response to LTD₄, is due to resistance of the LTC₄ to conversion to LTD₄, which is in turn rapidly metabolized to LTE₄. The conversion rate of LTC₄ to LTD₄ by a single longitudinal smooth muscle preparation is ~5 fmol/cm segment per min (Fig. 5) and compares favorably

with an average value of 8 fmol/cm segment per min for the two-step conversion of LTC₄ to LTE₄ by the intact ileum, because the conversion of LTC₄ to LTD₄ is the rate-limiting step (Fig. 1). In contrast, the conversion of LTD₄ to LTE₄ by the dipeptidase activity in the ileal preparation bearing mucosa was 46.6 fmol/cm segment per min (Fig. 2). The marked difference of the persistence of the contractile response to LTD₄ in the absence of the mucosal LTD₄ dipeptidase activity dramatically demonstrates that maintenance of a maximal response is determined by the continual integrity of the agonist and is not due to down-regulation by the muscle itself.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work was supported in part by grants AI-07722, AI-10356, AM-05577, HL-17382, and RR-05669 from the National Institutes of Health, a grant from the Lillia Babbitt Hyde Foundation, and a grant from the National Science Foundation.

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