Glucocorticoid protects rodent hearts from ischemia/reperfusion injury by activating lipocalin-type prostaglandin D synthase–derived PGD_2 biosynthesis

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Lipocalin-type prostaglandin D synthase (L-PGDS), which was originally identified as an enzyme responsible for PGD_2 biosynthesis in the brain, is highly expressed in the myocardium, including in cardiomyocytes. However, the factors that control expression of the gene encoding L-PGDS and the pathophysiologic role of L-PGDS in cardiomyocytes are poorly understood. In the present study, we demonstrate that glucocorticoids, which act as repressors of prostaglandin biosynthesis in most cell types, upregulated the expression of L-PGDS together with cytosolic calcium-dependent phospholipase A2 and COX2 via the glucocorticoid receptor (GR) in rat cardiomyocytes. Accordingly, PGD_2 was the most prominently induced prostaglandin in vivo in mouse hearts and in vitro in cultured rat cardiomyocytes after exposure to GR-selective agonists. In isolated Langendorff-perfused mouse hearts, dexamethasone alleviated ischemia/reperfusion injury. This cardioprotective effect was completely abrogated by either pharmacologic inhibition of COX2 or disruption of the gene encoding L-PGDS. In in vivo ischemia/reperfusion experiments, dexamethasone reduced infarct size in wild-type mice. This cardioprotective effect of dexamethasone was markedly reduced in L-PGDS–deficient mice. In cultured rat cardiomyocytes, PGD_2 protected against cell death induced by anoxia/reoxygenation via the D-type prostanoid receptor and the ERK1/2-mediated pathway. Taken together, these results suggest what we believe to be a novel interaction between glucocorticoid-GR signaling and the cardiomyocyte survival pathway mediated by the arachidonic acid cascade.

Introduction

Glucocorticoids play a key role in the response to stress, influencing the regulation of blood pressure, inflammation, immune function, and cellular energy metabolism (1). These acute effects contribute to an adaptive response, at least in the short term. For example, the cardioprotective effects of glucocorticoids in the acute setting of myocardial ischemia/reperfusion have been experimentally demonstrated in animals (2–5) and in humans (6). The beneficial effect of glucocorticoids has been attributed mostly to their ability to limit the acute inflammatory response associated with acute myocardial infarction: glucocorticoids act on leukocytes and endothelial cells to attenuate leukocyte–endothelial cell interactions (7) and to reduce the generation and release of proinflammatory cytokines and mediators (8). Alternatively, acute induction of endothelial nitric oxide synthase, possibly through nongenomic effects of the glucocorticoid receptor (GR) on endothelial cells, may reduce tissue injury caused by ischemia/reperfusion (9). However, little is known regarding the genomic actions of glucocorticoids on cardiomyocytes.

The GR is a member of the nuclear receptor superfamily of ligand-dependent transcription factors that positively and negatively regulate gene expression by distinct mechanisms (10). In the absence of glucocorticoids, the GR is sequestered in the cytoplasm by a protein complex that includes heat shock proteins. Upon

Conflict of interest: The authors have declared that no conflict of interest exists.

Nonstandard abbreviations used: ALD, aldosterone; COR, corticosterone; cPLA2, cytosolic calcium-dependent phospholipase A2; CRTH2, chemoattractant receptor–like molecule expressed on Th2 cells; CVZ, cortivazol; DEX, dexamethasone; DP, D-type prostanoid; $+dP/dt$, positive LV peak dP/dt; GR, glucocorticoid receptor; H-PGDS, hematopoietic-type prostaglandin D_2 synthase; LC-MS/MS, liquid chromatography–mass spectrometry/mass spectrometry; L-PGDS, lipocalin-type prostaglandin D synthase; LVDP, LV developed pressure; LVEDP, LV end-diastolic pressure; MR, mineralocorticoid receptor; Q-PCR, real-time quantitative PCR.

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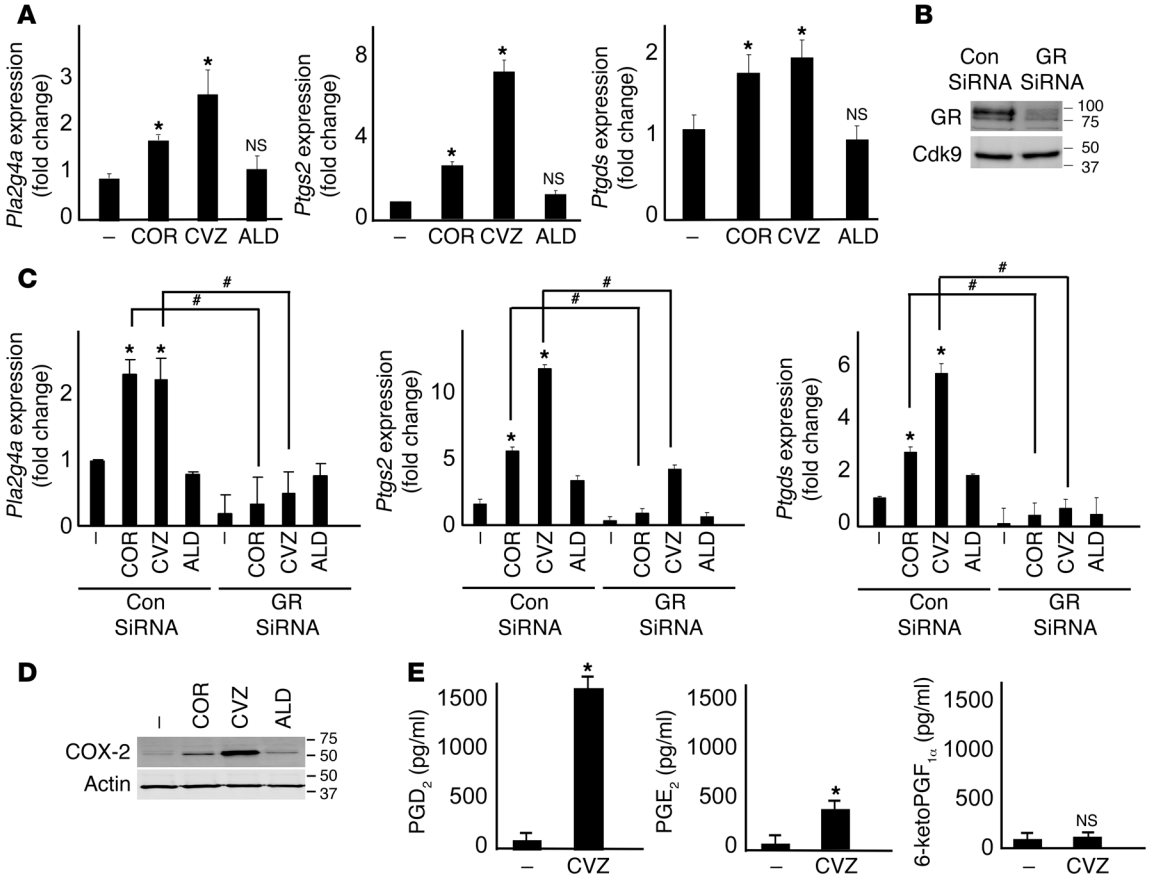

Figure 1

Glucocorticoids positively regulate PGD_2 biosynthesis by stimulating the expression of *Ptgs2*, *Pla2g4a*, and *Ptgds* via the GR in neonatal cardiomyocytes. (**A**) Neonatal rat cardiomyocytes were treated with vehicle (–) or with 100 nM COR, CVZ, or ALD for 3 hours. RNA was extracted, and Q-PCR was performed to determine the mRNA levels of *Ptgs2*, *Pla2g4a*, and *Ptgds* ($n = 5$). (**B**) Neonatal rat cardiomyocytes were transfected with control (Con) or GR siRNA. The endogenous GR protein levels were determined by Western blotting. (**C**) Control or GR siRNA–treated cells were treated with vehicle or stimulated with 100 nM COR, CVZ, or ALD for 3 hours. The mRNA levels of *Pla2g4a*, *Ptgs2*, and *Ptgds* were examined by Q-PCR ($n = 5$). (**D**) Neonatal rat cardiomyocytes were treated with vehicle or with 100 nM COR, CVZ, or ALD for 24 hours, and COX2 protein levels were determined by Western blotting. The membranes were stripped and reprobed with anti–α-actin antibodies. (**E**) Neonatal rat cardiomyocytes were treated with vehicle or 100 nM CVZ for 48 hours. The culture media were subjected to ELISA to quantify prostaglandin production from the cardiomyocytes ($n = 5$). $^*P < 0.05$ versus vehicle; $^\#P < 0.05$; Student's *t* test.

glucocorticoid binding, GR is released from this inactive complex and translocates to the nucleus. Within the nucleus, ligand-bound GR binds to palindromic glucocorticoid-responsive elements in specific promoters, thereby activating the transcription of target genes. In contrast, the GR suppresses the activation of inflammatory response genes by interfering with the activities of signal-dependent transcription factors, such as activator protein–1 and nuclear factor–κB (11, 12). This activity, which is referred to as transrepression, accounts for most of the antiinflammatory actions of glucocorticoids (10).

The elucidation of tissue-specific target genes of GR action is difficult, since the GR overlaps functionally with the mineralocorticoid receptor (MR) at the level of ligand-binding specificity, and most metabolically active organs, including the heart, express substantial levels of both GR and MR. Endogenous glucocorticoid — namely, cortisol in humans and corticosterone (COR) in rodents — binds to both the GR and the MR with comparable affinity (13). In the absence of 11β-hydroxysteroid dehydrogenase 2, which converts the glucocorticoid to inactive metabolites, the intramyocardial concentration of glucocorticoid reflects the free concentration in plasma, which is 1,000-fold higher than that of the mineralocorticoid aldosterone (ALD). Therefore, it seems likely that glucocorticoid rather than mineralocorticoid occupies the MR and influences the proinflammatory response after myocardial infarction (14). Thus, it is crucial to clarify the GR-specific target genes independently of the functional redundancy with MR.

Recently, we performed DNA microarray analysis to evaluate the changes in gene expression profiles in neonatal rat cardiomyocytes after stimulation with COR, the GR-selective agonist cortivazol (CVZ; refs. 15, 16), or ALD (17). Unexpectedly, we found that the expression of genes that encode 2 key enzymes in a common pathway of prostaglandin biosynthesis were upregulated by glucocorticoids via the GR in cardiomyocytes: phospholipase A2 group IVA (*Pla2g4a*; encoding cytosolic calcium-dependent phospholipase A2 [cPLA2]), which belongs to the class of cPLA2s that preferentially cleave arachidonic acid from membrane phospholipids; and pros-

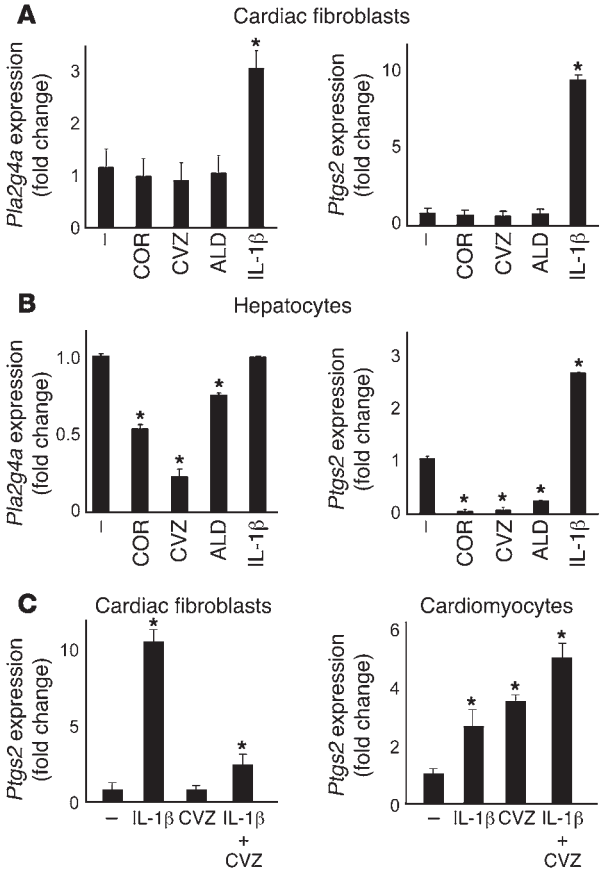

Figure 2
Glucocorticoids stimulate or suppress *Pla2g4a* and *Ptgs2* expression in a cell type–specific manner. (**A** and **B**) Neonatal rat fibroblasts (**A**) and adult mouse hepatocytes (**B**) were treated with vehicle; with 100 nM COR, CVZ, or ALD; or with 10 ng/μl IL-1β for 3 hours. The expression levels of the indicated genes were determined by Q-PCR ($n = 5$). (**C**) Neonatal rat cardiac fibroblasts and cardiomyocytes were treated with vehicle or were stimulated with 10 ng/μl IL-1β, 100 nM CVZ, or the combination for 3 hours. The expression levels of the indicated genes were determined by Q-PCR ($n = 5$). *$P < 0.05$ versus vehicle; Student's *t* test.

taglandin-endoperoxide synthase 2 (*Ptgs2*; encoding COX2), which converts arachidonic acid into PGH_2. Importantly, ALD did not have similar stimulatory effects on these genes. The induction of *Pla2g4a* and *Ptgs2* by GR is specific for cardiomyocytes, since GR has been shown to transrepress the activation of these proinflammatory genes in most cells (1). Therefore, we sought to investigate the major types of prostanoids produced in cardiomyocytes after exposure to glucocorticoids and to clarify the roles of these products in cardiac physiology. Among the genes for PGH_2 isomerases, expression of *Ptgds*, which encodes lipocalin-type prostaglandin D synthase (L-PGDS), was selectively upregulated by a GR-specific ligand. Consistent with this result, PGD_2 was the most prominently induced prostaglandin by GR-specific ligand stimulation of cultured cardiomyocytes and in vivo hearts. Using isolated Langendorff-perfused hearts and cultured cardiomyocytes, we demonstrate that the activation of L-PGDS–mediated production of PGD_2 was crucial for the cardioprotection against ischemia/reperfusion conferred by glucocorticoid-GR signaling. Our results suggest what we believe to be a novel interaction between glucocorticoid-GR signaling and the arachidonic acid cascade-mediated cardiomyocyte survival pathway.

Results

Glucocorticoid-GR signaling positively regulates PGD_2 synthesis via the induction of Pla2g4a, Ptgs2, and Ptgds in neonatal rat cardiomyocytes. Based on the microarray analysis, we identified 3 key GR-selective target genes involved in PGD_2 biosynthesis in cardiomyocytes: *Pla2g4a*, *Ptgs2*, and *Ptgds*. Their induction in cultured cardiomyocytes was validated by real-time quantitative PCR (Q-PCR) analysis. Treatment with COR and CVZ, but not ALD, increased the levels of *Pla2g4a*, *Ptgs2*, and *Ptgds* transcripts (Figure 1A). The siRNA-mediated knockdown of GR completely blocked the induction of *Pla2g4a*, *Ptgs2*, and *Ptgds* transcripts by COR or CVZ (Figure 1, B and C). Western blotting demonstrated that both CVZ and COR induced COX2 expression at the protein level, while ALD had little effect on COX2 expression (Figure 1D). Next, we stimulated cultured cardiomyocytes with CVZ for 24 hours and measured the prostaglandin concentrations in the culture media by ELISA. CVZ mainly stimulated the production of PGD_2. CVZ also increased the production of PGE_2 by cultured neonatal rat cardiomyocytes, albeit to a lower level, and had no effect on the production of the PGI_2 metabolite 6-keto-$PGF_{1\alpha}$ (Figure 1E).

The GR-mediated positive transcriptional regulation of *Pla2g4a* and *Ptgs2* was cardiomyocyte specific, since the expression levels of these genes were not affected in cardiac fibroblasts (Figure 2A), but were suppressed in adult hepatocytes (Figure 2B). In contrast, glucocorticoids stimulated serum glucocorticoid–regulated kinase (*Sgk*) expression in all the cell types examined (data not shown).

Glucocorticoid stimulates Pla2g4a and Ptgs2 expression in cardiomyocytes, even in the presence of proinflammatory stimuli. We examined the impact of glucocorticoids on *Ptgs2* expression in the presence of proinflammatory stimuli. The proinflammatory cytokine IL-1β markedly induced *Ptgs2* expression in both cardiac fibroblasts and cardiomyocytes. Costimulation with CVZ suppressed IL-1β–mediated induction of *Ptgs2* in cardiac fibroblasts. In contrast, costimulation with CVZ increased IL-1β–induced *Ptgs2* expression in cardiomyocytes (Figure 2C). These findings indicate that CVZ promotes *Ptgs2* expression in cardiomyocytes at both the basal level and in the presence of proinflammatory cytokine stimulation.

Glucocorticoids stimulate the production of PGD_2 in the adult heart. To directly determine the changes in arachidonic acid metabolism brought about by glucocorticoid-GR signaling in adult hearts, mice were injected i.p. with dexamethasone (DEX) at 2 mg/kg. Q-PCR analysis revealed that the levels of *Pla2g4a*, *Ptgs2*, and *Ptgds* transcripts in adult hearts at 6 hours after DEX administration increased 7.5-, 2.3-, and 1.8-fold, respectively, compared with vehicle-treated hearts (Figure 3A). RU486 injected i.p. 1 hour before DEX injection blocked DEX-mediated induction of these genes. Western blot analysis showed that the protein levels of L-PGDS increased 24 hours after DEX administration in an RU486-sensitive manner (Figure 3B). Another PGD synthase, hematopoietic-type prostaglandin D_2 synthase (H-PGDS), was also expressed in the hearts, although the H-PGDS protein levels were not affected by DEX treatment. DEX administration had no effect on the levels of COX1, microsomal PGE synthase–1 (mPGES-1), mPGES-2, and cytosolic PGE synthase (Supplemental Figure 1; supplemental material available online with this

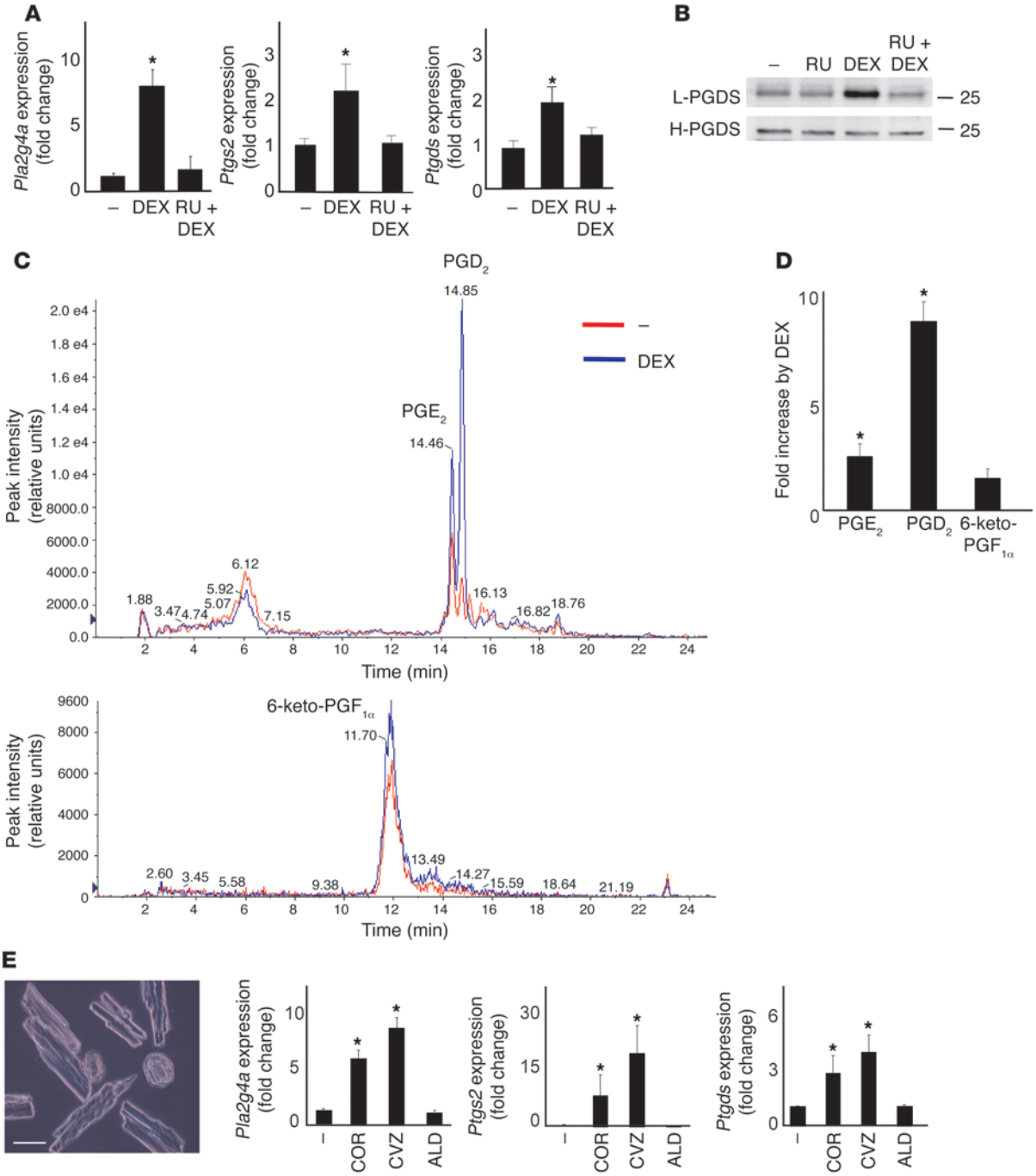

Figure 3

Glucocorticoids stimulate PGD_2 synthesis in adult hearts. (**A**) Adult 12-week-old male mice were injected i.p. with DEX at 2 mg/kg. RU486 (RU; 20 mg/kg) was injected 1 hour before DEX injection. The levels of induction of *Pla2g4a*, *Ptgs2*, and *Ptgds* expression in the ventricular myocardium were determined by Q-PCR ($n = 5$). (**B**) L-PGDS and H-PGDS protein levels were determined by Western blotting. (**C**) Levels of cardiac prostaglandins in vehicle- or DEX-injected mice were analyzed by LC-MS/MS. Representative results are shown; experiments were repeated 3 times. (**D**) Quantification of intramyocardial prostaglandins ($n = 3$). (**E**) Adult mouse cardiomyocytes were prepared and treated with vehicle or with 100 nM COR, CVZ, or ALD for 3 hours. Shown is a representative image of the cardiomyocyte culture. Scale bar: 20 μm. RNA was extracted, and Q-PCR was performed to determine the mRNA levels of *Ptgs2*, *Pla2g4a*, and *Ptgds* ($n = 5$). *$P < 0.05$ versus vehicle; Student's *t* test.

article; doi:10.1172/JCI37413DS1). In line with the induction of these enzymes, quantitative analysis of oxidative arachidonic acid metabolites by liquid chromatography–mass spectrometry/mass spectrometry (LC-MS/MS; ref. 18) demonstrated a 6.2-fold increase in the level of intramuscular PGD_2 in DEX-treated compared with vehicle-treated hearts (Figure 3, C and D). DEX also increased the PGE_2 level 1.8-fold, whereas it had no effect on the level of 6-keto-$PGF_{1\alpha}$. However, we need to use caution when inter-

Table 1
Cardiac parameters before the induction of ischemia

	LVSP (mmHg)	LVEDP (mmHg)	LVDP (mmHg)	+*dP/dt* (mmHg/s)	−*dP/dt* (mmHg/s)	Heart rate (bpm)	RPP[A]
Wild type							
Control (*n* = 8)	98 ± 4	10.7 ± 0.2	87 ± 4	3,560 ± 160	2,790 ± 180	460 ± 14	450 ± 26
DEX (*n* = 5)	97 ± 4	10.4 ± 0.2	86 ± 5	3,590 ± 190	3,110 ± 120	442 ± 23	429 ± 32
DEX+NS398 (*n* = 6)	97 ± 4	10.8 ± 0.3	87 ± 4	3,710 ± 200	3,260 ± 210	462 ± 14	449 ± 21
NS398 (*n* = 5)	96 ± 4	10.5 ± 0.3	85 ± 4	3,550 ± 220	3,140 ± 180	445 ± 25	430 ± 34
RU486+DEX (*n* = 6)	99 ± 2	10.2 ± 0.4	89 ± 2	3,530 ± 110	3,090 ± 110	450 ± 16	448 ± 24
RU486 (*n* = 5)	98 ± 2	10.6 ± 0.5	87 ± 2	3,520 ± 210	2,700 ± 280	425 ± 13	421 ± 27
L-PGDS knockout							
Control (*n* = 8)	100 ± 4	10.5 ± 0.4	90 ± 4	3,690 ± 210	2,900 ± 180	463 ± 20	435 ± 11
DEX (*n* = 8)	100 ± 4	10.5 ± 0.2	90 ± 4	3,560 ± 100	2,860 ± 80	446 ± 25	444 ± 26

LVSP, LV systolic pressure; RPP, rate-pressure product. [A]Values denote mmHg × bpm (×100).

preting data obtained from lipodomics using a single remotely related internal standard. Estimates of the quantitative changes in prostaglandin formation must be viewed as preliminary, given the absence of authentic internal standards. We estimated based on the capacity to generate prostanoids in serum and cardiac tissue rather than on actual rates of biosynthesis. Additionally, we isolated adult mouse cardiomyocytes and stimulated them with corticosteroids. As shown in Figure 3E, COR and CVZ, but not ALD, increased the expression levels of *Pla2g4a*, *Ptgs2*, and *Ptgds* in cultured adult mouse cardiomyocytes.

Glucocorticoid pretreatment attenuates myocardial ischemia/reperfusion injury in a COX2-dependent manner in isolated perfused hearts. The effect of glucocorticoid-GR signaling on functionality during ischemia/reperfusion injury was studied in Langendorff-perfused mice hearts. Mice were injected i.p. with 2 mg/kg DEX, and 24 hours later, the hearts were isolated and subjected to 30 minutes of total global ischemia followed by 60 minutes of aerobic reperfusion. DEX pretreatment did not affect the cardiac parameters at baseline (Table 1), whereas it significantly improved recovery of LV developed pressure (LVDP), as well as positive and negative LV peak *dP/dt* (+*dP/dt* and –*dP/dt*, respectively), during reperfusion ($P < 0.05$ versus control; Figure 4, A–E). Consistent with these findings, DEX significantly attenuated total LDH release into the perfusate during reperfusion compared with the control ($P < 0.05$; Figure 4F). In mice injected i.p. with 20 mg/kg RU486 1 hour before DEX injection, the augmentation of functional recovery and the reduction in total LDH release after ischemia/reperfusion were abrogated. These results strongly suggest that the cardioprotective effects of DEX are mediated through the GR. RU486 alone altered neither cardiac parameters at baseline (Table 1) nor functional recovery after ischemia/reperfusion (data not shown).

To investigate the possibility that COX2 acts as a downstream effector of DEX-GR–mediated signaling, mice were injected i.p. with 5 mg/kg NS398, a selective COX2 inhibitor, 40 minutes prior to excision of the heart. There was no difference in LV function before the induction of ischemia between the DEX alone and DEX plus NS398 groups (Table 1). Notably, NS398 completely suppressed both the improvement of LV functional recovery and the reduction in LDH release into the perfusate conferred by DEX treatment (Figure 5, A–F). As previously reported, NS398 alone does not exacerbate the degree of ischemia/reperfusion injury (19, 20).

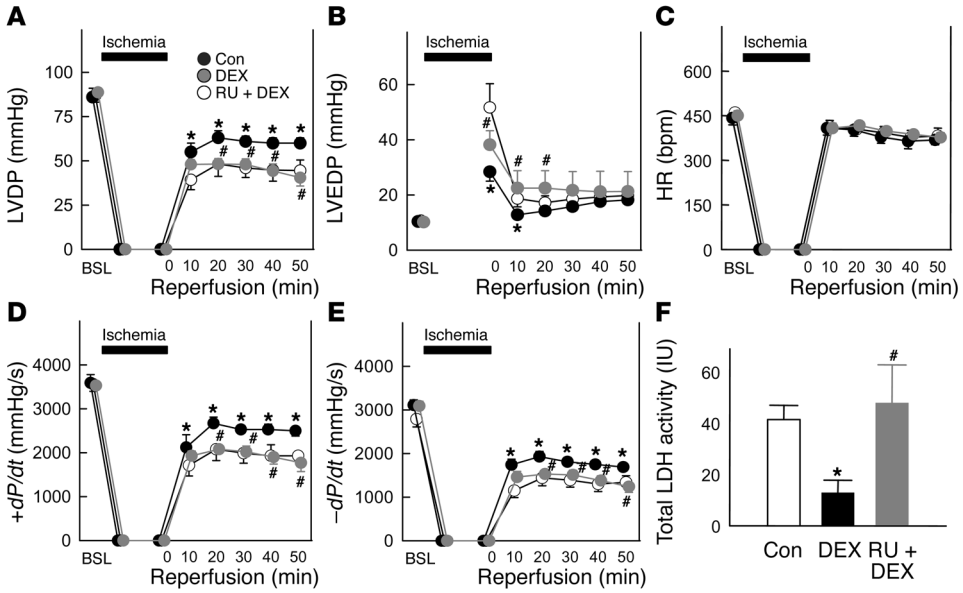

Figure 4
Glucocorticoid protects the heart against ischemia/reperfusion injury acting via the GR. Mice were injected i.p. with either 2 mg/kg DEX (*n* = 5) or vehicle control (*n* = 8). At 1 hour before the DEX injection, a group of mice was injected i.p. with 20 mg/kg RU486 (RU + DEX; *n* = 6). At 24 hours after DEX injection, hearts were isolated and subjected to 30 minutes of total global ischemia followed by aerobic reperfusion. BSL, baseline. (**A**) Recovery of LVDP. (**B**) LVEDP. (**C**) Recovery of heart rate. (**D**) Recovery of +*dP/dt*. (**E**) Recovery of –*dP/dt*. (**F**) LDH release in the perfusate. *$P < 0.05$ versus vehicle; #$P < 0.05$ versus DEX; ANOVA.

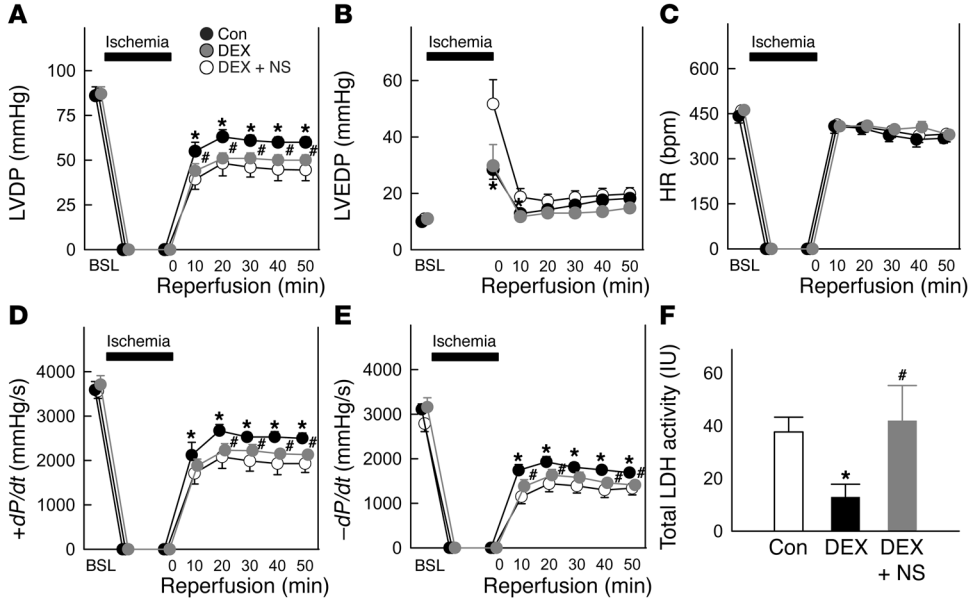

Figure 5
A COX2 inhibitor completely blocks the cardioprotective effect of glucocorticoid against ischemia/reperfusion injury. Mice were injected i.p. with the selective COX2 inhibitor NS398 (NS) at 5 mg/kg 40 minutes prior to excision of the heart ($n = 6$). (**A**) Recovery of LVDP. (**B**) LVEDP. (**C**) Recovery of heart rate. (**D**) Recovery of $+dP/dt$. (**E**) Recovery of $-dP/dt$. (**F**) LDH release in the perfusate. $^{*}P < 0.05$ versus vehicle; $^{\#}P < 0.05$ versus DEX; ANOVA.

Genetic deletion of L-PGDS abrogates the cardioprotective effect afforded by glucocorticoids to isolated perfused hearts. To examine the role of L-PGDS–catalyzed PGD_2 biosynthesis in the cardioprotective effect of glucocorticoid-GR signaling, L-PGDS–knockout mice were injected i.p. with either 2 mg/kg DEX or vehicle; 24 hours later, the hearts were isolated and subjected to 30 minutes of total global ischemia followed by 60 minutes of aerobic reperfusion. There was no difference in LV function before the induction of ischemia between the hearts from the L-PGDS–knockout mice and those from the wild-type control mice (Table 1). As expected, the expression levels of L-PGDS were negligible in the DEX-treated and vehicle-treated L-PGDS–knockout mouse hearts (Figure 6A). DEX did not improve the recovery of LVDP, $+dP/dt$, or $-dP/dt$ and did not reduce total LDH release into the perfusate during reperfusion of L-PGDS–knockout hearts ($n = 8$ per group; Figure 6, B–G).

Glucocorticoids reduce infarct size in an L-PGDS–dependent manner after ischemia/reperfusion injury in vivo. We subjected hearts to myocardial ischemia/reperfusion injury in vivo. Initially, we examined whether the level of PGD_2 was increased in the ischemic myocardium in the absence of DEX pretreatment by quantifying the levels

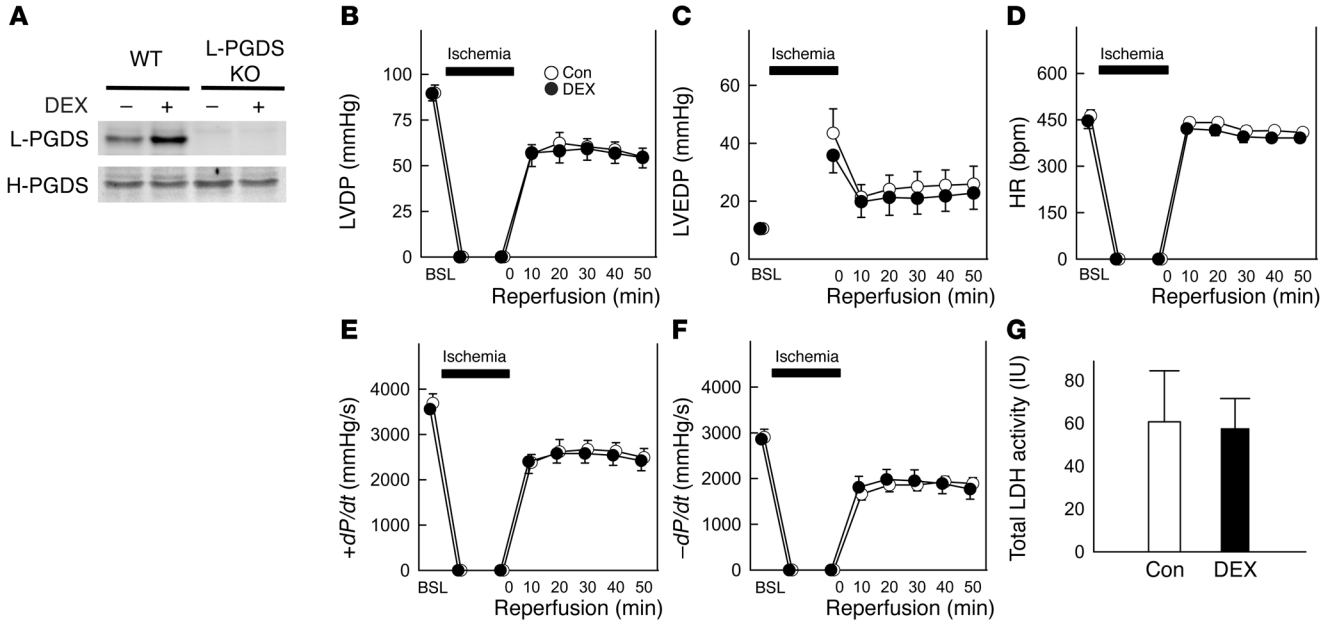

Figure 6
Lack of cardioprotective effect of glucocorticoid in L-PGDS–knockout mice. L-PGDS–knockout mice were injected i.p. with either 2 mg/kg DEX ($n = 8$) or vehicle control ($n = 8$). (**A**) Protein levels of L-PGDS and H-PGDS were determined by Western blotting. (**B**) Recovery of LVDP. (**C**) LVEDP. (**D**) Recovery of heart rate. (**E**) Recovery of $+dP/dt$. (**F**) Recovery of $-dP/dt$. (**G**) LDH release in the perfusate.

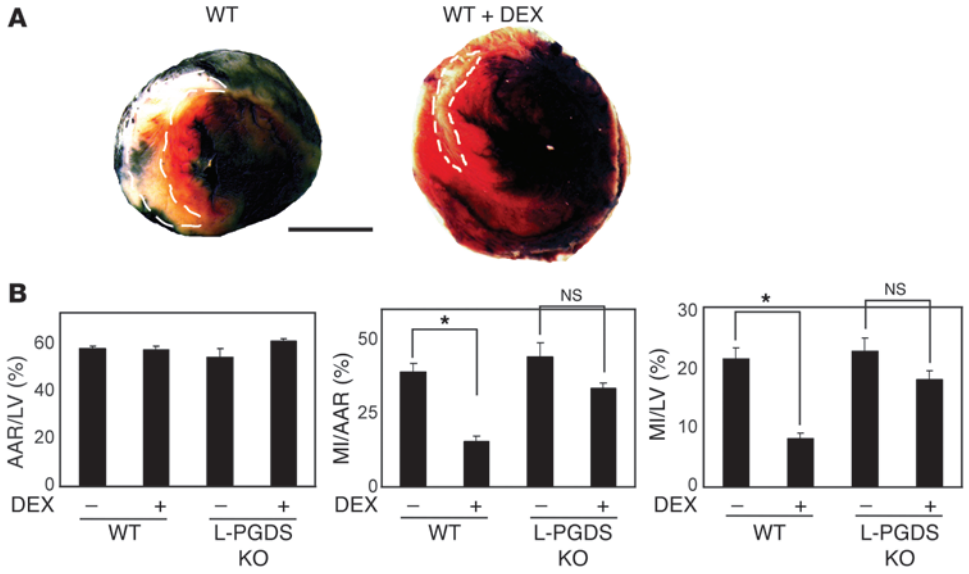

Figure 7
Reproduction of the L-PGDS–dependent cardioprotective effect of DEX in in vivo ischemia/reperfusion. (**A**) Representative photographs of heart sections obtained from wild-type mice subjected to myocardial ischemia/reperfusion injury in the presence or absence of DEX pretreatment. Areas of infarct are denoted by dotted white outlines. Scale bar: 4 mm. (**B**) Effect of DEX pretreatment on infarct size, expressed as a ratio of area at risk (AAR) to LV, of total infarct area (MI) to area at risk, and of total infarct area to LV ($n = 5$). *$P < 0.05$.

of the 3 major prostanoids in the hearts 10 minutes after reoxygenation. Ischemia itself had no effect on the intramyocardial levels of PGD_2 (Supplemental Figure 2).

We then investigated whether DEX could protect the in vivo heart against ischemia/reperfusion injury. Pretreatment with DEX did not affect the plasma levels of PGD_2, but significantly attenuated the levels of plasma PGE_2 compared with the untreated mice ($P < 0.0001$; $n = 7$; Supplemental Figure 3). Immunohistologic analyses revealed that L-PGDS was predominantly expressed in the myocardium at the infarct border zone, but not in the infiltrating cells after reperfusion (Supplemental Figure 4). DEX had no effects on the expression levels of the D-type prostanoid (DP) receptor and the chemoattractant receptor–like molecule expressed on Th2 cells (CRTH2; also known as DP2) in the heart (Supplemental Figure 1). Consistent with the results of the ex vivo analysis using isolated Langendorff-perfused hearts, pretreatment with DEX significantly reduced the ratio of infarct size to area at risk after ischemia/reperfusion in the wild-type mice (Figure 7A). We also performed myocardial ischemia/reperfusion in L-PGDS–knockout mice. The infarct sizes for the L-PGDS–knockout and wild-type mice without DEX pretreatment were similar. Interestingly, the cardioprotective effect of DEX was markedly reduced in L-PGDS–knockout mice compared with wild-type mice (Figure 7B).

Glucocorticoid-GR signaling protects cultured cardiomyocytes from anoxia/reoxygenation injury via COX2- and L-PGDS–dependent PGD_2 synthesis. To examine more directly the effects of glucocorticoids on cardiomyocyte viability, cultured cardiomyocytes were exposed to glucose-free hypoxia followed by reoxygenation. CVZ suppressed cell death caused by glucose-free hypoxia and reoxygenation, and this effect was abrogated by siRNA-mediated knockdown of the GR or pretreatment with RU486 (Figure 8, A–D), which suggests that CVZ-mediated survival signaling is regulated through the GR. To examine the possibility that COX2 acts as a downstream effector of the GR-mediated survival pathway, we investigated the impact of COX2 inhibition on CVZ-mediated protection against cell death. Inhibition of COX2 activity by siRNA-mediated knockdown of *Ptgs2* or treatment with 10 μM NS398 blocked the cytoprotective effect of CVZ under the conditions of glucose-free hypoxia and reoxygenation (Figure 8, A–D). In addition, siRNA-mediated knockdown of *Ptgds* abrogated the cytoprotective effect of CVZ against glucose-free hypoxia and reoxygenation. This indicates that PGD_2 production via the COX2/L-PGDS–mediated pathway plays a crucial role in the cardioprotective effect of CVZ.

To examine the direct effect of PGD_2 on cardiomyocytes, these cells were stimulated with 30 nM PGD_2, and the activated signaling cascades were evaluated. Among the MAPKs, PGD_2 selectively activated ERK in cultured cardiomyocytes (Figure 9A). Activation of ERK occurred within 5 minutes and continued for as long as 120 minutes after PGD_2 stimulation. PGD_2 activated ERK in a dose-dependent manner (Figure 9B). The DP receptor antagonist BWA868C (10 μM) significantly attenuated PGD_2-induced ERK activation, while the CRTH2 receptor antagonist CAY10471 (10 μM) did not (Figure 9C). PGD_2 (30 nM) protected the cardiomyocytes against cell death caused by glucose-free hypoxia and reoxygenation. Pharmacologic and genetic disruption of the DP receptor, but not of the CRTH2 receptor, significantly abrogated the cardioprotective effect of PGD_2 under the conditions of glucose-free hypoxia and reoxygenation (Figure 10, A–D, and Supplemental Figure 5). The MEK inhibitor PD98059 (20 μM) also significantly abrogated the cardioprotective effect of PGD_2.

Discussion

In the present study, we demonstrated that glucocorticoids stimulated the common pathway for prostaglandin biosynthesis through the upregulation of cPLA2-COX2 expression via the GR in cardiomyocytes. The concordant induction of L-PGDS by glucocorticoids resulted in the activation of PGD_2 biosynthesis. We found that PGD_2-dominated activation of prostanoid biosynthesis accounted for the cardioprotective effects of glucocorticoids against ischemia/reperfusion injury. PGD_2 exerted its cardioprotective effects through the DP receptor on cardiomyocytes. Moreover, ERK1/2 was the major downstream kinase involved in PGD_2-DP–mediated cardioprotection.

Unexpectedly, we found that glucocorticoids induced the expression of mRNA for 2 key enzymes in prostaglandin synthesis, cPLA2 and COX2. These results indicate that glucocorticoid-GR signaling stimulates the common pathway for prostaglandin synthesis,

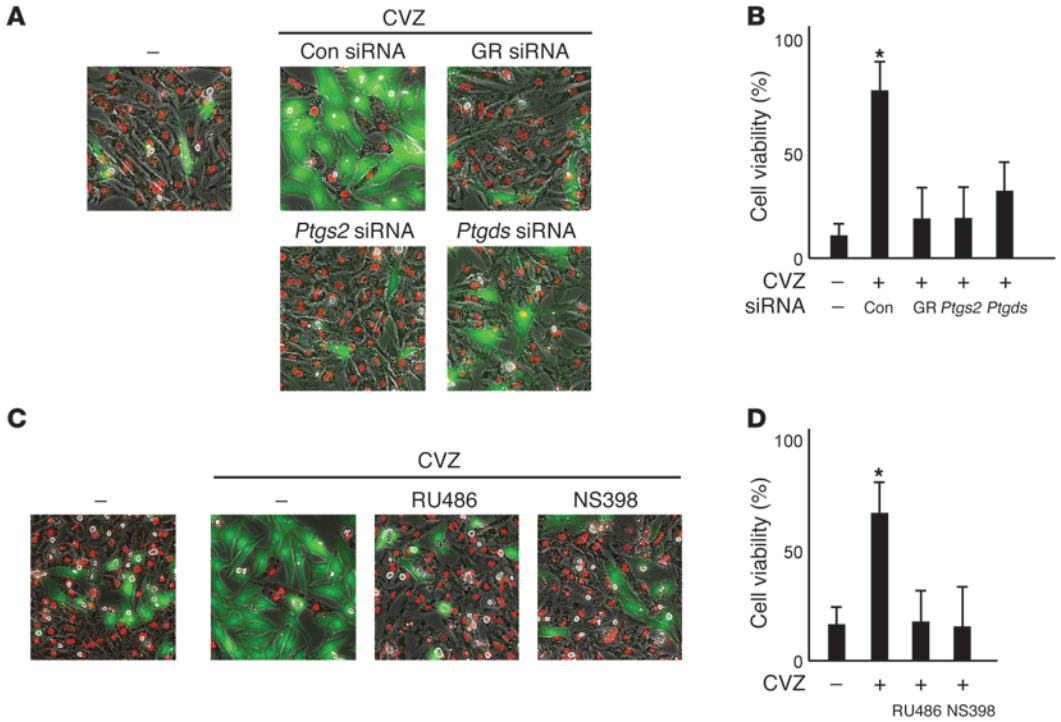

Figure 8

Glucocorticoid protects against cardiomyocyte death induced by anoxia/reoxygenation injury in GR-, COX2-, and L-PGDS–dependent manners. (**A** and **C**) Neonatal rat cardiomyocytes were (**A**) transfected with control-, GR-, *Ptgs2*-, and *Ptgds*-specific siRNAs or (**B**) pretreated with 10 μM RU486 or NS398. The cells were subjected to glucose-free anoxia for 5 hours, followed by reoxygenation. Dead cells (red nuclei) and viable cells (green) were quantified as described in Methods. Scale bars: 100 μm. (**B** and **D**) Viable cells from the experiments shown in **A** and **C**, respectively, were quantified by counting 100 cells in 5 independent experiments ($n = 5$). *$P < 0.05$ versus vehicle; Student's t test.

which begins with the liberation of arachidonic acids and ends with the synthesis of PGH_2. In inflammatory cells, such as monocytes/macrophages, fibroblasts, and endothelial cells, the GR blocks the expression of cPLA2 and COX2, thereby inhibiting prostaglandin synthesis (10–12). The molecular mechanism underlying the inhibitory effect of the GR on signal-dependent induction of *Pla2g4a* and *Ptgs2* transcription has been studied intensively as a prototypic example of transrepression by the GR (10–12). In contrast, in the present study, we found that glucocorticoid increased rather than suppressed the expression level of *Ptgs2* mRNA, even in the presence of IL-1β–mediated signaling, in cardiomyocytes.

In amniotic cells, the GR upregulates the expression of *Pla2g4a* and *Ptgs2*, as seen in cardiomyocytes (21–23). Interestingly, the glucocorticoid concentrations in the maternal and fetal circulations, as well as those in the amniotic fluid, increase toward the end of gestation and at the onset of labor. As PGE_2 production by the amnion is involved in the onset and progression of labor, these paradoxical stimulatory effects of glucocorticoids on prostanoid biosynthesis are believed to affect the feed-forward loops that trigger parturition. The upregulation of *Ptgs2* mRNA expression has been detected after myocardial infarction (24), as well as in the failing human heart (25), concomitant with increases in the circulating cortisol levels (26). There may be a causal relationship between increased circulatory levels of glucocorticoids and the induction of COX2.

The relative abundance of a specific prostanoid is determined by the expression and activity of its specific isomerase. Of the PGH_2 isomerases, we found that glucocorticoids selectively increased the expression level of L-PGDS via the GR in cardiomyocytes. Accumulating evidence suggests that L-PGDS–mediated, PGD_2-dominated eicosanoid production exerts protective effects on the vascular system. L-PGDS is expressed in the endothelial cells and in the synthetic state of smooth muscle cells in the atherosclerotic plaque (27). COX2 expression, when accompanied by minimal PGE_2 synthesis and high PGD_2 levels, may contribute to the resolution of inflammation (28). PGD_2 prevents platelet aggregation (29) and induces endothelial-dependent arterial relaxation (30). Furthermore, the PGD_2 metabolite J series of prostanoids, such as 15-deoxy-$\Delta^{12,14}$-PGJ_2, exerts several antiinflammatory and antioxidant effects through a mechanism that involves the activation of PPARγ (31). Indeed, L-PGDS–knockout mice are prone to develop atherosclerosis when fed a high-fat diet (32). Furthermore, atherosclerotic plaque instability appears to be determined by the balance between L-PGDS–mediated PGD_2 synthesis and mPGES-1–mediated PGE_2 synthesis (33). It is of clinical interest that an increase in serum L-PGDS levels 48 hours after PTCA correlates with the avoidance of restenosis (34). Similarly, renal protective effects of L-PGDS–mediated PGD_2 biosynthesis have been proposed. Urinary L-PGDS excretion markedly increases during the early stage of kidney injury, as in diabetic nephropathy (35). PGD_2 inhibits the TGF-β1–induced epithelial-to-mesenchymal transition in cultured renal epithelial cells (36). A renal protective role for L-PGDS is supported by the recent genetic evidence that L-PGDS–knockout mice develop glomerular hypertrophy, tubular damage, and renal fibrosis (32).

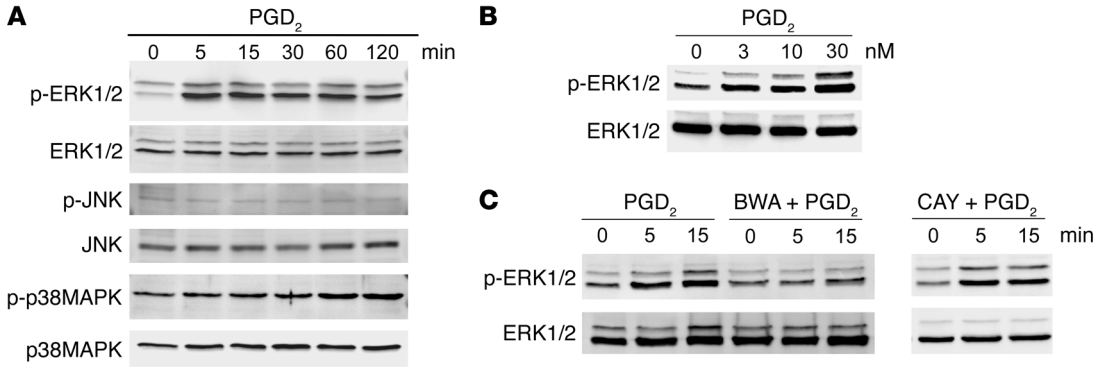

Figure 9

PGD_2 activates ERK1/2 via the DP receptor in cultured cardiomyocytes. (**A**) Neonatal rat cardiomyocytes were stimulated with 30 nM PGD_2 for the indicated times. Activation of MAPKs was detected by Western blotting using the respective antibodies directed against the phosphorylated forms of ERK1/2, JNK, and p38MAPK. The membranes were then stripped and reprobed with antibodies against ERK1/2, JNK, and p38MAPK. (**B**) Cells were stimulated with the indicated concentrations of PGD_2, and the activation of ERK1/2 was determined by Western blotting. (**C**) Cells were pretreated with 10 μM BWA868C (BWA) or 10 μM CAY10471 (CAY) and stimulated with 30 nM PGD_2. Lanes for combined CAY10471 and PGD_2 treatment were run on a separate gel.

L-PGDS is also highly expressed in the heart, being localized primarily to the atrial and ventricular cardiomyocytes, and levels of L-PGDS are elevated in the coronary circulation of patients with severe coronary heart disease (27). However, the factors that control *Ptgds* gene expression and the physiologic and pathophysiologic roles of L-PGDS in cardiomyocytes are poorly understood. The present study is, to the best of our knowledge, the first to demonstrate that glucocorticoids preferentially promote PGD_2 biosynthesis in cardiomyocytes through concomitant induction of L-PGDS and the cPLA2-COX2 pathway via the GR. Coordinated stimulation of the cPLA2–COX2–L-PGDS pathway is crucial for glucocorticoid-induced cardioprotection in the setting of ischemia/reperfusion injury, since glucocorticoid-enhanced recovery of LV function after ischemia/reperfusion was completely abrogated by either pharmacologic inhibition of COX2 or genomic disruption of L-PGDS. Furthermore, these results suggest that the function of L-PGDS as a PGD_2-producing enzyme is more important than its function as a transporter of lipophilic ligands, at least in the setting of glucocorticoid-induced cardioprotection against ischemia/reperfusion injury.

There were no changes with respect to the functional recovery of ex vivo hearts or the infarct sizes of the in vivo hearts after ischemia/reperfusion in the L-PGDS–knockout mice compared with wild-type mice without DEX pretreatment. However, these results do not exclude the potential cardioprotective effects of L-PGDS–derived PGD_2 production via the GR in response to physiologic elevations of the glucocorticoid levels after myocardial infarction. The activation of L-PGDS-mediated PGD_2 biosynthesis may mitigate pathologic ventricular remodeling in the late phase of acute myocardial infarction.

The cytoprotective effects of glucocorticoids that occur via the activation of PGD_2-dominated eicosanoid synthesis in cardiomyocytes were reproduced in an in vitro culture system. Glucocorticoid-GR signaling protected against cell death induced by glucose-free anoxia and reoxygenation of cultured cardiomyocytes. This cardioprotective action of glucocorticoids was abrogated by knockdown of either COX2 or L-PGDS. Conversely, PGD_2 itself protected cardiomyocytes against death caused by glucose-free anoxia and reoxygenation. These findings suggest that the PGD_2 produced by glucocorticoids in cardiomyocytes acts as a local mediator in both autocrine and paracrine fashions.

The DP receptor and the CRTH2 receptor, 2 distinct G protein–coupled receptors, have been identified as PGD_2 receptors. We found that the cardioprotective effects of PGD_2 in culture were chiefly mediated through the DP receptor. PGD_2 also mediates neuronal protection against ischemia/reperfusion injury via the DP receptor (37). With respect to signaling downstream of the DP receptor, we demonstrated that ERK1/2 was the major pathway for PGD_2–DP receptor–mediated protection of cardiomyocytes. Notably, ERK1/2 has been regarded as an integral part of the reperfusion injury salvage kinase that confers cardioprotection (38). However, PGD_2 is a relatively unstable product that is readily metabolized to the more stable J series of prostanoids. Further studies using distinct PGD_2 receptor–knockout mice are necessary to elucidate the receptor-dependent and/or -independent mechanisms underlying the cardioprotection afforded by PGD_2 to hearts in vivo.

The clinical significance of glucocorticoid administration remains controversial. The ambiguity of glucocorticoid effectiveness may be ascribed to the inappropriate design of clinical studies based on incomplete understanding of the fundamental mechanism of glucocorticoid action in the heart. The activities of glucocorticoids are diverse and are altered in time- and space-dependent manners. Furthermore, functional redundancy exists between GR and MR at the level of ligand-binding specificity, and the heart expresses both the GR and the MR. Therefore, we attempted to elucidate the heart-specific functions of glucocorticoid-GR signaling independently of the functional redundancy with MR. Our results indicated that glucocorticoids directly induced *Pla2g4a*, *Ptgs2*, and *Ptgds* expression via the GR in cardiomyocytes, and that the subsequent increase in PGD_2 protected cardiomyocytes against cell death induced by ischemia/reperfusion in both autocrine and paracrine manners. Considering the functional overlap between the GR and the MR at the level of ligand binding specificity, the cardioprotective effects of glucocorticoids may be offset by proinflammatory MR activation in response to stress, which includes acute myocardial infarction (14). In terms of overcoming this lim-

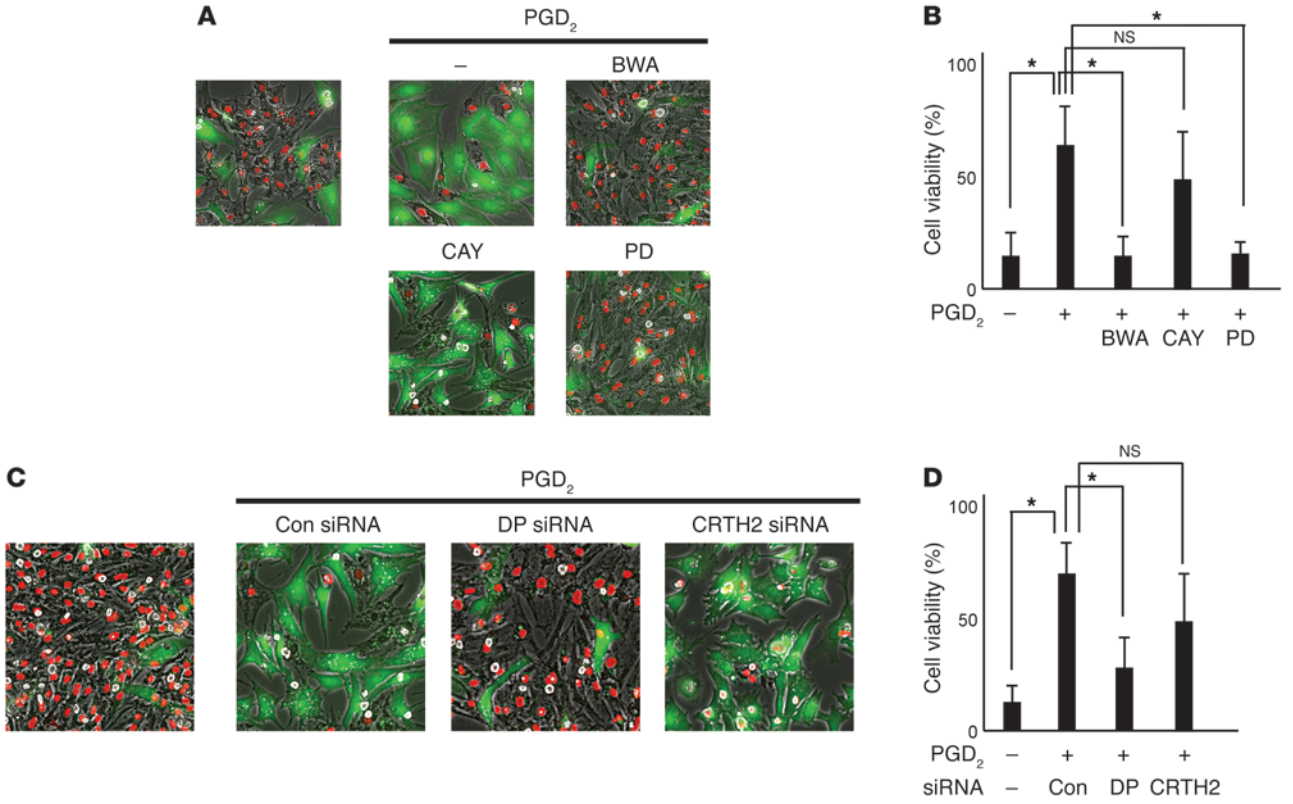

Figure 10

PGD_2 protects against cardiomyocyte death induced by anoxia/reoxygenation injury via the DP receptor and ERK1/2 signaling. (**A** and **B**) Neonatal rat cardiomyocytes were stimulated with 30 nM PGD_2 in the presence or absence of 10 μM BWA868C, 10 μM CAY10471, or 20 μM PD98059 (PD) and then subjected to glucose-free anoxia followed by reoxygenation. (**A**) Dead cells (red nuclei) and viable cells (green) were determined as described in Methods. Scale bars: 100 μm. (**B**) Viable cells were quantified by counting 100 cells in 5 independent experiments ($n = 5$). (**C** and **D**) Neonatal rat cardiomyocytes were transfected with control-, DP-, or CRTH2-specific siRNA. Reductions in the expression levels of the target genes were confirmed by Q-PCR (see Supplemental Figure 5). Cells were treated with 30 nM PGD_2 and then subjected to glucose-free anoxia followed by reoxygenation. (**C**) Dead cells (red nuclei) and viable cells (green) were determined as described in Methods. Scale bars: 100 μm. (**D**) Viable cells were quantified by counting 100 cells in 5 independent experiments ($n = 5$). *$P < 0.05$; Student's t test.

itation, GR-selective agonists, such as DEX and betamethasone, may have clinical advantages over nonselective GR agonists (e.g., prednisolone and cortisol) in limiting infarct size and improving mortality after myocardial infarction.

Methods

Animals. All animal experiments were reviewed and approved by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee at the Keio University School of Medicine. L-PGDS–knockout mice were generated as previously described (39).

Gene expression. Neonatal ventricular myocytes from 1- to 2-day-old Sprague-Dawley rats were subjected to Percoll gradient centrifugation and differential plating in order to enrich for cardiac myocytes and deplete nonmyocyte populations (40). Total RNA was isolated and hybridized to the GeneChip Rat Genome 230 2.0 Array (Affymetrix), composed of 31,042 probe sets representing approximately 28,000 rat genes. Q-PCR was performed using the ABI Prism 7700 sequence detection system (Applied Biosystems). Predesigned gene-specific primer and probe sets (TaqMan Gene Expression Assays) were used. The 18s ribosomal RNA was amplified as an internal control.

Western blotting. Nuclear extracts were prepared as previously described (41). Rabbit polyclonal antibodies against GR and goat polyclonal antibodies against COX2 were purchased from Santa Cruz Biotechnology. Rabbit polyclonal antibodies directed against COX-1 were purchased from Alexis, and rabbit polyclonal antibodies directed against L-PGDS, mPGES1, mPGES2, cytosolic PGE synthase, DP, and CRTH2 were purchased from Cayman Chemical. Protein expression was visualized using horseradish peroxidase–conjugated secondary antibodies and enhanced chemiluminescence (Amersham Biosciences) and was detected using the LAS-3000 luminoimage analyzer (Fujifilm).

ELISA. Neonatal rat cardiomyocytes were treated with 100 nM CVZ for 24 hours. The levels of PGD_2, PGE_2, and 6-keto-$PGF_{1\alpha}$ in the culture media were measured using a commercial ELISA kit (Cayman Chemical) according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Oxidized phospholipid analysis by LC-MS/MS. The frozen hearts were homogenized in methanol that contained 2 internal standards (LTB4-d4 and 17:0-LPC), and oxidative fatty acids and oxidative phospholipids were extracted using solid-phase extraction. LC-MS/MS analysis was performed using the 4000 Q-TRAP quadrupole linear ion-trap hybrid mass spectrometer (Applied Biosystems/MDS Sciex) with the ACQUITY Ultra Performance LC (Waters). Specific detection was performed by multiple reaction monitoring (18).

Glucose-free hypoxia and reoxygenation. An anaerobic jar that contained an Anaero Pack (Mitsubishi Gas Chemical) was used to expose the cells to hypoxic stress (42). The medium used to grow the cardiomyocytes was replaced with glucose-free DMEM before the cells were exposed to hypoxic stress. After 5 hours of exposure of hypoxia, the medium was replaced

with 10% FBS-containing DMEM (reoxygenation medium). Cell viability was determined by the LIVE/DEAD Viability/Cytotoxicity Assay Kit (Invitrogen) based on the simultaneous determination of live and dead cells with the calcein AM and ethidium homodimer-1 probes, which are specific for intracellular esterase activity and membrane integrity, respectively. Fluorescence imaging of the cells was performed with a fluorescence microscope (BZ-9000; Keyence): live cells were labeled green, whereas the nuclei of dead cells were labeled red.

siRNA oligonucleotides and transfection. siRNA oligonucleotides against the rat *GR*, *Ptgs2*, and *Ptgds* genes, as well as control siRNA, were purchased from Ambion. Transfection of these siRNA oligonucleotides was performed using the Lipofectamine RNAiMAX Reagent (Invitrogen).

Langendorff perfusion of the heart. Hearts were excised rapidly from heparinized mice, perfused with modified Krebs-Henseleit buffer (120 mmol/l NaCl, 25 mmol/l $NaHCO_3$, 5.9 mmol/l KCl, 1.2 mmol/l $MgSO_4$, 1.75 mmol/l $CaCl_2$, and 10 mmol/l glucose), and gassed with 95% O_2 and 5% CO_2 at 37°C according to the Langendorff procedure. Coronary perfusion pressure was maintained at 90 mmHg. A plastic catheter with a polyethylene balloon was inserted into the LV through the left atrium. Before the induction of ischemia, the LV end-diastolic pressure (LVEDP) was adjusted to 10 mmHg by filling the balloon with water. Indices of LV function (LV systolic pressure; LVEDP; LVDP, calculated as the difference between LVSP and LVEDP; $+dP/dt$; and $-dP/dt$) were recorded as described previously (43). Rate-pressure product was calculated as the product of LV systolic pressure and heart rate. Total LDH activity released into the perfusate was measured with a commercially available kit (Sigma-Aldrich).

In vivo myocardial ischemia/reperfusion model. Regional myocardial ischemia was induced by transient occlusion of the left anterior descending coronary artery. After 30 minutes of ischemia, the tube used for myocardial reperfusion we removed, and the thorax was closed with the suture intact. The suture around the coronary artery was retied 2 hours after reperfusion, and 2% Evans blue dye was injected into the LV cavity to delineate retrospectively the area at risk for myocardial infarction. The heart was removed, washed in PBS, and then sliced into sequential 1-mm-thick sections. The sections were stained with 2,3,5-triphenyltetrazolium chloride (TTC; 3%), and the infarct (white), noninfarct (red), nonischemic (blue), and at-risk areas (white and red) were measured.

Immunohistochemistry. Hearts were perfused from the apex with PBS, perfusion fixed with 4% paraformaldehyde in PBS, dissected, subsequently cryoprotected in sucrose solution at 4°C, embedded in OCT compound (Miles Scientific), and snap-frozen in liquid nitrogen. The fixed hearts were sectioned (8-μm thickness) using the CM3050S cryostat (Leica). For immunostaining, the sections were blocked in 5% BSA for 30 minutes at room temperature and then treated with anti–L-PGDS and anti-CD45 antibodies (BD Biosciences — Pharmingen) overnight at 4°C. Secondary antibodies conjugated to Alexa Fluor 546 or Alexa Fluor 488 (Invitrogen) were applied at 1:200 dilutions for 1 hour at 4°C. Nuclei were stained with TOTO-3 (Invitrogen) in a mounting medium. The slides were observed under a fluorescence microscope (Olympus BX-60).

Statistics. Values are presented as mean ± SEM. Statistical significance was evaluated using 2-tailed, unpaired Student's *t* tests for comparisons of 2 mean values. Multiple comparisons involving more than 3 groups were performed using ANOVA. A P value less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

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