

Immunological Identification of Human Lymphoid Cell Populations

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Summary

Lymphocytes can be subdivided into two major groups according to origin and function (1, 2).

T lymphocytes are thymus dependent and are responsible for cell-mediated immunity while the B lymphocytes represent precursors of immunoglobulin-producing plasma cells and give rise to humoral immunity. Considerable knowledge concerning the biological properties of T and B lymphocytes and their mutual interaction has been obtained in the last few years. Recent data also demonstrate further heterogeneity within each of the two main lymphocyte populations.

Certain lymphoid cells are capable of mediating cytotoxicity against target cells coated with specific antibody. These cells are termed K cells, and although some evidence seems to suggest that they comprise a subpopulation of B lymphocytes, their nature and localization in lymphoid organ is not well known.

This article will attempt to cover the methodologies involved in assays of T, B, and K cells. The methods to be discussed are used to detect the presence of different lymphoid cell populations; the markers used are not necessarily related to cell function.

Rosette Formation with Sheep Erythrocytes (E)

Lay et al., in 1971, first described, rosette formation between human lymphocytes and E as a probable T-cell marker (3). Other reports on the same phenomenon at the same time have not postulated its possible relationship with T cells (4, 5). Definite proof that E represents a valid T-cell marker was also obtained in our laboratory by studying the tissue distribution of lymphoid cells with membrane receptors for E in cryostat sections (6). A massive adherence of E to the thymus

and to thymus-dependent areas of lymph nodes and spleen could be demonstrated. Recently, these studies have been extended to other human lymphoid organs (7).

The identification of T cells by rosette formation with E has been widely used. A large number of publications are available which deal with technical parameters, biological significance, and clinical applications (survey: 8-10).

In our laboratory, the method has been applied in a variety of diseases (11-18).

The method of rosette formation that we are currently using is a modification of the one originally described by Lay et al. (3). A detailed description was given in recent papers (14, 19). Basically, the rosettes are obtained by mixing purified human lymphocytes with E and incubating the mixture at 4°C after favoring the contact by centrifugation. The cells are then resuspended gently with a Pasteur pipette and the rosettes counted in a hemocytometer. Only lymphocytes having 3 or more red cells around them are recorded as rosette-forming cells. In addition to sheep erythrocytes, erythrocytes other animal species such as pig (3, 5, 20), dog (20, 21), goat (21), horse, and burro (22) form rosettes with human lymphocytes. However, these rosettes are formed in smaller numbers than E rosettes and are less stable (20).

A very small number of E-rosetting cells carry surface markers usually found on B cells, e.g., immunoglobulin, Fc, or C3 receptors (19, 23, 24). Furthermore, cells stimulated by mitogens or allogeneic lymphocytes retain their capacity to bind E (25-28). Finally, it appears that rosette formation with E is an easy method for separating lymphocyte populations by gradient centrifugation (29).

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Technical Aspects

The technical aspects of the interaction between human T lymphocytes and E have been studied in detail in our laboratory and at Duke University (29). The rosette phenomenon is extremely unstable and sensitive to physical changes. The number of rosettes in normal blood varies widely depending on the method used. Our present technique (19) usually gets figures over 60%. The main steps of the current method are as follows:

1. Lymphocyte separation on Ficoll-Hypaque gradient;
2. 0.5% E suspension in HBSS (100 μ l);
3. 3×10^6 lymphocytes/mm³ in HBSS (60 μ l);
4. AB serum absorbed with E (40 μ l);
5. Mixture of 2, 3, 4 and 4 in 6 x 50 mm glass tubes;
6. 5 minutes incubation at 37°C;
7. Centrifugation (200 g, 5 min);
8. 1 hour incubation at 4°C;
9. Gentle resuspension with a Pasteur pipette after the addition of 1 drop of 0.33% methylene blue;
10. Reading in hemocytometer;
11. Results expressed in percentage and in absolute number/mm³ (in reference to lymphocyte differential cell count).

In our experience, addition of serum to the medium has a stabilizing effect which increases the number of cells detected.

The temperature is a crucial factor since there is no rosette formation at 0°C or 37°C (29). Most authors employ a two-step incubation (37°C for 5 to 60 minutes and 4°C for at least 60 minutes). The temperature of the second step may be from 4°C to 25°C (29). At temperatures over 37°C, rosettes are not formed since the receptors for E are released from the cell surface by heating (30, 31). Treatment of lymphocytes with certain enzymes such as neuraminidase or papain increase rosette formation (27, 32, 33) while other enzymes apparently destroy the receptor (trypsin, phospholipase A) (33, 34). A disadvantage of neuraminidase treatment is that some B cells may form rosettes with E by exposing "hidden" receptors. Rosette formation can also be abolished by treating E with

trypsin or papain (35, 36). The binding of E to T cells can be strengthened by treating the red cells with neuraminidase (35-37) or by adding 2-amino-ethyisothiuronium (38).

The optimal pH for rosette formation is between 7 and 8 (34). Metabolic inhibitors, drugs increasing the levels of cyclic AMP and ADTA, cause a decrease in rosette formation (34, 39-42).

Biological Aspects

The receptor for E can be recovered in a soluble form from the supernatant of heated (45°C) lymphocytes, normal human serum, and from preparations containing transfer factor and thymosin. This soluble receptor can restore rosette formation with E in previously heated lymphocytes. In addition it also binds to E; the complex formed (ER) is able to form rosettes with lymphocytes deprived of their receptors by previous heating (30, 31).

Incipient studies on the partial purification and characterization of the receptor have been made, but its chemical nature is not known (43-46). The structures on the red blood cell membrane which bind to the lymphocyte are likewise not characterized.

Rosette formation can be inhibited by treating the lymphocytes with heterologous antilymphocyte sera (47). Experiments from our laboratory have shown that rabbit antihuman brain serum, in spite of its lymphocytotoxic activity, does not inhibit rosette formation (48).

We have demonstrated the presence of antibodies cytotoxic for T cells which are capable of inhibiting rosette formation in the following types of antisera (48):

1. Rabbit antihuman thymus;
2. Sheep anti-T-cell E rosettes purified in a Ficoll-Hypaque gradient;
3. Sheep anti-T-cell receptor for E.

This antiserum, specific for the T-cell receptor, could be obtained by immunizing sheep with E sensitized with the supernatant from heated (45°C) human thymus cell suspension. The soluble receptors (R) for E present in this preparation can be specifically adsorbed onto the red blood cells; the ER complexes formed

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are washed and used to immunize sheep. Since the red blood cells are autologous, the antibodies formed will react only with the receptors. The above antisera, with antireceptor activity are cytotoxic for T cells, inhibit rosette formation, are able to agglutinate ER complexes, and can also be used to identify T cells by immunofluorescence. The antireceptor antibody also reacts in vitro with the receptor in a soluble form since normal human serum dialysate, the supernatant from heated lymphocytes, and preparations containing transfer factor neutralize the antibody activity against the receptor as evaluated by cytotoxicity, inhibition of rosette formation, and ER agglutination (48).

Studies recently carried out in our laboratory have shown a biological activity possessed by this receptor. Preparations containing this receptor in a soluble form such as supernatant from heated lymphocytes, normal human sera dialysate, and transfer factor have a potent chemotactic activity for granulocytes (49). This chemotactic activity is lost by absorption of these preparations with E. The chemotactic activity of preparations containing transfer factor was already known (50) and, therefore, probably is associated with the presence of the soluble receptor for E. The chemotactic activity of the soluble receptor for E is not removed by absorption with rabbit erythrocytes or with trypsinized sheep erythrocytes since the receptors do not bind to these cells. Other chemotactic preparations such as endotoxin-activated human serum which contain C3a or C5a do not lose their activity by absorption with E (49).

Anti-T-Cell Antibodies

Antisera specifically reactive with human T cells can be obtained by immunization of several animal species with thymus cells, peripheral-blood T cells, T leukemia cells, T-cell lines, and brain (51-55). In addition, as mentioned above, anti-T-cell antibodies directed against the receptor for E can be obtained by immunizing sheep with E-soluble receptor for E (ER) complexes (48). Heterologous antisera with anti-T-cell activity usually include antibodies which are species specific and

lymphocyte specific. Absorption with insolubilized human immunoglobulin, erythrocytes, liver, and kidney can be used to remove species-specific antibodies. The antibodies can be rendered specific for T cells by further absorption with purified B cells.

A specific anti-T-cell sera should react with the majority of thymus cells and give a "plateau" detecting 70% to 80% of peripheral blood lymphocytes, which are the E-rosette positive cells.

The tests commonly used to identify T cells using specific antibodies have been cytotoxicity and immunofluorescence, both direct and indirect.

Measles Virus Receptors

Recently, *Valdimarsson* et al. (56) showed that human T cells have membrane receptors for measles virus. T cells can be enumerated by this technique by rosette formation with cells infected with measles virus. The selectivity of measles virus for T cells corresponds with the capacity of this virus to impair T-cell-mediated immune responses (57).

Helix Pomatia A Hemagglutinin Receptors

Neuraminidase-treated human T lymphocytes have receptors for the A hemagglutinin of the snail *Helix pomatia* (HP) (58). The reaction of HP with T lymphocytes can be visualized with fluorescein-labeled HP (58) or, quantitatively, by determining the binding of ^{125}I -HP to the cells (59).

Identification of B Lymphocytes

The major procedures currently in use to identify human B cells are immunoglobulin staining by fluorescence, determination of complement receptors, and determination of Fc receptors. Other methods include the detection of Epstein-Barr virus receptors, rosette formation with mouse erythrocytes, and anti-B-cell antibodies.

Surface Immunoglobulin

The presence of intrinsic surface membrane immunoglobulin on the B cell is most common-

ly demonstrated by direct immunofluorescence. However, false positive surface staining may occur due to the binding of immune complexes or immunoglobulin aggregates to Fc receptors and due to the reaction of auto-antilymphocyte antibodies. These antibodies can be found in a variety of diseases including systemic lupus erythematosus, rheumatoid arthritis, certain malignancies and certain infectious diseases. Usually the activity of these antibodies increase with cold, and therefore, they can be eluted at 37°C for 45 to 60 minutes. These antibodies are primarily of the IgM class and, to a lesser extent, of the IgG class.

In order to diminish these sources of error, the detection of immunoglobulin associated with the cell membrane should be performed by using F(ab')₂ fragments of the fluorescent antihuman immunoglobulin, immune complexes formed by the reaction with minute amounts of serum immunoglobulins will not bind to Fc receptors. The most convenient methods for preparations of reagents, cell separation, and staining for the detection of immunoglobulin-bearing cells have been described in detail recently by *Winchester and Fu* (62). The values for IgG-bearing and IgA-bearing cells vary from 0% to 1%; those bearing IgD and/or IgM range from 3% to 18% approximately (62).

Complement Receptors

Human complement receptor lymphocytes (CRL) have receptors for C3b (immune adherence receptor) and/or for C3d. Most CRL have both types of receptors. These two types of receptors cap independently and interact with different regions of C4 or C3 molecules (63, 64). The C3b receptor is also present in human erythrocytes, granulocytes, and monocytes; it reacts with C4b or the C3c region of C3b. The C3b receptor can also be detected in monocytes and eosinophils (65, 66).

An average of 12% CRL (range 6% to 18%) in normal peripheral blood lymphocytes has been usually reported using EAC14, EAC1-3b or EAC1-3d (63, 67, 68).

Several methods have been reported for detecting CRL. One of the most common

utilizes erythrocytes (E) sensitized with antibody (A) and complement (yields EAC which forms rosettes with CRL). Sheep E should not be used to prepare EAC since they can form rosettes with human T cells directly due to the receptor for E (29). Red blood cells from any animal species unable to interact with human T cells can be used to prepare the EAC reagent.

In our experience as well as in other laboratories, human erythrocytes (HE) sensitized with IgM rabbit antibody (A) and complement (C) have been used successfully as an indicator for CRL (29, 36). The immune adherence receptors present in HE do not interfere with the detection of CRL.

In 1974 we introduced a new method for detecting CRL, which uses zymosan-C3 complexes (ZC). Zymosan activates the complement system by the alternate pathway so that there is no need of the antibody. Another advantage is that any source of complement can be used since the zymosan particles are not lysis-passive (19, 69). Using a mixture of ZC and E, B, and T, human cells can be detected simultaneously in the same suspension. The ZC method is the quickest and most practical way of detecting CRL. This method has been recently confirmed by another laboratory (70).

The main steps of the HEAC and ZC methods are as follows:

1. Lymphocyte separation on Ficoll-Hypaque gradient;
2. 0.5% HEAC or ZC (10^8 ZC particles/ml) suspension in HBSS (100 μ l)
3. 2×10^6 lymphocytes/mm³ in HBSS (100 μ l);
4. Mixture of 2 and 3 in 6 x 50 mm glass tube;
5. Centrifugation (200 g, 5 min);
6. Gentle resuspension with a Pasteur pipette after the addition of 1 drop of 0.33% methylene blue;
7. Reading in hemocytometer;
8. Results expressed in percentage and in absolute number/mm³ (in relation to lymphocyte differential cell count).

CRL have also been detected with soluble radiolabeled immune complexes (71) and

soluble complement components labeled by fluorescence (63, 72) or radioactivity (72). These methods have a high specificity and can be used for double-label studies.

The first important indication that human CRL are B cells was demonstrated in our laboratory. Here it was shown that the population of E rosette-forming cells and CRL do not overlap and that the distribution of CRL corresponds to thymus-independent areas of lymphoid tissues (6).

It has recently been demonstrated that when F(ab')₂ fragment of anti-immunoglobulin are used, only 50% to 70% of CRL are double-labeled. It was also shown that most of the CRL lacking surface immunoglobulin contained Fc receptors. In addition, 15% to 30% of CRL lack both immunoglobulin and Fc receptors (73). Therefore, it still must be established whether or not all human CRL with Fc receptors might be K cells, responsible for antibody-dependent cytotoxicity or the "third population" described by *Winchester et al.* (60).

Fc Receptors

Early studies suggested a correspondence between B cells and the presence of Fc receptors (74). More recently, however, these receptors have also been shown in other lymphocyte subpopulations (75).

The detection of cells bearing Fc receptors can be achieved by rosette formation with erythrocytes (E) sensitized by IgG antibodies (A) and by the binding of fluorescein or ¹²⁵I-labeled, heat-aggregated or antigen-complexed IgG (74-77). EA rosette-forming cells were reported to be mostly monocytes and B lymphocytes with surface membrane immunoglobulin or to belong to a third lymphocyte population (K cells) which lacked other membrane markers and possessed "high affinity" Fc receptors (78).

Human Fc receptor-bearing cells can be detected using human-indicator erythrocytes (OR₁R₂ cells) sensitized with anti-Rh (anti-CD) isoantibodies of the Ripley (Ri) type (79). Another current EA technique uses chicken erythrocytes coated with rabbit IgG antibodies (78).

Epstein-Barr Virus Receptors

Epstein-Barr virus (EBV) appears to bind to B cells with the membrane phenotype SmIg⁺, C3⁺ (80, 81). Recently, it has been shown that the EBV binding sites and C3 receptors are probably part of the same molecular structure on B cells (82). The assays currently used for virus receptors have been recently reviewed (83).

The observation of EBV receptors are relevant to understand the cellular events involved in infectious mononucleosis and other lymphoproliferative diseases. Its usefulness as a marker of B cells in normal blood, however, is limited

Mouse Erythrocyte Receptors

A small proportion (5% to 11%) of normal human peripheral blood lymphocytes and a large proportion of lymphocytes from patients with chronic lymphocytic leukemia form rosettes with mouse erythrocytes (84). Recent evidence has shown that these lymphocytes probably represent a subpopulation of B cells (85).

Anti-B-Cell Antibodies

Heterologous antisera reacting against B cells can be obtained by immunization with peripheral-blood B lymphocytes, B chronic lymphocytic leukemia cells, and B lymphoid cell lines. These antisera can be rendered B cell specific by absorption with human erythrocytes, liver, kidney T cells, and insolubilized serum immunoglobulins (86).

Recently, the term HL-B has been applied to a group of alloantigens recognized by pregnancy sera and selectively expressed on B lymphocytes (87, 88). These antigens appear to be closely related to the Ia system of the mouse. Many pregnancy sera contain both HL-A and HL-B antibodies. The former can be removed by absorption with T cells or platelets. HL-B antibodies can be detected either by inhibition of mixed lymphocyte reactions, cytotoxicity of enriched B cell suspension, or indirect immunofluorescence.

Identification of B and T Lymphocytes in Tissue Sections

B and T cells can be identified in tissue sections by the adherence of HEAC or ZC and E (6, 7, 12, 19).

Our current technique uses 6 μm thick cryostat sections which are dried at room temperature for 10 minutes and then covered with one drop of either E or HEAC 0.5% or ZC ($10^8/\text{ml}$) suspension in HBSS. The sections are incubated at 37°C for 15 minutes and then for 1 hour at 4°C in a moist chamber. The excess indicator is removed by placing the sections over saline (0.15 M sodium chloride) at 4°C for 20 minutes, thereby allowing the nonadherent erythrocytes or ZC to settle by gravity. The slides are then dried, fixed with absolute methanol, and stained with hematoxylin-eosin. The method can be used to study the distribution of T and B cells in lymphoid organs and in inflammatory infiltrates.

Identification of K Cells

Cells with a lymphocytic appearance and able to mediate antibody-dependent cytotoxicity of target cells are called K cells. These cells have receptors with strong affinity for Fc of IgG; the interaction between target cell-bound IgG and the Fc receptors may trigger the cytotoxic effect (89).

It seems that the majority of the peripheral T lymphocytes do not display K cell activity (90).

Usually a K cell assay system consists of purified lymphocytes, ^{51}Cr -labeled chicken erythrocytes serving as target cells, and hyper-immune rabbit anti-chicken erythrocytes antibodies (IgG) as the inducing agent (89).

B cells with high concentrations of SIg+ which have Fc receptors with low affinity are inactive in the K-cell assay. Some of the Fc+ cells seem to have E receptors and are probably also active in the K-cell assay (89).

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