ON THE STRUCTURE OF HUMAN SERUM HIGH-DENSITY LIPOPROTEIN: STUDIES BY THE TECHNIQUE OF CIRCULAR DICHROISM*

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Communicated by Dwight J. Ingle, January 12, 1968

Previous studies from this laboratory employing the technique of optical rotatory dispersion (ORD) have shown that human serum high-density lipoprotein (HDL) of d 1.063–1.21 gm/ml has a high content in α-helix which is to a large extent retained in its lipid-free form, apo HDL.¹

On the basis of the ORD parameters, an unordered structure was assigned to the nonhelical portion of the apoprotein, and this conclusion received corroboration from infrared spectroscopy analysis.² The present paper describes the optical properties of HDL and its products as studied by the technique of circular dichroism (CD). This method has the advantage over ORD of more clearly resolving bands relative to the optically active chromophores in the ultraviolet and far-ultraviolet regions. In agreement with the previous findings, both HDL and apo HDL exhibited a high α-helical content. The most significant observation was that the α-helical spectra were sufficiently different to permit a clear distinction between lipid-free and lipid-bound products. Moreover, they were found to differ in their optical behavior after chemical modification by succinic anhydride or changes in the solvent medium.

The studies were carried out on the two HDL products, HDL₃ (d 1.063–1.125) and HDL₄ (d 1.125–1.21). Since the results were similar, this report will be limited to HDL₃.

Materials and Methods.—Methods for the isolation and purification of human serum HDL₃ have been reported previously.³ Apo HDL₃ was obtained from HDL₃ by extraction with 3:2 ethanol–ethanol ether mixture at −10⁰.⁴ Either HDL₃ or apo HDL₃ was succinylated by the reaction with succinic anhydride.⁵ Apo HDL₃ was reduced and alkylated as previously described.⁶ Relipidation of either apo HDL₃ or succinylated apo HDL₃ (S-apo HDL₃) was carried out with aqueous dispersions of HDL₃ phospholipids and the resulting apo HDL₃-phospholipid complex isolated by ultracentrifugation.⁷ The products studied had a protein:lipid ratio of 2:1 by weight. All the materials were extensively dialyzed against the desired buffers before analysis. On occasion, the preparations had to be clarified by centrifugation (10,000 × g, 10 min).

Measurements of circular dichroism in the spectral region between 300 and 185 μₜ were carried out at 27⁰ in a Cary spectropolarimeter using quartz cells of 0.1-mm path length (Pyrocell, N.J.) with protein concentrations ranging between 1 and 2 mg/ml. All CD spectra were run at least twice. Baseline runs were made in the same cell, usually immediately after the sample run. The values of molar ellipticity [θ] in units of deg cm²/decimole were obtained from the relation: [θ] = θ MRW / 10 l c, where θ is observed ellipticity; MRW (mean residue weight) is 112; l = cell path length in cm; and c is concentration of solute in gm/ml. In the spectral region studied, the absorption of HDL₃ lipids in trifluoroethanol was found to be negligible and was not included in the computations. This was also the case for the dispersions of HDL₃ phospholipids in aqueous solutions.
In the studies where urea, guanidine hydrochloride (G-HCl), and sodium dodecylsulfate (SDS) were used, the reagents, recrystallized from ethanol, were added as a solid to the protein solutions. Protein concentrations were determined by the Lowry method.6

Results.—Studies with HDL₃: The CD spectrum was characterized by two negative Cotton effects with maxima at 222 and 208 μm, respectively, a crossover at 202 μm, and a positive Cotton at 194 μm. The same spectrum was obtained with HDL₃ preparations that had been (1) extracted with ethyl ether, (2) reacted with succinic anhydride, (3) dialyzed against pH 6, 8.6, and 10 buffers, (4) kept at 4°C for 1–2 weeks. Figure 1 represents the spectra of HDL₃ before and after succinylation. The α-helical content of HDL₃ estimated from the ellipticity value at 222 μm was about 65 per cent.

HDL₃ dissolved in 8 M urea-phosphate buffer of pH 8.4 or 7 M G-HCl exhibited a marked decrease of the ellipticity value of the n → π* transition. The spectrum below 210 μm could not be followed because of solvent opacity (Fig. 2). A significant change in spectrum was observed with HDL₃ preparations, in either buffers of pH between 11 and 12, or in neutral buffers made 0.1 to 0.2 M with SDS (Fig. 2 and Table 1). These changes were characterized by an increase of the negative ellipticity maxima at 208 μm.

Studies with apo HDL₃: As compared with HDL₃, the apo HDL₃ spectrum (Fig. 3 and Table 1) was characterized by a 208-μm band that was more intense than that at 222 μm, and by a shift of the crossover point to 200 μm. The same pattern was observed with apo HDL₃ after reduction and alkylation. Following succinylation (Fig. 3), the positions of all electronic transitions were shifted toward shorter wavelengths. The spectrum was characterized by a shallow band with a negative maximum around 220 μm, a deep Cotton at 205 μm, a
crossover point at 197 m\(\mu\), and a positive maximum at 190 m\(\mu\). A progressive blue shift was also noted in nonsuccinylated preparations as the pH of the solutions was increased from 10 to 12. At pH 12 the apo HDL\(_3\) spectrum was not significantly modified in SDS solutions (0.1 to 0.2 \(M\)). In 8 \(M\) urea, on the contrary, there was no longer evidence for the \(\alpha\)-helical parameters noted in apo HDL\(_3\) dissolved in aqueous buffers (Fig. 3).

Studies on apo HDL\(_3\)-phospholipid complex (Fig. 4): After recombination with phospholipids, apo HDL\(_3\) exhibited a CD spectrum very similar to that of HDL\(_3\). Like HDL\(_3\) it was more resistant than apo HDL\(_3\) to spectral changes induced by either pH variations, urea, or chemical modifications by succinic anhydride.

In the case of S-apo HDL\(_3\), addition of phospholipids did not restore the HDL\(_3\) spectrum completely. There was, however, a significant shift of the various electronic transitions toward longer wavelengths.

Discussion.—The present studies have shown that human serum HDL\(_3\) and its delipidated product apo HDL\(_3\) have circular dichroic bands in the position described for the \(\alpha\)-helix\(^7-10\) and that they differ from each other in the relative

### Table 1. Comparative parameters of ultraviolet circular dichroism between HDL\(_3\) and apo HDL\(_3\).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Position of the Cotton Effects</th>
<th>Molar ellipticity, (n \rightarrow \pi^*) parallel</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HDL(_3)</td>
<td>(n \rightarrow \pi^*) 222 208</td>
<td>(n \rightarrow \pi^<em>/\pi^</em>) 194 193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDL(_3)-SDS</td>
<td>(n \rightarrow \pi^*) 222 208</td>
<td>(n \rightarrow \pi^<em>/\pi^</em>) 193 0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apo HDL(_3)</td>
<td>(n \rightarrow \pi^*) 222 208</td>
<td>(n \rightarrow \pi^<em>/\pi^</em>) 193 0.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 3.—Ultraviolet circular dichroic spectra of apo HDL\(_3\) before and after succinylation.

Fig. 4.—Ultraviolet circular dichroic spectra of apo HDL\(_3\) before and after mixing with an aqueous dispersion of phospholipids.
value of the maxima at 222 and 208 m\(\mu\) (see Table 1). In descriptive terms, HDL\(\text{a}\) had a spectrum similar to that of poly-L-glutamic acid, whereas apo HDL\(\text{a}\) resembled that of poly-\(\gamma\)-methyl glutamate.\(^7\) Previous ORD studies had failed to identify two types of spectra in HDL\(\text{a}\) preparations before and after delipidation. This may be attributed to the greater resolving power of the CD technique, which facilitates detection of contributions of chromophores active in closely spaced regions of the spectrum.\(^11\) The reasons for the two "\(\alpha\)-helical" spectra are not apparent. One possibility is that there are no true conformational differences between the protein, with and without bound lipids, but that the observed spectral changes are due to changes in the environment around the active chromophores. This, however, appears improbable in view of the fact that a spectral shift HDL\(\text{a}\) \(\rightarrow\) apo HDL\(\text{a}\) was noted in HDL\(\text{a}\) preparations (containing lipids) treated with SDS or dissolved in high alkaline media. Such an observation plus the direct spectral analysis on phospholipids appear to rule out the possibility, postulated for other lipoprotein systems,\(^12\) that the lipids contribute significantly in the over-all spectral properties of HDL\(\text{a}\). Thus, we favor the idea that upon delipidation HDL\(\text{a}\) protein exhibits spectral changes that may be a reflection of changes in length, tightness, or orientation of the various helical segments of the polypeptide chains.

Another important difference between HDL\(\text{a}\) and apo HDL\(\text{a}\) is in their sensitivity to chemical modification by succinic anhydride (Figs. 1 and 4). Whereas S-apo HDL\(\text{a}\) underwent a marked spectral shift of all its electronic transitions toward lower wavelengths, suggestive of a rather disordered structure, its parent S-HDL\(\text{a}\) was essentially unchanged in respect to HDL\(\text{a}\). Since under the conditions of succinylation employed, the number of sites reacting with succinic anhydride is the same in either lipidated or delipidated HDL\(\text{a},\)\(^13\) we may conclude that lipids protected the polypeptide chains from undergoing conformational transition. This conclusion is supported by the observed relative resistance of HDL\(\text{a}\) to spectral changes produced by variations in the nature of the solvent medium (pH, urea, and guanidine-HCl) and also by the acquisition of such a resistance in apo HDL\(\text{a}\) products relipidated by phospholipids.

Previous studies from this and other laboratories,\(^3\), \(^4\), \(^14\), \(^15\) have shown that HDL\(\text{a}\) apoprotein has a multunit structure. Experiments have also been presented to suggest that in HDL\(\text{a}\) the various subunits are held together by lipid bridges\(^3\) and that the bonding may be largely hydrophobic.\(^5\) If the above information is combined with the results of the current and previous ORD data,\(^1\) one may postulate that in HDL\(\text{a}\) the helices relating to the various polypeptide chains are stabilized by the interaction of their hydrophobic interior with the nonpolar moiety of the phospholipids. Thus, one of the structural roles of phospholipids in HDL\(\text{a}\) may be that of stabilizing the secondary structure of the polypeptide chains, a structure that is in turn dependent upon the nature of each peptide backbone. This concept, which is also of relevance in biological problems such as that of lipoprotein biosynthesis, is currently undergoing experimental testing.

**Summary.—**(1) Human serum high-density lipoprotein of \(d\) 1.125–1.21 (HDL\(\text{a}\)) and its delipidated product apo HDL\(\text{a}\) had circular dichroic spectra
indicative of a high α-helical content. The two products were distinguishable by the relative intensity of the bands at 222 and 208 m\(\mu\) and the position of the crossover point.

(2) A spectral shift, apo HDL\(_4\) \(\rightarrow\) HDL\(_3\), was observed by mixing apo HDL\(_3\) with aqueous dispersions of phospholipids.

(3) Both HDL\(_3\) and apo HDL\(_4\)-phospholipid complex were more resistant than apo HDL\(_3\) to spectral changes induced by variations in the nature of the solvent medium.

(4) The results were taken to indicate that lipids of HDL\(_3\) serve a structural role by stabilizing the predominantly α-helical configuration of the various polypeptide chains, probably through hydrophobic interactions.

The authors wish to thank Dr. G. Holzwarth for advice during the course of the investigation. They are indebted to both Drs. G. Holzwarth and E. Taylor for critically reviewing the manuscript. Some of the early experiments were carried out in the laboratory of Dr. D. Urry.

Abbreviations used: HDL\(_3\), lipoprotein of d 1.25–1.21 gm/ml; apo HDL\(_3\), protein of HDL\(_3\) obtained by extraction with organic solvents; S-HDL\(_3\) and S-apo HDL\(_3\), succinylated HDL\(_3\) and apo HDL\(_3\), respectively; SDS, sodiumdodecylsulfate; G-HC\(_1\), guanidine hydrochloride.

* Supported by grants HE 08727 from U.S. Public Health Service, G-64-62 from Life Insurance Medical Research Fund, and C 65-1 from the Illinois and Chicago Heart Association. The Cary model 6001 spectropolarimeter was purchased by the U.S. Public Health Service special research resources grant FR 00332-01 to the Chemistry Department.

† Recipient of Research Career Development Award HE 26, 8671, from U.S. Public Health Service.

‡ U. S. Public Health Service postdoctoral fellow (1-F2-GM 33479).

§ Operated by the University of Chicago for the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission.


