UP-REGULATION OF REVERSE CHOLESTEROL TRANSPORT REQUIRES REDUCTION OF APOLIPOPROTEIN-E RICH HDL LEVELS IN HYPERLIPIDEMIC HAMSTERS TREATED WITH CETP INHIBITOR TORCETRAPIB

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INTRODUCTION

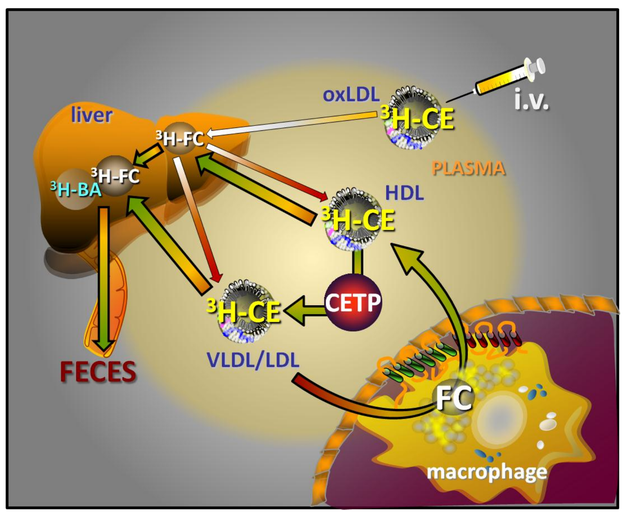
Cholesteryl ester transfer protein (CETP) inhibition increases the levels of enlarged/apolipoprotein E rich HDL particles (apoE-HDL). Whether these particles are functional to promote reverse cholesterol transport (RCT) remains unclear. Here we investigated this issue in hyperlipidemic hamsters, using an alternative method to measure *in vivo* reverse cholesterol transport (oxLDL-RCT method).

METHODS

- Golden Syrian hamsters were made hyperlipidemic with a 4-week high fat diet, which increased non-HDL-cholesterol levels, CETP activity, liver lipid levels and induced a 35% reduction in LDL-receptor protein expression (all $p<0.05$ vs. chow fed hamsters).
- Hyperlipidemic hamsters were treated with vehicle, CETP inhibitor torcetrapib 30mg/kg/day alone, berberine 150mg/kg/day alone or the combination of torcetrapib 30mg/kg/day and berberine 150mg/kg/day over 14 days. Biochemical parameters were measured after 10 days of treatment.
- After 11 days of treatment, hamsters were injected i.v. with ^{3}H-cholesteryl oleate labeled/oxidized LDL (^{3}H-oxLDL) to measure *in vivo* reverse cholesterol transport or with ^{3}H-cholesteryl oleate labeled/unmodified LDL (^{3}H-LDL) to measure *in vivo* LDL kinetics.
- In both radiotracer experiments, blood was collected continuously to measure plasma ^{3}H-tracer over 72 hours. Hamsters were then sacrificed and liver was harvested to measure hepatic ^{3}H-tracer recovery. Feces were collected over 72 hours to measure ^{3}H-radioactivity and mass in fecal cholesterol and bile acids fractions.

RESULTS

1. Measurement of *in vivo* reverse cholesterol transport



Measurement of *in vivo* reverse cholesterol transport using ^{3}H-cholesteryl oleate labeled oxidized LDL (BA, bile acids; CE, cholesteryl esters; CETP, cholesteryl ester transfer protein; FC, free cholesterol).

3. Berberine lowers LDL-cholesterol and improves liver steatosis

	vehicle	berberine
Total cholesterol (g/L)	3.96 ± 0.10	3.04 ± 0.15***
LDL-cholesterol (g/L)	0.93 ± 0.02	0.61 ± 0.06***
HDL-cholesterol (g/L)	2.16 ± 0.15	1.87 ± 0.08
Triglycerides (g/L)	2.95 ± 0.32	1.56 ± 0.23**
CETP activity (pmol/µL/h)	56 ± 3	50 ± 3
Liver mass (g)	5.9 ± 0.2	5.2 ± 0.2**
Hepatic cholesterol (mg/g)	40.3 ± 1.2	34.0 ± 1.9*
Hepatic triglycerides (mg/g)	38.1 ± 1.6	26.8 ± 3.2**
Fecal cholesterol (µg/day)	404 ± 24	589 ± 66**
Fecal bile acids (µmol/day)	27 ± 2	23 ± 2

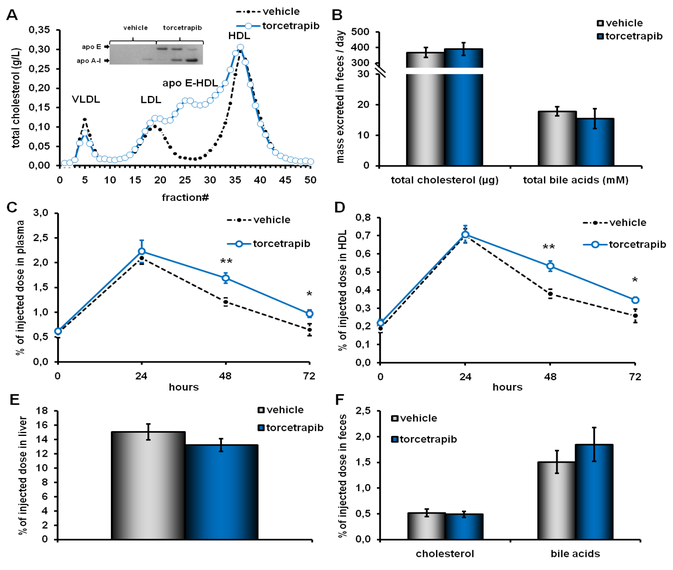
Plasma and liver parameters in hyperlipidemic hamsters treated with vehicle or berberine 150mg/kg/day (*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001 vs. vehicle).

5. Effects of torcetrapib and torcetrapib+berberine on biochemical parameters

	vehicle	torcetrapib	torcetrapib + berberine
Total cholesterol (g/L)	3.80 ± 0.12	5.15 ± 0.27***	4.43 ± 0.20
HDL-cholesterol (g/L)	2.04 ± 0.13	2.63 ± 0.13**	2.28 ± 0.10
Triglycerides (g/L)	3.02 ± 0.24	1.20 ± 0.09***	1.20 ± 0.13†††
CETP activity (pmol/µL/h)	58 ± 7	40 ± 2***	43 ± 3†††
Liver mass (g)	5.4 ± 0.3	5.8 ± 0.1	4.9 ± 0.2
Liver cholesterol (mg/g)	46.0 ± 2.6	47.2 ± 4.2	34.8 ± 2.5†
Liver triglycerides (mg/g)	33.1 ± 3.0	30.1 ± 1.1	32.8 ± 2.1

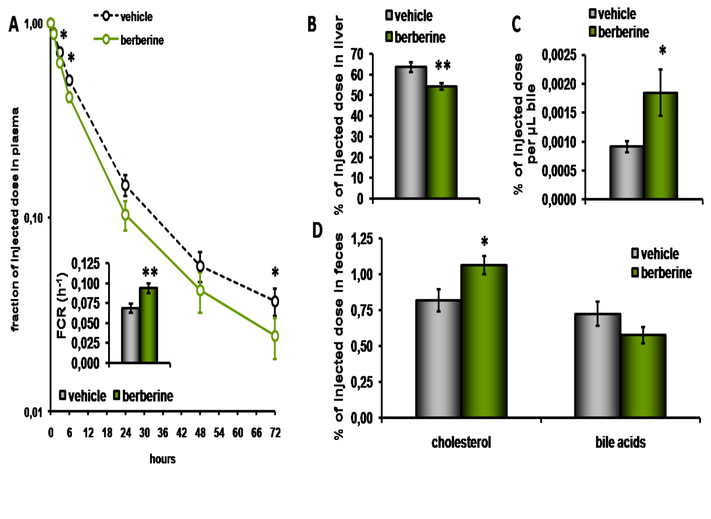
Plasma and liver parameters in hyperlipidemic hamsters treated with vehicle, torcetrapib 30mg/kg/day or torcetrapib 30mg/kg/day + berberine 150mg/kg/day (**p<0.01, ***p<0.001 vs. vehicle; †p<0.05, † † †p<0.001 vs. vehicle).

2. Torcetrapib does not promote reverse cholesterol transport



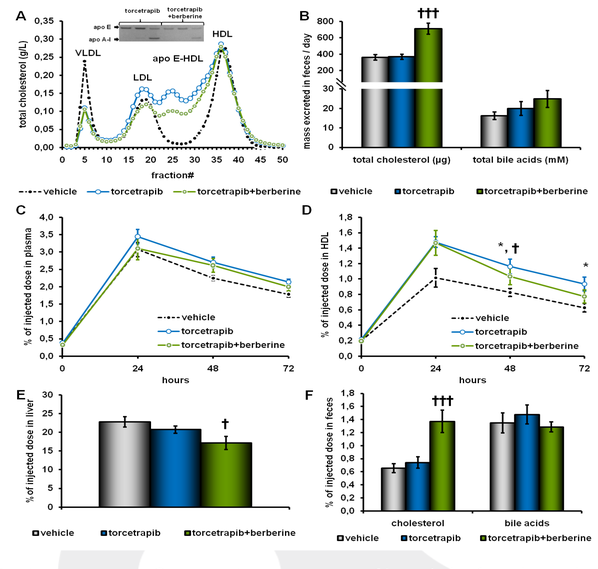
Fast Protein Liquid Chromatography profiles (A), fecal cholesterol/bile acids mass excretion (B), ^{3}H-tracer recovery in plasma (C), HDL (D), liver (E) and feces (F) after injection of ^{3}H-cholesteryl oleate labeled oxidized LDL in hyperlipidemic hamsters treated with vehicle or torcetrapib 30mg/kg/day (*p<0.05, **p<0.01 vs. vehicle).

4. Berberine increases LDL-CE catabolism and LDL-derived cholesterol fecal excretion



Plasma ^{3}H-tracer decay curve (A) and ^{3}H-tracer recoveries in liver (B), bile (C) and feces (D) after ^{3}H-cholesteryl oleate-labeled/unmodified LDL injection in hyperlipidemic hamsters treated with vehicle or berberine 150mg/kg/day (*p<0.05, **p<0.01 vs. vehicle).

6. Torcetrapib + berberine combination promotes reverse cholesterol transport



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CONCLUSION AND PERSPECTIVES

- **CETP inhibition with torcetrapib significantly increases HDL-C and apoE-HDL levels but does not promote reverse cholesterol transport in hyperlipidemic hamsters.**
- **Combination of torcetrapib with berberine, a compound known to up-regulate LDL-receptor expression, reduces apoE-HDL levels and promotes reverse cholesterol transport in hyperlipidemic hamsters.**
- **Stimulating reverse cholesterol transport under CETP inhibition requires reduction of apoE-HDL levels. These findings should be investigated in humans to evaluate the benefits of CETP inhibitors.**

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