
The Pro-Inflammatory Cytokine Cascade

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Introduction

The production of pro-inflammatory cytokines is a prerequisite for initiating the anti-infectious process, whereas their exacerbated production during severe inflammation may contribute to deleterious consequences. The capacity of interleukin (IL)-1 and tumor necrosis factor-alpha (TNF- α) to induce inflammatory mediators contributes to their pro-inflammatory properties. Phospholipase, cyclooxygenase and lipoxygenase are activated by IL-1 and TNF- α leading to the release of prostaglandins, thromboxane, leukotrienes, and platelet activating factor (PAF). Free radicals (superoxide [O₂⁻], nitric oxide [NO]), and proteolytic enzymes are other mediators produced by target cells in response to IL-1 and TNF- α . Other cytokines, including chemokines such as IL-8 or some T-cell derived cytokines, such as lymphotoxin- α are also involved in the cytokine cascade (Fig. 1). Different experimental approaches have demonstrated the contribution of the pro-inflammatory cytokines to the harmful effects observed in sepsis, trauma, burns, hemorrhage, severe surgery and other pathophysiological situations leading to systemic inflammatory response syndrome (SIRS). The injection of recombinant pro-inflammatory cytokines mimics some of the clinical parameters observed in SIRS patients and the use of anti-cytokine antibodies prevents most of the deleterious effects observed in animal models of SIRS.

Nature of the Stimuli Which Initiate the Cascade

When inflammation is initiated by an infectious process, the presence of microorganisms and their derived products (membrane compounds, released toxins, intra-cellular constituents following lysis) are potent activators of cytokine production. Macrophages are probably one of the major sources of cytokines. Among Gram-negative bacterial derived compounds, endotoxin or lipopolysaccharide (LPS) is a potent inducer of cytokines. During Gram-positive bacterial infection, membrane compounds such as peptidoglycan or lipoteichoic acid are strong inducers of macrophage-derived cytokines. In addition, exotoxins behave as superantigens and trigger the release of T-cell-derived cytokines. Other cells can contribute to the release of cytokines. For example, the beneficial TNF- α observed in experimental peritonitis has been demonstrated to be released by mast

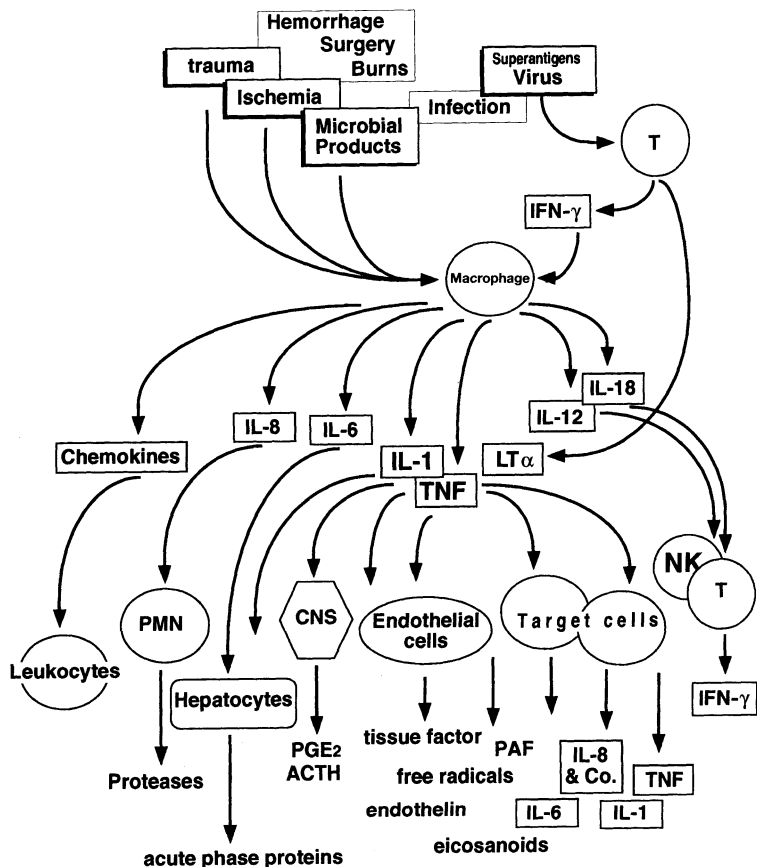


Fig. 1. Schematic representation of the pro-inflammatory cytokine cascade

cells [1]. So, in addition to the well known contribution of mast cells to inflammation observed in acquired immunity via the specific IgE antibodies, these cells play a central role during natural immunity by their capacity to release pro-inflammatory mediators in response to bacteria. Obviously, when the host is facing a stressful condition, many defense systems are activated, leading to the generation of newly synthesized or neo-generated compounds, as well as the release of pre-formed mediators. These factors have the capacity to modulate the generation of cytokines. Activation of the complement system and activation of the coagulation cascade lead to the appearance of factors (anaphylatoxins, thrombin, factor Xa) which can further enhance release of pro-inflammatory cytokines by activated macrophages. Once generated, cytokines possess the capacity of perpetuating their own production. In addition certain cytokines such as those generated by T lymphocytes (e.g., IL-3, granulocyte/macrophage colony-stimulating factor [GM-CSF]) and particularly Th1 cells (i.e., IL-2, IFN- γ) can amplify the release of the pro-inflammatory cytokines.

Bacterial derived products can also be triggering signals in pathophysiological situations that involve bacterial or endotoxin translocation. Hemorrhagic shock, burns or trauma can induce such translocation [2–4]. We have shown that in patients undergoing abdominal aortic surgery, which might be associated with mild gut ischemia, aortic clamping resulted in measurable amounts of circulating LPS and high levels of portal TNF- α suggesting local production by gut associated macrophages [5]. In an animal model, hemorrhage was also associated with local intestinal IL-6 production [6]. Other sites of production have been demonstrated during experimental models of hemorrhage, such as the lungs [7] and the peritoneum [8] where mononuclear phagocytes are a source of IL-1 and TNF- α . Very interestingly, it has been shown that resident mast cells within the tissue exposed to ischemia/reperfusion can degranulate and release pre-formed TNF- α [9]. In experimental liver ischemia and reperfusion experiments, reducing the production of IL-1 and TNF- α resulted in the reduction of polymorphonuclear leukocyte (PMN) infiltration and hepatic injury [10]. Ischemia is also associated with the local production of chemokines that contribute to the recruitment of inflammatory leukocytes [11]. *In vitro* experiments have demonstrated that hypoxia *per se* was capable of inducing the production of IL-1 and TNF- α by mononuclear cells [12]. Similarly, hypoxia induces the release of inflammatory cytokines by endothelial cells [13, 14]. Cardiopulmonary bypass (CPB) represents another inflammatory situation where the production of inflammatory cytokines occurs in various sites including peripheral blood as demonstrated by the presence of increased levels of cell-associated IL-1 in circulating monocytes [15]. The presence of cytokine transcripts in the skeletal muscle or the myocardium, and higher levels of TNF- α and IL-6 in coronary sinus blood than in arterial blood illustrates the various sites of production during CPB [16, 17]. Local production has been demonstrated within the site directly exposed to inflammation during acute pancreatitis [18], brain injury [19, 20], chest trauma [21] or laparotomy [22]. The compartmentalization of cytokine production was elegantly demonstrated in human unilateral pneumonia [23]. Bronchoalveolar lavage (BAL) levels of TNF, IL-1 and IL-6 and spontaneous production by alveolar macrophages were higher in the involved lung as compared to the non-involved lung.

Involvement of Pro-Inflammatory Cytokines in Inflammation

Activation of Endothelial Cells and Leukocyte Adherence to Endothelium

Endothelial cells are important target cells and actors during the inflammatory response. They constitute the interface between the injured tissues and the circulating leukocytes that need to be recruited. Endothelial cells are active producers of inflammatory mediators. In response to IL-1 and TNF- α , endothelial cells synthesize phospholipase and cyclooxygenase leading to the production of prostaglandins, express tissue factor enhancing the coagulation process, and release PAF, free radicals and a large panel of cytokines including IL-6 and IL-8. In addition, these cells express on their surface enhanced levels of adhesion molecules.

L- and P-selectins favor the capture of circulating leukocytes. The rolling of the cells onto the endothelium is mainly mediated by the E-selectins which together with the integrins lead to the firm adhesion of the leukocytes. Finally, integrins are involved in margination towards the tissues. Upon activation of endothelial cells by IL-1 or TNF- α , the expression of the E-selectin ELAM-1 (endothelial leukocyte adhesion molecule-1) is observed within one hour. Monocytes and neutrophils, harboring the counter-ligand Lewis X antigen, bind to the endothelium. The expression of vascular cell adhesion molecule-1 (VCAM-1) and intercellular adhesion molecule-1 (ICAM-1) occurs 4 h following IL-1 or TNF- α activation. *In vivo*, enhanced expression of these adhesion molecules has been demonstrated in various inflammatory processes. For example, augmented expression of ELAM-1 and ICAM-1 has been reported in the skin biopsies from atopic patients challenged locally with the corresponding allergen [24]. The counter-ligand for VCAM-1 is the VLA-4 molecule expressed on the surface of monocytes and lymphocytes. The counter-ligands for ICAM-1 are the LFA-1 (CD11a/CD18) and CR3 (CD11b/CD18) molecules found on the surface of monocytes and neutrophils. The activation of circulating cells leads to conformational changes of the LFA-1 and CR3 molecules that are necessary to favor a strong interaction with their ligands. Once leukocytes have adhered to endothelium, they migrate in response to chemoattractant signals locally delivered by chemokines. Blocking the chemokines by specific antibodies is associated with a lower recruitment of circulating cells and reduced inflammation [25]. Consequently, in infectious models, blocking chemokines is associated with impaired control of infection [26].

Cytokines and Coagulation

IL-1 and TNF are able to induce pro-coagulant activity on endothelial cells. Similar observations are reported with monocytes. This activity is a result of the induction of the membrane expression of tissue factor. Tissue factor combines with factor VII and initiates the coagulation cascade, activating factors X and IX. Injection of TNF in humans is associated with enhanced detection of factor X activated peptide and fragments 1 + 2 of thrombin [27]. In fact, TNF- α and IL-1 first activate fibrinolysis as assessed by enhanced levels of tissue plasminogen activator. An enhanced level of the inhibitor of tissue plasminogen activator occurs later and only then does thrombin become apparent. TNF- α and IL-1 activate coagulation via the induction of tissue factor, whereas IL-6 can also induce coagulation, independent of the induction of tissue factor. In contrast to IL-1 and TNF- α , IL-6 cannot induce fibrinolysis.

Induction of Lipid Mediators and Free Radicals

Many cells, in response to activation by IL-1 or TNF- α , release mediators derived from the metabolism of arachidonic acid either via the cyclooxygenase pathway, leading to the release of prostaglandins and thromboxanes, or via the lipoxygen-

ase pathway leading to the release of leukotrienes. Arachidonic acid itself is generated from membrane phospholipids following the action of phospholipase A2. Neosynthesis of phospholipase A2 and inducible cyclooxygenase (COX2) occurs following the action of IL-1 or TNF- α . Prostaglandins are involved in smooth muscle contraction, mucosal edema, increased vascular permeability, cellular infiltration and mucus secretion. In addition, eicosanoids can modulate the production of pro-inflammatory cytokines: For example, prostaglandin E2 (PGE2) inhibits TNF- α production, but has no significant effect on IL-1, and enhances IL-6 production, while thromboxane A2 favors TNF- α and IL-1 β production. Many activities generated by IL-1 and TNF can be suppressed by the use of cyclooxygenase inhibitors such as aspirin or ibuprofen, illustrating the contribution of PGE2 to the activities initiated by IL-1 and/or TNF- α . The action of phospholipase A2 on phosphatidylcholine generates arachidonic acid and lyso-PAF. The latter will be transformed by acetyltransferase to PAF. This factor, known to activate and aggregate platelets, is also responsible for the release of vaso-active mediators, resulting in increased permeability, vasoconstriction and bronchoconstriction.

Among the mediators induced by IL-1 and/or TNF, endothelin also acts on endothelial cells leading to vasoconstriction and increased blood pressure. Four different endothelins have been described. They are short 21 amino acid peptides derived from a 39 amino acid precursor. Endothelin acts via a 7 transmembrane domain receptor coupled to G protein.

Free radicals are also induced upon activation of the oxidative burst by IL-1 and TNF- α . Superoxide anion (O_2^-) generated upon the action of a membrane enzyme NADPH oxidase, has an anti-microbial activity but can also be toxic to local cells. It induces the peroxidation of unsaturated fatty acids leading to an alteration of membrane fluidity and permeability, as well as to the oxidation of amino acids resulting in an alteration of the proteins. Activation of the manganese superoxide dismutase by IL-1 and TNF- α generates hydrogen peroxide (H_2O_2). NO is generated from L-arginine through the action of NO synthase (NOS). Three NOS have been described – two are constitutive (NOS-1 involved in neuronal transmission and NOS-3 which contributes to the vasodilatation at homeostasis) and one is inducible (NOS-2) and produced by many cell types upon activation by IL-1 and TNF- α as well as by interferon- γ (IFN- γ) and migration inhibitory factor (MIF). The toxicity of NO is a result of its ability to inhibit glycolysis, the Krebs cycle, mitochondrial respiration, and DNA synthesis. Very unstable, NO is rapidly transformed to nitrite (NO_2^-) in the presence of H_2O and to nitrate (NO_3^-) by the effect of oxyhemoglobin.

Cytokines and Catabolism

IL-1 was previously known as catabolin and as osteoclast activating factor, a reflection of its ability to generate degradation of cartilage and to induce bone resorption. IL-6 is another cytokine which has been shown to be involved in osteolysis, particularly during the post-menopausal period. Muscle proteolysis is

also observed during inflammation. The release of amino acids from muscle further enhances the pool of free amino acids available for the neosynthesis of inflammatory proteins. TNF and to a lesser extent IL-1, have this capacity when acting on muscles. Furthermore, the activation of neutrophils leads to the degranulation of these cells and thus to the release of proteases such as cathepsin and collagenase which can degrade the extracellular matrix, as well as other cellular constituents.

The Main Pro-Inflammatory Cytokines

Interleukin-1

Injection of IL-1 into animals results in hypotension, increased cardiac output and heart rate, leukopenia, thrombocytopenia, hemorrhage, pulmonary edema [28] associated with pulmonary vascular endothelial injury [29], lacticacidemia, hypoaminoacidemia and histopathological lesions in the adrenal cortex [30]. Cyclooxygenase inhibition greatly prevents these effects. IL-1 receptor antagonist (IL-1ra) is a natural IL-1 inhibitor. Early treatment with IL-1ra reduced mortality from endotoxic shock [31, 32], prevented *Staphylococcus epidermidis*-induced hypotension [33], improved survival and hemodynamic performance in *Escherichia coli* septic shock [34] and, depending on the dosage, either reduced or enhanced lethality in a model of *Klebsiella pneumoniae* infection of new born rats [35]. In agreement with these observations, IL-1ra-deficient mice are more susceptible than controls to lethal endotoxemia [36]. IL-1 converting enzyme (ICE), or caspase-1, is an enzyme required for the maturation of the 30 kDa biologically inactive IL-1 β precursor to the mature 17 kDa active form of IL-1 β . Survival to a lethal dose of endotoxin reached 70% among ICE-deficient animals [37] and these ICE-deficient animals showed a 50% decrease in cellular infiltrate during zymosan-induced peritonitis [38]. On the other hand IL-1 β deficient mice were normally sensitive to the lethal effect of LPS [39]. The latter result suggests that, in mice, IL-1 α can fulfill the role of IL-1 β .

Tumor Necrosis Factor- α

TNF- α toxicity includes hemodynamic instability, fever, diarrhea, metabolic acidosis, capillary leak syndrome, activation of disseminated intravascular coagulation (DIC), late hypoglycemia, induction of a catabolic state, neurotoxicity, cachexia, organ edema, renal and hematological disorders, and acute pulmonary dysfunction, all phenomena associated with sepsis syndrome, systemic inflammatory response syndrome and the genesis of multiple organ failure (MOF) [40–44]. In a cancer patient receiving a high dose of recombinant TNF- α , a systemic inflammatory response syndrome was reported with marked hypotension, extreme generalized capillary leak syndrome and pulmonary function deterioration [45] while hepatic toxicity had been previously reported [46]. In addi-

tion, together with IL-1, TNF- α efficiently induced on endothelial cells the expression of adhesion molecules, an event which favors organ infiltration by leukocytes. Its lethal effect was synergistically enhanced by IL-1 [28], IFN- γ [47] and LPS itself [48]. Furthermore, its toxicity was influenced by circadian rhythms [49] and the route of infusion: Portal infusion of TNF- α led to high mortality, renal necrosis, and gut mucosal destruction, an effect not observed after systemic injection [50]. Anti-TNF treatments have been shown for more than a decade to be highly effective in protecting animals against endotoxic shock [51] and lethal bacteremia [52]. Such treatments also protect against pulmonary microvascular injury after intestinal ischemia injury that is associated with endotoxin translocation [53]. The soluble forms of the TNF- α receptors are natural inhibitors capable of limiting TNF- α bioactivity. Their injection into animal models of sepsis has also been shown to be essentially protective [54–56]. Mice rendered deficient for the p55 TNF- α receptor were resistant to endotoxin in the galactosamine model, whereas high doses of LPS in the absence of galactosamine led to a lethality similar to that observed in wild-type animals; similar findings were obtained with p75 TNF receptor deficient mice [57, 58] and TNF- α /lymphotoxin- α deficient mice [59]. In contrast, over-expression of TNF in transgenic animals is associated with a severe inflammatory process localized in the over-expressing tissues, ending in cardiac failure [60], degeneration of the central nervous system [61] or erosive arthritis [62].

Interleukin-12

Among the adverse effects of IL-12, hepato- and splenomegaly, leukopenia, anemia and myelodepression have been reported [63]. These phenomena are largely IFN- γ -dependent since they have not been reported to occur in IFN- γ receptor deficient mice. Hepatomegaly is associated with infiltration of activated macrophages and natural killer (NK) cells, and single-cell necrosis. In contrast, pulmonary edema and interstitial macrophage infiltration generated by IL-12 injection has been shown to be IFN- γ -independent. In a bacillus Calmette-Guérin (BCG)-primed model of LPS-induced shock and lethality, anti-IL-12 antibodies were shown to protect mice if injected before endotoxin [64]. The protection was associated with decreased IFN- γ production.

Interferon- γ

Side-effects of IFN- γ include tachycardia, myalgia, malaise, leukopenia, and weakness. Furthermore, its synergy with the detrimental activities of LPS have been clearly established: IFN- γ enhanced LPS-induced mortality and increased levels of LPS-induced circulating TNF- α [65]. Consequently, anti-IFN- γ antibodies protected against LPS- and *E. coli*-induced mortality [65, 66]. In addition, IFN- γ was shown to be a mediator of TNF- α -induced lethality. Sublethal doses of TNF- α and IFN- γ , when injected together, led to 100% lethality in mice, and anti-

IFN- γ antibodies protected against one to four LD100 of TNF- α [47]. Mice lacking IFN- γ receptors have been shown to be resistant to LPS challenge after priming with BCG [67] or treatment with galactosamine [68].

Leukemia Inhibitory Factor (LIF) and Oncostatin M (OSM)

LIF and OSM belong to the IL-6 superfamily, sharing the gp130 chain of the receptor. However, while IL-6 and IL-11 possess certain anti-inflammatory properties (see below), LIF and OSM can be considered as pro-inflammatory cytokines. Indeed, LIF is involved in the pathogenesis of inflammation and sepsis syndrome [69]. Produced upon activation by LPS and TNF, LIF can itself induce the release of other cytokines, including IL-1, IL-6 and IL-8, by various cell types. Passive immunization against LIF in mice challenged with intraperitoneal administration of endotoxin protects them from the lethal effects and blocked increases in serum levels of IL-1 and IL-6 [70]. Levels of plasma LIF, ciliary neurotrophic factor (CNTF, another member of the IL-6 family), and OSM are elevated in septic patients [71]. Subcutaneous injection of OSM in mice causes an acute inflammatory reaction [72]. OSM favors PMN adhesion to endothelial cells and transmigration via its capacity to enhance the expression of P- and E-selectin, ICAM-1 and VCAM-1. Furthermore, OSM induces the release of IL-6 and ENA78 (an α -chemokine), but not that of IL-8.

Macrophage Migration Inhibitory Factor

Recent investigations on pituitary-derived factors resulted in the rediscovery of an old cytokine named MIF. Bernhagen et al. [73] reported that injection of MIF together with one LD40 of LPS greatly potentiated lethality, and anti-MIF antibodies fully protected against one LD50 of LPS. As previously mentioned, MIF acts to counter-regulate the inhibitory effects of glucocorticoids on inflammatory cytokine production (Fig. 2). Interestingly, it was recently shown that MIF is expressed constitutively in many tissues including lung, liver, kidney, spleen, adrenal gland, and skin. MIF exists as a preformed cytokine which is rapidly released following LPS injection [74].

Interleukin-8 and the Chemokines

Sepsis and SIRS are often associated with organ dysfunction, a reflection of the inflammatory process occurring in the tissues. One of the major features of this phenomenon is the recruitment of inflammatory leukocytes, the adherence of circulating cells to the endothelium and their response to the locally produced chemokines. Endothelial cells are highly responsive to IL-1 and TNF, in terms of adhesion molecule and tissue factor expression, as well as cytokine production.

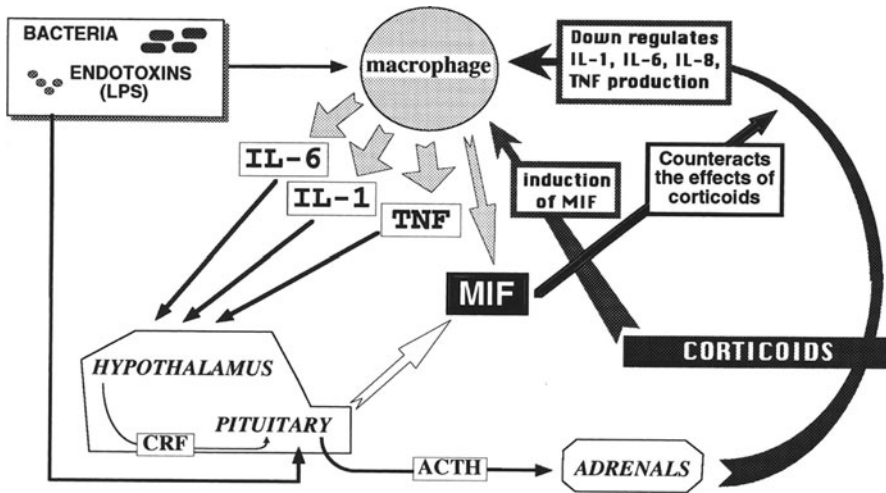


Fig. 2. Schematic representation of the regulatory loop involving down-regulation of pro-inflammatory cytokine production by glucocorticoids and its regulation by macrophage migration inhibitory factor (MIF) which behaves as a pro-inflammatory cytokine

Endothelial cell wall integrity is also perturbed by these cytokines as illustrated by the absence of endothelial damage in IL-1 receptor type I deficient mice [75]. Mice have been developed lacking molecules normally expressed on circulating leukocytes (e.g., L-selectin, CD62L) or on endothelial cells (e.g., ICAM-1). These adherence molecules are involved in the attachment of neutrophils, lymphocytes or monocytes to the endothelium [76, 77]. These deficient mice are significantly resistant to LPS-induced toxic shock lethality. Once immobilized on endothelium, leukocytes will migrate towards the tissues in response to IL-8 and the other chemokines. Thus, these chemokines favor the inflammatory cell infiltrate which contributes to the loss of tissue integrity. For example, it has been reported that neutralization of IL-8 profoundly inhibits neutrophil recruitment in an endotoxin-induced rabbit model of pleurisy, indicating that IL-8 is a major chemotactic factor in this model of acute inflammation [78]. During sepsis a large amount of IL-8 is detectable within the blood compartment, not only as a free cytokine [79] but also as a cell-associated form [80]. This first encounter of neutrophils with IL-8 led to their desensitization to further signals delivered locally by IL-8. Thus, the presence of IL-8 in the vascular space may well be a mechanism for limiting neutrophil accumulation at extracellular sites as illustrated by the defect in neutrophil migration during sepsis or endotoxemia [81–83]. Similarly, while monocyte-chemoattractant protein-1 (MCP-1) contributes to the recruitment of inflammatory macrophages within the tissues, neutralization of MCP-1 by specific antibodies before LPS administration resulted in a striking increase in mortality and injection of MCP-1 was protective [84].

The Beneficial Effects of IL-6 and IL-11

Many investigators have demonstrated that levels of circulating IL-6 correlate with severity of sepsis and may predict outcome [85–88]. Although IL-6 is often considered to be an inflammatory cytokine, most of its activities are associated with a negative control of inflammation. For example, IL-6 induces the release of IL-1ra and soluble TNF receptors [89]. Its most potent anti-inflammatory activity is linked to its capacity to induce the release of acute-phase proteins. In this context, it is interesting to note that IL-1ra has recently been identified as a product of hepatocytes, and regulated by pro-inflammatory cytokines like acute-phase proteins [90]. Furthermore, some acute-phase proteins such as the C-reactive protein (CRP), α 1-anti-trypsin, and α 1-acid glycoprotein, induce IL-1ra [91]. Reports have demonstrated that these acute-phase proteins can limit the inflammatory process [92], protect against meningococcal endotoxin [93], or even inhibit a lethal response to TNF [94, 95]. These results may explain why IL-6 has been shown to be protective in infectious and in septic shock models [96–98]. Nevertheless, IL-6 does possess some deleterious and pro-inflammatory effects which will be detailed below [99–102].

IL-11 belongs to the IL-6 superfamily, sharing the gp130 chain of the receptors. Although IL-11 stimulated the production of several major acute phase proteins by hepatoma cells, circulating IL-11 did not significantly participate in the production of acute-phase proteins by the liver [103]. One of the major beneficial effects of IL-11 is related to its healing activity on the intestinal tract. For example, chemotherapy and radiation both damage the small intestine mucosal barrier and lead to the entry of gastrointestinal organisms into the blood. In this lethal model, IL-11 was able to protect 80% of the animals [104]. Beneficial properties of IL-11 have also been demonstrated in a rat neonatal infectious model with group B streptococci. Prophylactic use of IL-11 enhanced the survival in this model in association with an increased number of platelets [105].

Are IL-1 and TNF the Main Directors of the Cascade?

In many pathophysiological situations, it has been reported that the production and the presence of pro-inflammatory cytokines correlates with the severity of the disease. For example, during cardiac surgery and in patients undergoing CPB, it was shown that TNF- α levels correlated with the duration of bypass and were associated with clinical complications which led to the development of SIRS/multiple organ dysfunction syndrome (MODS) [106]. More convincing is the direct demonstration that blockade of pro-inflammatory cytokines ameliorates the pathophysiological aftermath and improves survival in acute inflammatory diseases. Antibodies against TNF- α illustrate its role as a main mediator involved in the progression from local inflammation to a host-wide syndrome of organ injury. Thus anti-TNF- α antibodies were beneficial in various animal models of acute pancreatitis [107, 108], splanchnic artery occlusion [109], allograft rejection [110] or IL-2 toxicity [111]. Anti-TNF treatments reduced pulmonary injury fol-

lowing lower torso [112], hepatic [113], or intestinal [53] ischemia/reperfusion as assessed by reduced hemorrhage, edema, PMN sequestration, capillary leak and rise of leukotriene levels in BAL. Similarly, in hemorrhagic shock models, the use of anti-TNF- α demonstrated the contribution of this cytokine to the hemodynamic alterations, organ injury and mortality [114, 115]. In a model of zymosan-induced MODS Goris' group showed that treatment with a monoclonal antibody against TNF- α improved survival [116]. However, in humans, the therapeutic use of various anti-TNF- α approaches in sepsis has so far proven ineffective. In contrast, the use of anti-TNF- α antibodies has been shown to be particularly effective in the treatment of two chronic inflammatory diseases - rheumatoid arthritis [117] and Crohn's disease [118].

While these data indicate that TNF- α plays a major role in various acute inflammatory diseases, none fully demonstrate whether TNF is necessary for the deleterious effects associated with severe diseases. The use of TNF-deficient animals can help to answer this question. Interestingly, we demonstrated that in TNF- α /lymphotoxin- α deficient animals, LPS-induced lethality was similar to that of control animals [59], suggesting that death following endotoxin-induced shock could occur in the absence of TNF. Furthermore, we showed that 90 minutes after LPS injection the levels of circulating IL-6 in control and knock-out animals were similar, while after 3 hours, higher levels were observed in normal mice. These results indicate that TNF is not necessary for IL-6 production although its presence further enhances it. These results contrast with experiments performed with anti-TNF- α treatments which led to a significant decrease of IL-1, IL-6 and IL-8 at any time after bacterial injection [119]. On the other hand, survival can occur even with the presence of abundant circulating levels of TNF- α . In a rabbit model of endotoxin shock we have shown that hemofiltration coupled with resin adsorption significantly protected the animals from death while the levels of circulating bioactive TNF- α remained unchanged (Tetta et al., unpublished data).

Using IL-1ra to counteract the effects of IL-1, the contribution of IL-1 to various acute inflammatory diseases including pancreatitis [120], acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) [121], and immune complex-induced colitis [122] or lung injury [123] has been similarly demonstrated. IL-1ra is capable of preventing LPS-induced lethality and most of the endotoxin-induced injury. The inhibition of inflammation by IL-1ra is associated with a decrease in detectable IL-1 and TNF- α as shown in the lungs of mice following hemorrhage and resuscitation [124]. While the decrease of inflammatory cytokines reflects reduction of the inflammatory process, it is also the direct consequence of a reduced production of IL-1 and TNF- α by activated phagocytes [125]. These observations further illustrate the auto-regulatory loops between IL-1 and TNF- α ; each can induce the other, as well as itself.

Signaling by Pro-Inflammatory Cytokine

The Nuclear Factor- κ B (NF- κ B) Pathway

The inducible transcription factor NF- κ B plays a major role in intracellular signaling, during inflammatory processes induced by stress, mitogens or cytokines. Indeed, this is one of the main nuclear factors that regulates the transcription of numerous genes, including cytokines and growth factors (especially pro-inflammatory cytokines such as TNF- α , IL-1 β , IL-6 and IL-8), cytokine receptors, stress proteins and leukocyte adhesion molecules [126, 127]. The NF- κ B family is composed of various members, p50 (NF- κ B1), p52 (NF- κ B2), p65 (RelA), RelB and c-Rel, which can form homo- and heterodimers [128]. In most cells, the complex that is commonly found is the p50p65 heterodimer which is a potent transactivator, while it is generally believed that the p50p50 homodimer is not [129]. NF- κ B is regulated by a cytoplasmic inhibitor: I κ B. This protein also is member of a large family that includes I κ B α , I κ B β , I κ B γ , I κ B ϵ and Bcl-3. All possess multiple regions of homology known as the ankyrin-repeat motifs. These motifs are also present in the precursors of p50 and p52, p105 and p100 respectively, which also behave as NF- κ B inhibitors. In unstimulated cells, NF- κ B is retained in the cytoplasm by I κ B as an inactive complex. Upon stimulation, I κ B is phosphorylated on serines 32 and 36, leading to its subsequent ubiquitination and its degradation by the 26S proteasome pathway. TNF- α and IL-1 are potent activators of NF- κ B. As represented in Figure 3, the binding of TNF- α or IL-1 to their receptors recruits adaptor molecules which lead to the activation of an NF- κ B-inducing kinase (NIK) [130]. The signaling by the TNFR1 involves a TNF receptor-associated death domain protein (TRADD) [131]. Death domains mediate protein-protein

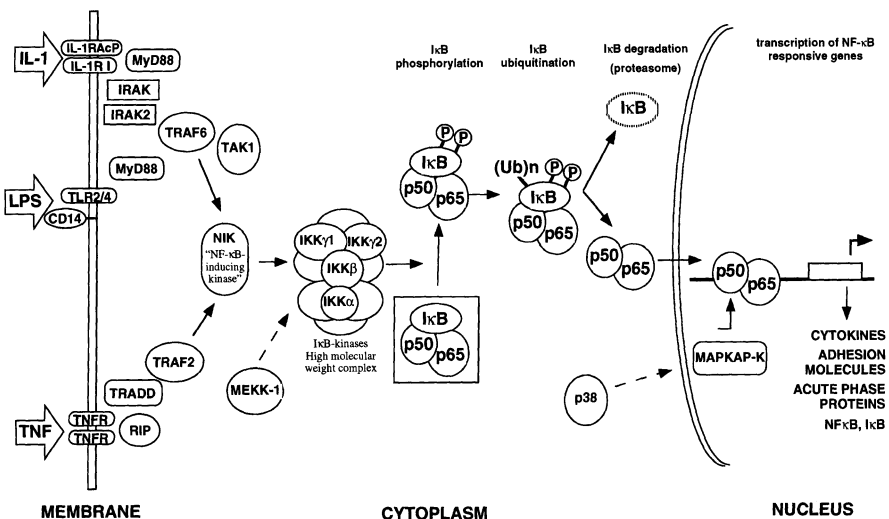


Fig. 3. Schematic cascade of NF- κ B activation by TNF- α and IL-1. See text for abbreviations

interactions; TRADD can bind to the TNF receptor-associated factor-2 (TRAF2) and to receptor interacting protein (RIP), another death domain-containing kinase [132, 133]. IL-1 signaling also uses many receptor-associated proteins. The IL-1 receptor I associates with the IL-1 receptor accessory protein (IL-1RAcP) [134], and MyD88 a death domain-containing protein. MyD88 can interact with IL-1 receptor associated kinase (IRAK) that, via TRAF6, activates NIK, a MEKK-1 related kinase [135]. MEKK-1 is a mitogen-activated protein kinase (MAPK) kinase implicated in one of the MAPK cascades (see the next section). The data about the contribution of this cascade to NF- κ B activation remains controversial. Indeed, recombinant MEKK-1 has been shown to phosphorylate I κ B *in vitro* [136] and its over expression in a fibroblastic cell line could induce NF- κ B activation during TNF stimulation through the degradation of I κ B [137]. However, another study showed that overexpression of inactive MEKK-1 has no inhibitory effect on NF- κ B activation via TRAF2, suggesting that it does not play a role in the activation of this transcription factor [138]. Thus, it would appear that NIK, rather than MEKK-1 itself, takes part in NF- κ B activation. Furthermore, NIK seems to be the convergence point of the TNF- α and IL-1-mediated NF- κ B activation, since mutant forms of NIK block the signaling from the receptors of these cytokines [130]. The final step of the kinase cascade leads to the activation of protein kinases that phosphorylate I κ B. These I κ B kinases (IKK) are associated with a high-molecular weight cytoplasmic complex [139–141]. Overexpression of NIK, but also MEKK-1 has been shown to phosphorylate and activate IKK α and β . Finally, after the degradation of I κ B, the NF- κ B dimer can translocate into the nucleus, bind to DNA and activate the transcription of target genes.

The Mitogen-Activated Protein Kinases

The MAPK cascades are the other intracellular signaling pathway activated during the inflammatory process and they also lead to the activation of numerous transcription factors. Three MAPK cascades have been described to date – the extracellular signal-regulated kinases (ERK), the c-jun N terminal kinase/stress-activated protein kinase (JNK/SAPK) and the p38 pathways (Fig. 4). The first identified cascade was that of ERK. The activation of ERK1 and 2, also known as p44 and p42, is triggered by mitogens and growth factors, while the two other cascades are strongly activated by IL-1, TNF- α , LPS and cell stress [142, 143]. c-jun is a component of the activator protein(AP)-1 transcription factor and the JNK cascade leads to its phosphorylation and an enhancement of its capacity to activate transcription. The JNK pathway contains a MAPK kinase kinase, MEKK-1, which has been shown in some experiments to take part in the activation of NF- κ B (see above). The p38 kinase is the last MAPK described to date and it has been implicated in the activation of various transcription factors and some reports suggest that it can play a role in the activation of NF- κ B. Indeed, it has been shown that a specific inhibitor of p38 (SB203580) prevented the expression of a reporter gene under the control of NF- κ B [144]. However, this was not due to an inhibition of the binding of NF- κ B to DNA. Thus, p38 does not seem to regulate I κ B phosphor-

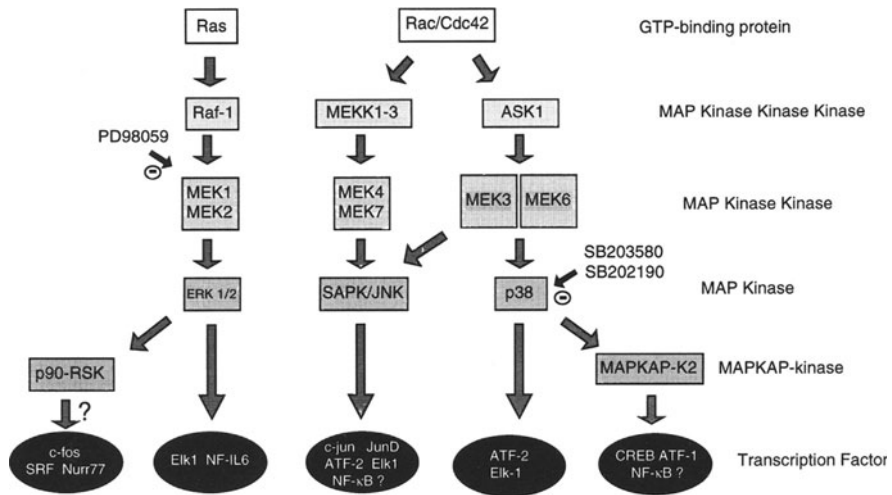


Fig. 4. Schematic representation of the three MAP kinase pathways (ERK, SAPK/JNK and p38). The ERK pathway is triggered by mitogens and growth factors while SAPK/JNK and p38 are strongly activated by endotoxin and also by cytokines such as TNF or IL-1

ylation, but most probably modulates the transactivation capacity of NF-κB via MAPKAP-kinases that in turn phosphorylate the p65 subunit. TNF and IL-1 contribute to the activation of JNK and p38 MAPK, but the molecular mechanisms between the receptors and these kinases are not completely understood. For TNF, it has been shown that TRADD, TRAF2 and RIP are implicated in the signaling leading to JNK and p38 activation [138, 145]. Furthermore, another kinase, the germinal center kinase (GCK), has been shown to interact with TRAF2 and MEKK-1 and thus could be the link between the events taking place at the receptor level and the MAPK kinase kinase [145]. For IL-1, MyD88 and IRAK are also needed for the signaling. IRAK-deficient mice showed reduced IL-1-mediated JNK and p38 activation [146]. Similarly, overexpression of MyD88 induced the activation of JNK and NF-κB while mutant forms of MyD88 inhibited their activation [135].

Inflammatory Stimuli-Induced Immune Suppression Limits the Pro-Inflammatory Cytokine Cascade

Immune depression is associated with numerous stressful conditions. Many immune responses such as delayed-type hypersensitivity, lymphoproliferative responses, NK activity, and cytokine production are diminished. Immunosuppression has often been associated with increased production of IL-10 and transforming growth factor-β (TGF-β) and levels of circulating IL-10 [147] and TGF-β [148] are increased in septic patients. Plasma IL-10 may contribute to the cell deactivation observed in septic and trauma patients [149, 150]. A similar hypothe-

sis has been proposed for TGF- β [151–153]. In addition, in humans, the use of many drugs may further modify cell reactivity [154–156].

Reduced *ex Vivo* Cytokine Production in Critically Ill Patients

Sepsis syndrome, surgery, trauma, hemorrhage and thermal injury are associated with an augmented *in vivo* production of pro- and anti-inflammatory cytokines as assessed by their increased levels in the blood stream. Paradoxically, the capacity of circulating leukocytes from these patients to produce cytokines is reduced when compared to cells from healthy controls. Although the hyporeactivity of the cells observed in septic patients has been associated with endotoxin tolerance [157], this phenomenon is specific neither for endotoxin [158] nor for septic patients. Hyporesponsiveness of circulating leukocytes and low cytokine production have been associated with immune depression observed in these patients.

Monocyte reactivity to LPS stimulation has been particularly studied in isolated monocytes and in whole-blood assays. Monocytes from septic patients show a diminished capacity to release TNF- α , IL-1 α , IL-1 β , IL-6, IL-10 and IL-12 [159–165] whereas this was not the case for IL-1ra [162]. Reduced cytokine production has also been observed with other stimuli such as silica, staphylococcal enterotoxin B (SEB), killed *Streptococcus* and *Staphylococcus* [165–168]. Similarly, in patients undergoing abdominal aortic surgery [169], cardiac surgery associated with CPB [170], or trauma [171], monocyte-derived cytokine production was significantly altered.

Similar hyporeactivity has been reported when studying neutrophils. In septic patients the production of IL-1 β , soluble IL-1ra and IL-8 by LPS-activated neutrophils is lower than in healthy controls [157, 172].

Indeed, the very first observation of the hyporeactivity of circulating leukocytes was demonstrated with peripheral blood lymphocytes. In this initial study, Wood et al. [173] reported decreased IL-2 production upon phytohemagglutinin (PHA) stimulation in major burn patients, with a more severe depression during the septic episodes. In patients undergoing surgery with or without CPB, hemorrhage and in trauma patients, reduced mitogen-induced IL-2 has been documented [171, 174–177]. The defect in IL-2 production was previously shown not to be related to a different CD4⁺/CD8⁺ ratio [174]. However, the different results obtained when different cell activators are used suggests that either the proportion of certain T-cell subsets may be modified in critically ill patients, or an alteration in cell reactivity may only occur among certain T-cell subsets [176]. Furthermore, certain monocyte subsets, particularly the human leukocyte antigen (HLA) DR⁺ cells, have a modified frequency in injured or septic patients [178], and may, as accessory cells, contribute to the different observed T cell reactivity. IL-2 production varies depending on the animal experimental models. Concanavalin (ConA)-induced IL-2 production by spleen cells was unaffected in endotoxemia [179] and reduced in trauma, hemorrhage, peritonitis, and thermal injury models [177, 180–183]. However, one should be very careful in extrapolating these data ob-

tained from animal models to the human situation. Mouse studies use spleen cells whereas human studies usually involve peripheral blood leukocytes. Circulating cells and cells within tissues are likely not affected similarly by the various stressful situations. IFN- γ *ex vivo* production was also reported to be altered in burns [183], trauma [171], hemorrhage [177], CPB [184] and in sepsis [165].

IL-2 and IFN- γ are both Th1 cytokines, therefore, it was of interest to know whether the production of Th2 cytokines was also modified during stressful situations. In sepsis, ConA-induced IL-2, IL-5, and IL-10 production by peripheral blood mononuclear cells was diminished, whereas this was not the case when PHA and anti-CD3 were employed as activation stimuli (Muret et al., unpublished data). In contrast, Miller-Graziano et al. [185] reported that PHA- and (anti-CD3 + anti-CD4)-induced IL-10 production were depressed in trauma patients. In animal models, the results depend on the insult and on the study. In experimental peritonitis following cecal ligation and puncture (CLP), ConA-induced IL-10 production by splenocytes was either enhanced [181] or reduced [186], and in models of hemorrhage, thermal injury, and trauma, ConA-induced IL-10 production was enhanced [149, 177, 182, 183, 186].

In a mouse model of severe injury (fracture + hemorrhage) it was reported that splenocytes produce more IL-5 upon stimulation by ConA, together with an increase in IL-4 and IL-10, whereas IL-2 production is decreased [182]. This animal model led Mack et al. [182] to postulate that there was a shift to a Th2-type splenocyte cytokine response after injury.

Reversibility of Immune Depression

The enhanced susceptibility of injured patients to infection is well known and associated with a depressed immune system. Attempts to restore immune cell reactivity have been made using IFN- γ . In mice, IFN- γ attenuated hemorrhage-induced suppression of macrophage and splenocyte function and decreased susceptibility to sepsis [187]. In humans, while the results did not show definite beneficial effects in severe surgery patients [188], IFN- γ restored monocyte reactivity and enhanced HLA DR⁺ frequency [189]. Other cytokines such as IL-2, IL-12, and GM-CSF could be considered to restore immune cell activity. IL-2 enhances the survival of mice in a burn and sepsis model and its activity was enhanced by the addition of lymphokine-activated killer cells [190]. IL-12 and GM-CSF were capable of reversing the LPS-induced desensitization *in vitro* as well as *in vivo* [191, 192]. Interestingly, other natural mediators, notably growth hormone [193] and prolactin [194] are capable of abrogating the immune defects associated with stressful conditions and of protecting against sepsis.

A Too Simplistic Dichotomy

The events occurring during inflammation are not as simplistic as just an interplay between pro- and anti-inflammatory actors. Indeed, the situation is far more

complex. First, the genetic background contributes to the heterogeneity of the inflammatory response in humans. Genetic polymorphisms have been reported for many pro- as well as anti-inflammatory cytokines [195–198], and, in addition, another polymorphism exists in terms of target cell reactivity in response to cytokine signaling [199]. While an excess of pro-inflammatory cytokines may be deleterious and even kill when used in animal models, these same cytokines are essential in the initiation of the anti-infectious response. More recently, their anti-inflammatory potential has even been outlined. For example, in response to an injection of myelin oligodendrocyte glycoprotein, a model which mimics human systemic sclerosis, TNF deficient mice display a more severe auto-immune mediated demyelination than their wild type counterparts [200]. In *in vitro* models, when delivered early enough to the cells, TNF can prevent the INF- γ -primed production of NO [201] or IL-12 [202]. The amount of the delivered cytokine may also influence its property. For example, while low concentrations of IL-12 exacerbated the disease in an experimental model of arthritis, IL-12 behaved as an anti-inflammatory cytokine when delivered at higher concentrations [203]. Surprisingly, INF- γ could inhibit the production of LPS-induced chemokines MIP-1 α and MIP-1 β to the same extent as IL-10 and TGF- β [204].

IL-4, IL-10, IL-13, IFN- α and TGF- β are considered as anti-inflammatory cytokines because of their capacity to inhibit the release of pro-inflammatory cytokines, to induce the production of IL-1ra and the release of soluble TNF receptor, and to limit some of the pro-inflammatory activities of IL-1 and TNF. However, many available examples illustrate that the pro- or anti-inflammatory properties of these cytokines may depend on the nature of the target cell, the nature of the stimuli the cell has encountered, the sequence of the events and the nature of the environmental factors.

While IL-4 inhibits the IL-1- or TNF-induced expression of ICAM-1 and ELAM-1 on the surface of endothelial cells, it favors the expression of VCAM-1, allowing the adherence of basophils and eosinophils [205]. Also, IL-4 inhibits the LPS-induced production of IL-8 by macrophages, but amplifies that of endothelial cells [206]. Similarly, while IL-13 diminishes chemokine production in activated macrophages, it induces the synthesis of MCP-1 in endothelial cells [207]. Whether a mediator exerts an inhibiting or, on the contrary, an enhancing property may also be linked to the timing of its exposure to the target cells. For example, IL-4 and IL-13 inhibit IL-6, IL-12, MCP-1 and TNF production when added simultaneously to activated monocytes whereas they enhance the production of these cytokines when they are delivered before the activating signals [208–210]. IL-4, which can block TNF production by LPS-activated freshly isolated monocytes, is unable to inhibit the TNF production by 7-day cultured monocytes stimulated by LPS but can block the IL-1 production [211]. The nature of the activator results in a different profile; IL-4 was shown not to interfere with the production of RANTES (regulated on activation, normal T expressed and secreted) by human monocytes activated by IFN- γ whereas it amplified it when the cells were activated by TNF [212]. Similarly, IL-13 inhibits TNF and IL-8 production in human whole blood assays in the presence of LPS while it does not modify the TNF production when heat killed streptococci are used as activators [213].

The nature of the responding cell may also influence the quality of the modulation of the response by TGF- β . While TGF- β 1 limited the production of IL-1 α and IL-8 in macrophages, it induced their production in epithelial cells [214].

IL-10 which is undoubtedly an anti-inflammatory cytokine, has been shown in various models to behave differently. IL-10 may well have some pro-inflammatory properties. Evidence from *in vivo* work (graft rejection [215], ocular inflammation [216], auto-immune diseases [217], anti-tumor activity [218]) suggests that in some circumstances, IL-10 may also behave as an immunostimulatory and/or pro-inflammatory cytokine. Injection of an adenocarcinoma expressing IL-10 gene results in a far more severe local inflammation than the non-transfected adenocarcinoma, as evaluated in terms of the presence of MCP-1 and inducible NOS, of leukocyte infiltrate and expression of adherence molecules [219]. Some *in vitro* reports have shown that IL-10 could also favor certain aspects of the inflammatory response. Thus, IL-10 induced E-selectin expression on small and large blood-vessel endothelial cells [220]. IL-10 may behave differently depending on the nature of the target cells. For example, a consistent, or even enhanced, production of IL-8 has been reported by dendritic cells [221] and endothelial cells [206]. While IL-10 could perfectly repress the production of IL-8 by LPS-activated blood neutrophils, such inhibition could not be obtained when neutrophils were derived from the sputum of patients with chronic bronchial sepsis [222]. While IL-10 repressed the production of NO by macrophages or keratinocytes [223, 224], it did not modify its release by mesangial cells [225] and even enhanced the production of NO by bone marrow derived macrophages and osteoclasts [226, 227]. The inhibitory capacity of IL-10 may also depend on the nature of the triggering agent. For example, the modulatory activity of IL-10 on the proliferation or the cytotoxic activity of CD8⁺ T lymphocytes was different when cells were activated with allogenic monocytes, anti-CD3 antibodies or IL-2 [228]. IL-10 repressed the LPS-induced IL-8 production by neutrophils but not TNF- α -induced IL-8 production [229]. We have shown in *in vitro* experimental studies that IL-10 primed leukocytes and led to enhanced production of TNF and IL-6 upon further stimulation by LPS. The prevention of monocyte adherence by red cells in the whole-blood assays or by cultures of peripheral blood mononuclear cells on teflon, contributed to this observation [230]. Altogether, these results indicate that IL-10-induced modulation of cytokine production depends on the *in vitro* experimental procedures used and on the *in vivo* localization of the event. A similar effect has been reported concerning the pre-treatment with IL-10 of human cell clones which then produced higher levels of IL-2, IL-4, IFN- γ , and TNF [231]. This observation was shown to be associated with the anti-apoptotic property of IL-10 on T cells. On T lymphocytes infected with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), IL-10 was shown to act synergistically with TNF to favor viral replication and even to induce the production of TNF [232]. On other cells such as mast cells, IL-10 can behave differently. IL-10 can inhibit cytokine generation by mast cells [233] but can act synergistically with c-Kit ligand to increase cyclooxygenase-2 expression and PGD₂ production [234].

IL-6 is also considered as an anti-inflammatory cytokine, mainly for its action on hepatocytes and its capacity to induce the production of acute phase proteins

which are essentially anti-inflammatory. However, in contrast, IL-6 can induce bone resorption [235], muscle atrophy [236], anemia [237] and can prime neutrophils for the production of PAF and superoxide anion [99, 100]. While IL-6 does not activate endothelial cells, it induces MCP-1, MCP-3, and IL-8 production, signal transducer and activator of transcription (STAT)-3 activation, and ICAM-1 expression, in the presence of its soluble receptor which is naturally found in plasma [102].

Another fascinating example of discordance between dogma and reality is given by the effect of cortisol infusion in human volunteers. While an injection of LPS at the end of the cortisol infusion did not lead to detectable circulating TNE, the same injection 14 to 144 h after the infusion led to far higher levels of TNF and IL-6 as compared with the same volunteers who did not receive the cortisol treatment [238]. Other examples will almost certainly appear in the next few months, illustrating, if necessary, that we still have a lot to understand and should be very careful when analyzing the inflammatory response during SIRS.

Conclusion

The generation of pro-inflammatory cytokines and the capacity of some of them to further induce the production of others within self-amplifying loops plays a major role in the perpetuation of the inflammatory process. However, most inflammatory mediators can be induced by other signals, such as microbial derived products or ischemia, activating the coagulation cascade and the complement system. The capacity of the pro-inflammatory cytokines to further induce a wide type of inflammatory mediator is characteristic of their activities. Of course natural counter-regulation occurs through the generation of acute phase proteins, anti-inflammatory cytokines, endogenous corticoids and heat shock proteins. These later events, together with the reduced capacity of circulating leukocytes to further produce cytokines, may reflect what Louis Pasteur called "Natura medicatrix". When this natural negative regulation appears insufficient, in many animal model of severe inflammation, the therapeutical blocking of the induction or the activities of the major pro-inflammatory cytokines has been demonstrated to be helpful. In human, such approaches have so far been rather disappointing in patients with acute inflammation and systemic inflammatory response syndrome but appear highly promising in some chronic inflammatory diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis or Crohn's disease.

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