

Original Research Article

Inhibition of miR-665 alleviates lipopolysaccharide-induced inflammation via up-regulation of SOCS7 in chondrogenic ATDC5 cells

Qiaoyi Ning^{1,2}, Yiting He^{3*}, Wukai Ma², Fang Tang², Ying Huang², Xueming Yao²

¹The 2nd Clinical School, Guangzhou University of Chinese Medicine, Guangzhou City, Guangdong Province 510120,

²Department of Rheumatology and Immunology, The 2nd hospital affiliated to Guizhou University of Chinese Traditional Medicine, Guiyang City, Guizhou Province 550003, ³Department of New Drug Development, the 2nd Clinical School, Guangzhou University of Chinese Medicine, Guangzhou City, Guangdong Province 510120, China

*For correspondence: **Email:** YitingHedjk@163.com; **Tel:** +86-20-81887233-31011

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Abstract

Purpose: To examine the effect and mechanism of action of miR-665 in osteoarthritis.

Methods: An *in vitro* inflammatory injury model of osteoarthritis was established using chondrogenic ATDC5 cells with lipopolysaccharide (LPS) treatment. The expression levels of inflammatory cytokines were determined by enzyme-linked immunosorbent assays (ELISAs) and by quantitative real-time polymerase chain reaction (qRT-PCR). A binding target for miR-665 was predicted using TargetScan and then evaluated using a dual-luciferase reporter assay.

Results: Treatment with LPS significantly up-regulated the inflammatory cytokine expressions of interleukin-1 β (IL-1 β), IL-6, and tumor necrosis factor- α (TNF- α), in ATDC5 cells ($p < 0.01$), and the expression of miRNA-665 was significantly increased in LPS-treated ATDC5 cells ($p < 0.01$). Knockdown of miR-665 down-regulated the expression levels of these inflammatory cytokines. Suppressor of cytokine signaling 7 (SOCS7) was identified as a target of miR-665. Data from qRT-PCR and western-blot analyses indicated that SOCS7 expression was promoted by miR-665 inhibition and inhibited by miR-665 over-expression. LPS treatment significantly decreased the expression of SOCS7 protein in ATDC5 cells ($p < 0.01$), and over-expression of SOCS7 attenuated the LPS-stimulated inflammatory injury. In addition, over-expression of miR-665 enhanced the inflammatory injury and reversed the protective effect of SOCS7 against LPS-stimulated inflammation.

Conclusion: Inhibition of miR-665 alleviated LPS-stimulated inflammatory injury in ATDC5 cells via the up-regulation of SOCS7, suggesting a potential therapeutic target for osteoarthritis.

Keywords: MiR-665, Lipopolysaccharide, Inflammation, SOCS7, Chondrogenic, ATDC5

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INTRODUCTION

The clinical manifestations of osteoarthritis, including recurrent joint pain and the progressive worsening of joint-movement disorders, has a

large impact on the health of the elderly around the world [1]. Chondrocytes are regarded as the main biomechanical elements leading to osteoarthritis [2], and osteoarthritis is strongly affected by chondrocyte inflammation [2]. Although joint-replacement therapy may be

recommended at later stages of osteoarthritis [2], new therapeutic targets are urgently needed to inhibit chondrocyte inflammation. Research has indicated that microRNAs (miRNAs) play a critical role in the regulation of osteogenesis, and affect the catabolism and anabolism of bone and cartilage [3]. A newly discovered inflammatory regulator, miRNA-665, has been shown to reduce inflammation and apoptosis during intestinal ischemia/reperfusion [4] and is now known to be associated with osteogenic differentiation of adipogenic stem cells [5]. However, its effects on inflammation in osteoarthritis have yet to be reported. Suppressor of cytokine signaling (SOCS) proteins, significant physiological regulators of cytokine responses, have demonstrated significant implications for osteoarthritis pathology [6]. For example, SOCS1 has been shown to negatively regulate the inflammatory response in osteoarthritis cartilage [7]. However, whether SOCS proteins are involved in miR-665 regulation of osteoarthritis has not been determined.

In the present study, we first determined the expression level of miR-665 in lipopolysaccharide- (LPS) induced chondrogenic ATDC5 cells, and then investigated both the effect of miR-665 on inflammation in ATDC5 cells and the underlying mechanism. The results suggest that miR-665 is a potential therapeutic target for osteoarthritis.

EXPERIMENTAL

Cell culture

Chondrogenic ATDC5 cells were cultured in Dulbecco's Modified Eagle's Medium (Thermo Fisher Scientific, Rockford, IL, USA) supplemented (for cell growth) with 10% fetal bovine serum (HyClone, Logan, UT, USA) in a 37°C incubator with a 5% CO₂ atmosphere. At 80% confluency, cells were treated with LPS (10 µg/ml, Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA) for 5 h before subsequent experiments.

Cell transfections

For the over-expression of SOCS7, its full-length sequence was introduced into the pcDNA3.1 vector (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA, USA). A miRNA-665 mimic, an inhibitor, and negative-control constructs were synthesized by GenePharma (Shanghai, China). Chondrogenic ATDC5 cells, with or without LPS treatment, were seeded (1 × 10⁶ cells per well) and then transfected with the miR-665 mimic, inhibitor (both at 100nM), pcDNA-SOCS7 (300 µg), or the

corresponding negative controls using Lipofectamine 2000. Two days later, transfection efficiency was evaluated.

Assessment of inflammatory cytokines

ELISA kits (R & D Systems, Minneapolis, MN, USA) were used to detect levels of IL-1β, IL-6 and TNF-α in the culture supernatant of ATDC5.

Quantitative real-time polymerase chain reaction (qRT-PCR)

Total RNA or miRNAs from ATDC5 cells were isolated and then reverse-transcribed into cDNA. SYBR Green Master Mix (Roche, Mannheim, Germany) was used for the qRT-PCR analyses with endogenous controls (GAPDH or U6). The primer sequences are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The forward (F) and reverse (R) primer sequences used in the study.

ID	Sequence (5'-3')
GAPDH F	5'-CAAAGCCAGAGTCCTTCAGA-3'
GAPDH R	5'-GATGGTCTTGGTCCTTAGCC-3'
IL-6 F	5'-GACAACCTTGGCATTGTGG-3'
IL-6 R	5'-ATGCAGGGATGATGTTCTG-3'
IL-1β F	5'-AGCAGCTTTTCGACAGTGAGG-3'
IL-1β R	5'-CTCCACGGGCAAGACATAGG-3'
TNF-α F	5'-GAACTGGCAGAAGAGGCACT-3'
TNF-α R	5'-GGTCTGGGCCATAGAACTGA-3'
miR-665 F	5'-ACCAGGAGGCTGAGGCCCT-3'
miR-665 R	5'-AACGAGACGACGACAGACTTT-3'
SOCS7 F	5'-CCAGCTCCAGGAGACTTAACA-3'
SOCS7 R	5'-CTGGTACGAGACAGCTCTGAT-3'
U6 F	5'-CTCGCTTCGGCAGCAC-3'
U6 R	5'-AACGCTTCACGAATTTGCGT-3'

Dual-luciferase reporter assay

Both wild type and mutant SOCS7 sequences were subcloned into the pmirGLO luciferase-reporter vector (Promega, Madison, Wisconsin, USA).

Chondrogenic ATDC5 cells were seeded (3 × 10⁴/well), and then co-transfected with the luciferase-reporter vectors along with miR-665 inhibitor, or negative control. After 48 h, luciferase activity was assayed using the Lucifer Reporter Assay System (Promega).

Western-blot analysis

Cells were lysed using RIPA buffer (Beyotime Institute of Biotechnology, Beijing, China). Lysates (30 µg) were separated using SDS-PAGE, and then transferred to PVDF membranes. The PVDF membranes were blocked using 5% fat-free milk, and then incubated overnight at 4°C with primary

antibodies against SOCS7 (1:1500; Abcam, Cambridge, MA, USA) and β -actin (1:3000). Following incubation with an HRP-labeled secondary antibody (1:5000; Abcam), protein signals were visualized and quantified using Quantity One 4.6.2 software (Bio-Rad, Hercules, CA, USA).

Statistical analysis

All results were expressed as means \pm SEMs. Using GraphPad Prism 7.0 software, the data were evaluated using a one-way analysis of variance. $p < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

RESULTS

LPS-induced inflammatory response, and up-regulation of miR-665 expression in ATDC5 cells

Data from the qRT-PCR analyses (Figure 1 A, left panel) indicated that LPS treatment (10 μ g/ml) significantly up-regulated the mRNA expression levels of pro-inflammatory factors (IL-1 β , IL-6, and TNF- α) in ATDC5 cells. This LPS-induced inflammatory response in ATDC5 cells was also confirmed by ELISA, as demonstrated by the up-regulation of pro-inflammatory factors (Figure 1 A, right panel). Furthermore, miR-665 was up-regulated in LPS-stimulated ATDC5 cells (Figure 1 B), suggesting a possible regulatory role for miR-665 in osteoarthritis.

Inhibition by miR-665 alleviated the LPS-stimulated inflammatory response

First, the transfection efficiency of the miR-665 inhibitor was confirmed (Figure 2 A), and then both the qRT-PCR and ELISA analyses indicated that the miR-665 inhibitor dramatically down-regulated the pro-inflammatory factors in LPS-induced ATDC5 cells (Figure 2 B).

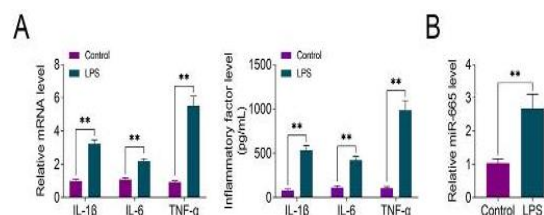


Figure 1: LPS-induced inflammatory response, and up-regulation of miR-665 expression in ATDC5 cells. (A) Effect of LPS on mRNA and protein expressions of IL-1 β , IL-6 and TNF- α in ATDC5 cells determined by qRT-PCR (left) and ELISA (right). (B) Effect of LPS on miR-665 expression in ATDC5 cells determined by qRT-PCR; ** $p < 0.01$

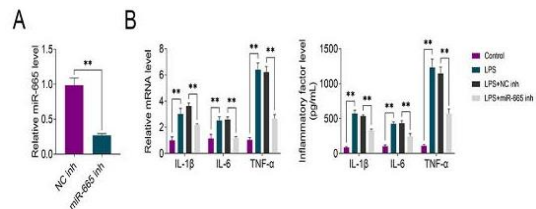


Figure 2: Inhibition of miR-665 alleviated the LPS-stimulated inflammatory response. (A) Transfection efficiency of the miR-665 inhibitor in LPS-induced ATDC5 cells. (B) Effect of the miR-665 inhibitor on mRNA and protein expressions of IL-1 β , IL-6 and TNF- α in ATDC5 cells assessed by qRT-PCR (left) and ELISA (right); ** $p < 0.01$

SOCS7 as a binding target for miR-665

Using a TargetScan analysis, SOCS7 was identified as a potential binding target for miR-665 (Figure 3 A). Application of the miR-665 inhibitor decreased the luciferase activity of the wild type SOCS7 reporter vector, while the same inhibitor had no significant effect on the mutant SOCS7 reporter (Figure 3 B), confirming the binding ability between miR-665 and SOCS7. Furthermore, SOCS7 mRNA expression was up-regulated in ATDC5 cells transfected with the miR-665 inhibitor (Figure 3 C).

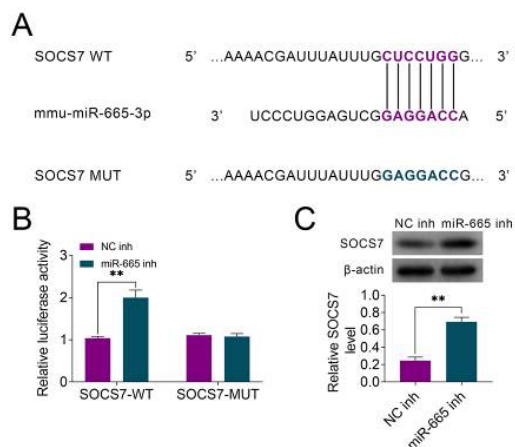


Figure 3: SOCS7 was identified as a target for miR-665 binding. (A) Potential binding site for miR-665 in SOCS7, and the corresponding mutant binding site. (B) Effect of miR-665 inhibition on luciferase activity in wild type and mutant SOCS7 luciferase-reporter vectors in ATDC5 cells determined by a dual-luciferase reporter assay. (C) Effect of the miR-665 inhibitor on SOCS7 mRNA and protein expressions in ATDC5 cells determined by qRT-PCR; ** $p < 0.01$

Over-expression of SOCS7 alleviated the LPS-stimulated inflammatory response

In ATDC5 cells, LPS induced a significant decrease of SOCS7 (Figure 4 A), while over-

expression of SOCS7 reversed this LPS-induced SOCS7 suppression (Figure 4 A). In addition, over-expression of SOCS7 reduced the LPS-stimulated increase in mRNA and protein levels of pro-inflammatory factors (Figure 4 B).

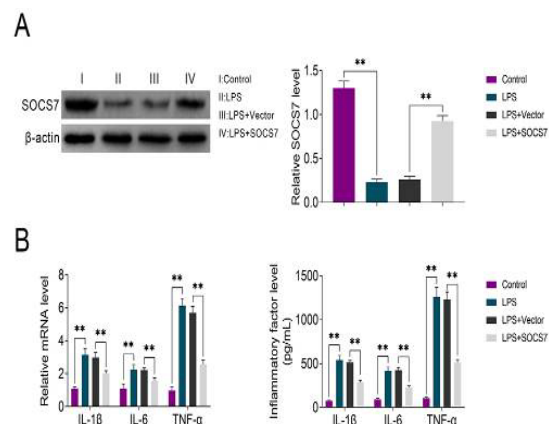


Figure 4: Over-expression of SOCS7 alleviated the LPS-stimulated inflammatory response. (A) Effect of LPS on SOCS7 protein expression in ATDC5 cells determined by western-blot analysis. (B) Effect of LPS and SOCS7 on mRNA and protein expressions of IL-1 β , IL-6, and TNF- α in ATDC5 cells determined by qRT-PCR and ELISA analyses; ** $p < 0.01$

MiR-665 promoted the inflammatory response by down-regulating SOCS7

First, the transfection efficiency of the miR-665 mimic was determined (Figure 5 A), and then both the qRT-PCR and ELISA analyses revealed that SOCS7 over-expression counteracted the effect of the miR-665 mimic on the expression levels of the pro-inflammatory factors in LPS-treated ATDC5 cells (Figure 5 B).

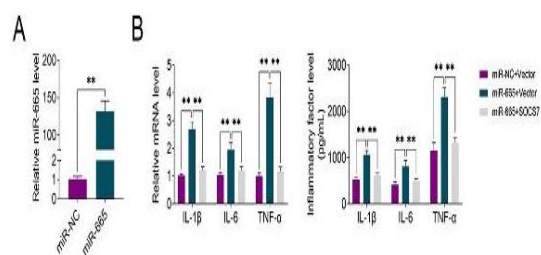


Figure 5: MiR-665 promoted an inflammatory response via down-regulation of SOCS7. (A) The transfection efficiency of the miR-665 mimic in LPS-treated ATDC5 cells. (B) Effect of the miR-665 mimic and SOCS7 on mRNA and protein expressions of IL-1 β , IL-6, and TNF- α in ATDC5 cells determined by qRT-PCR (left) and ELISA (right) analyses. ** $p < 0.01$

DISCUSSION

To date, 16 miRNAs have been found to be dysregulated in patients with osteoarthritis compared to people with normal cartilage [8]. Here, we evaluated the effect and underlying mechanism of miR-665 in a model of osteoarthritis.

Although osteoarthritis has traditionally been regarded as a non-inflammatory disease, inflammatory responses have been shown to contribute to its pathogenesis [9]. Inflammatory responses in articular cartilage promote the secretion of pro-inflammatory factors from chondrocytes, and result in the degeneration of articular cartilage and the development of osteoarthritis [10].

Lipopolysaccharide is known, both *in vitro* and *in vivo*, to stimulate inflammatory responses via increases in pro-inflammatory factors [11]. In addition, the chondrogenic cell line, ATDC5, has long been used as an *in vitro* model for chondrogenesis [12]. Recently, an LPS-stimulated chondrocyte model was developed for investigating the pathogenesis of osteoarthritis [13]. In the present study, LPS-treated ATDC5 cells have been established as a model for testing new drugs against osteoarthritis.

Previous research has shown that LPS treatment can promote the secretion of pro-inflammatory factors such as IL-1 β , IL-6, and TNF- α [11]. Here, we demonstrate that the expressions of pro-inflammatory factors were also increased in LPS-treated ATDC5 cells, suggesting that the treatment represents an inflammatory injury to these cells. IL-1 β functions as an important regulator of the inflammatory response, promoting chondrocyte apoptosis, and articular cartilage damage during the development of osteoarthritis [14].

Interleukin 6 mediates the proliferation and activation of T- and B-cells in the inflammatory process [15], and tumor necrosis factor- α also acts as a trigger for the inflammatory response [11]. Inhibition of these pro-inflammatory factors has been shown to be promising for ameliorating inflammatory injuries in osteoarthritis [11].

Moreover, it has been reported that miR-665 was up-regulated in LPS-stimulated ATDC5 cells, indicating that miR-665 participates in osteoarthritis regulation. Consistent with previous research [4], we have demonstrated a loss-of-function assay showing that miR-665 inhibition decreased the secretion of pro-inflammatory

factors, effectively relieving osteoarthritis inflammatory injury.

Although we have demonstrated an anti-inflammatory effect of miR-665 inhibition in LPS-treated ATDC5 cells, an underlying mechanism is still unclear. We identified SOCS7 as a binding target for miR-665 in this study, and as a member of the SOCS protein family regulating cytokine responses, SOCS7 has been implicated in allergic inflammation of mast cells via thymic stromal lymphopoietin [16], in insulin resistance [17], and over-expression of SOCS7 attenuated the inflammation in mice with unilateral urethral obstruction [18]. This study has shown that LPS stimulated a decrease in SOCS7, and that over-expression of SOCS7 relieved inflammation by decreasing the expression of pro-inflammatory factors.

Moreover, the anti-inflammatory effect of SOCS7 was reversed by an miR-665 mimic, revealing the critical role of the miR-665/SOCS7 axis for mediating LPS-stimulated inflammatory injury in ATDC5 cells. However, a previous study has shown that nuclear factor- κ B, SRY-related high-mobility-group box 9-related, and other signaling pathways are also associated with miRNA regulation in osteoarthritis pathogenesis [19], so the signaling pathways associated with regulation of the miR-665/SOCS7 axis in osteoarthritis also need further investigation.

CONCLUSION

MicroRNA-665 exhibits a pronounced pro-inflammatory effect in LPS-induced inflammation in ATDC5 cells; inhibition of miR-665 is manifested as an anti-inflammatory effect in this model of osteoarthritis via regulation of SOCS7. These findings reveal that the miR-665/SOCS7 axis may be a new potential therapeutic target for osteoarthritis.

DECLARATIONS

Acknowledgement

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Competing interests

The authors state that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

Availability of data and materials

All data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this published article.

Contribution of authors

We declare that this work was done by the authors named in this article and all liabilities pertaining to claims relating to the content of this article will be borne by the authors. QYN and YTH conceived and designed the experiments. WKM and FT analyzed and interpreted the results of the experiments. YH and XMY performed the experiments.

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