Oxazolone-induced gastrointestinal disorders enhance the oral transmission of AA amyloidosis in mice

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RUNNING HEAD: Oral transmission of AA amyloidosis
Abstract

Amyloid A (AA) amyloidosis is a lethal disease characterized by systemic AA amyloid deposition, and it is reported in many animal species. Despite experiments have shown that AA amyloidosis can be transmitted orally, horizontal transmission and cross-species transmission are concerns, the transmission mechanism has been unknown. In this study, we examined the oral transmission efficiency of AA amyloidosis using oxazolone-induced gastrointestinal disorder mice. As a result, the upper or lower gastrointestinal disorder groups developed more severe amyloid deposition in systemic tissues than the group without gastrointestinal disorders. The results of this study suggest that gastrointestinal damage promotes the oral transmission of AA amyloidosis.

Keywords: AA amyloidosis, gastrointestinal disorder, mouse, oral transmission, oxazolone.
Amyloidosis is a progressive and intractable disease caused by systemic or localized amyloid deposition. Amyloid A (AA) amyloidosis is a systemic amyloidosis that has been reported as a fatal disease in various animal species [7, 16]. AA amyloidosis is secondary to chronic inflammatory diseases, such as rheumatoid arthritis [15], but the detailed pathogenic mechanism has not yet been elucidated. Experimentally, AA amyloidosis can be induced by the long-term administration of inflammatory stimuli, such as silver nitrate and casein [19]. In addition, the inoculation of splenic extracts derived from AA amyloidosis-affected donor animals to other recipient animals with inflammation leads to the rapid development of AA amyloidosis. This phenomenon is known as “transmission of AA amyloidosis”, and the inoculated extract is called “amyloid-enhancing factors” (AEF) [14]. Amyloid fibrils in the AEF are thought to act as seeds for amyloid deposition in the recipient animals [12]. Since the oral transmission of AA amyloidosis has been demonstrated experimentally [13], there are concerns about horizontal transmission among animals or cross-species transmission from animals to humans similar to prion diseases. Despite these concerns, the mechanism of the oral transmission of AA amyloidosis has not yet been elucidated due to the lack of appropriate animal models that are useful for pathological analyses. The transmission efficiency of amyloid by oral administration is much lower than that by intravenous or intraperitoneal administration. As such, an oral transmission model requires long-term administration or a large amount...
of AEF, leading to low reproducibility between experiments [10, 11].

In prion diseases, oral exposure is involved in the transmissible pathogenesis [5, 8]. During the transmission of prion diseases, abnormal prion proteins are absorbed and amplified in Peyer’s patches, and this pathway is thought to play an important role in the pathogenesis of prion diseases [3]. Recently, it has been reported that inflammation in the intestinal tract enhances the absorption of abnormal prion proteins and exacerbates the disease pathology [18]. In this study, we hypothesized that AA amyloidosis involves an oral transmission mechanism similar to that of prion diseases. Therefore, oral transmission experiments were carried out using mice with experimentally induced upper or lower gastrointestinal disorders.

In all experiments, 6-week-old female C57BL/6J mice (Japan SLC, Hamamatsu, Japan) were used. All mice were bred under conventional conditions with ad libitum access to food and water. The research protocols were approved by the Animal Care and Use Committee at the Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology (Approved No. 31-47), and the research was performed according to the guidelines for animal experiments at the university.

4-Ethoxymethylene-2-phenyl-2-oxazolin-5-one (OXA; Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA) was used to induce enteritis. As an AEF, amyloid fibrils were extracted from the spleen and liver of AA amyloidosis-affected mice using Pras’ method [17].
Lipopolysaccharide (LPS; O111: B4, Sigma-Aldrich) was used as an inflammatory stimulus.

At first, an OXA-induced upper or lower gastrointestinal disorder model was developed (Experiment 1). The following procedures were used with reference to previous research [21]. Three mice were allocated into each experimental group, i.e., the orally OXA-treated group and the intracolonically OXA-treated group. On day 0, the dorsal skin of the mice was shaved, and 150 µl of 3% (w/v) oxazolone diluted with an equal amount of acetone and olive oil was dropped onto the shaved area. On day 7, 100 µl of 1% (w/v) oxazolone diluted with 50% ethanol was administered orally or intracolonically to the mice under anesthesia. Necropsy was performed on day 10. From day 0 to day 7, there was no weight loss in either group after the initial exposure to OXA. Then, both groups showed a slight weight loss after the second exposure to OXA (day 7 to day 9), but the body weights had begun to recover at necropsy (day 10) in both groups. Throughout the experiment period, there was no significant change in body weight among the groups (Supplementary Fig. 1a). At necropsy, mice were euthanized by exsanguination under deep anesthesia with 4% isoflurane, and tissue samples of the stomach, duodenum, and colon were collected. Histologically, typical oxazolone-induced allergic inflammation was observed in both groups. In the oral administration group, erosion and severe transmural inflammatory cell infiltration with neutrophils were observed in the stomach (Fig. 1a). In
the intracolonic administration group, mild erosion and moderate inflammatory cell 
infiltration was confirmed (Fig. 1b). For the quantification of gastrointestinal 
inflammation, hematoxylin and eosin-stained upper and lower gastrointestinal tissues 
were evaluated on a 7-point scale based on the scoring criterion of chemically induced 
enteritis proposed by Erben et al. [4]. The mean inflammation scores of the oral and 
intracolonic groups were 5 and 4, respectively (Supplementary Table 1). In the oral 
administration group, inflammation was limited to the stomach, and was not observed in 
the lower intestine.

Next, we examined the oral transmission of AA amyloidosis using the 
oxazolone-induced gastrointestinal disorder mice model developed above (Experiment 2). 
Thirty-seven mice were allocated into groups A to F (Supplementary Table 1). From day 0 
to day 10, upper gastrointestinal disorders were induced in groups C and D, and lower 
gastrointestinal disorders were induced in groups E and F using the same procedures as 
in experiment 1. On day 10, mice in groups B, D, and F were orally inoculated with 30 
µg/g body weight of amyloid fibrils. All mice were inoculated with 2 mg/kg body weight of 
LPS intraperitoneally twice per week from day 10 to day 38, and necropsied on day 41. In 
groups C to F, which were treated with oxazolone, the body weight change from day 0 to 
day 10 was similar to that in experiment 1 (Supplementary Fig. 1b). After the 
administration of LPS (Groups A, C, and E) or LPS and AEF (Groups B, D, and F) on day
10, rapid weight loss was observed in all groups. From day 12 to day 14, the body weight
began to recover in all groups, and on day 17, it had recovered to the same level as on day
10. After day 10, there were no significant differences in body weight among the groups.
At necropsy, mice were euthanized by exsanguination after deep anesthesia with 4%
isoflurane, and the liver, spleen, kidney, heart, lung, stomach, duodenum, and colon were
collected. Histologically, in the orally OXA-treated groups (groups C and D),
-inflammatory cell infiltration was very mild, and no mucosal damage was observed (Fig.
1c). In the intracolonically OXA-treated groups (groups E and F), mild inflammatory cell
infiltration was observed in the lamina propria (Fig. 1d). The scores in both the orally
OXA-treated groups (groups C and D) and the intracolonically OXA-treated groups
(groups E and F) were significantly lower than those in the groups in experiment 1 (Fig.
2), and comparable to those in the OXA-untreated group (group B). These results indicate
that the gastrointestinal inflammation in both groups had recovered to the normal level
by the time of necropsy.

Amyloid deposition was determined by polarization microscopy of Congo red-stained
specimens. The degree of amyloid deposition in each tissue was scored as follows: score 0,
no deposition; 1, mild deposition only in the vessel walls; 2, mild deposition in the vessel
walls and interstitial tissues; 3, moderate deposition in the vessel walls and interstitial
tissues; and 4, severe deposition in the vessel walls and interstitial tissues. No amyloid
depositions were observed in any tissues in groups A, C, and E, which did not receive AEF (Fig. 3). In group B, moderate amyloid deposition that was limited to the spleen was observed in one case. In contrast, in four cases in each of groups D and F, mild-to-severe amyloid deposits were observed in various organs, although mainly in the spleen (Fig. 4a). The average score of each tissue in individual mice was calculated as the amyloid-index (AI) score. The mean AI score of group D was significantly higher than that of group B (Supplementary Fig. S2). By immunohistochemistry (IHC) with anti-mouse serum AA polyclonal antibody (Cloud-Clone Corp., Houston, TX, USA) as the primary antibody, the amyloid deposits were positive for amyloid A, and they were diagnosed as AA amyloidosis (Fig. 4b).

In this study, the groups with OXA-induced gastrointestinal disorders developed a more severe AA amyloidosis pathology than the group without gastrointestinal disorders. In general, oxazolone-induced colitis is characterized by acute inflammation that occurs 3 to 4 days after OXA treatment and subsequent rapid recovery [6]. In this study as well, the body weight changes and pathological findings suggest that the inflammatory symptoms improved rapidly in both the orally and intracolonically OXA-treated groups. Therefore, it is unlikely that inflammatory stimulation in the intestinal tract is a direct etiology of amyloidosis. Regarding prion diseases, sensitivity to ingested abnormal prion proteins was increased by experimental bacterial enteritis in a mouse model [18]. In the
mouse model, it was suggested that the enhancement of the antigen-uptake capacity of M cells and mononuclear phagocytes in Peyer’s patches, which are associated with inflammatory reactions, affects the uptake and amplification of abnormal prion proteins [3]. Although further analyses will be required, this study also suggests that the activation of gastrointestinal immunity associated with damage to the mucosal barrier and inflammation may have increased the uptake of amyloid in the intestinal tract, leading to systemic amyloid deposition. However, it should also be noted that not only enteritis, but also the presence of minor oral wounds has been reported to be involved in prion disease pathology [2]. In this study, the OXA-treated mice had developed mucosal erosions in the early stages, so it is also necessary to consider the possibility that amyloid directly invaded the bloodstream.

In this study, there was no clear difference in tissue distribution of amyloid deposition between the orally and intracolonically OXA-treated mice. In the oral transmission of amyloidosis, the initial site of amyloid deposition is the spleen, which subsequently spreads throughout the body [11, 13]. In this study as well, the more severe deposition was observed in the spleen, supporting that amyloid absorbed in the gastrointestinal tract propagates to the spleen rather than being amplified at the absorption site.

Although a number of risk factors, such as enteritis or oral wounds described above, have been reported to be involved in prion disease pathology, little is understood about
the factors that influence oral transmission of AA amyloidosis [12]. In the oral
transmission of AA amyloidosis, large doses of AEF are required for inducing amyloid
deposition [11], and even higher doses are required for cross-species transmission [1, 9].
While there have been several reports of AA deposition in foods [20], the amount of
amyloid contained in these foods was very small, and it seems unlikely that the large
amount required for cross-species transmission would be ingested by humans [12].
However, the results of this study suggest the possibility that gastrointestinal tract
disorders may enhance the oral transmission of AA amyloidosis even at the low doses of
amyloid fibrils found in foods.

In conclusion, this study revealed that experimental upper and lower gastrointestinal
disorders enhanced the oral transmission of AA amyloidosis in mice. Further study is
needed to elucidate the pathogenic mechanisms of oral transmission of AA amyloidosis.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research,
authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Acknowledgements

This research was partially supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 20K15660
and Adaptable and Seamless Technology transfer Program through targetdriven R&D (A-STEP) Grant Number JPMJTM20CY.

References


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Oxazolone colitis, a Th2 colitis model resembling ulcerative colitis, is mediated by IL-13-producing NK-T cells. *Immunity*. **17**: 629–638.


**Fig. 1.** Histological features of the gastrointestinal tract. **a:** Stomach tissue from the orally oxazolone (OXA)-treated group in experiment 1. Transmural inflammatory cell infiltration and erosion are observed. **b:** Colon tissue from the intracolonically OXA-treated group in experiment 1. Infiltration of inflammatory cells is observed in the lamina propria and submucosa. **c:** Stomach tissue from the orally OXA-treated group in experiment 2. **d:** Colon tissue from the intracolonically OXA-treated group in experiment 2. Minute inflammation was observed (c, d). Hematoxylin and eosin stain. Bars = 100 µm.
Fig. 2. Comparison of the mean inflammation scores for each group. A: Scores of the stomach in the orally OXA-treated groups in experiments 1 and 2. B: Scores of the colon in the intracolically OXA-treated groups in experiments 1 and 2. In both comparisons, groups in experiment 2 showed a significant decrease in the inflammation score when compared to groups in experiment 1. Among the groups in experiment 2, there was no significant increase in the scores of the OXA-treated groups (C to F) when compared to the OXA-untreated group (B). Ex. 1, experiment 1; Ex. 2, experiment 2. The error bar indicates the standard deviation. **** p < 0.0001 vs. Ex. 1; Tukey’s test.
Fig. 3. Distribution and degree of amyloid deposition in groups A to F. The severity of amyloid deposition is represented as: 0, white; 1, yellow; 2, orange-yellow; 3, orange-red; 4, red; and ND, no data.
**Fig. 4.** Histological and immunohistochemical features of splenic amyloid deposition. **a:** In the spleen, amyloid deposition was observed around white palp. No. 1 in group D. Hematoxylin and eosin stain. **b:** Amyloid deposits were positive for AA. No. 1 in group D. Immunohistochemistry. Bars = 100 µm.
**Supplementary information**

**Supplementary Fig. 1.** Changes in the body weight in experiments 1 and 2. Each dot represents a value relative to the body weight at the start of the experiment, which was set as 1. Error bars indicate the standard deviation. Black arrowheads indicate the second administration of oxazolone. The white arrowhead indicates the administration of AEF and the first administration of lipopolysaccharide.
Supplementary Fig. 2. Comparison of the mean AI scores in groups B, D, and F. The mean AI score of group D was significantly higher than that of group B. *p < 0.05 vs. group B; *t-test.
Supplementary Table 1. Experimental groups in experiments 1 and 2.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Experiment</th>
<th>Group names</th>
<th>No. of animals</th>
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<th>AEF injection</th>
<th>Inflammation score*</th>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>0.9 ± 0.4</td>
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Abbreviations: LPS, lipopolysaccharide; AEF, amyloid enhancing factor. *mean value ± SD.