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Nature and Properties of Retinol-Binding Proteins

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Retinol-binding protein was isolated from human serum by using two different procedures. The first, similar to that employed by Kanhai, Raz & Goodman (1968), involves the following stages: (i) fractional precipitation of retinol-binding protein from serum by ammonium sulphate to yield concentrate (preparation C₁), (ii) chromatography of preparation C₁ on (a) DEAE-cellulose to give preparation C₂ and of the latter on (b) a combination of Sephadex G-75 and G-100 gels to yield preparation C₃, followed by (iii) electrophoresis preparation of C₃ on polyacrylamide gel at 5°C, yielding preparation C₄. Retinol (0.5mg) in 0.5ml of ethanol was then added to maintain saturation of the carrier protein, which was finally chromatographed on Sephadex G-75 to remove excess of buffer salts and retinol (preparation C₅).

Preparation C₅ was resolved by disc-gel electrophoresis into three components with α_1 mobility, only two of which fluoresced. The major slower-moving protein was called fraction RBP_s and the other fraction RBP_r. The third component with greatest mobility and present in only small amounts was subsequently found to bind retinol and was called fraction apo-RBP. These correspond to the fractions H₂, H₁ and A respectively reported by Raz, Shiratori & Goodman (1970).

A second, shorter, isolation procedure was developed. This involves chromatography of serum on arginine-Sepharose (6B), prepared as described by (Porath & Fornstedt, 1970), by using a gradient buffer system and concentration of the various fractions by membrane ultrafiltration. The retinol-containing fractions are detected by fluorescence and two major pure retinol-binding protein fractions can be obtained after passage of concentrates through the column three more times with various conditions of pH and salt concentration to be described. The first to be eluted from the final

column contains mainly fraction RBP_s with a trace of fraction RBP_{r1} and the second mainly fraction RBP_{r1} with a trace of a third protein, fraction RBP_{r2}, as revealed by disc-gel electrophoresis and isotachopheresis. Analysis of the pure components shows them to have the same amino acid composition, which is very similar to that reported by Kanhai *et al.* (1968). The molecular weights as determined in the ultracentrifuge and by Sephadex-gel chromatography are also the same at 21900. Both fraction RBP_r and fraction RBP_s contain 1mol of retinol/mol of protein. Evidence from u.v. and fluorescence spectra indicate that fraction RBP_r is derived from fraction RBP_s by transition of the latter to a more stable conformation. Optical-rotatory-dispersion spectra of the latter at pH 8.0 indicate that the molecule is randomly coiled.

The electrophoretic mobilities of fractions RBP_s and RBP_r were α_1 in polyacrylamide gel, in agreement with Kanhai *et al.* (1968). However, on support systems such as paper and cellulose acetate free from molecular-sieving effects and with tris buffer at pH 8.9 the true mobility is α_2 and less than that of caeruloplasmin, as shown by Glover & Walker (1964).

Insufficient evidence has been obtained yet to determine whether fraction RBP_s is the sole component in fresh serum or whether fraction RBP_r is also present or has been produced as an artifact by the isolation procedures. In other experiments with pig serum similar phenomena have been observed.

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Studies on Olfactory Receptor Mechanisms

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The olfactory neurones of higher animals, in contrast with the pheromone-receptor cells of insects, exhibit a broad stimulus specificity. The cells respond to a wide range of chemicals, though no two cells appear to have an identical specificity profile (Gestland, Lettvin & Pitts, 1965). Although a large number of speculative mechanisms have been advanced for the olfactory transduction process, few experimental investigations have been