Published in final edited form as:

J Am Chem Soc. 2012 June 6; 134(22): 9157–9159. doi:10.1021/ja302474a.

Thiamin pyrimidine biosynthesis in *Candida albicans*: a remarkable reaction between histidine and pyridoxal phosphate

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Abstract

In *S. cerevisiae* the thiamin pyrimidine is formed from histidine and pyridoxal phosphate. The origin of all of the pyrimidine atoms has been determined using labeling studies and suggests that the pyrimidine is formed using remarkable chemistry that is without chemical or biochemical precedent. Here we report the overexpression of the closely related *Candida albicans* pyrimidine synthase (THI5p) and the reconstitution and preliminary characterization of the enzymatic activity. A structure of the *C. albicans* THI5p shows PLP bound at the active site via an imine with Lys62 and His66 in close proximity to the PLP. Our data suggest that His66 of the THI5 protein is the histidine source for pyrimidine formation and that the pyrimidine synthase is a single turnover enzyme.

Keywords

Thiamin pyrimidine biosynthesis; *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*; THI5p; suicide enzyme

The thiazole **7** and the pyrimidine **10** heterocycles of thiamin are biosynthesized in *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* using chemistry that is fundamentally different from the bacterial pathway^{1,2} (Figure 1). In bacteria the thiazole is formed from deoxy-D-xylulose 5-phosphate, glycine (or tyrosine) and cysteine and the pyrimidine is formed from aminoimidazole ribotide³. In contrast, in *S. cerevisiae* the thiazole **7** is formed from NAD, glycine and an active site cysteine of the THI4 protein⁴ and the 4-amino-2-methyl-5-hydroxymethyl pyrimidine phosphate (HMP-P)(**10**) is formed from histidine and pyridoxal phosphate (PLP)^{5–9}. The origin of all of the atoms of HMP-P has been determined as shown in Figure 1 and suggests that HMP-P (**10**) is formed using remarkable chemistry that is without chemical or biochemical precedent. Genetic studies have demonstrated that HMP-P formation requires only a single gene (*THI5*)¹⁰. Here we report the overexpression of THI5p, the reconstitution of the enzymatic activity, the preliminary characterization of the reaction and a structure of the enzyme/PLP complex. These experiments suggest that the THI5 protein is the histidine source for HMP-P formation and that THI5p is a single turnover enzyme.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

THI5p purification, assay conditions, reaction characterization, MS analysis, crystallization and structure determination. This material is available free of charge via the Internet at <http://pubs.acs.org>.

The *THI5* gene from *Candida albicans* was overexpressed in *E. coli* BL21(DE3), grown in minimal medium from a pET28b vector and purified by Ni-NTA chromatography. The purified protein, has the expected molecular mass of 40408 Da. The active form of the enzyme was prepared by treating this protein with Fe(II) or Fe(III) under anaerobic conditions followed by removal of excess iron. Addition of PLP to this preparation, under aerobic conditions, yielded HMP-P (Figure 2). This reaction product was characterized by comigration with an authentic standard, by dephosphorylation to give HMP, by enzymatic conversion to thiamin monophosphate and by MS analysis. After optimization and scale-up, it was also possible to characterize the product by ^1H NMR analysis. Two remarkable features of this reaction are: 1) HMP-P formation does not require the addition of histidine or a histidine-derived metabolite and 2) the reaction was not catalytic ($\text{THI5p:HMP-P} = 1:0.5$).

^{15}N -THI5p, prepared by growing the overexpression strain in ^{15}N -ammonium chloride-containing minimal medium, produced HMP-P that upon MS analysis showed the expected M+2 peak corresponding to incorporation of 2 atoms of ^{15}N from the protein (Figure 3). This suggested the possibility that THI5p was serving as the donor of the histidine derived atoms of HMP-P.

To eliminate the possibility that HMP-P formation was dependent on the copurification of a tightly bound histidine or histidine metabolite, THI5p was treated with 8 M urea until no activity remained and then renatured by slow dialysis. The resulting protein, purified by Ni-NTA chromatography, showed 59% of the specific activity of the original preparation (Figure 4). Since denaturation destroys the active site structure, and dialysis removes any released metabolite, this experiment provides strong support for the hypothesis that the histidine derived N=C-N fragment is extracted from the THI5 protein.

The *C. albicans* THI5p sequence has six histidine residues. Of these, His18 and His66 are absolutely conserved in all species. If one of these histidine residues is the N=C-N donor, we would expect THI5p, after HMP-P formation (inactive THI5p) to show a mass deficit. However MS analysis of a tryptic digest of inactive THI5p gave fragments containing only five of the six-histidine residues; we were unable to identify a peptide containing His66 or modified His66 in samples of active and inactive enzyme. We do not yet understand why the MS analysis failed to identify this peptide. Each of the six histidine residues was then mutated in an alternative attempt to identify the histidine donor for HMP-P formation. The H18A, H128N, H234N, H273N and H323N mutants were active while the H66N mutant was inactive. This suggests that the absolutely conserved His66 might be the source of the N=C-N fragment.

X-ray crystallography of the *C. albicans* THI5p complexed to PLP provided further insight into the N=C-N source. The active site of this enzyme (Figure 5) shows PLP bound as an imine with Lys62 and His66 stacked on top of it. On the opposite face of the PLP is a cavity lined with conserved residues, presumably providing the iron binding site and the acid base residues needed to catalyze the conversion of a His-PLP adduct to HMP-P.

A starting mechanistic proposal for the conversion of PLP and histidine to HMP-P is outlined in Figure 6. In this mechanism the active site PLP imine **13** undergoes a tautomerization to give **14**. The azadiene part of **14**, activated by electron donating and electron withdrawing substituents, undergoes a formal Diels-Alder reaction with the CN double bond of His66 to give **15**. Tautomerization to **16** followed by imine hydrolysis gives **17**. Fe(III) mediated oxidation of the tertiary amine of **17** gives **18**, which can then undergo two radical mediated β -scission reactions to give **20**. After oxygen mediated regeneration of Fe(III), oxidation of **20** gives **22**. A substitution reaction, possibly mediated by Cys199

releases the HMP-P **10** from the protein. Hydrolysis of heterocumulene **21** to **24** completes the reaction.

In conclusion, active THI5p can be readily overexpressed in *E. coli*. The protein uses PLP and the active site His66 to form HMP-P. This reaction requires oxygen and Fe(III) and generates inactive THI5p. A structure of *C. albicans* THI5p shows PLP bound at the active site via an imine with Lys62 and His66 in close proximity to the PLP. A mechanistic proposal for a reaction between His66 and PLP to generate HMP-P is described. Many features of this proposal are readily testable and studies are currently underway to elucidate the mechanism of this remarkable reaction.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

Acknowledgments

We thank Pei-Jing Pai and David H. Russell (TAMU Chemistry) for obtaining ESI-MS of ¹⁴N-THI5p and ¹⁵N-THI5p and Stephanie Cologna for assistance with preliminary MALDI-TOF experiments with THI5p.

FUNDING SOURCES

This research was supported by NIH Grants DK44083 to T.P.B. and DK67081, RR015301 and GM103403 to S.E.E. and by the Robert A. Welch Foundation (A-0034)

ABBREVIATIONS

MS	Mass spectrometry
HMP	2-methyl-4-amino-5-hydroxymethylpyrimidine
HMP-P	2-methyl-4-amino-5-hydroxymethylpyrimidine phosphate
NAD	nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide

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Figure 1.
Thiamin pyrophosphate biosynthesis in *S. cerevisiae*.

Figure 2.

Reconstitution of the THI5 catalyzed reaction. A) The reconstitution reaction requires PLP and Fe(III) but is independent of added histidine. The small amount of HMP-P shown in the green trace is due to product that copurifies with THI5 and not to synthesis. B) The HMP-P forming reaction is oxygen requiring.

Figure 3. MS analysis of HMP-P formed using A) ^{14}N -THI5p and B) ^{15}N -THI5p.

Figure 4.

The THI5p denatured in urea and refolded is active. Red trace: HMP produced by THI5p before urea denaturation. Blue trace: HMP produced by THI5p after denaturation in 8 M urea and renaturation by slow dialysis.

Figure 5.
Active site of the *C. albicans* THI5p showing PLP bound via an imine to Lys62 and His66 in close proximity to the PLP.

Figure 6.
Mechanistic proposal for the formation of HMP-P from PLP and the active site His66.