Male spontaneously hypertensive rats (SHR) have higher blood pressure, a blunted pressure–natriuresis relationship, and accelerated progression of renal injury compared with female SHR. Evidence suggests testosterone as an important factor in the increased blood pressure and renal damage in male SHR. Castration and chronic blockade of the androgen receptor attenuates renal injury and decreases blood pressure in male SHR to levels seen in female SHR. More androgen receptor attenuates renal injury and decreases blood damage in male SHR. Castration and chronic blockade of the androgen receptor attenuates renal injury and decreases blood pressure and renal damage in male SHR. The aim of this study was to determine whether a gender difference exists in prostanoid production in SHR and whether sex steroids influence prostaglandin (PG) production. Thirteen-week-old intact and gonadectomized male and female SHR rats were placed in metabolic cages for 24-hour urine collection. Prostanoid excretion was determined using enzyme immunoassay. Kidneys were isolated and separated into outer and inner medulla for Western blot analysis. Female SHR had enhanced urinary excretion of PG E2 (PGE2) metabolites and thromboxane B2, an indicator of renal thromboxane production, compared with male SHR. There were no gender differences in excretion of systemic thromboxane or prostacyclin. Correspondingly, female SHR had enhanced microsomal PGE2 synthase protein expression in the renal inner medulla and greater cyclooxygenase-2 (COX-2) expression in the outer medulla. Orchidectomy was associated with increased PGE2 metabolite excretion and microsomal PGE synthase protein expression. Thromboxane B2 excretion was not affected by gonadectomy in either male or female SHR. Protein expressions of COX and cytoplasmic PGE2 synthase in the renal medulla were unchanged by gonadectomy in both sexes. These results demonstrate a sexual dimorphism in renal production of prostanoids in SHR and that PGE production is testosterone sensitive and estrogen insensitive. (Hypertension. 2005;45:406-411.)

Abstract—Male spontaneously hypertensive rats (SHR) have higher blood pressure, blunted pressure–natriuresis relationship, and accelerated progression of renal injury compared with female SHR. Renal medullary prostanoids mediate vascular tone, salt and water balance, and renin release and, as a result, are involved in the maintenance of renal blood flow and the pathogenesis of hypertension. The aim of this study was to determine whether a gender difference exists in prostanoid production in SHR and whether sex steroids influence prostaglandin (PG) production. Thirteen-week-old intact and gonadectomized male and female SHR rats were placed in metabolic cages for 24-hour urine collection. Prostanoid excretion was determined using enzyme immunoassay. Kidneys were isolated and separated into outer and inner medulla for Western blot analysis. Female SHR had enhanced urinary excretion of PG E2 (PGE2) metabolites and thromboxane B2, an indicator of renal thromboxane production, compared with male SHR. There were no gender differences in excretion of systemic thromboxane or prostacyclin. Correspondingly, female SHR had enhanced microsomal PGE2 synthase protein expression in the renal inner medulla and greater cyclooxygenase-2 (COX-2) expression in the outer medulla. Orchidectomy was associated with increased PGE2 metabolite excretion and microsomal PGE synthase protein expression. Thromboxane B2 excretion was not affected by gonadectomy in either male or female SHR. Protein expressions of COX and cytoplasmic PGE2 synthase in the renal medulla were unchanged by gonadectomy in both sexes. These results demonstrate a sexual dimorphism in renal production of prostanoids in SHR and that PGE production is testosterone sensitive and estrogen insensitive. (Hypertension. 2005;45:406-411.)

Key Words: gender ■ cyclooxygenase ■ prostaglandins ■ thromboxane ■ kidney

Received December 3, 2004; first decision December 22, 2004; revision accepted January 12, 2005.
From the Vascular Biology Center (J.C.S., D.M.P., J.S.P.) and Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology (J.C.S., J.M.S., J.S.P.), Medical College of Georgia, Augusta.
Correspondence to Jennifer C. Sullivan, Assistant Research Scientist, Medical College of Georgia, Vascular Biology Center, 1459 Laney-Walker Blvd, Augusta, GA 30912. E-mail jsullivan@mail.mcg.edu
© 2005 American Heart Association, Inc.
Hypertension is available at http://www.hypertensionaha.org
DOI: 10.1161/01.HYP.0000156879.83448.93

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porcine aortic endothelial cells, and human umbilical vein endothelial cells. Additionally, Dahl salt-sensitive female rats have lower blood pressure compared with males and higher plasma levels of PGE2 and PGJ2. These data suggest that estrogen and the female gender are associated with increased dilator prostanoids. In contrast, ex vivo testosterone treatment of aortas from female rats results in decreased PGJ2, and treatment of cultured rat aortic smooth muscle cells and guinea pig coronary artery smooth muscle cells increases TxA2 receptor density. TxA2 release is also more pronounced in mesenteric arteries from male SHR compared with females, suggesting that testosterone and the male gender are associated with enhanced constrictor prostanoid release. The aim of this study was to determine whether there is a gender difference in the renal prostanoid system in SHR and whether sex steroids influence these pathways. Gender differences in prostanoid synthesis may contribute to the elevated blood pressures in male SHR compared with females.

Methods

Animals
Male and female SHR were all studied at 12 to 13 weeks of age (Harlan Laboratories, Indianapolis, Ind) in accordance with the National Institutes of Health Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals and approved and monitored by the Medical College of Georgia committee for animal use in research and education. Rats were housed in temperature- and humidity-controlled, light-cycled quarters. Blood pressures were confirmed using the tail-cuff method. Rats were placed in metabolic cages to facilitate 24-hour urine collection. Subsets of animals were gonadectomized at 10 weeks of age and studied at 13 weeks of age. For orchidectomy surgeries, rats were anesthetized with sodium pentobarbital (50 mg/kg), and the testes were exteriorized, the spermatic cord was tied with silk suture, and testes cut free. The cut spermatic cord was returned to the inguinal canal and the wound was closed. For ovariectomy surgeries, rats were anesthetized with sodium pentobarbital (50 mg/kg) and the ovaries were exteriorized, tied off with silk suture, cut free, and the incision was closed. Ovariectomy was confirmed by uterine and body weight.

Assays and Chemicals
Urinary concentrations of electrolytes were determined by ion-selective electrodes (Synchroon EL-ISE; Beckman Instruments). Urinary protein was determined using a Bradford assay (Bio-Rad). Urinary TxB2, 2,3 dinor TxB2, 6-keto PG F1α, and PGE metabolite levels were determined by enzyme immunoassay according to manufacturer instructions (Cayman Chemical). The detection levels for TxB2 and 2,3 dinor TxB2 are 7.8 to 1000 pg/mL; TxB2 increases TxA2 receptor density. TxA2 release is also more pronounced in mesenteric arteries from male SHR compared with females, suggesting a higher degree of renal injury (55±8 and 25±6 mg per day, respectively; P<0.05). In addition, the males ingested more food and water compared with females (data not shown).

Results

Intact Animals
Age-matched male SHR were larger and had higher blood pressures compared with female SHR (males 295±3 g, 195±3 mm Hg; females 181±5 g, 177±2 mm Hg; P<0.05). Urinary protein excretion was also greater in males compared with females, suggesting a higher degree of renal injury. Urinary analysis data for male/female and intact/gonadectomized comparisons were analyzed using a Student t test (Statistica). Relative densitometric units for male/female and intact/gonadectomized comparisons were analyzed using an unpaired t test with Welch’s correction (Prism). For all comparisons, P<0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Western Blot Analysis
Western blot analysis was performed to determine whether the observed gender differences in PGE metabolite and TxB2 excretion were attributable to differences in protein expression of key enzymes involved in the synthesis of these mediators in the renal inner or outer medulla. COX-1– and COX-2–representative Western blots and the relative densitometric units are shown in Figure 2. There were no differences with gender in COX-1 expression (see figure legend for P values). There was a trend for COX-2 expression to be increased in the inner medulla from female SHR compared with males, and COX-2 expression was significantly greater.
in the outer medulla of female SHR. Figure 3 shows representative Western blots and the relative densitometric units for cytoplasmic PGE synthase and microsomal PGE synthase. The inner medulla of male SHR had significantly greater cytoplasmic PGE synthase protein expression compared with females, whereas inner medullary microsomal PGE synthase expression was greater in female SHR. There were no differences in protein expression of thromboxane synthase or the TP receptor between male and female SHR in either the outer or inner medulla (data not shown).

Gonadectomy

The effectiveness of ovariectomy surgery was verified by an increase in body weight and a decrease in uterine weight (body weight ovariectomized [OVX] 205±6 g; uterine weight in grams, intact, 0.43±0.03; OVX 0.13±0.01; P<0.05). Gonadectomy resulted in a decrease in blood pressure in males with no alteration in pressure among females (orchidectomized [ORX] 177±3 mm Hg; OVX 175±3 mm Hg). Protein excretion and food and water consumption were decreased in males after gonadectomy; ovari-
Discussion

Although evidence supports a role for COX-derived prostanoids to act as antihypertensive and natriuretic factors, this study is novel in examining the influence of gender and sex steroids on prostanoid pathways in hypertension. Our experiments revealed a sexual dimorphism in the urinary excretion of prostanooids; female SHR have enhanced PGE2 and TxA2 production compared with males. The increase in TxA2 levels attributable to enhanced renal production because there was no difference in systemic TxA2 levels between male and female SHR. Furthermore, we observed that PGE metabolite excretion was enhanced by orchidectomy but unchanged by ovariectomy, suggesting that PGE production is testosterone sensitive and estrogen insensitive. Renal thromboxane production was not influenced by sex steroids. We confirmed that male SHR had greater blood pressure and proteinuria compared with age-matched females. The sexual dimorphism in blood pressure and protein excretion was abolished by orchidectomy. Together, our data support the hypothesis that testosterone drives the elevation in blood pressure and renal injury in male SHR, in part through decreasing PGE2 production.

The PG pathway is altered in SHR and proposed to contribute to the development and maintenance of hypertension. One role of dilator prostanoids is to oppose renal vasoconstriction, therefore, decreased PGE2 production may result in increased blood pressure. In support of this theory, PGE2 levels are reduced in the medulla of male SHR compared with Wistar-Kyoto rats, and the renal medulla from normotensive female rats has higher basal levels of vasodilator PGs compared with males. Whereas this is the first study to examine the effect of gender on PGE2 levels in SHR, female Dahl salt-sensitive rats and wild-type mice have higher plasma levels of PGE2 and PG12 compared with males. As expected, we found PGE2 excretion to be greater in female SHR compared with males; however excretion of PG12 metabolites was comparable. Surprisingly, PGE2 production was not sensitive to estrogen but does appear to be sensitive to testosterone. Whereas the ability of sex steroids to modulate PGE2 levels has not been examined previously, PG12 has been shown to be positively regulated by estrogen in mouse cerebral arteries and aortic smooth muscle cells, ovine fetal pulmonary artery, porcine aortic endothelial cells, and human umbilical vein endothelial cells. TxA2 levels are known to be increased in male SHR compared with normotensive controls, and a role for TxA2 in the determination of blood pressure in SHR has been demonstrated by the ability of thromboxane synthase inhibitors

![Figure 3](http://hyper.ahajournals.org/)

*Figure 3.* Cytoplasmic and microsomal PGE synthase protein expression in renal inner and outer medulla from male (M) and female (F) SHR. A shows representative Western blots, and B shows the relative densitometric units. Inner medullary cytoplasmic PGE synthase expression was greater in male compared with female SHR (P<0.05), and medullary PGE synthase expression was higher in females relative to males (P=0.03). Expression of cytoplasmic PGE synthase and medullary PGE synthase were comparable between males and females in the outer medulla. Asterisk indicates significant difference from males by unpaired t test with Welch’s correction; n=5 to 8; 100 µg protein loaded per well.
and TP receptor blockade to decrease blood pressure in male rats.21,22 The role of thromboxane antagonism has yet to be examined in female SHR. Our finding confirms reports in the literature that female SHR excrete more TxB2 compared with males.23 The consequences of greater renal TxA2 production in female SHR are unknown, although our data would predict that thromboxane receptor antagonism may have a larger impact on blood pressures in female SHR. Alternatively, the increase in PGE2 may offset any impact of increased renal TxA2 on blood pressure. Future studies will address this question.

Renal medullary prostanooids are important in the control of salt and water balance and, as a result, are involved in the pathogenesis of hypertension.5,6 This was nicely illustrated in a recent article by Zewde and Mattson, in which infusion of a COX-2 inhibitor into the renal medulla increased blood pressure in normotensive male animals on a high-salt diet.22 PGE2 is the major COX metabolite of arachidonic acid in the kidney and is critical to the pressure–natriuresis response.5–8 Two enzymes catalyze the synthesis of PGE2: microsomal PGE synthase and cytoplasmic PGE synthase. COX-2 and microsomal PGE synthase protein expression were greater in the inner medulla from female SHR. Furthermore, COX-2 and microsomal PGE synthase colocalize in medullary interstitial cells in rats and rabbit kidneys.23,24 therefore, it is likely that the enhanced PGE metabolite excretion in female SHR results from a COX-2–driven increase in inner medullary microsomal PGE synthase expression. Microsomal PGE synthase has only recently been cloned, and this is the first study to examine the effects of gender and sex steroids on microsomal PGE synthase protein expression levels.25 Although male SHR had greater cytoplasmic PGE synthase protein expression comparable to females, levels of PGE metabolite excretion were greater in females. It is possible that despite an increase in protein expression, PGE enzymatic activity is impaired. It is not known whether the enzyme is regulated by post-translational modifications such as phosphorylation or how this would impact enzymatic activity.

Although COX-2 protein expression can be induced by inflammatory agents, COX-2 is also found constitutively localized in the medulla.1,7 It is possible that the increase in COX-2 expression in females is the result of greater inflammation; however, that seems unlikely. The kidneys of female SHR have been shown to have a slower progression of renal injury compared with males, and in our experiments, proteinuria was less in females. Furthermore, a recent article by Egan et al reported that COX-2 protein expression was increased in healthy mouse aortic smooth muscle cells by treatment with estrogen, supporting our data of enhanced COX-2 protein expression in tissue from females.19

Alterations in protein expression of thromboxane synthase and TP receptor could not account for the increased TxB2 excretion in females. Increased TxB2 may be the result of enhanced thromboxane synthase in the cortex; it is unknown what region of the kidney is responsible for urinary TxB2 excretion. Alternatively, thromboxane may be handled differently in male and female SHR. As mentioned above for cytoplasmic PGE synthase, protein expression does not always equate with enzymatic activity. There may be a gender difference in the metabolism and clearance of TxA2 or post-translational modifications of the enzyme-altering activity. As expected, TP receptor protein expression was decreased by orchidectomy. Testosterone has been shown to increase TP receptor density in aortic vascular smooth muscle cells.26 Interestingly, there was a trend for ovariectomy to decrease TP receptor density as well, suggesting that estrogen may also increase TP receptor density.

**Perspectives**

Our data suggest that prostanooid production may be regulated by male sex steroids but not female sex steroids in SHR. Castration and chronic blockade of the androgen receptor attenuate renal injury and decrease blood pressure in SHR, suggesting that testosterone is an important factor in the increase in blood pressure and renal damage in SHR.1–1 Our data support these findings and suggest that one of the mechanisms by which gender mediates increases in blood pressure and kidney injury is by decreasing inner medullary microsomal PGE synthase and PGE2 production. This is an important finding because COX-2 inhibitors have been widely used clinically, with a primary side effect being renal insufficiency. Epidemiological studies involving COX-2 inhibition do not currently differentiate between men and women; our data suggest that gender and blood pressure should be considered. If hypertensive males have a lower capacity to produce PGE2 compared with hypertensive females, an inhibitor could rapidly exacerbate an already compromised prostanooid system, resulting in severe renal injury.

**Acknowledgments**

This work was funded by grants HL60653 (to J.S.P.) and a Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America predoctoral fellowship (to J.M.S.). J.S.P. and D.M.P. are established investigators of the American Heart Association. The authors would like to acknowledge the excellent technical assistance of Jacqueline Musall, Janet Hobbs, David Osmond, Jeff Bobo, and Hiram Ocasio.

**References**


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Jennifer C. Sullivan, Jennifer M. Sasser, David M. Pollock and Jennifer S. Pollock

Hypertension. 2005;45:406-411; originally published online February 7, 2005;
doi: 10.1161/01.HYP.0000156879.83448.93
Hypertension is published by the American Heart Association, 7272 Greenville Avenue, Dallas, TX 75231
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Print ISSN: 0194-911X. Online ISSN: 1524-4563

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