Inhibition of allergen-induced airway obstruction and leukotriene generation in atopic asthmatic subjects by the leukotriene biosynthesis inhibitor BAYx 1005

Barbro Dahleén, Maria Kumlin, Elisabeth Ihre, Olle Zetterström, Sven-Erik Dahleén

Abstract

Background – Leukotriene receptor antagonists significantly blunt allergen-induced bronchoconstriction in asthmatic subjects. Inhibitors of leukotriene synthesis should theoretically provide similar protection, but conflicting results have been obtained when synthesis inhibitors have been tested in allergen challenge. BAYx 1005, a new inhibitor of leukotriene synthesis, was therefore evaluated in an allergen bronchoprovocation study.

Methods – Ten men with mild allergic asthma and bronchial hyperresponsiveness to histamine were recruited. On two different occasions each subject inhaled a single dose of allergen, previously determined to cause at least a 20% fall in forced expiratory volume in one second (FEV1) four hours after ingestion of 750 mg BAYx 1005 or placebo in a double blind crossover design. Urinary excretion of leukotriene E4 was measured before and during the challenges.

Results – The mean (SE) maximal fall in FEV1 was 7.1 (1.7)% after BAYx 1005 and 21.0 (3.0)% after placebo (p<0.05). The mean difference between treatments was 13.9 (95% CI 7.0 to 20.8) for the maximal fall in FEV1. All subjects were protected by BAYx 1005, the mean inhibition of the fall in FEV1, being 70.0 (7.0)%. The mean area under the curve (AUC) for urinary excretion of leukotriene E4 in the first two hours after the challenge was 1.7 (0.9) after placebo and 0.4 (0.6) after BAYx 1005 (difference = 1.3 (95% CI −0.1 to 2.7); p<0.05).

Conclusions – These results indicate that BAYx 1005 is a potent inhibitor of allergen-provoked leukotriene synthesis in asthmatic subjects and lend further support to the suggestion that leukotrienes are important mediators of allergen-induced bronchoconstriction.

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Keywords: asthma, BAYx 1005, leukotriene synthesis inhibition, allergens.

Recent experimental and clinical observations suggest that leukotrienes are important mediators of asthma and other inflammatory diseases. Drugs have therefore been developed to inhibit the action or formation of leukotrienes. Among such antileukotriene drugs, specific receptor antagonists of the cysteinyl leukotrienes (LTC4, LTD4, and LTE4) have been found to inhibit asthmatic reactions induced by allergens,1–6 exercise,7–9 and aspirin.10–11

Another class of antileukotriene drugs is represented by compounds which inhibit the biosynthesis of leukotrienes by inhibition of the 5-lipoxygenase or its activation. BAYx 1005 inhibits the production of leukotrienes12 by antagonism of the 5-lipoxygenase activating protein (FLAP)13 which has a pivotal role in the stimulation-evoked synthesis of leukotrienes from arachidonic acid. Consistent with this mode of action, BAYx 1005 has been found to inhibit IgE-dependent leukotriene formation in human lung in vitro, as well as the allergen-induced reactions in isolated human bronchi and animal models of asthma.14–16

This study evaluates the effect of BAYx 1005 on allergen-induced bronchoconstriction in a group of atopic asthmatic subjects. Furthermore, allergen provocation of asthmatic subjects is associated with release of LTE4 into the urine17–20 because a significant proportion of cysteinyl leukotrienes formed in the lungs is excreted by this route,21–22 so the effect of BAYx 1005 on endogenous formation of leukotrienes was assessed by serial measurements of urinary levels of LTE4.

Despite the current development of anti-leukotriene drugs for clinical treatment of asthma, a limited number of studies have been published on the effects of different anti-leukotriene drugs on allergen challenge. In particular, studies on the influence of leukotriene biosynthesis inhibitors on allergic bronchoconstriction are few and have produced variable results. For example, the 5-lipoxygenase inhibitors Zileuton and ZD 2138 failed to cause significant inhibition of allergen-induced bronchoconstriction12–14 whereas two FLAP antagonists, MK-886 and MK-591, were found to inhibit the response.25–26

Methods

Patients

Ten non-smoking atopic men with a history of asthma and with allergy to grass pollen, cat or dog dander participated in the study (table 1). Their asthma was stable and controlled by inhaled β2 agonists as required. During the study the subjects actively avoided contact with...
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Table 1 Subject characteristics

<table>
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<th>Patient no.</th>
<th>Age (years)</th>
<th>FEV1 (% pred)</th>
<th>Histamine PD20 (µg)</th>
<th>Allergen</th>
<th>Dose (SQ)</th>
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</table>

1 Dose used during the blinded sessions (see methods)
2 Geometric mean.

the allergens for provocation. Criteria for inclusion in the study included forced expiratory volume in one second (FEV1) of >75% predicted and bronchial hyperresponsiveness to histamine, defined as a provocative dose causing a 20% fall in FEV1 (PD20) of <1210 µg measured as previously described.22 The study was approved by the local ethics committee and the Swedish Medical Products Agency (Läkemedelsverket). The patients gave informed consent.

STUDY DESIGN

All patients first underwent a screening allergen test to establish their current sensitivity to allergen. The PD20 was determined by linear interpolation from the relation between cumulated dose of inhaled allergen and percentage change in FEV1. Within six months of the screening challenge (mean interval 120 days, range 32–180) the double blind, placebo controlled, crossover drug trial was started. On two separate days the patients received either 750 mg BAYx 1005 or placebo four hours before allergen challenge. Patients reported fasting to the clinic at the same time of the day (07.30 hours) and ingested the tablets under supervision at about 08.00 hours.

Breakfast was given two hours later. The dose of BAYx 1005 used was the highest that had been cleared for human studies at the time the study was performed. The time for pre-administration was selected from data on peak plasma concentration (3–5 hours) and plasma half life (3–5 hours) previously determined in pharmacokinetic studies of the compound in man (data on file, Bayer AG, Germany). The compound BAYx 100512 was supplied by Bayer AG, Leverkusen, Germany, as 250 mg of a crystalline powder in coated tablets. The two blinded bronchoprovocations were separated by an interval of about four weeks (mean 27 days; range 20–56) and performed by inhalation of the same single dose of allergen on both occasions. The dose used in the blinded provocations (table 1) corresponded roughly to the PD20 value obtained in the screening session.

ALLERGEN PROVOCATION AND STUDY DAY PROCEDURES

Bronchodilators were withheld for eight hours before the allergen challenges and were not used during the study days. Short acting histamine H1 receptor antagonists were not allowed for 48 hours before a study day. Long acting antihistamines, disodium cromoglycate, and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) were not used for 10 days before a challenge session. Bronchoprovocation was performed by inhalation of allergen using a dosimeter controlled jet nebuliser (Spira Elektro 2, Respiratory Care Centre, Finland). Driven by compressed air at 7.5 l/min, the nebuliser generated an aerosol with a mass median particle aerodynamic diameter of 4.1 µm and the output was set to 7.1 l per breath. Pulmonary function was measured as FEV1 on a spirogram (Vitalograph MDI Compact, Förbandsmaterial, Sweden). Three concentrations of allergen extract (1000, 10 000, and 100 000 SQ/ml; SQ = standardised quality, the manufacturer’s unit for allergen strength) were prepared by dissolving lyophilised powder in diluent. The extracts (Aquagen) and the diluent were from ALK Laboratories, Copenhagen, Denmark. By using the three concentrations and by varying the number of breaths from the nebuliser, the protocol used during the screening provocation resulted in approximately half log increments in the cumulated dose of allergen.

Baseline FEV1 was defined as the best of three recordings made five minutes apart. Spirometric values were obtained at hourly intervals after drug administration and the FEV1 value four hours after the drug was used as the baseline value for the ensuing allergen challenge. All challenges were preceded by inhalation of the diluent and, provided FEV1 did not change by more than 10%, bronchoprovocation with allergen was started. Pulmonary function was measured every 15 minutes after inhalation of allergen until the FEV1 had returned to within 10% of baseline, and thereafter hourly for up to six hours. For monitoring of late asthmatic reactions the patients measured their peak expiratory flow rates with a mini-Wright flow meter (data on file, Bayer AG, Germany). The compound BAYx 1005 was supplied by Bayer AG, Leverkusen, Germany, as 250 mg of a crystalline powder in coated tablets. The two blinded bronchoprovocations were separated by an interval of about four weeks (mean 27 days; range 20–56) and performed by inhalation of the same single dose of allergen on both occasions. The dose used in the blinded provocations (table 1) corresponded roughly to the PD20 value obtained in the screening session.

MEASUREMENTS OF URINARY LTE4

Urine was collected at one hour intervals before drug or placebo, four hours after drug administration, and for up to six hours after the challenge. The samples were divided into different aliquots and stored separately at −20°C and −70°C. The concentration of LTE4 was determined with a validated and semi-automated enzyme immunoassay method28 and expressed as ng LTE4/mmol creatinine.

MEASUREMENTS OF DRUG PLASMA LEVELS

Plasma samples were collected hourly before and after the challenge until the subjects left

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Figure 1  Group mean (SE) values for FEV1 on the two study days. Placebo or 750 mg of the leukotriene biosynthesis inhibitor BAYx 1005 were ingested immediately after obtaining the first morning baseline value (~4 hours). The same single dose of allergen, corresponding to the PD20 value determined prior to the study, was inhaled at t=0 on both occasions. The peak fall in FEV1 always occurred at the recording taken 15 minutes after the challenge.

Figure 2  Peak fall in FEV1 produced by inhalation of allergen following ingestion of placebo or 750 mg of the leukotriene biosynthesis inhibitor BAYx 1005 four hours before challenge. Individual results (♭) and mean (SE) results for all 10 subjects on each occasion (■) are given. *p<0.001, Student’s paired t test.

the clinic, transported on dry ice, and stored at below −15°C until analysis was performed at the human pharmacokinetic department of Bayer AG in Leverkusen, Germany. The HPLC method had a detection limit of 8 μg/l, a precision which varied from 7.6% to 12.7%, and an accuracy which deviated by a maximum of 3.8%.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Geometric mean PD20 values were calculated on log transformed raw data. The area under the curves (AUC) for FEV1 versus time and urinary LTE4 versus time were calculated using the trapezoidal rule for integration. Results are presented as means (SE) and mean differences between treatments with 95% confidence intervals (CI). The data for pulmonary function and urinary levels of LTE4 were found to be normally distributed (SigmaStat software for IBM PC, Jandel Scientific, USA). The Student’s paired t test was used to compare group means.

Differences were considered to be significant when the p value was <0.05. Period and carry-over effects of the drug treatments were analysed by the method of Hills and Armitage.

Results

Baseline pulmonary function was not significantly different on the two study days (fig 1), nor was there any significant change in FEV1 during the four hours following drug administration (fig 1). There were no subjective or objective signs of drug related side effects after intake of 750 mg BAYx 1005.

There was good agreement between the fall in FEV1 at screening and placebo for the eight subjects who inhaled the same dose of allergen on both occasions with a mean maximal fall of 26.5 (2.0)% and 23.5 (3.3)% for screening and placebo, respectively. For two subjects (4 and 10), the allergen dose selected for use in the double blind sessions (see methods) differed from the dose of allergen inhaled at screening. Subject 1 had late asthmatic reactions on screening and following placebo, but not after BAYx 1005.

The airway response to allergen was substantially inhibited when BAYx 1005 was given prior to challenge, both with respect to the amplitude of the fall in FEV1 and the duration of the reaction (fig 1). Figure 2 shows the peak fall for each individual and the group means during the two sessions. The fall in FEV1 was smaller after BAYx 1005 for all subjects. The mean peak fall after placebo was 21.0 (3.0)% compared with 7.1 (1.7)% after BAYx 1005. The mean difference between treatments was 13.9 (95% CI 7.0 to 20.8; p<0.001). Thus, the mean inhibition of the fall in FEV1 by BAYx 1005 was 70.0 (7.0)%.

The mean area under the FEV1-time curve (AUC FEV1) for each individual and the group means during the two sessions. The fall in FEV1 was 5.3 (0.7) and 1.5 (0.4) for placebo and BAYx 1005, respectively. The mean difference between treatments was 3.8 (95% CI 2.2 to 5.4), p<0.001, which corresponds to a mean inhibition of 74 (10.9)%.

The mean area under the FEV1-time curve for placebo and BAYx 1005 was 21.5 (4.7)% and 19.5 (6.7)% ng/mmol creatinine for placebo and drug, respectively, neither were there significant changes in the levels of urinary LTE4 in the time between drug intake and allergen challenge. Thus, at the time of challenge urinary LTE4, levels were 21.5 (4.7)%
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The concentration of LTE₄, in the sample of urine collected immediately prior to challenge (four hours after intake of placebo or drug) was selected as the reference on each occasion. For each individual this prechallenge concentration was subtracted from the value in the samples collected every hour after the provocative test. This produced a measure of net excretion after the challenge that was unrelated to each individual's baseline excretion of LTE₄.

The leukotriene biosynthesis inhibitor BAYx was, however, no relation between the drug levels in the urine and the degree of inhibition of FEV₁ or AUC at 0±1 hours was measured). The drug was found to be 5.2 (1.5) hours. There was bronchoconstrictor response by the drug (70–22% of the early asthmatic reaction with BAYx 1005 was superior to that reported for the more short lived leukotriene biosynthesis inhibitor MK-886, and was identical to that observed with another potent and long lived FLAP antagonist, MK-591. The leukotriene biosynthesis inhibitors so far reported to protect against allergen-induced bronchoconstriction (MK-886, MK-591, and BAYx 1005) are all FLAP antagonists, whereas the drugs that have failed in allergen challenges of asthmatic subjects are directly acting 5-lipoxygenase inhibitors. Studies are required to establish if there is a real difference between the effects of FLAP antagonists and directly acting 5-lipoxygenase inhibitors on allergen-induced airway obstruction.

Furthermore, the extent of inhibition (about 70%) of the early asthmatic reaction with BAYx 1005 in this study and with MK-591 in the study by Diamant et al is similar to the degree of protection which has been observed when allergen challenge has been performed in comparable study protocols after treatment with potent receptor antagonists of cysteinyl leukotrienes. Likewise, in a parallel study of the effect of BAYx 1005 on allergen-induced bronchoconstriction a lower dose of BAYx 1005 (500 mg) was given for 3.5 days and caused about 60% inhibition of the maximal fall in FEV₁ during the early response. The similar effects of several structurally unrelated drugs that inhibit the action or formation of leukotrienes by different mechanisms therefore reinforces the suggestion that leukotrienes are major mediators of the early asthmatic response in humans. Secondly, the similar effects of leukotriene biosynthesis inhibitors and receptor antagonists of cysteinyl leukotrienes on the early response to allergen suggests that it is the bronchoconstrictive cysteinyl leukotrienes rather than the leukocyte attractant LTB₄ that mediate this particular response.

One of the main end points in this study was to measure LTE₄ in urine collected before, during, and after provocation in order to follow the degree of in vivo inhibition produced by BAYx 1005. As expected, the levels of LTE₄ were increased in the samples of urine collected within two hours after the placebo treated challenge with allergen. This increase was substantially inhibited by BAYx 1005. The magnitude of inhibition of net release (level after challenge – level before challenge) of LTE₄ (76%) was similar to the inhibition of the bronchoconstrictor response by the drug (70–74%, depending upon whether the peak fall in FEV₁ or AUC at 0–1 hours was measured). There is therefore good reason to believe that the inhibition by BAYx 1005 of the increase in urinary levels of LTE₄ seen after challenge reflected its ability to inhibit pulmonary formation of leukotrienes and consequently the allergen-induced airway obstruction. There was, however, no relation between the drug plasma concentration and the degree of in-
hibitation of bronchoconstriction, nor between drug levels and the extent of inhibition of the allergen-induced urinary excretion of LTE_4, supporting previous suggestions that drug plasma levels of leukotriene antagonists or biosynthesis inhibitors do not correlate directly with drug effects on responses caused by the local release of leukotrienes in the airways. 1-3,5,25,26

In contrast to the inhibition of the allergen-induced enhanced urinary excretion of LTE_4, the prechallenge levels of urinary LTE_4 were unaffected by BAYx 1005. The method of measurement for urinary LTE_4 has been thoroughly validated, and the material determined with the present method is highly unlikely to be any other known metabolite of cysteinyl leukotrienes than LTE_4. 20 The finding therefore indicates that the overflow of urinary LTE_4 after allergen challenge reflects pulmonary formation of leukotrienes better than the baseline urinary excretion of LTE_4. This is intriguing and cannot be explained, but it may be important to consider in future work on the pharmacology of inhibitors of leukotriene synthesis. Previous studies of the influence of anti-leukotrienes on allergen-induced airway obstruction have generated some X and Y hypothesis that individuals differ with respect to the participation of leukotrienes, because a proportion of the subjects have been described as non-responders. 3-6,23 In this study, however, all subjects had a smaller and more short lived airway response after BAYx 1005 than after placebo. One reason for this uniform effect could be that the drug was ingested after overnight fasting and was well absorbed, as indicated by homogeneous plasma concentrations around 10 μM at the time of the challenge in all subjects. The half life of the drug was found to be 5.2 hours. Together, this indicates effective inhibition of leukotriene synthesis during the course of the reaction investigated. The findings thus lend strong support to the presence of a leukotriene component in all the subjects studied. The contribution of leukotrienes was most often substantial (>50% inhibition for eight of the 10 subjects, >70% inhibition for six). Nevertheless, there was some variability in effect (range of inhibition for fall in FEV_1, 37–100%) which, together with the lack of correlation between individual responses and degree of inhibition of urinary LTE_4, may indicate that the relative contribution of leukotrienes and other mediators might vary between individuals.

In conclusion, this study has shown that a single oral dose of the leukotriene biosynthesis inhibitor BAYx 1005 is sufficient to inhibit the early airway reaction to bronchial challenge with allergen. The inhibition was profound (about 70% of the response) and associated with a similar degree (about 75%) of inhibition of post-challenge excretion of urinary LTE_4. These findings add to the growing body of evidence in support of leukotrienes as important mediators in asthma, and suggest that this particular leukotriene inhibitor should be studied in other challenge models as well as in the treatment of asthma.
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