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# IGF-1 knockdown inhibits phosphorylation of Akt and ERK in chicken embryonic myotubes

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#### Abstract

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- Objective: We examined whether auto/paracrine insulin-like growth factor-1 (IGF-1)
- contributes to the phosphorylation of Akt and ERK in chicken myotubes.
- 19 Methods: Chicken myotubes were treated with IGF-1 siRNA, and then total RNA and
- 20 protein were harvested for real-time PCR and western blot analysis.
- 21 Results: Treatment with IGF-1 siRNA inhibited the phosphorylation of Akt and ERK, but
- 22 not of ribosomal protein S6, in chicken myotubes. Interestingly, IGF-1 siRNA
- 23 downregulated the expression of IGF-2.
- 24 Conclusions: The results of this study suggest that auto/paracrine IGF-1 contributes to
- 25 Akt and ERK phosphorylation in chicken myotubes.

27 Key words: Akt, chicken myotube, ERK, IGF-1

## INTRODUCTION

29	Skeletal muscle mass is one of the most important traits in meat production. It is
30	controlled by a balance between protein synthesis and degradation; skeletal muscle mass
31	increases when the rate of protein synthesis exceeds that of protein degradation. Therefore
32	numerous studies have been conducted to clarify the mechanisms of protein metabolism
33	in the skeletal muscles of domestic animals.
34	The serine/threonine kinase Akt is a key factor in the regulation of protein metabolism in
35	skeletal muscles. For example, mice lacking both skeletal muscle Akt1 (a ubiquitously
36	expressed isoform) and Akt2 (the major isoform in the skeletal muscles) display a
37	significant reduction in body weight and skeletal muscle mass [1]. Akt is activated by
38	phosphorylation in response to extracellular stimuli such as growth factors and insulin
39	[2,3]. Phosphorylated Akt activates the downstream mTOR/S6K1 signaling pathway and
40	stimulates protein synthesis [2,3]. In contrast, phosphorylated Akt inactivates FOXO1, a
41	transcription factor of atrogenes such as atrogin-1 and MuRF-1 [2-5]. Therefore, Akt
42	plays an important role in the regulation of both protein synthesis and degradation in
43	skeletal muscles.
44	ERK1 and ERK2 are members of a family of mitogen-activated protein kinases. They
45	regulate fundamental cellular processes such as proliferation, survival, growth,
46	metabolism, motility, differentiation, and development [6]. ERK signaling also has
47	important roles in cell growth, although its role is secondary to that of Akt/mTOR
48	signaling [6]. For example, ERK upregulates the transcription of ribosomal DNA by RNA
49	polymerase I (Pol I), of tRNA genes by Pol III, and of ribosomal protein genes by Pol II
50	via various factors [6-9]. Additionally, ERK activates ERK-activated MAPK-interacting
51	kinase, mTOR complex 1, and ERK-activated ribosomal protein S6 kinase [6,10-12],
52	which regulate translation via various factors. Previous studies have suggested that ERK
53	is involved in protein synthesis in chicken skeletal muscle. For example, an ERK inhibitor

abolishes the insulin-induced phosphorylation of S6K1 in chicken myoblasts [13]. 54 Fasting significantly decreases the phosphorylation of ERK2 (the only isoform detected 55 in bird tissues) in the leg muscles [14,15]. Therefore, both Akt and ERK play important 56 roles in the regulation of protein metabolism in chicken skeletal muscles. 57 58 Insulin-like growth factor-1 (IGF-1) is a primary hormone that promotes skeletal growth and stimulates Akt- and ERK-mediated signaling pathways [3,16]. Circulating IGF-1 is 59 60 mainly produced in the liver, and it acts as an endocrine hormone. Conversely, skeletal muscle IGF-1 acts in an auto/paracrine manner. Previous studies in chickens exhibiting 61 different body weights and growth rates showed that the blood concentration of IGF-1 62 63 and the levels of IGF-1 mRNA and protein in the skeletal muscle are higher in fast-64 growing chickens [17,18]. However, previous studies in conditional knockout mice 65 suggest that hepatic IGF-1 is not critical for skeletal muscle growth [19-21]. Another previous study in transgenic mice showed that skeletal muscle-restricted IGF-1 transgene 66 results in hypertrophy [22]. Therefore, these findings suggest that skeletal muscle IGF-1 67 68 plays a key role in the upregulation of protein synthesis in skeletal muscles. However, it 69 remains unclear whether endogenously produced IGF-1 in the skeletal muscle contributes 70 to the phosphorylation of Akt and ERK. In the present study, we investigated the effects of IGF-1 knockdown on the 71 72 phosphorylation of Akt and ERK in chicken embryonic myotubes using siRNA.

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#### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

75 Cell culture

The experiments using chicken embryos were approved by the Institutional Animal Care

and Use Committee and were performed according to the Kobe University Animal

78 Experimental Regulation.

79 Chicken embryonic myotubes were formed as described previously [23]. Breast muscles

dissected from 10-12 14-days-old chick embryos were minced using surgical scissors and digested with HBSS(+) (Nacalai Tesque, Inc., Kyoto, Japan) containing 0.2% collagenase (Worthington Biochemical Corp., Lakewood, NJ, USA) for 20 min at 37°C. The cells were collected by centrifugation and were resuspended in Dulbecco's modified Eagle medium (DMEM; Nacalai Tesque, Inc., Kyoto, Japan) supplemented with 15% serum (FetalClone III, GE Healthcare Bio-Sciences AB, Uppsala, Sweden), 1× non-essential amino acid solution (Nacalai Tesque, Kyoto, Inc., Japan), and  $1\times$ gentamicin/amphotericin solution (Life Technologies, Carlsbad, CA, USA). The cell suspension was passed through a cell strainer to remove tissue debris and was then transferred to an uncoated flask to allow attachment of fibroblasts. After 1 h, the unattached cells were transferred to another uncoated flask and this procedure was repeated 2–3 times. The unattached cells were counted and plated onto collagen I-coated 12-well plates at a density of 1×10<sup>5</sup> cells/well. The cells were incubated in the medium described above at 37°C and 5% CO<sub>2</sub> in humidified air until myotube formation. The myotube formation was confirmed by the observation using a light microscope. Chicken IGF-1-targeting siRNA (Table 1) was designed using the siDESIGN Center and was synthesized by Horizon Discovery Ltd. (Cambridge, UK). ON-TARGETplus Nontargeting siRNA #1 was purchased from Horizon Discovery Ltd. and used as the control. The transfection of siRNA was performed using Lipofectamine RNAiMAX Transfection Reagent (Life Technologies, Carlsbad, CA, USA) according to the supplier's protocol. Myotubes were cultured in the above described medium (plus serum, non-essential amino acid, and antibiotic/antimycotic) supplemented with siRNA for 2 days, and further cultured in fresh medium without siRNA for one day. To confirm the reproducibility, we conducted the same experiments twice independently. The representative results are shown in Figure 1.

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#### 106 Real-time PCR analysis

Real-time PCR analysis was performed as described previously [23]. The cells were first washed with phosphate-buffered saline (PBS). Total RNA was extracted from the cells using Sepazol-RNA I Super G (Nacalai Tesque, Inc., Kyoto, Japan). First-strand cDNA was synthesized from the total RNA using ReverTra Ace® qPCR RT Master Mix with gDNA Remover (Toyobo Co. Ltd, Osaka, Japan). Messenger RNA levels were quantified for each primer (Table 1) using the Thermo Scientific PikoReal PCR System (Thermo Fisher Scientific Oy, Vantaa, Finland), and TB Green Premix Ex Taq II (Tli RNaseH Plus; Takara Bio Inc., Otsu, Japan), according to the supplier's recommendations. The expression levels of target genes were normalized to those of ribosomal protein S17 (RPS17). The results are shown relative to those of the control group.

#### Western blot analysis

Western blot analysis was performed as described previously [23]. Briefly, the cells were rinsed with ice-cold PBS. The cells were then scraped into 100 μL of lysis buffer. The cell lysates were ultrasonicated and centrifuged at 17,900 × g for 15 min at 4°C. The supernatants were stored at -80°C. Protein concentration was determined using the Pierce BCA Protein Assay Kit (Pierce Biotechnology, Rockford, IL, USA). The lysates (3 μg of protein) were subjected to sodium dodecyl sulfate-polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis (SDS-PAGE) and western blotting using HorizeBlot (ATTO Co., Tokyo, Japan), according to the manufacturer's instructions. Bands were detected using Chemi-Lumi one Super (Nacalai Tesque, Inc., Kyoto, Japan), visualized with LumiCube (Liponics Inc., Tokyo, Japan), and quantified using the CS Analyzer software (ATTO Co., Tokyo, Japan). Anti-Akt (#9272), anti-phospho-Akt (Thr308) (#13038), anti-phospho-Akt (pAkt) (Ser473) (#9271), anti-p44/42 MAPK (Erk1/2) (#4695), anti-phospho- p44/42 MAPK (Erk1/2) (Thr202/Tyr204) (#9101), anti-ribosomal protein S6 (#2217), anti-phospho-

ribosomal protein S6 (Ser240/244) (#5364), anti- $\beta$ -actin (#8457), anti- $\alpha$ -tubulin (#2125), 132 133 horseradish peroxidase (HRP)-linked anti-rabbit IgG (#7074), and HRP-linked antimouse IgG (#7076) were purchased from Cell Signaling Technology (Beverly, MA, USA). 134 Anti-IGF-1 (#05-172) was purchased from EMD Millipore Corp. (Temecula, CA, USA). 135 136 Anti- $\beta$ -actin and anti- $\alpha$ -tubulin antibodies were used as loading controls. The results are 137 shown relative to those of the control group. 138

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Statistical analysis

Data were analyzed using the two-tailed t-test performed using Excel 2013 (Microsoft, USA).

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143 **RESULTS** 

> IGF-1 siRNA treatment significantly decreased IGF-1 expression at 2 days after siRNA addition in the myotubes, and siRNA treatment tended to decrease IGF-1 expression at 3 days (Fig. 1A). Unexpectedly, IGF-2 expression was significantly decreased by IGF-1 siRNA treatment (Fig. 1B). Akt phosphorylation at Thr308 and Ser473 tended to be inhibited at 2 days, and it was significantly inhibited at 3 days (Fig. 1C,D). Similarly, siRNA treatment significantly inhibited ERK phosphorylation (Fig. 1F). However, no significant change was observed in the phosphorylation of ribosomal protein S6 (RPS6, Fig. 1H), and total protein level of Akt, ERK, and RPS6 (Figure 1E,G,I). IGF-1 protein was not detected in any of the myotube samples.

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154 **DISCUSSION** 

> Fast-growing chickens have higher levels of IGF-1 in both the blood and skeletal muscles [17,18], suggesting that both endocrine and auto/paracrine IGF-1 play important roles in the growth of skeletal muscles. According to the manufacturer's publication [24],

FetalClone III contains 136 ng/mL IGF-1. In our previous study, medium without 158 159 FetalClone III significantly decreased the phosphorylation rate of Akt in chicken myotubes, compared to medium containing 15% FetalClone III [23]. Therefore, it seems 160 that the medium used in the present study contained enough IGF-1 to phosphorylate Akt 161 162 in chicken myotubes. Under these conditions, the present study showed that IGF-1 163 knockdown inhibited Akt and ERK phosphorylation in the myotubes. Therefore, the 164 findings of the present results suggest that auto/paracrine IGF-1 contributes to the upregulation of Akt and ERK signaling pathways in chicken myotubes, even though 165 166 endocrine IGF-1 regulates Akt and ERK signaling. 167 In the present study, IGF-1 siRNA significantly downregulated the expression of both 168 IGF-1 and IGF-2 expression. The BLAST results revealed that there was no significant similarity between the IGF-2 and IGF-1 siRNA sequences used in the present study, 169 suggesting that IGF-1 siRNA did not directly suppress IGF-2 expression in the myotubes. 170 A previous study on C2C12 myoblasts reported that IGF-2 also induces Akt and ERK 171 phosphorylation [25]. Another study in C2C12 cells showed that the inhibitor of 172 phosphatidylinositol 3-kinase, but not ERK, significantly inhibits IGF-2 expression, 173 whereas transfection with a constitutively active form of Akt significantly upregulates the 174 mRNA levels of IGF-1 and IGF-2 [26]. These findings raise the possibility that IGF-1 175 176 knockdown inhibits Akt and ERK phosphorylation, inhibition of Akt phosphorylation leads to suppression of IGF-2 expression, and suppression of IGF-2 enhances the 177 178 inhibition of Akt and ERK phosphorylation in chicken myotubes. Further studies are required to clarify how IGF-1 knockdown inhibits IGF-2 expression in chicken myotubes 179 and whether endogenous IGF-2 contributes the regulation of Akt and ERK signaling. 180 IGF-1 activates the Akt/mTOR/S6K1 pathway in C2C12 myotubes [16]. Phosphorylation 181 of RPS6 at Ser 240/244 can be used as a specific biomarker for the mTOR/S6K pathway 182 [27]. In the present study, no significant difference was observed in RPS6 183

phosphorylation at Ser 240/244 in chicken myotubes, even though Akt phosphorylation was inhibited by IGF-1 siRNA. Previous *in vitro* [28] and *in vivo* [29] studies have shown that leucine induces phosphorylation of mTOR and S6K1, but not Akt. Other essential amino acids such as lysine, methionine, phenylalanine, tryptophan, and threonine phosphorylate S6K1, but not Akt and mTOR, in C2C12 myotubes to a lesser extent than leucine [28]. Another study in C2C12 myotubes showed that the absence of glucose in the culture medium inhibits phosphorylation of S6K, but not Akt and ERK [30]. It is therefore likely that essential amino acids and glucose in the culture medium upregulate the mTOR/S6K1 signaling pathway in an IGF-1-independent manner, at least under the present experimental conditions.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

The results of this study suggest that auto/paracrine IGF-1 contributes to Akt and ERK phosphorylation in chicken myotubes, even though a sufficient amount of IGF-1 exists in the medium.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

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293 Figure legend

Figure 1. Effects of IGF-1 siRNA on the mRNA levels of IGF-1 and IGF-2 and 294 phosphorylation of Akt, Erk, and ribosomal protein S6 in chicken myotubes. (A) 295 296 IGF-1 mRNA level. (B) IGF-2 mRNA level. (C, D) Phosphorylation rate of Akt. (E) Total 297 Akt protein level. (F) Phosphorylation rate pf ERK. (G) Total ERK protein level. (H) Phosphorylation rate of ribosomal protein S6. (I) Total ribosomal protein S6 protein level. 298 Data are expressed as mean  $\pm$  SEM of six wells in each group. The two-tailed *t*-test was 299 used to analyze the differences between groups. \*\*,\*Significance with respect to the 300 control group (P < 0.01, 0.05, respectively). RPS17, ribosomal protein S17; RPS6, 301 302 ribosomal protein S6.

303 Table 1 Sequences of chicken IGF-1-targeting siRNA and primers used for real-time PCR

### 304 analysis

	Sense	Antisense
IGF-1 siRNA	5'-CAGUAAGCCUACAGGGUAUUU-3'	5'-AUACCCUGUAGGCUUACUGUU-3'
IGF-1 primers	5'-GGCTTCTACTTCAGTAAGCCT-3'	5'-GCCTCCTCAGGTCACAACTC-3'
IGF-2 primers	5'-CCTGGCTCTGCTGGAAACC-3'	5'-GAGAGGTCACGCTCTGACTTGA-3'

siRNA and primers for chicken IGF-1 (NM\_001004384) were designed using siDESIGN

Center (Horizon Discovery Ltd., Cambridge, UK) and Primer-BLAST (National Center

for Biotechnology Information, Bethesda, MD, USA), respectively. IGF-2

(NM\_001030342) primers were designed using Primer Express 3.0 (Applied Biosystems,

Foster City, CA, USA).

