Genistein modulates the effects of parathyroid hormone in human osteoblastic SaOS-2 cells

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Genistein and parathyroid hormone (PTH) are anabolic agents that stimulate bone formation through their direct actions in osteoblastic cells. In the present study, we aimed to determine whether genistein modulates the actions of PTH in human osteoblastic SaOS-2 cells in an oestrogen-depleted condition. The present results showed that genistein (10⁻³ to 10⁻⁶ m) induced alkaline phosphatase (ALP) activity and osteoprotegrin (OPG) expression in SaOS-2 cells in a dose-dependent manner. These effects could be completely abolished by co-treatment with oestrogen antagonist ICI 182780 (7α-[9-(4,4,5,5,5-pentafluoropentyl)sulfonyl]nonyl)-estr-1,3,5(10)-triene-3,17β-diol). Genistein (at 1 µM) could stimulate the mRNA expression of receptor activator of NF-κB ligand (RANKL). As OPG and RANKL are known to modulate osteoclastogenesis, the ability of genistein to modulate OPG and RANKL expression in SaOS-2 cells suggested that it might modulate osteoclastogenesis through its direct actions on osteoblastic cells. PTH (at 10 nM) stimulated ALP activity, induced RANKL mRNA expression and suppressed OPG mRNA expression in SaOS-2 cells, confirming its bi-directional effects on osteoblastic cells. Pre-treatment of SaOS-2 cells with genistein and oestrogen not only enhanced PTH-induced ALP activity, but also attenuated PTH up regulation of RANKL mRNA expression and PTH down regulation of OPG mRNA expression. Taken together, the present study provides the first evidence that genistein could modulate the actions of PTH in human osteoblastic SaOS-2 cells in an oestrogen-depleted condition.

Genistein: Parathyroid hormone: Alkaline phosphatase: Osteoprotegrin: Receptor activator of nuclear factor-κB ligand

In Asia, the incidence of osteoporosis-related fractures is low as compared with Western countries (Ross et al. 1991; Anonymous, 1994; Lauderdale et al. 1997). High phyto-oestrogen intake has been considered to be one of the contributing factors for the reduced risk of fracture among Asian women (Goldwyn et al. 2000; Valachovicova et al. 2004). Clinical trials have confirmed that dietary supplementation with isoflavone-enriched soya protein may improve the bone mass of both peri- and postmenopausal women (Potter et al. 1998; Alekel et al. 2000). Animal studies have shown the positive effects of treatment with isoflavones such as genistein and daidzein on bone loss induced by oestrogen deficiency (Anderson et al. 1998; Mei et al. 2001; Greendale et al. 2002; Morabito et al. 2002). The cellular mechanisms by which genistein may prevent bone loss are not fully understood.

Genistein is considered to act via a classical oestrogen receptor (ER)-mediated pathway. Genistein may stimulate ERβ expression (Anderson et al. 2000; Cusack et al. 2001) and down regulate IL-6 secretion in osteoblastic cells (Chen & Anderson, 2002). Studies have shown that genistein mimics oestrogen in stimulating the expression of osteoprotegrin (OPG), a member of the TNF receptor superfamily, in cultured bone cells (Yamagishi et al. 2001; Chen et al. 2003). The balance of OPG and the ligand for receptor activator of NF-κB (RANKL), another peptide expressed on the surface of stromal osteoblasts, is critical in the bone resorption process. RANKL stimulates osteoclast differentiation through its receptor (receptor activator of NF-κB; RANK) located on osteoclasts, whereas OPG acts as a decoy soluble receptor for RANKL and prevents its interaction with RANK (Bucay et al. 1998; Lacey et al. 1998; Kong et al. 1999). Thus OPG neutralises RANKL functions and prevents osteoclast differentiation, activity and survival. The RANKL–OPG system plays a crucial role in osteoclastogenesis and the balance of bone remodelling. It appears that the positive effects of genistein on bone might be, at least in part, mediated by the modulation of this cytokine system.

Parathyroid hormone (PTH) plays an important role in Ca homeostasis and in regulating the rate of bone turnover. Several studies support a possible relationship between PTH and accelerated bone loss following the menopause (Khosla et al. 1997; Masukikiewicz et al. 2000). In postmenopausal women,

Abbreviations: ALP, alkaline phosphatase; E₂, 17β-oestradiol; ER, oestrogen receptor; GAPDH, glyceraldehyde-3-phosphate dehydrogenase; MTT, 3-[4, 5-dimethyl thiazol 2-yl]-2, 5-diphenyltetrazolium bromide; OPG, osteoprotegrin; PTH, parathyroid hormone; RANK, receptor activator of NF-κB; RANKL, receptor activator of NF-κB ligand.

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serum PTH concentration and markers of bone resorption increase with advancing age (Khosla et al. 1997). Women receiving oestrogen therapy can prevent increases in PTH levels and reverse virtually all age-related increases in bone resorption (Khosla et al. 1997; Masiukiewicz et al. 2000). In vivo and in vitro studies have shown that PTH causes biphasic effects on bone. Intermittent administration of PTH increases bone mass, whereas continuous infusion of PTH reduces it (Dempster et al. 1993). The anabolic action of PTH is the result of its positive effect on osteoblast differentiation. The bone resorptive effect of PTH is currently believed to be mediated by cytokines such as RANKL, OPG, colony-stimulatory factor 1 and IL-6 (Greenfield et al. 1996; Onyia et al. 1997; Huang et al. 1998; Yao et al. 1998; Ysuda et al. 1998).

In vivo and in vitro studies have shown that oestrogen can modulate the action of PTH on osteoblast function in an oestrogen-deficient state. Oestrogen can attenuate the PTH-induced IL-6 production (Masiukiewicz et al. 2000) and PTH can stimulate osteoblast function in the presence of oestrogen pre-treatment (Nasu et al. 2000). Although oestrogen replacement therapy has been used to prevent or treat postmenopausal osteoporosis, the potential side effects, i.e. increased risk of endometrial, breast and ovarian cancers, has limited the long-term use of oestrogen replacement therapy (Deady, 2004). Thus, alternative approaches are needed for the prevention and treatment of osteoporosis. The study of the possible skeletal benefits of soyabean isoflavones will provide support for its use in prevention of osteoporosis.

The present study aims to characterise the effects of isoflavone genistein and/or PTH on human osteoblastic SaOS-2 cells in an oestrogen-depleted condition and to determine if genistein modulates the action of PTH on osteoblasts.

Materials and methods

Culture of human osteoblastic cell line (SaOS-2)

SaOS-2 cells (ATCC no. HTB-85) were cultured in Dulbecco’s Modified Eagle medium supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum, penicillin (100 units/ml) and streptomycin (100 µg/ml) (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA, USA) at a density of 1×10^4 cells/cm², with medium changes every 3 d. On the 6th day, cells were transferred to phenol red-free Dulbecco’s Modified Eagle medium supplemented with 1% charcoal-stripped fetal bovine serum for 1 d and then treated with E2 (10⁻⁸ M), genistein (10⁻⁸ to 10⁻⁶ M) or PTH (10⁻⁸ M) for 48 h. For the combined treatment, cells were pre-treated with or without E2 (10⁻⁸ M) or genistein (10⁻⁸ to 10⁻⁶ M) for 24 h, followed by treatment with (1–84) human PTH (10⁻⁸ M) for another 24 h. As an indirect measure of growth, the 3-[4, 5-dimethylthiazol 2-yl]-2, 5-diphenyletzrazolium bromide (MTT) assay was used as described previously (Denizot & Lang, 1986). Briefly the medium was removed and replaced with 100 µl MTT (5 mg/ml; Sigma) in PBS. The plates were incubated for 4 h at 37°C, followed by the addition of 100 µl lysis buffer (0.04 M HCl in propan-2-ol). The multiwell plates were shaken for 1 h at room temperature. The signals were detected by using a microplate reader at a wavelength of 595 nm.

Alkaline phosphatase activity

Quantitative alkaline phosphatase (ALP) activity of the culture was determined by an assay based on the hydrolysis of p-nitrophenylphosphate to p-nitrophenol by using an ALP detecting kit (Sigma). Treated cells were rinsed three times with PBS and harvested with 100 µl Nonidet P-40 lysis buffer (20 mM-trithyroxymethylaminomethane-HCl, pH 7.5, 150 mM-NaCl, 1 mM-CaCl₂, 1 mM-MgCl₂, 10% glycerol, 1% Nonidet P-40). The buffer was supplemented with protease inhibitors (2 µg/ml aprotinin, 2 µg/ml leupeptin, 1 mM-phenylmethylsulfonyl fluoride). Lysates were put on ice for 20 min and subjected to centrifugation at 14 000 rpm for 30 min at 4°C. Supernatant fractions were used for ALP activity detection. The ALP activity was determined according to the manufacturer’s instructions (Massion & Frankenfeld, 1972). Briefly, 1-0 ml ALP reagent was mixed with a 20 µl sample and incubated for 30 s. Absorbance (A) of the tested sample at 405 nm using water as reference was first recorded as INITIAL A. The absorbance recorded exactly after 2 min was final A. ALP activity was determined as follows:

\[ \text{ALP (U/l)} = \frac{(\text{FINAL} - \text{INITIAL})}{(2 \times \text{TV} \times 1000)} / (18.45 \times SV \times LP), \]

where TV was the total volume (1-02 ml), SV was the sample volume (0-02 ml) and LP was the lightpath (1 cm).

To normalise matrix protein expression to total cellular protein, a fraction of the reaction solution was used in a Bradford protein assay (Bio-Rad Laboratory, Hercules, CA, USA) (Bradford, 1976).

Real-time reverse transcriptase polymerase chain reaction analysis

Total RNA was isolated from cells using Trizol reagent according to the standard protocol. Approximately 2 µg total RNA was used to generate first strand cDNA in each sample using SuperScript II RT with oligo(dT) 12–18 primers.

Cell proliferative assays

For the growth study, SaOS-2 cells were seeded in ninety-six-well plates (3×10⁴ cells/well) in phenol red-free Dulbecco’s Modified Eagle medium supplemented with 1% charcoal-stripped fetal bovine serum for 1 d and then treated with E2 (10⁻⁸ M), genistein (10⁻⁸ to 10⁻⁶ M) or PTH (10⁻⁸ M) for 48 h. For the combined treatment, cells were pre-treated with or without E2 (10⁻⁸ M) or genistein (10⁻⁸ to 10⁻⁶ M) for 24 h, followed by treatment with (1–84) human PTH (10⁻⁸ M) for another 24 h. As an indirect measure of growth, the 3-[4, 5-dimethylthiazol 2-yl]-2, 5-diphenyletzrazolium bromide (MTT) assay was used as described previously (Denizot & Lang, 1986). Briefly the medium was removed and replaced with 100 µl MTT (5 mg/ml; Sigma) in PBS. The plates were incubated for 4 h at 37°C, followed by the addition of 100 µl lysis buffer (0.04 M HCl in propan-2-ol). The multiwell plates were shaken for 1 h at room temperature. The signals were detected by using a microplate reader at a wavelength of 595 nm.
Samples of total cDNA were amplified in each PCR reaction mixture of selected genes (Table 1). PCR amplification and analysis were achieved using a Smart Cycler thermal cycler (Cepheid, Sunnyvale, CA, USA). Immunoblotting was performed after the completion of Smart Cycler analysis and the PCR products were subjected to electrophoresis on a 1 % agarose gel, visualised, and photographed under UV illumination. Expected band lengths were 597 bp for ALP, 441 bp for OPG, 396 bp for RANKL and 452 bp for GAPDH. GAPDH was chosen as the reference gene for RT-PCR analysis. For quantification of RT-PCR product, standard curves based on the measured threshold cycle (Ct) were generated by dilution of cDNA extracted from an untreated control sample (a calibrator). The relative abundance of RT-PCR products in each unknown sample was then derived from these standard curves using the threshold cycle against the amount of input cDNA for both target and reference gene.

**Immunoblotting**

Conditioned media from cultured cells were collected and concentrated with Microcon-10 (Millipore Corp., Bedford, MA, USA). Equal amounts of concentrated proteins (20 μg) were separated by SDS-PAGE on 10 % reducing gels and transblotted to polyvinylidene fluoride membranes (Immobilon-P; Millipore Corp.). Immunoblotting was performed after blocking non-specific binding on the membrane with 5 % non-fat milk. The blots were probed firstly with polyclonal anti-rabbit antibody conjugated with horseradish peroxidase (1:2000; Santa Cruz Biotechnology, Inc., Santa Cruz, CA, USA) for 1 h. Finally, the antigen–antibody complexes were detected using an enhanced chemiluminescence reagent (SuperSignal West Pico; Millipore Corp.). Immunoblotting was performed after denaturing of cDNA at 95 °C for 3 min, the cycling conditions were as follows: forty cycles consisting of denaturation at 95 °C for 12 s, annealing at 56 °C (for ALP), 58 °C (for OPG), 56 °C (for RANKL) or 55 °C (for glyceraldehyde-3-phosphate dehydrogenase; GAPDH) for 12 s, and extension at 72 °C for 18 s. A melting curve analysis was performed after the completion of Smart Cycler analysis and the PCR products were subjected to electrophoresis on a 1 % agarose gel, visualised, and photographed under UV illumination. Expected band lengths were 597 bp for ALP, 441 bp for OPG, 396 bp for RANKL and 452 bp for GAPDH. GAPDH was chosen as the reference gene for RT-PCR analysis. For quantification of RT-PCR product, standard curves of the threshold cycle against the amount of input cDNA for both target and reference gene were generated by dilution of cDNA extracted from an untreated control sample (a calibrator). The relative abundance of RT-PCR products in each unknown sample was then derived from these standard curves based on the measured threshold cycle levels for both target and reference genes, and was expressed as the target:reference ratio.

**Effects of genistein and parathyroid hormone on cell proliferation**

The effects of genistein, E2 or PTH on cell proliferation were determined using the MTT assay. Treatment of human osteoblastic SaOS-2 cells with vehicle, genistein (10−8 to 10−6 M), E2 (10−8 M) or PTH (10−8 M), for 48 h did not alter the cell proliferation rate (Fig. 1 (a); P>0.05). These results are in agreement with those reported previously, i.e. that E2 has no effect on the proliferation of SaOS-2 cells (Slootweg et al. 1992; Rao et al. 1994; Nasu et al. 2000). Similarly, the cell proliferation rate was not altered in SaOS-2 cells that were co-treated with PTH and 10−8 M-E2 or varying concentrations of genistein (Fig. 1 (b); P>0.05).

**Regulation of alkaline phosphatase activity and mRNA expression by genistein**

SaOS-2 cells predominantly express the ERβ isoform and produce ALP in culture. ALP activity can be considered as an osteoblastic phenotype marker and thus an osteoblastic differentiation index in SaOS-2 cells (Muray et al. 1987). Preliminary experiments indicated that ALP activity increased in a time-dependent manner (24–72 h), and could be detected optimally at 72 h (data not shown). As shown in Fig. 2 (a), E2 (10−8 M) had no effect on the ALP activity of SaOS-2 cells (P>0.05), while genistein (10−8 to 10−6 M) increased the ALP activity in a dose-dependent manner (P<0.05). Co-treatment of SaOS-2 cells with oestrogen antagonist ICI 182780 (10−6 M), completely inhibited the increase of ALP activity induced by genistein.
The results indicated that genistein could stimulate SaOS-2 cell differentiation at dietary-achievable concentrations and these effects were ER-dependent. To determine whether E2 or genistein could regulate ALP expression transcriptionally, SaOS-2 cells were treated either with vehicle or E2 (10^{-8} M), or genistein (10^{-8} to 10^{-6} M) for 48h. The mRNA expression of ALP did not change in response to treatment with either E2 or genistein (P>0.05). Thus, it appears that genistein regulated ALP activity post-transcriptionally.

Modulating action of genistein on parathyroid hormone-induced alkaline phosphatase activity

To determine if genistein and E2 modulated the effects of PTH on osteoblastic differentiation, their combined effects on ALP activities were determined in SaOS-2 cells. ALP activities were assayed upon pre-treatment of SaOS-2 cells with either genistein, E2, or its vehicle for 24h, followed by co-incubation with PTH for another 48h so that the activities could be detected in SaOS-2 cells at the optimal duration of exposure (72h). As shown in Fig. 4, PTH (10^{-8} M) alone significantly increased ALP activity (P<0.05). The increase in ALP activity by PTH was augmented by pre-treatment of SaOS-2 cells with genistein in a dose-dependent manner (P<0.05). PTH-induced ALP activity was maximally augmented by 2.7 times following pre-treatment with 10^{-7} M-genistein. Pre-treatment with E2 (10^{-8} M) also has positive effects on the PTH-induced ALP activity (Fig. 4; P<0.05). The observed positive effect of E2 and PTH is consistent with the results reported in a previous study (Rao et al. 1994). The combined effect of genistein and PTH on ALP gene expression was also determined. ALP gene expression was not modulated by PTH in the presence or absence of E2 or genistein pre-treatment (data not shown).
**Fig. 3.** Effects of 17β-oestradiol (E2) and genistein on alkaline phosphatase (ALP) mRNA expression in human SaOS-2 cells. SaOS-2 cells were cultured and treated variously with vehicle (control; C), 10^{-8} (G8), 10^{-7} (G7) or 10^{-6} (G6) μ-gestrin or 10^{-8} μ-E2. Total RNA was isolated and subjected to real-time RT-PCR analysis for detection of ALP, and the control glyceraldehyde-3-phosphate dehydrogenase (GAPDH) transcript. The mRNA expression level of ALP is shown as a ratio to the expression of GAPDH. Results were obtained from three independent experiments. Values are means, with their standard errors represented by vertical bars. ALP mRNA expression level was not altered in SaOS-2 cells in response to treatment with E2 or genistein.

**Effects of genistein on osteoprotegrin protein expression**

OPG is a secretory protein produced by osteoblastic cells. The effect of genistein on its expression in SaOS-2 cells was therefore determined by measuring the amount of OPG secreted in the culture medium. The effects of genistein on OPG protein expression in SaOS-2 cells are shown in Fig. 5. E2 (at 10 nm) failed to alter the OPG protein expression in SaOS-2 cells, while genistein stimulated OPG protein secretion in a dose-dependent manner (Fig. 5 (a); P<0.05). The stimulation of OPG protein secretion by 10^{-7} m- and 10^{-6} m-genistein was 1.8- and 1.6-fold, respectively. The up regulation of OPG protein expression was completely blocked by oestrogen antagonist ICI 182780 (Fig. 5 (b); P<0.005), suggesting that the effects of genistein on OPG protein expression were ER-dependent. The immunoblots were stained with Coomassie brilliant blue to ensure that samples were equally loaded, and the differences observed between the samples were due to different treatment (data not shown).

**Effects of genistein on osteoprotegrin and receptor activator of nuclear factor-κB ligand mRNA expression**

OPG and RANKL are both expressed by osteoblastic cells and are involved in modulating osteoclastic cell activities. The secretion of OPG by osteoblastic cells could decrease the interactions of RANKL with RANK located on the osteoclastic cell surface, thereby preventing the induction of osteoclastic activities. Thus, the RANKL:OPG mRNA expression ratio could be used as an indirect index to evaluate the potential effects of different treatments on bone remodelling. An increase in the RANKL:OPG ratio suggests an increase in ability of the osteoblastic cells to recruit osteoclasts, whereas a decrease in the ratio suggests the reduction of osteoclastic cell recruitment. To determine if genistein could modulate osteoclastic cell activities, the effects of different concentrations of genistein on OPG and RANKL mRNA expression in SaOS-2 cells were determined. The expression of OPG and RANKL mRNA were analysed by quantitative real-time RT-PCR. As shown in Fig. 6 (a), treatment of SaOS-2 cells with E2 significantly increased OPG mRNA expression (P<0.05) but did not significantly alter the level of RANKL mRNA expression (Fig. 6 (b); P>0.05). The differential effects of E2 on RANKL and OPG mRNA expression in SaOS-2 cells resulted in a significant decrease in the RANKL:OPG ratio (Fig. 6 (c); P<0.05), suggesting that E2 exerts inhibitory effects on the recruitment of osteoclastic cells. The effect of genistein on OPG mRNA expression was similar to E2, in which treatment of SaOS-2 cells with 10^{-6} m-genistein resulted in a 1.6-fold increase in OPG mRNA expression (P<0.05). However, 10^{-6} m-genistein also increased RANKL mRNA expression by more than 1.3-fold (Fig. 6 (b); P<0.05). As a result, at 10^{-6} m, the effect of genistein on induction of OPG mRNA expression in SaOS-2 cells was counteracted by its inductive effects on RANKL mRNA expression. Thus, genistein (10^{-8} to 10^{-6} m) did not alter the RANKL:OPG ratio in SaOS-2 cells (Fig. 6 (c); P<0.05).

**Modulating action of genistein on parathyroid hormone-induced osteoprotegrin and receptor activator of nuclear factor-κB ligand mRNA expressions**

To determine if genistein could modulate the effects of PTH on osteoclastogenesis, the expressions of OPG and RANKL mRNA in SaOS-2 cells co-treated with PTH and genistein were determined. The present results indicate that genistein can alter OPG and RANKL expressions only at higher concentrations (10^{-7} and 10^{-6} m). Thus, SaOS-2 cells were pre-treated with either genistein at higher concentrations, E2 (10^{-8} m) or its vehicle for 24 h, followed by co-treatment with 10^{-8} m-PTH for another 48 h. Fig. 7 (a) and Fig. 7 (b) show that treatment of SaOS-2 cells with PTH alone resulted in a significant
decrease in the expression of OPG mRNA as well as a significant increase in the expression of RANKL mRNA \((P < 0.05)\). The resulting RANKL:OPG ratio was significantly increased upon treatment with PTH in SaOS-2 cells (Fig. 7 (c); \(P < 0.05\)), confirming the action of PTH in modulating osteoclastic activities. Pre-treatment of SaOS-2 cells with genistein or \(E_2\) could reverse the inhibitory effect of PTH on OPG gene expression (Fig. 7 (a)). In contrast, pre-treatment of SaOS-2 cells with \(E_2\) but not genistein, completely attenuated the induction of RANKL mRNA expression by PTH (Fig. 7 (b)). Taken together, it appears that genistein and \(E_2\) can prevent the up regulation of the RANKL:OPG ratio by PTH in osteoblastic cells (Fig. 7 (c); \(P < 0.05\)). These results suggest that the beneficial effect of genistein and \(E_2\) on...
Effect of genistein on human SaOS-2 cells

Several phenotypic markers of osteoblastic cells, including cell proliferation (MTT) and ALP, were used in the present study to determine the effects of genistein and PTH on human osteoblastic SaOS-2 cells. The results indicate that genistein, but not E2, significantly increased ALP activity in a dose-dependent manner, supporting its role in modulating osteoblastic cell differentiation. It appears that the stimulatory effect of genistein on ALP activity is ER-dependent and that cell proliferation as determined by the MTT assay is not affected by genistein or E2 treatment. The present results are consistent with those reported by others (Rao et al. 1994; Nasu et al. 2000), that E2 has no significant effect on ALP activity or cell proliferation and that neither E2 nor genistein modulate ALP gene expression in SaOS-2 cells. These results indicate that cell proliferation and ALP gene expression might not be involved in the anabolic effects of E2 and genistein in this bone cell model system.

Previous studies showed that serum genistein and isoflavone levels increased in a dose-dependent manner in response to in vivo administration of genistein in animals (Santell et al. 2000) as well as soya food consumption in human subjects (King & Bursill, 1998). However, the plasma level of genistein was seldom over 1 μmol/l even in a population with high traditional soya food intake. Thus, in the present study, the dietary achievable concentrations of genistein ranging from $10^{-8}$ to $10^{-6}$ m were chosen in order to mimic these in vivo conditions.

The equilibrium of RANKL and OPG expression plays an important role in controlling bone remodelling. To our knowledge, only three studies have looked at the effect of genistein on RANKL gene expression in osteoblastic cell lines (Chen & Anderson, 2002; Viereck et al. 2002; Chen et al. 2003) However, mRNA signals of RANKL were not detectable in these cell model systems. The present study is the first to report that RANKL gene expression is detectable in SaOS-2 cells and could be regulated by genistein. Genistein (at 1 μM) produced a 1.5-fold increase in RANKL gene expression. However, the stimulatory effect on RANKL gene expression did not occur in SaOS-2 cells in response to treatment with $10^{-6}$ and $10^{-7}$ m-genistein, indicating that the effect of genistein on RANKL expression was dose-dependent.

Genistein was recently reported to have stimulatory effects on OPG mRNA levels and protein secretion in several different osteoblastic cells lines, including OB, hFOB and MC3T3 cells (Chen & Anderson, 2002; Viereck et al. 2002; Chen et al. 2003). In the present study, the effects of genistein on the steady-state level of OPG mRNA and protein production in human SaOS-2 cells were assessed. Genistein significantly increased OPG protein and mRNA expression in a dose-dependent manner. The increase in OPG protein secretion induced by genistein appears to be ER-dependent, as co-treatment of SaOS-2 cells with ICI 182780 completely abolished the induction of OPG protein secretion by genistein.

In conclusion, it appears that genistein modulates bone health by modulating the effects of PTH on OPG and RANKL expression in osteoblastic cells.

**Discussion**

Bone health is partially mediated by modulating the effects of PTH on OPG and RANKL expression in osteoblastic cells.
significantly increased ALP activity, suggesting that PTH could modulate osteoblastic cell differentiation and has an anabolic effect on bone. On the other hand, PTH significantly decreased OPG mRNA expression and stimulated RANKL mRNA expression. The increase in the RANKL:OPG ratio in SaOS-2 cells by PTH as demonstrated in the present study is in agreement with the well-known role of PTH in inducing bone resorption. The results indicate that PTH could potentially increase osteoclastic cell recruitment by increasing the RANKL:OPG ratio in osteoblastic cells.

Increasing evidence suggests that oestrogen might modulate the action of PTH in bone (Masiukiewicz et al. 2000). An association between oestrogen deficiency and the rise in serum PTH was reported previously (Khosla et al. 1997). For women, receiving oestrogen therapy could prevent the increase in PTH levels associated with the menopause and reverse virtually all age-related increase in bone resorption induced by PTH (Khosla et al. 1997; Masiukiewicz et al. 2000). The present results are consistent with previous reports (Rao et al. 1994; Nasu et al. 2000), i.e. that the PTH-induced ALP activity was further increased in response to pre-treatment with E2. At the same time, E2 can exert its anabolic effect on bone through the up regulation of OPG gene expression and the down regulation of the RANKL:OPG ratio in this cell model system. Most importantly, E2 pre-treatment can completely reverse the induction of RANKL gene expression and the inhibition of OPG gene expression by PTH. These results indicate as a possible mechanism that E2 could modulate the effect of PTH by stimulating osteoblastic cell differentiation and inhibiting osteoclastogenesis, thereby promoting bone formation in osteoblastic cells.

The present results also demonstrate that genistein could modulate the action of PTH in osteoblastic cells. PTH-induced ALP activity was further increased in SaOS-2 cells in response to pre-treatment with genistein. Pre-treatment of SaOS-2 cells with 10^{-7} and 10^{-6} M-genistein modestly attenuated PTH-induced RANKL mRNA expression and significantly reversed the inhibition of OPG mRNA expression by PTH. Thus, genistein mimics the effect of E2 in modulating the stimulatory effects of PTH on ALP expression as well as reversing the inductive effects of PTH on osteoclastogenesis via its modulation of the RANKL:OPG ratio. The present findings suggest beneficial effects of genistein on bone health associated with an oestrogen-deficient state.

In conclusion, the present data demonstrate the anabolic effects of phyto-oestrogens in human SaOS-2 osteoblastic cells. PTH acted bi-directionally on osteoblastic SaOS-2 cells by stimulating ALP activity, inducing RANKL gene expression and inhibiting OPG gene expression. In addition, the present study demonstrates that the anabolic effect of oestrogen in osteoblastic SaOS-2 cells was at least partly mediated through the modulation of the RANKL–OPG system. Furthermore, both genistein and oestrogen can augment PTH-induced ALP activity and attenuate the induction of osteoclastogenesis by PTH in SaOS-2 cells. The results of the present study provide new insights for understanding the molecular actions of genistein in osteoblastic cells. Most importantly, as genistein is a major type of dietary phyto-oestrogens commonly found in soya products, the present study provides the mechanistic basis for supporting the observed bone-protective effects reported previously in both clinical and epidemiological studies. Thus, a diet high in phyto-oestrogen content might be helpful for postmenopausal women with high circulating PTH levels to protect against bone loss and prevent the development of osteoporosis.

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