

# A Mouse Analogue of the Human Carcinoembryonic Antigen<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Functional human carcinoembryonic antigen (CEA)-like genes have been shown to be present in the mouse. Southern analyses of murine DNA using both human and murine CEA complementary DNA probes have revealed the presence of multiple CEA-like genes, while analyses of RNA from different mouse tissues showed CEA-like transcripts in adult colon and liver. Furthermore, a CEA-like protein, immunoprecipitable with a rabbit polyclonal serum raised against human CEA, has been detected in adult murine colon tissue. Several murine CEA complementary DNA clones have been isolated from a murine colon complementary DNA library, and characterization of one such clone demonstrates that both the N-terminal and the internal domains have been conserved between the two species. The existence of a murine counterpart of CEA strengthens the case for an essential function for this human tumor marker and provides an experimentally amenable system for elucidation of its biological properties.

## INTRODUCTION

CEA<sup>3</sup> is a large cell surface glycoprotein ( $M_r$  180,000) first described in 1965 by Gold and Freedman as an antigen expressed in tumors of the human gastrointestinal tract (1) and in the fetal digestive system (2). This or related antigens have since been detected in a wide range of human malignancies including breast, lung, and ovarian cancers (3, 4). Assays that measure the serum or plasma levels of CEA have been useful in assessing the prognosis and monitoring the progress of cancer patients (5). CEA is also a member of a large and complex gene family (6). NCA, for example, is a family member specifically found in breast tumors, chronic myelogenous leukemia, and normal gall bladder (7, 8) as well as in normal spleen and lung (9, 10).

The cDNAs corresponding to CEA and NCA mRNAs have recently been cloned, and their nucleotide sequences and predicted translation products have been determined (11-15). Both proteins belong to the immunoglobulin supergene family, and initial studies point to an intercellular adhesion function for CEA.<sup>4</sup>

In depth investigations of the function of CEA and its role in malignancy will require animal models, preferably murine, allowing approaches such as transgenesis, controlled carcinogenesis, and *in situ* assessment of expression during development. Therefore, we have undertaken a search for a mouse counterpart of CEA. Previous studies of animal models have identified putative counterparts of CEA or NCA using immune sera or specific monoclonal antibodies. A putative rat CEA was detected in chemically induced colonic adenocarcinomas, embryonic tissues, and, in low concentrations, normal adult tissues

(16). An antigen which is immunologically closely related to human NCA and which cross-reacts with CEA has also been identified in lung and spleen tissues of Macaca monkeys (17), and blood samples from other primates including gorilla, orangutan, black ape, mangabey ape, baboon, and chimpanzee exhibited CEA-related substances (18). We report here the identification and initial characterization of a mouse counterpart of CEA present in normal adult colon and in liver tissues.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Cell Culture.** Cells of the human colonic adenocarcinoma line (LS-180) (19) and a line of L-strain mouse fibroblasts (LTA) were grown at 37°C in monolayer in  $\alpha$ -minimal essential medium (20) supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum and asparagine · H<sub>2</sub>O at 50  $\mu$ g/ml.

**<sup>32</sup>P-labeled Probes.** Hybridization probes for Northern and Southern analyses consisted of either an 800-base pair *Nco*I-*Bam*HI restriction fragment comprising the N-terminus and most of the first internal repeating domain of the human CEA cDNA (11), a 1.43-kilobase *Eco*RI restriction fragment specific for the 3'-untranslated region of the human NCA cDNA (7), or a 1.45-kilobase *Eco*RI restriction fragment of a murine CEA cDNA clone. These fragments were extracted from 0.8% low-melting agarose gels and <sup>32</sup>P-labeled using the random primer technique of Feinberg *et al.* (21).

**DNA Preparation and Southern Analyses.** Genomic DNA was prepared (22) from two mouse leukemic lines L1210SS and L1210DN (23), a mouse fibroblast line LTA 42.2 (24), and normal human liver tissues. DNA was digested with *Eco*RI restriction endonuclease, and the digestion products were electrophoresed on a 1% agarose gel. The gels were transferred to a hybridization membrane (Zeta-probe, Bio-Rad; or Hybond-N, Amersham). Identical mouse Southern filters were hybridized with the <sup>32</sup>P-labeled CEA probe in 5× SSPE, 1× Denhardt's solution (22), 100  $\mu$ g/ml of heat-denatured salmon testis DNA, and either 30%, 40%, or 50% formamide at 40°C for 48 h. The human genomic filters were hybridized at 42°C for 18 h under the same conditions but with 0.5% SDS, 10% dextran sulfate, and 30% formamide. The murine fibroblast genomic DNA was hybridized using the above conditions with 50% formamide at 42°C. Filters were exposed to Kodak XRP X-ray films for 18 to 36 h after washing.

**RNA Preparation and Northern Analyses.** Fresh tissues were collected from either pregnant or nonpregnant female CD-1 mice and immediately frozen in liquid nitrogen. Approximately 2 g of tissue were powdered using a mortar and pestle kept at -40°C, and the fine powder was vortexed into a solution of 4.0 M guanidium isothiocyanate containing 25 mM sodium citrate (pH 7.0), 0.5% Sarkosyl, and 0.1 M  $\beta$ -mercaptoethanol (25). Poly A<sup>+</sup> RNA was purified on oligo dT columns (26). Total or poly A<sup>+</sup> RNA was electrophoresed on 1.5% agarose gels containing 1.1 M formaldehyde, 10 mM sodium phosphate buffer (pH 7.4), and 1 mM EDTA; stained with acridine orange; and transferred to either nitrocellulose or Hybond-N (Amersham Corp.) membranes. Hybridization was done for 18 h at 37°C or 42°C in 5× SSPE, 1× Denhardt's solution, 30% or 50% formamide, 150  $\mu$ g/ml of heat-denatured salmon testis DNA, 2 mM sodium pyrophosphate, 0.1% SDS, 10% dextran sulfate for the nitrocellulose membranes, or 5% dextran sulfate for the Hybond-N membranes using 2.5 × 10<sup>6</sup> to 4.0 × 10<sup>6</sup> cpm/ml of the <sup>32</sup>P-labeled probes. The filters were washed up to a final stringency of 0.1× SSC and 0.1% SDS at 50°C. 18S rRNA (2.0 kilobases) and 28S rRNA (4.5 kilobases) were used as markers.

**cDNA Library and Isolation of Murine CEA cDNA Clones.** cDNA was synthesized, as described previously (10), from 5  $\mu$ g of poly A<sup>+</sup> RNA isolated from murine adult colon, ligated to dephosphorylated *Eco*RI-digested  $\lambda$ gt10 DNA, and packaged with Gigapack Plus extracts (Stratagene) to yield infectious virus.  $\lambda$ gt10 recombinant bacteriophages

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<sup>3</sup>The abbreviations used are: CEA, carcinoembryonic antigen; NCA, normal cross-reacting antigen; cDNA, complementary DNA; SSPE, 0.18 M NaCl:1 mM EDTA:10 mM sodium phosphate (pH 7.7); SDS, sodium dodecyl sulfate; poly A<sup>+</sup> RNA, polyadenylate-containing RNA; SSC, standard saline citrate.

<sup>4</sup>S. Benchinol *et al.*, manuscript in preparation.

were plated on *Escherichia coli* C600 hflA 150 (27). Five  $\times 10^5$  clones were screened by duplicate plaque hybridization using a human *NcoI*-*Bam*HI  $^{32}$ P-labeled restriction fragment of CEA cDNA (11) under low stringency conditions (30% formamide, 37°C) as described above. Filters were washed up to a final stringency of 0.1 SSC and 0.1% SDS at 50°C and exposed to Kodak XRP X-ray films. Positive cDNA clones were purified by three successive replatings on *E. coli* C600 hflA 150.

**DNA Sequence Determination.** Murine CEA cDNA inserts were subcloned into unique sites of the pGEM4 plasmid (Promega; Biotec). Two  $\mu$ g of plasmid DNA were denatured by a 5-min incubation in 0.2 N NaOH and 2 mM EDTA, followed by neutralization and ethanol precipitation. The DNA was then hybridized with 30 ng of either the SP6 or T7 promoter primer (Promega) and sequenced by the dideoxy chain termination method (28) using Sequenase (United States Biochemicals). Compression regions were verified by resequencing with dITP and confirmed by opposite strand sequence.

**Sequence Analysis.** Nucleotide and amino acid sequences were analyzed using the DNAsis and Prosis programs (LKB) or alternatively the Deverreux (29) programs.

**Western Blotting of Mouse Proteins.** Mice were sacrificed, and the specified organs were rapidly removed, incubated in ice-cold hypotonic buffer [20 mM 4-(2-hydroxyethyl)-1-piperazineethanesulfonic acid (pH 7.2); 3 mM MgCl<sub>2</sub>; 3 mM KCl; aprotinin (2  $\mu$ g/ml); phenylmethylsulfonyl fluoride (200  $\mu$ g/ml)] for 20 min on ice, and then disrupted with 15 strokes at 700 rpm using a Heidolph tissue homogenizer. The homogenate was then subjected to centrifugation (1,500  $\times g$  for 5 min), and the subsequent supernatant was subjected to centrifugation at 75,000  $\times g$  for 30 min to produce a membrane-enriched pellet. The pellet was resuspended in hypotonic buffer to determine the protein concentration of this fraction, and appropriate amounts of protein were precipitated with ice-cold 10% trichloroacetic acid. The precipitate was washed with -20°C acetone, air dried, dissolved directly into SDS-sample buffer, and heated at 100°C for 1 min. Proteins were resolved on 7.5% SDS-polyacrylamide gels and transferred to nitrocellulose membranes as described previously (30). Immunoreactive polypeptides were identified on the nitrocellulose blots using a rabbit polyclonal antiserum raised against purified human CEA (31). This antibody has not been absorbed with human tissue samples and may thus cross-react with NCA and other members of this protein family. Antigen-antibody complexes were visualized using an alkaline phosphatase-conjugated goat antibody directed against rabbit IgG.

## RESULTS

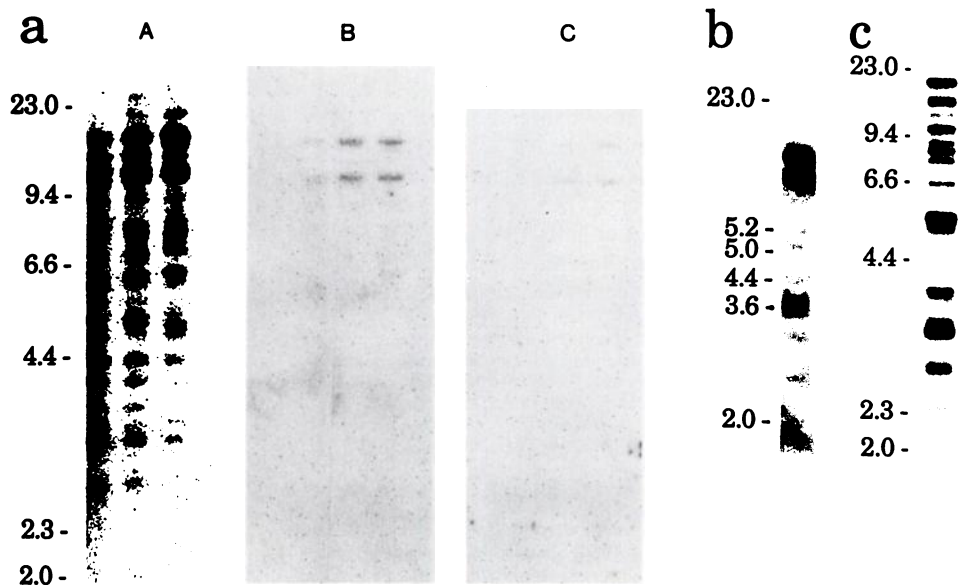
**Murine Analogues of Human CEA Genes.** In order to search for a murine analogue of the human CEA gene family, we

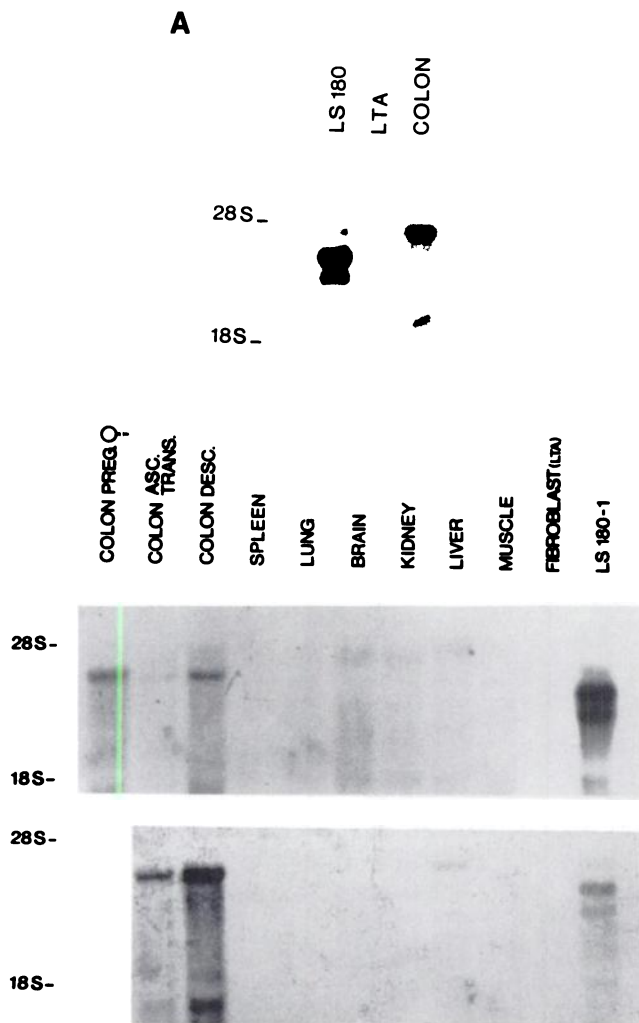
probed mouse *Eco*RI-digested genomic DNA filters with the CEA cDNA restriction fragment corresponding to the N-terminal portion and most of the first internal repeating domain. The autoradiogram yielded as many as 14 bands when hybridized at low stringency (30% formamide, 40°C; Fig. 1a, Panel A), while 2 bands remained at high stringency (40% and 50% formamide, 40°C; Fig. 1a, Panels B and C). Correspondingly, human *Eco*RI-digested genomic DNA preparations contained 14 to 17 bands when probed under the same low stringency conditions (Fig. 1c). The band patterns observed were different in the mouse and the human DNA preparations. Probing of murine *Eco*RI-digested genomic DNA under stringent conditions (50% formamide, 42°C) using a partial murine CEA cDNA insert yielded 2 strongly hybridizing bands and 6 fainter bands (Fig. 1b) which points to the existence of a CEA-like gene family in the mouse as shown previously in the human.

**Murine CEA Transcripts.** Northern filters were prepared with poly A<sup>+</sup> RNA from colons of normal pregnant female mice and from a fibroblast (LTA) cell line. As can be seen in Fig. 2A, hybridization at low stringency with the human CEA cDNA fragment described above revealed a strong unique 3.8-kilobase band present in the colon of adult mice, but absent in the fibroblasts. By comparison, 3 bands were present in the LS-180 human colon carcinoma cell line sample (7, 11). Hybridization of the same filter with a human NCA-specific probe detected the 2.6-kilobase NCA band in the human sample, but no signal in the murine samples (results not shown).

As human CEA, NCA and other members of this gene family have been detected in various tissues (2, 6-10), we prepared total RNA from ascending, transverse, and descending colons of nonpregnant female inbred mice as well as from spleen, lung, brain, kidney, liver, and muscle tissues of these animals. Northern filters of these total RNA preparations were hybridized with the human CEA-specific probe at low stringency and with the murine CEA-specific probe under stringent conditions. A strong band was detected in the descending colon samples and a fainter signal in the ascending and transverse colon sample as well as in the liver samples (Fig. 2, B and C). Shorter transcripts were also apparent in colon samples when the murine cDNA probe was used (Fig. 2C). These transcripts probably correspond to other members of the murine CEA gene family, since a number of murine cDNA clones specific for

Fig. 1. Southern analysis. In a, 7.5  $\mu$ g of each mouse *Eco*RI-digested genomic DNA preparation were resolved on an agarose gel, transferred to a Zeta-Probe membrane, and hybridized with a human CEA-specific probe as described in "Materials and Methods." Filters were washed to a final stringency of 2 $\times$  SSC and 0.1% SDS at 55°C. Lane 1, L1210SS DNA; Lane 2, L1210DN DNA; Lane 3, LTA 42.2 DNA. A, 30% formamide; B, 40% formamide; C, 50% formamide. In b, 10  $\mu$ g of mouse *Eco*RI-digested genomic DNA were separated on an agarose gel, transferred to a Hybond-N membrane, and hybridized at 42°C with a murine CEA-specific probe using the conditions described in "Materials and Methods" in a solution containing 50% formamide. Filters were washed to a final stringency of 0.1 $\times$  SSC and 0.1% SDS at 50°C. In c, 8.5  $\mu$ g of human liver *Eco*RI-digested genomic DNA were resolved on an agarose gel, transferred to a Hybond-N membrane, and hybridized at 42°C with a human CEA-specific probe using the conditions described in "Materials and Methods," in a solution containing 30% formamide. Filters were washed to a final stringency of 2 $\times$  SSC and 0.1% SDS at 55°C.



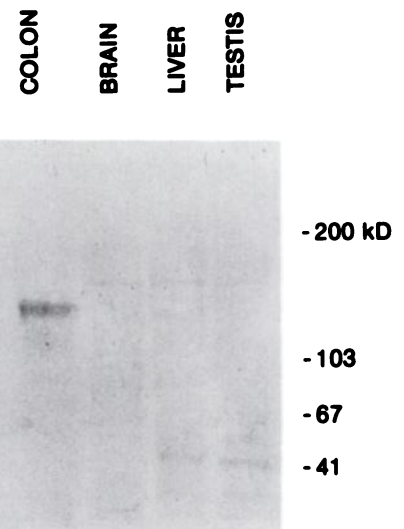


**Fig. 2.** Northern analysis. In *A*, samples of 5  $\mu$ g of poly A<sup>+</sup> RNA were separated on a formaldehyde-agarose gel, transferred to a nitrocellulose membrane, hybridized with a human CEA-specific radioactive restriction fragment, and washed using the conditions described in "Materials and Methods." RNA was extracted and purified from: *LS-180*, human colonic adenocarcinoma cell line; *LTA*, mouse fibroblast cell line; *COLON*, descending colon from pregnant CD-1 mice. In *B*, samples of 15  $\mu$ g of total RNA were separated as above, transferred to a Hybond-N membrane, hybridized with a radioactive human CEA-specific restriction fragment at 37°C in a 30% formamide solution, and washed as described in "Materials and Methods." RNA was extracted from: *Lane 1*, descending colon of pregnant mice; *Lane 2*, ascending and transverse colon; *Lane 3*, descending colon; *Lane 4*, spleen; *Lane 5*, lung; *Lane 6*, brain; *Lane 7*, kidney; *Lane 8*, liver; *Lane 9*, hind-leg muscle of female mice; *Lane 10*, mouse fibroblast LTA cell line; *Lane 11*, human colonic adenocarcinoma LS-180 cell line. In *C*, samples of 15  $\mu$ g of total RNA were separated, transferred as above, and hybridized with a radioactive murine CEA-specific restriction fragment at 42°C in a 50% formamide solution. Filters were washed to a final stringency of 0.1 $\times$  SSC and 0.1% SDS at 50°C.

shorter transcripts have been isolated from the colonic cDNA library (data not shown).

**Murine CEA-like Protein.** An immunoreactive  $M_r$  ~120,000 protein was detected by Western blotting in membrane-enriched preparations of adult mouse colon but not liver, testis, or brain using rabbit anti-human CEA polyclonal antibody (Fig. 3).

**Murine CEA Analogue.** In light of the positive results obtained in Northern analysis of murine RNA using a human CEA-specific probe, a mouse colon cDNA library was constructed and screened at reduced hybridization stringency with the human CEA cDNA fragments. Ninety-two positive clones were isolated from the  $5 \times 10^5$  cDNA clones screened. The restriction map, primary sequence, and deduced translated protein product of a 1.45-kilobase incomplete cDNA clone are presented in Fig. 4 and reveal striking homology to human



**Fig. 3.** Immunoblotting of mouse tissues with rabbit anti-human CEA antibodies. The indicated tissues were harvested and processed as described in "Materials and Methods." The arrow indicates the position of human colonic CEA protein on the gel.

CEA. The partial *N*-terminal domain contains two *N*-linked glycosylation consensus sequences, one of which is perfectly aligned with a similar site in the human protein. The carboxy region of this domain has diverged relative to human CEA, although the overall conservation is highly significant (72.6% identical and conserved residues in comparison to the human *N*-terminal domain). The internal domain shows less divergence (79.4% homology to the human first internal repeating unit); the four cysteine residues thought to be involved in disulfide bridges in the human protein are conserved in the murine analogue and are found within long stretches of identical residues. A less conserved region lies between the first and second cysteines where two gaps were introduced in the human protein sequence to maximize alignment. As in the human protein, eleven potential *N*-linked glycosylation sites can be identified, although they are not always present in the same positions as in the human protein.

## DISCUSSION

The results presented above demonstrate the existence of CEA-like genes in the murine system. Hybridization of genomic DNA Southern filters has revealed the presence of multiple fragments, while analysis of transcripts from different tissues of the mouse showed an abundant 3.8-kilobase transcript present in the adult colon and less abundant shorter transcripts in colon and liver tissues.

Furthermore, a murine CEA-like protein with a molecular weight of approximately 120,000 has been identified using rabbit anti-human CEA antibodies. This finding indicates that some antigenic determinants have been conserved between the human and murine CEA proteins. There are at least seven proteins to date assigned to the human CEA family by their immunological cross-reactivity and amino acid sequences (6). Our results imply that a CEA-like family may also be present in the murine system.

Analyses using differential hybridizations, restriction enzyme mapping, and DNA sequencing of various clones isolated from a mouse colon cDNA library have so far resulted in identification of four different members of the murine CEA family. These cDNAs are currently being fully characterized. Sequence



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