Tailoring Phospholipid Micellar Shape for Drug and Protein Delivery Systems

B. Ashok, C. Kirchhoff, L. Arleth, H. Onyukse, P. Thiyagarajan, R.P. Hjelm

1Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences, College of Pharmacy, University of Illinois at Chicago, IL, U.S.A.
2Los Alamos Neutron Scattering Center (LANSCE), Los Alamos National Laboratory, Los Alamos, NM, U.S.A.
3Present address: Danish Polymer Center, Risø National Laboratory, Roskilde, Denmark
4Intense Pulsed Neutron Source (IPNS), Argonne National Laboratory, Argonne, IL, U.S.A.

Introduction

Phospholipid micelles are relatively new drug delivery systems. They are thermodynamically stable or metastable, self-assembling systems [1]. Their mean hydrodynamic diameter (~16 nm) allows them to extravasate to the tissue compartments where the drug action is required. Phospholipid micelles have been shown to be nontoxic and acceptable for intravenous administration, and they appear to be more stable than other surfactant micelles upon aqueous dilution.

This phospholipid-based drug delivery system requires a clear understanding of which particle shapes are most effective in delivering a particular drug and how to achieve them. The particle shape in self-assembling micelle systems is derived from the local curvature, which is determined from the component surfactant shape and interactions [2, 3]. The additional degree of freedom introduced by mixing two or more surfactants of different intrinsic curvature allows for considerable latitude in controlling particle shape. The extensive literature on mixed surfactant systems bears this notion out [4].

Egg yolk phosphatidylcholine (EYPC) has zero intrinsic curvature. Distearoyl phosphatidyl ethanolamine modified with polyethylene glycol (DSPE-PEG) of increasing molecular weight has correspondingly increasing positive curvatures and solubilities. Thus, mixtures of EYPC with different proportions of DSPE-PEG with PEG of various molecular weights will provide the latitude to control particle shape. The extensive literature on mixed surfactant systems bears this notion out [4].

Methods and Materials

Various molar ratios of DSPE-PEG 2000 and 5000 and phosphatidylcholine (PC) (100:0, 85:15, 75:25, 60:40, 50:50, and 30:70) were dissolved in methanol. The mixtures were coprecipitated under vacuum by using a rotary evaporator to form dry films, then dried overnight to remove traces of solvent. The films were then rehydrated to a 1 mM lipid concentration with an isotonic 0.01 M HEPES buffer at pH 7.4 and equilibrated in the dark under argon at room temperature.

Protein solutions were mixed with DSPE-PEG 5000 micellar dispersions in buffer at the isoelectric point of the specific protein and allowed to equilibrate at room temperature for predetermined amounts of time. We also compared the interaction of the protein with polysorbate 80 (a standard pharmaceutical excipient used to stabilize proteins) to our PEGylated phospholipid-protein system. In addition, we assessed cytokine interactions with sodium dodecyl sulfate (SDS, a well-characterized surfactant used to stabilize proteins at low concentrations and to denature them at high concentrations). Finally, we used two other proteins (enzyme and enzyme inhibitor) for comparison in our PEGylated phospholipid system.

Small-angle x-ray scattering (SAXS) experiments were performed at BESSRC beamline 12-ID at the APS. The scattering data were measured on a 2-D charge-coupled device (CCD) detector. A q-range ($q = 4\pi\sin(\theta) / \lambda$, where $\theta$ is the scattering angle and $\lambda$ is the wavelength of the x-ray beam) from 0.065 nm$^{-1}$ to 2.5 nm$^{-1}$ was covered within a single setting. The resolution effects are negligible on this instrument. The data were radial-averaged by using the standard software of the facility.
and rebinned into 200 points evenly distributed on a log q-scale. The absolute scale of the scattering intensity was determined by measuring the incoherent scattering from pure water. Indirect Fourier transform analysis was performed on these scattering data, and the detailed structures of the lipid systems were determined from a modeling approach for analyzing scattering data.

Results and Discussion

**DSPE-PEG:EYPC Micelles**

Figure 1 shows SAXS data taken for DSPE-PEG2000 (Fig. 1a) and DSPE-PEG5000 (Fig. 1b) mixed in different mole fractions with EYPC. A model for the micelles with a hydrophobic core, surrounded by a dense hydrophilic layer that is covered by PEG chains in the form of Gaussian random coils attached to the outer surface (Fig. 2), is in good agreement with the scattering data (Fig. 1). The micelles are never perfectly spherical; even at 100% DSPE-PEG, oblate ellipsoidal micelles are formed. As more and more EYPC is incorporated in the micelles, the micelles elongate, and rodlike micelles with an elliptical cross section form. In the region where the growth takes place, the DSPE-PEG2000:EYPC micelles have larger aggregation numbers than the DSPE-PEG5000 micelles for identical mixing ratios. As the EYPC content increases, these micelles elongate, and at a DSPE-PEG:EYPC ratio of 30:70, rigid, rodlike micelles longer than 1000 Å are formed. By mixing DSPE-PEG and EYPC, considerable latitude in controlling the particle shape is obtained, and we have been able to demonstrate that the aggregation numbers and observed transition from spheroid to rodlike shape follows the predictions of a simple theory using the mean curvature of the surfactants. This may be useful for controlling micelle shape in controlled drug delivery applications.

**Protein:Surfactant Complexes**

SAXS data were taken from proteins and surfactants, both alone and in different mixing ratios. The comparison of the scattering curves allowed us to determine if the protein and surfactants were interacting, and, if so, to determine the stoichiometry of the interaction and the saturation level. We found that SDS forms complexes with all of our proteins. This is seen, for example, by analyzing the forward scattering extracted from the SAXS data, where the dependence of I(0) with the mixing ratio (Fig. 3) follows a model calculation for complex formation to a molar ratio of about 250 (SDS to protein), after which I(0) shows that complexes and pure micelles coexist. However, polysorbate interaction is minimal. The latter conclusion comes from the observation that the SAXS data for the complexes at all mixing ratios are the sums of the SAXS data from the individual components (Fig. 4). Both results were anticipated from other analytical methods described in the literature. In contrast, PEGylated phospholipid-protein interaction is complex and concentration dependent. One of our proteins becomes saturated with PEGylated phospholipid at phospholipid-to-protein molar ratios of ~40:1 and >75:1 for our model enzyme inhibitor. The complex size increases until saturation is achieved, suggesting that the proteins are coated by phospholipid. Complex sizes above
saturation approach the size of micelles. (Unlike standard phospholipids, PEGylated phospholipids form micelles in aqueous solutions.) In conclusion, our SAXS data have enabled an increased understanding of our complex systems.

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References