

STAT1 Pathway Is Involved in Activation of Caprine Arthritis-Encephalitis Virus Long Terminal Repeat in Monocytes

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The caprine arthritis-encephalitis virus (CAEV) long terminal repeat (LTR) is activated by gamma interferon (IFN- γ) in promonocytic cells. We have previously shown that a 70-bp element is necessary and sufficient for the response of the CAEV LTR to this cytokine. At the 5' end, this 70-bp IFN- γ response element contains sequence similarity to the gamma activated site (GAS). Here we demonstrate that the putative GAS element in the CAEV LTR binds specifically to a cellular factor induced by IFN- γ in promonocytic cells. Substitution mutations in this consensus sequence eliminate binding of the inducible factor. The GAS element from the 70-bp motif is sufficient to confer responsiveness to IFN- γ using a heterologous minimal promoter. Consistent with the binding data, the same mutations in the GAS element eliminate responsiveness to IFN- γ in the context of both a functional CAEV LTR and a heterologous promoter. The cellular factor that binds to the GAS element is present from 5 min to 14 h after stimulation with IFN- γ . Binding of the nuclear factor to the GAS element in the CAEV LTR is inhibited by antibody directed against STAT1 (p91/84). Thus, the GAS sequence in the CAEV LTR is essential for the response to IFN- γ and a STAT1-like factor binds to this site. The STAT-1 signaling pathway provides at least one mechanism for activation of the CAEV LTR by IFN- γ in monocytes. These data are the first demonstration of a role for a STAT family member in the regulation of a viral promoter.

Caprine arthritis-encephalitis virus (CAEV) causes a symmetric, peripheral arthritis in infected adult goats (3). CAEV belongs to the group of nononcogenic retroviruses called lentiviruses. Other members of the group include human immunodeficiency virus type 1 (HIV-1), HIV-2, simian immunodeficiency virus, equine infectious anemia virus, feline T-lymphotropic virus, and visna virus (11). All members of this retrovirus group are species specific, have tropism for the cells of the monocyte-macrophage lineage and are characterized by persistent infections in vivo. Although production of the virus is restricted in infected monocytes, differentiation into macrophages results in increased viral expression and an associated inflammatory response. In vivo expression and replication of the virus in tissue macrophages correlates with development of clinical disease, such as inflammatory arthritis (11, 17).

Several cellular signalling pathways have been shown to be involved in the regulation of lentiviral transcription in monocytes. The HIV-1 long terminal repeat (LTR) is regulated in monocytes by nuclear factor NF- κ B (9). Members of the *ets* family of proto-oncogenes, as well as NF- κ B, are important for increased expression of the HIV-2 LTR during monocyte differentiation (15). The FOS-JUN heterodimer binds to a site for activator protein (AP-1) and is involved in transcriptional activation of the visna virus LTR (24). The factors required for activation of the CAEV LTR have not been characterized.

Another pathway that leads to differentiation of monocytes is initiated by gamma interferon (IFN- γ). This cytokine is secreted by an activated subpopulation of T cells (Th1) and natural killer cells during inflammatory responses to viral infection (4). Signalling through the IFN- γ receptor leads to

activation of a distinct pair of tyrosine kinases, JAK1 and JAK2, which belong to the Janus kinase family (22). However, recent studies have demonstrated an additional requirement for a serine kinase and serine phosphorylation for maximal activation of transcription (29). The activated kinases lead to phosphorylation of a latent cytoplasmic protein, STAT1 (signal transducer and activator of transcription). Dimeric phosphorylated STAT1 translocates to the nucleus, binds to the gamma activation site (GAS) consensus element in IFN- γ -responsive promoters, and activates IFN- γ -dependent transcription of different cellular genes (5, 22, 25).

We have demonstrated in a previous report that the CAEV LTR is activated by stimulation of monocytes with IFN- γ . A 70-bp region is necessary and sufficient for the IFN- γ response in the promonocytic cell line U937 (26), and we call this region the CAEV 70-bp interferon response element (70-bp IRE). A variety of agents, including IFN- γ , can be used to induce differentiation of these cells into a more mature phenotype (13, 19, 20). Differentiation of U937 cells induced by IFN- γ is associated with the binding of two distinct cellular factors to the GAS sequence: IFN- γ activation factor (STAT1 or GAF) and differentiation-induced factor (DIF) (7). The 5' end of the CAEV 70-bp IRE contains sequence similarity to the GAS consensus element. We characterized the binding of cellular factors to and the function of this putative GAS element. Here we demonstrate that a GAS consensus site in the 70-bp IRE is necessary for regulation of the CAEV LTR by IFN- γ and is sufficient to confer IFN- γ responsiveness. We further identify the cellular factor binding to this sequence as STAT1. To our knowledge, these findings are the first demonstration of regulation of a viral promoter by a STAT family member.

The LTRs of two different isolates of CAEV, p1244 and Co, contain one or two copies of the 70-bp IRE, respectively (Fig. 1). Examination of these LTRs for sequence similarities to binding sites for known transcription factors revealed that the

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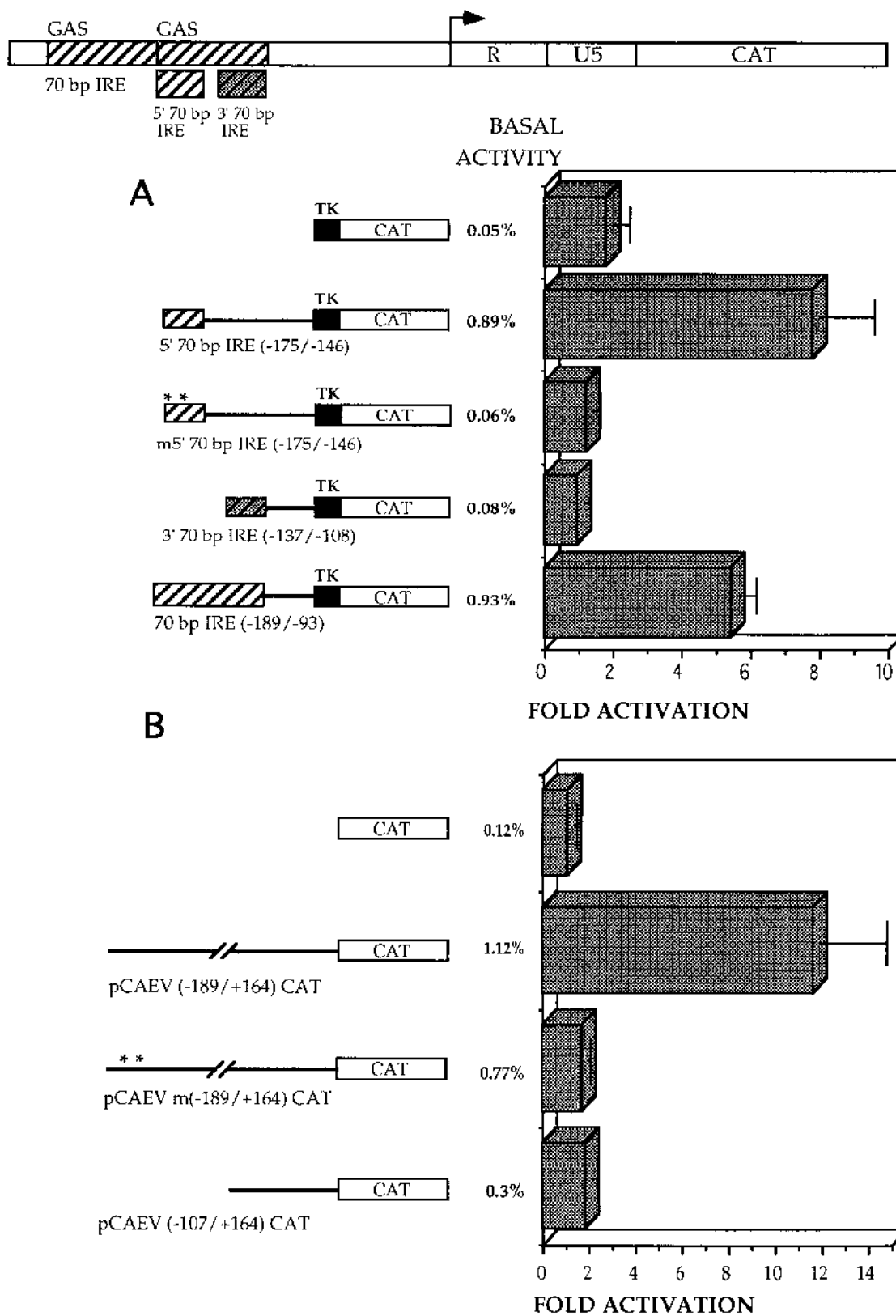


FIG. 3. The GAS sequence in the CAEV LTR is required for IFN response. A schematic diagram of the CAEV LTR is shown at the top. Duplicated 70-bp IREs are indicated by striped boxes. U937 cells were transiently transfected by the DEAE-dextran method with plasmids containing the indicated regions of the CAEV LTR upstream from the herpes simplex virus *tk* minimal promoter (A) or from the CAT reporter gene (B). Transfected cells were stimulated with medium alone (basal) or with IFN- γ (200 U/ml) for 24 h prior to harvesting. Cells were harvested, and basal activity was calculated as previously described (26). Fold activation was calculated as the ratio of CAT activity from stimulated cells over CAT activity from unstimulated cells. Data are the averages of the means from at least three independent transfections.

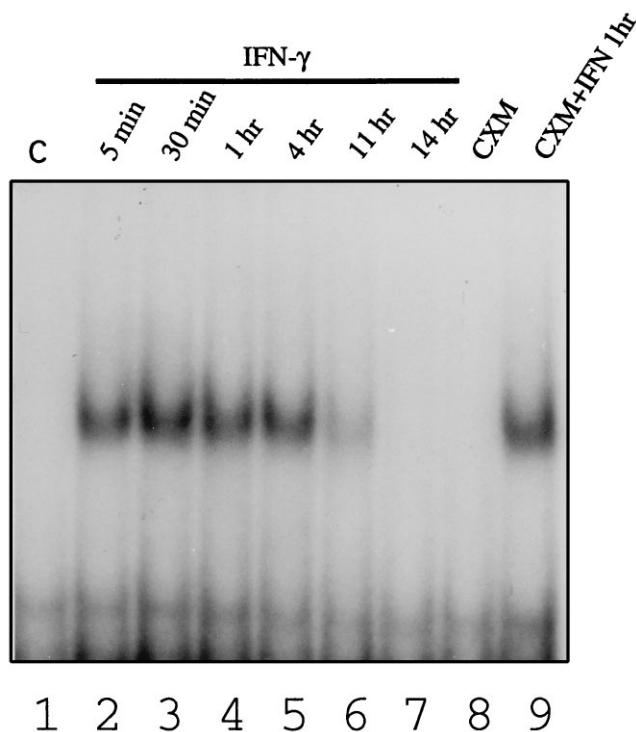


FIG. 4. Time course of activation of the nuclear factor that binds to the CAEV GAS. U937 cells were treated with medium alone (lane 1) or with IFN- γ (lanes 2 to 7) for the indicated periods of time. The cells were treated with cycloheximide (CXM) at 10 μ g/ml alone (lane 8) or prior to IFN- γ treatment (lane 9). Nuclear extracts were incubated with the radiolabeled 5' 70-bp IRE of CAEV (wild-type GAS) and analyzed by EMSA.

transferase (CAT) reporter gene (Fig. 3A and B). These plasmids were transiently transfected into U937 cells by the DEAE-dextran method (21) and stimulated after 24 h in culture with IFN- γ (final concentration, 200 U/ml) as described previously (26).

The full-length 70-bp IRE and the 5' 70-bp IRE resulted in increased basal activity and in similar responses to IFN- γ , i.e., 5.3- and 7.8-fold activation, respectively (Fig. 3A). Since comparable levels of activation were observed with the ICAM-1 pIRE (2), the 70-bp IRE, and the 5' 70-bp IRE were considered sufficient to confer responsiveness to IFN- γ . In contrast, the basal activities and the responses of the m5' 70-bp IRE, containing the mutated GAS element, and of the 3' 70-bp IRE were comparable to that of the unresponsive *tk* promoter alone (Fig. 3A). Thus, the lack of responsiveness of the m5' 70-bp IRE demonstrates the requirement for the GAS sequences for functional activity.

To demonstrate that the GAS element is necessary for the response of the CAEV LTR to IFN- γ , we used a functional CAEV LTR containing one copy of the 70-bp IRE in the plasmid pCAEV(-189/+164)CAT. This plasmid responds to IFN- γ with the same efficiency as the wild-type LTR of strain Co (26), positions -287 to +164 (Fig. 1). The 2-bp substitution mutations described above (Fig. 2A) in the GAS element were introduced into pCAEV(-189/+164)CAT by using in vitro mutagenesis (Altered Sites; Promega). Transient transfections of the functional LTR, pCAEV(-189/+164)CAT, into U937 cells resulted in 11.6-fold activation in the presence of IFN- γ (Fig. 3B). The mutated GAS element pCAEVm(-189/+164)CAT partially decreased the basal activity of the CAEV promoter and eliminated the response to IFN- γ (Fig. 3B). As

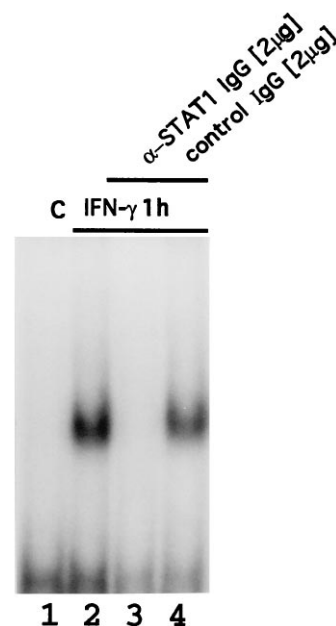


FIG. 5. Inhibition of binding of a nuclear factor to the CAEV GAS by an anti-STAT1 antibody (Santa Cruz Biochemicals). Nuclear extracts from U937 cells treated with medium alone (lane 1) or with IFN- γ (lanes 2 to 4) were incubated with the radiolabeled CAEV 5' 70-bp IRE. The reaction mixtures were incubated with the anti-STAT1 antibody (lane 3) or with an unrelated control antibody (lane 4) for 20 min at 4°C prior to the addition of the radiolabeled duplex oligonucleotide.

a negative control, deletion of the 70-bp IRE in the construct pCAEV(-107/+164)CAT also resulted in the loss of IFN- γ responsiveness. Thus, the GAS sequence in the CAEV LTR required for the binding of cellular factors induced by IFN- γ is also essential for its function as an IRE in the context of the CAEV LTR.

To determine the time course of the inducible factor, EMSAs were performed with nuclear extracts from U937 cells treated with IFN- γ for different periods of time. The nuclear factor that bound to the CAEV GAS element appeared at 5 min (Fig. 4, lane 2), was still present at 11 h (Fig. 4, lane 6), and disappeared at 14 h postinduction (Fig. 4, lane 7). Formation of the activation complex did not require de novo protein synthesis, as shown by cycloheximide treatment prior to IFN- γ induction (Fig. 4, lanes 8 and 9).

TABLE 1. Functional GAS elements

Gene	Species	Element
GBP	Human	ATTACTCTAAA
FcgRI	Human	TTTCCAGAAA
ICSBP	Human	TTTCTCGAAA
IRF-1	Human	TTTCCCGAAA
IRF-1	Mouse	TTTCCCGAAA
c-fos	Human	GTCCCGTCAA
IFP-53	Human	ATTCTCAGAAA
Ly6E	Mouse	ATTCTGTAAAG
CDC23b	Human	TACCTGAGAAA
IgHe	Mouse	TTCACATGAAC
ICAM-1	Human	TTTCCCGAAA
CAEV LTR	Goat	ATTCTGTAAA
Consensus		NTTNCNNNAA

The final identification of the cellular factor that binds to the GAS element in the CAEV LTR was provided by antibody treatment of cell lysates prior to EMSA. Preincubation of U937 nuclear extracts with an anti-STAT1 polyclonal antibody (Santa Cruz Biochemicals, Santa Cruz, Calif.) inhibited binding of nuclear factors to the CAEV element (Fig. 5, lane 3). Preincubation with a nonspecific control antibody had no effect (Fig. 5, lane 5), demonstrating that the inhibition was STAT1 specific. The STAT1 antibody also inhibited complex formation between the factor induced by IFN- γ and the radiolabeled ICAM-1 pIRE but had no effect on the binding of an unrelated protein complex to the radiolabeled AP1 oligonucleotide (data not shown).

Our experiments show that (i) the GAS element in the CAEV LTR is essential for the IFN- γ response and (ii) the nuclear factor that interacts with CAEV GAS is STAT1 or a STAT1-like factor. STAT1 belongs to the STAT family of proteins, which are activated in response to a large number of cytokines, growth factors, and interferons (16). Treatment of monocytes with IFN- γ induces the aggregation of the receptor complex. The recruitment of Janus kinases JAK1 and JAK2 results in the reversible phosphorylation of the IFN- γ receptor α chain, which creates a docking site for the src homology 2 domain of cytoplasmic latent STAT1 (8). STAT1 becomes tyrosine phosphorylated, dissociates from the receptor, dimerizes, and translocates to the nucleus. In the nucleus, phosphorylated STAT1 binds to the GAS consensus element in the promoters of IFN-inducible genes and initiates transcription. The strict requirement of STAT1 for IFN- γ responsiveness has been recently demonstrated in STAT1-deficient mice (6, 18). The CAEV GAS consensus element resembles the well-conserved GAS sequence of cellular genes (Table 1). Our experiments show that in addition to these cellular genes, IFN- γ can activate the transcription of viral genes through the GAS element.

The anti-STAT1 serum used in our experiments (Fig. 5) is STAT1 specific and was raised against a peptide corresponding to amino acids 688 to 700 in the carboxy domain. It has been used to discriminate between different members of the STAT family, such as STAT3, STAT4, and STAT5 (27). The sequence of the carboxy terminus of STAT1 is unique and is not related to those of the other STATs (7). This serum recognizes two naturally occurring splice variants, STAT1 α and STAT1 β (p91 and p84, respectively). STAT1 α contains 38 additional C-terminal amino acids. Although STAT1 β becomes phosphorylated and can bind to DNA, it does not activate transcription after induction with IFN- γ (5, 16).

The time course of the appearance of the CAEV GAS binding factor (Fig. 4) is consistent with that of STAT1 (5). Based on our results demonstrating the requirement of CAEV GAS for transcriptional activation (Fig. 3A and B), we conclude that the CAEV GAS binding protein is STAT1 α and that STAT1 is at least one pathway by which the CAEV LTR is activated by IFN- γ .

Another factor that can bind to the GAS consensus element is the differentiation-induced factor DIF (7). DIF and STAT1 are clearly distinct molecules, although both are induced in U937 monocytes in response to IFN- γ treatment. DIF has a slower mobility on EMSA than STAT1, binds to selected GAS elements, and requires de novo protein synthesis (7). Antibodies to p91 (STAT1) abolish the binding of STAT1 to GAS but do not affect the binding of DIF to GAS elements (7). The factor that bound to the CAEV GAS sequence in our experiments was STAT1 and not DIF, since antibodies to STAT1 abolish binding to the CAEV GAS element, and the factor does not require de novo protein synthesis (Fig. 4).

Our demonstration of STAT1 involvement in upregulation of the CAEV LTR provides an interesting insight into the multiple roles of IFN- γ , initially identified due to its antiviral effects. The role of IFN- γ as an antiviral agent is documented by three types of clinical observations: (i) IFN production correlates with natural recovery in many viral infections, (ii) inhibition of IFN production or action enhances the severity of infection, and (iii) IFN treatment protects against viral infection (1). One mechanism for the antiviral effect of IFN- γ is a specific inhibitory effect on viral promoters such as the murine cytomegalovirus (CMV) immediate-early promoter (12). Inhibition of the murine CMV promoter correlates with inhibition of viral replication by IFN- γ in infected fibroblasts. Alternatively, IFN- γ can enhance replication of rat CMV in macrophages (10). In addition, the IFN- γ pathway appears to be required for the development and progression of murine AIDS (28). Thus, effects of IFN- γ on viral replication in vivo are variable.

CAEV infection of immature monocytes results in low levels of viral replication. We propose a model in which subsequent infection of the host with other viruses stimulates the production of IFN- γ by natural killer cells and the Th1 subset of T-helper cells. Stimulation of infected monocytes by IFN- γ activates not only cellular genes but also the CAEV promoter through the STAT1 pathway. Activation of the CAEV promoter results in increased viral replication, which could stimulate additional host immune responses. The host immune and inflammatory responses produce the clinical disease that occurs in CAEV-infected goats. Whether the STAT1 pathway is essential for the viral life cycle and disease development in the infected host will be addressed in future experiments.

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