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## **MSX1 and Orofacial Clefting with and without Tooth Agenesis**

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### **Abstract**

*MSX1* has been considered a strong candidate for orofacial clefting, based on mouse expression studies and knockout models, as well as association and linkage studies in humans. *MSX1* mutations are also causal for hereditary tooth agenesis. We tested the hypothesis that individuals with orofacial clefting with or without tooth agenesis have *MSX1* coding mutations by screening 33 individuals with cleft lip with or without cleft palate (CL/P) and 19 individuals with both orofacial clefting and tooth agenesis. Although no *MSX1* coding mutations were identified, the known 101C>G variant occurred more often in subjects with both CL/P and tooth agenesis ( $p = 0.0008$ ), while the \*6C-T variant was found more often in CL/P subjects ( $p = 0.001$ ). Coding mutations in *MSX1* are not the cause of orofacial clefting with or without tooth agenesis in this study population. However, the significant association of *MSX1* with both phenotypes implies that *MSX1* regulatory elements may be mutated.

### **Keywords**

*MSX1*; cleft lip; cleft palate; tooth agenesis

## **INTRODUCTION**

Isolated cleft lip with or without cleft palate (CL/P) is a common birth defect that affects about 1/700 births, depending on the population. Asian or Amerindian populations have the highest frequencies (1/500 or higher), Caucasian populations have intermediate frequencies (1/1000), and African populations have the lowest reported frequencies (1/2500) (Vanderas, 1987; Wyszynski et al., 1996; Mossey and Little, 2002).

CL/P presents with characteristics of a genetically complex trait. It has been suggested that from 3 to 14 genes, interacting multiplicatively, may be involved in the etiology of CL/P (Schliekelman and Slatkin, 2002). *MSX1*, a non-clustered homeobox gene, has been considered

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a strong candidate for clefting in humans, based on the biological evidence composed of expression studies (Robert et al., 1989) and a knockout mouse model (Satokata and Maas, 1994) as well as association studies (Lidral et al., 1998; Beaty et al., 2001; Fallin et al., 2003; Jugessur et al., 2003; Vieira et al., 2003), complete sequencing (Jezewski et al., 2003; Suzuki et al., 2004), and linkage studies (Moreno et al., 2004; Schultz et al., 2004) in humans.

We have identified a susceptibility locus for isolated CL/P in the 4p16 region in families from Ohio (Moreno et al., 2004). The positive marker D4S2366, located 4.63 cM proximal from the *MSX1* gene, presented a LOD score of 1.53 under the parametric recessive linkage analysis. Because of the important role that *MSX1* plays in the etiology of orofacial clefting, we performed a *MSX1* mutation screen in individuals with isolated CL/P from the same Ohio population.

Furthermore, data from genetic studies are consistent with a contribution of *MSX1* to CL/P and tooth agenesis (Slayton et al., 2003) and isolated tooth agenesis (Vieira et al., 2004). *MSX1* mutations and rare variants have been previously described in individuals with CL/P and/or hereditary tooth agenesis (Vastardis et al., 1996; van den Boogaard et al., 2000; Jumlongras et al., 2001; Lidral and Reising, 2002; Jezewski et al., 2003; Suzuki et al., 2004; De Muynck et al., 2004). Also, *Msx1*-deficient mice have both cleft of the secondary palate and failure of tooth development (Satokata and Maas, 1994).

Tooth agenesis affects 1.6% to 9.6% of the Caucasian general population, excluding third molars (Graber, 1978). This malformation is found more frequently in children affected with CL/P than in the general population (Ranta, 1986; Shapira et al., 1999). The prevalence of hypodontia, both in the vicinity of the cleft and outside the cleft area, in the permanent dentition is significantly higher in children with cleft lip, cleft palate, or both, and the prevalence of hypodontia increases markedly with the severity of cleft.

We believe that the occurrence of both CL/P and tooth agenesis in some individuals is caused by the same genetic mutation, and that *MSX1* is a very plausible candidate. Therefore, we hypothesized that mutations in *MSX1* are causal for orofacial clefting with or without tooth agenesis.

## MATERIALS & METHODS

### Subjects

The study group consisted of 52 unrelated individuals with orofacial clefting recruited from the Children's Hospital in Columbus, OH, USA. The age range of these individuals was from 7 to 16 yrs old. The inclusion criterion was the diagnosis of orofacial clefting with or without congenital agenesis of at least one permanent tooth, not including third molars, as verified by radiographs and dental history. Instances of tooth agenesis adjacent to a cleft site were not included, because the absence of such teeth is likely the consequence of local developmental anomalies at the cleft site. To identify any syndromes or phenocopies, we examined individuals clinically and interviewed them using a clinical survey to gather information regarding medical history, family history, and gestational environmental exposures.

Thirty-three of the individuals had only isolated orofacial CL/P. They were included in this mutation search, however, because we have found suggestive linkage to the *MSX1* region in this population. Nineteen of the individuals had both orofacial clefting and tooth agenesis, and they were included in this study to test the hypothesis that *MSX1* is mutated in patients with both phenotypes. Six of these 19 had additional major anomalies or facial dysmorphism (Table 1).

The study was approved by the institutional review boards at the Ohio State University and the University of Iowa, and written, informed consent was obtained from each person included in the study.

### Direct Sequencing

DNA was extracted from whole blood or cheek swabs with the use of a commercial kit (Puragene, Gentra, Minneapolis, MN, USA). The entire coding region of the *MSX1* gene was direct-sequenced in both directions. Four primer pairs were used to amplify overlapping regions of the 2 exons of the *MSX1* gene (Appendix). Genomic DNA was amplified by PCR under the following conditions: 0.24 $\mu$ M each primer, 200 $\mu$ M dNTPs, 50 mM KCl, 10 mM Tris Cl, 1 or 1.5 mM MgCl<sub>2</sub>, 0.01% gelatin, 0.045 U Taq polymerase, 10% (v/v) DMSO, and 20 ng/ $\mu$ L DNA in a 30- $\mu$ L reaction volume. Templates included either PCR products purified by QIAquick Gel Extraction Kit (Qiagen, Valencia, CA, USA) or QIAquick PCR Purification Kit (Qiagen). Cycle sequencing was performed in a 10- $\mu$ L reaction with 1 $\mu$ L of ABI Big Dye Terminator sequencing reagent (version 1.1, Applied Biosystems, Foster City, CA, USA), 0.35 $\mu$ L of 20 $\mu$ M/L sequencing primer, 0.5 $\mu$ L DMSO, 1 $\mu$ L of 5X buffer, and 2.5 ng/100 base pair of DNA template. Following a denaturation step at 96°C for 30 sec, reactions were cycle-sequenced at 96°C for 10 sec, at TM (melting temperature) of the primer – 5°C for 5 sec, and 60°C for 4 min for 35 cycles.

Clean-up of amplicons was performed through the AMPure™ PCR Purification system (Agencourt, Beverly, MA, USA), with the use of Agencourt's solid-phase paramagnetic bead technology. Beads were washed with 85% ethanol to remove excess oligonucleotides, nucleotides, salts, and enzymes, and purified products were eluted from the magnetic beads with sterilized water and injected onto an Applied Biosystems 3700 sequencer.

### Sequence Analysis

First-pass base-calling (Perkin Elmer) was performed with the ABI sequence software (version 2.1.2). Chromatograms were transferred to a Unix workstation (Sun Microsystems Inc., Mountain View, CA, USA), base-called with Phred (version 0.961028), assembled with Phrap (version 0.960731, scanned by PolyPhred (version 0.970312), and the results viewed with the Consed program (version 4.0) (Nickerson et al., 1997).

### Case-Control Comparisons

The case-control comparisons in this study used individuals with orofacial clefting recruited from the Children's Hospital in Columbus, OH, and included in our mutation search. Thirty-three unrelated individuals with only isolated CL/P, and 19 unrelated individuals with both orofacial clefting and tooth agenesis were used in the analysis.

In this study, we used controls of the same ethnic group (Caucasian) from a population-based case-control study within the University of Iowa Craniofacial Anomalies Research Center (CARC), previously genotyped by Lidral et al. (1998). Using a pseudo-random number generator (Romitti et al., 1998), we selected controls from all Iowa live births (between 1 January 1987 and 31 December 1991) not reported to the *Iowa Birth Defects Registry*.

We also analyzed the group with both orofacial clefting and tooth agenesis, excluding six individuals with clefting, tooth agenesis, and additional major anomalies or facial dysmorphism (Table 1).

Data were analyzed by means of 2 x n contingency tables, which were evaluated by either the Pearson  $\chi^2$  test or Fisher's exact test, when any of the cells had an expected frequency of  $\leq 5$ . P values < 0.05 were considered statistically significant.

## RESULTS

Phenotypes of the individuals who presented with both orofacial clefting and tooth agenesis are described in Tables 1 and 2. Most individuals were missing only 1 tooth outside of the cleft area, and the highest number of missing teeth in an individual was 8 (Fig.). Of the 33 individuals with isolated CL/P, 20 had a positive family history for CL/P. Among the 11 individuals with both orofacial clefting and tooth agenesis, and for whom the family history was known, only four presented a positive family history for CL/P. Among the eight individuals with both orofacial clefting and tooth agenesis, and for whom the family history was known, one presented a positive family history for tooth agenesis.

Neither new mutations nor new variants were found in the *MSX1* coding regions of the 52 individuals. However, 4 known polymorphic variants were observed in the study population (Table 3). The \*6C>T variant, 6 nucleotides 3' of the stop codon, was observed more frequently in subjects with CL/P than in controls ( $p = 0.001$ ). The exon 1 101C>G variant, causing an Ala34Gly substitution, was observed more frequently in subjects with both orofacial clefting and tooth agenesis than in controls ( $p = 0.0008$ ) (Table 3). This difference was still significant after exclusion of the six individuals presenting additional major anomalies or facial dysmorphism (Table 3).

## DISCUSSION

No specific variant of *MSX1* has been directly implicated as a major causal allele for clefting thus far. In our study, we found association of *MSX1* variants not only with clefting, but also with clefting and tooth agenesis (Table 3). The 101C>G variant is more frequent in individuals with both orofacial clefting and tooth agenesis than in controls. In contrast, the \*6C>T variant is more common in individuals with isolated CL/P than in controls. Also, the frequency of the \*6C>T variant is much lower in clefting with tooth agenesis cases. Similar results were found in the clefting and tooth agenesis study group, when individuals presenting additional major anomalies or facial dysmorphism were excluded from the analysis. Moreover, when all 52 individuals were compared with the controls, the  $p$ -value was not significant ( $p = 0.052$ ) (data not shown). This provides evidence that future investigations should phenotypically distinguish clefting associated with tooth agenesis from clefting alone. It appears that the variant 101C>G is marking a specific genetic factor that contributes to the clefting and tooth agenesis phenotype, and the variant \*6C>T is specific for isolated clefting.

Interestingly, the *MSX1*-CA 169 base-pair allele (allele 4)—the most common allele in all populations, and one that has been associated with isolated clefting in populations of European descent (Lidral et al., 1998; Beaty et al., 2001; Vieira et al., 2003)—is in linkage disequilibrium with the \*6C>T variant (Jezewski et al., 2003). It is possible, therefore, that the \*6C>T variant is the actual functional variant contributing to clefting in the study population. The cytosine of the \*6C>T variant is conserved with bovines, but not with mice or rats. The variant 101C>G could also be functionally relevant to the development of clefting with tooth agenesis. This variant produces an amino acid change, Ala34Gly, which is conserved among mice, rats, bovines, and chickens (Jezewski et al., 2003). Functional analysis of the variants observed in this study would be of interest in further investigations of their consequences and role in clefting, with or without tooth agenesis.

In the present study, no mutations were found in *MSX1* coding regions in individuals with isolated CL/P or both orofacial clefting and tooth agenesis. Similarly, De Muynck et al. (2004) found no mutations in 43 families with CL/P with or without tooth agenesis. To date, only one *MSX1* mutation was reported in a family with both CL/P and hereditary tooth agenesis (van den Boogaard et al., 2000). One possible explanation could be that *MSX1* mutations for

this phenotype are in regulatory regions, which have not been well-characterized. Another explanation is that *MSX1* microdeletions may be causal in our study participants, and such deletions would have been missed by our mutation screen. Previous reports have showed that oligodontia in individuals with Wolf-Hirschhorn syndrome is associated with deletion or inactivation of one copy of *MSX1* (Hu et al., 1998; Nieminen et al., 2003), supporting the conclusion that hereditary tooth agenesis associated with mutations in *MSX1* is caused by haploinsufficiency.

Gene-gene interactions could be the mechanism for developing CL/P with tooth agenesis. There is genetic evidence that *MSX1* interacts with *PAX9* in isolated tooth agenesis (Vieira et al., 2004), and apparently *Pax9* regulates *Msx1* expression in the mouse (Peters et al., 1998). *PAX9* is also a transcription factor expressed in the face and tooth buds, and mice lacking *Pax9* also present with both cleft palate and oligodontia (Peters et al., 1998). Future studies focusing on the *MSX1* variants observed in our study and *PAX9* variants are recommended to test the hypothesis that these two genes play a joint role in CL/P with tooth agenesis.

Finally, the phenotypes of the study participants may not be caused by *MSX1* coding mutations. There is a typical pattern of tooth agenesis and a large number of missing teeth among the families reported to have *MSX1* mutations. Specifically, the average number of missing teeth has been reported to be 11/person (Vastardis et al., 1996), 8/person (van den Boogaard et al., 2000), 16/person (Jumlongras et al., 2001), 12/person (Lidral and Reising, 2002), and 17/person (De Muynck et al., 2004). In our study, only two cases (10.5%) presented oligodontia (6 or more missing teeth) (Fig.). This suggests, again, that agenesis of only a few teeth is not associated with *MSX1* mutations (Lidral and Reising, 2002).

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#### APPENDIX

##### *MSX1* PRIMER PAIRS

Name	Primer Sequence	Primer Location <sup>a</sup>	Size (bp)
X1.1F	TGG CCA GTG CTG CGG CAG AA	414-433	421
X1.3R	TCT GGC AGC TTG AGG AGT CC	815-834	
X1.4F	CGC TCG GCC ATT TCT CGG TG	792-811	
X1.4R	GCG CCT GGG TTC TGG CTA CT	924-943	152
X2.1F	GGC TGA TCA TGC TCC AAT GCT	3186-3205	
X2.3R	GTA CAT GCT GTA GCC CAC AT	3658-3677	493
X2.3F	AGC TGG AGA AGC TGA AGA TG	3478-3497	
X2.4R	GCA CCA GGG CTG GAG GAA TC	3722-3741	

<sup>a</sup> Nucleotide numbers correspond to GenBank entry AF426432.

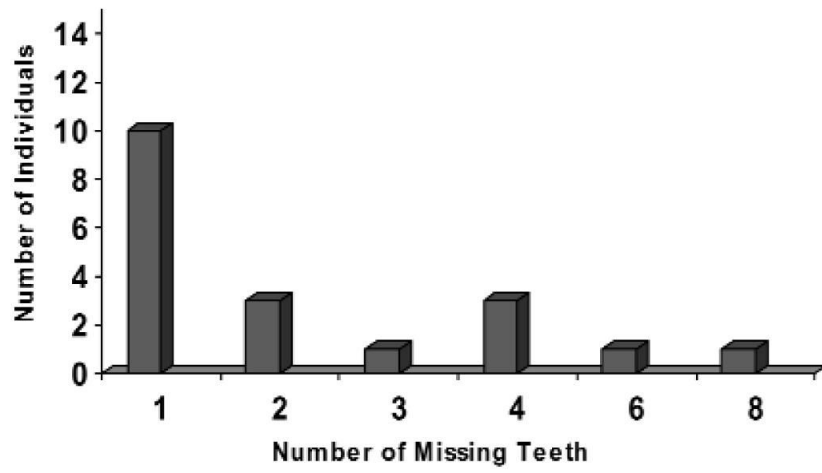
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**Figure.**  
Number of missing teeth in individuals with orofacial clefting and tooth agenesis.



Table 1

Phenotypes of Individuals with Both Orofacial Clefting and Tooth Agenesis

ID Number	Gender	Cleft Lip <sup>a</sup>	Cleft Palate <sup>b</sup>	Family History of Clefting <sup>c</sup>	Family History of Tooth Agenesis <sup>c</sup>	Other Findings
556-1	F	B	H, S	-	0	
585-1	F	-	H, S	+	0	
A039*	M	R	H, S	-	-	Sub-aortic stenosis
A052*	M	-	S	-	-	
A054*	F	-	S	-	-	
A063*	M	B	H, S	0	0	
A075*	F	B	H, S	0	-	
A100*	F	-	SM	+	-	Facial dysmorphism
A107	M	L	H, S	0	0	
A108	M	B	H, S	0	0	Short stature and facial dysmorphism
A109	M	L	H, S	+	0	
A111	M	L	H, S	0	0	
A113	M	B	H, S	-	-	
A115	M	R	H, S	-	-	
A117	M	L	H, S	+	+	
A118	F	B	H, S	0	0	Ventricular septal defect
A119	F	L	H, S	0	0	Facial dysmorphism
A120	M	B	H, S	0	0	Facial dysmorphism
A121	F	-	SM	0	0	Facial dysmorphism

\* Individuals also screened by SSCP for *MSX1* mutations as reported by Lidral and Reising (2002).<sup>a</sup> B, bilateral cleft lip; R, right cleft lip; L, left cleft lip; -, no cleft lip.<sup>b</sup> H, cleft hard palate; S, cleft soft palate; SM, submucous cleft palate.<sup>c</sup> +, positive family history; -, negative family history; 0, unknown family history.

Summary of Congenitally Missing Teeth in Individuals with Both Orofacial Clefting and Tooth Agenesis

Table 2

ID Number	Right								Left							
	8*	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
556-1				*									*			
585-1				*									*			
A039				*									*			
A052				*									*			
A054				*									*			
A063				*									*			
A075				*									*			
A100				*									*			
A107				*									*			
A108				*									*			
A109				*									*			
A111				*									*			
A113				*									*			
A115				*									*			
A117				*									*			
A118				*									*			
A119				*									*			
A120				*									*			
A121				*									*			

\* 1 = central incisor; 2 = lateral incisor; 3 = canine; 4 and 5 = first and second premolars, respectively; 6, 7, and 8 = first, second, and third molars, respectively.

## Association of Observed Polymorphism with Orofacial Clefting with or without Tooth Agnesis

Table 3

Nucleotide Position <sup>d</sup>	Nucleotide Variant	Amino Acid Variant	Clefting (CL/P), n = 33 <sup>*</sup>		Clefting and Tooth Agnesis <sup>b</sup> , n = 19		Case-Control Comparisons Clefting and Tooth Agnesis <sup>c</sup> , n = 13		Controls <sup>d</sup> , N = 165
			Number of Variants <sup>e</sup> (%)	p value	Number of Variants <sup>e</sup> (%)	p value	Number of Variants <sup>e</sup> (%)	p value	
5'UTR 434	-36G>A	-	4/66 (6.1%)	0.22	0/38 (0%)	0.11	0/38 (0%)	0.11	20/330 (6.1%)
EXON 1 570	101C>G	Ala34Gly	12/66 (18.2%)	0.14	16/38 (42.1%)	0.0008	9/26 (34.6%)	0.028	60/330 (18.2%)
799	330C>T	Gly110Gly	3/66 (4.5%)	0.11	0/38 (0%)	0.56	0/38 (0%)	0.56	5/318 (1.6%)
3'UTR 3695	6C>T <sup>*</sup>	-	30/66 (45.4%)	0.001	4/38 (10.5%)	0.014	2/26 (7.7%)	0.017	66/248 (26.6%)

<sup>\*</sup> n = number of individuals included in the analysis.

<sup>a</sup> Positions of variants are referred to by the nucleotide position within the GenBank entry, AF426432.

<sup>b</sup> Analysis included 19 individuals with clefting and tooth agnesis.

<sup>c</sup> Analysis excluded six individuals with clefting, tooth agnesis, and additional major anomalies or facial dysmorphology.

<sup>d</sup> Control data from Lidral et al. (1998).

<sup>e</sup> Number of variants is number of chromosomes for rare allele/total number of alleles.