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The Role of TP53: A Key Tumor Suppressor Gene in Cancer Prevention

James Kwon*

Department of Cancer Therapeutics, University of Seoul, South Korea

INTRODUCTION

The TP53 gene, commonly known as the "guardian of the genome," is one of the most critical tumor suppressor genes in the human body. Its protein product, p53, is a crucial regulator of cell division and plays a vital role in preventing cancer by maintaining genomic stability. In response to cellular stress, such as DNA damage, low oxygen levels, or oncogene activation, p53 is activated and triggers a cascade of responses to prevent the development of cancer. Mutations in TP53 are the most common genetic abnormalities in human cancers, highlighting its importance in tumor suppression and making it a focal point of cancer research. Understanding the function of TP53 and how its loss contributes to cancer progression provides insight into potential therapeutic approaches for treating various malignancies [1].

DESCRIPTION

The TP53 gene, located on chromosome 17, encodes the p53 protein, which operates as a transcription factor and is involved in numerous cellular processes. One of the critical functions of p53 is to arrest the cell cycle. When DNA damage is detected, p53 induces the expression of genes that halt the cell cycle, particularly at the G1/S checkpoint. This pause in the cell cycle allows the cell to repair its DNA before proceeding with division. If the damage is irreparable, p53 activates apoptotic pathways, which lead to programmed cell death, eliminating potentially cancerous cells. In addition to cell cycle control and apoptosis, p53 is also involved in other processes that suppress tumor formation, such as DNA repair and inhibition of angiogenesis (the formation of new blood vessels that supply nutrients to tumors). By influencing multiple cellular pathways, p53 serves as a multi-faceted barrier against the emergence and proliferation of cancerous cells. Mutations in TP53 are found in approximately 50% of human cancers, making it the most frequently altered gene in cancer biology. Most of these mutations are missense mutations, which result in a single amino acid change that disrupts the protein's normal function. Unlike typical tumor suppressor genes, which usually require both alleles (copies) to be inactivated for cancer to develop, some p53 mutations produce a dominant-negative effect. TP53 mutations are associated with various cancers, including breast, lung, colon, and ovarian cancers, as well as aggressive cancers such as glioblastoma and pancreatic cancer. Germline mutations in TP53 (mutations present from birth) lead to Li-Fraumeni Syndrome (LFS), a rare, inherited disorder that significantly increases the risk of developing various cancers early in life. Individuals with LFS often develop cancers like sarcomas, breast cancer, leukemia, and brain tumors. The presence of a TP53 mutation in every cell of the body compromises the cellular defense against cancer, making LFS a valuable model for studying the gene's role in tumor suppression. Given the high prevalence of TP53 mutations in cancers, restoring or compensating for its lost function has been a major goal in cancer research. While still experimental, this approach aims to restore normal p53 function and induce cell death in tumors. Small molecules that can reactivate mutated p53 or stabilize the wild-type protein are being explored. Drugs like PRIMA-1 and APR-246 aim to restore the normal structure and function of mutated p53 proteins. In tumors with TP53 mutations, researchers are exploring synthetic lethality strategies. By identifying and targeting specific vulnerabilities in TP53-deficient cancer cells, this approach aims to selectively kill cancer cells while sparing normal cells. Tumors with TP53 mutations often exhibit high mutation rates, leading to the production of neoantigens, which can make them susceptible to immunotherapy. Checkpoint inhibitors are showing promise in treating cancers with TP53 mutations, as these tumors may be more recognizable to the immune system [2-4].

CONCLUSION

The TP53 gene is one of the most important safeguards against cancer. As a tumor suppressor, it plays a crucial role

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Corresponding author James Kwon, Department of Cancer Therapeutics, University of Seoul, South Korea, Email: jkwon@uniseoul.kr

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in maintaining cellular integrity by regulating cell division, promoting DNA repair, and triggering apoptosis. Mutations in TP53 are common in many cancers and result in a loss of these protective functions, allowing cells to accumulate additional mutations and become malignant. The understanding of TP53 and its function has not only deepened our knowledge of cancer biology but also opened up new avenues for targeted therapies, aiming to restore p53 activity or exploit vulnerabilities in TP53-mutant cancers. With ongoing research, therapies aimed at restoring or bypassing the lost function of p53 hold the promise of improving outcomes for patients with TP53-related cancers.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author's declared that they have no conflict of interest.

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