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thought to be sufficient to reach the Hayflick limit, or the maximum number of mitoses allowed prior to entering replicative senescence. Cells in humans, such as telomeres, compensate for telomere erosion by expressing telomerase, the only enzyme able to polymerize telomeric sequences de novo at the extremity of telomeres. Knocking out telomerase components, such as the catalytic subunit (TERT) or the RNA template (TERC), induces several features of aging in mice. In humans, germline mutations in telomerase subunits are responsible for progeroid syndromes, such as Dyskeratosis congenita, a rare genetic form of bone marrow failure. Furthermore, healthy lifespan in humans is positively correlated with longer telomere length and patients suffering from age-related diseases and premature aging have shorter telomeres compared with healthy individuals. An accumulation of unrepaired damage within telomeric regions has also been shown to accumulate in aging mice and non-human primates, suggesting that damage of telomeres with age may also be contributing to age-driven disease states and reduced healthspan. Thus, one could argue that the activation and expression of telomerase may be a way of reducing age-related diseases and increasing overall longevity. However, the constitutive expression of telomerase, unfortunately, is a characteristic of almost all cancer cells. It is therefore, no surprise that transgenic animals over-expressing the catalytic subunit of telomerase (mTERT), develop cancers earlier in life. However, overexpression of telomerase in mice that are highly resistant to cancers has shown large increases in median lifespan and significantly reduced age-associated disorders. Since humans are not highly resistant to cancer, this is not a feasible option for humans. However, additional studies in mice, where constitutive expression of telomerase is only introduced into a small percentage of host cells using adenovirus gene therapy techniques has yielded more promising results. Adenoviruses are a group of viruses that form an icosahedral protein capsid that houses a linear double stranded DNA genome. Infections in humans typically cause symptoms of the common cold and are usually mild in nature. These are a good target for gene therapy, as the DNA that they carry can be mutated, so that they are deficient in their ability to replicate once they have infected the host. They can also be transformed to carry a gene-of-interest into the host, where that gene can then integrate into the host genome. Experiments in mice that were infected with an adenovirus carrying the mTERT gene showed that mTERT was delivered to a wide range of tissues within the body, and increased telomere length within those tissues. Furthermore, the mTERT expressing mice were healthier than their litter mates and displayed a reduction in disabling conditions associated with physiological aging such as osteoporosis and insulin resistance (Figure 9.27). Cognitive skills and metabolic functions were also improved. Noticeably, mice treated with gene therapy did not have increased incidence in cancer rates, suggesting that in at least the short-lived mouse species, that a gene therapy approach to increased telomerase activity is safe. Within these animals, median lifespan was increased by 24% when animals were treated at 1 year of age, and by 13% if treated at 2 years of age. Figure 9.27 Promoting Healthspan in Mice using a Telomerase Gene Therapy. Delivery of the catalytic subunit of telomerase (TERT) using a modified adenovirus vector (rAAV) suppresses aging associated telomere erosion and extends short telomeres in a variety of tissues. Consequently, animals display improved healthspan and extended lifespan. Figure from: Boccardi, V. and Herbig, U. (2012) EMBO Mol Med 4:685-687. Replication and Repair of Telomere Sequences In addition to the end replication problem, telomeric DNA (telDNA) replication and repair is a real challenge due to the different structural features of telomeres. Firstly, the nucleotidic sequence itself consists of an hexanucleotidic motif (TTAGGG) repeated over kilobases, with the 5'-3' strand named the "G-strand" due to its high content in guanine. During the progression of the replication fork, the lagging strand, corresponding to the G-strand, forms G-quadruplex (G4) structures, which have to be resolved to allow fork progression and to complete replication (Figure 9.28a). Secondly, R-loops corresponding to highly stable RNA:DNA hybrids, involving the long non-coding telomeric transcript TERRA (telomeric repeat-containing RNA) also have to be dissociated. Thirdly, the extremity of telomeres adopts a specific loop structure, the T-loop, which has to be unraveled. This is the loop that hides the double strand end from the DNA damage sensors, and is locked by the hybridization of the 3' single strand overhang extremity with the above 3'-5' strand, thereby displacing the corresponding 5'-3' strand to form a D-loop (displacement loop) structure (Figure 9.28a). Lastly, replication also has to deal with barriers encountered elsewhere in the genome, such as torsions and a condensed heterochromatic environment. Figure 9.28 Obstacles and solutions to replicate telomeres. (a) Telomeric sequence, with the G-strand in solid red line and the C-strand in solid green line, is depicted. The terminal D-loop structuring the much larger T-loop is stabilized by the shelterin complex. The replisome (PCNA, pol *ε*, etc) polymerizes a new G-strand (depicted in dotted red line) and frees the parental G-strand, enabling the formation of G4 secondary structure. R-loops corresponding to TERRA hybridization (in dotted black lines) with the 3'-5' strand, and torsions due to the fork progression are also shown. (b) Replication helpers, such as helicases, either helping in G4 unwinding or in D-loop unlocking are depicted. The DNAses (Top2a, DNA2) and RNAses (RNase H1 and FEN1) help in resolving torsions and RNA:DNA heteroduplexes, while Timeless stimulates the replisome and POT1 competes with RPA1 for binding of the single-strand and helps in G4 dissolution. The shelterin components, POT1, TRF1 and TRF2 help in loading the helper-proteins (fine green arrows) Figure from: Billiard, P. and Poncet, D.A. (2019) Int J. Mol. Sci. 20(19) 4959 Since telomeres face a host of obstacles to completing the replication process, as discussed in Figure 9.28, the cell possess a set of specialized machinery to fully achieve their replication, such as the RTEL1, TRF1, and TRF2 proteins, DNAses, RNAses, and Timeless. The recruitment of these factors is orchestrated by the shelterin complex. At the molecular level, the GGG telomeric repeats are particularly sensitive to ROS, which produce stretches of 8-oxoguanine that are especially difficult to repair. Coupled with inefficient telomere repair, these ROS-induced lesions produce single and double-strand breaks, and/or generate replicative stress, ultimately resulting in telomere shortening. The presence of unrepaired single or tandem 8-oxoguanine drastically inhibits the binding of TRF1 and TRF2, and impairs the recruitment of telomerase, especially when ROS damage is localized in the 3' overhang. This type of damage contributes to telomere deprotection and shortening. Strikingly, ROS (and other metabolic stresses) also induce the relocation of TERT to mitochondria, as observed (i) in primary neurons after oxidative stress; (ii) in neurons exposed to the tau protein; (iii) in Purkinje neurons subjected to excitotoxicity; and (iv) in cancer cell lines treated with a G4 ligand. Mitochondrial TERT increases the inner membrane potential, as well as the mtDNA copy number, and decreases ROS production with a protective effect on mtDNA. Mitochondria are also critical sensors of cellular damage and contribute to the processes of autophagy and apoptosis (programmed cell death). The relocalization of TERT following chromosomal damage in the nucleus, may indicate one mechanism the mitochondria utilizes to monitor cellular stress and damage. Back to the Top Which of the following is the enzyme that replaces the RNA nucleotides in a primer with DNA nucleotides? DNA polymerase III DNA polymerase I primase helicase [reveal-answer q="628075"]Show Answer/[reveal-answer] [hidden-answer a="628075"]Answer b. DNA polymerase I is the enzyme that replaces the RNA nucleotides in a primer with DNA nucleotides. [hidden-answer q="855893"]Which of the following is not involved in the initiation of replication? helicase DNA polymerase ligase telomerase [reveal-answer q="650146"]Show Answer/[reveal-answer] [hidden-answer a="650146"]Answer d. Telomerase is unique to eukaryotes. [hidden-answer q="429167"]Which of the following would be synthesized using 5'-CAGTTCGGA-3' as a template? 3'-AGGCTTGAC-4' 3'-TCCGAAGCT-5' 3'-CAGTTCGGA-5' [reveal-answer q="429167"]Show Answer/[reveal-answer] [hidden-answer a="429167"]Answer c. 3'-GTCAAGCCT-5/[hidden-answer] The enzyme responsible for relaxing supercoiled DNA to allow for the initiation of replication is called DNA gyrase or topoisomerase II. [hidden-answer q="378861"]Unidirectional replication of a circular DNA molecule like a plasmid that involves nicking one DNA strand and displacing it while synthesizing a new strand is called rolling circle replication. [hidden-answer q="25479"]True/[hidden-answer] Why is primase required for DNA replication? What is the role of single-stranded binding protein in DNA replication? Below is a DNA sequence. Envision that this is a section of a DNA molecule that has separated in preparation for replication, so you are only seeing one DNA strand. Construct the complementary DNA sequence (indicating 5' and 3' ends). DNA sequence: 3'-T A C T G A C T G A C G A T C-5' Review Figure 1 and Figure 2. Why was it important that Meselson and Stahl continue their experiment to at least two rounds of replication after isotopic labeling of the starting DNA with 15N, instead of stopping the experiment after only one round of replication? If deoxyribonucleotides that lack the 3'-OH groups are added during the replication process, what do you expect will occur? Back to the Top Parker, N., Schneegurt, M., Thi Tu, A.-H., Lister, P., Forster, B.M. (2019) Microbiology. Openstax. Available at: Principles of Biochemistry/Cell Metabolism I: DNA replication. (2017, August 6). Wikibooks, The Free Textbook Project. Retrieved 19:07, October 31, 2019 from . Kaiser, G.E. (2015) Prokaryotic Cell Anatomy. Community College of Baltimore County. Available at: gkaiser/SoftChalk%20BIOL%2020230/Prokaryotic%20Cell%20Anatomy/nucleoid/nucleoid/nucleoid3.html The RCSB PDB "Molecule of the Month": Inspiring a Molecular View of Biology D.S. Goodsell, S. Dutta, C. Zardecki, M. Voigt, H.M. Berman, S.K. Burley (2015) PLoS Biol 13(5): e1002140. doi: 10.1371/journal.pbio.1002140 Wikipedia contributors. (2020, May 7). Helicase. In Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. 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