

Purification and Characterization of a Novel α -Amylase Inhibitor from Wild Amaranth(*Amaranthus paniculatus*) Weeds

WANG Lin, ZHOU Tie-yang, TANG Xing, WANG Xian-chun*, LIANG Song-ping*
(College of Life Sciences, Hunan Normal University, Changsha 410081, China)

Abstract A novel proteinaceous inhibitor of α -amylase was purified from the wild amaranth (*Amaranthus paniculatus*) seeds. The inhibitor, named WAF1, has a molecular weight of 986.5 determined by MALDI-TOF mass spectrometry. It is the smallest proteinaceous inhibitor of α -amylase found so far. Preliminary compositional and structural analysis indicated that WAF1 is a nonapeptide with N-terminal pyroglutamate. Purified directly by reversed-phase HPLC, WAF1 potently inhibited the α -amylase activity of the insect (*Periplaneta Americana*) digestive duct in a noncompetitive manner and did not inhibit the human salivary α -amylase. WAF1 inhibited α -amylase activity of *Periplaneta Americana* digestive duct evidently under mild acid conditions, with optimal inhibitory pH 6.0. WAF1 exhibited the highest inhibitory activity after preincubation with the enzyme at 37 °C for about 30 min. When a fixed amount of α -amylase used, along with the increase of the inhibitory/enzyme ratio the inhibition percentages of the α -amylase activity were linearly increased up to about 50%, and then increased slowly up to a maximum of about 65%.

Key words proteinaceous inhibitor, α -amylase, amaranth

野生苋属植物籽实中新型 α -淀粉酶抑制剂的分离纯化及其性质研究

王琳, 周铁杨, 唐兴, 王贤纯*, 梁宋平*
(湖南师范大学生命科学学院, 长沙 410081)

摘要 从野生苋属植物(*Amaranthus paniculatus*)籽实中分离纯化出 α -淀粉酶的一种新型蛋白质类抑制剂. 该抑制剂被命名为 WAF1. MALDI-TOF 质谱测得其分子量为 986.5, 是目前报道的 α -淀粉酶的蛋白质类抑制剂中分子量最小的. 初步的组成和结构分析结果表明, WAF1 由 9 个氨基酸残基组成, 其 N 端为焦谷氨酸. 直接用 RP-HPLC 纯化后, WAF1 能在弱酸性条件下, 以非竞争性抑制作用方式有效抑制美洲蜚蠊消化道 α -淀粉酶的活性, 最适抑制 pH 6.0, 但对人唾液淀粉酶活性无影响. WAF1 在 37 °C 下与酶预温浴约 30 min 后显示最大抑制活性. 当 α -淀粉酶用量一定时, α -淀粉酶活性的抑制率在约 50% 的范围内随抑制剂/酶比例的增大而呈线性增加, 超过 50% 后, 抑制率随抑制剂/酶比例的增大而缓慢上升, 最终达到最大值(约 65%).

关键词 蛋白质类抑制剂, α -淀粉酶, 苋属植物

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* Corresponding authors. Tel: 0731-8872556; Fax: 0731-8861304; E-mail: liangsp@public.cs.hn.cn; Wang_xianchun@263.net

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* 联系人 Tel: 0731-8872556; Fax: 0731-8861304; E-mail: liangsp@public.cs.hn.cn; Wang_xianchun@263.net;

王琳, 女, 1978年2月生, 硕士研究生

Many plants contain proteinaceous substances which are specifically inhibitory to hydrolytic enzymes. α -Amylase (EC 3.2.1.1) inhibitors, which have been found for over half a century^[1,2], are a family of such substances. So far, α -amylase inhibitory activity has been detected in wheat *Triticum aestivum*^[3-5], barley *Hordeum vulgareum*^[6,7], sorghum *Sorghum bicolor*^[8], rye *Secale cereale*^[9,10], rice *Oryza sativa*^[11], pigeonpea *Cajanus cajan*^[12], cowpea *Vigna unguiculata*^[13], bean *P. vulgaris*^[14-17] and many other plants. These inhibitors show remarkable structure variety leading to different modes of inhibition and different specificity profiles against diverse α -amylases. Such inhibition specificity of these inhibitors has aroused interest in their inhibition mechanisms and potential applications. Some inhibitors may play a vital role in controlling endogenous α -amylase activity and therefore regulating starch metabolism in plants^[18]. A knowledge of these inhibitors could improve our understanding of α -amylases and the related metabolism. On the other hand, the inhibitors which specifically inhibit insect and microbial α -amylases may be used to play a role in preventing insect and microbial^[19-21] for crop. The selective inhibition of human α -amylases is of high potential pharmaceutical value as regulative agents in reducing digestive-starch degradation in patients suffering from diabetes and obesity^[22,23]. In addition, the unique property of some inhibitors to specifically inhibit endogenous cereal α -amylases synthesized *in vivo* during germination^[18] may be of importance to the baking industry. Endogenous α -amylase inhibitors have been used as natural additives in doughs prepared from sprouted wheat flour^[24]. It is worthwhile to note that flour processed from sprout-damaged wheat is not suitable for bread making because of increased levels of α -amylase.

We have been attempting to identify naturally occurring proteinaceous inhibitors that have strong activity against insect digestive enzymes but little or none against mammalian enzymes. Our ultimate wish is to transfer genes that encode inhibitors selective for insect digestive enzymes into crops by genetic engineering, with the goal of creating new insect-resistant crop varieties. In the process of surveying more than fifteen wild plants for potential inhibitor of insect α -amylase, a novel proteinaceous inhibitor was found in wild amaranth weeds. The purification and preliminary study of the inhibitor is reported in this paper.

1 Materials and Methods

1.1 Extraction and ultrafiltration

Weeds of wild Amaranth (*A. paniculatus*) were collected from the open country. The weeds (5 g) were soaked in distilled water (20 ml) for 1 hour at room temperature, then disintegrated and homogenized in a

mortar. Crude extract was obtained by centrifugation (10 000 g for 10 min). The extraction was repeated three times. Crude extract was pooled and then heated at 70 °C for 15 min to inactivate α -amylase^[6]. The resulting turbid solution was centrifuged (15 000 g for 10 min). The clear supernatant was ultrafiltered (Elite, 0.22 μ m) and subsequently used for RP-HPLC.

1.2 Reversed-phase high performance liquid chromatography (RP-HPLC)

RP-HPLC was conducted firstly using a Waters 2010 HPLC station with a preparative column (Elite 10 \times 250 mm, Hypersil 10 μ m C8, 30 nm of pore size), and then using a Waters Alliance2690 HPLC station with an analytical column (Waters 4.6 mm \times 250 mm, Vydac 5 μ m C18, 30 nm of pore size). Solvent A was 0.1 % TFA in water, and solvent B was 0.1 % TFA in acetonitrile. All the solvents were of HPLC or analytical grade. Water was redistilled.

1.3 Preparation of insect α -amylases^[25]

The digestive ducts of adult cockroach (*Periplaneta Americana*) were homogenized with PBS containing 0.02 mol/L NaCl and 0.1 mmol/L CaCl₂ (pH 6.7), and centrifuged at 15 000 g for 10 min. The supernatant was used as an insect α -amylase preparation. The specific activity is about 1200.

1.4 Assay for α -amylase and inhibitor activities

The activity of the crude insect α -amylase was measured using a modified Bernfeld method^[26]. Namely, a suitable amount of α -amylase preparation was incubated with 100 μ l of 10 g/L soluble starch solution in 0.2 mol/L sodium phosphate buffer (pH 6.0) at 37 °C. After 5 min the reaction was stopped by the addition of 500 μ l of 3,5-dinitrosalicylic acid and heated in boiling water for 10 min. After standing for 15 min at room temperature, the absorbance of the solution was read at 546 nm. The amount of α -amylase used in the assay was properly adjusted so that the A_{546} values were in the range of 0.4–0.7. The α -amylase activity was expressed in A_{546} values directly. Inhibitor activity was expressed as a percentage of inhibited enzyme activity out of the total enzyme activity used in the assay.

2 Results

2.1 Purification and molecular weight of the inhibitor

The result of RP-HPLC using the preparative C8 column is shown in Fig. 1. Using the method described above, the peak labeled with an asterisk was identified to be active toward the insect α -amylase used (Table 1). The active peak fraction was further purified by the Vydac analytical C18 column (Fig. 2 A). Active peaks from the second HPLC separation were collected and lyophilized. Fig. 2 B is the chromatogram of the inhibitor further purified. Only one sharp and symmetric peak appeared, indicating high purity of the inhibitor. MALDI-TOF mass

spectrometric analysis indicated that the obtained inhibitor, named WAF1 by us, has a molecular weight of 986.5 (spectrum not shown).

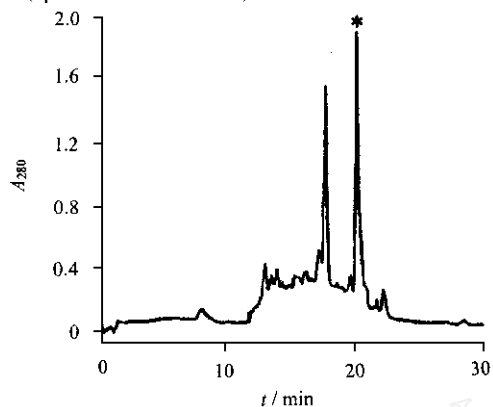


Fig. 1 Chromatogram of RP-HPLC of the extract with a preparative column

Table 1 Identification of active peak

| | Control | Active peak |
|-----------|---------|-------------|
| A_{546} | 0.409 | 0.186 |

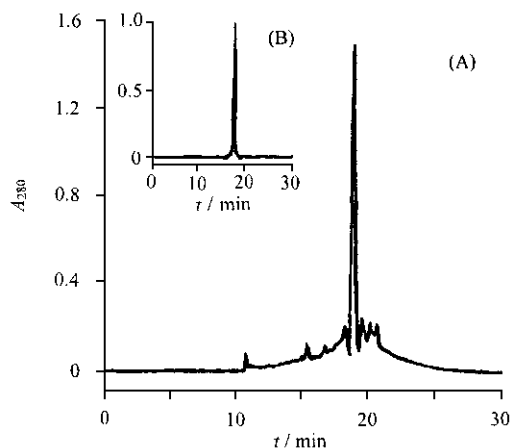


Fig. 2 Chromatogram of RP-HPLC of the active peak with an analytical column

2.2 Effect of pH on inhibitory activity

The extent of inhibition of cockroach α -amylase was measured at different pH values by preincubation of WAF1 (2.6 μ g) and enzyme in PBS buffer. The α -amylase activity remaining after preincubation at 37 $^{\circ}$ C for 20 min was determined. Controls were included to correct for the loss of enzyme activity at various pH during preincubation. The results (Fig. 3) show that WAF1 inhibits cockroach α -amylase activity significantly under mild acid conditions, with optimal inhibitory pH 6.0.

2.3 Effect of preincubation duration on inhibitory activity

For a given amount of α -amylase and WAF1 (2.5 μ g), the percentage inhibition of α -amylase activity was

determined at different durations of preincubation of the enzyme and inhibitor and at 37 $^{\circ}$ C pH 6.0. Results (Fig. 4) showed that the inhibitory activity of WAF1 was related to the preincubation duration. In the early preincubation, the inhibitory activity of WAF1 increased as the preincubation duration extended. However, the inhibitory activity reached a maximum after a certain length of time. Under the experimental conditions used, the maximum extent of inhibition (%) was observed at preincubation duration of about 30 min.

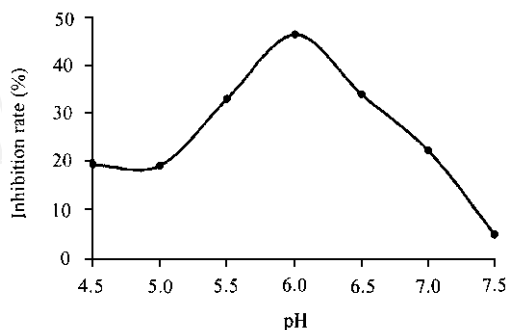


Fig. 3 pH dependence of inhibitory activity of WAF1

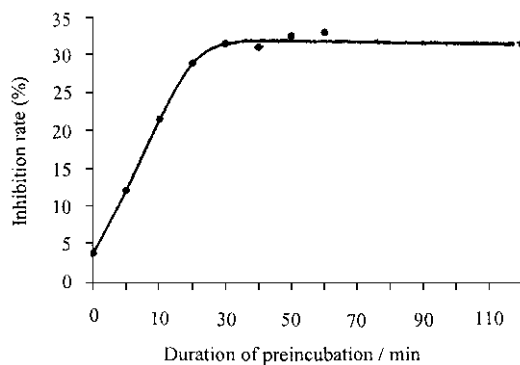


Fig. 4 Effect of preincubation duration on inhibitory activity

2.4 Effect of WAF1 concentration on α -amylase activity

When a fixed amount of α -amylase was used, the enzyme and WAF1 of different concentrations were preincubated at pH 6.0 and 37 $^{\circ}$ C for 20 min prior to the addition of starch solution. The results (Fig. 5) showed that the level of inhibition was dependent on the inhibitor/enzyme ratio. The percentage inhibition of α -amylase activity increased linearly up to about 50% with increasing WAF1 concentration, then deviated from linearity at inhibition (%) higher than 50%, and attained finally a plateau at about 65%.

2.5 Nature of α -amylase inhibition by WAF1

To ascertain whether inhibition of cockroach α -amylase by WAF1 was competitive or not, Lineweaver-Burk plots were drawn for the uninhibited and partially inhibited enzyme. The rate of α -amylase action was

determined at different starch concentrations in digests (1.0 ml) containing soluble starch (0.2, 0.4, 0.5 and 1.0 mg/ml) in the absence and presence of a fixed amount of inhibitor WAF1 at 37 °C and pH 6.0, respectively. Reaction velocity (v) was expressed in μmol maltose liberated per minute. Lineweaver-Burk double reciprocal plot for the uninhibited and partially inhibited enzyme intersected on the abscissa (Fig. 6), indicating that WAF1 is a noncompetitive inhibitor of cockroach α -amylase.

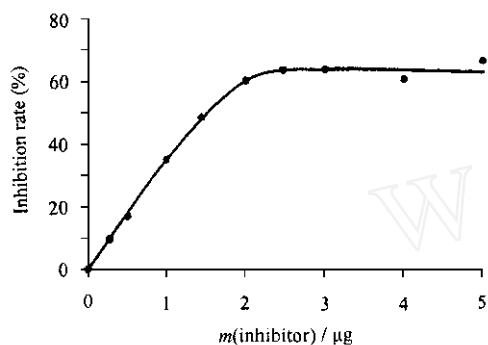


Fig. 5 Effect of WAF1 concentration on α -amylase activity

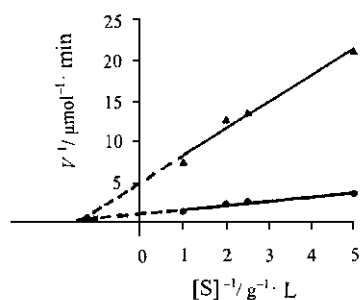


Fig. 6 Lineweaver-Burk double reciprocal plot for the uninhibited (○) and partially inhibited (□) enzymes

2.6 Specificity of WAF1

The purified WAF1 was tested for its ability to inhibit α -amylases from *Periplaneta Americana* digestive ducts and human saliva from laboratory postgraduates simultaneously. When tested at similar concentrations, WAF1 was found to potently inhibit α -amylases from the insect digestive ducts, having no inhibitory effect on human salivary α -amylase (Table 2).

Table 2 Results of specificity of WAF1

| | Control | Insect amylase | Human amylase |
|-----------|---------|----------------|---------------|
| A_{546} | 0.564 | 0.242 | 0.559 |

2.7 Amino acid composition and N-terminal of WAF1

In order to investigate the composition of WAF1, the inhibitor was hydrolyzed in 6 mol/L HCl at 110 °C for 24 hours. Analysis of the hydrolysate indicated that WAF1 was composed of nine amino acids. However, Edman

degradation of WAF1 did not give any signal of phenylthiohydantoin amino acid (Fig. 7A), suggesting that its N-terminal was blocked. After WAF1 was treated with 1 mol/L HCl at 60 °C for 4 hours according to the method described by Hashimoto T *et al.*^[27], its molecular weight increased 18 determined by MALDI-TOF mass spectrometry (mass spectrum not shown) and Edman degradation gave an obvious signal of Gu (Fig. 7B), indicating that the N-terminal residue of WAF1 is pyroglutamate.

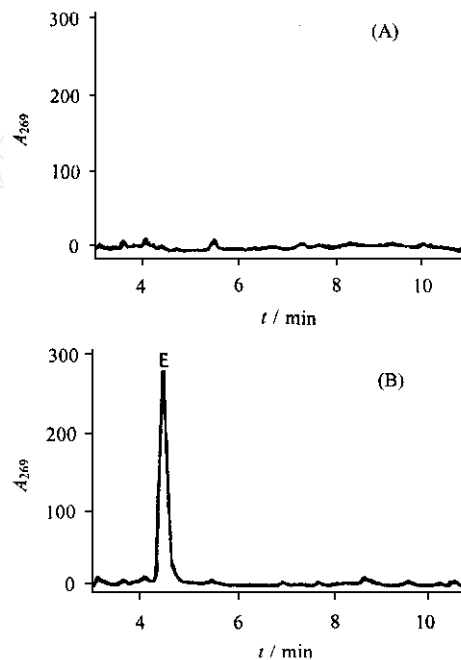


Fig. 7 Identification of WAF1 N-terminal before (A) and after (B) hydrolysis in 1 mol/L HCl

3 Discussion

Internet search indicates that WAF1 is the smallest known proteinaceous inhibitor of α -amylase. Such a small proteinaceous inhibitor can be purified from natural materials readily by RP-HPLC widely used in the purification of peptides^[28-31]. Chagolla-Lopez *et al.* purified an α -amylase inhibitor (AAI) from the seeds of *Amaranthus hypocondriacus*, a variety of the Mexican crop plant amaranth^[32]. AAI with a molecular weight of 3586.1 was reputed as the major α -amylase inhibitor present in the amaranth seeds and the shortest α -amylase inhibitor described. Interestingly, when WAF1 from wild amaranth seeds in southern China was purified, AAI could hardly be found, suggesting that the α -amylase inhibitor distribution profile of Chinese wild amaranthus plants is different from that of Mexican crop plant amaranth.

Like most other α -amylase inhibitors, the inhibitory activity of WAF1 is dependent on the preincubation time, pH and temperature, etc. The inhibition takes place much more rapidly at 37 °C than at 0 °C and 25 °C (data

not shown). Inhibition studies carried out between pH 4.5 and 7.5 showed that WAF1 exhibited the highest inhibitory activity at pH 6.0. Therefore, the detailed investigation of the effects of WAF1 on insect α -amylases was made at 37 °C and pH 6.0. When fixed amounts of WAF1 and α -amylase were preincubated for different time periods, about 4% inhibition was obtained with a 0-min preincubation time and the maximum inhibition required a preincubation period of about 30 min, indicating the equilibrium nature of the inhibition reaction.

In the present study, the curves relating WAF1 concentrations with the residual activity of insect α -amylase showed that the inhibition increased almost linearly up to the point where about 50% reduction in enzyme activity was effected. Similar curves have previously been reported for other α -amylase-inhibitor systems^[33,34]. The enzyme-inhibitor complex has been reported to have some amolytic activity^[35,36], which probably is the cause of the plateau at higher WAF1 concentrations.

The binding site of inhibitor to the α -amylase molecule is different from that of the enzyme to starch^[33]. An α -amylase inhibitor, therefore, is effective only against certain α -amylases which probably have suitable groups capable of binding with it. Since WAF1 can selectively inhibit insect α -amylases, it is apparent that insect α -amylases have sites suitable for binding with WAF1. Substrate can not dissociate the enzyme-inhibitor complex, and the inhibition is noncompetitive in nature.

Preliminary composition and structural analysis indicated that WAF1 is a nonapeptide with N-terminal pyroglutamate. Some of the amino acids are modified or uncommon amino acids. The primary structure of WAF1 is partially cyclic. Further studies are in progress to determine the detailed molecular structure and inhibition mechanism of WAF1.

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邮编: 100084