The N-terminal peptide of α-smooth muscle actin Ac-EEED inhibits myofibroblast contraction: therapeutic implications

Giulio Gabbiani, Department of Pathology and Immunology, Medical Faculty, University of Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland

It is well accepted that connective tissue remodeling during wound healing, fibromatoses and fibrotic diseases depends on myofibroblast contractile activity. Myofibroblast are characterized by the neo-expression of α-smooth muscle (SM) actin (SMA), the actin isoform typical of vascular SMCs. Experimental work has shown that α-SMA expression is responsible for tension production by myofibroblasts. Our laboratory has produced a specific antibody for α-SMA whose epitope is the N-terminal sequence Ac-EEED unique for this protein. This sequence, microinjected in myofibroblasts or administered to cultured myofibroblasts by means of a cell penetrating peptidic sequence, displaces α-SMA from stress fibers and reduces myofibroblast contractility. We have also tested the action of Ac-EEED in vivo using a model of splinted wound. When the peptide is administered once a day from the 8th to the 10nth day after producing a 2 by 2 cm splinted wound on the dorsal region of rats it results on a significant reduction of wound contraction 24 hours after removal of the splinting frame. These results show that Ac-EEED can influence myofibroblast contraction in vitro and wound contraction in vivo and suggest that this peptide represents a new candidate for the treatment of inappropriate connective tissue remodeling in several pathological situations, including Dupuytres’s disease.