



Increased fat mass and insulin resistance in mice lacking pancreatic lipase-related protein 1

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Received 18 December 2009; received in revised form 25 May 2010; accepted 1 June 2010

Abstract

Pancreatic triglyceride lipase (PTL) and its cofactor, colipase, are required for efficient dietary triglyceride digestion. In addition to PTL, pancreatic acinar cells synthesize two pancreatic lipase-related proteins (PLRP1 and PLRP2), which have a high degree of sequence and structural homology with PTL. The lipase activity of PLRP2 has been confirmed, whereas no known triglyceride lipase activity has been detected with PLRP1 up to now. To explore the biological functions of PLRP1 *in vivo*, we generated *Plrp1* knockout (KO) mice in our laboratory. Here we show that the *Plrp1* KO mice displayed mature-onset obesity with increased fat mass, impaired glucose clearance and the resultant insulin resistance. When fed on high-fat (HF) diet, the *Plrp1* KO mice exhibited an increased weight gain, fat mass and severe insulin resistance compared with wild-type mice. Pancreatic juice extracted from *Plrp1* KO mice had greater ability to hydrolyze triglyceride than that from the wild-type littermates. We propose that PLRP1 may function as a metabolic inhibitor *in vivo* of PLT–colipase-mediated dietary triglyceride digestion and provides potential anti-obesity targets for developing new drugs.

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Keywords: Fat mass; Insulin resistance; Obesity; Pancreatic lipase-related protein 1; Knockout

1. Introduction

Obesity is a risk factor for a variety of diseases, particularly heart disease and type 2 diabetes [1,2]. The cause of obesity is excess of dietary calories relative to energy expenditure. Fat contains much higher calories in comparison to carbohydrate and protein. Accordingly, digestion and absorption of dietary triglycerides in the digestive tract have been extensively explored for controlling obesity [3]. Gastric and pancreatic lipases are the main enzymes that digest dietary triglycerides [4]. Up to 20% of the hydrolysis of dietary lipids occurs in the stomach; the rest is completed in the small intestine by pancreatic lipases [5,6]. Bile salts contribute to this process by emulsifying dietary fats. In addition, they also bind to the oil–water interface and prevent PTL adsorption and thus lipolysis [7,8]. This inhibition can be reversed by colipase [9–12], a specific pancreatic protein which is co-secreted with lipase, *via* the formation of a specific lipase–colipase complex [13].

Screening of pancreatic cDNA libraries from different species 41 revealed the presence of two lipase-related proteins (PLRP1 and 42 PLRP2) besides PTL [14–17]. Sequence alignment showed that the 43 two proteins possess all the amino acids that were essential for 44 colipase binding. Recombinant PLRP2 is able to hydrolyze both 45 phospholipids and triacylglycerols [16–18]. Mice deficient in PLRP2 46 showed that PLRP2 contributes to fat digestion in suckling animals 47 [19]. PLRP1 showed few activity against triglycerides and no 48 measurable activity against phospholipids, galactolipids or choles- 49 terol esters [20,21]. Neither bile salts nor colipase activates PLRP1, 50 although indirect measures indicated that PLRP1 could interact with 51 colipase [21]. Kinetic studies also supported binding between 52 colipase and PLRP1 [22], yet the exact physiological roles of 53 PLRP1 still remain unknown. 54

In the present study, *PLRP1* KO mice were prepared and studied to 55 explore the biological function of PLRP1 *in vivo*. These *Plrp1* KO mice 56 were viable and fertile. No statistical difference was found between 57 *Plrp1* KO mice and wild-type littermates in body weight before 58 adulthood. However, adult *Plrp1* KO mice displayed increased fat 59 mass and developed impaired glucose tolerance associated with 60 insulin resistance. A high-fat diet exacerbated these conditions in 61 *Plrp1* KO mice. Lipase activity assay revealed higher pancreatic lipase 62 activity in pancreatic juice from the KO mice. These results suggested 63

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that PLRP1 may influence classic PTL-colipase-mediated dietary triglyceride digestion, and this animal model was useful to investigate PLRP1-mediated physiological role *in vivo*.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Targeting of the *Plrp1* gene in embryonic stem cell (129/SvEv)

KO mice were produced by replacing exons 1–8 of *Plrp1* with a neo cassette (Fig. 1A). The homology arms (1.6 and 4.1 kb) flanking the positive selection marker gene (neo) were amplified from 129/SvEv embryonic stem (ES) cell genomic DNA. Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) analysis of genomic DNA from ES cell clones was carried out with the following primers: F1: 5-GCCACAAAGCAAACAGAG-3; F2: 5-TACATAGACAGCAGATACATACCCCTTCAC-3. Positive clone was identified by two PCR products at 9 and 5 kb (see Fig. 1A–B). The 9-kb band was amplified from the non-recombined allele (the left four lanes in Fig. 1B). The 5-kb band represents the recombined left arm. The recombination was verified by amplification with primers F3 and F4; the generation of the 5.7-kb band represented the recombined right arm (Fig. 1A and C). Primer F3: 5-GCTTGGCGGCAATGGGCTGAC-3; primer F4: 5-TGGTGGGGGAATAACTACATGGCTTTGAAT-3. The veracity of the recombination was further confirmed by DNA sequencing of the PCR products.

2.2. Generation of *Plrp1* knockout mice

Positive ES clone was injected into blastocysts to generate chimeras. The chimeric mice were bred with C57BL/6 to generate F1 progeny. The heterozygotes (PLRP1^{+/-}) were used to generate wild-type (PLRP1^{+/+}), heterozygotes and

homozygous (PLRP1^{-/-}) subjects for further experiments. Mice were genotyped by PCR using three primers. Wild-type (WT) mice contained only a 1-kb PCR band, whereas the homozygotes contained only a 1.5-kb PCR product. The presence of both PCR products indicated heterozygosity (HT). Primers were as follows: F, 5-GGGCCCCACCATGCTTGCTCT-3 (in 1.6 kb homology-arm region); R1, 5-CCACCGG-90 GACCTTTTATGCTC-3 (in exon 1–8 region of *Plrp1*); and R2, 5-TCGGCAGGAG-91 CAAGGTGAGATGACAGGAG-3 (in tk-neo cassette).

Mice were housed at a temperature of 23±1°C under a 12-h light/12-h dark cycle (lights on at 7:00 a.m.). Mice were fed either a normal chow or high-fat (HF) diet (D12492, Research Diets, Inc., New Brunswick, NJ, USA). Age-matched wild-type littermates served as the controls for all experiments. Male mice were used in the studies if not defined. All experiments were conducted in accordance with institutional guidelines.

2.3. RT-PCR analysis and qRT-PCR

For semi-quantitative reverse transcription-PCR (RT-PCR), total RNA was extracted from the pancreas by using Trizol reagent (Invitrogen Corp., Carlsbad, CA, USA). cDNA was prepared by reverse transcription of 1 µg of total RNA. The resulting cDNAs were amplified using the following primers: 5-ATGCTGATTCTCTG-103 GACAATCC-3 and 5-GAAGTTTATAGGGCCTGATAGC-3. The internal 18S RNA control was amplified using 5-GTAACCCGTTGAACCCATT-3 and 5-CCATCAATCGGTAG-105 TAGCG-3. Real-time quantitative PCR was conducted using a SYBR Green detection system (Bio-Rad, Hercules, CA, USA). Relative gene expression levels were normalized against GAPDH. The primer sequences were as follows: GAPDH, 5-TTGCCATCAATGACCCCTTCA-3 and 5-CGCCCCACTTGATTTTGA-3; PTL, 5-CTGGGAGCAGTAGCTGGAAG-3 and 5-AGCGGGTGTGATCTGTGC-3; PLRP2, 110

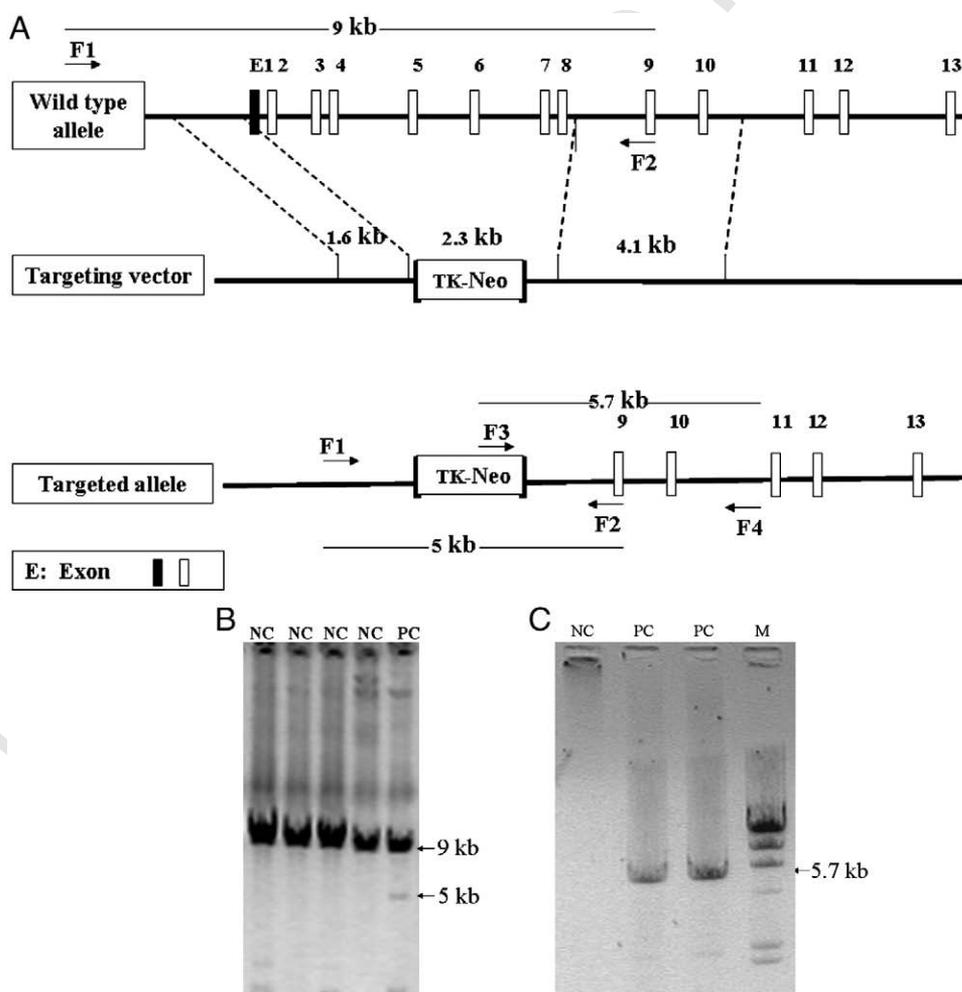


Fig. 1. Targeted disruption of the murine *Plrp1* gene in ES cells. (A) Schematic representation of the *Plrp1* locus and targeting vector. The open boxes in the targeting vector schematics correspond to the tk-neo selectable marker genes. (B–C) Homologous recombination of the positive ES cell clone was verified by PCR analysis. The wild-type allele (negative clone) generated a 9-kb band with primers of F1 and F2 [left four lanes in (B)], while the mutant allele (positive clone) produced a 5-kb band due to the replacement of exons 1–8 with a neo cassette in the targeting vector. The 5.7-kb PCR products with primers of F3 and F4 showed that the right arm had also been appropriately recombined. PC, Positive clone; NC, negative clone; M, DNA marker.

111 5-ATGCCTATGGATGTCGCGGA-3 and 5-TGCCAGGGCTTGTCATTG-3; CLPS (colipase),
 112 5-GCTCTTGCCTTCTGCTGTCTGA-3 and 5-ATGGCCGCGATGATGCTCCTGT-3.

113 2.4. Western blot analysis

114 Pancreatic protein extracts were resolved by SDS-PAGE and transferred to a poly
 115 (vinylidene difluoride) membrane (Amersham Pharmacia, USA). The membrane was
 116 blocked in 1 × TBS containing 0.1% Tween (TBST) and 5% nonfat dry milk for 1 h at room
 117 temperature. After incubation with a primary antibody at 4°C overnight, the membrane
 118 was washed three times with TBST buffer and incubated with goat anti-rabbit or anti-
 119 mouse HRP-conjugated IgG for 1 h at room temperature. Proteins of interest were
 120 detected by using an enhanced chemiluminescence detection system. Polyclonal anti-
 121 PLRP1 antiserum was generated in the laboratory by immunization of rabbits with
 122 purified GST fusion protein containing amino acids 65–86 and 465–473 of PLRP1.

123 2.5. Determination of total fat/lean content by magnetic resonance imaging

124 Mice were fasted overnight for 16 h prior to analysis of total fat mass, lean mass
 125 and body fluid using a Bruker's minispec Lean Fat Analyzer (Bruker Optics, Inc.,
 126 Billerica, MA, USA).

127 2.6. White adipose tissue histology

128 Epididymal fat tissues were dissected from 11-month-old mice. Sections (10 μm)
 129 were stained with hematoxylin and eosin. Photographs were taken at ×200
 130 magnification.

131 2.7. Blood glucose, glucose tolerance tests, insulin tolerance tests, serum insulin assay

132 Blood glucose was determined by using an automated glucose monitor (Roche
 133 Diagnostics Shanghai Ltd., Shanghai, China). Serum insulin levels were measured by
 134 enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (Linco Research Inc., St. Charles, MO, USA).
 135 Glucose tolerance test and insulin tolerance test were performed after 16 h of fasting
 136 overnight. In the glucose tolerance test, the mice received 2 g/kg glucose
 137 intraperitoneally. Glucose level in tail blood was measured immediately before and
 138 at 15, 30, 60 and 120 min after the injection. In the insulin tolerance test, mice
 139 received 0.6 mU/g insulin (Humulin R, Eli Lilly, Indianapolis, IN, USA) intraperitone-
 140 ally. Blood sample was collected from the tail vein at 0, 15, 30, 45 and 60 min after the
 141 insulin injection.

142 2.8. Extraction of pancreatic juice and lipase activity assay

143 Mice were fasted for 6 h and euthanized by cervical dislocation. The pancreas was
 144 removed and soaked in a physiological saline solution for 8 h on ice, then centrifuged at
 145 14,000 × g for 10 min at 4°C. Protein concentration of the supernatant was determined
 146 with a BCA protein assay kit (Beyotime Institute of Biotechnology, Haimen, China).

147 Lipase activity in pancreatic juice was determined using a lipase assay kit (Nanjing
 148 Jiancheng Bioengineering Institute, China). Five microliters of pancreatic juice was
 149 added to 95 μl of modified emulsified triglyceride substrate at room temperature. The
 150 absorbance at 410 nm (reflecting the remaining emulsified triglyceride) was recorded
 151 every 10 s. The decrease in absorbance at 410 nm represents the hydrolysis of the
 152 emulsified triglyceride due to lipase activity in pancreatic juice.

153 2.9. Statistical analysis

154 Data were analyzed by a two-tailed Student's *t* test or one-way ANOVA.
 155 Multifactorial two-way ANOVA was also adopted to assess statistical difference. Values
 156 were presented as mean ± S.D. Statistical significance was set at *P* < .05.

157 3. Results

158 3.1. Generation of *Plrp1* knockout mice

159 The targeting vector was designed as shown in Fig. 1A. The *Plrp1*
 160 knockout mice were generated in our laboratory (for details see
 161 Materials and Methods). RT-PCR (Fig. 2B) and Western blot analysis
 162 (Fig. 2C) indicated that *Plrp1* transcripts and corresponding protein
 163 were not detected in the pancreas of KO mice. The *Plrp1* deficient
 164 mice were viable, fertile and not significantly different from the wild-
 165 type controls in body weight at 4 and 10 weeks after birth (data not
 166 shown), although PLRP1 exhibits high neonatal mRNA level in the
 167 pancreas [14].

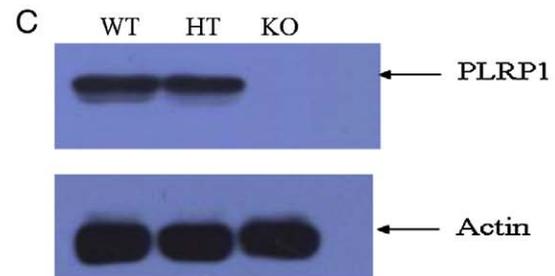
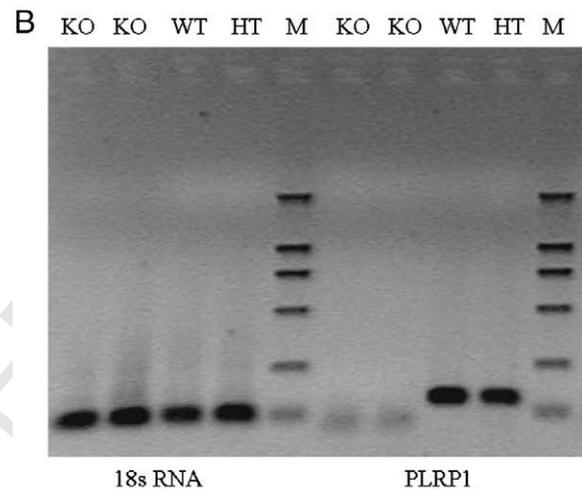
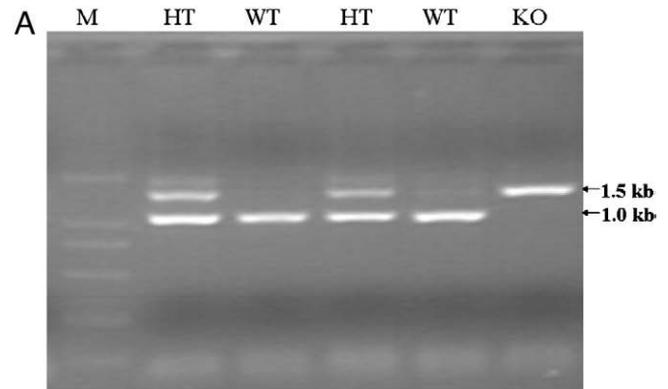


Fig. 2. Confirmation of disruption of the *Plrp1* gene in adult mice. (A) PCR analysis of offspring from heterozygote intercrosses was carried out with the three primers in the reaction system. Arrow shows the location of the knockout (KO) allele band (1.5 kb) and wild-type (WT) allele band (1 kb). The PCR products with both bands indicate heterozygous (HT) mice. M, DNA marker. (B) RT-PCR analysis of *Plrp1* expression in pancreas from adult WT, HT and KO. The 18s RNA was the internal control (left four panels). (C) Western blot analysis of *Plrp1* expression in pancreas from adult WT, HT and KO mice. The blot was probed with rabbit polyclonal antibodies against mouse PLRP1.

3.2. Increased fat accumulation in *Plrp1* knockout mice

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Body weights of adult KO mice and wild-type littermate
 controls were measured every 2 weeks as shown in Fig. 3A. The
 mean body weight of KO mice was higher than that of wild-type
 littermates, although there was no statistically significant differ-
 ence. Furthermore, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) showed
 that the KO mice had body fat contents at 24.4%, 23.6% and 22.7%
 of their respective body weights, compared with 13.2%, 10.0% and
 8.6% of body weights from WT littermates at 28, 37 and 45 weeks,
 respectively. In contrast, the KO mice had lean mass contents at
 68.7%, 68.9% and 69.5% compared with 80.1%, 82.9% and 84.5% in

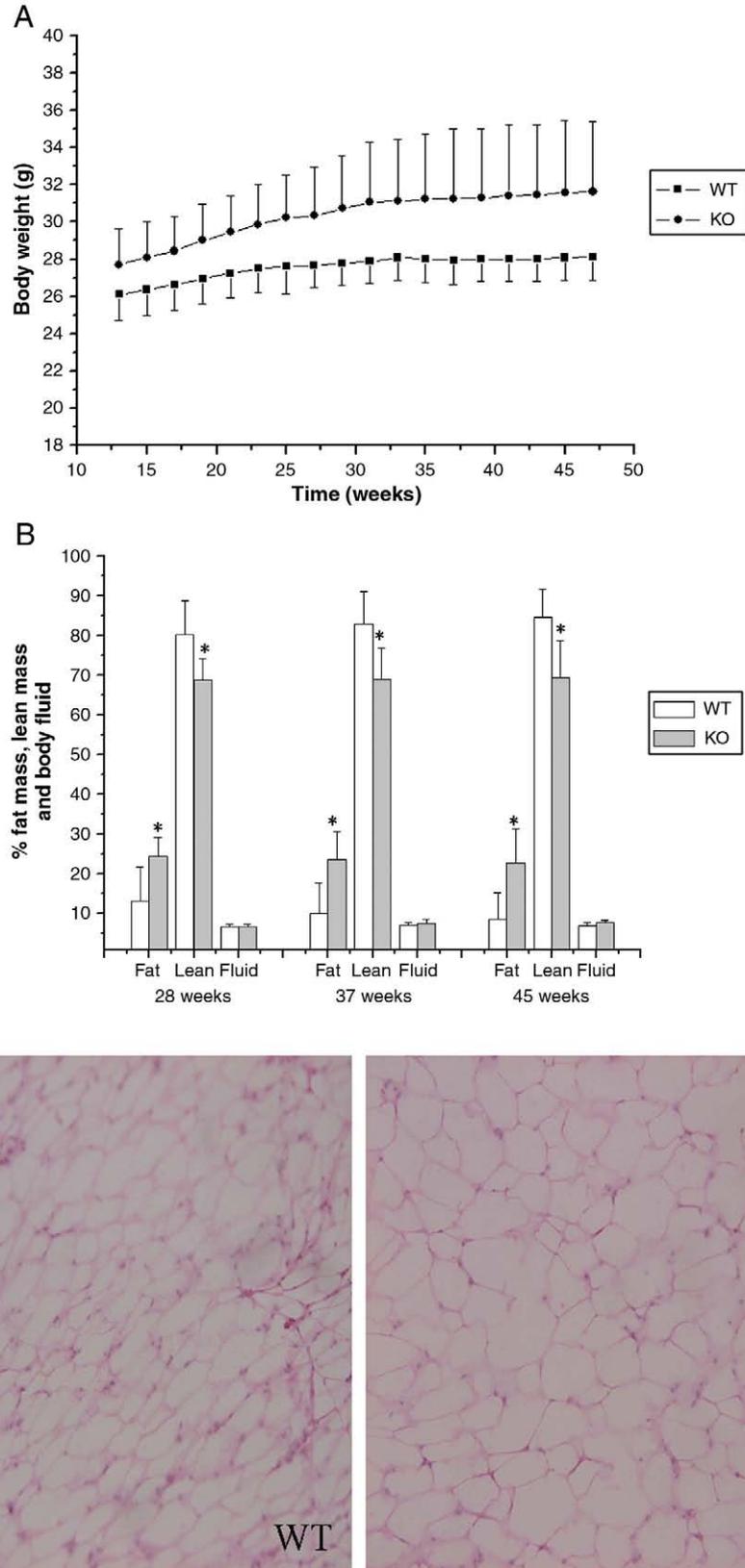


Fig. 3. Deletion of *Plrp1* in male mice may lead to obesity. (A) Body weights of male *Plrp1* KO mice and WT littermates. Data are presented as means \pm S.D. $n=5-6$. (B) The percentage of fat, lean mass and body fluid was determined with a Bruker minispec Live Mice Analyzer at the age of 28, 37, 45 weeks. Data are presented as means \pm S.D. $n=5-6$. * $P<.05$. (C) Histology of adipose tissue. Hematoxylin and eosin-stained epididymal white adipose tissues are shown. Magnification, $\times 200$.

179 wild-type mice, respectively (Fig. 3B). These results suggested that
180 the KO mice had become mildly obese with higher fat content and
181 lower lean mass relative to the wild-type littermates on a normal
182 chow diet.

183 Macroscopic analyses showed that the subcutaneous, visceral and
184 epididymal fat depots were increased in *Plrp1* KO mice in comparison
185 to those in wild-type mice (Supplementary Fig. 1). The size of
186 adipocytes in white adipose tissue was also larger than that in wild-
187 type controls (Fig. 3C). These results showed that deletion of *Plrp1* in
188 mice led to mature-onset obesity.

189 3.3. Impaired glucose tolerance in *Plrp1* null mice

190 *Plrp1* KO mice showed mild hyperglycemia and hyperinsulinemia
191 at 7 months (Fig. 4A–B). To investigate this point further, we
192 performed glucose and insulin tolerance tests (GTT and ITT). In the
193 GTT, KO mice displayed impaired glucose tolerance with higher blood
194 glucose at 30, 60 and 120 min after glucose administration compared
195 with that from WT littermates (Fig. 4C). Insulin sensitivity was also
196 significantly decreased in KO mice (Fig. 4D).

3.4. *Plrp1* KO mice developed more severe obesity and insulin resistance 197 on high-fat diet 198

We next challenged mice with high-fat diet at the age of 10 weeks. 199
The *Plrp1* KO mice had significantly higher body weight than WT 200
littermates upon a high-fat diet for 6 weeks (Fig. 5A). Ten weeks of 201
high-fat diet increased fat content in KO mice to 27.8%, compared with 202
WT littermates at 17.8%. There was also a tendency for KO mice to have 203
a higher fat content at the age of 20 weeks when mice were fed on a 204
normal chow diet (Fig. 5B). Furthermore, *Plrp1* KO mice displayed 205
more severe glucose intolerance and insulin resistance than wild-type 206
mice after feeding high-fat diet for 14 weeks (Fig. 5C and D). 207

3.5. Increased lipase activity in pancreatic juice extracted from *Plrp1* 208 KO mice 209

In vitro studies indicated that PLRP1 could bind to colipase and 210
inhibited PTL activity in the presence of colipase, and increasing the 211
colipase concentration could restore the PTL activity [23], which 212
suggested that PLRP1 could compete with PTL for colipase. To further 213
test the hypothesis that PLRP1 inhibits dietary triglyceride digestion 214

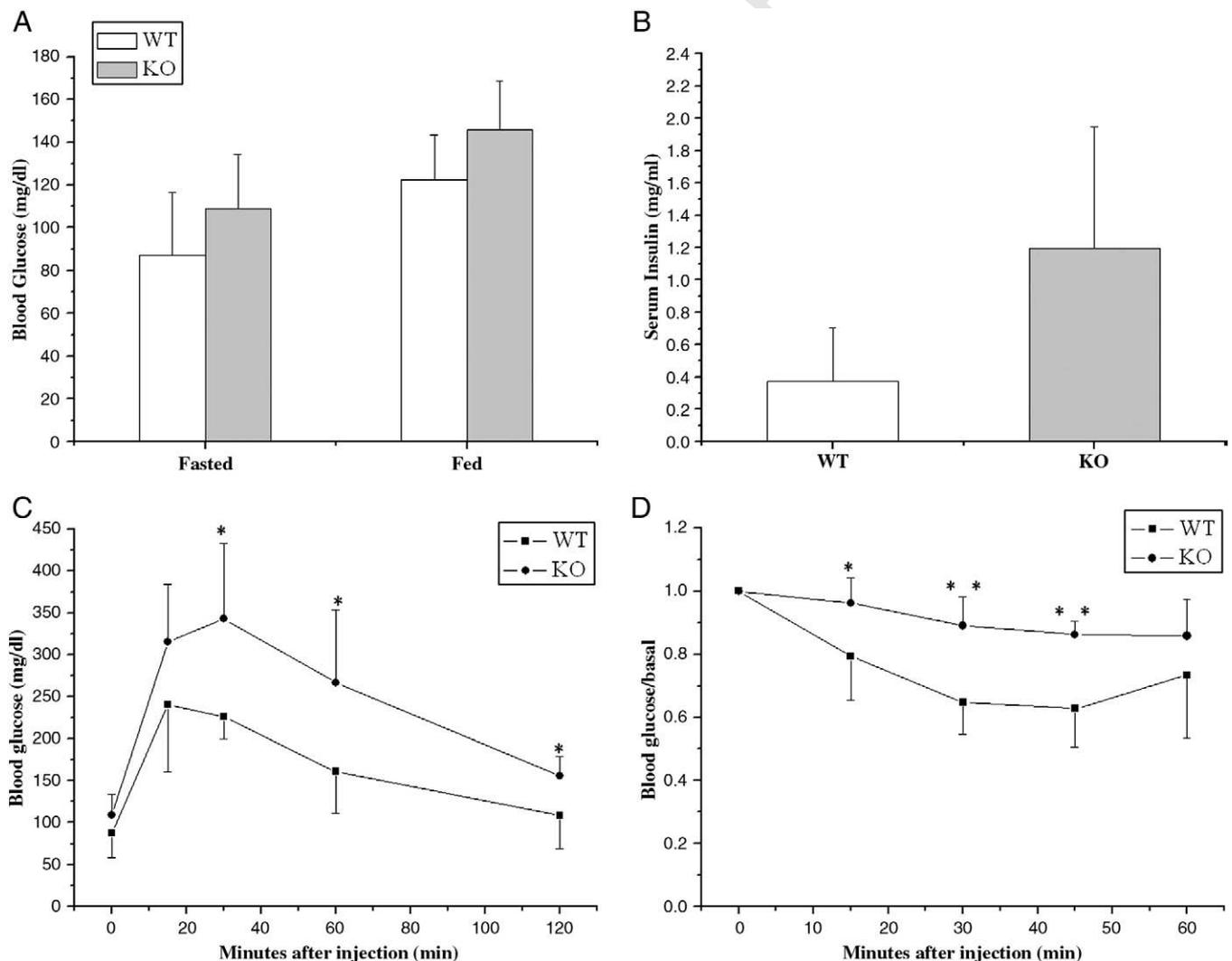


Fig. 4. *Plrp1* KO mice display insulin resistance. (A) Blood glucose levels of KO mice and WT littermates under fasted (16 h) and fed conditions at the age of 7 months. (B) Serum insulin concentration for 7-month-old KO mice and WT littermates. (C–D) Glucose and insulin tolerance tests in 9-month-old KO mice and WT littermates. Data are presented as means \pm S.D. $n=5$. * $P<.05$; ** $P<.01$.

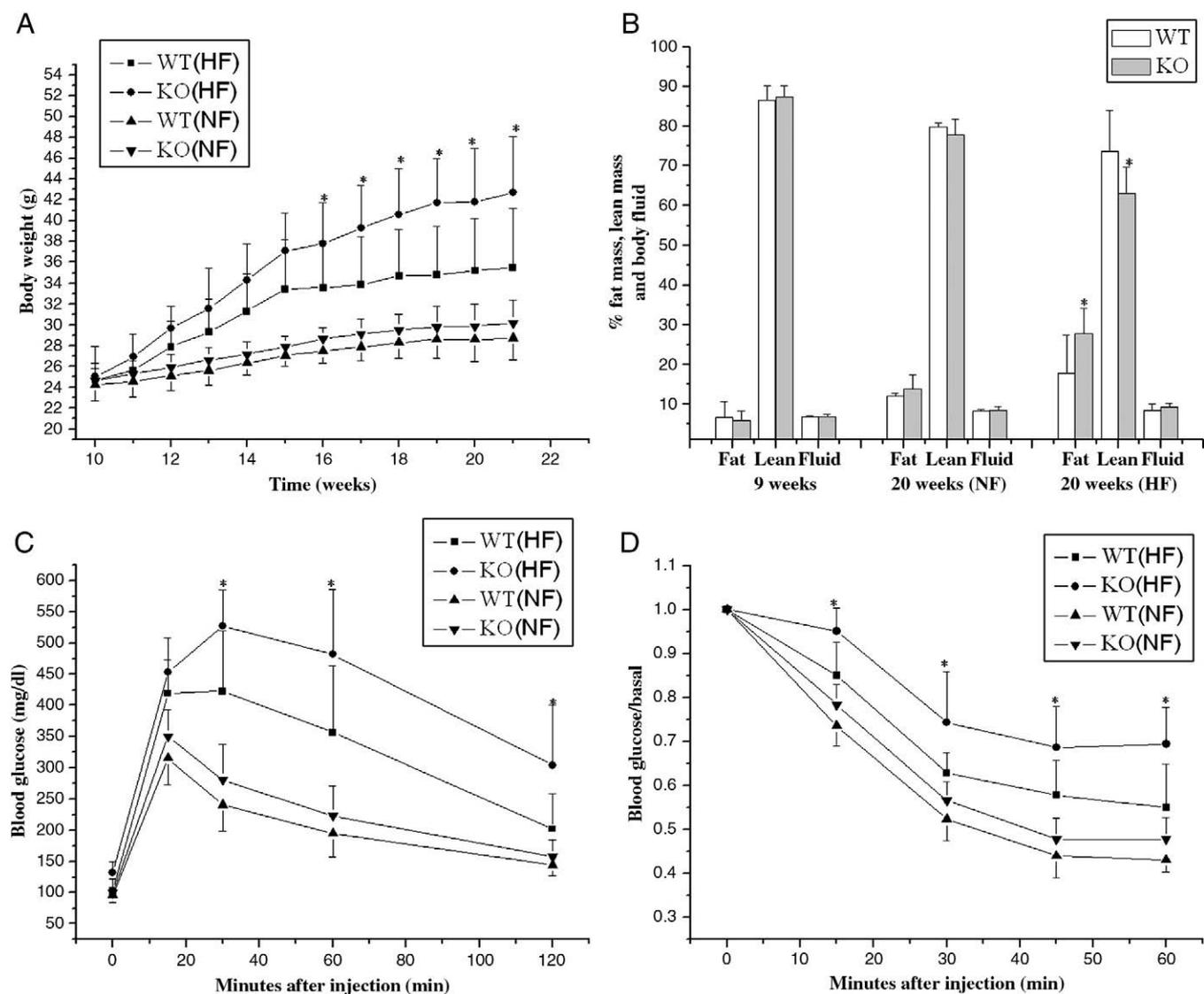


Fig. 5. Mice deficient in *Plrp1* develop obesity and insulin resistance on high-fat (HF) diet. (A) Body weights of *Plrp1* KO mice and WT littermates when mice were on HF diet from age of 10 weeks or fed normal food (NF). Data are presented as means \pm S.D. $n=7-10$. (B) NMR determination of fat contents of KO mice and WT littermates. Mice were on NF or HF diet at age of 10 weeks. Data are presented as means \pm S.D. $n=7-10$. (C-D) Glucose and insulin tolerance tests in 6-month-old KO mice and WT littermates fed NF or HF diet for 14 weeks. Data are presented as means \pm S.D. $n=7$. * $P<.05$.

215 *in vivo*, we assessed the lipase activity of pancreatic juice from KO
 216 mice and WT littermates. Pancreatic juice extracted from KO mice had
 217 higher lipase activity in comparison to WT littermates (Fig. 6A).
 218 Furthermore, real-time PCR showed that the expression of PTL, PLRP2
 219 and CLPS (colipase) was not different between the KO and WT mice
 220 (Fig. 6B-D).

221 4. Discussion

222 It is now widely accepted that PTL performs a key function in
 223 dietary fat digestion and absorption by hydrolyzing triglycerides
 224 into diglycerides and subsequently into monoglycerides and free
 225 fatty acids. PLRP1 has a 68% amino acid sequence identity with
 226 PTL, but several investigators have revealed that native or
 227 recombinant PLRP1 showed no lipolytic activity in a standard
 228 pancreatic lipase assay using a large variety of substrates and
 229 condition, although PLRP1 was shown to possess the same affinity
 230 as PTL for colipase. Substituting two residues (V179 and A181) in
 231 PLRP1 for those found in PTL (A179 and P181) restores a

significant lipolytic activity [20,21]. Thus, the lack of lipase activity
 232 of PLRP1 is likely to result mainly from particular features of the
 233 N-terminal domain. Until now, the physiological function of PLRP1
 234 has not been established, although it has been demonstrated in a
 235 restricted expression in the pancreas and PLRP1 is secreted with
 236 PTL and colipase. 237

We generated and characterized mice deficient in PLRP1. The
 238 *Plrp1* KO mice were viable, fertile and had no significant difference
 239 from the wild-type controls in body weight at 4 and 10 weeks
 240 after birth. However, they displayed increased fat mass content
 241 and insulin resistance after adulthood. Obesity and insulin
 242 resistance were exacerbated by high-fat diet in KO mice. A
 243 previous *in vitro* study showed that PLRP1 could reduce PTL lipase
 244 activity in the presence of colipase and bile salts, and this activity
 245 was recovered upon further colipase addition [23], indicating that
 246 PLRP1 is a metabolic inhibitor of PLT-colipase-mediated dietary
 247 triglyceride digestion. PLRP1 and PLT share a homolog colipase
 248 binding domain and the same affinity to colipase; hence, it may
 249 be that PLRP1 competes with PTL for colipase *in vivo*. This
 250

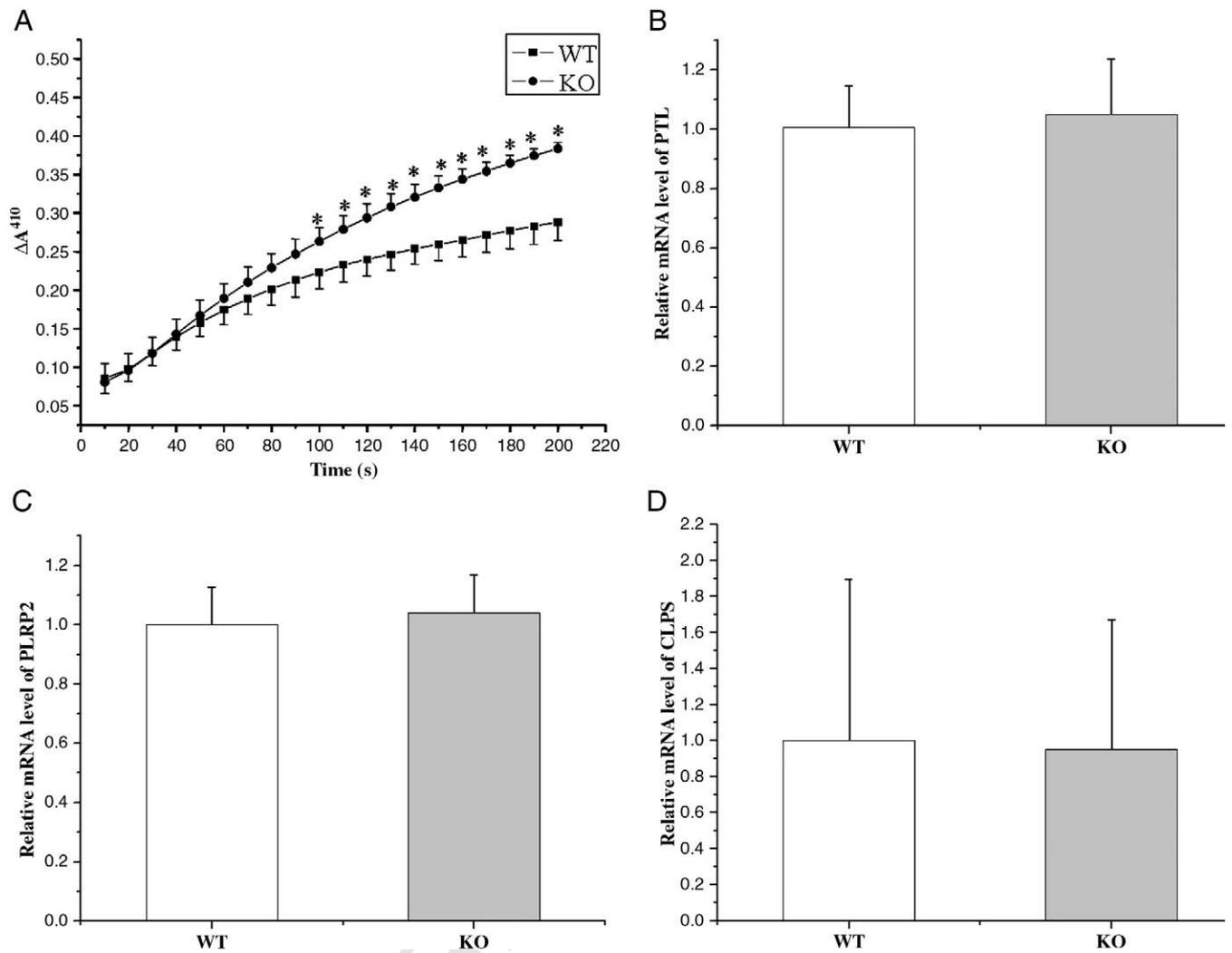


Fig. 6. Determination of lipase activity of pancreatic juice and expression levels of PTL and PLRP2 in KO and WT mice. (A) The pancreatic lipase activity was measured using a spectrophotometric assay with emulsified triglyceride as the substrate, and the decrease of absorbance at 410 nm represents the hydrolysis of triglyceride. Data are presented as means \pm S.D. $n=4$. (B–D) Expressions of PTL, PLRP2 and CLPS in *Plrp1* KO mice were not significantly different from WT controls by comparing the relative mRNA levels in pancreas from WT and KO mice. Data are shown as relative values. $n=4$.

251 hypothesis is in agreement with our studies showing that
 252 pancreatic juice extracted from KO mice had higher lipase activity
 253 in comparison to WT littermates. When KO mice are placed on a
 254 normal chow diet, the higher lipase activity in their digestive
 255 system is helpful for digestion of dietary triglycerides, although
 256 the process is very effective in the intestine and may contribute to
 257 increased fat mass content in KO mice over a long period of time.
 258 As for high-fat diet, the high-fat content in food causes incomplete
 259 digestion and absorption of dietary triglycerides, so the lack of
 260 PLRP1 would improve the process and the KO mice deficient in
 261 *Plrp1* developed obesity early and significantly compared to
 262 wild-type mice.

263 In newborns, the mRNA levels of PLRP1 and PLRP2 are high,
 264 while PTL is not expressed at detected levels [14]. It has been
 265 reported that PLRP2 was critical for efficient fat digestion in this
 266 period. Whether or not PLRP1 has a role in suckling animals
 267 remains unclear since no significant difference in body weight
 268 at 4 weeks has been observed. PTL exhibits maximal expression
 269 level in adulthood, and colipase is an obligatory cofactor for PTL
 270 [14]. It is reasonable to speculate that colipase deficiency due to
 271 competition by PLRP1 may influence PTL activity in adulthood.
 272 This provides a potential explanation for our observations that

pancreatic juice extracted from KO mice had higher lipase 273
 activity. Although no significant difference in expression of PTL, 274
 PLRP2 and CLPS (colipase) was observed, it cannot exclude the 275
 potential possibility that ~~the change of other pancreatic lipase~~ 276 Q1
 Thus, further investigations are required to elucidate the 277
 detailed mechanisms. 278

It is well accepted that adipose tissue has a substantial influence 279
 on systemic glucose homeostasis through secretion of adipocytokines 280 Q2
 [23–25]. Our findings showed that adult *Plrp1* KO mice displayed 281
 impaired glucose clearance associated with insulin resistance. These 282
 results may be due to increased fat mass and the development of 283
 obesity in *Plrp1* KO mice. 284

In summary, we provide the first evidence *in vivo* that mice 285
 lacking PLRP1 may develop obesity and the symptom of glucose 286
 intolerance and insulin resistance. Although the detailed mechanism 287
 and the significance of the physiological regulation *in vivo* are still 288
 waiting for exploration, the PLRP1 itself or compounds regulating its 289
 expression and activity may have a great potential for developing 290
 attractive pharmacological interventions counteracting obesity and 291
 related metabolic diseases. 292

Supplementary material related to this article can be found online 293
 at doi:10.1016/j.jnutbio.2010.06.002. 294

295 **Acknowledgments**

296 We thank Dr. Ping Huang, Bao Zhang and Xihua Li for technical
 297 support. We thank Liyun Zhao for valuable discussion and Jiajuan
 298 Shen for the antibody raise. This work was supported by the National
 299 863 High-Tech Project (2008AA02Z126); Science and Technology
 300 Commission of Shanghai Municipality (54319939, 06XD14014,
 301 07DZ19503) and E-Institutes of Shanghai Municipal Education
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Supplementary Fig. 1A. Images of subcutaneous, visceral and epididymal fat of male Plrp1 KO mice and WT mice.

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