

Structure of an Acidic Phospholipase A₂ from the Venom of *Deinagkistrodon acutus* in a New Crystal Form

GU Li-Chuan, ZHANG Hai-Long, SONG Shi-Ying, ZHOU Yuan-Cong¹, LIN Zheng-Jiong*

(National Laboratory of Biomacromolecules, Institute of Biophysics, the Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing 100101, China;

¹ Institute of Biochemistry and Cell Biology, the Chinese Academy of Sciences, Shanghai 200031, China)

Abstract The three-dimensional structure of an acidic phospholipase A₂ purified from the venom of *Deinagkistrodon acutus* (*Aghkistrodon acutus*) was determined in a new crystal form by molecular replacement at 0.28 nm resolution with a crystallographic *R* factor of 21.9% (*R*-free = 25.7%) and reasonable stereochemistry. Being similar to the previous reported crystal form, a significant conformational adaptation of segment 14–23 at the dimer interface was observed. This segment was related to the “interface recognition site” (IRS). It was found that a positively charged residue at position 34 seems to be a common feature for most of hemolytic PLA₂s belonging to group II. Structural comparison between the two crystal forms showed that NaCl had significant effects on the crystal packing, thus leading to dramatic changes of the unit cell parameters. In the new crystal form, MPD (2-methyl-2,4-pentanediol) molecules exist in the hydrophobic channel of the enzyme.

Key words phospholipase A₂; X-ray crystallography; three-dimensional structure; hemolysis; interfacial catalysis

Phospholipase A₂ (PLA₂s, EC 3.1.1.4) catalyzes the hydrolysis of the fatty acid ester at the *sn*-2 position of phospholipids in a calcium-dependent reaction. The low molecular mass PLA₂s are classified into two main groups based on sequence and structural homology. It is well known that in addition to being a catalyst for the hydrolysis of phospholipids, PLA₂ from snake venom possesses a wide variety of pharmacological activities^[1,2] such as neurotoxicity, cardiotoxicity, myotoxicity, and hemolytic, anticoagulant and antiplatelet activities.

It has long been observed that the hydrolysis rate catalysed by phospholipase A₂ increases dramatically while the substrates present as multimolecular aggregates and the increase depends on the NaCl concentration. Biochemistry research suggested that NaCl promotes affinity between PLA₂ and the phospholipid interface^[3].

Some of PLA₂s from snake venom show hemolytic activity, such as the CMS-9 from *Naja nigricollis* venom^[4] and basic PLA₂ from *Aghkistrodon halys* Pallas^[5]. Studies of the hemolytic

mechanism of PLA₂ have been done by chemical modification^[6–8]. The first structure of hemolytic PLA₂, the crystal structure of the basic PLA₂ from *Aghkistrodon halys* Pallas was determined^[9]. According to the structure and the fact that most PLA₂s with hemolytic activity are basic PLA₂s, Zhao *et al.*^[10] proposed that a basic residue cluster in C-terminus region might be responsible for the hemolytic activity.

Four kinds of PLA₂ were obtained from the venom of *Deinagkistrodon acutus* through gene engineering^[11,12]. All these PLA₂ were characterized and their amino acid sequences were determined using cDNA method. They were designated as acidic phospholipase A₂I (aPLA₂I), acidic phospholipase A₂II (aPLA₂II), basic phospholipase A₂(bPLA₂) and Lys⁴⁹-phospholipase A₂(Lys⁴⁹-PLA₂) according to their isoelectric points, which are 4.49, 5.05, 9.49 and 9.3, respectively. It was shown that aPLA₂I has an inhibiting effect on platelet aggregation and all phospholipase A₂s except aPLA₂II have hemolytic activities. An acidic PLA₂ recently purified from the venom of *Deinagkistrodon acutus* and characterized by Zhang *et al.*^[13] displays the same isoelectric point and pharmacological activities as aPLA₂I.

This PLA₂ enzyme was crystallized in two crystal

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* Corresponding author: Tel, 86-10-64888513; Fax, 86-10-64877837; e-mail, lin@sun5.ibp.ac.cn

forms with the same space group but different unit cell parameters [$P2_1(I)$ and $P2_1(II)$]¹³¹. In contrast with $P2_1(I)$ form, which was grown in solution containing NaCl, $P2_1(II)$ form was grown in the absence of NaCl. Crystal structure of this enzyme in $P2_1(I)$ has been determined and the relationship between structure and activity of inhibiting platelet aggregation was discussed¹⁴¹. In this paper, we report crystal structure determination of $P2_1(II)$ at 0.28 nm resolution and structural comparison with $P2_1(I)$ crystal form, and explore the hemolytic site based on a comparison of the amino acid sequences and the three-dimensional structures.

1 Materials and Methods

1.1 Crystallization and data collection

The PLA₂ enzyme provided for crystallization was extracted from the venom of *Deinagkistrodon acutus* (*Aghkistrodon acutus*, collected from Jiangxi Province, China) according to the procedure outlined previously¹³¹. Crystals were grown at 18 °C by the hanging-drop method with 10 g/L of protein, 0.05 mol/L HEPES buffer (pH 7.5) and 35% MPD in 8 μ l drops equilibrated against 0.5 ml solution of 0.1 mol/L HEPES buffer (pH 7.5) and 70% MPD. The data were collected with a Mar345 research area detector using a single crystal. The data were scaled and merged using the HKL suite¹⁵¹. The crystal belongs to space group $P2_1$ with cell dimensions $a = 4.348$ nm, $b = 7.149$ nm, $c = 4.385$ nm and $\beta = 116.32^\circ$. There are two protein molecules in the asymmetric unit according to the Matthews coefficient¹⁶¹. The data set contains 5 253 unique reflections with R -merge of 8.4% and completeness of 88.5% (78.6% for the high resolution shell) at 0.28 nm. The details of purification, crystallization and preliminary X-ray analysis of $P2_1(II)$ have been published earlier¹³¹.

1.2 Structure determination and refinement.

The structure was solved by the molecular replacement method using the AMoRe package¹⁷¹. The search model used in the cross-rotation function calculation was the dimer from the previously reported $P2_1(I)$ structure (*Deinagkistrodon acutus* aPLA₂, 1IJL in the Brookhaven Protein Data Bank). The cross-rotation function search was calculated using the data in the resolution range 0.8—0.4 nm with an integration radius of 1.9 nm. The top 4 peaks of the cross-rotation function were used to calculate the translation functions. The translation function showed that the first peak was the correct solutions judged by their significance of correlation coefficients. The rigid body refinement of Amore resulted in an R factor of 39.8% and a correlation

value of 47.7%. The initial model, oriented and positioned according to the molecular replacement solution, was examined on a Silicon Graphics O2 workstation using the program FRODO/TURBO, and the molecular packing in the crystal was confirmed to be reasonable.

The refinement was carried out using the CNS program¹⁸¹ with 10% of the data reserved to calculate the free R factor¹⁹¹. A total of 4 511 reflections in the resolution range 0.8—0.28 nm were used in the refinement. Model building was carried out using the program FRODO/TURBO. The main-chains and side-chains of the molecules were adjusted according to the $2Fo-Fc$ and $Fo-Fc$ electron density maps. During the course of the refinement, the R factor was gradually reduced. One calcium ion, one sulfate anion, three MPD (2-methyl-2,4-pentandiol) molecules and 80 water molecules were included in the model based on the appearance of corresponding electron densities and their environments. After several cycles of atomic position and group B factor refinements and model rebuilding, R value and R -free value were converged, the $Fo-Fc$ map showed no obviously uninterpretable features.

2 Results

2.1 Model quality

The final model gives an R value of 21.9% and an R -free value of 25.7% in the resolution range 0.8—0.28 nm. The $2Fo-Fc$ electron density is well defined for both the backbone and the side-chains except for several residues on the molecular surface (Fig. 1). The model has good stereochemistry with *r. m. s.* deviations from ideal values being 0.0012 nm for bond lengths, 2.61° for bond angles and 27.06° for torsion angles. Calculations by the program PROCHECK²⁰¹ indicated that most of non-glycine and non-proline residues in the asymmetric unit were located in the most favored regions (163 residues, 81.5%) or the additional allowed regions (33 residues, 16.5%), and only four (2%) in the general allowed regions. The refinement results are listed in Table 1.

2.2 Dimer structure

The sequence of the PLA₂ enzyme has four different residues (Ala¹⁰², Ala¹⁰³, Pro¹³¹ and Pro¹³³) and one inserted residue (Pro¹²²) in comparison with that of the aPLA₂I. The final model consists of all (1 912) non-H protein atoms from two crystallographically independent molecules, one calcium ion, one sulfate anion, three MPD molecules and 80 water molecules. All these atoms occupied 56.8% of the unit cell volume.

Like $P2_1(I)$, the two molecules (A and B) in

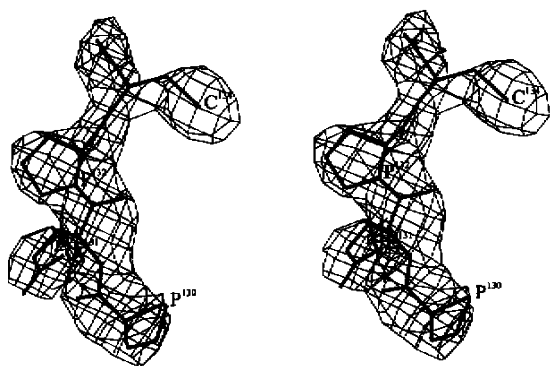


Fig. 1 The fitting of the proline riched C-terminus of molecule A with $2F_o-F_c$ electron density map contoured at the 1.0σ level

Table 1 The refinement results

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----------|
| R factor (%) | 21.90 |
| R -free factor (%) | 25.70 |
| Resolution range (nm) | 0.8–0.28 |
| Number of reflections | 5 039 |
| Model | |
| Number of non-H protein atoms | 1 912 |
| Number of calcium ions | 1 |
| Number of water molecules | 80 |
| Number of sulfate anion | 1 |
| Number of MPD molecules | 3 |
| $r. m. s.$ deviations from ideality | |
| Bond distances (nm) | 0.0012 |
| Bond angles ($^\circ$) | 2.61 |
| Dihedral angles ($^\circ$) | 27.06 |
| Improper angles ($^\circ$) | 1.06 |

the asymmetric unit form a dimer with approximate two-fold symmetry and the dimer is stabilized by large amounts of hydrophobic interactions formed by residues Leu², Ile³, Ile⁹, Met¹⁹, Phe²⁰, Trp²¹, Ala²⁴, Trp³¹ and Trp¹¹⁹ and five intermolecular hydrogen bonds. The surface area buried by the formation of the dimer is 9.05 nm^2 (program CCP4), corresponding to 14.6% of the monomer surface area, a value close to that of $P2_1(I)$ as a typical dimer^[21].

The superposition of the dimer in $P2_1(II)$ and $P2_1(I)$ gives an $r. m. s.$ deviation of 0.09 nm for all the $\text{C}\alpha$ atoms. This shows the overall similarity between the two dimers from different crystal forms (Fig. 2). If the molecules A from the two forms were superimposed, the two molecules B would deviate with each other only slightly, resulting from minor structural differences in two segments around β -wing and C-terminal ridge, i. e. 76–93, 124–133 for molecule A and 74–90, 124–134 for molecule B ($r. m. s.$ deviation > 0.1 nm for the $\text{C}\alpha$ atoms). The comparison between the two crystal forms of the enzyme is important as it indicates the stability of the



Fig. 2 Superposition of $\text{C}\alpha$ traces of dimers from different crystal forms, $P2_1(II)$ (thick line) and $P2_1(I)$ (thin line)

dimer structures.

The two molecules in the asymmetric unit of $P2_1(II)$ greatly differ from each other at some local regions, particularly the segment consisting of residues 14–23 (0.825 nm for $\text{C}\alpha$ atom at residue 19), located at the dimer interface. In molecule A, the segment includes a short α -helix (17 to 22), while in molecule B it shows an unusual irregular turn conformation. This observation is consistent with that previously reported for $P2_1(I)$ ^[14]. The different conformation of segment 14–23 seen in $P2_1(I)$ is present once again in this new crystal form. Since segment 14–23 involves several residues at the “interface recognizing site” (IRS)^[22,23], that the segment conformation can adapt when it binds to a contacted molecule implies the flexibility of the IRS as suggested previously^[14]. This work reinforces this viewpoint. The conformational flexibility of the IRS may be required by the “allosteric activity” of the enzyme-oil/water interface interaction.

2.3 Positively charged residue 34 and hemolytic activity

Dienagkistrodon acutus aPLA₂I is the only known member of acidic PLA₂s which exhibits hemolytic activity. Careful inspection shows that aPLA₂I does not contain as many basic residues at putative hemolytic site as proposed for *Agkistrodon halys* Pallas bPLA₂. This implies that not all of the basic residues in the cluster are responsible for the hemolytic activity and only a few residues out of this cluster may be pivotal in exerting the hemolytic activity.

The amino acid sequence comparison of hemolytic group II PLA₂ with non-hemolytic group II PLA₂ reveals distinct difference at the residue 34 (Table 2). At this position, all of hemolytic group II PLA₂ enzymes have a basic residue and all non-hemolytic group II PLA₂s have non-basic residues. His³⁴ of *Dienagkistrodon acutus* aPLA₂ points out of the molecular surface.

The suggestion that the basic residues at position 34 may play a pivotal role in the hemolytic activity was supported by point mutational study of

Table 2 The N-terminus amino acid sequence comparison of the group II PLA₂, showing characteristic differences between hemolytic and non-hemolytic PLA₂

| | | 1 | 10 | 20 | 30 | 40 | 50 |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|---------|-----------|----------------------------|
| <i>Deinagkistrodon acutus</i> | aPLA ₂ | SLIQFETLIM | KVVK-KSGMF | WYSAYGCYCG | WGG | GRPQDA | TDRCCFVHDC ^[11] |
| <i>Aagkistrodon halys</i> Pallas | bPLA ₂ | H. L. RKM. K. | MTG- | EPVV S. AF. | S. | K. K. | [28] |
| <i>Aagkistrodon halys</i> blomhoffii | bPLA ₂ | H. L. RDM. K. | MTG- | EPVI S. AF. | S. | K. KN. | [29] |
| <i>Deinagkistrodon acutus</i> | bPLA ₂ | | | | K. | R. N. | [31] |
| <i>Deinagkistrodon acutus</i> | K ⁴⁹ -PLA ₂ | FELGKM. W | QETG- | NPVK N. GL. | N. V. | E. L. | K. [14] |
| <i>Aagkistrodon halys</i> Pallas | aPLA ₂ | | A. | | N. | Q. | [30] |
| <i>Aagkistrodon halys</i> blomhoffii | aPLA ₂ | M. | IAG-R. | IW Y. GS. | A. Q. | S. | [31] |
| <i>Aagkistrodon halys</i> Pallas. | baPLA ₂ | H. L. RKM. K. | MTG- | EPVV S. AF. | S. | Q. K. K. | [27] |
| <i>Aagkistrodon halys</i> Pallas | nPLA ₂ | N. | N. | EE. | NAIP F. | G. Q. | G. [32] |
| <i>Bothrops jararaca</i> | PLA ₂ | D. W. | GOMN D. MR- | EYVV. N. LY. | | I. K. RG. | [33] |
| <i>Vipera aspis. Zinnikeri</i> | PLA ₂ | N. F. | AKM. N GKLK- | AFSVW N. IS. | | Q. T. K. | [34] |
| <i>Vipera russelli formosensis</i> | PLA ₂ | N. F. | GEM. L EKTG- | EVVH S. AI. | | Q. A. | [35] |

The top five enzymes are all hemolysins, and the remaining are non-hemolytic. It is very clear that all of the PLA₂s with hemolytic activity possess a basic residue at 34 position. The blanks in the sequences are based on a homology numbering scheme in the large family of PLA₂ molecules, derived from the bovine pancreatic PLA₂ sequence^[24-26].

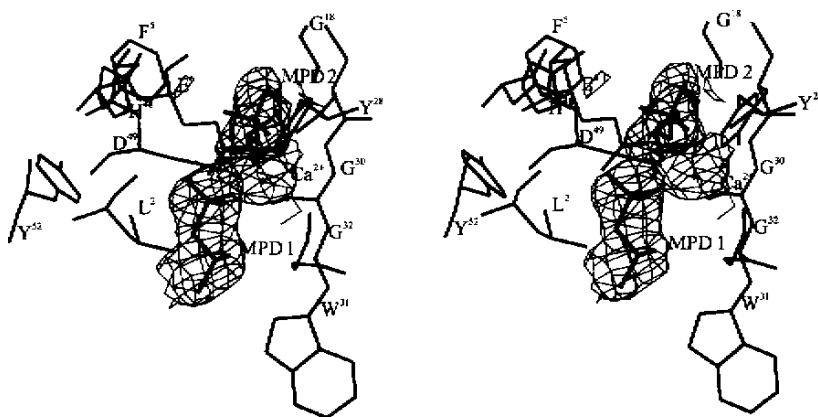


Fig.3 Two MPD molecules (MPD 1 and MPD 2) located at the bottom of the hydrophobic channel (molecule A) MPD 1 is coordinated by the calcium ion.

Aagkistrodon halys Pallas bPLA₂, in which when the positively charged Arg³⁴ was changed to a negatively charged residue or a neutral residue, the hemolytic activity was significantly decreased (see accompanying paper^[36]).

2.4 Ca²⁺ ions and MPD molecules

Calcium is an essential cofactor for the catalytic activity of phospholipase A₂. In the present structure, calcium ion is missing in the molecule B, but evidently occupies the expected position around the calcium binding loop of molecule A, although we did not add Ca²⁺ to the crystallization solution. A structural comparison of the calcium binding loops for both molecules shows no remarkable difference in their overall conformation. This implies that the presence of a calcium ion does not influence the loop structure significantly.

Deinagkistrodon acutus aPLA₂ was crystallized in P2₁(II) from MPD with high concentration (35%). Three MPD molecules are visible in the

structure. Two MPD molecules (MPD 1 and MPD 2) are located at the bottom of the hydrophobic channel leading to the active site of molecule A. The other one is positioned at the hydrophobic channel of molecule B. The MPD molecules bind in the hydrophobic channel mainly through hydrophobic contacts. Hydrogen bonds to the protein molecules also contribute to these interactions. One MPD molecule in molecule A seems to be coordinated by the calcium ion and being more stable than the other two MPD molecules (Fig.3).

2.5 Crystal packing

Both crystal forms of *Deinagkistrodon acutus* aPLA₂ belong to P2₁ space group, however their unit cell parameters are considerably different. The unit cell parameters of P2₁(II) ($a = 4.348$ nm, $b = 7.149$ nm, $c = 4.385$ nm and $\beta = 116.32^\circ$) are in contrast with those of P2₁(I) ($a = 4.871$ nm, $b = 3.800$ nm, $c = 6.990$ nm and $\beta = 99.35^\circ$). In the two crystal forms, the dimer structures are similar,

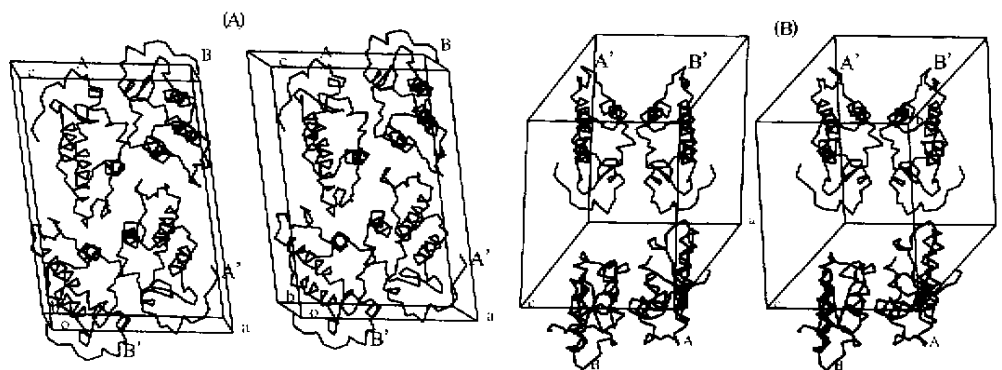


Fig.4 Comparison of the two dimer packing

(A) $P2_1(I)$, the non-crystallographic two-fold axes of the dimers run parallel to each other. (B) $P2_1(II)$, the non-crystallographic two-fold axes of the two dimers are approximately perpendicular to each other.

whereas the patterns of the dimer packing differ greatly.

Fig.4 represents dimer packing of the two crystal forms. In the unit cell of $P2_1(I)$, the two dimers extend along the c axis and the two non-crystallographic two-fold axes of the two dimers run parallel with each other and deviates 13.1° from c axis. While in $P2_1(II)$ the two dimers extend along the b axis, the two-fold axes of the two dimer are approximately perpendicular to each other and one of them deviates 14.4° from b axis.

In $P2_1(I)$ form, one Zn^{2+} ion was found to connect two His³⁴ residues from two adjacent dimers, while in $P2_1(II)$ form, such metal-mediated interactions are absent.

The different crystal packing leads to different dimer-dimer contact regions in the two crystal forms. In $P2_1(I)$, the dimers contact with each other tightly through jagged interlock. The molecule A in a dimer only forms tight interactions (hydrogen bonds and hydrophobic interactions) with molecule B in a neighboring dimer and *vice versa*. The contact regions mainly involve segments 86—91, 113—126, 131—134 of molecule A and 1—5, 114—132 of molecule B. In $P2_1(II)$, molecule A forms extensive interactions only with molecule B from adjacent dimers; however, molecule B has extensive interactions with both molecules B and A from adjacent dimers. The contact regions here mainly involve segments 30—43, 71—85, 111—118 of molecule A and 85—92, 130—134 of molecule B.

3 Discussion

It has long been observed that the increased hydrolysis rate of phospholipase A₂ on substrates presenting as multimolecular aggregates depends on NaCl concentration. The interfacial rate enhancement was attributed to three factors: (a) promotion of PLA₂ binding by net anionic charge of the interface;

(b) enhancement of substrate affinity of PLA₂ at the interface; and (c) stimulation of the rate-limiting chemical step^[3]. The structural analysis and comparison of the two crystal forms of *Deinagkistrodon acutus* aPLA₂ correlate with this viewpoint.

The differences between the structures of $P2_1(I)$ and $P2_1(II)$ can be summarized into three main points: calcium ion's occupancy in the calcium binding loop, the presence or absence of MPD molecules in the hydrophobic channel and the pattern of dimer's packing. These differences may reflect the effect of the presence of NaCl as well as the concentration of MPD.

This work shows the stability of the dimer of *Deinagkistrodon acutus* aPLA₂ in different crystallization conditions and the dependence of the dimer packing on the crystallization conditions. Careful examination indicates that the intra-dimer interactions of *Deinagkistrodon acutus* aPLA₂ mainly consist of hydrophobic interactions, whereas the inter-dimer interactions mainly involve hydrophilic interactions (hydrogen bonds). It implies that the presence of NaCl or the change of ionic strength has significant influence on the hydrophilic interactions between dimers, resulting in different crystal forms.

In $P2_1(I)$ form both molecules in the asymmetric unit bind calcium ions, but in $P2_1(II)$ form only the molecule A binds a calcium ion. This suggests that NaCl may improve affinity of PLA₂ to its cofactor. The molecule A has high catalytic activity during interfacial catalysis. The molecule B with unusual conformation for segment 14—23, however has low catalytic activity. The molecule B may bind the calcium ion only in the presence of NaCl.

Unlike $P2_1(II)$, there is no MPD molecule in the $P2_1(I)$ structure. The MPD molecules locate at the hydrophobic channel and might mimic the fatty acid chains of a substrate analogue bound in the active

site. The presence of MPD in the hydrophobic channel in one form but not in the other indicates that NaCl may affect the charge's environment of the hydrophobic channel and then affect the affinity of PLA₂ to its substrate.

The influence of NaCl on the interactions between PLA₂ molecules implies that the ion strength will affect the distribution of charges on the protein surface, and thus affect the interactions between the enzyme and the oil-water interface.

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尖吻蝮蛇毒酸性磷脂酶 A₂ 的新晶型结构

谷立川 张海龙 宋时英 周元聪¹ 林政炯*

(中国科学院生物物理研究所生物大分子国家重点实验室, 北京 100101; ¹ 中国科学院生物化学与细胞生物学研究所, 上海 200031)

摘要 从尖吻蝮蛇毒中分离出一种酸性磷脂酶 A₂, 得到了一种新的晶型。用分子置换法测定其晶体结构, 结构的分辨率达到 0.28 nm。该结构给出 21.9% 的晶体学 R 因子 (R-free = 25.7%) 和合理的立体化学参数。与已报道的晶型相似, 不对称单元的两个独立分子形成二体, 揭示了这种二体的稳定性。二体的形成过程也伴随着 14~23 肽段显著的构象变化, 这一肽段属于磷脂酶 A₂ 的界面识别部位。氨基酸序列分析表明, 带正电荷的 34 位残基是所有第二类具有溶血活性磷脂酶 A₂ 的共同特点。NaCl 对晶体的堆积具有显著的影响, 从而导致晶胞参数的明显改变。与已报道的晶型不同, 在酶分子的疏水通道内观测到了 2-甲基-2-戊二醇 (2-methyl-2-pentenediol, MPD) 分子。

关键词 磷脂酶 A₂; X 射线晶体学; 三维结构; 溶血活性; 界面催化

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* 联系人: Tel, 010-64888513; Fax, 010-64877837; e-mail, lin@sun5.ibp.ac.cn