

Tumor necrosis factor induces cholesterol accumulation in human arterial endothelial cells through LDL receptor surface redistribution

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ABSTRACT

Tumor necrosis factor alpha (TNF α) and low density lipoprotein (LDL) are important modulators of the atherosclerotic process. Here, the effect of TNF α on confluent primary human aortic endothelial cell (pHAEC) LDL-derived lipids and trafficking were investigated. TNF α promoted up to 2 folds increase in cellular cholesterol and could induce a massive increase in the non-hydrolysable tracer, Dil, by over 200 folds. The lipid increase was associated with increased ¹²⁵I-LDL surface binding. Further, Dil-LDL cellular association was blocked by excess unlabeled LDL, but not oxidized LDL (oxLDL). Moreover, TNF α -induced Dil and cholesterol increase were enhanced by the endosomal pH-raising agent, chloroquine. Internalization of Dil-LDL was reduced by the scavenger receptor B1 (SR-B1) antagonist, BLT-1, and the LDLR family antagonist, proprotein convertase subtilisin/kexin type 9 (PCSK9), but not receptor associated protein (RAP). Additionally, surface accessible LDLR was higher in TNF α -treated cells by about 30 folds, without a significant change in total LDLR. Correspondingly, specific LDLR antibody blocked Dil-LDL internalization to undetectable levels, and Dil-apoE3-VLDL by 94%, but had no effect on Dil-HDL3 internalization. TNF α

did not increase Dil-HDL3 cellular association. Further, ACAT inhibitor reduced cholesteryl esters, but not the total cholesterol increase induced by TNF α . On pHAECs grown on transwell inserts, TNF α did not enhance apical (AP) to basolateral (BL) LDL cholesterol or Dil release. It is concluded that TNF α induces LDLR surface localization and that LDLR does not promote AP to BL LDL transport across pHAECs.

INTRODUCTION

TNF α was originally discovered as a tumor-selective hemorrhagic factor (1,2). However, it is now recognized to have multiple cell-type dependent effects (3,4). Released as a 17 kD soluble protein from a transmembrane precursor by tumor necrosis factor converting enzyme (TACE) (5-7), this cytokine mainly promotes changes that facilitate leukocyte (inflammatory) functions. (4,8). Acting through the rapid-acting transcription factor, nuclear factor kappa B (NF- κ B), it can induce expression of pro-inflammatory mediators such as interleukin 1 and 2 (9,10). Likewise, it is capable of inducing apoptosis (11-13), possibly through c-jun N-terminal kinase (JNK) activation (14-16). Thus TNF α may clear way for passage of leukocytes through target epithelial cell apoptosis. On the

other hand, it can induce proliferation of lymphocytes and fibroblasts (12,17-19). This ability to induce proliferation have been reported to be due to upregulation of growth factor receptors (20,21) or growth factor release, such as vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF) (21-23) .

Some report that TNF α is atherogenic (24-26). The pro-atherogenic arm of TNF α is in part due to its ability to enhance monocyte entry into the intima through induction of adhesion molecules on arterial endothelial cells. In atherosclerotic lesions, macrophages (27) and smooth muscle cells (27,28) have been reported to express TNF α , where it acts on overlying endothelial cells to stimulate expression of leukocyte adhesion molecules such as E-selectin, vascular cell adhesion molecule-1 (VCAM-1), and intercellular adhesion molecule-1 (ICAM-1) (29,30). More, it induces expression of monocyte chemoattractant protein I (MCP-1) (31), which stimulates gradient migration of lymphocytes and monocytes (32,33).

Still, TNF α can have a neutral or ambiguous effect on atherosclerosis development (34,35). For example, targeted elimination of tumor necrosis factor receptor (TNFR) have produced mixed results. TNFR1 has been reported to be anti-atherogenic (34,36), pro-atherogenic (24,37,38), or neutral (39). Likewise, TNFR2 has been reported to be pro-atherogenic (40) or neutral (34). These conflicting results suggest that the mechanisms by which TNF α affects atherosclerosis development need further clarification. Of note, TNF α deletion is associated with elevated HDL cholesterol, but reduced LDL cholesterol, indicating that it regulates serum lipoprotein levels (25).

Background inflammation is an independent risk factor for atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease (41). Serum concentration of TNF α increases with severity of atherosclerotic lesion (42,43) and age (44). Thus, it has been reported to be

about 200 folds higher in the atherosclerotic lesion than in the circulating blood (45).

Although TNF α levels in the arterial wall are elevated in the late stages of atherosclerosis, this elevation need not occur late in the disease. Elevated native LDL, which is pro-atherogenic, (46,47), stimulates TNF α production in smooth muscle cells (48). Further, viremia, bacteria, and other forms of microbial infections affecting the artery may lead to focal elevation of TNF α , which can initiate atherosclerosis development (49). Certain endothelial dysfunctions, such as impaired NO release, are well-characterized in late atherosclerotic lesions (50). However, other endothelial functions that may affect initiation and progression of atherosclerosis are not well known.

Unlike macrophages (51,52) and smooth muscle cells (51,53), normal confluent endothelial cells are resistant to cholesterol accumulation (54). However, fibro-fatty atherosclerotic lesions contain endothelial foam cells with intact monolayer (55-57). In this report, I present evidence of non-inflammatory function of TNF α . It will be shown that TNF α increases pHAEC cholesterol and lipid accumulation through increased surface accessible low density lipoprotein receptor (LDLR).

RESULTS

TNF α enhances cholesterol accumulation and LDL binding to pHAECs. Atherosclerotic lesion is characterized by release of inflammatory cytokines, among which is TNF α . To evaluate the effect of TNF α on pHAECs cholesterol content, confluent pHAECs were treated with or without TNF α and the cellular cholesterol content was measured. As is shown in **Figure 1A**, TNF α significantly increased unesterified cholesterol, and to a greater degree, esterified cholesterol (**Figure 1B**). **Figure 1A-B** also show that the ability of TNF α to induce cholesterol accumulation plateaus at around 100 μ g/ml LDL protein. To evaluate whether TNF α

affects the ability of LDL to bind to the cells, ^{125}I -LDL binding was performed. **Figure 1C** shows that TNF α enhanced ^{125}I -LDL surface releasable ^{125}I -LDL at 4 °C, after the cells were pre-treated at 37 °C. The amount released increased in the presence of 20 folds unlabeled LDL. This indicates that the ^{125}I -LDL bound to some native LDL receptor. Further, cell-associated ^{125}I -LDL was also higher on TNF α -treated pHAECs (**Figure 1D**), indicating higher ^{125}I -LDL internalization.

LDL oxidation is not required for TNF α -induced LDL binding and internalization.

Having demonstrated that TNF α promoted LDL binding to pHAECs (**Figure 1**), the requirement for oxidative modification of LDL was investigated. Particularly, TNF α has been reported to promote release of the reactive oxygen species, superoxide and hydrogen peroxide (58,59). Hence, experiments were performed to determine whether oxidative modification of LDL is a prerequisite to TNF α -induced LDL binding. To visualize TNF α -induced LDL binding and subsequent internalization, Dil-LDL was used.

As can be seen in **Figure 2A**, Dil accumulation within the pHAECs can be seen as intracellular clusters located primarily to either pole of the cell. This internalized Dil-LDL was significantly increased through TNF α pre-treatment (**Figure 2A-B**). It can also be seen in **Figure 2A-B** that excess unlabeled native LDL blocked binding and internalization of Dil-LDL to undetectable levels. This demonstrates that native LDL components, and therefore receptors, are required for Dil-LDL binding and internalization. Excess unlabeled oxLDL, on the other hand, had weaker effect on Dil-LDL association in control cells. It had no effect on TNF α -treated cells (**Figure 2B**). The weak suppression of Dil-LDL association under control conditions is not too surprising. It can be seen in **Figure 2C** that oxLDL retains some apoB moiety, which can explain the residual effect on Dil-LDL association.

TNF α induces massive Dil over [^3H]CE lipid accumulation from LDL. The lipids, Dil and ^3H -cholesteryl esters ([^3H]CE), are stably fixed within LDL. To evaluate the ability of pHAECs to retain LDL hydrolysable [^3H]CE or the non-hydrolysable Dil, the cells were treated with increasing concentration of TNF α in the presence of [^3H]CE-LDL or Dil-LDL. As is shown in **Figure 3A**, ^3H -cholesterol accumulation induced by [^3H]CE-LDL and increasing TNF α plateaued at about 30 ng/ml TNF α , increasing to about 2 folds. On the other hand, Dil accumulation increased by about 50 folds (**Figure 3B**). Next, cells were treated with increasing Dil-LDL concentration without (**Figure 3C**) or with TNF α (**Figure 3D**). As is shown in **Figure 3C**, 400 $\mu\text{g/ml}$ Dil-LDL increased intracellular Dil level by about 50 folds compared to that at 1 $\mu\text{g/ml}$ under control condition. Compared to Ctrl at 400 $\mu\text{g/ml}$ Dil-LDL, TNF α increased the intracellular Dil by over 200 folds (**Figure 3D**).

Blockage of endosomal acidification enhances TNF α -induced LDL lipid accumulation.

The lowering of pH facilitates disintegration and degradation of internalized LDL through the lysosomal compartment. This degradation is suppressed by the pH-raising compound, chloroquine (60). To evaluate whether a similar phenomenon occurs in pHAECs, the cells were treated in the presence or absence of chloroquine. The presence of chloroquine caused the Dil to accumulate circumferentially within the cells, presumably in defective lysosomal structures (**Figure 4A**). As can be seen in **Figure 4A-B**, chloroquine greatly enhanced Dil accumulation without TNF α . The presence of TNF α further increased the amount of chloroquine-induced cellular Dil. Chloroquine also increased ^3H -cholesterol level from [^3H]CE-LDL. However, it was not as pronounced as in the case of Dil (**Figure 4C**).

Effect of native lipoprotein receptors on Dil-LDL cell association in pHAECs and

hepatocytes. Having found evidence that TNF α promotes cholesterol accumulation in pHAECs through enhanced endocytosis of native LDL, I next investigated what members of the LDLR family are responsible, in addition to the potential role of SR-B1. Specifically, LDL-derived lipid accumulation have been shown to be increased by SR-B1(61-63). To investigate these possibilities, experiments were performed with their respective inhibitors. The data in **Figure 5A-B** show that blockage of SR-B1 selective uptake with BLT-1 reduced TNF α -induced Dil-LDL internalization. Likewise, the pan-LDLR family blocker PCSK9 (64-66), but not RAP (67), suppressed the Dil accumulation.

SR-B1 and the LDLR family members are abundantly expressed in hepatocytes. Thus, to evaluate whether RAP activity is measurable in hepatocytes, the cells were treated with all the inhibitors (**Figure 5C**). The results show that the failure of RAP to inhibit Dil-LDL internalization is specific to pHAECs. Since RAP has been reported to be ineffective against LDLR (68), the data point to LDLR as the most likely candidate.

TNF α increases surface-accessible LDLR without a significant change in total protein. Having pinpointed LDLR as a likely receptor through which TNF α induces cholesterol and Dil accumulation in pHAECs, I next evaluated the effect of TNF α on the LDLR protein product (**Figure 6A-B**). The data show that TNF α did not significantly increase total LDLR. However, it greatly promoted association of surface LDLR to its antibody in the culture medium as demonstrated by enhanced upward shift of the LDLR protein (**Figure 6A**).

LDLR mediates TNF α -induced LDL internalization. Up to now, the data suggest that SR-B1 and/or LDLR contributes to the mechanism by which TNF α induces Dil-LDL binding and internalization. To evaluate the roles of these receptors, experiments were performed to test SR-B1 surface expression with Dil-HDL3

(61,63) and LDLR surface expression with Dil-LDL and Dil-apoE3-VLDL. Since lipid-bound apoE binds all the LDLR family members (69), information about the type of family member involved can further be evaluated in the presence of specific LDLR antibody. Accordingly, the data in **Figure 7A-B** show that Dil-HDL3 internalization in pHAECs was not enhanced by TNF α . Further, LDLR antibody did not block Dil-HDL3 cellular association. In contrast, LDLR antibody blocked TNF α -induced Dil-LDL cell association to undetectable levels (**Figure 7C-D**) and blocked TNF α -induced Dil-apoE3-VLDL association by approximately 94% (**Figure 7E-F**). The overall data thus demonstrate that LDLR is the dominant receptor for uptake of non-HDL lipoproteins in pHAECs, with or without TNF α .

TNF α induces surface redistribution of LDLR. The data presented in Figure 6 indicated that more surface LDLR are induced by TNF α . Having found that LDLR mediates TNF α -induced LDL internalization without a significant change in the total protein (Figure 6), I investigated the extent of surface LDLR differences through immune-fluorescent microscopy. As can be seen in **Figure 8A**, TNF α did not enhance association of control antibody with the cells, but significantly induced association with specific LDLR antibody by 30 minutes at 37 °C. This indicates that TNF α did not promote non-selective endocytic processes. The surface distribution of LDLR (arrows) and the internalization of the surface LDLR (arrow heads) in cells treated with TNF α can be seen in **Figure 8B**.

The total amount of surface LDLR bound by the antibody at 37 °C can be seen to increase with time. At 0, 5, 30, and 120 minutes, there was about 30, 50, 7, and 2 folds, respectively, more surface LDLR in TNF α -treated cells compared to control cells at the corresponding time (**Figure 8C-D**). This demonstrates that LDLR antibody rapidly binds surface LDLR in the case of TNF α -treated cells, plateauing by about 2

hours. This plateauing is consistent with the finding that the total LDLR is not significantly different between control and TNF α -treated pHAECs (Figure 6).

ACAT inhibitor does not prevent TNF α -induced LDL cholesterol accumulation. It has been reported that TNF α induces cholesteryl ester accumulation in monocytes through enhanced ACAT activity in the presence of oxLDL (70). To evaluate the extent to which enhanced ACAT activity is responsible in raising pHAEC cholesterol in the presence of LDL, the cells were with or without ACAT inhibitor, Sandoz 58-035. As is reported in **Figure 9A-B**, inhibition of ACAT activity slightly raised the unesterified cholesterol, and significantly suppressed cholesteryl ester accumulation. Despite this inhibition, the TNF α -induced total cholesterol accumulation, now mainly in the unesterified form, was not prevented (**Figure 9A,C**). ACAT inhibition also reduced the total cholesterol in the cells, with or without TNF α stimulation (**Figure 9C**). This is a known effect of ACAT inhibition. The higher elevated unesterified cholesterol is more likely to be effluxed from the cells than the esterified one (71).

TNF α does not affect AP to BL release of degraded LDL protein. To address the effect of increased LDLR-mediated uptake of LDL on apical to basolateral LDL protein transport, the pHAECs were grown to confluence on transwell inserts, as shown in **Figure 10A**. 125 I-LDL detected in the BL medium was either non-intact (**Figure 10B**) or intact (**Figure 10C**). In **Figure 10B**, it is shown that unlabeled LDL competitor reduced the amount of non-intact 125 I-LDL in a TNF α -independent manner. In contrast, the unlabeled competitor had no effect on the intact 125 I-LDL measured in the BL medium (**Figure 10C**). The overall data thus indicate that the LDLR cargo is not efficiently trafficked in a polarized manner in pHAECs.

TNF α does not affect AP to BL LDL lipid release. To determine whether LDLR facilitates AP to BL LDL lipid transport, the pHAECs on transwell inserts were incubated with LDL colabeled with Dil and 3 H-cholesteryl esters (**Figure 11A-B**). As can be seen in the figures, TNF α dose-dependently increased the accumulation of Dil-LDL on the pHAECs grown on transwell inserts, in the same manner as those grown on plastic dishes. Similar to pHAECs on plastic dishes, LDLR antibody significantly blocked uptake of Dil-LDL by pHAECs grown on transwell inserts. The corresponding uptake of 3 H-cholesteryl esters is shown in **Figure 11C**. The 3 H-cholesteryl ester accumulation induced by TNF α is blocked in the presence of antibody against LDLR. Surprisingly, LDLR blockage had no effect on the amount of measurable 3 H-cholesteryl ester detectable in the BL medium (**Figure 11D**). This is consistent with the BL Dil-LDL, whose value was independent of TNF α treatment (**Figure 11E**).

DISCUSSION

Native LDL modification due to oxidation (72,73), aggregation (74), or complex formation with proteoglycans (75-77) is known to promote cholesterol accumulation in macrophages. Although confluent arterial endothelial cells are resistant to cholesterol accumulation induced by lipoproteins, my results demonstrated that this can be altered in the presence of TNF α . Thus, LDL modification is not an absolute requirement for LDL-induced cholesterol or lipid accumulation. The data suggest that pHAECs, like macrophages, may be susceptible to changes related to excess cholesterol loading, including apoptosis, which is known to occur in the most advanced form of atherosclerotic lesions (78).

Interestingly, bovine brain microvascular endothelial cells have been reported to promote apical to basolateral transport of LDL through LDLR (79). It thus appears that LDLR trafficking in brain microvascular endothelial cells is different from human aortic endothelial

cells. Additionally, it has been reported that AP to BL LDL transport occurs in vivo across arterial endothelial cells (80). My findings suggest that this transport is probably not through LDLR. SR-BI, on the other hand, have been reported to bind LDL (61,81,82). Since SR-BI have been shown to cause AP to BL transport of HDL in bovine aortic endothelial cells (83), it is possible that it can do the same for LDL in human aortic endothelial cells. However, the results indicate that LDLR is the dominant receptor utilized by pHAECs for LDL uptake. The binding of LDLR to RAP is controversial. On one hand, it has been reported to bind LDLR (84), while others report the opposite (68). My data suggest that if it binds LDLR, it does not interfere with the ability of LDLR to subsequently internalize LDL.

TNF α is a pleiotropic autocrine and paracrine mediator important in multiple signaling cascades that range from activating immune cells to fight viruses, bacteria, and cancer cells, to promoting entry of monocytes and lymphocytes into atherosclerotic lesions (85-87). The latter process is recognized to be pro-atherogenic. TNF α has also been reported to play an important role in the current COVID-19 pandemic (88). Thus, nonspecific disruption of TNF α activity in the animal interferes with many important biological functions (89). My finding that TNF α upregulates surface LDLR function in pHAECs implies that it is possible to regulate this process selectively, while leaving the beneficial functions of TNF α intact. Excess cholesteryl ester accumulation in arterial endothelial cells is likely to lead to endothelial dysfunction due, in part, to space disruption.

Native lipoproteins that are potentially atherogenic exist in the form of LDL and β -VLDL. Unlike normal VLDL which contains triglycerides and apoB as their major constituents, β -VLDL is enriched in apoE and cholesterol (90). β -VLDL levels increase as the plasma cholesterol values increase in animals fed high cholesterol diet (91). My finding that

apoE-enriched Dil-VLDL produced a marked increase in Dil accumulation, further enhanced by TNF α , suggest that it can initiate endothelial dysfunction in an LDLR-dependent manner. In addition to carrying cholesterol and cholesteryl esters as its primary cargo, LDL may transport other lipid soluble agents. Thus lipid-soluble drugs carried by non-HDL lipoproteins are predicted to negatively impact endothelial cells in the setting of infections, chronic inflammatory stress, and atherosclerosis.

The significantly greater Dil accumulation over cholesterol indicates that pHAECs have an efficient mechanism of overcoming enhanced LDL uptake. Neutral cholesteryl ester hydrolase activity and endosomal recycling are known to be intact in the presence of chloroquine (63,92). My data suggest that LDL-derived [3 H]CE may be hydrolysed outside the lysosome in pHAECs. This type of hydrolysis is typical of HDL cholesteryl ester hydrolysis (63). Another possible explanation behind the higher Dil accumulation may be due to greater free cholesterol efflux induced by TNF α . Thus, it has been reported that TNF α enhances cholesterol efflux (78) and ABCA1 mRNA and protein through NF- κ B signaling (93).

It has been reported that TNF α enhances ACAT1 activity in leukocytic cells and promotes cholesteryl ester accumulation in the presence of oxLDL (70). This was not observed in the non-leukocytic cells tested (70). Enhanced cholesterol esterification as the primary mechanism underlying TNF α -induced cholesterol accumulation in pHAECs was not observed in this study. Of note, TNF α and oxidative stress are known to upregulate the oxLDL receptor, lectin-like oxLDL receptor (LOX-1) in arterial endothelial cells (94,95). Elevated cholesterol loading may secondarily elevate ACAT activity (96). The extent to which the mechanism contributed to the findings is unclear.

EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES

Materials. Agilent Technologies (Santa Clara, CA): Bond elut column, 12256060. Alfa Aesar (Haverhill, MA): 1,10-phenanthroline (PhenA, A16254), tetramethylthiourea (TMTU, L13392). ATCC (Manassas, VA): pHAECs (PCS-100-011), vascular basal medium (VBM, PCS-100-030), and vascular endothelial growth factor kit (VEGF, PCS-100-041). BioIVT (Westbury, NY). Cayman Chemical (Ann Arbor, MI): PCSK9 (20631). Cellvis (Mountain View, CA): 96-well glass bottom dishes (P96-0-N). Enzo Life Sciences (Farmingdale, NY): Latrunculin A (BML-T119), receptor associated protein (RAP, BML-SE552-0100). Images were obtained using Keyence (Itasca, IL) phase-contrast fluorescence microscope. Pall Corporation (Port Washington, NY): Centrifugal filter (MAP003C36). Perkin Elmer (Waltham, MA): [1,2-³H(N)]-Cholesterol (NET139001). ProSci Inc (Poway, CA): Tumor necrosis factor alpha (TNF α , 96-734). R&D Systems (Minneapolis, MN): anti-goat (NL001), fetal bovine serum (FBS, S11550), LDLR antibody (AF2148), normal goat IgG (AB-108-C). Sigma-Aldrich (St. Louis, MO): BLT-1 (373210), Dil (468495), fatty acid free bovine serum albumin (FAF-BSA, A8806), modified Hanks balanced salt solution (mHBSS, H8264), phosphatase inhibitor (P0044), protease inhibitor (P8340), Sandoz 58-035 (S9318). Spectrum Labs (Cincinnati, OH): Dialysis membrane, 131204. Thermo Fisher Scientific (Waltham, MA): Antibiotic-antimycotic (15240112), desalting columns (89890), iodination beads (28665).

Cell culture and incubations. pHAECs (passages 3-7) were maintained in VBM with growth factor kit (VEGF), ATCC, in the presence of 15% FBS, and antibiotic, antimycotic (100 units/mL of penicillin, 100 μ g/mL of streptomycin, and 0.25 μ g/mL of amphotericin B, from ThermoFisher). Under serum-free conditions, the cells were cultured in VBM, VEGF, with the latter antimicrobials and 0.1% FAF-BSA. Incubations were at 37 °C, unless indicated otherwise. Experiments were best started with pHAECs confluent for 5 days

or longer. Separate cells from individuals (2-36 years old) were used during the course of the experiments, with similar results. Overnight incubations in serum medium were 24 ± 5 hours. For cell-associated studies at 37 °C, cells were washed 3X with mHBSS at 0 °C. Imaging studies demonstrated that the vast majority of dil-lipoproteins were within the cell under these conditions. For intracellular LDL levels, pHAECs were incubated at 0 °C for 5 minutes with ice cold 400 units/mL sodium heparin in mHBSS, washed twice with the same buffer, then two more times with ice cold mHBSS, to remove surface LDL. Lipids were extracted as described below or the cells were fixed with 4% paraformaldehyde in PBS prior to microscopy.

Lipoprotein purification. All procedures were performed between 0 and 4 °C. Centrifugations and dialysis were performed at 4 °C. Lipoproteins were isolated from freshly drawn human blood anticoagulated with Na₂EDTA (BioIVT). The blood was centrifuged at 4,000 g for 30 minutes to obtain the plasma. To the plasma, butylated hydroxytoluene (BHT) in DMSO was added to 45 μ M (0.01%). Then, sequential density ultracentrifugations (97) were performed to obtain $d < 1.006$ (VLDL), $d = 1.019$ - 1.063 (LDL), or $d = 1.12$ - 1.21 (HDL3) g/mL. Ultracentrifugations were done using type Ti70 rotor at 50,000 rpm for 20 (VLDL and LDL) or 48 hours (HDL3). The lipoproteins were dialyzed through ~4 kD molecular weight cut-off membrane in 3 successions against ~180 times dialysis buffer (DB): 10 mM Tris-HCl, 150 mM NaCl, 0.3 mM Na₂EDTA, pH 7.5, with deionized water, in the dark, each lasting about 24 hours. After concentration using 3 kD MWCO centrifugal filters, the LDL was filtered through 0.2 μ m membrane under sterile conditions. Lipoprotein contents were routinely verified by western blotting and coomassie staining. In addition, the cholesterol and cholesteryl ester contents were verified to be consistent with previous publications (98-100). Lipoprotein concentrations represent the protein content throughout the manuscript.

Cellular cholesterol determination. Lipids were extracted with hexane: isopropanol (1:1) at room temperature for 3 hours, then the solvent was evaporated at room temperature using centrivap concentrator (Labconco). The extracted lipids were redissolved in isopropanol. To determine the unesterified cholesterol content, the lipids in isopropanol were mixed with 10 times volumes of cholesterol assay buffer (CAB): 0.1% fatty acid free BSA (Sigma), 2 mM sodium taurocholate (Beantown Chemical), 50 mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.5, 0.3 mM Na₂EDTA, 5% isopropanol, and 250 mM sucrose, with freshly added 0.5 U/ml horseradish peroxidase (ThermoFisher) and 0.02 U/ml cholesterol oxidase (Sigma) in the presence of 30-50 μ M scopoletin (101) (excitation 360, emission 460). The CAB was kept at room temperature to ensure full solubilization of the lipids. (Due to the presence of organic solvents, it is recommended that N95 mask be worn). This enzymatic approach is a modification of a previously published procedure (102). Total cholesterol was determined as above, with the addition of 0.1 U/ml cholesteryl esterase (MP Biologicals). Readings were obtained after incubation at 37 °C for 20 minutes. Cholesteryl esters were determined by subtracting unesterified cholesterol from the total cholesterol. The residual cell matter after lipid extraction was lysed with 0.1 M NaOH, 0.1% SDS, for protein reading using BCA assay kit (ThermoFisher).

³H-cholesteryl ester ([³H]CE) generation. 40 μ Ci of ³H-cholesterol (Perkin Elmer) in ethanol was added in 10 μ l aliquots to 40 ml of 0.2 μ M filtered human serum under sterile conditions. The mixture was incubated at 37 °C for 48 hours in the dark. ³H-cholesteryl esters and other lipids were extracted with chloroform: methanol (103). After evaporation of the solvent, the residue was dissolved in a minimal volume of chloroform. Subsequently, ³H-cholesteryl esters were purified using serial bond elut columns (Agilent

Technologies) with several hexane passages, as previously described (104).

Western blotting. pHAECs were lysed with lysis buffer (0.2 % SDS, 2% Triton X-100, PBS, pH 7.5, 2% protease inhibitor and 2% phosphatase inhibitor, Sigma) by sonication at 2 setting (Fisher sonic dismembrator model 100) on ice for 10 seconds. After centrifugation at 16,000 g x 10 minutes at 4 °C, equal volume of loading buffer (8 M urea, 2% SDS, 125 mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.0, 5% glycerol, 10% beta-mercaptoethanol, 0.06% bromphenol blue) was mixed with the supernatant at room temperature. This was followed by electrophoresis, electrical transfer to PVDF membrane, and immunoblotting.

Dil- and/or [³H]CE-Lipoproteins. Generation of Dil-labeled lipoproteins was obtained essentially as previously described (105), with minor modifications. In brief, a mixture of about 2 mg HDL3, LDL, or VLDL protein and 7 ml of human lipoprotein deficient serum was mixed with ~1 mg [³H]CE and/or 0.5 mg Dil in 10 μ l DMSO aliquots under sterile conditions. In the case of VLDL, 100 μ g apoE3 was included to obtain Dil-apoE3-VLDL. After covering with foil, the mixture was incubated at 37 °C for 21 hours. The lipoproteins were repurified as described above, after adjusting to their respective densities with solid KBr. Combined Dil, [³H]CE-LDL radioactivity was 8.1 dpm/ μ g protein.

LDL iodination with Na¹²⁵I. About 2 mg LDL protein in PBS and 10 iodination beads (ThermoFisher) were incubated with Na¹²⁵I for 10 minutes at room temperature in glass vials. The transformation was stopped with 50 mM each of unlabeled sodium iodide and sulfite, and 100 μ M BHT in DMSO (0.01%). The labeled LDL was washed with desalting columns, then passed through centrifugal filters, 3 kD MWCO, against dialysis buffer.

¹²⁵I-LDL cell surface binding. Confluent pHAECs on plastic dishes were cultured with 0 or 5 ng/ml TNF α in 15% serum for 48 hours. Treatment continued with serum-free medium in the continued presence of TNF α for 3 hours to deplete surface-bound LDL. Subsequently, ¹²⁵I-LDL was added to 15 μ g/ml for 1 hour at 37 °C. The cells were then washed two times with PBS at room temperature, then chilled on ice. Afterwards, serum-free medium at 4 °C with 0 (buffer) or 300 μ g/ml LDL was added. Following additional incubation at 4 °C for 1 hour, the radioactivity released to the medium was taken as surface-releasable ¹²⁵I-LDL.

LDL oxidation. LDL was dialysed against PBS at 4 °C, passed through 0.2 μ m filter, and incubated at 37 °C for 22 hours with 5 μ M CuSO₄ in PBS under sterile conditions. After adding BHT in DMSO (0.005%) to 1 μ M and Na₂EDTA to 10 mM, the mixture was dialysed against dialysis buffer, and finally filtered through 0.2 μ m membrane under sterile conditions.

Dextran-Mn separation of intact and non-intact ¹²⁵I-LDL. Intact ¹²⁵I-LDL was separated from non-intact LDL using dextran sulfate, Mn²⁺ procedure essentially as previously described (106). To the BL medium, d<1.21 g/ml FBS was added to 15% to produce a visible precipitate, mixed, then dextran sulfate and MnCl were added to 65 mg/ml and 0.2 M, respectively. After incubation for 20 minutes at room temperature, the mixtures were centrifuged at 5000 g x 5 minutes at 4 °C. The pellet was redissolved with 20 mg/ml dextran sulfate before scintillation counting.

Surface LDLR Detection. Confluent pHAECs in serum medium were incubated with 0 or 100 ng/ml TNF α for 20-24 hours. Subsequently, the media were replaced with serum-free medium containing 10 μ g/ml normal goat IgG or LDLR Ab (R&D Systems) in the continued presence of 0 or 100 ng/ml TNF α for 0, 5, 30, or 120 minutes at 37 °C. Afterwards, the cells were

chilled on ice and further incubated at 4 °C for 1 hour. Then the cells were washed 2X with ice-cold mHBSS, fixed with ice-cold methanol at -20 °C for 10 minutes, washed once with mHBSS at room temperature, then blocked with 50% human serum in mHBSS, 0.1% sodium azide (blocking buffer) for 1 hour at room temperature. Afterwards, it was replaced with 4 μ g/ml red antigoat antibody (R&D Systems) in blocking buffer. Following 30 minute incubation at room temperature, the medium was replaced with mHBSS, washed 3X with blocking buffer (10 minutes each at room temperature), fixed with 4% paraformaldehyde in PBS, followed by fluorescence microscopy.

Fluorescence Microscopy. Fluorescence microscopy was performed using Keyence phase-contrast fluorescence microscope. Images were analyzed using CellProfiler (107). Confocal microscopy was performed using glass bottom dishes (Cellvis).

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS. Data are reported as averages \pm standard deviation, where indicated. Analysis of variance, followed by Tukey post hoc testing was done by using statpages.info website.

DATA AVAILABILITY. All data are contained in the manuscript.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest with the contents of this article

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FOOTNOTES

Abbreviations: ACAT, acyl-CoA cholesterol acyltransferase; AP, apical; apoE, apolipoprotein E; BHT, butylated hydroxytoluene; BL, basolateral; CAB, cholesterol assay buffer, DB, dialysis buffer; DiL, 1,1'-Diocadecyl-3,3',3',3'-tetramethylindocarbocyanine perchlorate; DMSO, dimethyl sulfoxide; GAPDH, glyceraldehyde 3-phosphate dehydrogenase; FAF-BSA, fatty acid-free bovine serum albumin; FBS, fetal bovine serum; LDLR, low density lipoprotein receptor; LRP, ldlr- related protein; mHBSS, modified Hanks' balanced salt solution; PBS, phosphate buffered saline; PCSK9, proprotein convertase subtilisin/kexin type 9; PhenA, 1,10-phenanthroline; pHAECs, primary human aortic endothelial cells; RAP, receptor associated protein; SDS, sodium dodecyl sulfate; TMTU, tetramethylthiourea; TNF α , tumor necrosis factor alpha; VBM, vascular basal medium; VEGF, vascular endothelial growth factor kit;

FIGURE LEGENDS

Figure 1. TNF α enhances cholesterol accumulation and LDL binding to pHAECs. A-B, The pHAECs in serum-free, growth factor-containing medium were treated with the indicted concentration of human LDL without (Ctrl) or with 100 ng/ml TNF α for 24 hours. Unesterified cholesterol and cholesteryl

esters were determined as described under Experimental Procedures. The data represent 5 independent experiments. **C**, Confluent pHAECs were pre-treated with 0 or 5 ng/ml TNF α in serum medium as described under Experimental Procedures. The amount of 125 I-LDL released to serum-free medium at 4 °C without (0) or with 20 folds unlabeled LDL competitor (+) was determined as the surface 125 I-LDL. **D**, The experiment was performed as in E, and the amount of radioactivity associated with the cell was determined. C-D are representative of 3 experiments. Error bars represent standard deviations. *, **, ***, $p < 0.05, 0.01, 0.001$, respectively, relative to the corresponding Ctrl.

Figure 2. LDL oxidation is not required for TNF α -induced LDL binding and internalization. A-B, Cells were treated with 0 (Ctrl) or 100 ng/ml TNF α (TNF α) for 24 hrs in serum medium. The media were replaced with serum-free media in the continued presence of TNF α for 2 hrs to remove surface lipoproteins. Finally, 2 μ g/ml dil-LDL in serum-free medium (Dil-LDL) containing 40 times LDL (+40X LDL) or oxLDL (+40X oxLDL) was added. Following 2 hr incubation, the cells were washed 3X with mHBSS, then fixed with paraformaldehyde. Images in A are typical of 3 independent experiments, B. Error bars represent standard deviations. **C**, Coomassie stain of two batches of electrophoresed LDL and oxLDL proteins isolated during the course of the experiments. Positions of apoB and apoE are indicated.

Figure 3. TNF α induces massive Dil over [3 H]CE lipid accumulation from LDL.

pHAECs in serum medium were pre-treated with the indicated concentration of human TNF α for 24 hrs. Subsequently, the cells were treated in the continued presence of the previous TNF α concentration and 50 μ g/ml [3 H]CE-LDL (**A**) or 5 μ g/ml Dil-LDL (**B**) without serum. 24 hrs later, the cells were washed with heparin as described under Experimental Procedures. **C**, The cells were treated without (Ctrl) or with 100 ng/ml TNF α , as above (**D**) in the presence of increasing concentration of Dil-LDL. The data are representative of 3-5 independent experiments performed in triplicates or greater. Error bars represent standard deviations. *, **, ***, $p < 0.05, 0.01, 0.001$, respectively, relative to 0 ng/ml TNF α or Dil-LDL. ##, $p < 0.01$, relative to the previous TNF α dose. \$\$\$, $p < 0.001$, relative to the corresponding Dil-LDL concentration under Ctrl condition.

Figure 4. Blockage of endosomal acidification enhances TNF α -induced LDL lipid accumulation.

The cells were pre-treated with 0 or 100 ng/ml TNF α (+) for 24 hrs in the presence of serum. Subsequently, in the continued presence of TNF α , the cells were treated with 0.5 μ g/ml Dil-LDL, plus 50 or 200 μ g/ml [3 H]CE-LDL, and containing 0 or 50 μ M chloroquine diphosphate (Cl-quine), +, an endosomal deacidifier, without serum. After 24 hrs, the intracellular fluorescence (**A-B**) or radioactivity (**C**) was determined. The separation of cells in A is an artifact of preparation prior to lysing the cells for radioactivity. The circumferential accumulation of the Dil-LDL upon raising the endosomal pH is apparent in A. The images are 20X magnifications. Error bars represent standard deviations. The data are representative of 2 independent experiments performed in triplicates without significant variation.

Figure 5. Effect of native lipoprotein receptors on Dil-LDL cell association in pHAECs and hepatocytes. A-B, pHAECs in serum medium were pre-treated with 0 or 100 ng/ml TNF α for 24 hrs.

Afterwards, the cells were cultured in the presence of 0.05% DMSO vehicle, or the vehicle plus 50 μ M BLT-1 (SR-B1 inhibitor), 12.5 μ g/ml human PCSK9 (ApoER, LDLR, LRP, and VLDLR inhibitor), or 21 μ g/ml human RAP (ApoER2, LRP, and VLDLR inhibitor) in serum-free medium for 1 hr. Lastly, 8 μ g/ml dil-LDL was added, followed by 4 hr incubation. The data are representative of 3 independent experiments. **C**, Mouse immorto hepatocytes were incubated in serum-free RPMI 1640 medium containing the indicated inhibitors as above for 1 hr. Lastly, the hepatocytes were incubated with 10

µg/ml dil-HDL3, -LDL, or apoE-VLDL, as indicated, for 2 hrs. Error bars represent standard deviations. **, ***, $p < 0.01$, 0.001 , respectively. NS = not significant.

Figure 6. TNFα increases surface-accessible LDLR without a significant change in total protein. A-B, Confluent pHAECs were pre-treated with 0 or 100 ng/ml TNFα (+) in serum medium for 24 hrs. The cells were then cultured in serum-free medium in the continued presence of TNFα without any antibody (None), 18 µg/ml normal goat IgG control (Ctrl) or goat LDLR antibody (LDLR) for 3 hrs. Cellular LDLR and GAPDH were detected by immunoblotting. It can be seen in A that the LDLR Ab is selective for the LDLR. The data are representative of 3 independent experiments. Error bars represent standard deviations. NS = not significant.

Figure 7. TNFα-induced dil-LDL and apoE-VLDL cell association are blocked by specific LDLR Antibody. Confluent pHAECs in serum medium were pre-treated with 0 (Ctrl) or 100 ng/ml TNFα (TNFα) for 24 hrs. Subsequently, in the continued presence of TNFα, the media were replaced with 20 µg/ml control normal goat IgG (NG IgG) or LDLR antibody (LDLR Ab) for 1 hr without serum. Afterwards, Dil-HDL3 (A-B), Dil-LDL (C-D), or Dil-apoE3-VLDL (E-F) were added to 10 µg/ml. Following 2 hr incubation, cell-associated Dil-lipoproteins were determined. The images are from a single experiment, representative of 4 independent experiments. The images are 20X magnifications. Error bars represent standard deviations. ***, $p < 0.001$ relative to NG IgG.

Figure 8. TNFα induces surface redistribution of LDLR. Confluent pHAECs in serum medium were pre-treated with 0 (Ctrl) or 100 ng/ml TNFα (TNFα) for 24 hrs. Subsequently, in the continued presence of TNFα, the media were replaced with 5 µg/ml control normal goat IgG or LDLR antibody (LDLR Ab) for 0, 5, 30, or 120 minutes at 37 °C. The surface-accessible LDLR was then determined as detailed under Experimental Procedures. **A**, 20X objective magnification of LDLR detected after 30 minutes. **B**, 40X confocal detection of LDLR in TNFα-treated pHAECs at 0 and 5 minutes. The arrows show the membrane distribution of the LDLR in focus, while the arrowhead shows internalized LDLR. **C**, Surface-accessible LDLR as a function of time under control condition. **D**, As C, in the presence of TNFα. The data are representative of 4 independent experiments. Error bars represent standard deviations. **, $p < 0.01$ relative to control at the same time.

Figure 9. ACAT inhibitor does not prevent TNFα-induced LDL cholesterol accumulation. Confluent pHAECs in serum-free medium were treated with 0 or 100 ng/ml TNFα in the presence of 0.1% DMSO (DMSO) or 10 µg/ml ACAT inhibitor (Sandoz 58-035) and 100 µg/ml LDL for 24 hrs. After washing with heparin as described under Experimental Procedures, the cellular cholesterol content was determined. The data are representative of 3 independent experiments. Error bars represent standard deviations. *, **, ***, $p < 0.05$, 0.01 , 0.001 , respectively, relative to corresponding Ctrl or as indicated with bars.

Figure 10. TNFα does not affect AP to BL release of degraded LDL protein. A, Diagram of the experimental setup in B-C, in which pHAECs were grown to confluence on 3 µm polycarbonate filters, with ^{125}I -LDL in the AP medium. **B**, pHAECs in serum medium were pre-treated with 0 (Ctrl) or 5 ng/ml TNFα on the BL side for 48 hrs. Then 10 µg/ml ^{125}I -LDL without serum was added to the AP side (No Competitor) or with 30 folds unlabeled LDL (Unlabeled Competitor), in the continued presence of TNFα. After 3 hours, the BL media were collected, and non-intact ^{125}I -LDL was measured as described under Experimental Procedures. **C**, The experiment was performed as in B, followed by detection of

intact BL ¹²⁵I-LDL. The data are representative of 3 independent experiments. Error bars represent standard deviations. *, **, p < 0.05, 0.01, respectively,

Figure 11. TNFα does not affect AP to BL LDL lipid release. **A-D**, pHAECs were pre-treated as in Figure 10 with 0, 10, or 100 ng/ml TNFα for 24 hrs in serum. Subsequently, 20 μg/ml control normal goat IgG (Goat IgG) or LDLR antibody (LDLR Ab) was added to the AP medium without serum for 2 hrs. Finally, 1.6 mg/ml double labeled Dil,[³H]CE-LDL was added to the AP medium for 3 hrs. After heparin wash, the intracellular fluorescence (**A-B**), ³H radioactivity (**C**), or medium BL ³H (**D**) was determined. **E**, The cells were treated for 3 or 24 hrs with 0 (Ctrl) or 100 ng/ml TNFα without serum in the presence of apical Dil-LDL, and the BL fluorescence was determined. The images in A are from a single experiment. The data are representative of 3 independent experiments. Error bars represent standard deviations. NS = not significant.

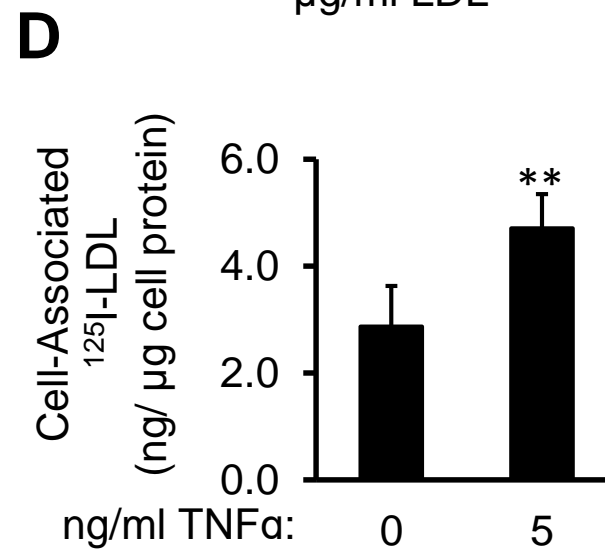
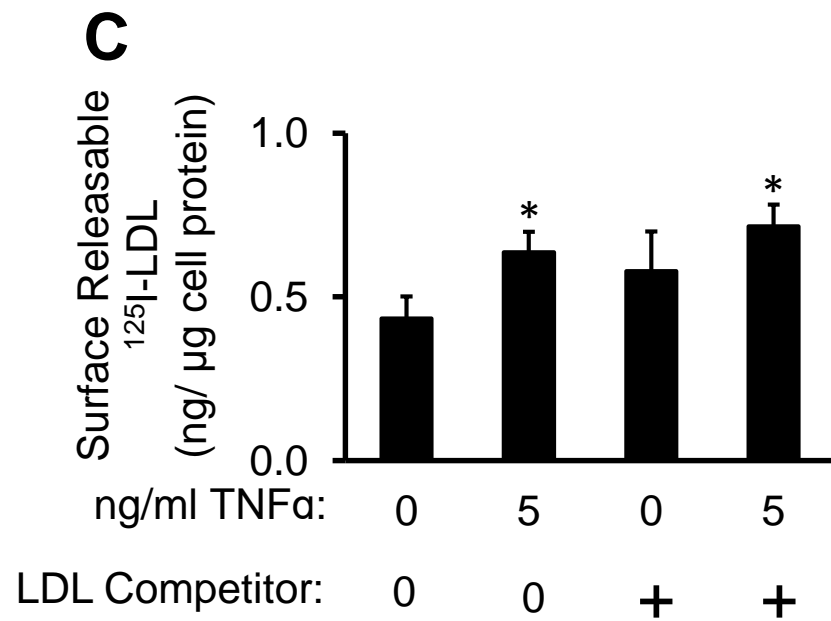
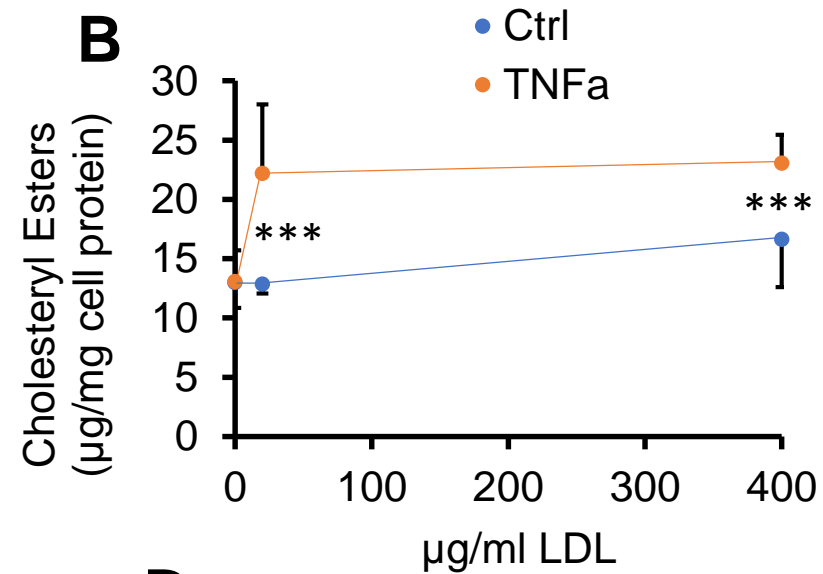
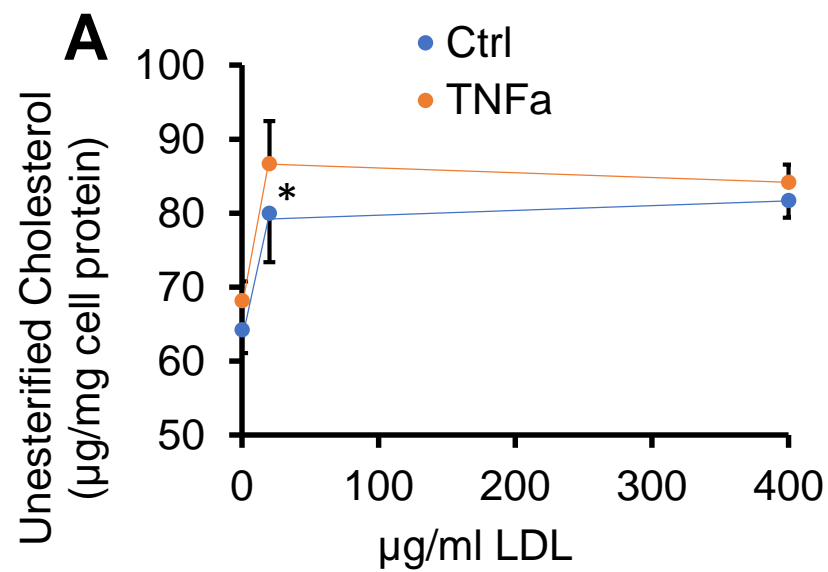


Figure 1

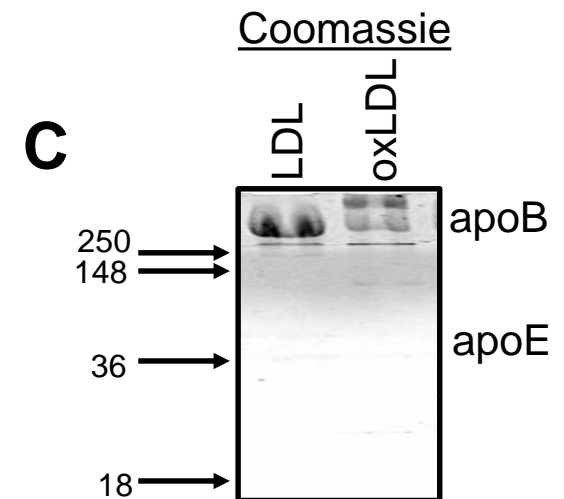
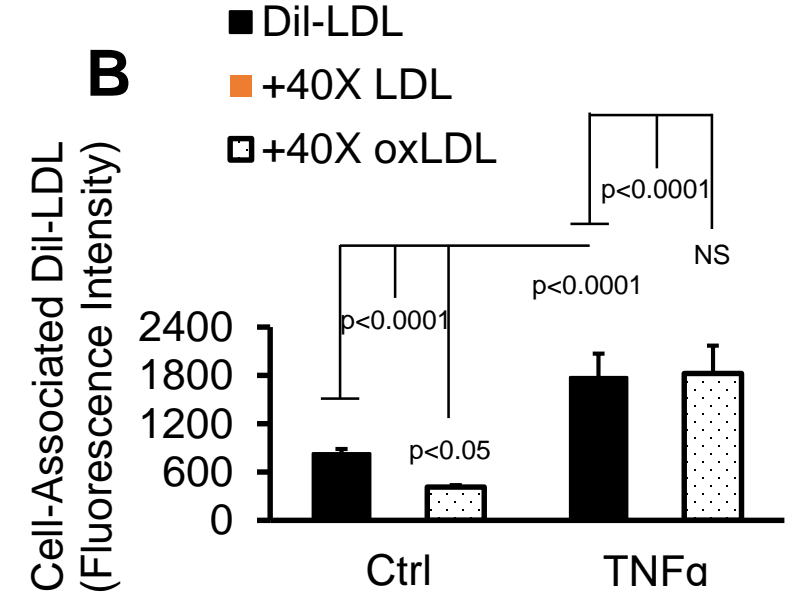
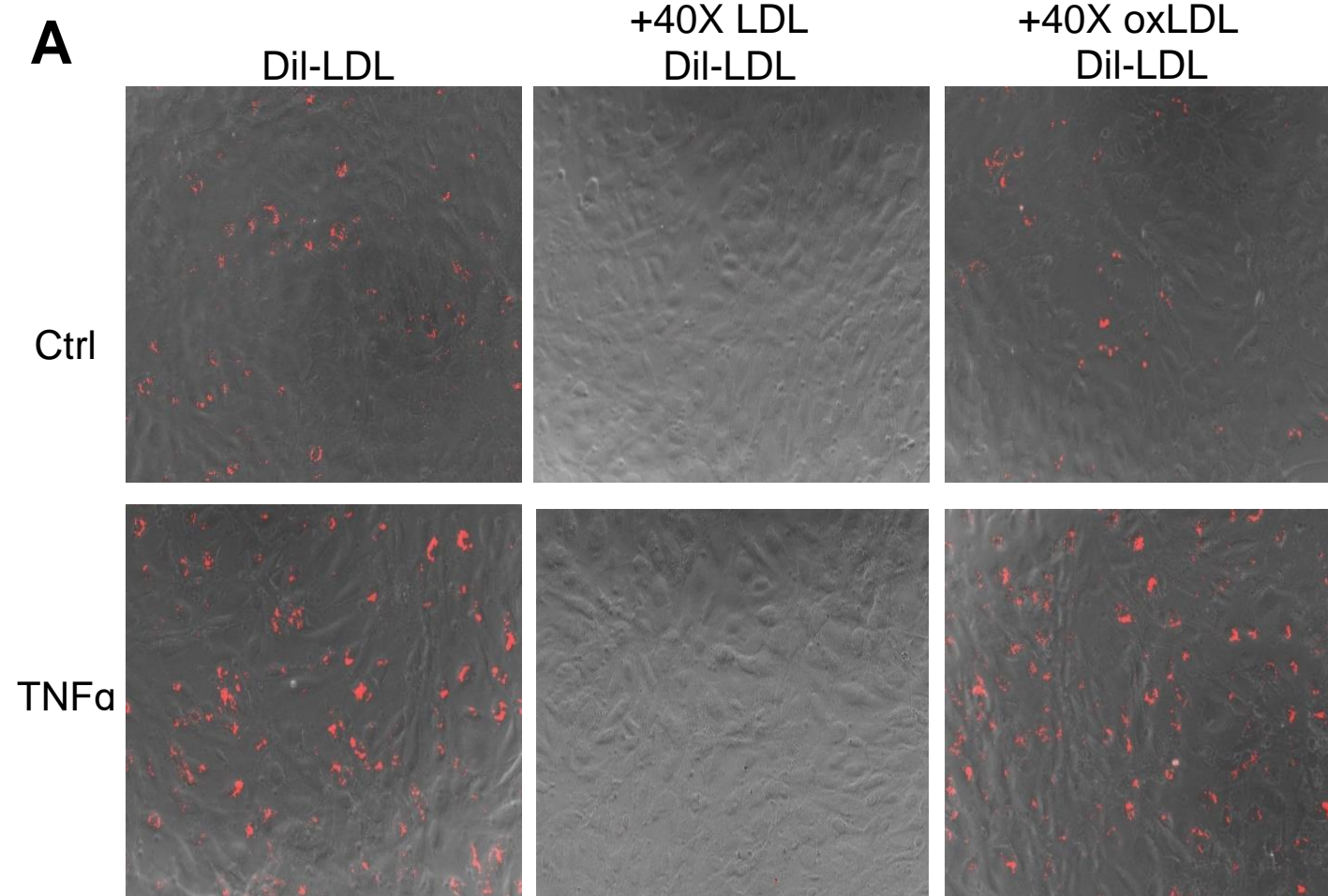


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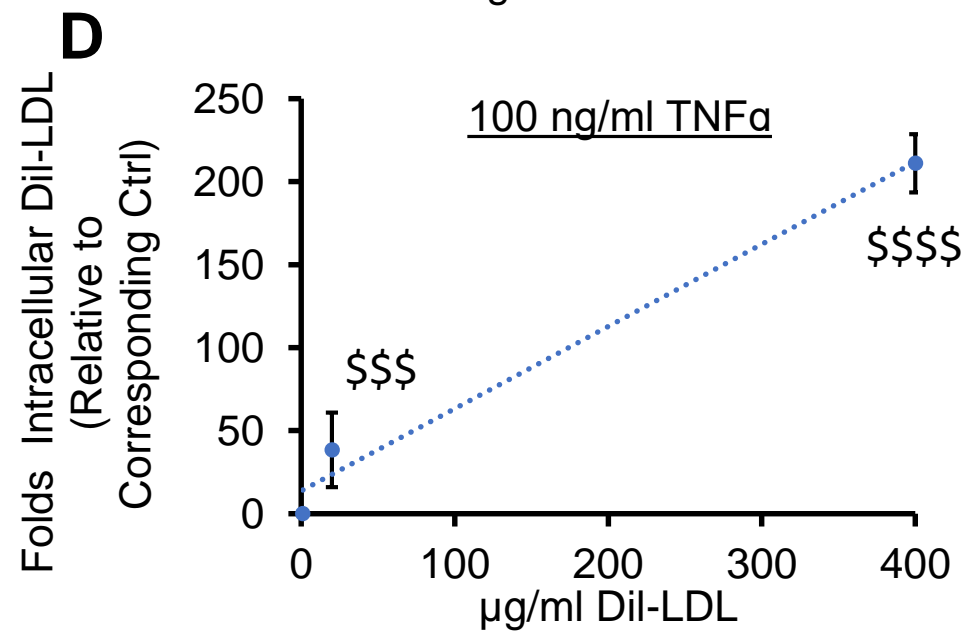
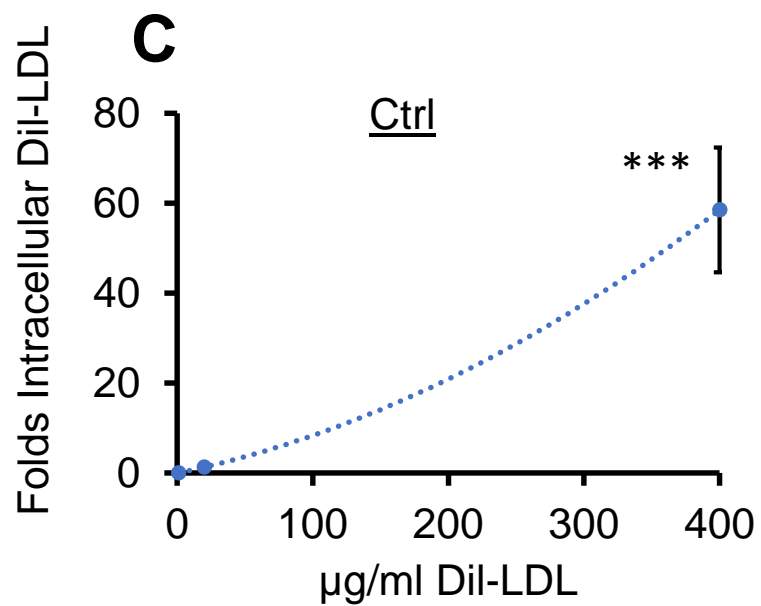
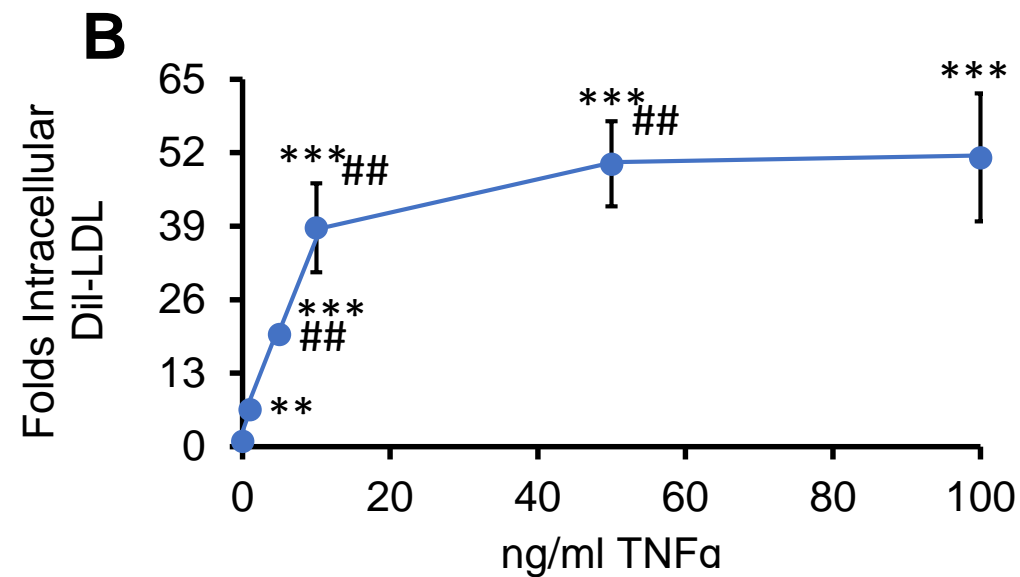
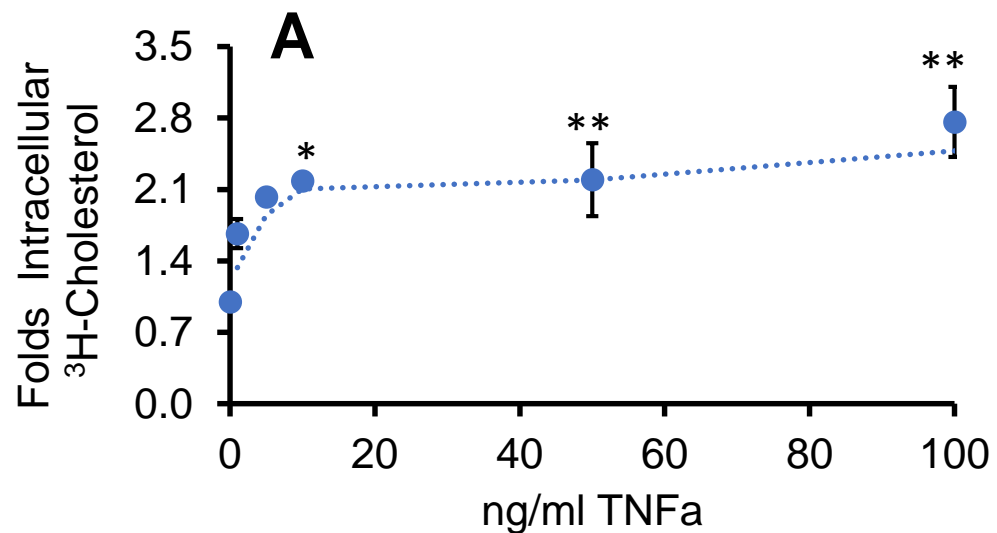


Figure 3

A

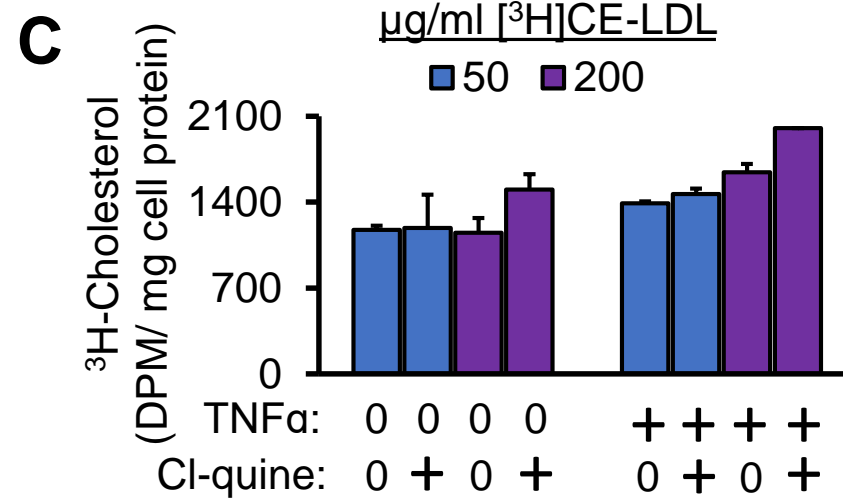
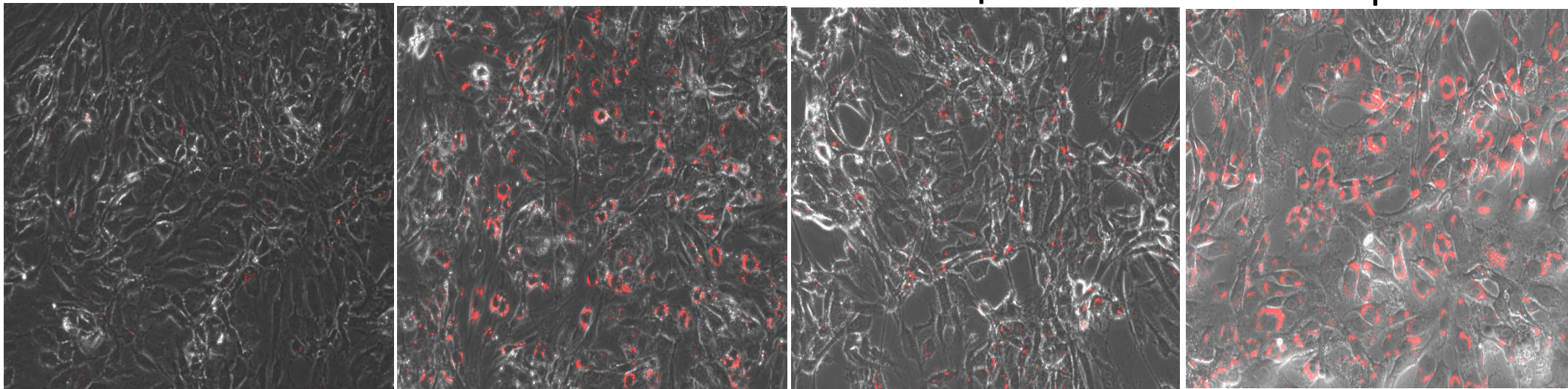


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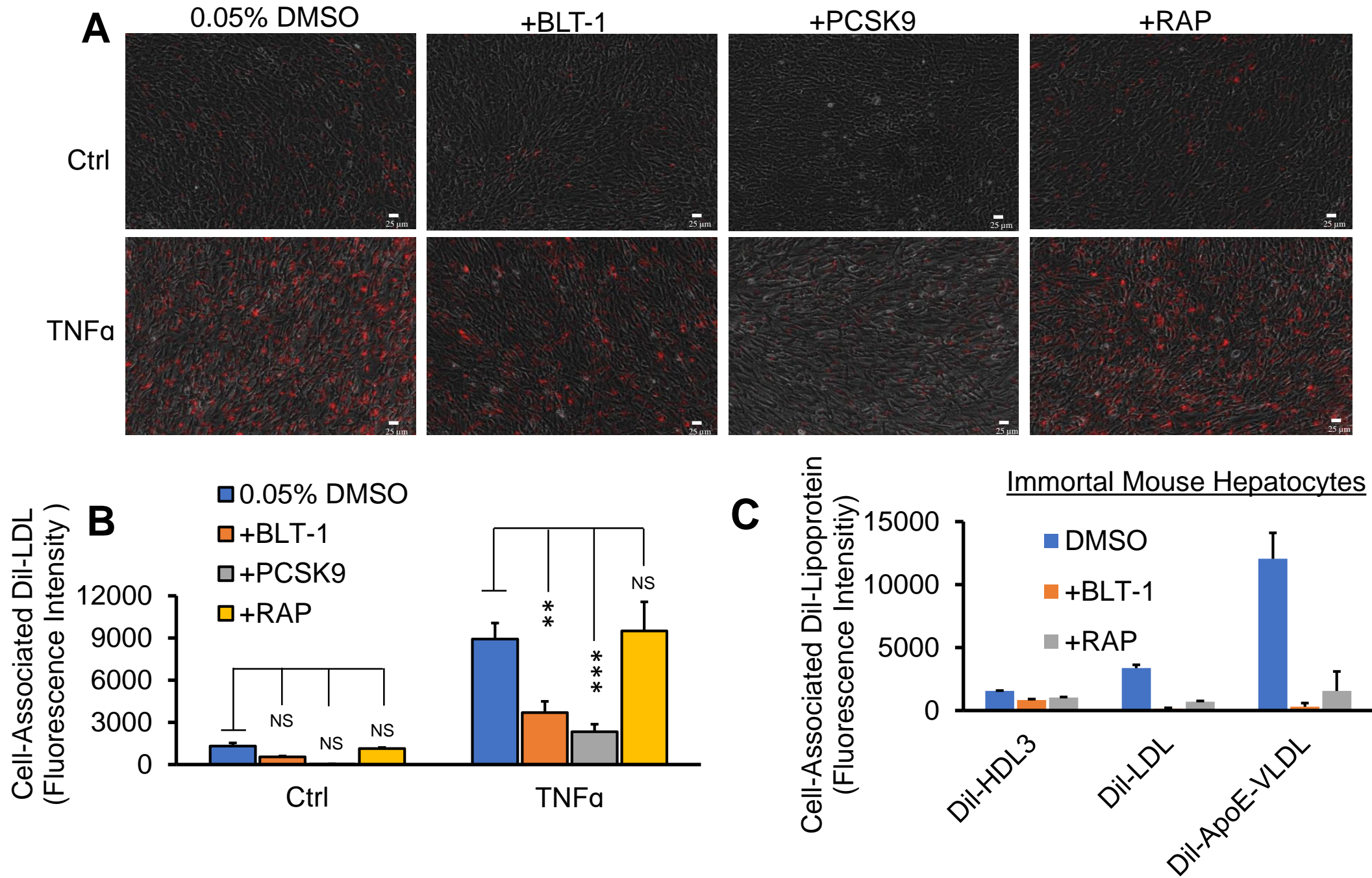


Figure 5

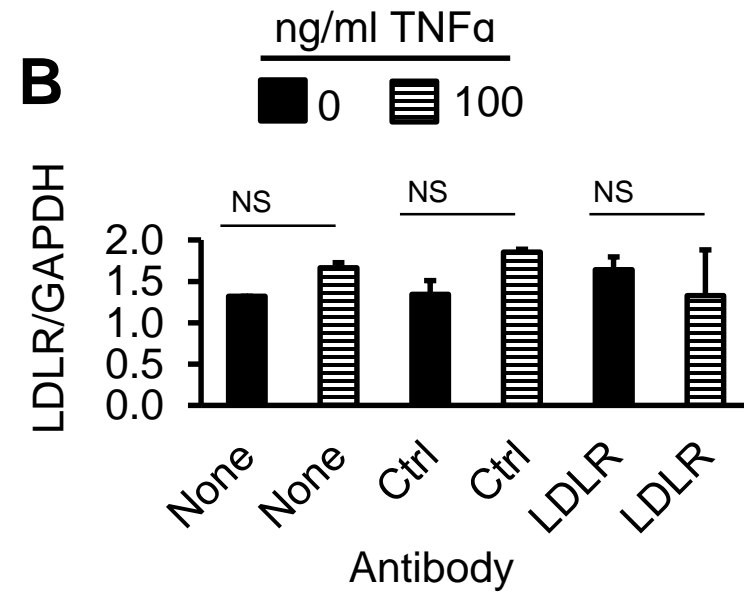
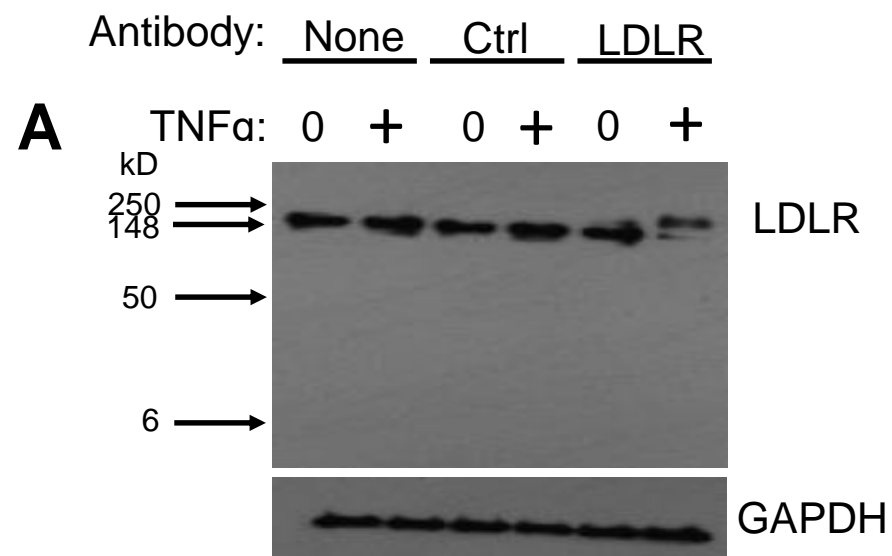


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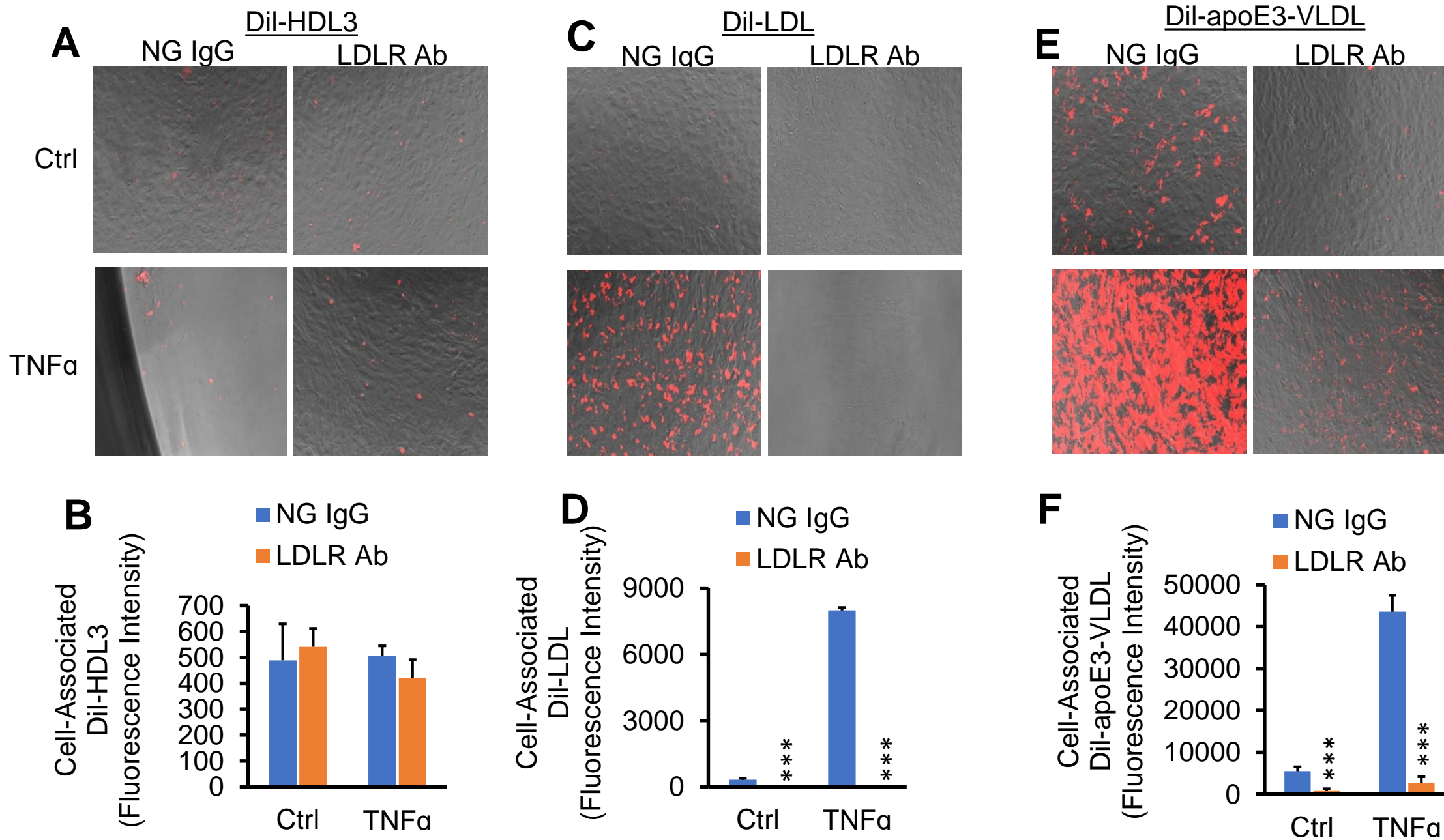


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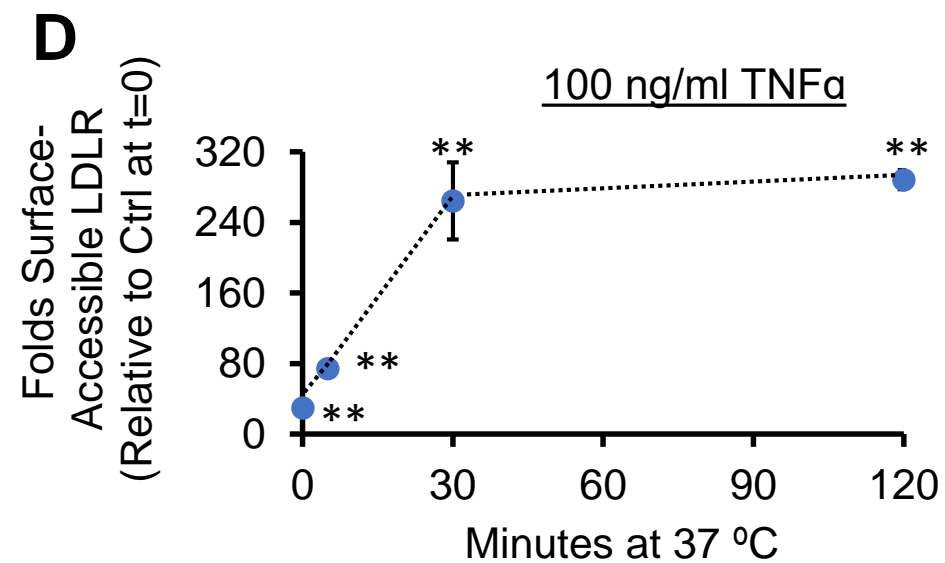
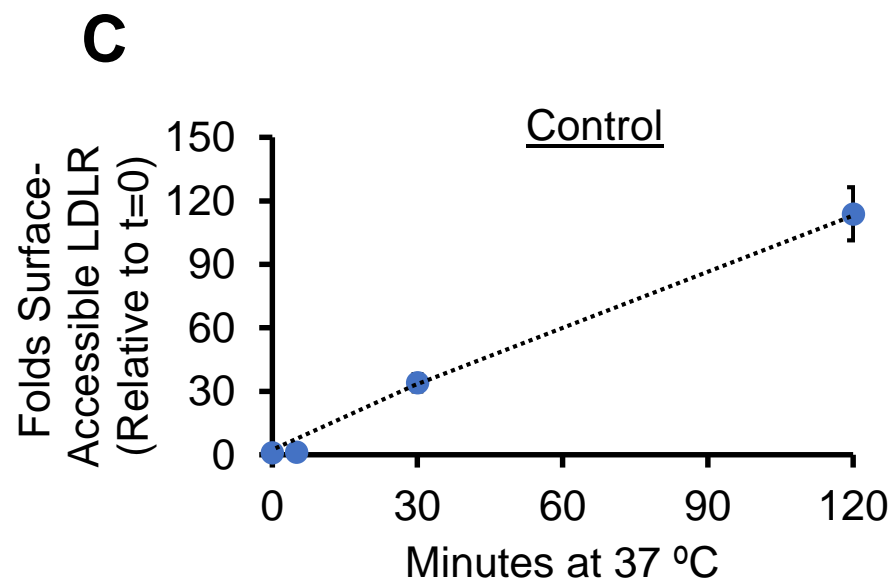
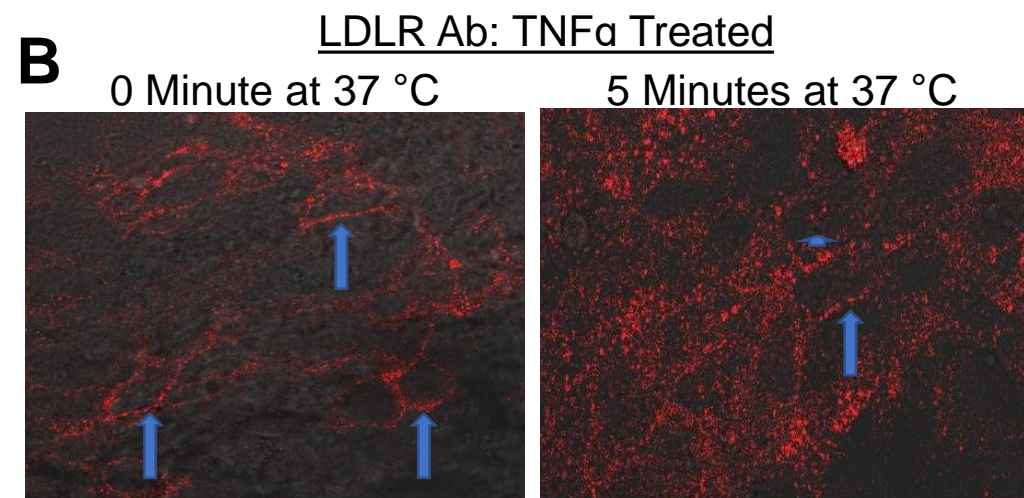
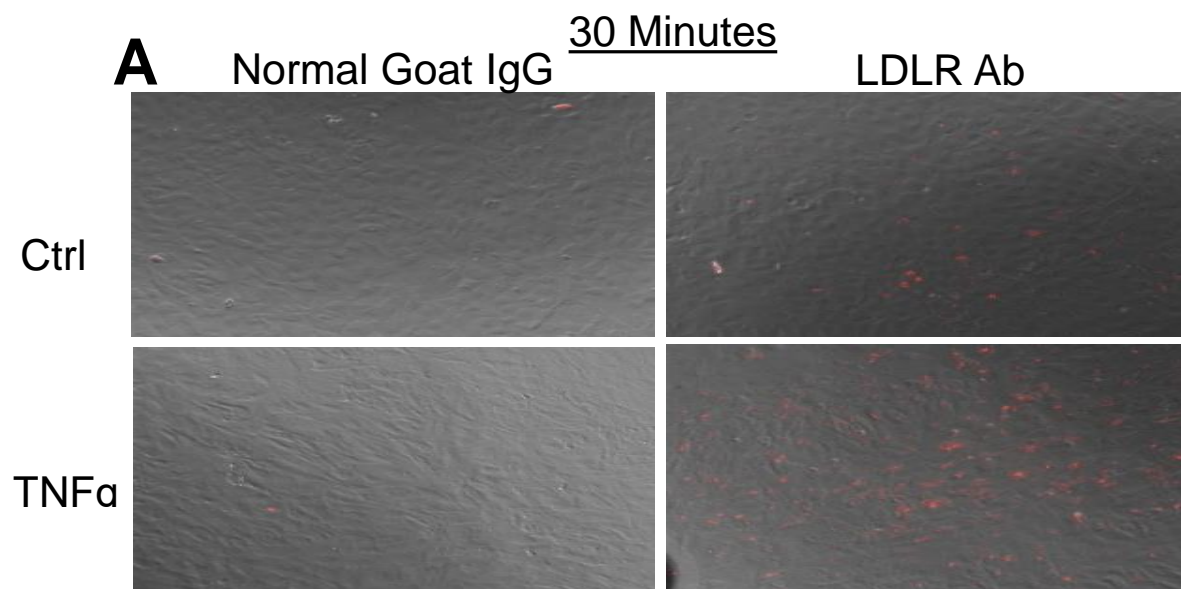


Figure 8

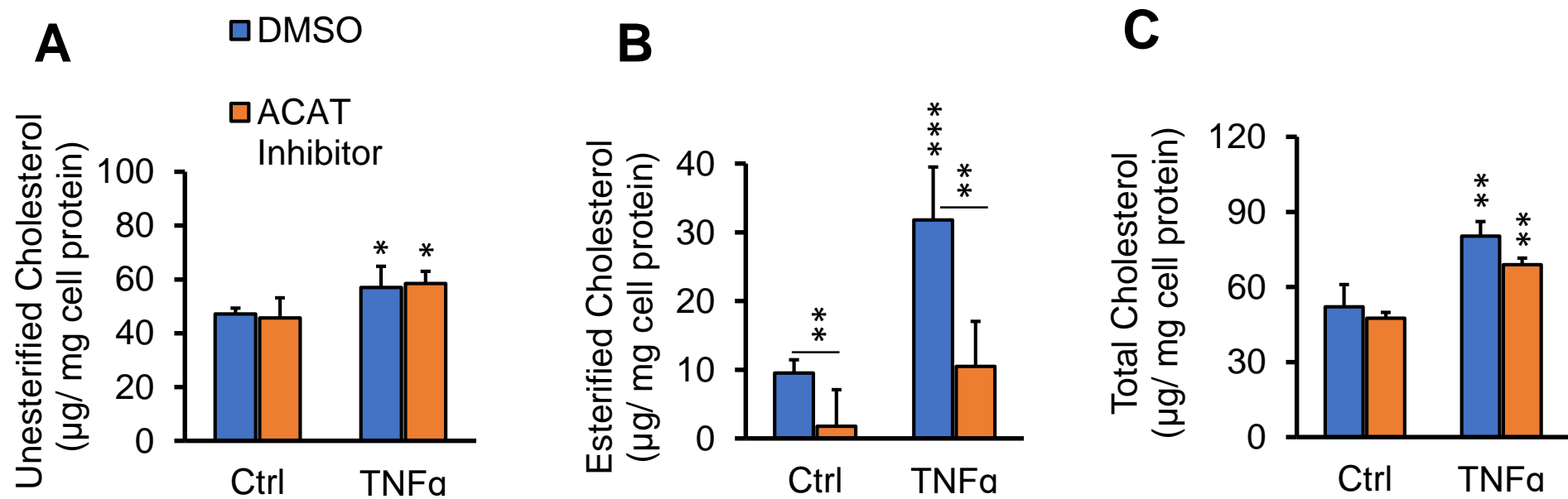


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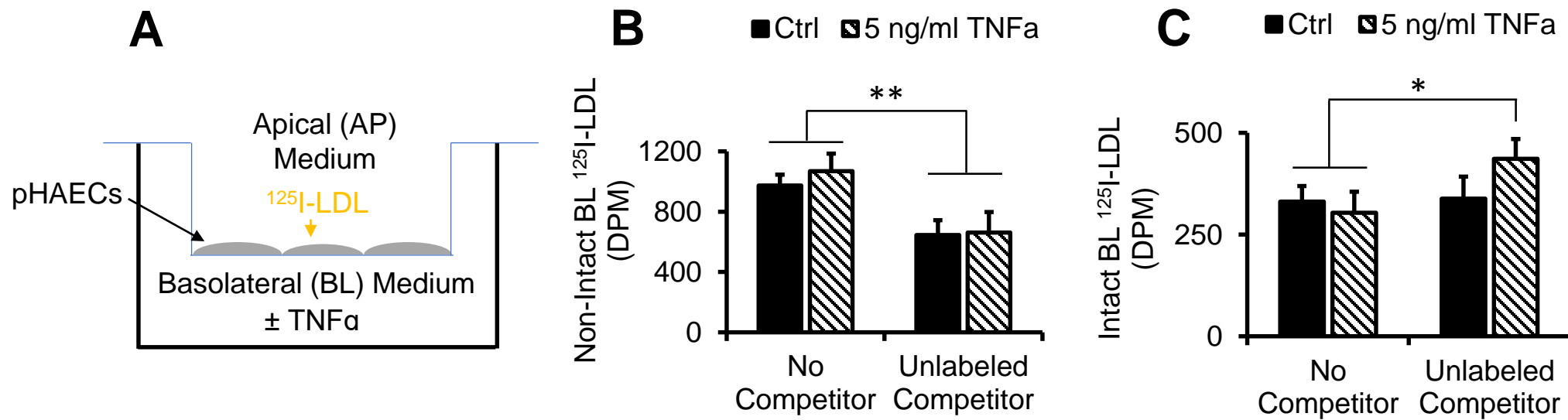


Figure 10

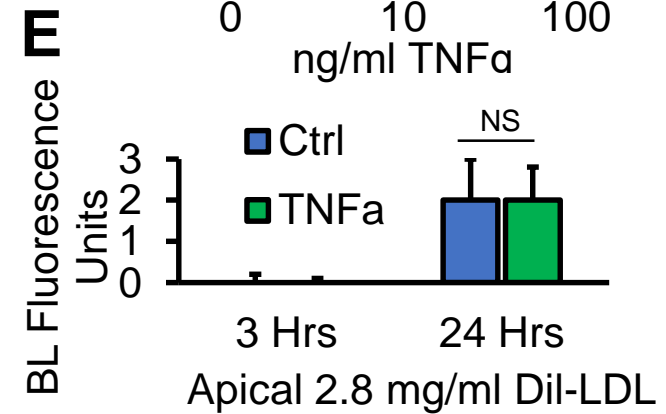
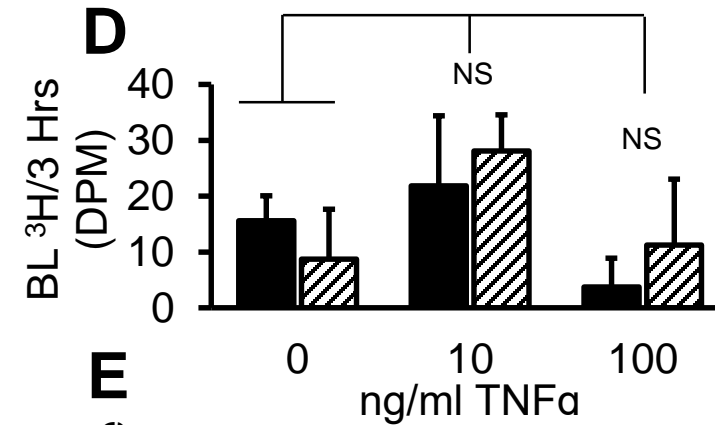
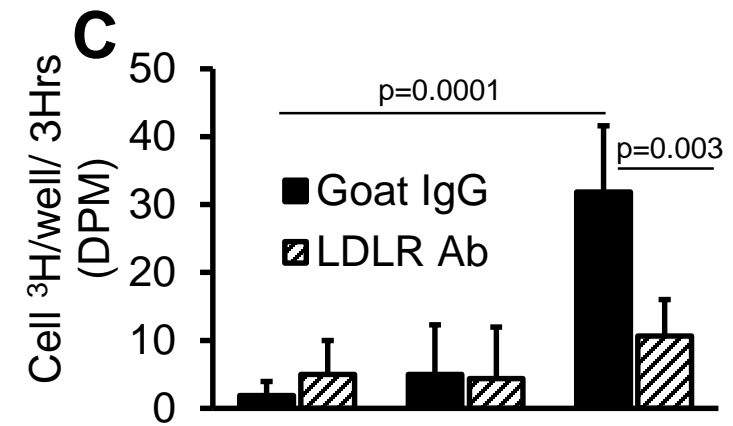
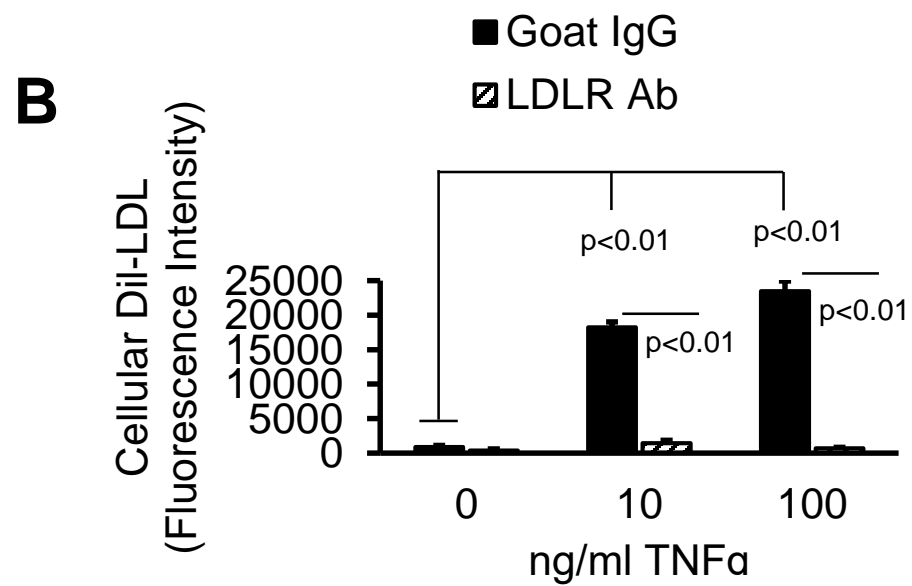
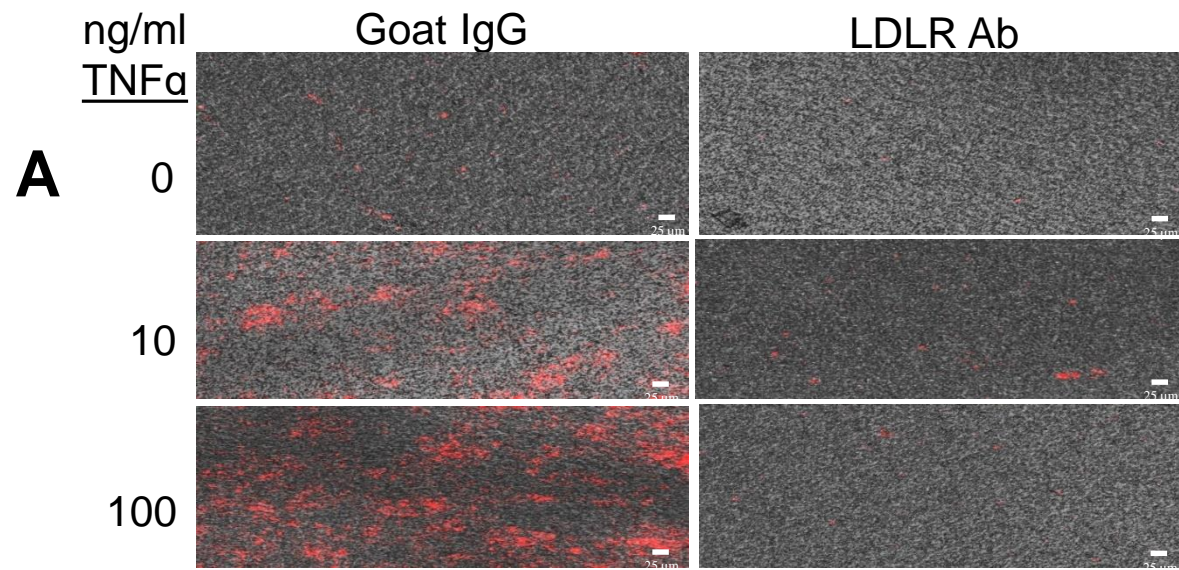


Figure 11