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A mechanism for telomere-specific telomere length regulation

8 Gabriela M. Teplitz [1*], Emeline Pasquier [1,2*], Erin Bonnell [1], Evelina De Laurentiis[1], Louise
9 Bartle[1,3], Jean-François Lucier [4], Dean S. Dawson [5] Raymund J. Wellinger [1,$].

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1: Department of Microbiology and Infectiology, Faculty of Medicine and Sciences, Université
de Sherbrooke, Sherbrooke, Canada
2: Current Address: CNRS-UMR9019, Gustave Roussy Institute, Villejuif, France.
3: Current Address: School of Agriculture, Food and Wine, The University of Adelaide,
Urrbrae, Australia
4: Department of Biology, Faculty of Sciences, Université de Sherbrooke, Sherbrooke Canada
5: Department of Cell Biology, University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, Oklahoma
City, USA.

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25 * The first two authors contributed equally to this work.

26
27 $ To whom correspondence should be addressed:
28   Email: Raymund.Wellinger@Usherbrooke.ca   Tel: (819) 821 8000 ext 75214

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Regulation of the set-length of telomeric repeats is telomere-specific.

- TEL03L on yeast chromosome III displays a set-length regulation that confers an extremely long repeat tract.

- Transferring the distal part of TEL03L onto chromosome XV is sufficient to impose the very long set-length regulation.

- Telomere-specific tract set-length regulation depends on the alternate telomerase recruitment pathway involving Sir4 and yKU and the chromatin boundary protein Tbf1.

GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT

SUMMARY:

Telomere length is a critical determinant of telomere function and hence chromosome stability. Critically short telomeres induce cellular senescence and division arrest, which eventually may lead to devastating age-related degenerative diseases. Conversely, maintenance of telomere length is a hallmark of cancer. How telomere set-length is established and molecular mechanisms for telomere-specific length regulation remained unknown. Here we detail a mechanism of a telomere-specific set-length regulation that causes drastic differences in telomere length between individual telomeres in the same cell. Indeed, the results show that telomerase recruitment is modulated in *cis* in a telomere-specific way. Increased Sir4 abundance on yeast TEL03L subtelomeric heterochromatin leads to a set-length maintenance that is two to three times higher than on any other telomere. Remarkably, the distal 15 kb of TEL03L are sufficient to transfer this telomere specific set-length regulation to another chromosome. Furthermore, a mutation in the telomere boundary element protein Tbf1 allows increased Sir4 binding on all telomeres and hence results in longer set-lengths. The results therefore will force a rethinking of telomere length regulation away from the generalized view that all telomeres are treated the same to a more telomere-specific treatment.

INTRODUCTION:

Telomeric repeat DNA and associated proteins are required for maintaining genome

stability [1]. In general, telomeric DNA is composed of short, guanine-rich repeats that render its

replication particularly challenging [2]. The so-called end-replication problem will lead to

telomere shortening at every cell division [3-5], and replication fork difficulties can lead to abrupt

losses of a large part of the repeats [2]. Eventually, depending on the initial set-length of the

telomeric repeat tracts, telomeric DNA becomes too short to assume telomeric functions and

cells enter a permanent cell cycle arrest called cellular senescence [6,7]. This telomere-length

derived limitation of cell divisions on the one hand directly contributes to age-related

degenerative disease, and on the other hand also restricts cells from undergoing uncontrolled

cell divisions that may lead to cancer [8,9]. Therefore, telomere equilibrium set-length is a key

parameter that will affect the timing of onset of senescence and needs to be strictly regulated

for optimal organismal function.

This telomere set-length is thought to be determined very early in life. Young humans

have a set-length of about 10-12 kb of telomeric repeats [10]. Currently, it is thought that very

few, perhaps less than five, extremely short dysfunctional telomeres are sufficient to engage

telomere-mediated cellular senescence [11-13]. If the cellular DNA-damage checkpoint

machinery is compromised, senescence can be bypassed, and most cells die in replicative

crisis [8,9]. However, some cells can pass crisis and advance to malignant transformation [8].

Given that it takes only few dysfunctional telomeres to initiate the events leading to

senescence, it may very well matter which are the causative telomeres for the process.

We know very little about how the initial set-length for telomeric repeat DNA is

determined. Furthermore, while there is evidence that individual human [14,15] and yeast [16,17]

telomeres can have telomere-specific set-lengths, mechanisms for how specific telomeres in

the same cell could have significantly differing set-lengths remained unknown. Specifically, at

least one budding yeast telomere, the telomere on chromosome end IIIL (TEL03L), has a set-

length that deviates dramatically from those of all other telomeres [18]. Indeed, in wild-type

cells, the telomere set-length of TEL03L is about double the size of all other telomeres.

Therefore, we investigated the mechanisms that lead to such a markedly different set-length

for TEL03L. Significantly, our results show that an increased level of Sir4 at TEL03L is

attracting telomerase via a Sir4-Yku80 interaction which links the TEL03L telomere to the

telomerase RNA. This mechanism leads to an increased activity of telomerase at telomere

TEL03L and delineates how the heterochromatin like domain on TEL03L leads to a telomere-

specific telomerase recruitment mode that affects the telomere set-length determination

exclusively in *cis*. Sir4 presence on telomeres is limited by heterochromatin boundary proteins

such as Tbf1. We thus generated a mutation in Tbf1 that allows increased Sir4 presence, and

in cells harbouring this new tbf1-453 allele, telomere set-length significantly increased on all

telomeres. Therefore, our work on telomere TEL03L overall defines a molecular mechanism

for telomere-specific set-length regulation. Extrapolating this new concept to human cells,

such mechanisms could determine which telomeres have a higher or lower probability to be

the first to become dysfunctional, leading to the initiation of senescence.

RESULTS:

Extremely long telomere set-length on TEL03L is dependent on the Sir-proteins and the silent

mating type locus HML.

In budding yeast, either of two types of subtelomeric sequences, called Y'- or X-elements,

occur directly adjacent to the terminal telomeric repeats [19]. Accordingly, telomeres are

classified as either X-telomeres or Y'-telomeres, each accounting for about half of all 32

telomeres in common lab-strains; 15 and 17 respectively in the strains used here. X-elements

are not highly conserved, and many have enough unique sequences to be distinguished for

single telomere analyses. During work on telomeric chromatin of such individual X-telomeres

we found that the telomeric repeat tract on the X-telomere 3L consistently was much longer

(510 ± 55 bp) than the previously described average of 300 ± 75 bp [19] (Suppl. Fig. 1a). This

exceptional set-length for TEL03L was determined via TeloPCR (see Methods for details;

Suppl. Fig. 1a) or by standard Southern blotting of genomic DNA digested with an appropriate

restriction enzyme (PvuII, Fig. 1a, c; lanes WT). DNA from the same WT strains analyzed

using the more common XhoI restriction digest and Southern blotting using a telomeric repeat

probe did yield the canonical expected tract sizes on Y'-telomeres or on X-telomeres TEL11L

and TEL06R (Fig. 1a-d; lanes WT). The fact that TEL03L is exceptionally long had been

reported when this telomere was first cloned [16], and more recent data show that this occurs in

most WT yeast strains from around the globe, including all lab strains [18]. We also performed

pan-telomere analysis by chromosome end-to-end sequencing using nanopore sequencing [17].

Individual telomeric tract lengths are documented in violin plots for each telomere (Suppl. Fig.

1b WT, light blue) and compared to the average size of all telomeres (Suppl. Fig. 1b, stippled

line). Analysis of the means of each telomere versus the grand mean of all telomeres shows

that TEL03L, and to a lesser extent TEL08L, TEL08R, TEL09R and TEL11L were significantly

longer, while TEL10R, TEL11R, TEL14L, and TEL14R appeared somewhat shorter than the

grand mean of all telomeres (Suppl. Fig. 1c). Given that TEL03L was already confirmed to

have an extremely long set-length [16,18], we concentrated our efforts on this telomere.

Unique features of budding yeast chromosome III include a locus that determines haploid

mating behavior (*MATa* or *MATα*). In addition, there are silenced copies of those mating type

specifying genes near the telomeres of chromosome III: *HMR*, about 20 kb from telomere

TEL03R [20]; and *HML* about 10 kb from TEL03L [16]. Silencing of those *HM*-loci depends on the

association of a set of Sir-proteins (Sir1, Sir2, Sir3 and Sir4) [21]. In fact, transcriptional

silencing can also be observed near telomeres [22], and this repression is dependent on the

Sir2, Sir3 and Sir4 proteins, but not on Sir1 [23]. Focussing on telomere TEL03L on

chromosome III, we therefore assessed whether the very long telomere set-lengths observed

above are dependent on the presence of the SIR-genes (Fig. 1a-d; Suppl. Fig. 1b). In fact,

deletion of any of the *SIR2, SIR3* or *SIR4* genes shortened the set-length telomere phenotype

of TEL03L specifically such that the set-length of this telomere now became close to the

median of all telomeres in the cell (Fig. 1a, c; Suppl. Fig. 1b). Such a Sir-gene specific

deviation was not observed for any of the other telomeres on which the set-length deviated

from the grand mean of all telomeres (Suppl. Fig. 1b). As reported previously [24], we also

noticed that the deletion of the *SIR4* gene caused a slight reduction in the size of all

telomeres, and remarkably, TEL03L also further adjusted to the slightly shorter overall set-

lengths (Figure 1a-d). Specifically, the average telomere length in a *sir2Δ* strain measured

342±20 bp and that of TEL03L matched that size quite well 312±10 bp; in a *sir4Δ* strain,

overall lengths were reduced to 276±21 bp and that of TEL03L to 256±14 bp (Figure 1a, c).

Remarkably, in a *sir1Δ* strain, the overall telomere set-lengths were not significantly affected

(Fig. 1c, d), but the length of TEL03L was reduced from around 559±87 bp to 487±30 bp (Fig.

1a, c). Given that the Sir1 protein exclusively is involved in silencing the HM loci, but not at

telomeres, we surmised that Sir1 binding at the *HM*-loci may be required to affect the set-

length telomere length in *cis*. We thus deleted *HML*, or *HMR* as a control, from the genome

and discovered that deletion of *HML*, but not *HMR*, indeed also partly suppressed the long

set-length phenotype on TEL03L (Fig. 1e-g). Notably, the set-length of the telomeric repeats

on TEL03L in the *sir1Δ* strain (487±30 bp, Fig. 1c) was very similar to the size as in the *hmlΔ*

strain (481±78, Fig. 1g). On the other hand, deletion of *HMR* did not affect any telomere set-

lengths that we could measure (Fig. 1e-g). Further, neither of the deletions affected telomeric

repeat lengths of X-telomeres TEL11L or TEL06R (Fig. 1e, f), and the overall length of all 17

Y'-telomeres also remained unaffected (Fig. 1e, f). We conclude that in WT cells, the set-

length of TEL03L is dramatically longer than that of any other telomere and this extended set-

length is dependent on the Sir2, 3, 4-proteins. Furthermore, the loss of Sir1 or the deletion of

the *HML* locus exclusively caused TEL03L to shorten by about 100 bp and did not affect any

other telomere set-lengths.

Set-length telomere regulation on TEL03L depends on the telomerase pathway.

We next wished to investigate how this very long equilibrium set-length at TEL03L was

established and maintained. Telomere maintenance can be dependent on homologous

recombination or on the telomerase enzyme [19]. Examining telomere lengths by Southern

blotting in strains lacking Rad52 and which can not maintain telomeres by recombination

showed that the set-lengths of TEL03L were indistinguishable in WT vs *rad52Δ* strains (Fig.

2a). Therefore, we surmised that the TEL03L telomere was maintained by a telomerase

dependent mechanism. In this case, the steady-state telomere length will be determined by

an equilibrium between telomere shortening activities and telomerase-mediated telomere

lengthening activities. To examine whether the length of TEL03L was due to reduced

shortening activities, we compared the loss rates at various telomeres to that at TEL03L in the

absence of telomerase. Previous data showed that in strains lacking an essential telomerase

component, telomeres lose approximately 3-5 bp/generation [25,26]. Given that we wanted to

examine those losses immediately after telomerase loss, we fused Est3 and Est1, essential

protein components of telomerase [19], to the FKBP12-rapamycin-binding domain of human

TOR1 (FRB-domain) in the Anchor Away system [27]. This setup allowed us by simple addition

of rapamycin to rapidly deplete nuclear Est3/Est1 and examine telomeric sequence losses

thereafter (Fig. 2b-e). At the start of the experiments, telomere lengths for Y'-telomeres as

well as those for X-telomeres TEL11R and TEL06R were in the range of 300 ± 75 bp (Fig.

2b). However, TEL03L was much longer at approximately 480bp. We then induced Est3-FRB

expulsion from the nucleus by addition of rapamycin and measured telomere length changes

during the next ten days (corresponding to ~95 population doublings (Fig. 2c, e). At the end,

telomere loss rates were calculated as a function of population doublings for each X-telomere

separately and the Y'-telomeres collectively (Fig. 2d). Although there is some variability in the

data, the sequence loss rates at TEL03L were not significantly lower than those for the other

telomeres analyzed in either the Est3-FRB or the Est1-FRB experiments (Fig. 2e). This result

is consistent with previous results indicating that upon loss of telomerase, overall similar

sequence loss rates are observed, irrespective of the starting telomere length [28]. By

inference, these data also strongly suggest that the extended set-length of TEL03L is due to a

more efficient lengthening by telomerase.

Long set-length regulation on TEL03L is contained in the distal 16.7 kb of subtelomeric DNA

and is transferable.

The extended set-length of the telomeric tracts on TEL03L occurs in many yeast strain

backgrounds, including wild yeast strains collected in nature [18]. Furthermore, the sequences

on TEL03L, including the terminal repeats themselves, are highly conserved between strains.

Therefore, the terminal sequence of TEL03L itself might have been at the base of the

telomere-specific long set-length. We considered that either the TEL03L X-element or some

special terminal repeat arrangement could cause the long set-length. To examine those two

possibilities, we replaced the terminal TEL03L X-element with the X-element present on

TEL01L (Fig. 3a, b; Suppl. Fig. 2a for details). As a control to examine the terminal repeat

sequences only, the replacement procedure was also performed with the original TEL03L X-

element that harbored only a very short telomeric repeat seed, followed by assessing the

regrowth of the TEL03L in this situation (see Suppl. Fig. 2a). Remarkably, both situations

allowed for a lengthening of the modified TEL03Ls to well beyond the average 300 bp size of

telomeric repeat tracts in the cells: telomeric tract lengths as measured by Southern blotting

were 420±40 bp for TEL03L-3L and 451±56 bp for TEL03L-1L (Fig. 3a, b). Similar results

were obtained when the altered TEL03Ls were analyzed by TeloPCR (Suppl. Fig. 2b). The

TEL03L before modification was at 466±65 bp. These data therefore show that the TEL01L X-

element and a short telomeric repeat seed alone are sufficient to allow the generation of the

long set-length on TEL03L. In addition, there is no special TEL03L-specific terminal repeat

arrangement required for this overextension.

Considering the partial suppression of set-length regulation on TEL03L observed in *sir1Δ*

and *hmlΔ* strains (Fig. 1), the above data suggested that the genomic area from *HML* to the

terminal repeat tracts may be required to specify the full extended set length on TEL03L in

cis. If this was the case, this area alone should be sufficient to transfer an extended set-length

to another telomere. We tested this hypothesis by swapping the entire distal telomeric

TEL03L region (~ 16.7 kb including *HML*) with the distal 13.5 kb telomeric region of TEL15L

on chromosome XV (Fig. 3c, d; see schematic in Suppl. Fig. 3a for details). The telomere

swap via the inserted RS recombination sites was verified by locus-specific PCR (Suppl. Fig.

3b) and by hybridization of pulsed field gel (CHEF) Southern blots (Suppl. Fig. 3c). Telomeric

tract lengths on the original or transposed telomeres TEL03L or TEL15L was then assessed

by Southern blotting (Fig. 3c, d). The displaced TEL03L on chromosome XV (ChrXV-TEL03L)

indeed was sufficient to maintain a very long telomere set-length (650 ± 60 bp), while the

TEL15L telomeric area on chromosome III (ChrIII-TEL15L) remained close to the average

length of all other telomeres (356 ± 16 bp, Fig. 3d). These data thus show that the distal

telomeric region of chromosome III enforces an extended set-telomere length exclusively on

this telomere in *cis*, independently from the identity of the rest of the chromosome.

Telomerase recruitment via Sir4-yKu is required for long set-length on TEL03L

The above data suggest that the extension activity of telomerase is more active on

TEL03L than on other telomeres. Our hypothesis was that telomerase-mediated extension

and hence telomerase recruitment somehow was more efficient on TEL03L. Telomerase

recruitment in yeast depends on an essential interaction between the Est1 component on

telomerase and the telomere-bound Cdc13 protein [19]. However, the yeast yKu heterodimer,

composed of Yku70/Yku80, interacts with the telomerase RNA Tlc1 [29] and is involved in non-

essential alternative recruitment of telomerase. Specifically, Yku80 interacts with Sir4, which

in turn can interact with the telomere-bound Rap1 protein. This Tlc1-Yku70/Yku80-Sir4-Rap1

axis provides for accessory telomerase recruitment that lengthens all telomeres by about 50

bp [30,31]. Given the above, the long set-length on TEL03L could be due to an enhancement of

this recruitment mode. This hypothesis predicts that in strains harboring any mutations that

disrupt this axis, all telomeres would be equally dependent on the Est1-Cdc13 recruitment

and have the same set-lengths. We therefore introduced alleles that interrupt the axis and

compared global telomere set-lengths to the one on TEL03L. The telomerase RNA allele *tlc1-*

Δ48 does not interact with yeast yKu [29] and the *yku80-L140A* allele of *YKU80* can not interact

with Sir4 [32]. The average telomere length of all telomeres decreased slightly by about 50 bp in

strains with the *tlc1-Δ48*, *yku80-L140A* or the *sir4Δ* alleles (Fig. 4a, b; Suppl. Fig. 4a, b),

consistent with previous data [29,32]. Remarkably, in all three strains, the set-length of TEL03L

also was reduced to the same lengths as the mean of all telomeres (Fig. 4b; Suppl. Fig. 4a).

These results thus show that the long telomere set-length of TEL03L is dependent on the

Tlc1-Yku70/Yku80-Sir4 telomerase recruitment axis, which therefore mediates the telomere-

specific level of telomere-telomerase interactions.

A mutation in Tbf1 increases telomeric Sir4 association and globally increases

telomere set-lengths.

There is evidence that on TEL03L, the Sir2/3/4-proteins spread from the distal telomeric

X-element and are associated with the entire 10 kb sequence between the *HML* locus and

TEL03L [33,34]. This explains a significantly increased presence of Sir4 on this telomeric locus

but this Sir-protein spreading on TEL03L is exceptional on telomeres. On virtually all other

natural telomeres, the Sir-proteins do not spread much beyond the telomeric repeat DNA on

Y'-telomeres, or beyond the proximal end of the X-elements [33,34]. It is therefore stipulated that

except for the proximal end of the X-element on TEL03L, there is a strong chromatin

boundary that inhibits spreading beyond the transition sites [33-35]. Given that the telomeric

repeat tract distal of the X-element of TEL01L also becomes very long if that X-element is

placed onto the end of telomere IIIL (Fig. 3), we hypothesized that Sir-protein coverage from

TEL03L to the *HML* locus may be due to telomere-independent association of Sir-proteins at

the *HML* locus and spreading towards the telomere, an effect that could weaken this

boundary element in *cis*.

If indeed a weakened boundary element at TEL03L caused the long set-length on

TEL03L, mutations in boundary element proteins, such as Tbf1 [35], may weaken the boundary

effect in general, allowing increased Sir4 association on all telomeres and leading to overall

telomere lengthening. Boundary element proteins such as Tbf1, Reb1, or Abf1 are also

important general transcription factors and essential in yeast [19]. Therefore, we screened for a

new allele of *TBF1* that still supports cell viability but in which the boundary function may be

affected. The *tbf1-453* allele fulfills these requirements: it contains a single amino acid change

(Q453H) and cells harbouring this allele grow slowly but are viable at 30°C. In these cells, no

major change in their transcriptomic profiles was detectable (Suppl. Fig. 5a, b, c). Moreover,

in cells with the *tbf1-453* allele, the abundance of the Sir4 protein significantly increases on

telomere adjacent sites (1.5 kb to 3.1 kb from the transition of subtelomeric to the respective

X-elements; Suppl. Fig. 5d). Finally, in these cells, all analyzed telomeres had extended set-

lengths, including X-telomeres TEL06R, TEL11L, TEL11R, TEL03L, and the Y'-telomeres (Fig.

5a, b, Fig. 6). Moreover, these new telomere set-lengths are specific to the *tbf1-453* allele and

are not observed in cells lacking another telomeric chromatin associated protein such as

Rpd3 (Fig. 6a, b). Deleting any of the *SIR2, SIR3 or SIR4* genes in cells with the *tbf1-453*

allele however is epistatic and reduces the elongated set-length of the telomeres (Fig. 5b), as

predicted if the over elongation of telomeres in the *tbf1-453* cells is dependent on Sir-protein

association on telomeres.

DISCUSSION:

The analyses presented here show that on TEL03L in yeast, an increased presence of

Sir-proteins on the terminal 10 kb of DNA is responsible for a very long equilibrium set-length

of telomeric repeats specifically at this telomere. It is well established that the Sir-proteins

associate with regions requiring transcriptional silencing, such as the *HML* and *HMR* loci [21]. In

addition, the Sir2/3/4-proteins, but not Sir1, also strongly associate with telomeres and

subtelomeric X-elements [33,34]. However, on all native telomeres except TEL03L, there is only

very limited presence of the Sir2/3/4-proteins centromere proximal from the X-elements [33,34].

The abrupt loss of Sir-association at the centromere proximal side of the X-elements or at the

transitions between telomeric repeat DNA and the Y'-element closely parallels the loss of

transcriptional repression in native telomere environments, an effect ascribed to boundary

elements at these transition sites [35,36]. Our data show that in an experimental setting with

generally increased Sir-protein associations; in cells with the *tbf1-453* allele, all analyzed

telomeres, including TEL03L, lengthen to a new set-length that is approximately 50 bp longer

than in WT cells (Fig. 5, Fig. 6).

Next, our data show that the very long set-telomere length on TEL03L is dependent on

the yKu-Sir4 protein interaction that bridges Sir4-bound telomeric loci to yKu-bound

telomerase RNA (Fig. 4). It was reported before that for Y'-telomeres, this non-essential

telomerase recruitment mode results in a 50 bp increase of the telomere set-length from

about 260 bp, in the absence of the yKu-Sir4 axis, to about 300 bp in WT cells [24,29] (Fig. 4).

However, on TEL03L, the set-length is increased from 260 bp to ≥ 500 bp (Fig. 1) in a

telomerase-dependent manner (Fig. 2). The X-element on TEL03L is not required for the long

set-length on TEL03L, because replacing this 03L-X with the one of TEL01L (01L-X) also

results in a very long set-length on TEL03L (Fig. 3). By extension, the boundary element on

the TEL03L-X does not appear to differ from other boundary elements. Interestingly, the

presence of the *HML* locus does affect the set-length of TEL03L by a significant amount (Fig.

1e-g), but has no effect on the set-lengths of any other telomere. We ascribe this result to the

strong association of the Sir-complex with the *HML* locus (discussed above). Consistent with

this idea, the fully elongated set-length at TEL03L is dependent on the Sir1 protein and the

presence of the *HML* locus, but the equilibrium set-lengths of other telomeres are not

significantly influenced by their presence or absence (Fig. 1, [23]). Finally, transposing the entire

distal region of chromosome III onto chromosome XV leads to an extended telomere set-

length on the transposed telomere, while the new telomeric locus on chromosome IIIL

comprising the chromosome XV specific distal sequences remains in the 300-350 bp range,

characteristic of many other telomeres (Fig. 3).

These results therefore detail the molecular requirements for how the very long set-length

of TEL03L is achieved: an increased association of the Sir4 protein over 10 kb of telomere-

adjacent chromatin yields increased Sir4-yKu mediated telomere-telomerase interactions. The

latter allows for an increased probability of telomere elongation events in *cis* on this telomere,

leading to a long set-length telomere. We surmise that the probability of extensions events

still is inversely correlated with repeat-length, as previously proposed [37], but that on TEL03L,

the probabilities are increased for longer telomeres. Given a constant shortening rate for all

telomeres (Fig. 2), the telomere set-length will thus be increased at equilibrium. This

mechanism also explains the previously puzzling observation that tethering of the Sir4 protein

to a specific telomere will cause lengthening exclusively of that particular telomere in *cis* [38].

Other telomeres also deviate from the mean of all telomeres (Supp. Fig. 1 and [17]), but so

far, it remains unclear whether their regulation is based on the mechanism described here or

additional mechanisms exist to regulate end-specific equilibrium telomere lengths.

Taken together, our results document a mechanism for how the equilibrium set-length of

telomeric repeats can be determined by specific subtelomeric chromatin in *cis* and thus lead

to a telomere-specific length homeostasis. Recent data indicates that in human cells,

telomeres also have chromosome end-specific set lengths [14,15]. For humans, telomere length

is a critical and limiting parameter for the number of cell divisions that can occur. For example,

very short telomeres lose their full capping function and are sensed by a telomere-specific

DNA damage response that induces cellular senescence [6,39]. Moreover, inappropriate

telomere lengths are associated with cancer development. Chromosome end-specific length

differences predict distinct telomeres may be the first to be sensed as dysfunctional, which

will have important implications for aging and cancer.

METHODS:

<u>Strains and plasmids</u>

All strains are derivatives of W3749 *MATa*, a *RAD5*-corrected W303 strain [40] unless otherwise noted. The genotypes of the strains used in this study are described in Supplemental Table 1.

To delete Sir genes, we constructed GTY11, 12, and 13. These strains were obtained by a one-step replacement of the *SIR1, SIR2* and *SIR3* genes with a KanMX6 cassette. To delete *RAD52* we constructed JNY301 and JNY302 by a one-step replacement of *RAD52* with a *LEU2* cassette in W303 *MATa* and *MATα* [41].

For the anchor away system we constructed AHY001 and AHY005 strains from KLY18 strain by C-terminal tagging of *EST1* and *EST3* genes respectively by one-step PCR-mediated technique. The FRB::KanMX6 cassettes used for C-terminal tagging of Est1 and Est3 were obtained from amplification of pLK2 plasmid with primers Est1_CterTag_F and Est1_CterTag_R and Est3_CterTag_F and Est3_CterTag_R (Supplemental Table 2).

For the TEL03L X-element swap we constructed GTY26 and GTY27. GTY26 was constructed by transforming W303 *MATa* [41] with a plasmid containing TEL03L subtelomeric region, Tel03L X-element and telomeric repeats with a *LEU2* flanked by RS site (T3TD plasmid digested with NsiI/Eco53kI). After, the *LEU2* selection marker was recombined out obtaining the final strain. GTY27 was constructed by transforming W303 *MATa* WT with a plasmid containing TEL03L subtelomeric region, TEL01L X-element and telomeric repeats with a *LEU2* flanked by RS sites (pAH01 digested with NsiI/Eco53kI) that was recombined out to obtain the final strain.

For the deletion of *HML* and *HMR* loci, we constructed GTY02, GTY19 and GTY20. GTY02 was obtained by transformation of W3749A with pJH2039 [42] digested with HindIII-HF. GTY19 and GTY20 were obtained by transformation of W3749A with PCR fragments (primers Hml-F and R and Hmr-F and R (Supplemental Table 2) from plasmids pGT02 and pGT03 respectively.

For the deletion of the Ku stem of Tlc1 in W3749A strain, we constructed GTY10. Plasmid pRS306-tlc1Δ48 digested with BsrGI was used for the integration and then, PCR was used to select correct recombination. For expression of Yku80 and Yku80-L140A, EPY129 strain was

transformed with the pJP7c plasmid (*YKU80-Mycx2-Hisx10*, CEN, *TRP1*) and pJP7C-L140A

[43].

To construct *tbf-453* (ELY268-6b), site-directed mutagenesis primers (Supplemental Table 2)

were designed to introduce the desired amino acid substitution into the pRS304-TBF1::NatMX

plasmid which was then digested to obtain the desired fragment for integrating *tbf1-453* allele

in the TBF1 locus to create a heterozygous diploid. Then, the strain was microdissected to

obtain haploid strains. CLY05, CLY06 and GTY28 were obtained by a one-step replacement

of the *SIR2, SIR3* and *SIR4* genes with a KanMX6 cassette in *tbf1-453* strains. Strain GTY31

was obtained by a one-step replacement of the *RPD3* gene with a *TRP1* cassette.

To do the W37492RS Telo-swap (TEL03L-TEL15L telomere swap) we constructed EDY10.

We started by constructing EDY06 (RS-URA3-RS was added 16.8 kb away from the

telomeric repeats of TEL03L-W3749α) and EDY07 (RS-URS3-RS was added 13.5 kb away

from the telomeric repeats of TEL15L-W3749a). The URA3 flanked by RS sites was

recombined out to obtain the final strains. These strains were mated, recombination was

induced, and the strains were finally microdissected to obtain haploid strains.

Strains containing the *tbf1-453* and *sir4-myc* alleles were constructed by mating W3749 *tbf1-*

453 with a *SIR4-Myc* W303 (JC3433 W303 *MATa* with *SIR4-13Myc::KanMX*) [44]. Then strains

were microdissected to obtain haploid strains.

Yeast strains obtained were verified by PCR followed by sequencing or Southern blot. Unless

specified differently, in all experiments, yeast cells were grown at 30°C with constant agitation

in standard conditions (YEP or YC media with appropriate carbon sources).

Plasmids are described in Supplemental Table 3 and all plasmids used were verified by

sequencing.

T3TD was obtained by Gibson Assembly to be able to insert the subtelomere of TEL03L,

LEU2 flanked by R-sites and the X-element of TEL03L into the NsiI-NotI sites of pRS303.

Then, telomeric repeats were inserted into the NruI-NotI sites of the new plasmid.

pAH01 was obtained by replacing X-element of TEL03L with X-element of TEL01L in T3TD

(NcoI-NotI sites).

pGT01 and pGT02 were constructed by Gibson assembly by adding HML or HMR flanking

sequences with the *TRP1* marker to a pRS303 plasmid.

pEP21 was constructed by ligating pJP7C (NotI digested) with the NotI digested fragment of

pB3 [45].

<u>DNA isolation and Southern blotting</u>

DNA was extracted using a standard phenol–chloroform procedure [46]. An appropriate quantity

of digested DNA, ranging from 0.5 µg to 1 µg, was separated on 0.7% TBE (1 x) agarose

gels, transferred onto a BrightStar™-Plus Positively Charged Nylon Membrane (Invitrogen)

and hybridized to specific ^{32}P-labelled radioactive probes. Specific probes (TEL03L, TEL15L)

to one chromosomal end were obtained by genomic DNA PCR-based amplification using

specific primers followed by amplicon purification on gel and random priming labeling

procedure [47]. Sequences of primers used to amplify a specific chromosomal end are depicted

in Supplemental Table 2. As a telomeric repeat probe, a 300-bp fragment containing 280-bp

TG repeats derived from pYLPV was radiolabelled using a random priming labeling procedure

[48]. Data were visualized with a Typhoon FLA9000 apparatus. When necessary, membranes

were stripped by boiling in 0.1% SDS and left at room temperature for 30 min and

rehybridized with other radioactive probes. Data analysis GelAnalyzer software was used to

determine the size of each detectable fragment.

Pulsed field gels were run using a BioRad CHEF-DR II system. Full-length chromosomal DNA

was prepared according to the manufacturer's instructions. DNA was subjected to

electrophoresis at 14°C in a 1% agarose gel in 0.5 x TBE for 24 hours at 200 volts with switch

times ramping from 60 seconds to 120 seconds.

Following electrophoresis, the gel was stained with 1 µg/ml ethidium bromide and

photographed, then the chromosomal DNA was fragmented by exposure to 60 mJoules of

254 nm irradiation. The DNA was transferred to a Nytran SuPerCharge membrane using a

Whatman Turboblotter. Transfer was performed according to the alkaline method described

by the manufacturer.

TeloPCR

We modified the protocol based on Zubko *et al.* 2016 [49]. For the terminal transferase-
mediated tailing of genomic DNA, we used 60 ng of genomic DNA in a volume of 10 μL and
the DNA was denatured at 95°C for 5 min in a thermal cycler and cooled on ice. Then, 40 μL
of transferase reaction mix was added to make total volume 50 μl. The transferase reaction
mix contained 1X transferase buffer, 0.25 mM $CoCl_2$, 0.2 mM dCTP and 2 U of terminal
transferase (New England Biolabs). The mix was incubated at 37°C for 30 min, and then the
enzyme was heat inactivated at 70°C for 10 min at. After heat inactivation, the tailing
reactions were used in PCR.

PCRs for amplification of chromosomal termini were performed on tailed DNA in 20 μL using
GoTaq® Long PCR master Mix (Promega). PCR mix included 10 μL of GoTaq® Long PCR
master Mix, 0.5 M of a subtelomeric specific region, 1 M of a G tail primer (Supplemental
Table 2) and 1 μL of C-tailed genomic DNA. PCR conditions were the following:

95 °C - 2 min, and then 40 cycles at 95 °C - 20 s, 65 °C - 30 s, 65 °C - 2 min with final
extension at 72 °C for 10 min. PCR reactions were carried out in 0.2 mL tubes (VWR) using
Bio Rad T-100 Thermal Cycler. After PCR a 1.2% TBE 0.5X gel was run overnight at 40 volts.

Nanopore sequencing

High molecular weight genomic DNA extraction from BY4741 WT [50] and BY4741 *sir3Δ* cells
and DNA molecular end tagging were done according to Sholes *et al.* 2021 [17].
Nanopore library preparation of 1μg input DNA with a molecular tag was performed using the
Native barcoding genomic DNA kit (Oxford Nanopore Technologies EXP-NBD104 and SQK-
LSK109). Samples were run on a MinION flow cell (v.9.4.1) for 24 to 72 hours and were
operated using the MinKNOW software (v.19.2.2). Only reads with barcodes on both ends
were selected to pass.

To analyze individual telomere lengths from nanopore sequencing, software has been
developed and the code is hosted on GitHub (https://github.com/jflucier/E2EAssembler). The
first step allows genome assembly from Nanopore sequencing data for each strain. We

divided the sequencing reads into different parts, each with a total genome coverage of

approximately 60X. We used Canu assembly software to individually assemble each different

part. The produced assemblies were then merged [51]. The second step consists of the

annotation of subtelomeres, telomeric repeats, and telotag on the assembled genome. The

third step consists of the extraction of length value of telomeric tracts for each read from the

different chromosome ends. Data representation was done using R software.

<u>Anchor away system</u>

We modified the protocol based on Haruki *et al.* 2008 [27]. Senescence assays of anchor-away

strains have been performed with 2 WT clones, 3 independent clones of EST1-FRB and 3

clones of EST3-FRB. YEPD supplemented with rapamycin at 1 µg/ml final (YEPD +

Rapamycin) was freshly made daily. After an overnight pre-culture in YEPD, cells were diluted

at 0.04×10^7 cells/ml in YEPD + Rapamycin. After 24 hours, OD_{660} was measured, and cells

were diluted to 0.04×10^7 cells/ml in YEPD + Rapamycin. Population doublings were

calculated using OD_{660} measurements converted to cells/ml using a standardized chart. The

process was repeated each day for 14 days and for each day, the remaining cells were

pelleted, and DNA was extracted.

<u>Chromatin immunoprecipitation and qPCR</u>

Chromatin immunoprecipitation experiments were performed as previously described [52] with

minor modifications. Briefly, 100mL cultures per ChIP were grown at 30 °C to OD_{600nm} 0.5–

0.8. Cells were cross-linked with 1% formaldehyde for 10 min. After stopping the cross-link

reaction and washes, cells were lysed in 500 µL ChIP lysis buffer (50 mM HEPES–KOH pH

7.5, 140 mM NaCl, 1 mM EDTA pH 8.0, 1% Triton X-100, 0.1% Na-deoxycholate, 1 mM

PMSF) with glass beads using a FastPrep (MP Biomedicals). Following sonication, 500 µL of

whole cell extract (WCE) was incubated overnight at 4°C with 2 µg anti-*c*-myc antibodies

(mouse monoclonal, clone 9E10, Roche) for immunoprecipitation of myc-tagged proteins. The

next day, 50 µL equilibrated Pierce protein A/G magnetic beads (Thermo Fisher Scientific)

were added for a 2 hour incubation at 4 °C. The purified immunoprecipitated and input DNAs

were diluted and subjected to qPCR using appropriate primers (Supplementary Table 2) and

PerfeCTa SYBR Green SuperMix (Quantabio, 95054-02K).

The percent input method was used to analyze qPCR signals. Briefly, the input signal

was adjusted to 100% using the formula: Ct Input - log2 of dilution factor. The ΔCq was

calculated using: Ct IP - adjusted Ct input. The percent input was then calculated using the

formula:

$\% \text{ input} = 2^{-[Ct(IP)]-[Ct(input)-log2(\text{dilution factor})]} \times 100$

qPCR reactions were performed in technical triplicates for 3 independent biological cultures.

The mean, standard deviation and statistics for independent biological replicates are reported.

<u>Total RNA sequencing</u>

For total RNA extractions, 10 mL of yeast cells were grown to approximately OD_{600} 0.8,

washed, resuspended in 500 μL LETS buffer and lysed by glass beads. Samples were

extracted twice with phenol/chloroform/isoamyl alcohol (25:24:1) and once with

chloroform/isoamyl alcohol (24:1). RNA was precipitated with 30 μL 3M NaOAc and 1 ml cold

100% ethanol. Samples were washed with 70% EtOH, dried, and resuspended in 20 μL of

nuclease-free water and quantified. RNA integrity was assessed with an Agilent 2100

Bioanalyzer (Agilent Technologies). Libraries were quantified and subjected to RNA-

sequencing by Illumina PE100bp Hiseq 4000.

<u>Statistics and reproducibility</u>

GraphPad prism was used to perform all statistical analyses. Statistical differences of mean

values of measurements were determined by two-tailed unpaired Student t test. Significance

was denoted as ns for not significant, ∗ for $p < 0.05$, ∗∗ for $p < 0.01$, ∗∗∗ for $p < 0.001$.

DATA AVAILABILITY

- The complete numerical values for all telomere length determinations by Southern blotting reported in this paper will be shared by the lead contact upon request. The dataset on the whole genome raw sequencing reads generated in this study has been submitted to the NCBI BioProject database under accession number PRJNA1088003. The Illumina RNA-seq data have been submitted to the NCBI BioProject database under accession number PRJNA1099244.

- This original code/software for determining individual telomere lengths from nanopore sequencing, E2EAssembler, is hosted on GitHub and publicly available (https://github.com/jflucier/E2EAssembler).

- Any additional information required to reanalyze the data reported in this paper is available from the lead contact upon request.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

GMT and EP performed all biochemical and *in vivo* experiments; EB, EDL and LB contributed strain constructions, ChIP and RNA seq experiments; J-FL wrote scripts for nanopore sequencing analyses; DSD performed the pulsed field gels; RJW study conception, design and financing. RJW wrote and edited the manuscript with input of all co-authors.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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FIGURE LEGENDS:

Figure 1: The long telomere set length on TEL03L is dependent on the SIR-proteins.
a. Southern blot of DNA derived from W3749A WT, *sir1Δ* (GTY11), *sir2Δ* (GTY12), *sir3Δ* (GTY13) and *sir4Δ* (EPY031) cells, digested with PvuII and probed with a telomeric repeat fragment. *b*. Southern blot of the same DNA as in *a,* but digested with the XhoI enzyme. *c*. Quantified telomeric tract lengths from *a* of TEL03L, TEL11L and TEL06R are plotted with respect of the genotype (ns for difference not significant, ∗ for p < 0.05 and ∗∗ for p < 0.01, ∗∗∗ for p < 0.001, t-test). *d.* Quantification as in *c.*, but for the blot in *b.* with the Y'-telomeres and TEL06R. *e.* Southern blot of DNA derived from W3749A WT, *hmlΔ::TRP1* (GTY19), and *hmrΔ::TRP1* cells, digested with PvuII and probed with a telomeric repeat fragment. *f.* Southern blot of the same DNA as in *e,* but digested with the XhoI enzyme. *g.* Quantification of the telomeric repeat tract lengths on TEL03L in WT, *hmlΔ::TRP1,* and *hmrΔ::TRP1* cells. ∗ for p < 0.05, t-test.

Figure 2: Long telomere set length regulation is dependent on the telomerase pathway.
a. Southern blot with DNA derived from three clones of W3749A, four clones of *rad52Δ MATa*, two clones of *rad52Δ MATα* and one clone of W3749α. DNA was digested with PvuII and probed with a telomeric repeat fragment. TEL03L, TEL11L and TEL06R telomeric repeat tract lengths are indicated on right. (ns for difference not significant, t-test). *b.* Initial telomeric tract lengths for 3 clones of Est3-FRB are shown for TEL03L, TEL06R, TEL11R and Y'-telomeres. *c*. Changing telomeric tract lengths of TEL11R, TEL06R and Y'-telomeres during culture outgrowth (14 days or indicated population doublings) of Est3-FRB cells. *d*. Same as *c.* but for TEL03L. *e*. Calculated telomeric repeat loss rates (in bp/population doublings; bp/PDs) for Est1-FRB and Est3-FRB strains are tabled for TEL03L, TEL11R, TEL06R and Y'-telomeres. (ns for difference not significant, t-test).

Figure 3: Telomere set length regulation can be moved to another telomere.
a. Southern blot and telomeric tract lengths of Tel03L-03L cells (GTY26), Tel03L-1L cells (GTY27) and WT cells with DNA digested with HindIII and probed with a TEL03L unique

probe. *b*. Quantified telomeric tract lengths (TEL03L) of the blot shown in *a*. (ns for difference not significant, t-test). *c*. Southern blot of DNA derived from 3 independent clones of W37492RS No-swap cells, and from 6 independent clones in which the distal parts of TEL03L and TEL15L were swapped (W37492RS Telo-swap; see Suppl. Fig. 3 for details), digested with the XhoI restriction enzyme and probed with two unique probes for TEL03L and TEL15L. Lane far right: DNA from W3749 WT cells before RS site integrations. *d*. Quantified telomeric tract lengths of TEL03L on chromosome III (TEL03L) or on chromosome XV (ChrXV-TEL03L) as well as TEL15L on chromosome XV (TEL15L) and on chromosome III (ChrIII-TEL15L).

Figure 4: Long set-length on TEL03L depends on telomerase recruitment via the Sir4-yKu-Tlc1 axis.

a. Left: Southern blot of DNA derived from W3749A WT cells, cells harboring the *tlc1Δ48* allele (GTY10), cells harboring the *hmlΔ::URA3* allele (GTY02), or cells with a *sir4Δ* allele (EPY031). DNA was digested with PvuII and hybridized to a telomeric repeat fragment. Right: Southern blot as on left, but with W3749A WT cells, cells with a *yku80Δ* allele (EPY129), EPY129 cells in which the *yku80Δ* allele is complemented by a plasmid-borne WT *YKU80* (indicated as p*YKU80*; strain GTY23) and EPY129 cells in which the *yku80Δ* allele is complemented by a plasmid-borne *yku80-L140A* allele (indicated as p*yku80-L140A*; strain GTY24). Bands labeled with an * are new recombinant X-telomere bands, but not TEL03L (see Supplmental Fig. 4a). *b.* Quantified telomeric tract lengths of TEL03L, TEL11L, TEL06R, and Y'-telomeres are plotted on the graph vs the indicated genotypes (ns for not significant, ∗ for p < 0.05, t-test). Southern blots for the data are in Fig. 4a, Suppl. Fig. 4a, b)

Figure 5: A boundary element mutation causes Sir-dependent telomere elongation.

a. Southern blot of DNA from W3749A WT cells, cells with the *tbf1-453* allele (ELY268-6b), cells with both the *tbf1- 453 and sir2Δ* alleles (CLY05), cells with both the *tbf1-453 and sir3Δ* alleles (CLY06), cells with both the *tbf1-453 and sir4Δ* alleles (GTY28). DNAs were digested with PvuII and probed with a telomeric repeat fragment. *b.* The telomeric tract lengths of TEL03L, TEL11L andTEL06R from the gel in *a* were quantified and plotted on the graph vs the indicated genotype (ns for not significant, ∗ for p < 0.05 and ∗∗ for p < 0.01, t-test).

Figure 6: Rpd3 is not involved in telomere set-length regulation.

a. Southern blot of DNA from W3749A WT cells, cells with the *rpd3Δ* allele (GTY31), cells with the *tbf1-453* allele (ELY268-6b), and cells with the *sir4Δ* allele (EPY031). The DNA was digested with XhoI (left part), or PvuII (right part) and hybridized to a telomeric repeat fragment. *b.* The quantified telomeric tract lengths of TEL03L, TEL11L and TEL06R vs the indicated genotypes are plotted ($*$ for $p < 0.05$, $**$ for $p < 0.01$ and $***$ for $p < 0.001$, t-test).

Figure 2

a

kb

GTY26 TEL03L-3L   GTY27 TEL03L-1L   W303 TEL03Lwt

M

3.0

2.0

1.5

HindIII digested DNA

b

TEL03 tract lengths (bp)

ns
ns   ns

420   451   466

TEL03L-3L   TEL03L-1L   TEL03wt

c

W37492RS *No-swap*   W37492RS *Telo-swap*   W3749 WT

clone 1 2 3   1 2 3 4 5   6

kb

TEL03L

TEL15L

XhoI digested DNA

d

Strain	Telo.	Mean +/- SD	n
W37492RS *No-swap*	**TEL03L**	501 ± 29.51	3
W37492RS *Telo-swap*	**ChrXV-TEL03L**	651.4 ± 59.32	5
W37492RS *No-swap*	**TEL15L**	294.7 ± 15.04	3
W37492RS *Telo-swap*	**ChrIII-TEL15L**	356.6 ± 16.10	5

a

PvuII digested DNA

b

a

PvuII digested DNA

b

Figure 6

a

Strain: W3749A GTY31 ELY268-6b EPY031   W3749A GTY31 ELY268-6b EPY031
       WT   rpd3Δ tbf1-453 sir4Δ   WT   rpd3Δ tbf1-453 sir4Δ

11R
6R

17 Y'
Telos

XhoI digested DNA   PvuII digested DNA

3L

11L

6R

b