

Original Paper

# Sodium Fluoride Arrests Renal G2/M Phase Cell-Cycle Progression by Activating ATM-Chk2-P53/Cdc25C Signaling Pathway in Mice

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## Key Words

Sodium fluoride • G2/M phase arrest • ATM-Chk2-p53/Cdc25C signaling pathway • Proliferation • Kidney • Mice

## Abstract

**Background/Aims:** Excessive fluoride intake can induce cytotoxicity, DNA damage and cell-cycle changes in many tissues and organs, including the kidney. However, the underlying molecular mechanisms of fluoride-induced renal cell-cycle changes are not well understood at present. In this study, we used a mouse model to investigate how sodium fluoride (NaF) induces cell-cycle changes in renal cells. **Methods:** Two hundred forty ICR mice were randomly assigned to four equal groups for intragastric administration of NaF (0, 12, 24 and 48 mg/kg body weight/day) for 42 days. Kidneys were taken to measure changes of the cell-cycle at 21 and 42 days of the experiment, using flow cytometry, quantitative real-time polymerase chain reaction (qRT-PCR) and western blot methods. **Results:** NaF, at more than 12 mg/kg body weight, induced G2/M phase cell-cycle arrest in the renal cells, which was supported by the finding of significantly increased percentages of renal cells in the G2/M phase. We found also that G2/M phase cell-cycle arrest was accompanied by up-regulation of p-ATM, p-Chk2, p-p53, p-Cdc25C, p-CDK1, p21, and Gadd45a protein expression levels; up-regulation of ATM, Chk2, p53, p21, and Gadd45a mRNA expression levels; down-regulation of CyclinB1, mdm2, PCNA protein expression levels; and down-regulation of CyclinB1, CDK1, Cdc25C, mdm2, and PCNA mRNA expression levels. **Conclusion:** In this mouse model, NaF, at more than 12 mg/kg, induced G2/M phase cell-cycle arrest by activating the ATM-Chk2-p53/Cdc25C signaling

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pathway, which inhibits the proliferation of renal cells and development of the kidney. Activation of the ATM-Chk2-p53/Cdc25C signaling pathway is the mechanism of NaF-induced renal G2/M phase cell-cycle arrest in this model.

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## Introduction

Fluoride is a ubiquitous ingredient of drinking water, foodstuffs, medicines and dental products [1, 2], and it is widely used in a variety of industrial practices, such as the production of phosphoric acid, phosphate fertilizers, ceramics, aluminum, steel, and brick [3]. Moreover, NaF is a useful phosphatase inhibitor. According to World Health Organization guidelines, the recommended concentration of fluoride in drinking water is 1.0 mg/L, and the upper limit is 1.5 mg/L [4]. Especially high fluoride concentrations in nature have been found in India, Mexico, Turkey, North Africa and China (Yunnan, Gui zhou) [5]. Excessive fluoride intake can cause dental and skeletal fluorosis in animals and humans [6, 7] as well as structural and functional changes in soft tissues, including brain [8-10], thymus [11, 12], liver [13-15], heart [11, 16], lung [17], spleen [18-21], intestine [22, 23], cecal tonsil [24, 25], reproductive organs [26] and the bursa of Fabricius [27]. As the major organ involved in retention and excretion of fluoride, the kidney is sensitive to fluoride toxicity [28]. And previous studies have demonstrated that high doses of fluoride can induce cytotoxicity, lipid peroxidation, DNA damage, apoptosis and cell-cycle changes in the kidney [29, 30].

The cell-cycle is a complex process that participates in the growth and proliferation of cells, development of organisms, regulation of DNA damage repair, and diseases such as cancer [31]. The divisions of the standard cell-cycle are G1 (cell prepares for DNA synthesis), S (cell is synthesizing DNA), G2 (cell prepares for mitosis), and mitosis (M) phases [32]. Cells in the G1 phase can enter a resting state called the G0 phase, which usually indicates potential for cell division. Cell transition from one cell-cycle phase to another occurs in an orderly fashion and is regulated by cell-cycle-regulating proteins, such as the cyclin proteins and cyclin-dependent kinases (CDKs) [33]. Checkpoints also exist in the cell-cycle to ensure correct cell-cycle progression. Cell-cycle checkpoints are mainly positioned before the cell enters S phase (G1/S checkpoint), after DNA replication (G2/M checkpoint) or during S phase (S checkpoint) [34]. In response to DNA damage, cell-cycle checkpoints arrest the cell-cycle progression to provide more time for DNA repair [35]. The prolonged cell-cycle arrest disrupts the balance between cell proliferation and cell death, and ultimately results in cellular growth arrest or death [36]. Bai et al. [37] have reported that excessive sodium fluoride (NaF) intake can induce G0/G1 phase cell-cycle arrest of renal cells in chickens. Also, NaF, at the dose of 50 mg/L, reduced the number of rat renal cells in G2/M phase [38], and excessive NaF induced loss of control in proliferation of rat renal cells by disturbing the G1/S and G2/M phase [39]. However, there are inconsistencies in these reports about the effects of fluoride on the renal cell-cycle.

The cell-cycle is controlled by numerous mechanisms that ensure correct cell division. Ataxia-telangiectasia-mutated (ATM), as a sensor of DNA damage, plays an important role in cell proliferation and DNA repair [40]. Recent studies have reported that ATM-dependent signaling pathways participate in the regulation of multiple cell-cycle checkpoints, and the activation of ATM-dependent signaling pathways can induce the expression of many genes that are involved in cellular functions, such as cell-cycle arrest, DNA repair, or apoptosis [40]. However, there are no studies on the molecular mechanisms of fluoride-induced renal cell-cycle changes in animals and humans.

In this study, we first used a mouse model to investigate, by flow cytometry, the effects of fluoride on the cell-cycle in renal cells. We then explored the underlying molecular mechanisms of NaF-induced renal cell-cycle changes by measuring protein expression levels of phosphor-ATM (p-ATM, Ser-1981), p-checkpoint kinase 2 (p-Chk2, Thr-68), p-p53 (Ser-15), p21, growth arrest and DNA-damage-inducible protein 45 alpha (Gadd45a), Cyclin B<sub>1</sub>, p-CDK1 (Tyr-15), p-cell division cyclin 25C (p-Cdc25C, Ser-216), murine double minute 2

(mdm2) and proliferating cell nuclear antigen (PCNA) with western blot; and by measuring mRNA expression levels of ATM, Chk2, p53, p21, Gadd45a, Cyclin B<sub>1</sub>, CDK1, Cdc25C, mdm2 and PCNA with quantitative real-time polymerase chain reaction (qRT-PCR).

## Materials and Methods

### *Chemicals and sources*

NaF was obtained from Chengdu Kelong Chemical Co., Ltd. (Chengdu, China). RNAiso Plus, Prim-Script™ RT reagent Kit and SYBR® Premix Ex Taq™ II were supplied by Takara Biotechnology (Dalian) Co., Ltd. (Dalian, Liaoning, China). Radio-immunoprecipitation Assay (RIPA) lysis buffer (P0013C), phenylmethylsulfonyl fluoride (PMSF, ST506), and Bicinchoninic acid Protein Assay Kit (P0012) were obtained from Beyotime Biotechnology, China. Mouse p-ATM (651201) was supplied by Biologend Inc. (Biologend, CA, USA). P-Cdc25C (orb304716) was purchased from Biorbyt, UK. Cyclin B<sub>1</sub> (4138), p-p53 (9284), p-CDK1 (9111), PCNA (13110), β-actin (4970), anti-rabbit IgG (7074) and anti-mouse IgG (7076) were obtained from Cell Signaling Technology, USA. P-Chk2 (bs-3721R) was purchased from Bioss Biotechnology, Inc. (Bioss, Beijing, China). Mdm2 (ab178938) was purchased from Abcam, UK. P21 (BA0272) was supplied by Boster Biological Technology Co., Ltd (Boster, Wuhan, China). Gadd45a was obtained from Absin Bioscience Inc. (Absin, Shanghai, China). Other chemicals, including 75% ethanol, 100% ethanol, isopropyl alcohol and chloroform, were of analytical grade.

### *Experimental animals and treatment*

One hundred twenty male and one hundred twenty female four-week-old ICR mice were obtained from Chengdu Dossy Experimental Animals Co., Ltd [License No. SCXK (Sichuan) 2008-24]. and housed in separate cages. All animals were allowed access to diet and water *ad libitum* throughout the experimental period. After one week of acclimatization, animals were randomized into four groups of 60 animals each for 42 days. Control group (untreated) animals were given distilled water by gastric gavage (1ml/100g body weight). Groups I, II and III were given NaF by gastric gavage (1ml/100g body weight) at the dose of 12, 24 and 48 mg/kg body weight, respectively.

All experimental procedures involving the use of mice were approved by the Animal Care and Use Committee of Sichuan Agricultural University.

### *Determination of viscera index of the kidney*

At 21 and 42 days of the experiment, the body weight and kidney weight of four male and four female mice in each group were recorded. Viscera index of the kidney was calculated by the formula: Viscera index = kidney weight (g)/ body weight (kg).

### *Determination of cell-cycle phase changes in the kidney by flow cytometry*

At 21 and 42 days of the experiment, kidneys of four male and four female mice from each group were taken to measure the renal cell-cycle by flow cytometry. Kidneys were crushed, filtered with 300-mesh nylon membrane, centrifuged (600 × g, 5 min), and adjusted to a cell density of 1.0×10<sup>6</sup> cells/mL with phosphate-buffered saline (PBS, pH 7.2-7.4). Then 500 μL cell suspensions were transferred to culture tubes and centrifuged (600 × g, 5 min) once more. The supernatant was decanted, and cells were incubated at room temperature in the dark (30 min) with 0.25% Triton X-100 and propidium iodide (51-66211E, BD, USA). Finally, 500 μL of PBS were added to each tube, and stained cells were analyzed with BD FACS Calibur flow cytometer within 45 min. The results were analyzed by use of the Mod Fit LT for Mac V3.0 computer program.

### *Determination of cell-cycle regulatory molecule mRNA expression levels in the kidney by qRT-PCR*

At 21 and 42 days of the experiment, four male and four female mice from each group were sacrificed, and the kidneys were removed immediately. The kidneys were homogenized in liquid nitrogen for RNA extraction. Total RNA was extracted with RNAiso Plus (9109; Takara, China), according to the manufacturer's protocols. The cDNA was synthesized with a Prim-Script™ RT reagent Kit (RR047A, Takara, China) according to the manufacturer's instructions. Information of genes was acquired from the National Center for

Biotechnology Information, and primers were designed and synthesized by Sangon (Shanghai, China).  $\beta$ -actin, a house-keeping gene, was used as an internal control. The accession number, sequence, product size and  $T_m$  ( $^{\circ}$ C) of the primers are listed in Table 1. The mRNA expression levels of ATM, Chk2, p53, p21, Gadd45a, Cyclin B<sub>1</sub>, CDK1, Cdc25C, mdm2 and PCNA were determined with SYBR® Premix Ex Taq™II (RR820A, Takara, China) according to the manufacturer's instructions. The results of qRT-PCR were analyzed with the 2<sup>- $\Delta$ ACT</sup> method [41].

**Table 1.** Primer sequences of genes selected for analysis by qRT-PCR

Target gene	Accession number	Primer	Primer sequence (5'-3')	Product size	$T_m$ ( $^{\circ}$ C)
ATM	NM_007499	Forward	TCCGATATGCCAGTCTTTTCA	117bp	60
		Reverse	CCAGTTCTCCAATTGCGCTGC		
Chk2	NM_016681	Forward	CTCGGCTATGGGCTCTTCAG	131bp	59
		Reverse	CCGGTACTTGTCCGTCTTC		
P53	NM_011640	Forward	AGAGACCGCCGTACAGAAGA	227bp	60
		Reverse	GCATGGGCATCCTTTAACTC		
P21	U24173	Forward	CAAAGTGTGCCGTTGTCTCTT	111bp	61
		Reverse	TCAAAGTTCACCCGTTCTCG		
Gadd45a	NM_007836	Forward	GAAGACCGAAAGGATGGACA	200bp	61
		Reverse	TGAGGGTGAAATGGATCTGC		
Cyclin B1	NM_172301	Forward	TGGCCTGCAGAAAGAGTATC	192bp	59
		Reverse	CCAGTCACTTCACGACCCTG		
CDK1	NM_007659	Forward	TCCGGCTCGTTACTCCACTC	154bp	59
		Reverse	GCCACACTTCGTTGTAGGA		
Cdc25C	NM_009860	Forward	ACAGGACCTATCCAGCTGC	172bp	61
		Reverse	TTAGGTTTGGCGAGTCGTGG		
mdm2	NM_010786	Forward	TGAGTCTATCGGGTCACAG	124bp	61
		Reverse	GGGAGGATTTCATTTTCATTGC		
PCNA	NM_011045	Forward	ATCCAGAACAGGAGTACAGC	92bp	60
		Reverse	ACAGCATCTCCAATGTGGGT		
$\beta$ -actin	NM_007393	Forward	GCTGTGCTATGTGTGCTCTAG	117bp	59
		Reverse	CGCTCGTTGCCAATAGTG		

*Determination of cell-cycle regulatory molecule protein expression levels in the kidney with western blot*

The kidneys used for measuring the mRNA expression levels of ATM, Chk2, p53, p21, Gadd45a, Cyclin B<sub>1</sub>, CDK1, Cdc25C, mdm2 and PCNA were used also for measuring the protein expression levels of p-ATM, p-Chk2, p-p53, p21, Gadd45a, Cyclin B<sub>1</sub>, p-CDK1, p-Cdc25C, mdm2 and PCNA. The kidneys were homogenized in liquid nitrogen with RIPA lysis buffer supplemented with 1 mM PMSF. Protein content of the kidneys was measured with the Bicinchoninic acid Protein Assay Kit. The protein samples were separated by sodium dodecyl sulfate-polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis (SDS-PAGE; 5%-15% gels), with protein standards used as molecular weight markers. After electrophoresis, proteins were transferred to nitrocellulose filter membranes. The membranes were blocked with 5% nonfat-dried milk in phosphate-buffered saline with 0.1% Tween 20 for 1 h and incubated with primary antibodies overnight at 4 $^{\circ}$ C. The primary antibodies were p-ATM (dilution, 1:500; 350 kDa), p-Chk2 (dilution, 1:100; 62 kDa), p-p53 (dilution, 1:1500; 53 kDa), p21 (dilution, 1:200; 21 kDa), Gadd45a (dilution, 1:800; 18 kDa), Cyclin B<sub>1</sub> (dilution, 1:1000; 55 kDa), p-CDK1 (dilution, 1:800; 34 kDa), p-Cdc25C (dilution, 1:500; 53 kDa), mdm2 (dilution, 1:500; 90 kDa) and PCNA (dilution, 1:1000; 29 kDa). After the primary antibodies had been incubated overnight, the membranes were washed three times in phosphate-buffered saline with 0.1% Tween 20 for 10 min, incubated with biotin-conjugated secondary antibodies for 1 h with gentle shaking, and washed again in phosphate-buffered saline with 0.1% Tween 20. Blots were visualized with ECL™ (Bio-Rad, Hercules, CA, USA) and X-ray film. Protein expression was measured with ImageJ2x software.

*Statistical Analysis*

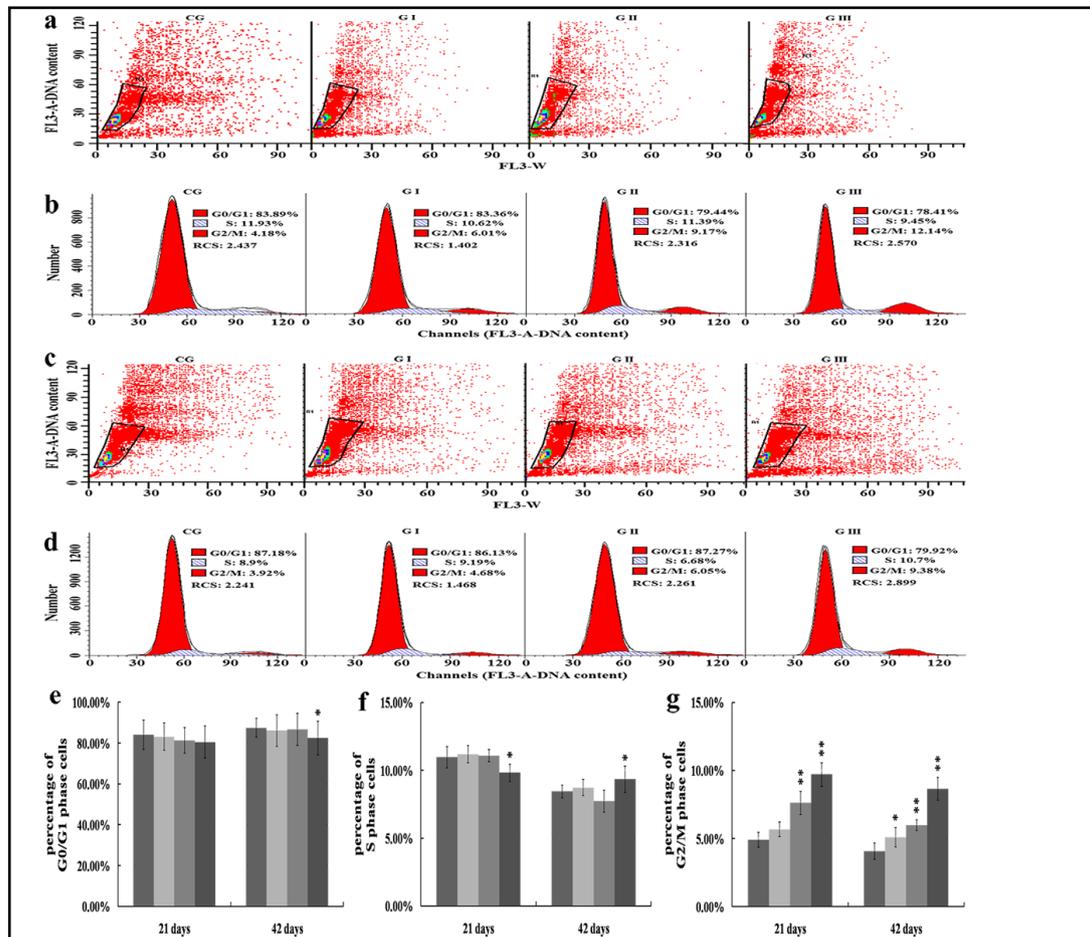
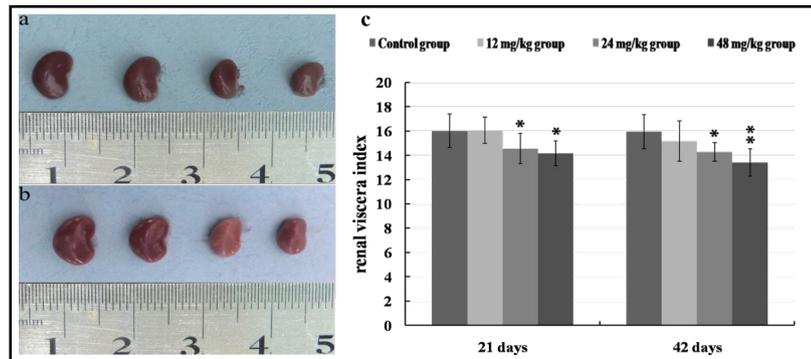
The SPSS 17.0 statistical software package programme for windows was used for variance tests. All results were presented as mean  $\pm$  standard deviation. The significance of difference between the control group and the three experimental groups was analyzed with one-way analysis of variance. Differences were considered statistically significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

**Results**

*Changes of viscera index and volumes of the kidney*

Fig. 1a-b shows that the renal volumes were smaller in the 12, 24 and 48 mg/kg groups at 21 and 42 days of the experiment than those in the control group. As seen in Fig. 1c, the renal viscera index was lower ( $p < 0.01$  or  $p < 0.05$ ) in the 24 and 48 mg/kg groups at 21 and 42 days than those in the control group.

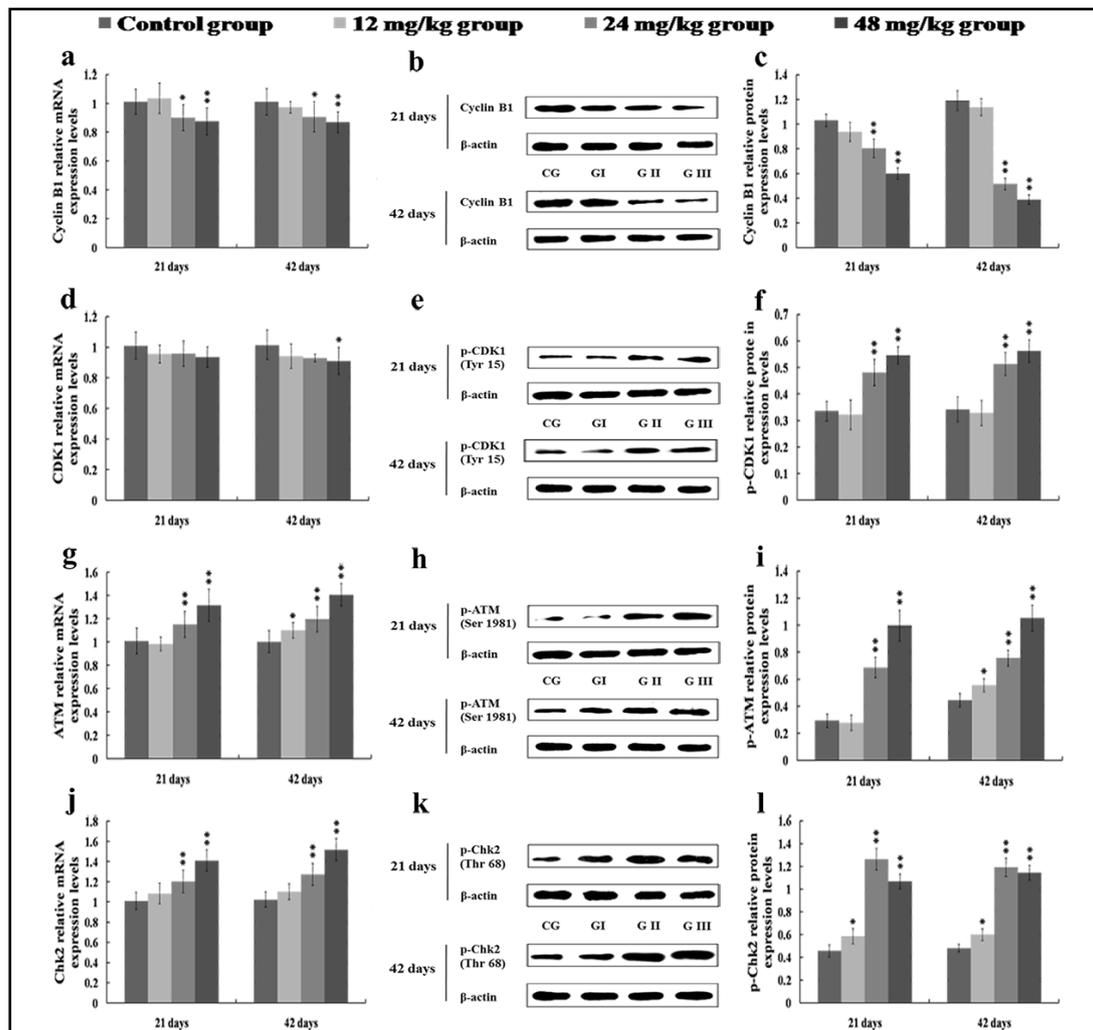
**Fig. 1.** Changes of renal volumes and viscera index at 21 and 42 days of the experiment. a The kidneys at 21 day of the experiment (from left to right are the control group, 12 mg/kg, 24 mg/kg and 48 mg/kg groups). b The kidneys at 42 day of the experiment (from left to right are the control group, 12 mg/kg, 24 mg/kg and 48 mg/kg groups). c Renal viscera index at 21 and 42 days of the experiment. Data are presented with the means  $\pm$  standard deviation (n=8). \*p < 0.05, compared with the control group; \*\*p < 0.01, compared with the control group.



**Fig. 2.** Changes of renal cell-cycle phase distribution in the kidney at 21 and 42 days of the experiment. a-b The diagram of renal cell-cycle phase distribution obtained by flow cytometry at 21 days of the experiment. c-b The diagram of renal cell-cycle phase distribution obtained by flow cytometry at 42 days of the experiment. e The percentages of G0/G1 phase cells. f The percentages of S phase cells. g The percentages of G2/M phase cells. CG: Control group; GI: 12 mg/kg group; GII: 24 mg/kg group; GIII: 48 mg/kg group. Data are presented with the means  $\pm$  standard deviation (n=8). \*p < 0.05, compared with the control group; \*\*p < 0.01, compared with the control group.

*Changes of cell-cycle phase in the kidney*

The percentages of G2/M phase cells were increased ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the 12 mg/kg group at 42 days of the experiment and were significantly increased ( $p < 0.01$ ) in the 24 and 48 mg/kg groups at 21 and 42 days of the experiment in comparison with percentages in the control group. The percentages of G0/G1 phase cells were lower ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the 48 mg/kg group at 42 days of the experiment than in the control group. The percentages of S phase cells were decreased ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the 48 mg/kg group at 21 days and increased ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the 48 mg/kg group at 42 days compared with percentages in the control group. The results are shown in Fig. 2.

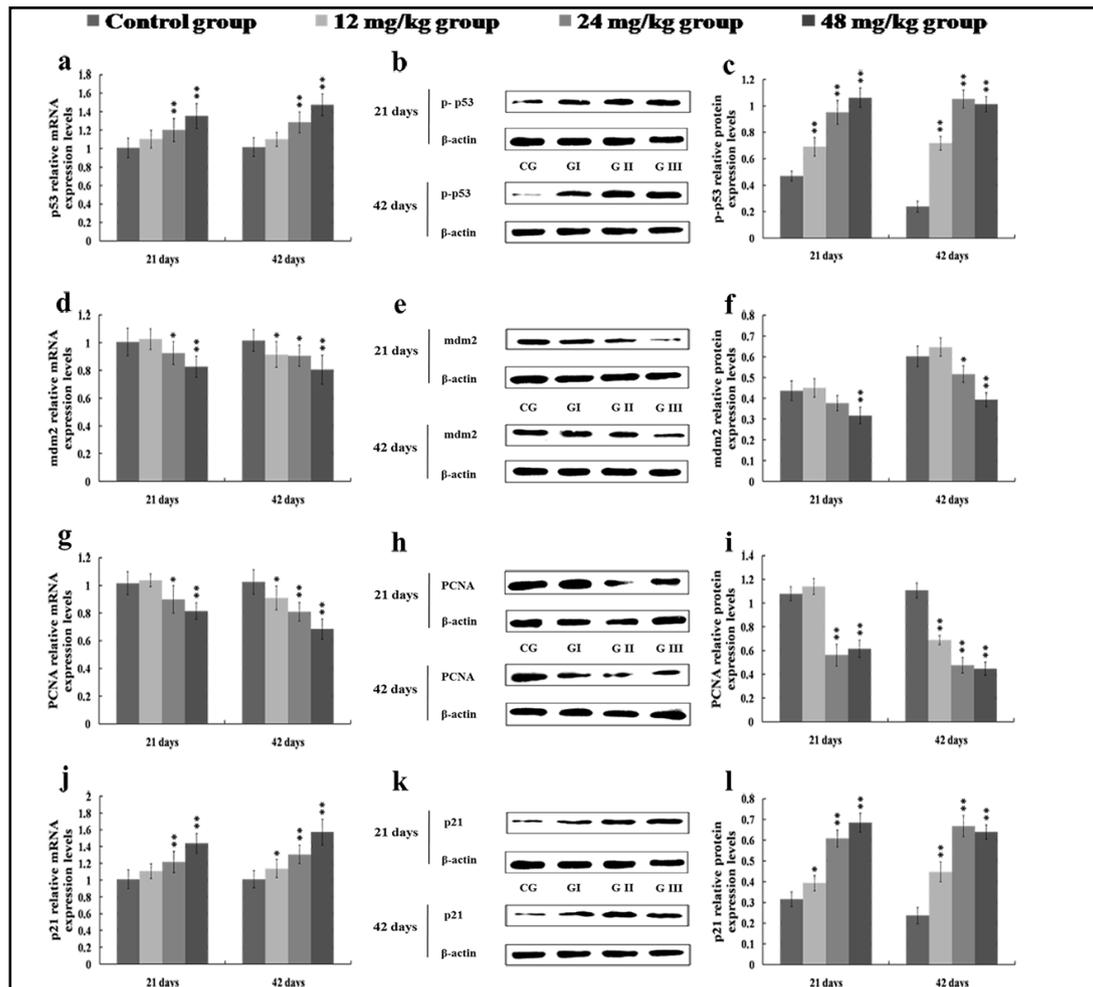


**Fig. 3.** Changes of mRNA and protein expression levels of Cyclin B1, CDK1, ATM, Chk2 in the kidney at 21 and 42 days of the experiment. a The relative mRNA expression levels of Cyclin B1. b The western blot assay of Cyclin B1. c The relative protein expression levels of Cyclin B1. d The relative mRNA expression levels of CDK1. e The western blot assay of p-CDK1. f The relative protein expression levels of p-CDK1. g The relative mRNA expression levels of ATM. h The western blot assay of p-ATM. i The relative protein expression levels of p-ATM. j The relative mRNA expression levels of Chk2. k The western blot assay of p-Chk2. l The relative protein expression levels of p-Chk2. CG: Control group; GI: 12 mg/kg group; GII: 24 mg/kg group; GIII: 48 mg/kg group. Data are presented with the mean  $\pm$  standard deviation ( $n=8$ ), \* $p < 0.05$ , compared with the control group; \*\* $p < 0.01$ , compared with the control group.

*Changes of cell-cycle regulatory molecule mRNA and protein expression levels in the kidney*

The Cyclin B1 mRNA and protein expression levels were lower ( $p < 0.01$  or  $p < 0.05$ ) in the 24 and 48 mg/kg groups at 21 and 42 days of the experiment than in the control group, as shown in Fig. 3a-c. Fig. 3d shows that the CDK1 mRNA expression levels were decreased ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the 48 mg/kg groups at 42 days of the experiment in comparison with those in the control group. The results in Fig. 3e-f shows that the p-CDK1 protein expression levels were higher ( $p < 0.01$ ) in the 24 and 48 mg/kg groups at 21 and 42 days of the experiment than those in the control group.

Fig. 3g-i shows that the ATM mRNA and p-ATM protein expression levels were significantly increased ( $p < 0.01$  or  $p < 0.05$ ) in the 12 mg/kg group at 21 and 42 days of the experiment and in the 24 and 48 mg/kg groups at 21 and 42 days of the experiment compared with those in the control group.



**Fig. 4.** Changes of mRNA and protein expression levels of p53, mdm2, PCNA, p21 in the kidney at 21 and 42 days of the experiment. a The relative mRNA expression levels of p53. b The western blot assay of p-p53. c The relative protein expression levels of p-p53. d The relative mRNA expression levels of mdm2. e The western blot assay of mdm2. f The relative protein expression levels of mdm2. g The relative mRNA expression levels of PCNA. h The western blot assay of PCNA. i The relative protein expression levels of PCNA. j The relative mRNA expression levels of p21. k The western blot assay of p21. l The relative protein expression levels of p21. CG: Control group; GI: 12 mg/kg group; GII: 24 mg/kg group; GIII: 48 mg/kg group. Data are presented with the mean  $\pm$  standard deviation ( $n=8$ ), \* $p < 0.05$ , compared with the control group; \*\* $p < 0.01$ , compared with the control group.

The Chk2 mRNA and p-Chk2 protein expression levels were significantly increased ( $p < 0.01$ ) in the 24 and 48 mg/kg groups at 21 and 42 days of the experiment compared with those in the control group. The p-Chk2 protein expression levels were significantly increased ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the 12 mg/kg groups at 42 days of the experiment compared with those in the control group. The results are shown in Fig. 3j-l.

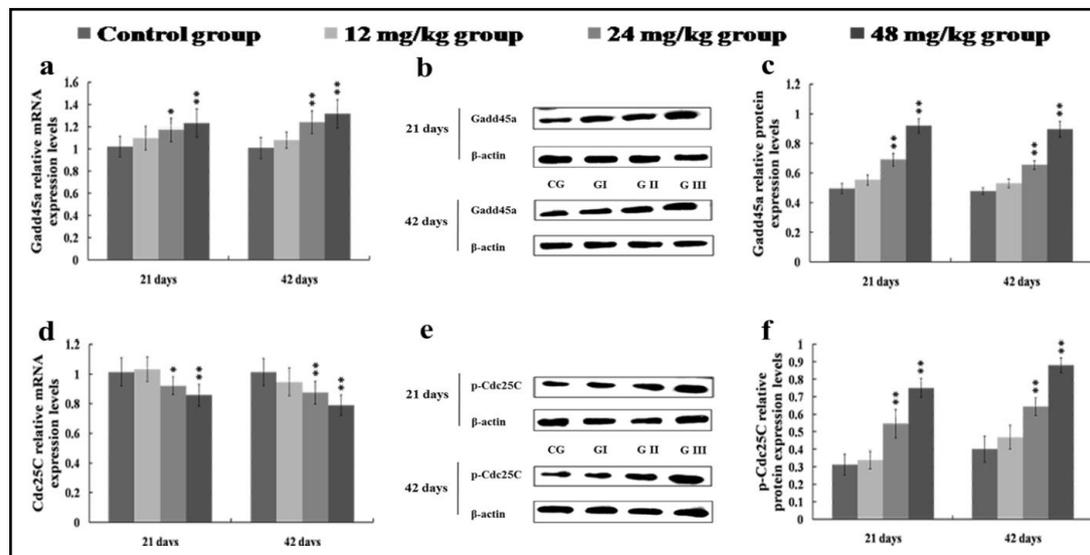
Fig. 4a shows that p53 mRNA expression levels were significantly increased ( $p < 0.01$ ) in the 24 and 48 mg/kg groups at 21 and 42 days of the experiment compared with those in the control group. The p-p53 protein expression levels were significantly increased ( $p < 0.01$ ) in the 12, 24 and 48 mg/kg groups at 21 and 42 days of the experiment compared with those in the control group, as shown in Fig. 4b-c.

The mdm2 mRNA expression levels were decreased ( $p < 0.01$  or  $p < 0.05$ ) in the 12 mg/kg groups at 42 days of the experiment and in the 24 and 48 mg/kg groups at 21 and 42 days compared with those in the control group, as shown in Fig. 4d. Fig. 4e-f shows that the mdm2 protein expression levels were reduced ( $p < 0.01$  or  $p < 0.05$ ) in the 24 mg/kg groups at 42 days of the experiment and in the 48 mg/kg group at 21 and 42 days compared with corresponding levels in the control group.

The results in Fig. 4g-i shows that the PCNA mRNA and protein expression levels were lower ( $p < 0.01$  or  $p < 0.05$ ) in the 12 mg/kg group at 42 days of the experiment and in the 24 and 48 mg/kg groups at 21 and 42 days than those in the control group.

The mRNA expression levels of p21 were significantly higher ( $p < 0.01$  or  $p < 0.05$ ) in the 12 mg/kg groups at 42 days of the experiment and in the 24 and 48 mg/kg groups at 21 and 42 days than those in the control group, as shown in Fig. 4j. Fig. 4k-l shows that the p21 protein expression levels were significantly increased ( $p < 0.01$  or  $p < 0.05$ ) in the 12, 24 and 48 mg/kg groups at 21 and 42 days of the experiment compared with corresponding levels in the control group.

The results in Fig. 5a-c shows that the mRNA and protein expression levels of Gadd45a were significantly increased ( $p < 0.01$  or  $p < 0.05$ ) in the 24 and 48 mg/kg groups at 21 and 42 days of the experiment in comparison with those in the control group.



**Fig. 5.** Changes of mRNA and protein expression levels of Gadd45a, p21 in the kidney at 21 and 42 days of the experiment. a The relative mRNA expression levels of Gadd45a. b The western blot assay of Gadd45a. c The relative protein expression levels of Gadd45a. d The relative mRNA expression levels of Cdc25C. e The western blot assay of p-Cdc25C. f The relative protein expression levels of p-Cdc25C. CG: Control group; GI: 12 mg/kg group; GII: 24 mg/kg group; GIII: 48 mg/kg group. Data are presented with the mean  $\pm$  standard deviation ( $n=8$ ), \* $p < 0.05$ , compared with the control group; \*\* $p < 0.01$ , compared with the control group.

As shown in Fig. 5d, the Cdc25C mRNA expression levels were lower ( $p < 0.01$  or  $p < 0.05$ ) in the 24 and 48 mg/kg groups at 21 and 42 days of the experiment than in the control group. Fig. 5e-f shows that p-Cdc25C protein expression levels were significantly increased ( $p < 0.01$ ) in the 24 and 48 mg/kg group at 21 and 42 days of the experiment compared with corresponding levels in the control group.

## Discussion

To explore how NaF induces renal cell-cycle changes, we first used a mouse model to investigate the effects of NaF on the renal cell-cycle by flow cytometry. The percentages of G2/M phase cells were significantly increased in the 24 and 48 mg/kg groups compared with percentages in the control group, demonstrating that NaF exposure caused G2/M phase cell-cycle arrest in renal cells of mice. Jothiramajayam et al. [42] have demonstrated that NaF at low concentrations ( $< 1 \mu\text{g/ml}$ ) induced G0/G1 phase cell-cycle arrest and apoptotic cell death in human lymphocytes. However, Wang et al. [43] reported that NaF can suppress proliferation, S phase cell-cycle arrest and apoptosis in primary mouse osteoblasts. Our results are like those of the report that NaF can induce G2/M phase cell-cycle arrest and apoptosis in primary cultured rat chondrocytes [44].

Cell-cycle checkpoints are necessary for correct cell-cycle progression [34]. The checkpoint involved in the G2/M phase is controlled by the Cyclin B1/CDK1 complex. The complex is kept inactive through reduction of Cyclin B1 and/or the phosphorylation of CDK1 (Tyr-15) [45]. An inactive Cyclin B1/CDK1 complex does not allow cells to progress beyond the G2/M cell-cycle checkpoint [46]. In this study, the Cyclin B1 and CDK1 mRNA expression levels as well as the Cyclin B1 protein expression levels were lower in the 24 and 48 mg/kg groups than in the control group, and the p-CDK1 (Tyr-15) protein expression levels were markedly increased in the 24 and 48 mg/kg groups compared with levels in the control group, suggesting that the activity of Cyclin B1/CDK1 complex was inhibited by NaF and the renal cells were consequently arrested at the G2/M phase.

Recent studies have demonstrated that the activity of Cyclin B1/CDK1 complex is regulated by numerous mechanisms to ensure the proper transition of G2/M phase [47]. Guo et al. [48] have shown that dietary  $\text{NiCl}_2$  can cause G2/M phase cell-cycle arrest in kidneys of broiler via ATM-Chk1/Chk2 pathways. Zhang et al. [49] have reported that genistein can induce G2/M cell-cycle arrest via the ATM/p53-dependent pathway in human colon cancer cells. It has been found also that mangiferin can induce cell-cycle arrest at the G2/M phase through the ATR-Chk1 pathway in HL-60 leukemia cells [50]. However, no reported studies have focused on the underlying molecular mechanisms of fluoride-induced G2/M phase cell-cycle arrest *in vivo* and *in vitro*.

It has been reported that fluoride can induce DNA damage in the kidney [28, 29]. DNA damage generally results in the activation of the ATM-dependent signaling pathway [40]. To explore the molecular mechanism of fluoride-induced G2/M phase cell-cycle arrest, we next examined the effects of NaF on the key signaling molecules of ATM-dependent signaling pathways. We found that ATM mRNA expression levels and p-ATM (Ser-1981) protein expression levels were increased in the 12, 24 and 48 mg/kg groups, indicating that NaF induced the activation of ATM. Activated ATM can be recruited at the sites of DNA damage, where it initiates a series of signaling cascades through the phosphorylation of DNA damage-response cell-cycle proteins, including Chk2 and p53 [51]. The Chk2 and p53 mRNA expression levels as well as the p-Chk2 (Thr-68) and p-p53 (Ser-15) protein expression levels were significantly increased in the 12, 24 and 48 mg/kg groups, suggesting that Chk2 was activated by ATM, and p53 then was activated by Chk2. Ha et al. [52] have demonstrated that fluoride can increase the protein expression of p53 in human embryo hepatocytes. Generally, mdm2 binds to p53 and suppresses p53 transcriptional activity, which contributes to the proteolytic degradation of p53 [40]. In the present study, mdm2 mRNA and protein expression levels were decreased in the 24 and 48 mg/kg groups, demonstrating that NaF

induced mdm2 reduction and that this response also contributed to the activation and accumulation of p53. Activated p53 stimulates the transcription of p53-effector genes, such as p21 and Gadd45a. p21, as a CDK inhibitor (CKI), binds to CDK, and regulates CDK activity [53]. Accumulation of p21 can result in CDK1 inhibition and G2/M phase cell-cycle arrest [34]. The regulation of Gadd45a on G2/M phase may be due to its ability to dissociate the complexes of Cyclin B1/CDK1 [54]. Over-expression of Gadd45a can arrest cells at the G2/M phase by inhibiting the activities of Cyclin B1/CDK1 complexes. In this study, we found that the mRNA and protein expression levels of p21 and Gadd45a were significantly increased in the 24 and 48 mg/kg groups. These results are like those of reports that various stimuli can cause cell-cycle arrest via the activation of p53 and p21 [55, 56]. The above-mentioned results suggest that the ATM-Chk2-p53 signaling pathway was activated by NaF.

In addition to p53, activated Chk2 can inhibit CDK1 activity by phosphorylating Cdc25C [57]. As a CDK-activating kinase (CAK), Cdc25C is kept in the cytoplasm. Dephosphorylation of CDK1 at tyr-15 induced by Cdc25C is necessary for the activation of CDK1 [58]. In the present study, the Cdc25C mRNA expression levels were reduced, and the p-Cdc25C (Ser-216) protein levels were significantly increased in the 24 and 48 mg/kg groups, indicating that the activation of Cdc25C was inhibited, and the activities of Cyclin B1/CDK1 complexes were then inhibited. These results suggest also that the ATM-Chk2-Cdc25C signaling pathway was activated by NaF. Our findings are like that of the report that UCN-01 can induce G2/M phase cell-cycle arrest through the Chk2/Cdc25C signaling pathway [59].

Prolonged cell-cycle arrest can result in growth arrest or death of cells. Previous studies have demonstrated that p21 can inhibit cellular DNA synthesis by binding to and inhibiting PCNA [60]. PCNA is an essential processivity factor for DNA polymerases, and it also is an index of cell proliferation [61]. Viscera index is usually used to assess the toxic effects of medicines and the development of living tissue [19, 62]. In this study, the mRNA and protein expression levels of PCNA and the renal viscera index were reduced in the 24 and 48 mg/kg groups, suggesting that the proliferation of renal cells and development of the kidney were suppressed. These suppressive effects may be due to the renal G2/M phase cell-cycle arrest induced by NaF.

## Conclusion

In a mouse model, NaF, at more than 12 mg/kg, induced renal G2/M phase cell-cycle arrest by increasing the protein expression levels of p-ATM, p-Chk2, p-p53, p-Cdc25C, p-CDK1, p21, and Gadd45a; increasing the mRNA expression levels of ATM, Chk2, p53, p21, and Gadd45a; reducing the protein expression levels of CyclinB<sub>1</sub>, mdm2, PCNA; and reducing mRNA expression levels of CyclinB<sub>1</sub>, CDK1, Cdc25C, mdm2, and PCNA. These results ultimately inhibited the proliferation of renal cells and the development of the kidney, as determined by the viscera index. Activation of the ATM-Chk2-p53/Cdc25C signaling pathway is the mechanism of NaF-induced renal G2/M phase cell-cycle arrest in the mouse model. Relevance of these findings to fluoride toxicity in humans should be studied in the future.

## Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the program for Changjiang scholars and the university innovative research team (IRT 0848), and the Shuangzhi project of Sichuan Agricultural University (03571800; 03572437).

## Disclosure Statement

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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