

CHAPTER 2

Reactive Oxygen and Reactive Nitrogen Species in the Lung

Gregory J. Quinlan and Nicholas J. Lamb

*Unit of Critical Care, Royal Brompton Hospital, National Heart and Lung Institute
at Imperial College, Sydney Street, London SW3 6NP, UK*

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1. Introduction

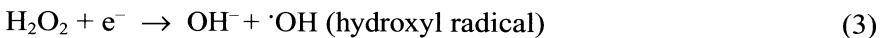
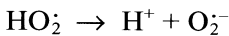
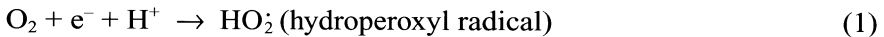
Reactive oxygen species (ROS) and reactive nitrogen species (RNS) have been implicated as contributing to the pathogenesis of a broad spectrum of diseases [1, 2]. Historically, oxygen free radicals were primarily considered to be aggressive species, indeed the superoxide (O_2^-) theory of oxygen toxicity is based on this hypothesis, (reviewed in 3). There is circumstantial evidence to support this view, some of which will be reviewed elsewhere in this chapter. However, other roles for free radicals – or more appropriately ROS and RNS – have recently emerged, most notably as signal or second messenger molecules. It seems therefore that these species can have differing effects which are dependent on their levels of production and on antioxidant defences. This chapter will mainly be concerned with the deleterious consequences associated with these reactive species, particularly in the lung, with special reference to acute lung injury (ALI) and acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS).

1.1. Definitions

A biological definition of a free radical is “any chemical species capable of independent existence that contains one or more unpaired electrons” [4]. Classically, free radicals are thought of as highly reactive species, but this is often not the case. Ground state molecular oxygen and nitric oxide (NO) have unpaired electrons, and therefore are free radicals, although neither are particularly reactive species. However, other related reactive oxidants like ozone and peroxynitrite (ONOO⁻), or species such as hydrogen peroxide (H₂O₂), with the potential to form reactive species, are not free radicals. For this reason, the terms reactive oxygen species (ROS) for oxygen containing species, and reactive nitrogen species (RNS) for nitrogen containing species, have been introduced to allow free radicals and other related species to be included within common definitions.

2. Reactive Oxygen Species (ROS)

Oxygen is an essential requirement for aerobic life forms, as the terminal electron acceptor at the end of the respiratory chain. During aerobic metabolism carbohydrate is oxidised whilst oxygen is reduced by the sequential addition of four electrons, leading to the formation of water. Various ROS are produced as intermediates during this process (equations 1–4):



O₂⁻ although a free radical anion, is a weak oxidising agent, capable of oxidising thiols and ascorbic acid. It is, however, a much stronger reducing agent, capable of reducing several iron complexes. At physiological pH it is unstable and rapidly dismutates to H₂O₂, a process which is accelerated by the antioxidant enzyme superoxide dismutase (SOD).

H₂O₂ is an uncharged molecule, readily soluble in water, with the ability to enter and leave cells easily. It is not a very reactive species, but can ultimately lead to the formation of the most aggressive oxygen free radical known, the hydroxyl (·OH) radical. H₂O₂ levels are regulated *in vivo* by glutathione peroxidase, and catalase antioxidant enzymes.

The ·OH radical can be formed via the iron (Fenton reaction) or copper catalysed decomposition of H₂O₂. This reaction emphasises the importance

of redox active transition metal ions in free radical chemistry and oxygen toxicity. The $\cdot\text{OH}$ radical is an extremely reactive oxidant that attacks most biological molecules at almost diffusion-controlled rates. This extreme reactivity, however, limits its ability to cause damage at any distance from its site of formation, although it can initiate radical chain reactions such as lipid peroxidation [4]. Recently iron-independent mechanisms for *in vivo* $\cdot\text{OH}$ production have been proposed, either via the decomposition of peroxyxynitrous acid [5] or from the reaction of O_2^- with hypochlorous acid (a neutrophil derived oxidant) [6]. Both mechanisms are, however, still open to debate [7, 8].

Ozone is a powerful oxidant and toxic pollutant which has been implicated in various respiratory disorders including asthma [9]. It is capable of causing oxidative damage to biomolecules such as DNA, lipids, and carbohydrates [10, 11].

Ground state molecular oxygen (O_2) is classified as a free radical as it contains two unpaired electrons with parallel spins. This spin restriction limits its reactivity. It can, however, react by accepting electrons one at a time, in reactions involving transition metal ions such as iron and copper. More reactive forms of oxygen can also be formed, as a result of energy input into ground state oxygen, and are known collectively as singlet oxygen. Two forms exist, ($^1\Sigma_g^+\text{O}_2$) is the most reactive, and is a free radical containing two unpaired electrons with opposite spins. It rapidly decays to the ($^1\Delta_g\text{O}_2$) form, which is not a free radical as both electrons now occupy the same orbital. Singlet oxygen can also be formed from the interaction of H_2O_2 with the hypochlorite ion, a reaction that may be of biological significance. Its formation *in vivo* is most often associated with photosensitization reactions.

Hypochlorous acid is a potent bleaching agent, produced by the lysosomal enzyme, myeloperoxidase, of activated neutrophils. Its key function is as a microbial killing agent. Production of this powerful oxidant can, however, also have detrimental effects. It readily oxidises or chlorinates many biological molecules including thiols, amines and nucleotides [12], and causes intramolecular crosslinking of proteins [13]. Hypochlorous acid can interact with other ROS or decompose to form other damaging oxidants including the $\cdot\text{OH}$ radical (either independently [6] or via iron catalysis [8]). Recently hypochlorous acid has been shown to form a potent chlorinating and nitrating species on interaction with nitrite [13, 14].

2.1. Organic Oxygen Radicals

Lipid peroxides can be formed in biological systems by a variety of mechanisms. Purposeful enzyme catalysed lipid peroxidation occurs in both animal and plant tissues to produce bioactive substances collectively known as eicosanoids. Various ROS are also capable of initiating lipid peroxida-

tion that can lead to deleterious consequences. Singlet oxygen is capable of reacting directly with carbon-carbon double bonds to produce lipid hydroperoxides [16]. Other non-radical oxidants such as ozone, ONOO^- , and hypochlorite have also been implicated in lipid peroxidation processes [17–19]. The $\cdot\text{OH}$ radical, if formed locally reacts with unsaturated fatty acids resulting in the formation of peroxy radicals capable of initiating further peroxidation. Stable lipid peroxides can also be formed, these are not free radicals, but in the presence of iron or copper ion catalysts form alkoxy or peroxy radicals, which are also able to propagate the peroxidation process.

2.2. Reactive Nitrogen Species (RNS)

NO, contrary to popular belief is not a particularly reactive molecule, except under certain circumstances (reactions with other free radicals). It is an environmental pollutant and is also found in cigarette smoke. NO is produced *in vivo* both constitutively and inducibly via the NO synthase (NOS) enzyme systems. Its biological functions are indistinguishable from those of endothelial-derived relaxing factor (EDRF) and may also function as an antioxidant by inhibiting the ROS producing enzyme xanthine oxidase [20], by scavenging O_2^- [21], and by acting as a chain breaking antioxidant.

Nitrogen dioxide (NO_2) is a free radical gas, a pollutant, and a constituent of cigarette smoke. It is a powerful oxidant and may therefore be of some significance to respiratory diseases such as asthma [22]. NO_2 can be formed by reaction of nitrogen with molecular oxygen. However, this reaction is thought to be of little physiological relevance, as it is out competed by ONOO^- formation [23].

ONOO^- is not a free radical; it is however, a powerful oxidant, formed from the reaction of O_2^- with NO (reviewed in [23]), and possibly by NOS enzymes directly [24]. As an oxidant, ONOO^- can damage lipids, DNA, and proteins [25–27]. It is also a nitrating and nitrosating species, able to nitrate tyrosine and tryptophan residues [28, 29], and nitrosate thiol groups to form nitrosothiols [30, 31]. It has been suggested that the major deleterious effect associated with its formation *in vivo*, is not as an oxidant but rather as a nitrating agent of proteins, the modification of which can result in a loss of function. High and low molecular mass nitrosothiols may act as an *in vivo* sink for NO, indicating a positive role for ONOO^- formation *in vivo*. Indeed, reports have shown the ability of ONOO^- to induce vasorelaxation, some via thiol dependent release of NO [32]. Other reports suggest further beneficial effects may be associated with the scavenging of O_2^- , as NO has been shown to protect against this type of ROS-mediated lung injury [33, 34]. Additionally, physiologically relevant doses of ONOO^- have been found to be cardioprotective in a cat model of myocardial ischaemia and reperfusion [35].

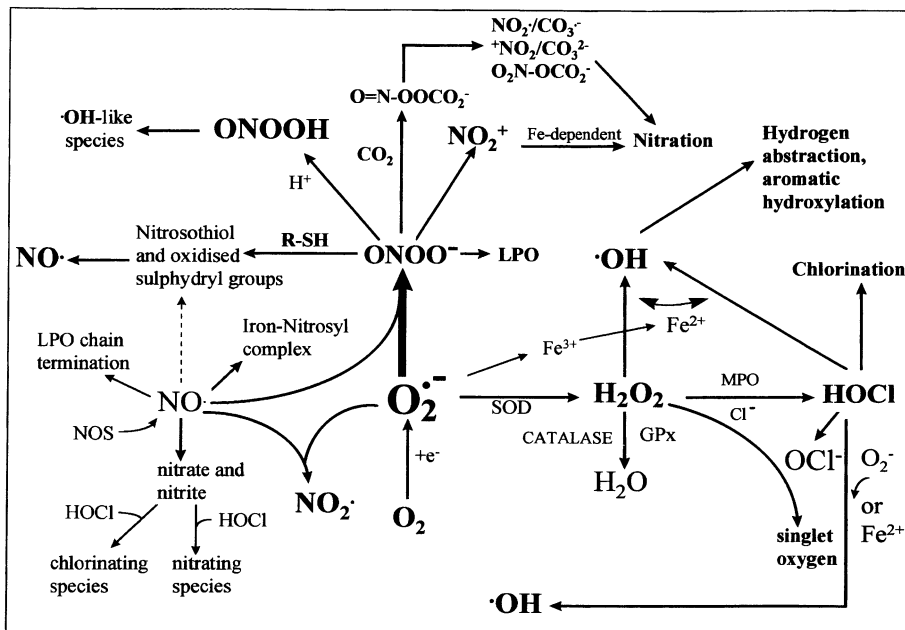


Figure 1. The interactions which may lead to the production of ROS and RNS *in vivo* are depicted. (LPO) lipid peroxidation, (GPx) glutathione peroxidase, (SOD) superoxide dismutase.

2.3. Summary

It is clear then that numerous ROS and RNS can be produced *in vivo*, and that there is a complex interrelationship between these species, which is further influenced by transition metal ion catalysts and antioxidants (see Fig. 1).

3. ROS and RNS and Their Role in Lung Injury

3.1. Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS)

ARDS is an acute form of inflammatory lung injury, precipitated by a variety of predisposing causes, many not directly related to the lung. It is characterised by non-cardiogenic pulmonary oedema and carries with it a high instance of mortality (for reviews see [36, 37]). ROS and RNS have been implicated as contributory factors to the onset and progression of ARDS, such species arise as a result of various processes (see Fig. 2).

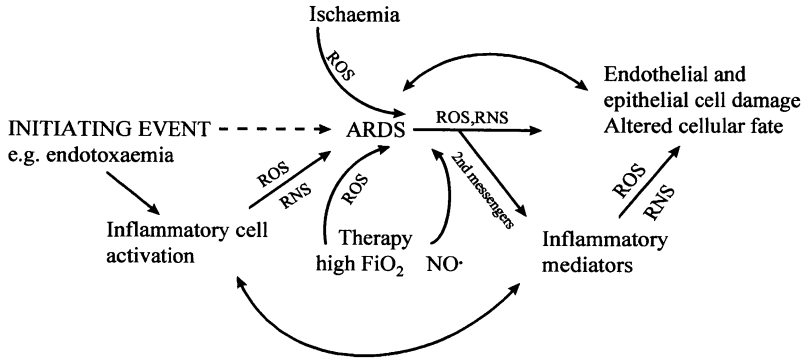


Figure 2. Possible sources of ROS and RNS in ARDS are illustrated.

3.2. Hyperoxia

It is now known that the deleterious effects of oxygen are attributable to the reactive nature of its reductive intermediates, this was first proposed as a theory by Gerschman and colleagues in 1954 [38]. ROS and RNS arise *in vivo* principally as a result of normal cellular metabolic processes. 1% of all oxygen consumed during aerobic respiration leaks from the respiratory chain of mitochondria as O_2^- , which is scavenged by endogenous antioxidants. However, exposure to normobaric concentrations of oxygen greater than those found in normal air during hyperoxia, leads to increased leakage of O_2^- from mitochondria and other organelles, with a consequent increase in H_2O_2 (for reviews see [39, 40]). The pathology of oxygen toxicity in the lungs of humans results in tissue damage and can lead to ALI [9]. Oxygen-induced lung damage leads to atelectasis, fibrin deposition, thickening and hyalinisation of alveolar membranes [41], and alterations in the composition and properties of surfactant [42]. Evidence for the involvement of oxidants in this form of lung injury is further strengthened by findings showing protection from oxygen toxicity after previous exposure to hyperoxia [43], endotoxin [44], or cytokines [45]. Protection results from the induction of lung antioxidant defences at the time of primary exposure. These defences include upregulation of antioxidant enzymes (SODs, catalase, glutathione peroxidases), iron-oxidising enzymes (caeruloplasmin) [46, 47], and protective peptides [48]. Recently, inhibitors of anion exchange and L-arginine have been shown to attenuate this form of lung injury, implicating the O_2^- anion and $ONOO^-$ in the injury process [49].

3.3. Ischaemia Reperfusion Injury

When tissues are deprived of oxygen (ischaemia) or oxygen tensions are reduced (hypoxia), biochemical changes result in cell damage and death. If

oxygen is restored to tissues they can survive, but this is dependent on the length of time the tissue was deprived of oxygen and also on the type of tissue. However, studies have shown that on reoxygenation an additional cellular injury occurs which is mediated in part by the production of ROS and is known as ischaemia/reperfusion injury [50]. Several mechanisms for ROS production in ischaemia/reperfusion injury have been proposed but it is now thought that they may be formed as a result of changes to the mitochondrial electron transport chain during ischaemia/hypoxia, which result in increased leakage of O_2^- when tissues are reperfused. The formation of eicosanoids relies on single electron transfer reactions, these biosynthetic processes are upregulated during ischaemia and may lead to ROS formation (reviewed in [51]). Inflammatory cell activation and ROS release during the respiratory burst may also be involved in ischaemia/reperfusion injury, although some literature suggests that this is not a feature in the initial stages of injury [51]. Much research into ischaemia/reperfusion injury has concentrated on the enzyme xanthine oxidase (XOD) and its role in ROS production during ischaemia/reperfusion [50, 52, 53]. The enzyme exists in two isoforms, and is rate limiting in purine catabolism. The oxidase form of XOD is produced by limited proteolysis or oxidative modification [54] as a result of neutrophil activation [55]. XOD catalyses the breakdown of purines to uric acid, coupled with the reduction of oxygen to O_2^- and H_2O_2 . Appreciable conversion of the enzyme occurs during ischaemia, and when oxygen is reintroduced, ROS are formed. Additionally, levels of substrates (hypoxanthine and xanthine) for the enzyme become elevated during the ischaemic period due to aberrant ATP metabolism [54], so increasing the prooxidant potential of XOD. Recently, substrate formation rather than enzyme conversion has been shown to be of key importance in myocardial ischaemia/reperfusion injury [56]. A potential for XOD-mediated ROS production in patients with ARDS exists, as plasma and bronchoalveolar lavage fluid (BAL) hypoxanthine levels are found to be significantly elevated in non-surviving patients [57] and XOD is detectable in plasma from such patients [58]. Lung injury in the form of high permeability pulmonary oedema is seen in animal studies where XOD and xanthine are instilled into the lungs of rabbits or rats [59, 60]. Further, lipopolysaccharide (LPS)-induced pulmonary oedema in the mouse lung is associated with the induction of XOD activity [61].

The liver and the gut are particularly rich in XOD [62], which is present in relatively low amounts in the heart and lung [63], casting doubt on the role of XOD in ischaemia/reperfusion injury in these organs. However, recent evidence shows that XOD has a heparin-like binding site and is capable of binding to endothelial cells [64]. So raising the possibility that XOD may be released into the circulation, and may subsequently bind to the endothelium within organs where it is not normally found. Indeed, recent studies in animal models of gut and liver induced surgical ischaemia show lung injury attributable to the activity of XOD [65]. Further, XOD

has now been demonstrated in animal [66], and human endothelial cells [67] where it contributes to lung injury through several mechanisms including oxidant formation [68]. XOD may contribute to ischaemia/reperfusion injury by promoting neutrophil sequestration in the lung by an O_2^- -dependent mechanism [69] and by contributing to their adherence to cultured endothelial cells in the presence of xanthine [70]. It may also promote cytokine production and NF- κ B activation in lungs, as seen in a mouse models of haemorrhagic shock [71, 72].

3.4. *Inflammatory Cells*

Activated neutrophils and macrophages contain a membrane-bound nicotinamide dinucleotide phosphate (NADPH) oxidase enzyme, which produces O_2^- (the respiratory burst), and contributes to bacterial cell killing [73]. Recently, similar enzyme systems have been found in other cell types including lung fibroblasts [74]. Increased levels of O_2^- production have been demonstrated in animal models of ALI induced by oleic acid and endotoxemia [75, 76], and the NADPH oxidase inhibitor apocynin is known to attenuate sepsis induced lung injury in guinea-pigs [77]. Under normal physiological conditions O_2^- rapidly dismutates to H_2O_2 an effect which can also be seen during the respiratory burst of neutrophils [78]. H_2O_2 is detectable in breath condensates of patients with ARDS, at significantly elevated levels compared to ventilated non-ARDS control patients [79], and in patients with hypoxemic respiratory failure [80]. Additionally it can be detected in the urine of critically ill patients with sepsis and ARDS [81], (reviewed in [82]). The $\cdot OH$ radical is formed from H_2O_2 in the presence of redox active iron, and recently this form of iron has been measured in human BAL fluid [83]. This may have implications for ROS mediated lung injury in acute inflammatory states such as ARDS and ALI. Indeed evidence for $\cdot OH$ mediated damage to BAL fluid protein measured as non-enzyme formed tyrosine isomers (makers of $\cdot OH$ formation), has been found in these patients [84]. The $\cdot OH$ radical is also capable of initiating lipid peroxidation. Animal models of acute lung injury show increases in non-specific markers of lipid peroxidation, such as thiobarbituric reactive substances (TBARS) in lung tissue [85] and conjugated dienes in plasma [86], the levels of which are related to the degree of lung injury. In humans with ARDS, elevated plasma levels of TBARS have been found accompanied by decreased levels of unsaturated fatty acids and vitamin E [87]. Plasma TBARS levels have also been shown to correlate well with the Murray lung injury score in ARDS patients, although the mechanisms involved may not be entirely neutrophil dependent [88]. Mechanical ventilation may also contribute to plasma lipid peroxidation in such critically ill patients [89]. However, 4-hydroxy-2-nonenal (HNE) is a more reliable indicator of lipid peroxidation. It is a specific aldehydic n-6 fatty acid oxidation prod-

uct, which has been demonstrated *in vivo* (reviewed in [90]). HNE can be cytotoxic, chemotactic, inhibit some enzymes and be produced by lung neutrophils in the rat [91]. Elevated levels of this bio-active aldehyde have been reported in the plasma of patients with ARDS [92]. HNE and other products of lipid peroxidation are markers of oxidative damage, but additionally may contribute to injurious processes in the lung. For instance, linoleic acid hydroperoxides which induce broncho- and vasoconstriction in isolated rat lungs [93], are toxic to endothelial cells [94], and lead to increased phospholipid oxidation [95]. The other oxidant produced by neutrophils is hypochlorous acid. Evidence to implicate this aggressive ROS in lung injury is strengthened by findings of subcellular matrix damage of the endothelium [96], and loss of lung surfactant surface tension function [97]. Recently, chlorinated tyrosine residues (markers of hypochlorous acid formation) on BAL fluid proteins have been detected in patients with ARDS at significantly elevated levels compared to ventilated and normal control groups, findings suggestive of a role for this oxidant in lung injury seen in these patients [84].

It is now clear that RNS are formed in a variety of inflammatory disease states where NO may be formed in excess. Upregulation of inducible NOS leads to increased formation of NO. Under such conditions, where there are high levels of both NO and O_2^- , ONOO⁻ formation is favoured. This reaction is very fast and 'out competes' SOD enzymes, and occurs at a much faster rate than iron catalysed $\cdot OH$ formation. Promoting some to suggest that ONOO⁻ is chiefly responsible for the oxidative damage seen in pathological conditions (reviewed in [2]). ONOO⁻ is a powerful oxidant, but supportive evidence for its formation *in vivo* comes mainly from measurement of products formed due to its action as a nitrating species, in particular its ability to nitrate tyrosine residues [98]. The precise mechanism of the nitration reaction is unclear, but may involve an iron-dependent reaction in which nitronium ions are formed and react with tyrosine [98] or via the formation of a reactive intermediate with carbon dioxide [99, 100]. Macrophages [101], neutrophils [102], and cultured vascular endothelium [103], have all been implicated as sources of ONOO⁻. In addition nitrotyrosine has been detected by immunohistochemistry in lung slices [104] and by high-pressure liquid chromatography (HPLC) in BAL fluid proteins from patients with ARDS [84].

The mechanisms of ONOO⁻ mediated lung injury are varied, and may include its ability as an oxidant to cause lipid peroxidation [105], glutathione depletion [106] and other forms of $\cdot OH$ -like damage. It can nitrate lung surfactant proteins (SP-A) leading to a decreased ability to aggregate lipids [107] and decreased mannose binding ability [108] resulting in impaired surfactant function. It may also impair sodium transport [109] and surfactant synthesis by alveolar type II cells [110]. All these adverse effects might be exacerbated by the use of inhaled NO therapy, which is sometimes used as a treatment for pulmonary hypertension [111]. Indeed,

numerous studies in animals have demonstrated damage and dysfunction associated with inhaled NO treatment [111].

3.5. *Antioxidants*

The extracellular iron-binding and iron-oxidising anti-oxidant proteins transferrin and caeruloplasmin, are compromised in patients with ARDS [112, 113] and free redox active iron can be detected in the plasma of some patients [114]. Likewise in BAL fluid of patients with ARDS, abnormalities in transferrin and caeruloplasmin are present [115]. Recently, redox active iron has been demonstrated in normal BAL fluid, and elevated levels of transferrin iron saturation have been found in BAL fluid from patients with ARDS [23]. Deficiencies in these antioxidants may therefore contribute to increased oxidative damage and nitration, via iron catalysed mechanisms, in these patients. Interestingly, plasma levels of the intracellular iron-binding protein ferritin have been shown to be a predictive mortality factor in ARDS [116]. Reduced glutathione contains a thiol group, it reacts with oxidants such as H_2O_2 , hypochlorous acid, and $ONOO^-$, and protects proteins from aldehydic modification [117], and is a cofactor for the anti-oxidant protein glutathione peroxidase. Extracellular levels of glutathione are low except in lung lining fluid, but in patients with ARDS this is not the case as most of the glutathione is oxidised [118], suggestive of increased oxidative stress in the lungs of these patients. In plasma, glutathione levels are very low, but there are other high molecular mass thiol containing proteins (mainly albumin) which perform similar antioxidant functions, levels of which are reduced in patients with ARDS [119]. Other plasma and lipid phase antioxidants such as ascorbic acid and vitamin E are similarly reduced in these patients [120, 121]. To compensate for this deficiency in antioxidant levels treatment regimes involving the use of exogenous antioxidants such as N-acetylcysteine have been employed with limited success [122].

3.6. *Other Lung Diseases*

ROS and RNS have been implicated in many other respiratory diseases including asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), in which iron [123], inflammatory cell activation [124] and ROS [124] production are implicated (for review see [125]). XOD formation may also contribute to oxidative stress in these patients [126]. The underlying mechanism of asthma is at present unclear, but ROS formed by inflammatory cells are implicated [127]. Further, lung cells recovered from asthmatics can generate increased amounts of ROS and have reduced antioxidant (SOD) activity [127], other antioxidants are also reduced in the plasma of

these patients (glutathione peroxidase) [128]. Elevated levels of inducible NOS and NO [129] are also seen, raising the possibility of ONOO⁻ production in these patients. In addition, inhaled oxidant pollution gases are implicated in asthma (see previous sections), as are particulate air pollution products (PM10s). Recent findings show that these particles exhibit oxidant activity [130].

Patients with cystic fibrosis experience elevated oxidative stress due to chronic lung inflammation, and inadequate absorption of dietary antioxidants. Increased levels of markers of oxidative damage to lipids and DNA are found in such patients [131, 132], which in the case of lipids correlates with pulmonary dysfunction. Markers of RNS formation are elevated in the lungs of patients with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis implicating such species in the disease process [133]. Paraquat poisoning causes damage to pulmonary tissue via the redox cycling activity of this herbicide which results in the formation ROS capable of damaging DNA [134].

4. ROS and RNS as Second Messengers

NO is a known second messenger, but recently other RNS/ROS have been attributed roles in intracellular signal transduction pathways. Many cellular processes including apoptosis [135], are thought to be regulated by sub-toxic levels of ROS/RNS. Indeed the anti-apoptotic gene *bcl-2* has been shown to operate by lowering intracellular ROS production [136, 137]. The level of oxidative stress is critical in the signalling process, low concentrations of H₂O₂ will induce apoptosis, but higher concentrations lead to unwanted cell death via necrosis [138], similar findings are seen with other

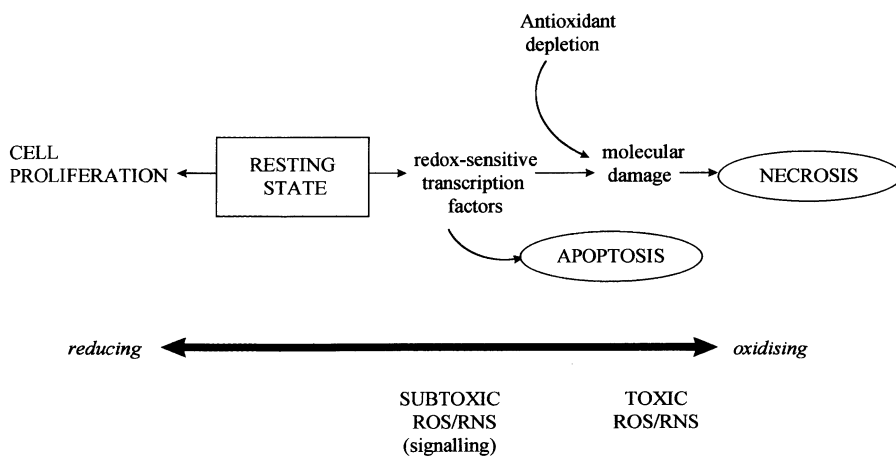


Figure 3. The role of ROS and RNS as second messengers in determining cellular fate are illustrated.

ROS and RNS (for reviews see 139). Transcription factors such as AP-1 [140], and NF κ B [141, 142] are redox-sensitive and can be activated by ROS/RNS, apoptosis may ultimately be regulated by mechanisms such as these (see Fig. 3).

5. Concluding Remarks

The direct measurement of oxidants and the detection of specific markers of oxidative damage in both acute and chronic lung injury, are suggestive of the production of ROS and RNS in these disease states. However, in humans the role of these species as contributors or consequential agents to disease processes still remains to be elucidated. In animal models the evidence is more obvious as both oxidants and antioxidants have been shown to exhibit profound and opposing effects in the lung. Much recent interest has centred on the contribution of ROS and RNS, at sublethal levels, to lung function and heart disease. It is now apparent that at low levels, many reactive species can act as second messenger molecules and may be involved in many regulatory steps that determine cellular fate. Understanding these redox regulatory processes may lead to a better understanding of the role of ROS and RNS in lung injury and other disease processes.

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