

Age-related changes of nuclear architecture in *Caenorhabditis elegans*

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Mutations in lamins cause premature aging syndromes in humans, including the Hutchinson–Gilford Progeria Syndrome (HGPS) and Atypical Werner Syndrome. It has been shown that HGPS cells in culture undergo age-dependent progressive changes in nuclear architecture. However, it is unknown whether similar changes in nuclear architecture occur during the normal aging process. We have observed that major changes of nuclear architecture accompany *Caenorhabditis elegans* aging. We found that the nuclear architecture in most nonneuronal cell types undergoes progressive and stochastic age-dependent alterations, such as changes of nuclear shape and loss of peripheral heterochromatin. Furthermore, we show that the rate of these alterations is influenced by the insulin/IGF-1 like signaling pathway and that reducing the level of lamin and lamin-associated LEM domain proteins leads to shortening of lifespan. Our work not only provides evidence for changes of nuclear architecture during the normal aging process of a multicellular organism, but also suggests that HGPS is likely a result of acceleration of the normal aging process. Because the nucleus is vital for many cellular functions, our studies raise the possibility that the nucleus is a prominent focal point for regulating aging.

lamin | LEM domain | nuclear envelope | nuclear lamina

In eukaryotic cells, the nucleus and the cytoplasm are separated by the nuclear envelope, which consists of inner and outer nuclear membranes, nuclear pore complexes, and the nuclear lamina. The nuclear lamina underlies the inner nuclear membrane and is composed of lamins, which are type V intermediate filament proteins, and lamin-associated proteins (1). In metazoan cells, the nuclear lamina is required for maintaining nuclear shape, organization of chromatin, DNA replication, RNA transcription, cell cycle progression, nuclear migration, and cellular development and differentiation (see reviews in refs. 2–4).

Mutations in lamins and lamin-associated proteins cause a variety of heritable human diseases that are collectively called laminopathies, ranging from muscular dystrophy to accelerated aging (see reviews in refs. 5–8). Fibroblast cells from laminopathic patients frequently display irregular nuclear shapes, abnormal composition of nuclear lamina proteins, and changes in chromatin organization (1). Among the laminopathies, Hutchinson–Gilford Progeria Syndrome (HGPS) is a premature aging disorder that is most commonly caused by a silent point mutation in the human lamin A gene (*LMNA*), which creates a new splice isoform that lacks 50 residues in its C-terminal domain (9, 10). Goldman *et al.* (11) have recently shown that HGPS cells exhibit age-dependent progressive alterations of nuclear architecture, which they hypothesize would ultimately lead to premature aging in HGPS patients. These studies raise the question whether there is any age-dependent alteration of nuclear architecture in individuals undergoing the normal aging process.

The nematode *Caenorhabditis elegans* offers an excellent model system to investigate possible changes of nuclear architecture during the normal aging process. *C. elegans* has a relatively short lifespan. Like humans, aging *C. elegans* animals

experience stochastic deterioration of tissue integrity, especially in muscles (12, 13). The evolutionarily conserved insulin/IGF-1-like signaling pathway is involved in regulating the lifespan of *C. elegans* (see a recent review in ref. 14). In particular, mutations in the *daf-2* insulin receptor gene and the *age-1* phosphatidylinositol 3-kinase gene lead to an extension of lifespan, and this lifespan extension phenotype requires the function of the FOXO transcription factor DAF-16 and the heat-shock transcription factor HSF-1 (14). The various mutants in the insulin/IGF-1-like signaling pathway provide us with powerful genetic tools to study age-related processes.

In this study, we characterized the major changes of nuclear architecture that accompany *C. elegans* aging. We show that the nuclear architecture in most nonneuronal cell types undergoes progressive and stochastic alteration as the animal ages and that the rate of this alteration is affected by mutations in the insulin/IGF-1 like signaling pathway. Furthermore, we show that reducing the levels of lamin and lamin-associated LEM domain proteins can lead to shortening of the lifespan.

Materials and Methods

***C. elegans* Strains.** Strains were maintained and manipulated under standard conditions as described by Brenner (15). The following strains were used: N2, *daf-16(mu86)* I, *emr-1(gk119)* I, *lmn-1(tm1502)* I/*hT2(qIs48)* (I; III) (*tm1502* was obtained from Shohei Mitani, Tokyo Women's Medical University School of Medicine, Tokyo), *age-1(hx546)* II, and *daf-2(e1370)* III.

The following strains carrying integrated reporter transgenes were used to visualize the nuclear envelope. All integrated strains were generated by γ -irradiation except for YG003 and 720519, which were generated by bombardment. They were all subsequently out-crossed at least three times with the wild-type N2 strain.

lmn-1::gfp: LW0697(*ccIs4810*) X, LW0698(*ccIs4811*) X, and LW0700(*ccIs4812*) X, containing [*pJKL380.4(lmn-1p::lmn-1::gfp::lmn-1 3'UTR)+pMH86(dpy-20(+))*] (16).

gfp::lmn-1: LW0709(*jjIs0709*) I and LW0696(*jjIs0696*) (not on X), containing [*pDRNL1(lmn-1p::gfp::lmn-1::unc-54 3'UTR)+pMH86(dpy-20(+))*] (ref. 16 and this work).

emr-1::gfp: LW0699(YG003 out-crossed three times) and LW0725(720519 out-crossed three times), containing [*p720-4(lmn-1p::emr-1::gfp::unc-54 3'UTR)+unc-119(+)*] (this work).

npp-1::gfp: LW0271(*jjIs0271*), containing [*pnp-1(npp-1p::npp-1::gfp::npp-1 3'UTR)+pMH86(dpy-20(+))*] (this work, plasmid *npp-1* is a gift from Aaron Schetter and Ken Kemphues, Cornell University).

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Abbreviations: HGPS, Hutchinson–Gilford Progeria Syndrome; RNAi, RNA interference; TEM, transmission electron microscopy.

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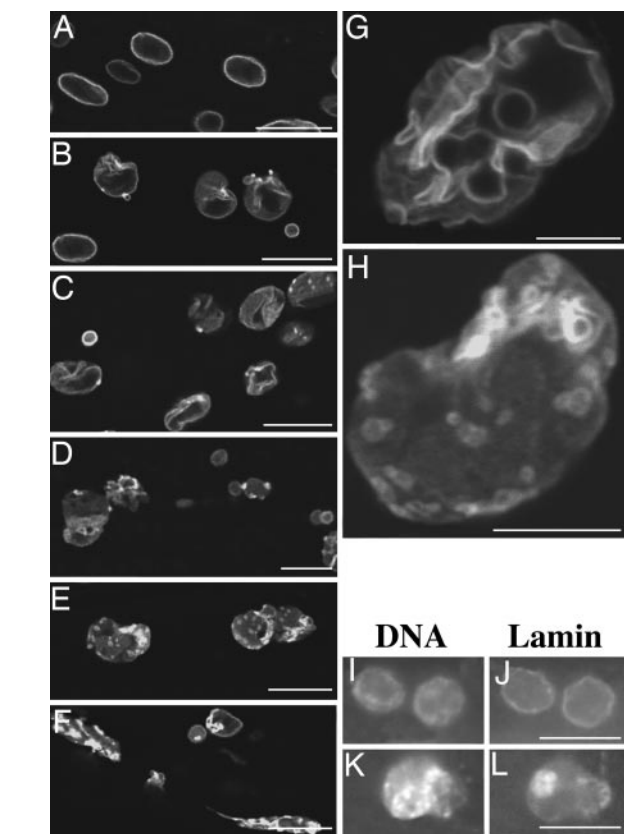


Fig. 1. The nuclear lamina undergoes progressive changes in aging nematodes. The nuclear lamina morphology as revealed in live *C. elegans* animals by LMN-1::GFP in days 4 (A), 8 (B), 12 (C), 15 (D) and 18 (E and F) animals under a confocal microscope. (G and H) Higher magnification confocal images of typical nuclei in days 12 (G) and 18 (H). Notice the folding of the nuclear lamina in G and the less distinct nuclear periphery and increased intranuclear localization of LMN-1::GFP in H. DAPI (I and K) and anti-LMN-1 antibody (J and L) staining of days 4 (I and J) and 14 (K and L) animals. Animals used in this experiment and the experiments in Figs. 2 and 5 were grown at 16°C from eggs until day 4. They were then shifted to 25°C and allowed to grow at 25°C until death. (Scale bars, 5 μ m in G and H and 10 μ m in A–F and I–L.)

that the class C animals tend to accumulate more class III nuclei as compared to class A and B animals (data not shown).

To rule out the possibility that the observed age-related changes in nuclear lamina morphology were an artifact of the LMN-1::GFP used, we fixed age-synchronized populations of wild-type N2 animals and stained them with anti-Ce-lamin antibodies. We observed similar age-related changes of Ce-lamin distribution to those observed by using LMN-1::GFP. As shown in Fig. 1 *I–K*, although most nuclei of young animals at day 4 had distinct nuclear peripheral Ce-lamin staining (Fig. 1 *I* and *J*), nuclei in old animals at day 14 showed less distinct nuclear peripheral Ce-lamin staining and relatively more intranuclear staining with abnormal accumulation of the LMN-1 signal in bright foci or blobs (Fig. 1 *K* and *L*). In addition to staining fixed animals, we also observed live animals under differential interference contrast optics and found that the nuclear periphery in older animals became progressively less well defined (data not shown), similar to observations previously reported by Garigan *et al.* (12). Therefore, we conclude that wild-type animals undergo stochastic and progressive alterations of their nuclear lamina as they aged.

Aging Wild-Type Animals Show Alterations of Other Aspects of Nuclear Architecture. To examine whether the nuclear envelope in

general underwent progressive alteration in aging wild-type

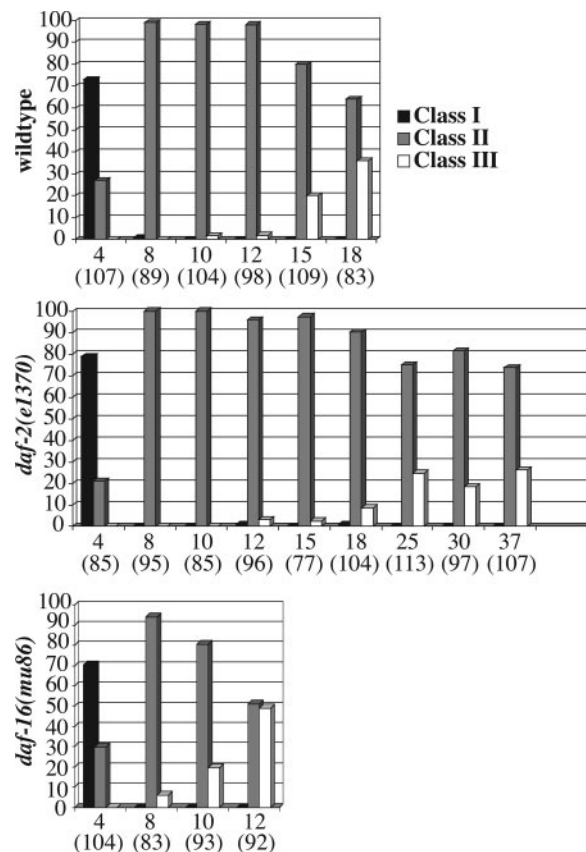


Fig. 2. Summary of nuclear morphology changes in aging animals of different genetic backgrounds. Nuclear morphology of wild-type, *daf-2(e1370)*, and *daf-16(mu86)* animals was monitored by using *ccls4810(lmn-1::gfp)*. Multiple images were taken of the middle part of the worm (excluding the head and the tail) by a confocal or a compound microscope. Nuclei from the collected images were counted and grouped into three different classes (class I–III) based on their morphology and GFP signal distribution (see *Results*). Neuronal nuclei were excluded from the counting. The nuclei counted are primarily hypodermal. Data were derived from a total of 20–30 animals on each of the days indicated (pooled from two to three experiments). y axis, percent of nuclei in a given category (black column, class I; gray column, class II; white column, class III). x axis, days (total number of nuclei scored).

animals, we followed other components of the nuclear envelope by generating integrated transgenic lines carrying GFP fused to Ce-emerin, an integral inner nuclear membrane protein encoded by *emr-1* (19) and NPP-1, a component of the nuclear pore complex encoded by *npp-1* (A. Schetter and K. Kemphues, personal communication). As shown in Fig. 6, which is published as supporting information on the PNAS web site, both proteins showed age-dependent changes in distribution, similar to those observed by using LMN-1::GFP. Thus, different nuclear envelope components undergo progressive alterations in aging *C. elegans* animals.

To further analyze the nuclear and chromatin phenotypes in aging animals, wild-type worms that were grown at 25°C to different ages were fixed, embedded, sectioned, stained, and viewed by TEM. At day 4 of development the nuclear membranes, nuclear pore complexes and heterochromatin of muscle (Fig. 3 A–C), hypodermal, and pharyngeal nuclei (data not shown) looked normal and similar to that of nuclei from larval stages (data not shown). At day 8, ≈30% of the nuclei started to have a convoluted appearance ($n = 47$), which was accompanied by heterochromatin loss from the nuclear periphery (Fig. 3 D–F). By day 12, most nuclei were highly lobulated and peripheral

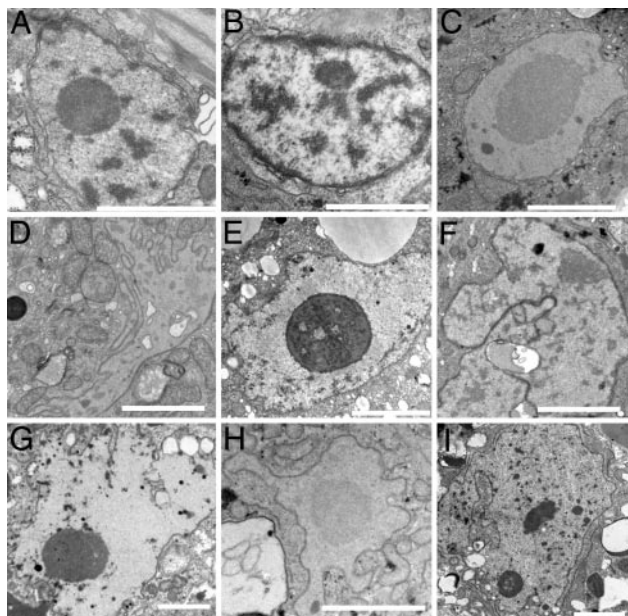


Fig. 3. Thin section electron microscope pictures demonstrating the gradual deterioration of nuclear and nuclear envelope structures with age. Muscle nuclei from anterior (*B*, *F*, and *H*), middle (*A*, *D*, and *I*), and posterior (*C*, *E*, and *G*) of the worm. The nuclei were from days 4 (*A–C*), 8 (*D–F*), and 12 (*G–I*) animals grown at 25°C. (Scale bars, 2 μ m.)

heterochromatin could not be detected (Fig. 3 *G–I* and Fig. 7, which is published as supporting information on the PNAS web site). However, condensed chromatin could be observed away from the nuclear periphery (Figs. 3 *G* and *I* and 7). In addition, 21% of (57 of 273) of the muscle nuclei looked highly lobulated or fragmented (Figs. 3 *G* and *I* and 7). Again, these changes in nuclear morphology were accompanied with changes in heterochromatin loss from the nuclear periphery. Higher magnification of day 12 or older nuclei showed additional phenotypes including the presence of mitochondria in grooves of the nuclear envelope, abnormal looking chromatin, dark inclusions of unknown material, and additional layers of nuclear membranes that indicated membrane proliferation (Fig. 7).

All together, these results demonstrate specific changes in nuclear architecture in aging animals.

The Insulin/IGF-1-Like Signaling Pathway Influences the Rate of Age-Related Nuclear Architecture Changes. The insulin/IGF-1-like signaling pathway plays a major role in regulating the lifespan of *C. elegans* (14). Previous studies have shown that mutations in this pathway change the rate at which tissues age (12, 13). To examine whether this pathway also affects the rate of age-related changes in nuclear architecture, we introduced the integrated *lmn-1::gfp* transgene (*ccls4810*) into the long-lived mutant *daf-2(e1370)* and the short-lived mutant *daf-16(mu86)* (23, 24). We then examined the nuclear envelope morphology in aging animals of different genotypes by following LMN-1::GFP distribution. We found that the nuclear envelope in both *daf-2(e1370)* and *daf-16(mu86)* mutant animals underwent age-related morphological changes and that the characteristics of these changes in the mutants were similar to those of wild-type animals (Fig. 4). However, the rate of changes in these mutant animals was significantly different from that of wild-type animals. As shown in Figs. 2 and 4, although both *daf-2(e1370)* and *daf-16(mu86)* mutant animals started to accumulate class II nuclei at about the same age, the age onset of significant accumulation of class III nuclei in these mutant animals differed from that of wild-type animals. In

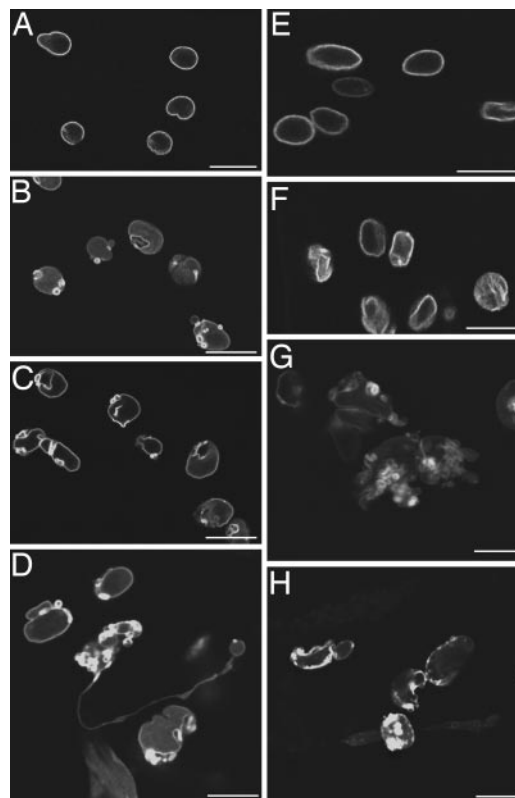


Fig. 4. Mutants in the insulin/IGF-1-like signaling pathway exhibit altered rate of nuclear envelope deterioration. (*A–D*) LMN-1::GFP in *daf-2(e1370)* mutant animals at days 4 (*A*), 8 (*B*), 20 (*C*), and 37 (*D*). (*E–H*) LMN-1::GFP in *daf-16(mu86)* mutant animals at days 4 (*E*), 8 (*F*), 10 (*G*), and 12 (*H*). (Scale bars, 10 μ m in all panels.)

wild-type animals, significant accumulation of class III nuclei (20.2%) was detected on day 15 (Fig. 2). A similar portion of class III nuclei (24.8%) was detected in long-lived *daf-2(e1370)* mutant animals only at day 25, whereas 10-day-old short-lived *daf-16(mu86)* mutant animals accumulated 19.4% class III nuclei (Fig. 2). Similar observations were obtained in the long-lived *age-1(hx546)* (25) and the short-lived *hsf-1(RNAi)* (26) mutant animals (data not shown). Therefore, we conclude that the activity of the insulin/IGF-1-like signaling pathway influences the rate of age-related changes of the nuclear envelope.

Reducing the Level of Nuclear Lamina Components Results in Shortened Lifespan. Given that mutations in the human *LMNA* gene cause HGPS and that the accumulation of the mutant LMNA protein is correlated with progressive changes of nuclear architecture in HGPS cells (9–11), we next examined by Western blot analysis whether there were age-correlated changes of Ce-lamin level or modification state. We saw no dramatic changes in either the mobility or the level of Ce-lamin from aging animals (Fig. 8, which is published as supporting information on the PNAS web site).

To further investigate whether Ce-lamin plays any role in the aging process, we examined the consequences of reducing the level of Ce-lamin on lifespan. We obtained an *lmn-1* deletion allele, *tm1502*, from the National Bioresource Project for the nematode. *tm1502* deletes 604 base pairs, including the translation start site and the first three exons of the *lmn-1* gene (Fig. 5A). We out-crossed and balanced the *tm1502* mutation. *tm1502/tm1502* homozygous animals are viable but sterile. Their survival to adulthood is presumably due to the maternal load of the Ce-lamin protein from the heterozygous *tm1502/+* mother,

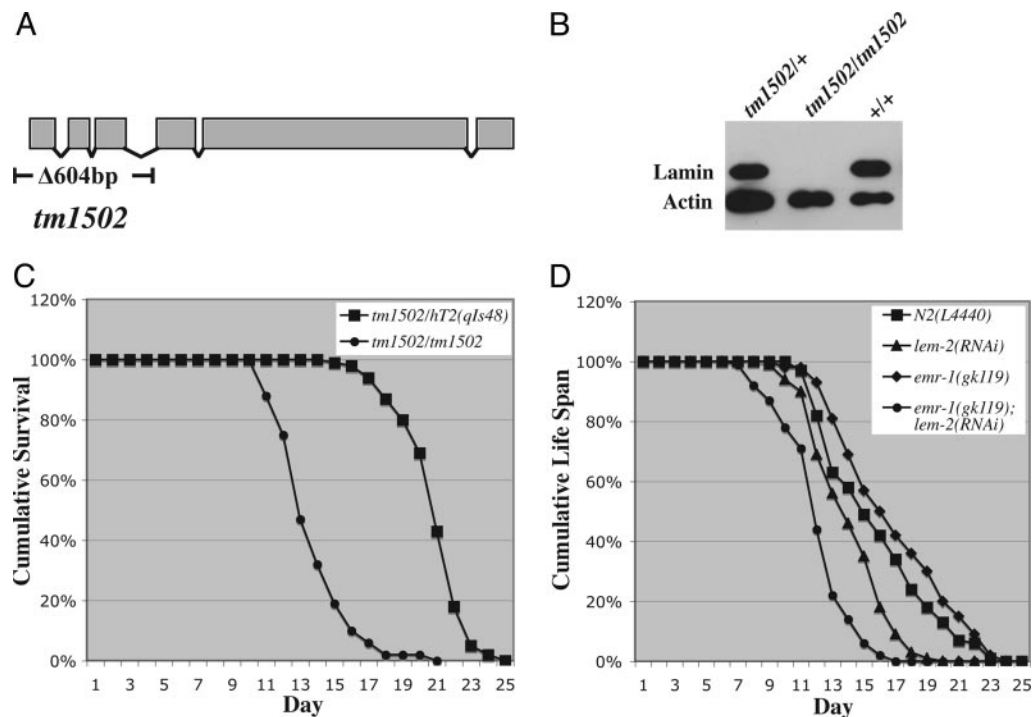


Fig. 5. Animals with reduced level of Ce-lamin or the two LEM domain proteins Ce-emerin and Ce-MAN1 have a shorter lifespan. (A) Diagram of the *lmn-1* genomic structure depicting the location of the *tm1502* mutation. (B) Western blots of extracts from adult N2, *tm1502/+* and *tm1502/tm1502* animals probed with antibodies against Ce-lamin and actin. (C) Lifespan of *tm1502/+* and *tm1502/tm1502* animals at 20°C. (D) Lifespan of *emr-1(gk119); lem-2(RNAi)* animals at 20°C (see Materials and Methods). N2(L4440) and *emr-1(gk119)* refer to wild-type and *emr-1(gk119)* single mutant animals fed on control bacteria with the empty RNAi feeding vector L4440, respectively. *lem-2(RNAi)* and *emr-1(gk119); lem-2(RNAi)* refer to wild-type and *emr-1(gk119)* single mutant animals fed on bacteria expressing ds-RNA against *lem-2*, respectively.

as we have shown that Ce-lamin proteins are very stable (16). Adult *tm1502/tm1502* animals had no detectable Ce-lamin on Western blots (Fig. 5B). However, they showed no morphological or movement defects. They appeared to have a normal-looking vulva, and they contained all of the differentiated cells derived from the single postembryonic mesodermal lineage, the M lineage (data not shown). The normal vulva and the normal M lineage suggest that postembryonic cell divisions in somatic tissues are normal in *tm1502/tm1502* mutant animals. Despite the apparently normal soma, *tm1502/tm1502* animals lived significantly shorter compared to *tm1502/+* animals (Fig. 5C and Table 1).

We also specifically reduced Ce-lamin levels during postembryonic development to bypass its essential requirement for normal embryonic development. We did this by feeding wild-type animals from hatching through postembryonic development with bacteria expressing dsRNA against *lmn-1*. More than 80% of the *lmn-1(RNAi)* animals generated this way were fertile and they produced close to 100% dead embryos, as expected by the loss of maternal Ce-lamin function (16). These fertile animals showed no detectable morphological defects ($n > 200$). However, they exhibited a shortened lifespan compared with wild-type animals fed with control bacteria (Table 1). Thus, Ce-lamin is critical for the normal lifespan of *C. elegans*.

We have previously shown that Ce-lamin interacts with two LEM domain proteins Ce-emerin and Ce-MAN1, encoded by *emr-1* and *lem-2*, respectively (19, 27). Because reducing the level of Ce-lamin led to a decrease in lifespan (Fig. 5C and Table 1), we also examined the consequences of reducing both Ce-emerin and Ce-MAN1 on the lifespan of the animals. We have obtained a deletion allele of *emr-1* from the *C. elegans* Gene Knockout Consortium, *gk119*, which has the entire coding region of *emr-1* deleted. *emr-1(gk119)* mutant animals are fertile with a normal

lifespan (Fig. 5D and Table 1). However, when we fed *emr-1(gk119)* mutant animals from hatching throughout postembryonic development with bacteria expressing dsRNA against *lem-2*, the resulting *emr-1(gk119); lem-2(RNAi)* animals were sterile and had a significantly shorter lifespan than that of *emr-1(gk119)* animals fed on control bacteria (Fig. 5D and Table 1). Feeding wild-type animals with bacteria expressing dsRNA against *lem-2* also resulted in a reduction of lifespan, but to a lesser degree (Fig. 5D and Table 1). Therefore, we conclude that nuclear envelopes with normal Ce-lamin and the two LEM domain proteins Ce-emerin and Ce-MAN1 are critical for the normal lifespan of *C. elegans* animals.

Discussion

Our studies demonstrate that wild-type *C. elegans* animals undergo age-related changes of the nuclear architecture. We have observed changes of nuclear shape, abnormal distribution of nuclear envelope proteins and loss of peripheral heterochromatin in increasingly older animals. These age-related changes of nuclear architecture are not restricted to specific areas of the animal, and they primarily occur in nonneuronal cells, including muscle, hypodermal, and intestinal cells. Furthermore, the specific changes we observed varied among individual cells within an animal and among different individual animals. These findings are consistent with previous findings that *C. elegans* animals undergo age-dependent deterioration of nonneuronal tissues, especially in muscle cells, and that the age-related tissue deterioration in *C. elegans* has a strong stochastic component (12, 13). We have shown that the insulin/IGF-1-like signaling pathway influences the rate of age-related nuclear architecture changes (Figs. 2 and 4). This same signaling pathway has also been shown to influence rates of tissue degeneration in aging animals (12,

