

Review article

Integration of calcium with the signaling network in cardiac myocytes

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Abstract

Calcium has evolved as global intracellular messenger for signal transduction in the millisecond time range by reversibly binding to calcium-sensing proteins. In the cardiomyocyte, ion pumps, ion exchangers and channels keep the cytoplasmic calcium level at rest around ~100 nM which is more than 10,000-fold lower than outside the cell. Intracellularly, calcium is mainly stored in the sarcoplasmic reticulum, which comprises the bulk of calcium available for the heartbeat. Regulation of cardiac function including contractility and energy production relies on a three-tiered control system, (i) immediate and fast feedback in response to mechanical load on a beat-to-beat basis (Frank-Starling relation), (ii) more sustained regulation involving transmitters and hormones as primary messengers, and (iii) long-term adaptation by changes in the gene expression profile. Calcium signaling over largely different time scales requires its integration with the protein kinase signaling network which is governed by G-protein-coupled receptors, growth factor and cytokine receptors at the surface membrane. Short-term regulation is dominated by the β -adrenergic system, while long-term regulation with phenotypic remodeling depends on sustained signaling by growth factors, cytokines and calcium. Mechanisms and new developments in intracellular calcium handling and its interrelation with the MAPK signaling pathways are discussed in detail. © 2006 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Calcium signaling; Intracellular signaling; Cardiac remodeling; Mitochondrial calcium regulation; MAPK signaling; Adrenergic signaling

Contents

1. Introduction	184
2. Aim of this review	184
3. Revelation of calcium as global signaling component	185
4. Why was calcium chosen as intracellular messenger?	186
5. Calmodulin and troponin-C as prototypical calcium sensors	187
6. Integration of calcium signaling in the cardiomyocyte	188
7. Adrenergic signaling pathways	189
7.1. Adenylyl cyclase	189
7.2. Phosphodiesterase	190
7.3. Phospholipase-C	190
7.4. Protein kinase-A	190
7.5. Protein kinase-C	190
7.6. G-protein coupled receptor kinase	191
8. Clearing calcium from the cytoplasm	191
8.1. $\text{Na}^+/\text{Ca}^{2+}$ exchanger	191
8.2. SR Ca^{2+} pump	192

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8.3.	Phospholamban and sarcolipin	192
8.4.	Calmodulin-dependent protein kinase-II	192
8.5.	Phosphorylation of calmodulin	193
8.6.	Protein phosphatases	193
8.7.	Plasma membrane Ca ²⁺ pump	194
8.8.	Na ⁺ /K ⁺ pump	194
9.	Calcium entry into the cytoplasm during the action potential	194
9.1.	L-type Ca ²⁺ channel (DHPR)	195
9.2.	Ryanodine receptor at the cytoplasmic side	196
9.3.	Ryanodine receptor at the luminal SR side.	197
9.4.	Inositol 1,4,5-trisphosphate receptor	197
9.5.	Calcium binding S100A1 protein	198
10.	Mitochondrial calcium.	199
10.1.	Mitochondrial calcium handling and overload	200
10.2.	Calcium regulation of the mitochondrial permeability transition pore	200
11.	Calcium functions as an autoregulatory signal	201
12.	Modulation by Ca ²⁺ and phosphorylation at the sarcomere level	201
12.1.	Troponin-I and troponin-T	201
12.2.	Myosin binding protein-C (cMyBPC).	202
12.3.	Myosin regulatory light chain-2.	202
12.4.	Titin kinase as mechanosensor	203
13.	Long-term calcium signaling and cardiac remodeling.	204
13.1.	Calcineurin	204
13.2.	Calcineurin signaling	205
13.3.	Calcineurin-dependent feedback by MCIPs.	206
13.4.	Angiotensin-II signaling.	206
13.5.	Interdependence of calcineurin and MAPK signaling.	207
14.	Conclusions	207
	Acknowledgments	209
	References	209

1. Introduction

Intracellular signaling coordinates life sustaining cellular processes as diverse as growth, differentiation, maintenance of specific cell functions, energy production to match demand, protective responses to various types of extracellular stressors (e.g. mechanical stretch or hypoxia), and, if the rescue operation fails, even energy consuming programmed death by apoptosis. Stimuli for these various processes reach the cell in the form of extracellular primary messengers like transmitters and hormones (e.g. catecholamines, angiotensin-II, endothelin, growth factors, cell mediators) via the blood. In the case of excitable cells such as cardiomyocytes, the stimulus for contraction, a fast process that takes place in a fraction of a second, induces depolarisation of the resting membrane potential (around -80 mV), which involves a series of ionic fluxes through the membrane including entry of Ca²⁺ to the cytoplasm. The Ca²⁺ ion was shown to serve as intracellular second messenger controlling fast processes such as contraction.

On the other hand, myocyte maintenance and hypertrophic remodeling represent long-lasting processes under the control of distinct intracellular signaling pathways that have been defined within the past decades [1–4]. These signaling cascades primarily relay to two broad classes of surface membrane receptors, the G-protein coupled receptors with seven trans-

membrane segments (GPCRs) and the receptor components with one membrane-inserted segment displaying intrinsic enzyme activity, receptor tyrosine kinases (RTK) or receptor Ser/Thr kinases (RSTK). Signal transduction in these cascades is predominantly effected, step by step, via reversible phosphorylation reactions [1,3]. However, Ca²⁺ plays a decisive role not only at multiple steps in the receptor-dependent cascades but in many instances constitutes the ultimate signal transducer in the chain, which is responsible for the cellular response.

2. Aim of this review

We focus here on how Ca²⁺ as the major intracellular messenger is integrated into the general signaling network and how the different pathways ultimately affect the Ca²⁺-modulated cellular responses. This may be justified by the fact that research in the two fields of Ca²⁺ signaling and receptor-dependent cascading does not entirely overlap. Since our approach covers a wide area of research, reviews – where the reader may find the primary literature – are often cited.

By selecting from the large body of literature, we have constructed a series of schematic diagrams integrating major aspects of intracellular signaling in order to visualize the complexity at different levels (Figs. 1–3). Fig. 1 displays the

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