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Brief communication

Abnormal neuronal networks and seizure susceptibility in mice overexpressing the APP intracellular domain

D.L. Vogt [a,*], D. Thomas [a], V. Galvan [c], D.E. Bredesen [b], B.T. Lamb [a], S.W. Pimplikar [a,**]

[a] *Department of Neurosciences, Lerner Research Institute, Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland, OH 44195, USA*

[b] *Buck Institute for Age Research, 8001 Redwood Boulevard, Novato, CA 94945, USA*

[c] *Department of Physiology and the Sam and Ann Barshop Institute for Longevity and Aging Studies, University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, San Antonio, TX 78245, USA*

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Abstract

Alterations in the processing of the amyloid precursor protein (APP) lead to familial Alzheimer's disease (AD). AD patients exhibit increased seizure susceptibility and alterations in their EEGs, which suggests that APP and its metabolites may modulate neuronal networks. Here we demonstrate that transgenic mice overexpressing APP intracellular domain (AICD) and its binding partner Fe65 exhibit abnormal spiking events and a susceptibility to induced seizures. These abnormalities are not observed in PDAPP(D664A) mice, which express high Aβ levels but harbor a mutation in the APP intracellular domain. These data suggest that alterations in the levels of AICD contribute to network dysfunction in AD.

Keywords: Alzheimer's; AICD; APP; Fe65; Electroencephalogram; Seizure

1. Introduction

Familial mutations associated with Alzheimer's disease (AD) alter amyloid precursor protein (APP) processing, resulting in early onset AD (Price and Sisodia, 1998). When these familial mutations are introduced into mice, key pathological features of AD, such as elevations in amyloid beta (Aβ) peptides and plaques, are present. These mouse models also exhibit altered neuronal activity and a susceptibility to seizure activity (Palop et al., 2007), which is consistent with the high incidence of seizures in AD patients as compared to the normal population (Menendez, 2005). However, because full-length APP is expressed in these mouse models, it is difficult to distinguish the contribution of individual peptides generated from APP processing.

Comparisons of two mouse models suggest an important contribution of the APP intracellular domain (AICD). In mice that overexpress human APP (hAPP) with familial mutations and an additional mutation in the intracellular domain, PDAPP(D664A), high levels of Aβ are present but mice exhibit no deficits in long term potentiation (LTP) or memory (Galvan et al., 2006; Saganich et al., 2006). Another transgenic line, PDAPP(J20) mice, harbors the same familial mutations in APP but lacks the mutation in the intracellular domain. PDAPP(J20) mice have similar levels of Aβ as the PDAPP(D664A) mice, as well as deficits in long term potentiation, spontaneous seizures and a susceptibility to seizure-inducing drugs (Galvan et al., 2006; Saganich et al., 2006; Palop et al., 2007) These data suggest that other APP metabolites, particularly AICD, may be involved in the electrical aberrations that are prominent in AD and AD mouse models.

AICD peptides of 59, 57 and 50 amino acids can be generated by γ-secretase, while caspase cleavage generates a fragment of 31 amino acids. AICD interacts with many cytosolic proteins, including Fe65, which may be important for the activity of AICD and AD pathology (Russo et al.,

* Corresponding author. Current address: Nina Ireland Laboratory of Developmental Neurobiology, Department of Psychiatry, University of California at San Francisco, San Francisco, CA 94143, USA.
Tel.: +1 415 476 7872; fax: +1 216 444 7927.
** Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: daniel.vogt@ucsf.edu (D.L. Vogt), pimplis@ccf.org (S.W. Pimplikar).

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1998; McLoughlin and Miller, 2008). Interestingly, transgenic mice overexpressing both AICD and Fe65 have high levels of active GSK-3β (Ryan and Pimplikar, 2005) which is observed in AD patients (Hooper et al., 2008). In addition, we recently observed that these mice exhibit other AD pathological features without altering APP metabolism (Ghosal et al., in press), suggesting that imbalances in AICD may be sufficient to cause some features of AD. Here we demonstrate that mice overexpressing AICD and Fe65 exhibit abnormal EEG spiking, and these changes are correlated with a strong susceptibility to induced seizures. These data demonstrate the first in vivo biological function for AICD in regulating neuronal networks, and suggest that AICD contributes to these phenotypes in AD mouse models.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Transgenic mice

All mice were maintained on a C57BL/6J background. Mice co-expressing AICD59 and Fe65 (FeCγ lines) or Fe65 alone (Fe27 line) under the CaMKIIα promoter were previously described (Ryan and Pimplikar, 2005). AICD protein levels in FeCγ12 are slightly elevated over wildtype (WT) while high in the FeCγ25 line, and all transgenic lines express equal amounts of Fe65. R1.40 mice express human APP containing the Swedish (K670N, M671L) familial AD mutation, and have been previously described (Lamb et al., 1997). PDAPP(D664A) mice (line B254) express hAPP with Swedish and Indiana (V717F) familial mutations and a point mutation in the intracellular caspase cleavage site (D664A), and have been previously described (Galvan et al., 2006). WT littermates were used as controls for all experiments.

2.2. Kainic acid injections

3–5-Month-old female mice were injected i.p. at a dose of 25 mg/kg body weight with kainic acid (Sigma). Mice were video monitored for 65 min, and maximum seizure severity was scored every 5 min. Mortality was determined as the time when mice ceased breathing and did not respond to a noxious stimulus. A modified version of Racine's scale (Racine et al., 1972), previously reported for other AD mouse models (Palop et al., 2007), was used to score seizure severity, where (0) normal activity, (1) freezing/immobility, (2) mild twitch, (3) tail extension, (4) forelimb clonus/repeated forelimb extensions, (5) consistent loss of balance/tonic-clonal seizures, (6) hyperactivity with jumping, (7) full body extension, and (8) death.

2.3. EEG surgeries and analysis

EEG surgeries were performed according to the manufacturer's protocol (Pinnacle Technology, Lawrence, KS). Briefly, mice were anesthetized with Avertin (0.02 ml/g body weight) and mounted in a stereotaxic device (Kopf). A mouse EEG head implant (Pinnacle technology) was affixed to the skull with four intracortical screws. EEG screws were positioned in the frontal and parietal cortices, using the headmount frame as a guide to ensure proper placement and spacing. The headmount was sealed with orthodontic resin and mice were allowed to recover for at least 3 days before chronic EEG monitoring.

EEGs were sampled at 200 Hz over 24 h intervals using Sirenia (v8.1.2), accompanied by video monitoring in a cylindrical plexiglass chamber with access to food and water ad libitum. Data were screened with video recordings and only those episodes not exhibiting environmental artifacts were exported for offline processing using Origin (v7.5). Abnormal EEG episodes were defined as amplitudes that were at least three times greater than the baseline and lasted at least 3 s. Events that occurred within 5 s were considered to be part of the same episode.

2.4. Statistical analysis

Data were processed using Prism (v4.0), and considered significant if $p < 0.05$.

3. Results

We previously generated mice that overexpress AICD and Fe65 or Fe65 alone and found that they exhibit some features observed in AD, including hyperactivation of GSK-3β (Ryan and Pimplikar, 2005). As these mice aged (>18 months) we noticed frequent behavioral seizures characterized by forelimb clonus and tonic–clonic seizures (11 of 32 mice, data not shown). However, these phenotypes were never observed in Fe27 mice that overexpress only Fe65, or wildtype (WT) littermates. To determine if AICD expression contributes to neuronal circuit disruptions at an earlier age, transgenic mice co-expressing Fe65 and high (line FeCγ25) or low (line FeCγ12) levels of AICD were implanted with intracortical EEG electrodes at 3–4 months of age and video monitored for several days. WT mice displayed consistent EEG readings without any abnormal spiking episodes (12 of 12) (Fig. 1A). The majority of mice (6 of 7) expressing Fe65 alone (line Fe27) resembled WTs, suggesting that elevated Fe65 is not sufficient to induce abnormal EEGs (Fig. 1B). Interestingly, both lines of FeCγ mice displayed abnormal spiking events detectable by EEG, (FeCγ12: 7 of 8) and (FeCγ25: 7 of 7) (Fig. 1C and D), with episodes lasting from a few seconds up to several minutes. However, we did not observe the same severe behavioral alterations seen in aged mice during these episodes. These data suggest AICD overexpression contributes to alterations of neuronal networks that may give rise to spontaneous spiking episodes.

Since AD mouse models have abnormal EEGs (Wang et al., 2002; Palop et al., 2007) we compared EEGs from FeCγ mice to those obtained from the R1.40 AD mouse model.