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Short Communication

Levetiracetam in submaximal subcutaneous pentylentetrazol-induced seizures in rats

Giangennaro Coppola [a,*], Salvatore Arcieri [a], Alfredo D'Aniello [a], Tullio Messana [a], Alberto Verrotti [b], Giuseppe Signoriello [c], Antonio Pascotto [a]

[a] Clinic of Child Neuropsychiatry, Second University of Naples, Italy
[b] Section of Pediatrics, Department of Pediatrics, University of Chieti, Italy
[c] Department of Public Health, Second University of Naples, Italy

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ABSTRACT

Despite anticonvulsant efficacy in animal models of generalized epilepsy, levetiracetam was not effective in the maximal subcutaneous PTZ model in mice and rats.

Aim of this study was to assess the efficacy of levetiracetam (LEV) against submaximal, s.c. MET test (PTZ at the dose of 70 mg/kg) acute seizures in Wistar rats, in comparison to valproic acid (VPA).

Thirty male Wistar rats (P42) were divided in three drug-treatment groups (10 rats in each group) as follows: valproic acid, levetiracetam, and controls. All animals were tested for seizure threshold at age P50. VPA (110 mg/kg) and LEV (108 mg/kg) were freshly dissolved in saline and injected i.p. in 2–3 ml/kg, 15 and 30 min, respectively, before pentylenetetrazol (PTZ) injection at the dose of 70 mg/kg.

The average latency of the seizure type 3 (generalized clonic seizure with loss of righting reflexes) significantly differed between controls and the drug-treated animal groups ($p \leq 0.02$). The average duration of the seizure type 2 (threshold seizure) was significantly longer in both groups compared to controls (<0.02).

In conclusion, LEV plays a role against seizures triggered by subcutaneous PTZ injection given at submaximal doses in rats, as demonstrated by a significant increase in duration of the seizure type 2 (threshold seizure).

1. Introduction

Levetiracetam (LEV) is a new generation drug which was effective for the treatment of focal seizures with or without secondary generalization, as well as tonic-clonic and myoclonic generalized seizures.[1–4] Recent report confirmed LEV to be also effective in controlling absence seizures,[5] and placebo-controlled trials with this drug are ongoing.

In preclinical studies, levetiracetam has been shown active in animal models that are believed to represent generalized seizures. The expression of seizure activity was prevented in both audiogenic susceptible mice[6] and rats.[7] A marked suppression of the mean duration of spike-and-wave discharges was also obtained by levetiracetam in rats from the Genetic Absence Epilepsy Rats from Strasbourg (GAERS) strain even at the lowest tested dose. A similar suppression of pentylenetetrazol (PTZ)-induced spike-and-wave discharges was also observed with an i.p. dose of 17 mg/kg[6].

Despite such a clinical evidence in humans and animal models of generalized epilepsy, LEV was not effective at doses up to 500 mg/kg in the experimental animal model of maximal s.c. PTZ at the dose of 90 mg/kg, in mice and rats.[8] This model has been hypothesized to correlate with the efficacy of an anticonvulsant drug against myoclonic and clonic seizures in humans.[9] Yet, the type and severity of the generalized seizures induced in this model are related to the dose and route of PTZ injection.[10,11]

It is well accepted that maximal pentylentetrazole test (MMT) and maximal electroshock test (MES) are considered "suprathreshold" tests, while "threshold tests" include the PTZ infusion test and the threshold electroconvulsive test (ECS). Among these, the subcutaneous pentylentetrazol (scMET) test[12] may be included, since a lower dose of PTZ (70 mg/kg) is given instead of 90 mg/kg, as in the MMT test.

While suprathreshold tests are best suited to study maximal seizures in rodents, consisting of tonic forelimb and hindlimb extension, and are used in drug development to model tonic-clonic

* Corresponding author at: Clinic of Child and Adolescent Neuropsychiatry, Department of Psychiatry, Second University of Naples, Via Pansini 5, Naples, Italy. Tel.: +39 081 5666695; fax: +39 081 5666694.
E-mail address: giangennaro.coppola@unina2.it (G. Coppola).

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seizures in humans, threshold tests can better assess minimal (threshold) seizures consisting of face and forelimb clonic jerks, and are used in drug development to model myoclonic seizures in humans.[9]

Such an experimental model may indeed contribute to better disclose the anticonvulsant properties of a new drug, i.e. by comparing them with those of a well established one.

In order to further assess the actual efficacy of LEV in such a seizure model, specific for generalized seizures of clonic and myoclonic type, we evaluated LEV efficacy against s.c. MET test (PTZ at the dose of 70 mg/kg) acute seizures in Wistar rats.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Animals and diet

Thirty male Wistar rats (Harlan Italy, Milan, Italy) were housed in groups of two in polycarbonate cages at a temperature of 25 °C, on an alternating 12-h light/12-h dark cycle with lights on at 06:00 h.

Animals arrived at 42 days of age (P42) and were fed rodent chow (F1515 Rodent diet, AIN-76A, 1/2 pellets by Bio-Serv, Frenchtown, NJ, USA) and provided water ad libitum for 8 days before initiation of the experiment.

All animals were maintained within conditions specified in approved Institutional Animal Care and use Committee protocols. The experiment protocol was previously approved by the local Ethic Committee.

2.2. Seizure threshold

After maintenance on a free chow diet, all animals were divided in three drug-treatment groups (10 rats in each group) as follows: valproic acid, levetiracetam, and controls.

Valproic acid (VPA), supplied by Sanofi-Aventis as purified product, was dissolved in 0.9% NaCl, sterile filtered (0.2 μm, Coster), and injected intraperitoneally (i.p.) at the dose of 110 mg/kg. This VPA dosage was reported to be the ED50 in Wistar rats by Löscher et al.[9].

Levetiracetam (LEV), supplied by UCB-Belgium as purified product, was dissolved in 0.9% NaCl sterile filtered (0.2 μmol, Coster) and injected intraperitoneally (i.p.) at the dose of 108 mg/kg. This dose, effective in the e.v. PTZ model 13), was chosen to be assessed in a submaximal s.c. PTZ seizure model.

Controls were given an equivalent volume of saline (i.p.). All animals were tested for seizure threshold at age P50.

Pentylenetetrazol (PTZ) (Sigma Chemical Co.) was dissolved in bacteriostatic saline (Abbott) to a concentration of 10 mg/ml and injected at the dose of 70 mg/kg subcutaneously into a loose fold of skin on the back of the neck of the animals. The PTZ seizure threshold test was administered according to a modification of the procedure by Krall et al.[14] The dose of 70 mg/kg was considered intermediate between the maximal dose (90 mg/kg) and 50 mg/kg, which was determined in a separate experiment as the minimal dose required to induce generalized seizures in 100% of our rats within approximately 30 minutes after PTZ injection.

Valproic acid (110 mg/kg) and levetiracetam (108 mg/kg) were freshly dissolved in saline and injected i.p. in 2–3 ml/kg, 15 and 30 min (time to maximum serum concentration) before PTZ injection, respectively.[9,15,16]

Soon after PTZ administration, each rat was video-taped and monitored for 1 h, and the different seizure types (in order of appearance) were rated as follows: 0, no seizures; 1, generalized myoclonic twitches; 2, generalized clonic seizure without loss of righting reflexes ("threshold seizure"); 3, generalized clonic seizure with loss of righting reflexes; 4, loss of righting reflexes with forelimb tonus; 5, loss of righting reflexes with hindlimb tonus.[9]

Since PTZ was given at the dose of 70 mg/kg, that is less than the CD97 (90 mg/kg by Löscher et al.[9]), rats with no seizures (seizure type 0) were excluded from the study. Following the same reason, the video monitoring of each rat was prolonged for at least 1 h after PTZ injection.

All animals were seizure naïve when tested and each was subjected to seizure testing only once. Seizures were always induced between 13:00 and 17:00 to minimize possible complicating effects of circadian rhythms[17].

2.3. Statistical analysis

One-way analysis of variance was performed to evaluate the relationship between groups of treatment and Dunnett *t*-test was used to compare all other groups against control. A p value below 0.05 was considered significant.

3. Results

All rats developed seizures leading to exitus. While there was no significant difference among the three groups as regards the start of the seizures type 1 and 2, the average latency of the seizure type 3 significantly differed between controls and the other two groups ($p \leq 0.02$; Dunnett *t*-test, two-sided). Furthermore, the average latency (in seconds) was essentially overlapping both in VPA and LEV group (1159.43 ± 928.0 and 1477.43 ± 615.0) (Fig. 1).

Fig. 2 shows the mean duration ± SD of the seizures type 1 and 2 (seizure threshold) in each group of animals. While duration of the seizure type 1 was only slightly increased in the VPA group, the seizure type 2 lasted significantly longer in both groups, compared to controls ($p \leq 0.02$).

4. Discussion

In the present study, levetiracetam has increased, to the same extent of valproic acid, the seizure threshold in rats that were injected with s.c. PTZ at the dose of 70 mg/kg. In previous studies, levetiracetam resulted ineffective in the experimental model of s.c.

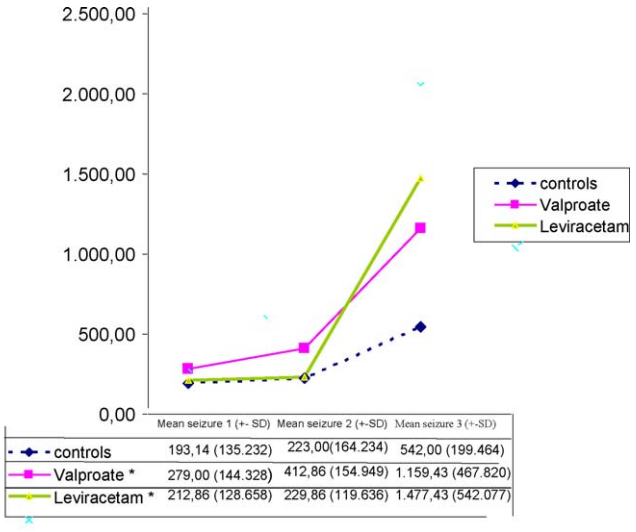

Fig. 1. Latency (seconds) of different seizure types in the three groups of rats. *$p \leq 0.02$ (Dunnett *t*-test, two-sided (seizure latency in controls vs. the other groups).