

Muscarinic M1 and M2 receptors, fasting and seizure development in animals

M1 ve M2 muskarinik reseptörler, açlık ve hayvanlarda nöbet gelişimi

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Cite this article as: Bacanak M. Muscarinic M1 and M2 receptors, fasting and seizure development in animals. Exp Health Sci 2018; 8: 308-313.

ABSTRACT

Muscarinic M₁ and M₂ receptors are widely distributed in the brain and contribute to various physiological and pathological functions. It is well known that enhancement of cholinergic activity produces convulsions in animals. Pilocarpine, the M₁ muscarinic receptor agonist, is commonly used to induce seizures in rodents. On the other hand it has been reported that fasted rats and mice pretreated with the M₁ and M₂ receptor antagonist atropine, scopolamine or biperiden develop convulsions after food intake indicating cholinergic hypoactivity as the underlying mechanism. This review will present pharmacological data for the M₁ and M₂ receptors in the brain and focus on the contrasting findings related to their contribution to convulsions.

Keywords: Seizures, receptors, muscarinic m1, muscarinic m2

ÖZ

M₁ ve M₂ muskarinik reseptörler beyinde oldukça yaygındır ve çeşitli fizyolojik ve patolojik fonksiyonlara katkıda bulunurlar. Kolinerjik aktivitenin artırılmasının hayvanlarda konvülsiyon oluşturduğu iyi bilinmektedir. M₁ muskarinik reseptör agonisti olan pilokarpin ise kemiricilerde nöbet oluşturmak için sıklıkla kullanılmaktadır. Öte yandan M₁ ve M₂ muskarinik reseptör antagonisti atropin, skopolamin veya biperiden uygulanan aç fare ve sıçanlara yem verildikten sonra konvülsiyon oluştuğu ve bunun altında yatan mekanizmanın kolinerjik hipoaktiviteyi gösterdiği bildirilmiştir. Bu derlemede beyindeki M₁ ve M₂ reseptörlere ilişkin farmakolojik bilgiler sunulacak ve bu reseptörlerin konvülsiyonlara katkılarına ilişkin çelişkili bulgular üzerinde durulacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Nöbetler, reseptörler, m1 muskarinik, m2 muskarinik

INTRODUCTION

Subtypes, regional distribution and synaptic localization of muscarinic receptors

Five muscarinic receptor subtypes, M₁, M₂, M₃, M₄ and M₅ have been identified. Their regional distribution and function in the brain are shown in Table 1. Muscarinic receptors in brain are located in neurons and glia cells. The most prevalent subtypes in rat brain are M₁ and M₂ receptors (1).

M₁, M₃ and M₅ receptors preferentially couple to Gq subunit that activate phospholipase C and generate second messengers, inositol triphosphate (IP₃) and diacyl glycerol (DAG) and so intracellular calcium levels increase (Figure 1). These receptors may also activate phospholipase A₂ and phospholipase D in certain cells (2). On the other hand muscarinic M₂ and M₄ receptors preferentially couple to Gai/o subunit that inhibits adenylate cyclase and reduce the production of second messenger cyclic adenosine monophosphate (cAMP).

In brain, M₁ receptors are most commonly located postsynaptically while M₂ receptors are most commonly located presynaptically (3) (Figure 1). Blockade of postsynaptic muscarinic receptors reduces the effects of acetylcholine, whereas blockade of presynaptic muscarinic autoreceptors causes an increase in acetylcholine release (4). M₂ receptor was shown to be the main presynaptic autoreceptor in hippocampus and cerebral cortex (4), while both M₁ and M₂ receptors are located presynaptically and postsynaptically in cerebral cortex and hippocampus (3, 4, 5). Blockade of the M₁ receptors increases acetylcholine release in rat cerebral cortex and hippocampus (5, 6), whereas does not change acetylcholine release in human cerebral cortex cell culture (7). Presynaptic muscarinic autoreceptors (M₁, M₂, M₃, M₄) inhibit acetylcholine release and are also located on noncholinergic nerve terminals as heteroreceptors and contribute to the effects of acetylcholine (8, 9). Blockade of M₁ heteroreceptors leads to a decrease in dopamine release (10) and blockade of M₂ heteroreceptors leads to an increase in glutamate release (8).

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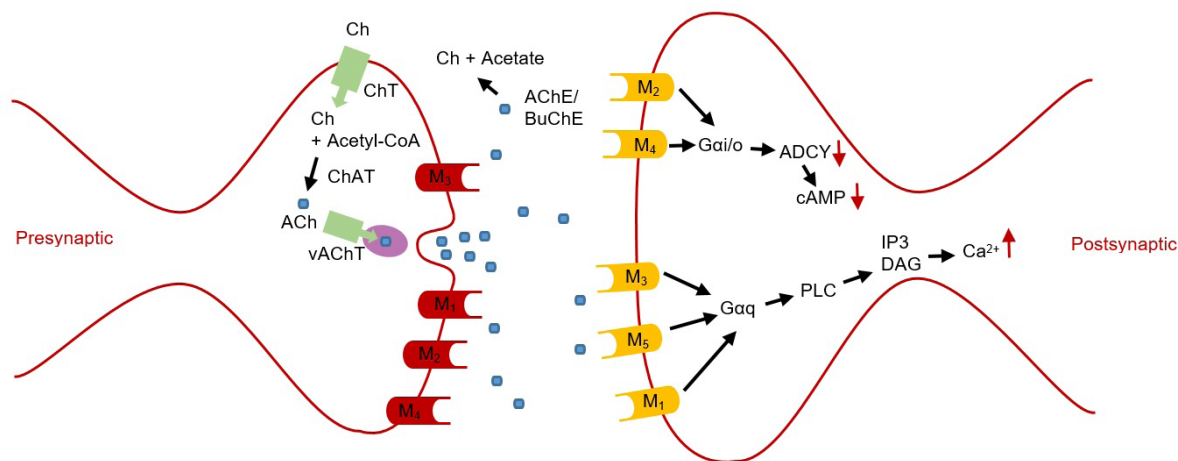


Figure 1: Cholinergic synapse, muscarinic receptors and synaptic neurotransmission (50)

Abbreviations: ChT, high-affinity choline transporters; ChAT, choline acetyltransferase; vAChT, vesicular ACh transporter; AC, acetylcholine; AChE, acetylcholinesterase; BuChE, butyrylcholinesterase

Table 1: Distribution and function of muscarinic receptor subtypes

Muscarinic receptor subtype	Widely distributed region in the brain	Associated physiological functions
M ₁	Cerebral cortex, hippocampus, striatum (41)	Receptor stimulation → Regulation of learning and memory like cognitive functions (18), regulation of locomotor activity (42), increases wakefulness while reducing delta sleep (43) Receptor blockade → Increased cognitive performance including memory (21), decreased REM sleep-like state (44)
M ₂	Forebrain, thalamus, motor neurons (1)	Receptor stimulation → antinociceptive effect (45) Receptor knockout → Reduced food intake and increased locomotor activity, decreased pituitary and serum growth hormone (GH) and prolactin (46),
M ₃	Hypothalamus, hippocampus (21)	Receptor stimulation → regulation of metabolic functions and longitudinal growth (46), regulation of learning and memory like cognitive functions (47) Receptor knockout → Increased locomotor activity and dopaminergic activity so contribution to antiparkinsonian effect (21)
M ₄	Corpus striatum (21)*	Receptor stimulation → Contribution to antipsychotic effect (21), antinociceptive effect (45) Receptor knockout → Abolished cholinergically induced cerebral vasodilation (48)
M ₅	Substantia nigra pars compacta, ventral tegmental area (21)**	Receptor stimulation → Increased dopamine release in substantia nigra pars compacta, inhibition of dopamine release in striatum (49)

*M₄ receptors are distributed in the corpus striatum being co-localized with dopamine receptors (21).

**M₅ is the only muscarinic subtype expressed by the dopamine-containing neurons of the substantia nigra pars compacta (21).

Muscarinic agonists and antagonists

Muscarine, pilocarpine and arecoline are the naturally occurring muscarinic agonists. Methacholine, carbachol, bethanechol and oxotremorine are the most known synthetic muscarinic agonists. Oxotremorine-M is the most potent N-methyl quaternary derivative of oxotremorine and cannot pass through the blood brain barrier. Arecoline and pilocarpine are the partial agonists. Selectivity and

affinity for the muscarinic receptor subtypes differ between the muscarinic agonists and antagonists. Pilocarpine demonstrated selectivity for M₁ and M₃ subtypes regarding the intrinsic relative activity (RA_i) (11). In this study arecoline, carbachol and oxotremorine-M lacked marked selectivity among M₁ to M₄ receptors. Xanomeline, the synthetic muscarinic agonist demonstrated functional selectivity for the M₁ and M₄ (12) muscarinic receptor subtypes. However binding studies showed similar affinity of xanomeline at all five subtypes (13).

The affinities of atropine, scopolamine, biperiden and pirenzepine, the main muscarinic receptor antagonists are shown in Table 2. Atropine, the nonselective muscarinic receptor antagonist has equal affinity for all muscarinic receptor subtypes, however scopolamine has lower affinity for M₂ receptors than the other subtypes. Biperiden has highest affinity for M₁ receptors. And pirenzepine is the selective antagonist of M₁ subtype. According to the in vitro muscarinic receptor radio ligand binding assays, the affinities of pirenzepine, biperiden, scopolamine (14) and atropine (15) were 98, 46, 6 and 2 fold higher for M₁ subtype than M₂ subtype (Table 2). Additionally atropine and scopolamine had showed 10 times higher affinity for presynaptic receptors than postsynaptic receptors (16).

Table 2: Comparison of binding affinities for atropine, scopolamine, biperiden and pirenzepine at human muscarinic receptors as Ki values

	M ₁	M ₂	M ₃	M ₄	M ₅
Atropine	0,17	0,339	0,209	0,107	0,316
Scopolamine	0,83 (0,05)	5,3 (1,4)	0,34 (0,06)	0,38 (0,07)	0,34 (0,11)
Biperiden	2,2 (0,23)	102 (24)	5,3 (1,3)	3,1 (0,8)	4,4 (1,4)
Pirenzepine	43 (14)	4200 (1370)	468 (172)	148 (53)	237 (122)

Human cloned receptors were expressed in Chinese hamster ovary cell membranes. Binding was measured as competition with [3H]N-methyl-scopolamine. Data represent as Ki (mean ± S.E.M.) in nanomolar (14, 15).

CLINICAL AND RESEARCH CONSEQUENCES

Roles of musarinic receptors in physiological functions and pathological processes

As shown in Table 1, muscarinic receptors participate in many physiological functions including learning and memory formations, locomotor activity, sleep-wake cycle, regulation of heart rate, growth hormone, prolactin, gastric acid and salivary secretions and contraction of smooth muscles.

Muscarinic receptors contribute to the pathophysiology of various neurological disorders. It is known that cognitive function is impaired in Alzheimer's disease and schizophrenia. Selective M₁ agonism has been shown to retard the age, Alzheimer's disease or schizophrenia related dementia and cognitive deficits with few side effects (17). Additionally M₁ receptors have been demonstrated to control amyloid precursor protein (APP) processing and the generation of the neurotoxic APP fragment, amyloid β-peptide (Aβ) in Alzheimer's disease (18). Various researchers have suggested that cholinergic function may be improved by selective blockade of M₂ receptors alone or together with M₁ agonism in early stages of Alzheimer's disease. Post-mortem and brain-imaging studies have shown that M₁ muscarinic receptor protein and M₁ receptor mRNA were reduced in different brain regions of patients with schizophrenia (19). Benzotropine, a selective M₁ receptor antagonist, reduces the adverse side effects of antipsychotic treatments in schizophrenic patients (20). However M₁ agonists are promising for reversing some of the cognitive impairments associated with schizophrenia (19). So the efficient way for the treatment of schizophrenia regarding the

M₁ muscarinic receptor agonism vs antagonism remains unclear. In the caudate putamen, muscarinic M₂ receptors act as inhibitory heteroreceptors on dopaminergic terminals. Therefore, selective M₂ antagonism may provide beneficial effects in schizophrenia, where dopaminergic transmission is increased (21). Dopaminergic neurons in the striatum are lost in Parkinson's disease and this causes an imbalance between dopaminergic and cholinergic effects with an excess of cholinergic effects. This is associated with increased striatal acetylcholine levels, which contributes to the development of the motor signs typically associated to Parkinson's disease. Selective M₁ receptor antagonists are used for the prevention and the treatment of dyskinesia and the treatment of dystonia (20). Muscarinic M₄ receptor knockout mice displays enhanced locomotor activity and D₁ dopaminergic receptor related effects (21). M₄ muscarinic receptors seem to suppress D₁ receptor function. So, selective blockade of M₄ receptors are being investigated in the treatment of Parkinson's disease.

Convulsions induced by muscarinic agonists

Enhancement of cholinergic activity by M₁ and M₂ muscarinic receptor agonists carbachol (22) and pilocarpine (23) or the acetylcholinesterase inhibitor soman (24) produce convulsions in animals.

Pilocarpine, a nonspecific muscarinic receptor agonist is commonly used to induce seizures in mice and rats with high systemic or intracerebral administrations. Pilocarpine-treated animals demonstrate structural damages (23) and tonic-clonic generalized seizures (25) like in humans with temporal lobe epilepsy. Animals display status epilepticus (SE) followed by a latent period. After this seizure-free period, spontaneous recurrent seizures (SRSs) are generated (25). M₁ muscarinic receptor knockout pilocarpine treated animals display no seizure activity. So M₁ receptors seem to be responsible for the seizure development (26). After binding to M₁ receptors, phospholipase C is activated. DAG and IP₃ are produced, Ca²⁺ and K⁺ currents are altered. Consequently, neuronal excitation is increased. The activity of ATPases in the hippocampus may be reduced. So, the plasma membrane could not be repolarized. As the Ca²⁺ ions could not be extruded, the increased Ca²⁺ levels elevates glutamate release and this leads to SE. The glutamate permits Na⁺ and Ca²⁺ influx, thus the Mg²⁺ is moved out of the cell. Mg²⁺ acts as a blocker on the N-methyl-D-aspartate (NMDA) receptors. When Mg²⁺ is extruded, glutamate activates the NMDA receptors. This causes excessive Ca²⁺ entry and subsequent excitation and death of the cell. On the other hand, M₂ receptor activation by pilocarpine inhibits adenylate cyclase. This causes a reduction in the acetylcholine release and the excitability of the brain (27).

Convulsions induced by muscarinic antagonists

Enginar et al. showed that mice deprived of food displayed seizures after food intake in a study exploring the effects of scopolamine on memory and learning processes (28). In a series of experiments, mice and rats fasted for ≤ 48 h and treated with antimuscarinics, scopolamine, atropine or biperiden developed convulsions soon

after finding and eating the food pellet (29, 30). Antimuscarinic pretreatment and access to food are required in the generation of convulsions. Hypoglycaemia was prevented by glucose intake but convulsion development not. So, the contribution of a hypoglycaemic effect during fasting was ruled out (29). The binding characteristics of glutamatergic receptors were changed after fasting for 48 h. These changes were moderately blocked by scopolamine pretreatment and eating food (31). The convulsions seem similar with a form of reflex seizures called eating epilepsy regarding the triggering factors, exhibition of the seizure activity and response to antiepileptics (32). This new method/technique may provide insight into the seizures in patients.

It is very interesting that scopolamine has actually anticonvulsive effect. Scopolamine prevents seizures induced by anticholinesterase soman (24) and muscarinic agonist pilocarpine (22). The convulsive effects of scopolamine, atropine and biperiden have been suggested to be an anticholinergic effect arising from the antagonism of postsynaptic M_1 and/or M_2 muscarinic receptors. These receptors show different postsynaptic and presynaptic localizations and distributions in the brain and have different autoreceptor and heteroreceptor characteristics as mentioned above. Which of these receptors is responsible for the convulsions has not been fully understood yet. It has been reported that the topical administration of high concentrations of antimuscarinics to the brain produced seizures (33, 34). This effect has been suggested to imply an anticholinergic as well as cholinergic activity due to their efficacy in increasing the release of acetylcholine.

Prolonged fasting has been shown to alter the expression or binding characteristics of various receptors in brain. For instance; fasting for 48 h produced changes in glutamatergic receptors (31) and 120 h food deprivation decreased the gamma aminobutyric acid (GABA) receptors in the cerebellum (35). In the studies investigating the receptor binding and gene expression changes in rats with insulin-induced hypoglycaemia, M_1 , M_2 and M_3 receptors in the cerebral cortex (36) and M_1 receptor expression in the hippocampus (37) were decreased. In a model of posttraumatic stress, the increase of M_2 expression in the frontal cortex and M_1 expression in the hippocampus show the effect of stress on receptor expression (38). Muscarinic receptor expression is also altered in various pathological conditions including schizophrenia (19), epilepsy (39) and cancer (40). There may such changes occur in the expression of muscarinic receptors leading to the convulsions. Thus, the relationship between receptor expression and fasting and the muscarinic receptor subtype which plays a role in the occurrence of convulsions need to be investigated.

Conclusion

Acetylcholine has prominent functions in the brain. Various physiological and pathological processes involve alterations in muscarinic receptor expression. Studies using M_1 and/or M_2 agonists and antagonists may clarify the underlying mechanisms of convulsions regarding the contribution of cholinergic/anticholinergic activities.

Author contributions: Concept; Literature Search; Writing; Merve Saygi Bacanak, Pharm. PhD.

Conflict of Interest: There is no conflict of interest.

Hakem Değerlendirmesi: Dış Bağlımsız.

Yazar Katkıları: Fikir; Literatür taraması; Yazıyı Yazan; Dr. Ecz. Merve Saygi Bacanak

Çıkar Çatışması: Yoktur.

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