Memory Function and Brain Glucose Metabolism

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Memory formation and memory retrieval are subject to complex cellular and molecular processes. Increasing evidence exists that neuronal glucose metabolism and its control by the insulin signal transduction cascade are the main players in such processes. Acetylcholine synthesis depends on the availability of acetyl CoA, provided from glucose breakdown, and insulin, which controls the activity of acetylcholine transferase. ATP is necessary for both synaptic activity and plasticity. This is also true for APPs, the secreted derivative of APP. Trafficking of the latter protein is controlled by

insulin and insulin receptor function also acting on activity-regulated cytoskeleton-associated gene expression, which induces biochemical stimuli involved in synaptic activity and plasticity. Any damage in neuronal glucose metabolism and its control may, therefore, cause disturbances in memory function – as is found for example in sporadic Alzheimer's disease. Mimicking these metabolic and behavioral abnormalities in experimental animals, it was found that EGb 761® (definition see editorial) shows beneficial effects both on brain glucose and energy metabolism and on behavior.

Introduction

Numerous studies have provided clear evidence that memory function is highly dependent on the cholinergic system's functionality [9]. The degeneration of forebrain cholinergic projections has been demonstrated to be one of the most salient neurobiological and/or neuropathological features of both normal aging and sporadic Alzheimer's disease [6,7,14,63], although alterations in other neurotransmitter systems may also contribute to memory function [45,49,57]. Besides its effect on memory function, acetylcholine, together with norepinephrine, acts on the regulation of cerebral microvessel diameter in a concerted action in maintaining the supply of substrates, such as oxygen and glucose, to the brain [1,59,60]. In the brain, acetylcholine is formed from the energy-rich compound acetyl-CoA, which is generated by oxidation of pyruvate, the glycolytic end product [13]. The activity of the acetylcholine formation catalyzing enzyme, acetylcholine transferase, is controlled by insulin [34]. In this article, it is especially focused on the role of cerebral glucose metabolism and the function of insulin in the brain regarding memory capacity under normal and pathological conditions.

Insulin, Insulin Receptor and Glucose and Energy Metabolism in Normal Brain

The central significance of glucose as the major nutrient of the brain, its metabolism and control, have been well documented [24,26,27]. The derivative acetyl-CoA is used for acetylcholine formation (see above) for intracellular formation of cholesterol, which is the main sterol in membranes, and mainly for further oxidation to ATP that maintains most cellular and molecular functionalities. Therefore, the work of the endoplasmic reticulum and Golgi apparatus is highly dependent on a pH maintained at 6, which is ensured by an ATP-driven H⁺-pump [53,61].

There is increasing evidence that neuronal glucose metabolism is antagonistically controlled by insulin and cortisol. Insulin in the brain originates from the pancreatic β -cells, but is also partially formed in pyramidal neurons such as those in the hippocampus, prefrontal cortex, entorhinal cortex and the olfactory bulb, but not in glial cells. Insulin receptors are widely distributed in the brain, with the highest densities in the olfactory bulb, hypothalamus, cerebral cortex and hippocampus (for details, see [21]). Insulin stimulates neuronal insulin receptor function [20,29]. In con-

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trast, both glucocorticoids and catecholamines have been reported to cause insulin receptor desensitization [15,18]; the former have been shown to have drastic effects on glucose metabolism [47].

Effects of Insulin and Insulin Receptor on Amyloid Precursor Protein (APP) Metabolism and Tau Phosphorylation

Full-length APP normally undergoes processing by as yet undetected enzymatic activity known as ' α -secretase,' which cleaves the holoprotein precluding the formation of β A40 and β A42, the amyloidogenic derivatives. More detailed recent studies have given rise to the assumption that APP trafficking in the endoplasmic reticulum and Golgi apparatus is controlled by insulin and insulin receptor tyrosine kinase [12,56]. Insulin increased extracellular levels of the secreted form of APP (APPs) and the contrations of both β A40 and β A42 dose-dependently, and reduced the intracellular concentrations of these three derivatives. The insulin-mediated reduction of intracellular β A40 and β A42 was found to be the result of an increasing egress from the Golgi apparatus and the trans-Golgi network. Interestingly, the insulin receptor tyrosine kinase activity appeared to be essential for the effect of insulin on β A trafficking – that is, reduction of both intracellular β A40 and β A42. Inhibition of the insulin receptor function resulted in adverse effects - retention of APPs, β A40 and β A42 within the cell, and reduction in the extracellular milieu. Interestingly, recent evidence was provided that accumulation of intracellular β A42 may play a direct pathogenetic role in sporadic Alzheimer's disease [16,62].

Insulin has been shown to regulate the phosphorylation state of tau protein by regulating the activity of phosphorylating enzymes. Insulin concentration deficit increased the activity of glycogen synthase-3 kinase [22], which was found to cause tau-hyperphosphorylation [38]. ATP acts in a similar way; reduction of ATP activates both protein kinases erk36 and erk40 [51], which in turn causes tau-hyperphosphorylation [5].

Interrelationship between Memory and Brain Glucose Metabolism (Table 1)

A. Normal condition

As mentioned above, synthesis of the memory enhancing and memory stabilizing neurotransmitter, acetylcholine, from the glucose metabolism compounds acetyl-CoA and choline is controlled by insulin [34]. The binding of acetylcholine to its muscarinergic m1 and m3 receptors stimulates the formation of APPs, the amyloid precursor protein in its secreted form [43], which exerts multifold effects. APPs modulates synaptic plasticity in the hippocampus [31] and promotes dendritic outgrowth [39]. Together with the increase in synaptic density, the morphologic basis is formed to enhance memory capacity [41,50]. Besides acetylcholine, insulin enhances the extracellular levels of APPs as a consequence of its increasing egress from the Golgi apparatus and the trans Golgi-network in a dose-dependent fashion [12,56]. It is not yet clear whether or not the secretion of APPs from the cell mediated by acetylcholine and insulin occurs independently or in a concerted action. The energy-rich phosphate, ATP, strengthens synaptic transmission [30], and is itself a very rapid-acting extracellular neurotransmitter [4].

Functionally, synaptic plasticity forms the most important site of neuronal plasticity. Recent evidence exists that both synaptic activity and plasticity depend on biochemical stimuli that were found to be induced by the expression of the activity-regulated cytoskeleton-associated gene regulated by the insulin and insulin receptor signal transduction cascade [17, 33, 44, 58, 64].

B. Pathological condition

The most frequent pathologic condition associated with memory disturbances, dementia, is sporadic Alzheimer's disease. Early and severe abnormalities were found in the cerebral glucose metabolism, which worsened in parallel with dementia symptoms (for review, see [24]). As a consequence, the synthesis of acetylcholine in the presynaptic neuron is markedly diminished [55], and a fall of ATP production from glucose by around 50% in the beginning of sporadic Alzheimer's disease occurs, declining thereafter throughout the course of the disease [23]. The abnormality in neuronal glucose metabolism is assumed to be caused by a disturbance in the control of this metabolic pathways at the level of the insulin signal transduction [11,25]. Both the deficit in ATP availability and the abnormality in the insulin signal transduction cascade may have a severe impact on APP trafficking [12,61] causing a reduction in extracellular APPs concentration [12,56], thereby reducing synaptic activity and morphologically reducing neuronal activity (for review [52]). In all probability, the disturbance in the insulin signal transduction cascade reduces the expression of the activity-regulated cytoskeleton-asso-

Table 1 Effects of glucose on memory

Acetylcholine synthesis	ATP formation	APP trafficking	Activity-regulated cytoskeleton- associated gene expression
Acetylcholine function	Synaptic acitivity	APPs β A4 function	Synaptic activity and plasticity

Acetyl-CoA is generated from glycolytic glucose breakdown [13]. Acetyl-CoA and choline form acetylcholine under insulin control [34]. Acetylcholine stimulates the formation of the secreted form of the amyloid precursor protein [APPs] after binding to acetylcholinergic muscarinergic m1- and m3-receptors [43]. APPs has been found to promote dendritic outgrowth [39] and to increase synaptic density, thus enhancing memory capacity [50].

In the normal brain, ATP is formed from glucose only [23]. In the present context, ATP has two important functions – first, it acts as a rapid extracellular neurotransmitter [4] and second, it maintains synaptic transmission [30].

Full-length APP normally undergoes processing by an enzymatic activity known as α -secretase (for review, see [54]). However, recent findings give rise to the assumption that APP trafficking is controlled by insulin and the tyrosine kinase insulin receptor. Insulin increases the extracellular levels of APPs, β A40 and β A42, dose-dependently, and reduces the intracellular concentrations of all three APP derivatives [12, 56]. Besides the beneficial effects of APPs (see text), the APP derivative β A40 has been found to promote cell proliferation and tyrosine phosphorylation in nanomolar concentration [37].

The insulin and insulin receptor signal transduction cascade has been found to induce the expression of the activity-regulated cytoskeleton-associated gene, which in turn mediates biochemical stimuli necessary for both synaptic activity and plasticity for memory formation and for memory function [17, 33, 44, 58, 64].

ciated gene, which mediates biochemical stimuli necessary for both synaptic activity and plasticity for memory formation and for memory function [17,33,44,58,64].

Thus, the brain glucose/energy metabolism and its control by the regulatory insulin signal transduction cascade participate greatly in diverse memory processes. Disturbances in this central metabolism may be most important mechanisms in the development of dementia.

In vivo experimental approach

To test the relationship between neuronal glucose metabolism and its control on the one hand, and behavior on the other, an in vivo animal model was established in which the neuronal insulin signal transduction cascade was damaged by intracerebroventricular application of the diabetogenic substance streptozotocin (STZ). STZ is known to inhibit the phosphorylation of tyrosine kinase of the insulin receptor [32]. At the neuronal receptor level, upregulation was observed in the hippocampus [36]. Regional glucose consumption was found to be reduced in 17 out of 35 brain structures, with the parietotemporal cortex, the entorhinal cortex and hippocampal subfields being most markedly affected [10]. The activities of glycolytic key enzymes were clearly diminished in cerebral parietotemporal cortex and in hippocampus [46]. The reduction in both glucose consumption and glycolytic flux caused a drop in the cellular energy pool after short-term and long-term effects of STZ slightly but permanently deteriorating over time [35, 42] (Fig. 1). In addition to the glucose and energy metabolism, a cholinergic deafferentiation along with a reduced activity of acetylcholine transferase have been observed [19,48]. These abnormalities in the cerebral glucose and energy metabolism and related metabolism were found to be accompanied by disturbances in learning, memory and cognitive ability [2,3,40,48]. In long-term studies, the abnormalities in learning, memory and cognitive ability deteriorated progressively [35] (Fig. 2).

Ginkgo biloba extract (EGb 761®) exerts beneficial effects on neurons after hypoxic damage [8]. Studies performed on streptozotocin-damaged rats clearly showed a return to almost completely normal values of cerebral energy metabolism (Table 2),

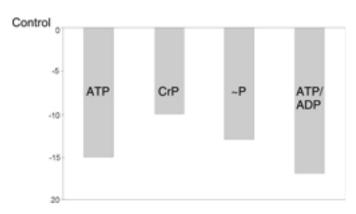


Fig. 1 Significant percent changes of energy rich phosphates after a triplicate intracerebroventricular injection of streptozotocin (STZ) 90 days after the first treatment. ATP, adenosine triphosphate; CrP, creatine phosphate; ADP, adenosine diphosphate; ~P, sum of available phosphate; p < 0.05.

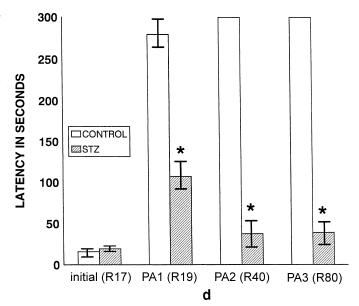


Fig. **2** Effects of intracerebroventricular streptozotocin (STZ) on retention passive avoidance behavior in rats. STZ was administered first 18 days before training. STZ did not affect the step through latency (R 17). Foot shock was applied at day R 18. Retention tests were conducted at days R 19, R 40 and R 80. White columns represent controls. $^*p < 0.05$.

whereas deficits in learning, memory and cognitive ability were partly compensated [28] (Fig. 3). Additionally, EGb 761® shifted STZ-induced abnormalities in glucose transporters and insulin binding to its receptor to normal ranges [36] (Fig. 4, 5, 6).

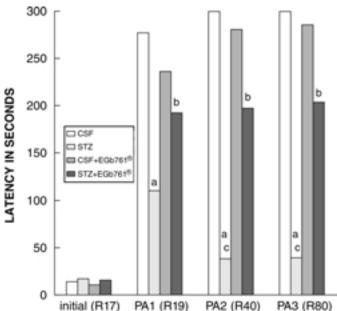


Fig. **3** Passive avoidance behavior after a triplicate intracerebroventricular STZ application and under treatment with EGb 761 $^{\circ}$. Initially, no differences were found between the experimental groups (R 17). EGb 761 $^{\circ}$ improved latency significantly after icv STZ damage as compared to icv STZ (see also Fig. **2**). PA 1, passive avoidance test at day R 19; PA 2, at day 40; PA 3, at day 80; a, p < 0.05 between CSF and STZ; b, p < 0.05 between STZ and STZ + EGb 761 $^{\circ}$; c, p < 0.06 between R 19 and R 40/80.

Table 2 Energy-rich compounds in cerebral cortex

	ATP	ADP	ATP/ADP	CrP	GTP	~P
CSF	2.48 ± 0.33	0.42 ± 0.07	6.05 ± 1.17	5.76 ± 0.99	0.62 ± 0.08	1.31 ± 0.20
STZ	1.90 ± 0.29^{a}	0.77 ± 0.21^{a}	2.69 ± 0.89^{a}	4.85 ± 0.62^{a}	0.47 ± 0.06^{a}	1.07 ± 0.14^{a}
CSF + EGb 761®	2.20 ± 0.26^{a}	0.49 ± 0.16	4.88 ± 1.47 ^a	5.17 ± 0.85	0.56 ± 0.04^{a}	1.17 ± 0.16
STZ + EGb 761®	$2.13 \pm 0.39^{a,b}$	0.68 ± 0.24^{a}	3.52 ± 1.48^{a}	5.36 ± 0.94^{b}	0.51 ± 0.09^{a}	1.19 ± 0.20^{b}

Mean values and standard deviations of energy rich phosphates in parietotemporal cerebral cortex of rats after icv STZ and treatment with EGb 761[®]; ^a p < 0.05 vs CSF; ^b p < 0.05 between STZ and STZ + ECb 761

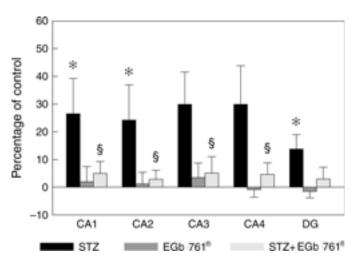


Fig. **4** Quantitation of autoradiography of [3 H]cytochalasin-B binding to total glucose transporter in hippocampal brain sections from good performing (GP) rats. Data are expressed as percentage change over control values and represent the mean \pm SEM obtained from five animals. STZ, streptotozotocin-treated rats; EGb671, rats treated with EGb 761 $^{\circ}$; STZ-EGb761 $^{\circ}$, STZ-damaged rats treated with EGb 761 $^{\circ}$ (see also Table **1**). *p < 0.05 vs. control; \$p < 0.05 vs. STZ-treated group, two-tailed Student's t-test (from [36]; with permission of Springer Publ. Vienna).

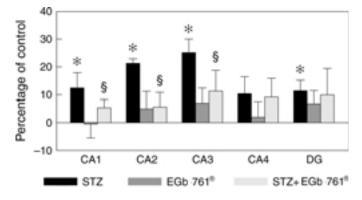


Fig. **5** Quantitation of autoradiography of [3 H]cytochalasin-B binding to total glucose transporter in hippocampal brain sections from poor performing (PP) rats. Data given are expressed as percentage change over control values and represent the means \pm SEM obtained from five animals. STZ, streptozotocin-treated rats; EGb 761 $^{\circ}$, EGb 761 $^{\circ}$ Ginkgo biloba extract; STZ-EGb 761 $^{\circ}$, STZ-damaged rats treated with EGb 761 $^{\circ}$ (see also Table 1). *p < 0.05 vs. control; p < 0.05 vs. STZ-treated group, two-failed Student's p-test (from [36]; with permission of Springer Publ. Vienna).

These results from this pathophysiological model of both behavior and oxidative brain metabolism underscore the beneficial effect of EGb 761® on these abnormalities, which represent the de-

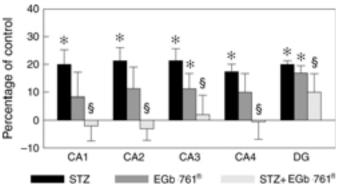


Fig. **6** Quantitation of autoradiography of [125]Insulin receptor binding in hippocampal brain sections from good performing (GP) rats. Data are expressed as percentage change over control values and represent the mean \pm SEM obtained from five animals. STZ, streptotozotocin-treated rats; EGb 761 $^{\circ}$, rats treated EGb 761 $^{\circ}$ Ginkgo biloba extract; STZ-EGb 761 $^{\circ}$, STZ-damaged rats treated with EGb 761 $^{\circ}$ (see also Table 1). *p < 0.05 vs. control; §p < 0.05 vs. STZ-treated group, two-tailed Student's *t*-test (from [36]; by permission of Springer Publ. Vienna).

fective sites in dementia. Our tentative conclusion is that EGb 761[®] may act in a regulatory manner on the function of the neuronal insulin receptor.

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