Original Paper

Annexin 7 in the Regulation of Gastric Acid Secretion

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Abstract

Background/Aims: Glucocorticoids enhance gastric acid secretion and inhibit gastric cyclooxygenase, thus downregulating formation of PGE2, an inhibitor of gastric acid secretion. In erythrocytes, PGE2 formation is inhibited by annexin 7. The present study thus explored whether annexin 7 participates in the regulation of gastric acid secretion.

Methods: Annexin 7 protein expression was determined by Western blotting, cytosolic pH (pHi) of parietal cells utilizing BCECF-fluorescence, and gastric acid secretion by determination of Na+ -independent pHi recovery from an ammonium pulse (ΔpHi/min). Experiments were performed in isolated glands from gene targeted mice lacking annexin 7 (anx7−/−) and in respective wild type animals (anx7+/+).

Results: Prior to treatment pHi and ΔpHi/min were similar in isolated gastric glands from anx7−/− and from anx7+/+ mice. Aspirin (100 µM added to the glands 1 hr prior to the experiment) significantly increased ΔpHi/min to similar values in both genotypes. The administration of dexamethasone (10 µg/g BW subcutaneously for 4 consecutive days prior to the experiments) significantly increased ΔpHi/min to similar values in both genotypes. The administration of dexamethasone (10 µg/g BW subcutaneously for 4 consecutive days prior to the experiments) significantly increased ΔpHi/min to similar values in both genotypes. In neither genotype dexamethasone increased ΔpH/min further in the presence of 35 mM K+ or presence of aspirin.

Conclusions: Annexin 7 is required for the stimulation of gastric acid secretion by glucocorticoids.
Introduction

Annexins, Ca²⁺- and phospholipid-binding intracellular proteins [1-5], contribute to the regulation of a wide variety of functions such as inhibition of phospholipase A₂ [6, 7], regulation of ion channels [8], aggregation of chromaffin granules [9], endo- and exocytosis [10, 11] or crosslinking of proteins within the cell cortex [12]. The isoform annexin 7 (or annexin VII, synexin) has been shown to interfere with prostaglandin E₂ (PGE₂) formation [13] and to participate in the regulation of secretion [14-16], hormone release [17], as well as cell survival and tumor growth [18-27]. Annexin 7 contributes to spherocytosis [28], cardiac remodelling [29] and inflammatory myopathies [30].

Initially generated annexin 7 knockout mice were lethal on embryonic day 10 [31]. In a second attempt viable annexin 7 knockout mice were generated [32], suffering from disorders of cardiac excitation [32, 33], enhanced glial cell proliferation [34] as well as accelerated suicidal erythrocyte death [35] associated with slightly increased osmotic erythrocyte resistance [36] and relative resistance to malaria [13]. The increased suicidal erythrocyte death and partial resistance to malaria resulted from excessive formation of PGE₂ [13].

PGE₂ is known to inhibit gastric acid secretion [37-39], which is accomplished by the H⁺/K⁺ ATPase pumping H⁺ into the gastric lumen in exchange of K⁺ [40-43]. K⁺ recycles into the lumen through KCNQ1/KCNE K⁺ channels [44-46]. Genetic knockout of KCNQ1 thus abrogates gastric acid secretion [47]. The channels [48-51] and thus gastric acid secretion [41, 43, 52] are stimulated by cAMP. Gastric acid secretion is further stimulated by glucocorticoids [53], which decrease prostaglandin formation by downregulating cyclooxygenase 2 [38]. Nothing is known about the involvement of annexins in the glucocorticoid-dependent regulation of gastric acid secretion.

The present study thus explored, whether annexin 7 contributes to the regulation of gastric acid secretion. To this end, gastric acid secretion was determined in gene-targeted mice lacking functional annexin 7 and their wild type littermates.

Materials and Methods

Animals

Experiments were performed in gene-targeted mice lacking annexin 7 (anx7⁻/⁻) and in corresponding wild-type mice (anx7⁺/+). Generation, properties and genotyping of anx7⁻/⁻ mice were described earlier [32]. Sex and age-matched mice with age more than 3 months were used for the experiments. All animal experiments were conducted according to the German law for the care and use of laboratory animals and were approved by local authorities (Regierungspräsidium Tübingen).

Treatments

Mice had free access to a standard mouse diet (C1310, Altromin, Lage, Germany) and tap water. Dexamethasone was administered subcutaneously at a dose of 10 µg/g BW for 4 consecutive days to the mice prior to the experiments. Aspirin (100 µM) was added to the glands 1 hr prior to the experiment. The substances were obtained from Sigma (Taufkirchen, Germany). The stock solutions were prepared in DMSO. Sham experiments were performed by adding DMSO or plain distilled water to the perfusing solution at a final dilution of 0.1 %.

Western blot analysis

After sacrificing the animals, tissues were immediately snap frozen in liquid nitrogen. Samples were lysed with ice-cold lysis buffer (Thermo Fisher Scientific) supplemented with complete protease and phosphatase inhibitor cocktail (Thermo Fisher Scientific). After centrifugation at 10000 rpm for 5 min, 30 µg protein were boiled in Roti-Load1 Buffer (Carl Roth GmbH) at 100°C for 10 min. Proteins were separated on SDS-polyacrylamide gels and transferred to PVDF membranes. The membranes were incubated overnight at 4°C with primary goat anti-Annexin 7 antibody (diluted 1:200, R&D Systems) or rabbit anti-GAPDH antibody (diluted 1:1000, Cell Signaling) and then with secondary anti-goat HRP-conjugated antibody
(diluted 1:2000, Santa Cruz Biotechnology) or with secondary anti-rabbit HRP-conjugated antibody (diluted 1:1000, Cell Signaling) for 1 hour at room temperature. For loading controls, the membranes were stripped in stripping buffer (Carl Roth GmbH) at 56°C for 5 min. Antibody binding was detected with the ECL detection reagent (Amersham). Bands were quantified with Quantity One Software (Bio-Rad Laboratories).

**Gastric H⁺ secretion**

For isolation of gastric glands animals were fasted for 16 hours prior to experiments on wire grids with free access to tap water. After sacrificing the animals the stomach was removed and cut longitudinally. After washing with standard HEPES solution the fundic and pyloric regions were discarded and the gastric corpus was sliced into 0.3 cm² sections. The tissues were transferred onto the cooled stage of a dissecting microscope (Zeiss Axiovert 135), which was used in the epifluorescence mode with a 40 x oil immersion objective (Zeiss Neoplan, Germany). BCECF was successively excited at 490/10 and 440/10 nm and the resultant fluorescent signal was monitored at 535/10 nm using an intensified charge-coupled device camera (Proxitronic, Germany) and specialized computer software (Metafluor; USA) [55]. Between 8 and 20 parietal cells were outlined and monitored during the course of the measurements. The results from each cell were averaged and taken for final analysis. Intensity ratio (490/440) data were converted into pH values using the high-K⁺/nigericin calibration technique [56, 57]. To this end the glands were perfused at the end of each experiment for 5 minutes with standard high-K⁺/nigericin (10 µg/ml) solution (pH 7.0). The intensity ratio data thus obtained were converted into pH values using the r

\[
\text{pH} = \log \left( \frac{\text{ratio}_{\text{max}}}{\text{ratio}_{\text{min}}} \right) - \text{pK}.
\]

For acid loading, cells were transiently exposed to a solution containing 20 mM NH₄Cl leading to marked initial alkalinization of cytosolic pH (pH_i) due to entry of NH₄⁺ and binding of H⁺ to form NH₄⁺ [58, 59]. The acidification of cytosolic pH upon removal of ammonia allowed calculating the mean intrinsic buffering power (ß) of the cells [58]. Assuming that NH₄⁺ and NH₃ are in equilibrium in cytosolic and extracellular fluid and that ammonia leaves the cells as NH₄⁺:

\[
\beta = \frac{\Delta[NH_4^+]}{\Delta pH_i},
\]

where \(\Delta pHi\) is the decrease of cytosolic pH (pH_i) following ammonia removal and \(\Delta[NH_4^+]\), is the decrease of cytosolic NH₄⁺ concentration, which is identical to the concentration of [NH₄⁺] immediately before the removal of ammonia. The pK for NH₄⁺/NH₃ is 8.9 [60] and at an extracellular pH (pH_e) of 7.4 the NH₄⁺ concentration in extracellular fluid ([NH₄⁺]e) is 19.37 [20/(1+10^{(pH_e-pK)})] mM. The intracellular NH₄⁺ concentration ([NH₄⁺]i) was calculated from:

\[
[NH_4^+]_i = 19.37 \cdot 10^{(pH_e-pK)} \text{ mM}.
\]

The calculation of the buffer capacity required that NH₄⁺ exits completely. After the initial decline, pH_i indeed showed little further change in the absence of Na⁺ and presence of omeprazole, indicating that there was no relevant further exit of NH₄⁺. The pH recovery during and following the NH₄⁺ pulse was determined in the absence of Na⁺ to prevent cellular realkalinization by the Na⁺/H⁺ exchanger.

To calculate the \(\Delta pHi/min\) during re-alkalinization, a manual linear fit was placed over a narrow pH range (pH 6.7 to 6.9) which could be applied to all measured cells [61]. The solutions were composed of (in mM): standard HEPES: 115 NaCl, 5 KCl, 1 CaCl₂, 1.2 MgSO₄, 2 NaHPO₄, 10 glucose, 32.2 HEPES; sodium free HEPES: 132.8 NMDG-Cl, 3 KCl, 1 CaCl₂, 1.2 MgSO₄, 2 KH₂PO₄, 32.2 HEPES, 10 mannitol, 10 glucose (for sodium free ammonium chloride 10 mM NMDG-Cl and mannitol were replaced with 20 mM NH₄Cl); high K⁺ for calibration: 105 KCl, 1 CaCl₂, 1.2 MgSO₄, 32.2 HEPES, 10 mannitol, 10 µg/ml nigericin. The pH of the
solutions was titrated to 7.4 or 7.0 with HCl/NaOH, HCl/NMDG and HCl/KOH, respectively, at 37°C. Where indicated, the K⁺ concentration was increased at the expense of Na⁺/NMDG⁺ to 35 mM.

**Determination of pH and acid content of the gastric lumen**

The pH of the luminal stomach contents depends on the amount of acid secreted. Activation of gastric gland leads to decrease in luminal pH and conversely inhibition leads to increase in pH. The luminal pH of the overnight fasted mice serves therefore as a useful indicator of basal gastric acid secretion. To determine the basal intraluminal pH, a previously described method was slightly modified and used [62-64]. Briefly, the mice were fasted overnight on wire grids with free access to tap water and sacrificed under slight ether anaesthesia. The whole stomach was then carefully removed and cut open and the luminal contents were collected by washing the stomach with 10 ml unbuffered isotonic sodium chloride solution (containing additionally 5 mM KCl and 10 mM glucose). The washings were then centrifuged at 150 g for 5 minutes to remove the particulate matter and the pH of the supernatant solution was measured by a standard pH meter (Knick, Germany). The acid content in the solution was measured by titration of the above obtained supernatant solution with 0.01 N NaOH to an endpoint of pH 7.0 by monitoring the pH with a pH meter and additionally adding a universal pH indicator (Sigma, Taukirchen, Germany) to the solution. The acid content thus obtained was then corrected by the acid content of the blank isotonic sodium chloride solution and used for further statistical analysis.

**Statistics**

Intracellular pH, pH recovery and buffer capacity of all parietal cells from one gland were averaged and the respective mean values were used for further statistical analysis. Data are provided as arithmetic mean ± SEM, n represents the number of mice used. All data were tested for significance using Student’s t-test with Welch’s correction or ANOVA (Dunnett’s test), where applicable, and only results with p < 0.05 were considered statistically significant.

**Results**

The present paper pursued the hypothesis that annexin 7 participates in the regulation of gastric acid secretion by glucocorticoids, such as dexamethasone. To possibly disclose a role of annexin 7 in the regulation of gastric acid secretion, annexin 7 knockout (anx7⁻/⁻) mice and corresponding wild-type animals (anx7⁺/⁺) were analysed. Following an overnight fasting period the body weight and the weight of empty stomach were determined. The body weight was similar in anx7⁻/⁻ mice (20.5 ± 1.8 g, n=5) and anx7⁺/⁺ mice (23.6 ± 1.6 g, n=5). The stomach weight was again similar in anx7⁻/⁻ mice (0.27 ± 0.02 g, n=5) and anx7⁺/⁺ mice (0.24 ± 0.01 g, n=5). Western blot analysis was performed in gastric tissue from anx7⁻/⁻ and anx7⁺/⁺ mice without treatment or following prior treatment with dexamethasone (10 µg/g BW for 4 consecutive days prior to the experiments) to elucidate the expression of annexin 7. As illustrated in Fig. 1, annexin 7 is expressed in parietal cells from anx7⁻/⁻ mice but not from anx7⁺/⁺ mice. Dexamethasone treatment did not appreciably alter annexin 7 expression in neither anx7⁻/⁻ nor anx7⁺/⁺ mice. Thus, annexin 7 is expressed in gastric glands but its expression is not modified by glucocorticoids.

The impact of annexin 7 on gastric acid secretion was explored by utilizing BCECF fluorescence for the determination of cytosolic pH. Without treatment cytosolic pH was similar in isolated gastric glands from anx7⁻/⁻ and from anx7⁺/⁺ mice. Cytosolic pH was not significantly modified by treatment with dexamethasone (10 µg/g BW for 4 consecutive days to the mice prior to the experiments) or aspirin (100 µM added to the glands 1 hr prior to the experiment) or by increasing extracellular K⁺ concentration from 5 mM to 35 mM (Table 1). The buffer capacity was also not significantly different between gastric gland cells from anx7⁻/⁻ and anx7⁺/⁺ mice and was again not significantly different between presence or absence of dexamethasone, aspirin or enhanced extracellular K⁺ concentration (Table 1). Accordingly, the effect of H⁺ movement across the cell membrane is reflected by the respective changes of cytosolic pH in gastric glands from anx7⁻/⁻ and anx7⁺/⁺ mice. Gastric H⁺/K⁺ ATPase activity
was estimated from the Na\(^{+}\)-independent pH recovery following an ammonium pulse (\(\Delta pHi/\text{min}\)). As shown in Fig. 2, \(\Delta pHi/\text{min}\) in untreated gastric glands was not significantly different between \(anx7^{+/−}\) and \(anx7^{+/+}\) mice. Aspirin increased \(\Delta pHi/\text{min}\) in both \(anx7^{+/−}\) and \(anx7^{+/+}\) mice. The administration of omeprazole (100 µM) virtually abolished \(\Delta pHi/\text{min}\) in both genotypes (Fig. 2) indicating that the observed alkalinization was due to H\(^+/\text{K}^+\) ATPase activity. The observations suggest that in the absence of glucocorticoid treatment H\(^+/\text{K}^+\) ATPase activity is downregulated by cyclooxygenase irrespective of the presence of annexin 7.

As shown in Fig. 3, treatment with dexamethasone (10 µg/g BW for 4 consecutive days prior to the experiments) increased \(\Delta pHi/\text{min}\) significantly in \(anx7^{+/−}\) mice but not in
anx7−/− mice. Additional experiments were performed following exposure of gastric glands to increased extracellular K+ concentration. An increase of the bath K+ concentration to 35 mM (replacing Na+/NMDG+) increased ΔpH/min to similarly high levels in anx7−/− mice and in anx7+/+ mice (Fig. 3). In neither genotype dexamethasone treatment increased ΔpH/min further in the presence of 35 mM K+. Accordingly, an increase of extracellular K+ concentration abolished the stimulation of gastric acid secretion by dexamethasone treatment. The observations indicate that in the absence of annexin 7, the stimulating effect of glucocorticoids on gastric acid secretion is virtually abrogated, an effect apparently involving K+ channels.

Further experiments were performed under inhibition of cyclooxygenase by aspirin. The additional treatment of dexamethasone gastric glands with aspirin did not significantly...
modify ΔpH/ min in anx7+/ mice but significantly increased ΔpH/ min in anx7−/− mice (Fig. 4). Accordingly, following treatment with both, dexamethasone and aspirin, ΔpH/ min was similarly high in anx7+/− and anx7−/+ mice. Those experiments suggest that annexin 7 is effective by inhibiting cyclooxygenase.

The difference in gastric acid secretion between anx7+/− and anx7−/+ mice was further studied by determination of pH and acid content of the gastric lumen. As shown in Fig. 5, without treatment the pH of the solution containing the luminal aspirates was similar in both genotypes. Dexamethasone treatment decreased the pH in anx7−/+ mice but not in anx7+/− mice. Accordingly, luminal pH was, following dexamethasone treatment, significantly lower in anx7−/+ mice than in anx7+/− mice. Similarly, the acid content was significantly higher in the gastric lumen of anx7−/+ mice than of anx7+/− mice. Thus, the effects of dexamethasone and annexin 7 on H+ secretion are reflected by respective alterations of luminal pH and acid content.
**Fig. 4.** Effects of dexamethasone on pH recovery in parietal cells in the absence and presence of aspirin. A. Time dependent alterations of pH$_i$ (arithmetic means ± SEM of 6-10 cells each) in representative single experiments in anx7$^+/+$ mice (left panels) and anx7$^+/-$ mice (right panels) without (upper panels) and with stimulation with dexamethasone (10 µg/g BW for 4 consecutive days prior to the experiments) without (middle panels) and with (lower panels) additional treatment with aspirin (100 µM added to the glands 1 hr prior to the experiment). B. Arithmetic means ± SEM (n = 6 mice each group) of Na$^+$-independent alterations of cytosolic pH (ΔpH/min) in parietal cells from anx7$^+/+$ mice (black bars) and anx7$^+/-$ mice (white bars) in the absence of dexamethasone (left bars) or presence dexamethasone in the absence (middle bars) and presence (right bars) of aspirin. * indicates significant difference between anx7$^+/-$ mice and anx7$^+/+$ mice, # indicates significant difference to absence of dexamethasone, § indicates significant difference to absence of aspirin.

**Fig. 5.** Intraluminal pH and acid content of stomach from overnight fasted mice. Arithmetic means ± SEM of (n = 5-7 mice each group) of (A) the pH of the luminal contents and (B) acid equivalents in the luminal contents of stomach from anx7$^+/+$ mice (black bars) and anx7$^+/-$ mice (white bars) without (left bars) and with (right bars) dexamethasone treatment (10 µg/g BW for 4 consecutive days to the mice prior to the experiments). * indicates significant difference between anx7$^+/-$ mice and anx7$^+/+$ mice. # indicates significant difference to absence of dexamethasone.
Discussion

The present study discloses a novel signaling molecule participating in the regulation of gastric acid secretion. Lack of annexin 7 virtually abolishes the effect of the glucocorticoid dexamethasone on gastric acid secretion, an effect reversed in the presence of cyclooxygenase inhibitor aspirin. The observations suggest that the stimulation of gastric acid secretion by glucocorticoids requires suppression of cyclooxygenase by annexin 7. Previously, we have shown that following Plasmodium berghei infection, PGE$_2$ plasma levels were larger in annexin 7-deficient mice than in their wild-type littermates [13]. Suppression of PGE$_2$ formation would indeed be expected to enhance gastric acid secretion. Surprisingly, the stimulatory effect of dexamethasone on gastric acid secretion fully depends on annexin 7. Moreover, it is fully mimicked by aspirin. In the presence of aspirin, dexamethasone does not stimulate gastric acid secretion further. Thus, annexin 7-dependent inhibition of cyclooxygenase appears to be critically important for the stimulation of gastric acid secretion by glucocorticoids.

Aspirin enhances gastric acid secretion in both genotypes, i.e. mice lacking annexin 7 (anx7$^{-/-}$) and wild type mice (anx7$^{+/+}$). It is tempting to speculate that basal gastric acid secretion is suppressed by a cyclooxygenase product, such as PGE$_2$, and that dexamethasone stimulates gastric acid secretion by annexin 7-dependent inhibition of cyclooxygenase.

An increase of extracellular K$^+$ concentration to 35 mM enhanced gastric acid secretion, which could not be increased further by application of dexamethasone. An increase of extracellular K$^+$ concentration should depolarize the cell membranes thus augmenting the K$^+$ exit across the apical membrane. Gastric acid secretion critically depends on K$^+$ recycling through KCNQ1 channels [47]. Possibly, annexin 7-sensitive cyclooxygenase activity leads to inhibition of KCNQ1 channels.

In theory annexin 7 may influence the regulation of gastric acid secretion by altered release of secretagogues. Moreover, annexin 7 could interfere with signaling stimulating gastric acid secretion. Gastric acid secretion is stimulated by increase of cytosolic Ca$^{2+}$ activity and cAMP [43, 65, 66] as well as by phosphoinositide 3 kinase (PI3K)-dependent signaling [67-70].

According to an earlier study [53], the stimulation of gastric acid secretion depends on the serum- and glucocorticoid-inducible kinase (SGK1), which is known to stimulate a variety of epithelial channels and transporters [71]. The difference between SGK1-deficient mice and their littermates was similarly abrogated in the presence of 35 mM K$^+$ [53]. Future studies may disclose interactions of SGK1 and annexin 7-dependent signaling in the regulation of gastric acid secretion.

In conclusion, the gastric acid secretion is similar in anx7$^{-/-}$ mice and in anx7$^{+/+}$ mice under basal conditions but cannot be upregulated by the glucocorticoid dexamethasone in anx7$^{-/-}$ mice. Aspirin upregulates gastric acid secretion in both, anx7$^{-/-}$ mice and anx7$^{+/+}$ mice. Thus, Annexin 7-sensitive cyclooxygenase activity contributes to the stimulation of gastric acid secretion by glucocorticoids.

Abbreviations

BCECF (2',7'-bis-(2-carboxyethyl)-5-(and-6)-carboxyfluorescein, acetoxyethyl ester); DMSO (Dimethylsulfoxide); NMDG (N-methyl D-glucamine); HEPES (4-(2-hydroxyethyl)-1-piperazineethanesulfonic acid); ATP4b (β-subunit of H$^+$/K$^+$ ATPase); Tbp (TATA box binding protein); PDK (phosphoinositide-dependent kinase); PI3K (phosphoinositid 3 kinase).

Conflict of Interests

All authors of this manuscript declare that they have no conflicts of interests.
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