Enhancement of the intrinsic defecation reflex by mosapride, a 5-HT$_4$ agonist, in chronically lumbosacral denervated guinea pigs

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Abstract

The defecation reflex is composed of rectal distension-evoked rectal (R-R) reflex contractions and synchronous internal anal sphincter (R-IAS) reflex relaxations in guinea pigs. These R-R and R-IAS reflexes are controlled via extrinsic sacral excitatory nerve pathway (pelvic nerves), lumbar inhibitory nerve pathways (colonic nerves) and by intrinsic cholinergic excitatory and nitrergic inhibitory nerve pathways. The effect of mosapride (a prokinetic benzamide) on the intrinsic reflexes, mediated via enteric 5-HT$_4$ receptors, was evaluated by measuring the mechanical activity of the rectum and IAS in anesthetized guinea pigs using an intrinsic R-R and R-IAS reflex model resulting from chronic (two to nine days) lumbosacral denervation (PITH). In this model, the myenteric plexus remains undamaged and the distribution of myenteric and intramuscular interstitial cells of Cajal is unchanged. Although R-R and R-IAS reflex patterns markedly changed, the reflex indices (reflex pressure or force curve-time integral) of both the R-R contractions and the synchronous R-IAS relaxations were unchanged. The frequency of the spontaneous R and IAS motility was also unchanged. Mosapride (0.1–1.0 mg/kg) dose-dependently increased both intrinsic R-R (maximum: 1.82) and R-IAS reflex indices (maximum: 2.76) from that of the control (1.0) 6–9 days following chronic PITH. The dose-response curve was similar to that in the intact guinea pig, and had shifted to the left from that in the guinea pig after acute PITH. A specific 5-HT$_4$ receptor antagonist, GR 113808 (1.0 mg/kg), decreased both reflex indices by approximately 50% and antagonized the effect of mosapride 1.0 mg/kg. This was quite different from the result in the intact guinea pig where GR 113808 (1.0 mg/kg) did not affect either of the reflex indices. The present results indicate that mosapride enhanced the intrinsic R-R and R-IAS reflexes and functionally compensated for the deprivation of extrinsic innervation. The actions of mosapride were mediated through endogenously active, intrinsic 5-HT$_4$ receptors which may be post-synaptically located in the myenteric plexus of the anorectum.

Key words: extrinsic reflex, internal anal sphincter, intrinsic reflex rectum, 5-HT$_4$ receptor

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**Introduction**

We have previously reported that gradual and subsequent sustained rectal distension evoked rectal (R-R) cholinergic reflex contractions and the synchronous internal anal sphincter (R-IAS) nitrergic reflex relaxation in a reproducible manner (Yamanouchi et al., 2002). These reflexes are composed of both extrinsic and intrinsic components. Firstly, the extrinsic component which involves the lumbar inhibitory reflex through the lumbar colonic nerves, that is subject to supraspinal inhibition from the pons, together with the extrinsic sacral excitatory reflex through the pelvic nerves. In fact, stimulation of the pontine lateral reticular formation inhibited lumbar colonic nerve efferent discharge (Fig. 1). Pelvic afferent stimulation also inhibited lumbar colonic nerve efferent discharge mediated via the pons. Nevertheless, the extrinsic lumbar inhibitory reflex suppresses the extrinsic sacral R-R and R-IAS reflexes (Takaki et al., 1980; 1983; 1985; 1987). Secondly, the intrinsic component involves both cholinergic excitatory and nitrergic inhibitory reflexes (Yamanouchi et al., 2002). Since defecation involves both of these intrinsic and extrinsic reflexes affecting the anorectum (Matsufuji et al., 1998), our
5-HT4 receptors in defecation reflex

The experimental model is suitable for the evaluation of the effect of drugs on these defecation pathways.

To exclude the influence of both supraspinal control and extrinsic nervous control, we have adopted a procedure which involves the acute destruction of both the lumbar and sacral spinal cord (PITH). The trauma possibly caused by acute PITH per se, however, might have interfered with the experimental outcome. In fact, acute PITH reduced the R-R and R-IAS reflex indices to approximately 40% and 60% of that in control, respectively. We had previously thought that this indicated that 40% of the rectal contraction is due to the intrinsic (enteric) excitatory nerve-mediated reflex response while 60% of the IAS relaxation is due to the intrinsic inhibitory nerve-mediated reflex response (Yamanouchi et al., 2002). However, four to nine days after chronic PITH, the reflex indices of R-R reflex contractions and synchronous R-IAS reflex relaxations were unchanged although the reflex pattern had markedly changed. Therefore, it is considered that the trauma caused by acute PITH per se might have continued for two days and have decreased the R-R and R-IAS reflex indices. The chronic PITH model should enable the determination of the actual contribution of the enteric nervous system to both the R-R and R-IAS reflexes, although some remodeling of the enteric nervous system may occur to compensate for the lack of extrinsic nerve input.

**Chronic PITH model**

Experimental procedures followed the guidelines of the local animal ethics committee. After laminectomy under anesthesia with Nembutal 40 mg/kg i.p., the 1st to 4th lumbar spinal cord and the 1st to 3rd sacral spinal cord was gently and slowly removed by inserting a needle into the vertebral canal to remove the extrinsic excitatory reflex through the pelvic nerves and the inhibitory reflex through the lumbar colonic nerves, while leaving intact the intrinsic (enteric) neural pathway. Hemostasis was obtained by inserting cotton wool into the vertebral canal. After surgery, guinea pigs were kept carefully for two to nine days, using manual bladder compression for urination, because of the interruption of the normal bladder control (Kojima et al., 2005).

**Changes in intrinsic R-R and R-IAS reflexes two to nine days after chronic PITH**

Acute PITH attenuated the intrinsic (enteric) R-R and R-IAS reflexes (reflex indices: 0.37 ± 0.17 and 0.59 ± 0.21 respectively in six guinea pigs) from those in the control (= 1.0) (Yamanouchi et al., 2002). On the 2nd day after PITH, while the R-R reflex was attenuated, many small waves were observed. These small waves were likely to be indicative of rectal distension-evoked neurogenic phasic activity, because these waves in the rectum and IAS were synchronous and abolished by a neuron blocker, tetrodotoxin (TTX) (Kojima et al., 2005). However, if the recovery from the surgical trauma in the ICC is faster than that in enteric neurons, it may be that the interstitial cells of Cajal (ICC) contributed to the generation of these small waves, because the normal distribution of myenteric (ICC-MY) and intramuscular ICC (ICC-IM) in the anorectum was unchanged after chronic PITH (Fig. 2). The attenuation of both
the R-R and R-IAS reflexes on the 2nd day following PITH, was possibly due to trauma of the enteric neurons as a result of the PITH procedure (Fig. 2). Between the 4th to 9th day following PITH, typical R-R and R-IAS reflexes were observed, but the reflex pattern gradually and markedly changed; there was a decrease in frequency associated with an increase in amplitude (Fig. 2) (Kojima et al., 2005).

**5-HT receptors**

There is an extensive distribution of 5-HT receptors in both the central nervous system and in peripheral tissues. A number of sub-types of 5-HT receptors are known to be expressed by enteric neurons, including the 5-HT₁₅, 5-HT₂₅, 5-HT₂₆, 5-HT₃, and 5-HT₄ sub-types (Liu et al., 2005). In addition, the 5-HT₁₉ sub-type has also been identified in the enteric nervous system (ENS) (Takaki et al., 1985; Branchek et al., 1988; Mawe et al., 1986). However, although this receptor sub-type has been proposed to be identical to the 5-HT₄ receptor (Grider et al., 1996),
it is thought to be unrelated to the 5-HT$_4$ receptor by others (Galligan et al., 1996; 2003; Gershon, 2004). Either way, both of these receptor types are important because each has been implicated in the initiation of peristaltic reflexes (Gershon, 2004; Grider et al., 1998; Jin et al., 1999).

Since the discovery of 5-HT$_4$ receptors in 1988, significant advances have been made in our understanding of their physiology and pharmacology. The 5-HT$_4$ receptor is a member of the seven transmembrane spanning G-protein-coupled family of receptors (Liu et al., 2005). The 5-HT$_4$ receptor is thought to be coupled by Gs to the stimulation of adenyl cyclase, increase in cAMP, and activation of PKA (Bender et al., 2000; Bockaert et al., 1990; Liu et al., 2005). The 5-HT$_4$ receptor is pharmacologically defined by selective agonists such as SC 53116 and RS 67506, and selective antagonists such as GR 113808, SB 204070 and RS 39604 (Gale et al., 1994; Hegde et al., 1996). In the gastrointestinal tract, stimulation of 5-HT$_4$ receptors has a pronounced effect on smooth muscle tone, mucosal electrolyte secretion, and on the peristaltic reflex (Costall et al., 1993; Grider et al., 1998; Hegde et al., 1996; Jin et al., 1999; Kadowaki et al., 2002). Sakurai-Yamashita et al. (1999, 2000) have recently reported that 5-HT$_4$ receptors are distributed in the human sigmoid colon, guinea pig distal colon and human rectum.

Makimoto et al. (2002) also recently reported that mosapride, a prokinetic benzamide which is known to be a specific enteric 5-HT$_4$ agonist, accelerated intestinal motor activity in parallel with increases in the release of ACh from enteric cholinergic neurons within the dog small intestine in the whole animal, which were thus mediated via 5-HT$_4$ receptors. In vitro experiments have also shown that mosapride enhances the electrically stimulated contractions of isolated guinea-pig ileal longitudinal smooth muscle with attached myenteric plexus via 5-HT$_4$ receptors (Mine et al., 1997). Furthermore, there are several papers showing that mosapride enhances colonic motility and peristalsis in both the guinea pig (Inui et al., 2002; Mine et al., 1997) and rat (Kadowaki et al., 2002). On the basis of these results, it would be expected that mosapride would have an effect on the motility of regions of the lower gastrointestinal tract such as the rectum and the IAS.

**A specific enteric 5-HT$_4$ receptor agonist, mosapride, enhances both R-R and R-IAS reflexes in the chronic PITH model**

Mosapride (0.1–1.0 mg/kg i.v.) dose-dependently increased both intrinsic R-R and R-IAS reflex indices above control levels, six to nine days following PITH. The dose-response curve was similar to that in the intact guinea pig (Shimatani et al., 2003). However, marked differences between the intact and chronic PITH model guinea-pigs were found as follows: a specific 5-HT$_4$ receptor antagonist, GR 113808 (1.0 mg/kg) decreased the R-R and R-IAS reflex indices by approximately 50% and antagonized the effect of mosapride (1.0 mg/kg) in the chronic PITH model whereas GR 113808 (1.0 mg/kg) did not affect the both reflex indices in the intact model. The results indicated that mosapride enhanced the intrinsic R-R and R-IAS reflexes which were thus remodeled to compensate for the deficiency in extrinsic nerve function, mediated through endogenously active, intrinsic 5-HT$_4$ receptors that may be post-synaptically located in the myenteric plexus of the anorectum (Fig. 3).
Mosapride only enhanced the neural reflex response in the rectum and IAS in guinea pigs even after chronic PITH (Kojima et al., 2005). A recent report was able to clearly demonstrate that 5-HT_4 receptors are abundantly located in the enteric nervous system in the colon of guinea pigs. Between 6–9 days following PITH, postsynaptic 5-HT_4 receptors may express in the enteric nervous system, in addition to presynaptic 5-HT_4 receptors. The co-distribution of myenteric interstitial cells of Cajal (ICC-MY) and myenteric plexus (MP) in the rectum did not differ between 4th and 9th day following PITH (right panel). NA: noradrenaline, Ach: acetylcholine, NO: nitric oxide.

Our results showing that mosapride synchronously enhances both reflex responses after chronic PITH, without any effects on spontaneous motor activity, strongly suggests that 5-HT_4 receptors are located on nerve terminals impinging on myenteric motor neurons of the myenteric ganglia (Fig. 3) but not on ICC-MY and/or ICC-IM, although Liu et al. (2005) revealed the presence of 5-HT_4 receptors on ICC-MY in the mouse ileum.
Changes in spontaneous motility in R and IAS without rectal distension

Spontaneous motility was observed in both the R and IAS without rectal distension from two to nine days following the PITH procedure. Although these motilities are almost the mirror image of each other, and the frequency and amplitude of both were decreased after treatment with TTX, significant differences in the frequency of R and IAS spontaneous motility due to TTX treatment were only detected on the 6th day after PITH, and in the frequency of IAS in controls. As TTX significantly decreased the frequency in IAS but not R, it is possible that the frequency of IAS is constitutively increased by a neuronal mechanism.

Immunoreactivity for PGP 9.5 and c-Kit

No marked changes in the myenteric plexus (MP) of the rectum were observed after PITH, compared to the control. No differences in the distribution of ICC-IM and ICC-MY were observed between the rectum and IAS. It appeared that there were no marked differences in the co-distribution of the MP and ICC-MY in the rectum between that of the control and that of the 9th day after PITH.

Conclusion

The findings reported here indicate that (1) the intrinsic R-R and R-IAS reflexes are functionally compensated after deprivation of autonomic extrinsic nerves and (2) mosapride moderately enhanced the intrinsic R-R and R-IAS reflexes mediated through endogenously active enteric neural 5-HT₄ receptors, possibly postsynaptic 5-HT₄ receptors. In addition, we propose that the present experimental procedure is a good model for exploring the ideal pharmacotherapy for the disturbance of defecation following spinal cord injury.

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