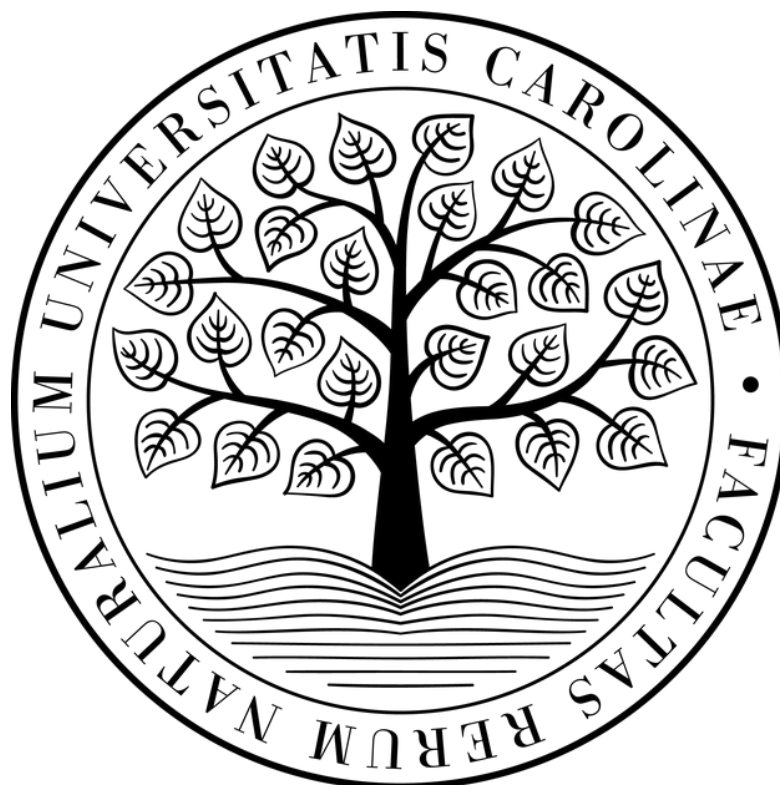


Charles University

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Molecular biology and biochemistry of organisms



Veronika Marková

The role of Autophagy in neurodegenerative diseases

Role autofagocytózy v neurodegenerativních onemocněních

Bachelor Thesis

Supervisor: doc. RNDr. Jiří Novotný, DSc.

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V Praze, 10. srpna 2018

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Poděkování

Chtěla bych moc poděkovat svému školiteli doc. RNDr. Jiřímu Novotnému DSc. za trpělivost a ochotu při psaní mé bakalářské práce.

Abstract

Pro neurodegenerativní onemocnění jako je Alzheimerova, Parkinsonova a Huntingtonova choroba je charakteristická akumulace proteinů a nefunčních organel v cytoplasmě, které nejsou odstraněny pomocí autofagocytózy. Ukazuje se, že autofagocytóza je narušena odchylující se od bazální autofagocytózy, která za normálních podmínek zajišťuje homeostázu vnitřního prostředí. Proces autofagocytózy není schopen odstranit všechny toxické částice při větším množství z důvodu úplné saturace a tak dojde k aktivaci jiných degradačních systémů, které mohou vést k obnovení homeostázy. Ovšem za některých okolností dochází k poškození neuronů, které vedou k jejich ztrátě. Úbytek neuronů v konkrétní oblasti mozku vede k pohybovým problémům i demenci.

klíčová slova: autofagocytóza, neurodegenerace, Alzheimerova choroba

Abstract

The characteristics of many neurodegenerative diseases including Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and Huntington's disease is the accumulation of proteins and damaged organelles in the cytoplasm. Unfortunately, they aren't eliminated by autophagy. The basal autophagy, that maintains the cellular homeostasis, is disturbed in neurodegeneration. The process of autophagy becomes saturated unable to remove all the toxic substances. Therefore, other degradation systems are activated, aiming to restore the homeostasis. However, the neuronal cells are damaged under certain conditions leading to their death. The reduction in the number of neurons in specific brain areas causes severe ataxias and dementias.

key words: autophagy, neurodegeneration, Alzheimer's disease

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Abbreviations

A β	amyloid β peptide
AD	Alzheimer's disease
AMBRA1	Activating molecule in beclin-1 regulated autophagy
AMPK	AMP activated kinase
ATG	Autophagy-related gene
AV	Autophagic vacuole
BCL-2	B cell lymphoma
CMA	Chaperone-mediated autophagy
DN	Distrophic neurite
FIP200	FAK family-interacting protein of 200 kD
FLIP	FLICE-inhibitory proteins
GAPDH	Glyceraldehyde-3-phosphate dehydrogenase
GFP	Green fluorescent protein
GSPC	Glioma stem progenitor cell
HD	Huntington's disease
HSC70	Heat shock cognate 70 kDa protein
HTT	Huntingtin
IP3	Inositoltriphosphate
LAMP2A	Lysosome-associated membrane protein 2
LC3-I	Protein 1 light chain 3
LYNUS	Lysosome nutrient sensing machinery
3-MA	3- methyladenine
MEF2	Myocyte enhancer factor 2
mTORC1	Mammalian target of rapamycin complex 1
NSPC	Neural stem progenitor cell
NTD	Neural tube defect
PAS	Pre-autophagosomal structure
PD	Parkinson's disease
PI3K	Phosphatidylinositol 3-kinase
PI3K	Phosphatidylinositol 3-phosphate
PINK1	PTEN-induced putative kinase 1
PMP22	Peripheral myelin protein 22
ULK1	Unc-51 like autophagy activating kinase 1
UVRAG	UV radiation resistance-associated gene

1. Introduction

Neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's, Parkinson's or Huntington's disease are prevalent in the population. The characteristics of neurodegeneration include neuronal damage and neuronal loss in specific brain regions.

Neurodegeneration has a dramatic effect on the overall wellbeing of an organism like altered mental functioning and ataxias. At the moment, neurodegenerative diseases aren't curable, but we can establish therapy slowing down the degeneration.

Autophagy is one of the degradation pathways that can be used to treat neurodegenerative diseases. There are many types of autophagy, but they all function together to maintain the cellular homeostasis. The interaction of those systems is called basal autophagy (Hara et al., 2006). However, the basal autophagy is impaired in neurodegeneration. Eventhough the understanding of molecular mechanisms regarding autophagy is getting more detailed every year, the pathological disturbances are remaining a mistery.

One of the side effect of impaired autophagy is the accumulation of proteins and damaged organelles that are the major cause of toxicity for the neuronal cells. There are dystrophic neurites around the senile plaques composed of β -amyloid ($A\beta$) peptide and tau protein in Alzheimer's disease (Yu et al., 2005). In Parkinson's disease, Lewy bodies made up of α -synuclein and ubiquitin are observed in neuronal cells in many brain regions (Fujiwara et al., 2002). Mutant huntingtin aggregates are also found in the neuronal tissue of HD patients (DiFiglia et al., 1997).

The role of autophagy in these neurodegenerative diseases is going to be discussed in detail comprising the molecular mechanisms. Indeed, some regulation mechanisms are also going to be described since they might be the site for potential treatment of neurodegenerative diseases.

2. Definition of autophagy

The term "autophagy" derives from the Greek word "self-eating" used by Christian de Duve in 1963 who also named the vacuoles to be "autophagic". The term "autophagy" was used for the first time at a Symposium in London the same year. (Klionsky J.D. 2008) Some type of autophagy can be found in eukaryotes for example yeast, plants and animals. The autophagy machinery is probably evolutionary conserved proving a useful mechanism for the cell to survive. (Wesselborg S., Björn S., 2015)

Autophagy is one of the degradation pathways in the cell that is essential for the maintenance of homeostasis, cell differentiation and development and mainly its survival. It is believed that autophagy is more specific than other degradation pathways and has an adaptive function to protect the cell from neurodegeneration, aging other other pathologies. (Levine B., Kroemer G. 2008)

There are major steps in autophagy process consisting of nucleation, elongation, maturation and degradation. There is a double membrane being formed around the vesicle and the autophagosome is delivered to lysosome for fusion to form autolysosome. The abnormal macromolecules including proteins, lipids and nucleotides are degraded using the autophagy-lysosomal pathway. This degradative pathway can also be applied to damaged organelles such as mitochondria and peroxisomes. (Ghavami et al., 2014)

2.1 specific autophagy

During the non-selective autophagy, the inner membrane of autolysosome is degraded together with the cargo and molecular building blocks are transported by lysosomal permeases back to the cytoplasm. On the other hand, autophagy might be very specific when pathogens or organelles need to be removed. The selective pathways of degrading different molecules include the xenophagy (intracellular pathogens), aggrephagy (aggregates of proteins), lipophagy (lipids) or zymophagy (secretory granules). The autophagic degradation of organelles include the ribophagy (ribosomes), mitophagy (mitochondria), ER-phagy (endoplasmic reticulum) and others. The autophagy might be induced under stress conditions like infection of pathogens, hypoxia, lack of nutrients or removal of growth factor needed for the development and maintenance of homeostasis. (Wesselborg S., Björn S. 2015)

3. The types of autophagy

We can distinguish three subtypes of this process occurring in higher eukaryotes- the macroautophagy, microautophagy and the chaperone-mediated autophagy. These degradative pathways are in balance with the synthesis of the components including proteins to ensure the proper function of the cells. (Mizushima et al., 2008)

3.1 Macroautophagy

Preferably, I'm going to talk about the macroautophagy for which we use the term "autophagy". The origins of this term are Greek where "auto" means "self" and "phagy" means "to eat". (Yorimitsu T., & Klionsky D. 2005) This process is not selective compared to other degradational processes in the cell. This type of autophagy is the most conserved and can be found across organisms from yeast to humans. Macroautophagy is activated by protein aggregates, damaged organelles and cellular stress. (Baba et al., 1997)

First, a part of a membrane becomes isolated in the cell that is known by the term phagophore or an isolation membrane. There is a preautosomal structure (PAS) created in yeast. (Suzuki et al., 2001) This structure or the phagophore expands around the cytoplasm containing the structure for degradation (aggregated proteins or organelles) and encloses itself to form autophagic vacuole (AV) or an autophagosome.

Autophagosomes with the aggregated proteins in the cell are up to 1 μm in diameter. At this point, the autophagosomes can become part of endocytic pathway, the late endosomes or the multi-vesicular bodies. Eventually, they come across lysosomes. They fuse together forming the autolysosomes and the cargo is slowly degraded by acidic hydrolases. The cargo is broken down to amino acids that are taken by the transporters back to the cytoplasm. These amino acids are used in biosynthetic pathways to build new proteins. The autophagy has a central role in many processes including the degradation of proteins and pathogens, tumor suppression, antigen presentation etc (Hosokawa et al., 2009).

3.2 Microautophagy

Microautophagy is a mechanism described in yeast therefore being more direct than the other types of autophagy. The proteins are directly taken inside the late endosome using the its invagination. This process might be an analogy with the

multivesicular body formation but the similarities are not yet clear (Sahu et al., 2011).

The tubular invaginations were observed not only in living yeast cells but also in isolated vacuoles. The vesicles budding from the tubules create autophagic bodies that are degraded by the hydrolases. The reconstruction of the in vitro microautophagy has been done using the purified yeast vacuoles. The Luciferase enzyme has been used to monitor the concentration of solute uptake. There is a suggestion that the ATG proteins might be involved in the regulation of microautophagy as shown in the cytosolic extracts from the starved ATG mutants (Kunz et al., 2004).

3.3 Chaperone mediated autophagy

In the third type of autophagy, the chaperons are involved in the identification of substances and they deliver them to the translocation complex on the lysosomal membrane for degradation. The Chaperone mediated autophagy is more selective than the first two because the process relies on the binding of the heat shock cognate 70 kDa protein (Hsc70) to the cytosolic substrate proteins to form a complex. This complex binds to membrane protein associated with the lysosomal membrane, usually being the type 2A. The substrate proteins are unfolded and taken into the lysosome for degradation.

The researchers have found that knocking down the LAMP protein type 2A results in the reduction of chaperone-mediated autophagy as well as the decrease of GAPDH and aldolase in dendritic cells. The glyceraldehyde-3-phosphate dehydrogenase (GAPDH) and aldolase are the soluble cytosolic proteins in dendritic cells. Indeed, there was a significant decrease of protein degradation on the lysosomes (Sahu et al., 2011).

The CMA is activated when the levels of two major regulators Hsc70 and LAMP-2A increase in the cells. The activation of CMA is induced by levels of stress for example the starvation, oxidative stress or coming to contact with toxic substances. The LAMP-2A forms a dynamic multimeric complexes that gather during different steps of the CMA. The targeting sequence of five amino acids LysPheGluArgGln is essential for the delivery of cytosolic proteins into the lysosomes for degradation (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2008).

4. Autophagy genes in mammals

There are five functional groups of ATGs in mammals and every system regulates different steps during the autophagosome biogenesis and they have an influence on each other as well. The five groups include ULK1 kinase complex, the Vps34/PI3-kinase complex, ATG9 complex, ATG18 homologs and ubiquitin-like conjugation systems. The autophagy genes are activated in the early stages of autophagy probably operating to form the autophagosome (Wesselborg S., Björn S. 2015).

4.1 UKL1 kinase complex

In the first group of UKL1-ATG13-FIP200-ATG101 complex, some orthologs of ATG1 were found. These include several uncoordinated movement like kinase (ULK) for example ULK1, ULK2, ULK3, ULK4. The knockout of ULK1 blocked the autophagy response. The FIP200 is a tyrosine kinase in the cytoplasm that contains nuclear localisation signal and therefore can be also found in the nucleus. ATG13 is a substrate of ULK1 so that it binds to its CTD and ATG13. (Chan et al., 2009)

The FAK family-interacting protein of 200 kD (FIP200) was found to be interacting with ULK1 and ULK2 at the autophagic membrane. ATG13 and FIP200 enhance the kinase activity and stability of UKL1. The complete interaction is needed for the recruitment ULK1 to the phagophore thus inducing autophagy. The ATG101 hasn't got any ortholog in *S. cerevisiae* and it interacts with ULK1 through the ATG13. (Hara et al., 2008)

4.2 The Vsp34/PI3 class III kinase complex

The second group of Vsp34/PI3 class III kinase complex can be found in yeast, but in mammals has a function in autophagy and also in sorting the vacuolar proteins. The complex I contains Vps15, Vps 30, Vps34 and ATG14 and it can regulate the process of autophagy. In mammals, the PtdIns3K complex is composed of Vps15, Vps34 and Beclin 1. (Kihara et al., 2001)

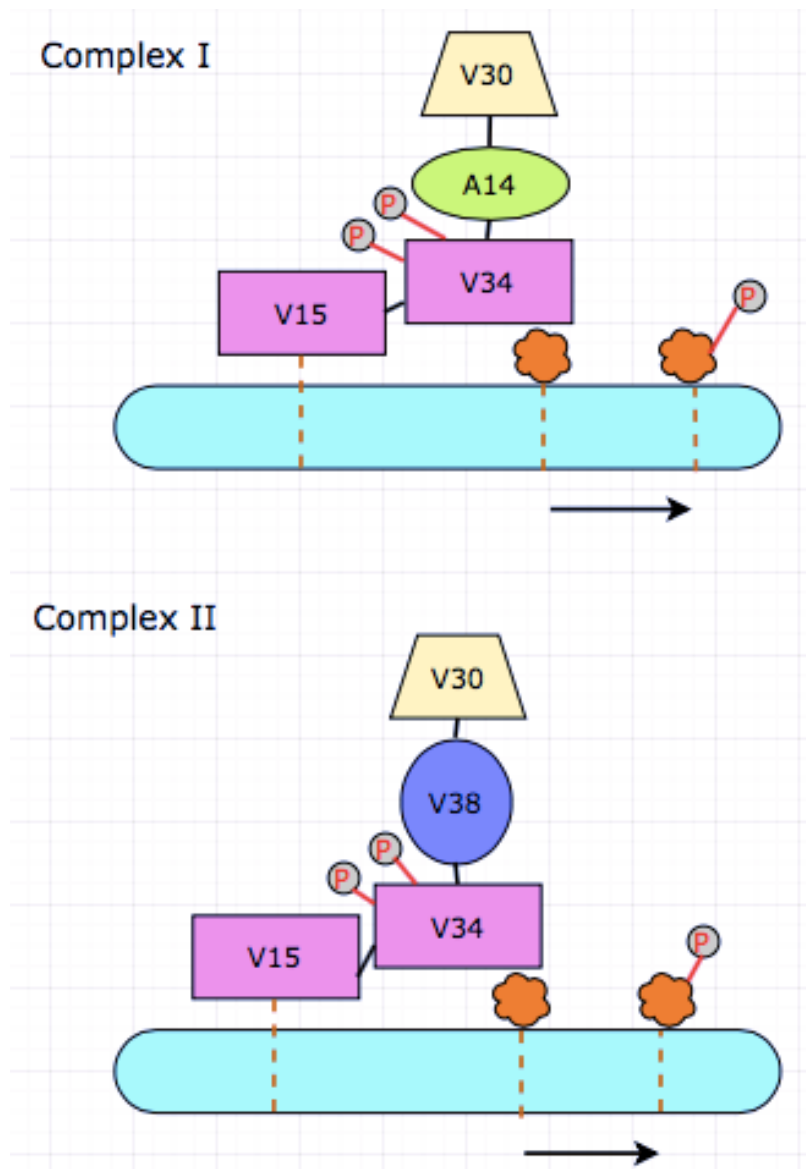
Beclin 1 contains many domains including the C-domain, coiled-coil domain and the BH3 domain. Beclin 1 initiates autophagy because it promotes the vesicle nucleation. It also has an autophagy-specific domain called BARA. (Ranaghan et al., 2017) This protein forms a core part of the phosphatidylinositol-3-kinase type III complex (PI3K) and has a key role in localizing its production to a specific parts of the membrane. Therefore the complex is involved in the membrane trafficking. This complex together with the protein kinase VPS34 and VPS15 produces the

phosphatidylinositol-3-phosphate (P13P) in vesicle membranes important for trafficking as well. (Kihara et al., 2001)

The P13 kinase-beclin1 complex can recruit ATG proteins and their interaction is crucial for activation or repression of autophagy. The P13 kinase-beclin1 complex can interact with another ATG14 and UVRAG (Ultra-Violet Radiation Resistance Associated Gene) associated with AMBRA (Activating molecule in beclin1 regulated autophagy) and this interaction supports the activation of autophagy. AMBRA1 is the activating molecule in Beclin1-dependent autophagy as its deficiency in mouse embryos causes autophagy impairment (Fimia et al., 2007).

Picture 1

Complex I and Complex II are two different PtdIns 3-kinase complexes. There are two different connectors A14 in complex I and V38 in complex II. They mediate the interaction between two protein kinases- VPS30p and VPS34P. The VPS15P phosphorylates the VPS34P for their interactions as well as the interaction with the ATG14P/VPS38P. Modified from (Kihara et al., 2001).



4.3 ATG9 recycling complex

The multi-spanning transmembrane protein ATG9 contributes to the de novo formation of the pre-autophagosomal structure called PAS. It has six transmembrane domains and is essential for the survival. There are ATG9 vesicles containing the ATG9 molecules formed in the cytoplasm. The eventually become part of the phagophore and the ATG9 clusters are recycled in the cytoplasm. (Mari et al., 2010)

The ortholog of ATG9 called ATG9A was found in the trans-Golgi network. This ortholog changes its position when the cell is starving and integrates in the endosomal membranes that shows positive autophagosomal marker GFP-LC3.

Other research argues, that the ATG9A is not integrated into the autophagosomal membrane, but it only regulates the creation of phagophores. It is suggested that the localisation of ATG9A is regulated by the WIPI2 and the ULK1. However, some studies demonstrate that the ULK1 can localise the autophagosome formation independently on the ATG9A during already mentioned Parkin-mediated mitophagy (Itakura et al., 2012).

4.4 ATG18 homolog

The P13P protein has other effectors including the ATG18 proteins found in yeast. The ATG18 plays a role in autophagy but the ATG21 is rather involved in micronucleophagy. The both enable the intake of ATG8 to the site of autophagosome formation. The ATG18 is in complex with ATG2 during autophagy but the autophagosome can be created without the presence of ATG18. There are four homologs to ATG18 in mammals named WIPI1-4. The WIPI1 and WIPI2 play a role in autophagy because they show the highest homology to ATG18. They allow a right localisation place to the phagophore and they also regulate the lipidation of LC3 (Proikas-Cezanne et al 2004).

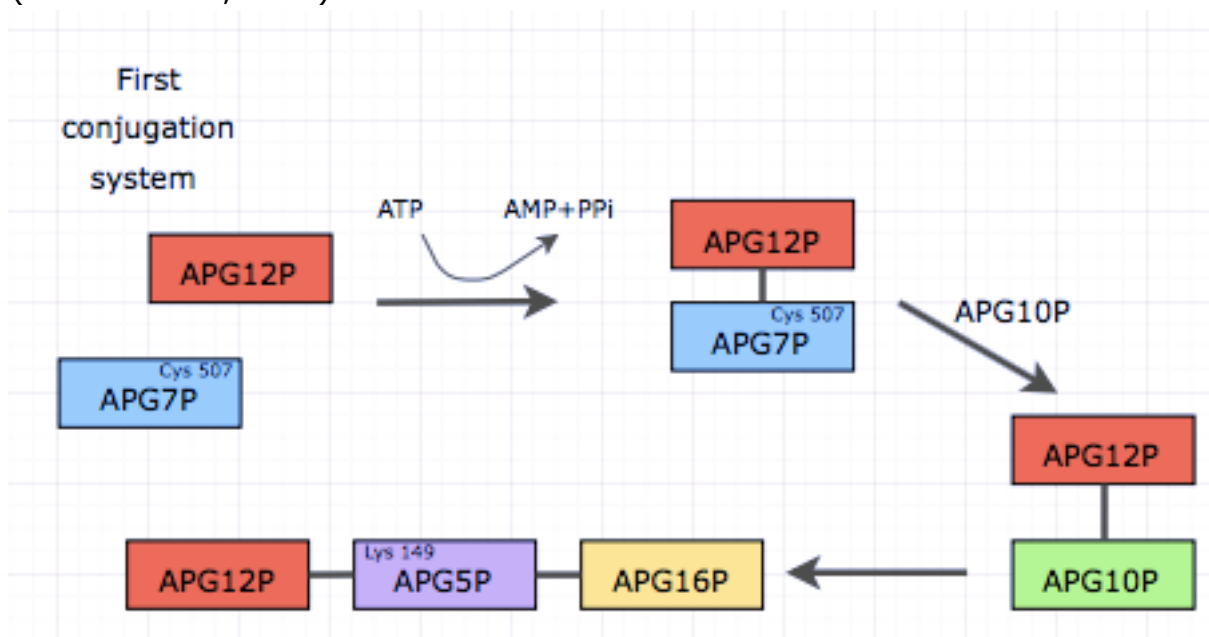
4.5 Ubiquitin-like conjugation systems

Finally, there are two ubiquitin-like conjugation systems in autophagy. Both are involved in the expansion of autophagosomes and they show functional similarities. The ATGs in both conjugation systems have ubiquitin-like functions and they are essential for autophagy. In the first system, the ATG7 has the same function like E1 enzyme, the ATG10 is like E2 enzyme and both are needed for an effective autophagy. The ATG12 as the hydrophilic protein is activated by ATG7 and transferred to ATG10. ATG12 is then covalently attached to ATG5 and this complex associates with ATG16 to form a huge multimeric complex. (Shintani et al., 1999).

The final multimeric complex ATG12-ATG5-ATG16 has a smaller size approximately 350 kDa in yeast compared to more than two times bigger 800kDa in mammals. The bigger size of this complex in mammals suggests that it might be composed of several sets of the ATGs. Indeed, the ATG16 is the major protein for ATG5 targeting and is probably localised in the pre-autophagosomal structure. (Muzushima et al., 2003)

In the second ATG8/LC3 PE conjugation system, there is a prior step that has to be taken before the activation of ATG8. The ATG4 removes the C-terminal using its proteolytic activity. The second step becomes the activation of ATG8 by ATG7 and the complex is transferred to the ATG3. The ATG7 also serves the function of an E1 enzyme, but the E2-like enzyme becomes a different protein ATG3. The ATG3 is conjugated with ATG8 through a thioester bond suggesting its specificity. (Ichimura et al., 2000)

There comes the connection of the first and the second conjugation systems because the ATG12-ATG5 is the E3-like enzyme for the ATG8. The lipidation of ATG8 is stimulated by ATG12-ATG5 thus activating the conjugation system. (Hanada et al., 2007)



Picture 2

The formation of the multimeric complex APG12P-APG5P-APG16P in the first conjugation system. The APG7P activates APG12P with the ATP hydrolysis and becomes attached at Cys 507 residue. The multimeric complex is formed after the interaction between APG12P and APG10P. Modified from (Shintani et al., 1999).

5. Regulation of Autophagy

There are non-ATG proteins that influence the process of autophagy. These include the mammalian target of rapamycin (mTOR), BCL2, Beclin1, vacuolar sorting protein 34 (VPS34), AMPK and ULK1.

initiation

5.1 mTOR dependent induction

In yeast *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, autophagy is activated directly by inhibition of TOR using rapamycin or amino acid starvation. There are two types of TOR (TOR1 and TOR2) and their inactivation has the same effect on cellular processes. When there is a lack of nutrients, the phosphatidylinositol kinase-related kinase TOR is activated. Rapamycin is an immunosuppressive drug that can also inhibit TOR thus inducing autophagy. As a result, there is an accumulation of autophagic vesicles (AVs) in both cases. Autophagy is inhibited in nutrient-rich conditions. (Noda T., Ohsumi Y. 1998)

5.1.1 mTOR1 in mammals

In mammals, the autophagic flux can be inhibited by many factors including high levels of insulin that reduce the concentration of amino acids. On the other hand, glucagon increases the amount of amino acids thus reducing autophagic flux. The autophagy is negatively regulated using kinase complex mTORC1. Under starvation conditions or the application of rapamycin, the autophagy is induced by suppressing MTOR. The S6 protein is phosphorylated and decreased thus inducing autophagy. (Blommaert et al., 1994)

The mammalian target of rapamycin (mTOR) restricts the activity of ULK which results in autophagy inhibition. First, it is necessary to form the pre-autosomal complex and this formation is not yet described. The initiation complex is formed de novo from ULK complex with at least four ATG genes ATG1, ATG9, ATG13, ATG17, multimeric complex and ATG6. The rapamycin intensifies the kinase activity of ATG1 and hyperphosphorylates the ATG13. The hyperphosphorylation decreases the affinity of ATG13 to ATG1 thus repressing the autophagy. (Jung et al., 2009)

To initiate autophagy, the mTORC1 dissociates from the mega complex and both ULK1 and ATG13 become dephosphorylated. The ULK1 autophosphorylates and is able to phosphorylate the ATG13 and FIP200 thus inducing autophagy. This model tells us that the phosphorylation of ULK1, ATG13 and FIP200 depends on the action of mTOR. (Jung 2009)

The phosphorylation of ATG13 mediated by ULK1 is necessary for the release of ATG13 and its recruitment to damaged mitochondria where it has a major contribution to Parkin-mediated mitophagy. (Joo et al., 2011)

5.2 mTOR independent induction

There are other ways to activate autophagy that are independent on mTOR. These include the Beclin1, AMPK and FLIP proteins.

5.2.1 Beclin

The autophagy effector Beclin 1 is one of the first identified autophagy proteins that has around 30% of identical sequences with ATG6. It is a 52kDa protein that has a coiled-coil structure and is a key component of phosphatidylinositol 3-kinase (PI3Kc3). The core function of Beclin1 is the nucleation of autophagosomes and regulation of membrane trafficking. The BH3 domain composed of 105-128 residues is the region involved in binding other molecules for example Bcl-2s. The Beclin1- dependent autophagy is inhibited by Murine γ -Herpesvirus (γ HV) Bcl-2s or its homolog M11. (Sinha et al., 2008)

Beclin 1 is an adaptor protein that can stimulate or suppress autophagy. When in interaction with Vps34, this complex is important in formation of autophagosomes. Furthermore, if the cells fail to produce beclin 1, the vesicles during autophagy would not accumulate due to its failure to be localised. This impairment of autophagy caused by Beclin1 deficiency was observed in Alzheimer's disease patients. (Salmien et al., 2013)

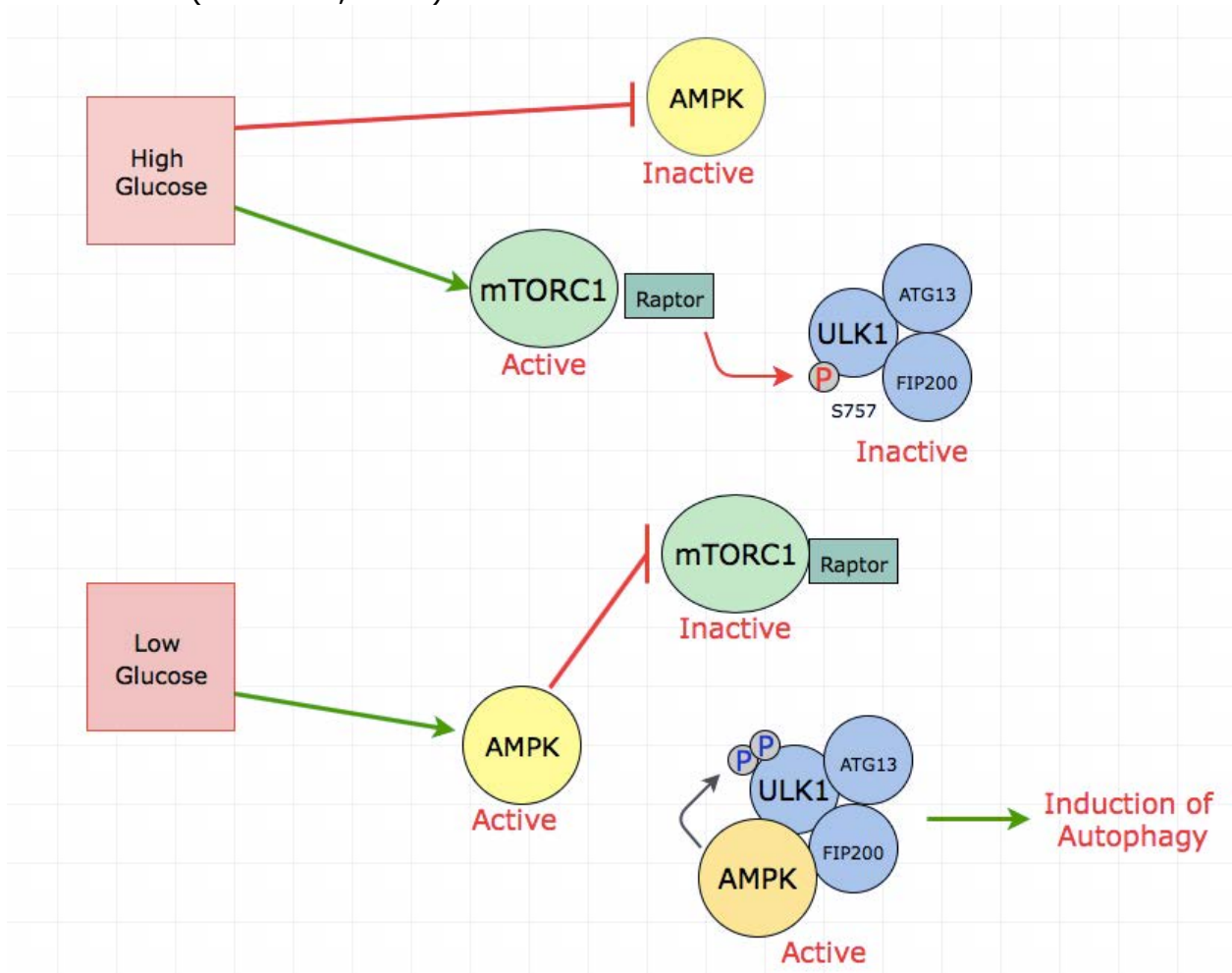
5.2.2 AMPK and the role of Ca^{2+}

The AMP-activated kinase (AMPK) is a positive regulator of autophagy that increases the autophagic flux when the levels of Ca^{2+} or IP3 decrease. The endoplasmatic reticulum is the organelle that stores the major amount of intracellular Ca^{2+} . The IP3Receptors control the release of Ca^{2+} from the Endoplasmatic reticulum therefore blocking the IP3 receptors also inhibits the basal autophagy. (Kania et al., 2017)

The glucose starvation triggers a response in the cell. The AMPK activates the ULK1 by its phosphorylation on Ser 317/Ser 777 inducing autophagy. ULK1 is the autophagy-initiating kinase and the interaction between ULK1 and AMPK was promoted using rapamycin treatment. (Kim et al., 2011)

5.2.3 FLIP proteins

There are two types of FLICE-inhibitory proteins; the viral type vFLIP and the mammalian cellular homologue cFLIP. Both of them can suppress rapamycin-induced autophagy as they bind to ATG3. There is a strong interaction with ATG3 when competing with the LC3. The LC3-I can be converted to LC3-II but the suppression prevents the autophagosome formation so the levels of detected LC3-II remain low. (Lee et al., 2009)



Picture 3

Up: When there is high level of glucose in the neuronal cell thus enough energy, the mTORC1 is activated and phosphorylates the ULK1 at Serine 757. The phosphorylation prevents the interaction between AMPK and UKL1 complex.

Down: When there is a low level of glucose, the AMPK is activated and reacts with ULK1. The mTORC1 is inhibited by phosphorylation of Raptor using AMPK. The phosphorylated ULK1-AMPK complex induces the autophagy.

Modified from (Kim et al., 2011).

6. Autophagy in neuronal cells

In the case of neuronal cells, autophagy may be adapted to different compartments (the soma, dendrites or the axons). The basal autophagy is essential for their survival. The maintenance of the axonal homeostasis is the major function of basal autophagy in neuronal cells and neurons quickly degenerate when autophagy is impaired. Neurons are large polarised cells that are very sensitive to aggregates of any type. (Hara et al., 2006)

6.1 The role in the development of the nervous system

Autophagy is an important process during neurogenesis as it is related to the differentiation of the cells in the nervous system. Neural tube is produced by the process of neurulation from the neural plate. The precursor cells are originated in the neural tube and a proper function of the brain is dependent on an accurate differentiation and migration of the cells to specific brain areas (Anjen Chenn and Susan K. McConnell 1995).

The deficiency of autophagy regulator AMBRA1 in the early stages of embryonic neurulation results in the development of neural tube defects (NTDs). The NTDs are caused by an incomplete closure of the neural tube during neurulation. The role of the regulators of autophagy such as protein kinase C (PKA) or the AMP-activated protein kinase are still contradictory. There is a weakened autophagy in the rhombencephalon, prosencephalon mesencephalon in the exencephalic embryos observed as LC3-GFP (Wang et al., 2017).

There is a significant difference in the rate of autophagy between the neural stem/progenitor cells (NSPCs) isolated from the human fetal brain tissue and the glioma stem/progenitor cells (GSPCs). Autophagy is diminished in GSPCs compared to normal autophagy activity in NSPCs where autophagosomes are observed under TEM. Indeed, Western blot analysis confirmed higher LC3-II/LC3-I ratio in NSPCs than in GSPCs. However, when the GSPCs were stimulated for differentiation, autophagy was induced as LC3 positive vacuoles were detected in the cytoplasm (Zhao et al., 2010).

6.2 Autophagy and homeostasis

There is an evidence that autophagy has a central role for neuronal cells during their development and it is also crucial for maintaining cellular homeostasis. The autophagosomes and autolysosomes travel in anterograde and retrograde direction. However, the autophagosome is created preferably at the distal axon and

undergoes the retrograde transport via dynein motors to the soma of the neurons, where the lysosomes are stored. (Katsumata et al., 2010)

The organelles and a part of cytoplasm is degraded using autophagy, where the key step is the fusion of autophagosomes with lysosomes to form autolysosomes. The ATPase proton pump contributes to the change in the internal environment to be more acidic activating the acid hydrolases including cathepsins inside the lysosomes. The axonal transport of organelles using autophagy pathway is slowed down when the proteolysis of lysosomes is inhibited. (Tanida et al., 2005)

The autophagosomes were detected in primary cortical neurons and the vesicles with the central protein for autophagy called LC3 were detected almost evenly distributed along the axons moving mostly in the retrograde direction. Indeed, the levels of LC3 are still kept low under normal conditions suggesting low levels of autophagy. It is suggested, that the amount of autophagosomes is low, but there is a high rate of their turnover to maintain balance. (Tanida et al., 2005)

6.3 Autophagy and neuronal death

The neuronal death can be induced by the loss of autophagy. The loss can be in the specific region of the Central nervous system or in the specific type of neuronal cells. The protein aggregates or lack of nutrients promotes the survival of neurons by activating the autophagy. However, the degradations of large aggregates becomes difficult and the intracellular inclusions made up of aggregated proteins are observed in neurodegenerative diseases. (Johnston et al., 1998).

The neural cells are very sensitive to protein aggregates and damaged organelles. They have to be removed by autophagy or any other programmed cell death to maintain active electrochemical signalling. Neurons also have a high energy consumption as they constantly transport proteins and organelles from the cell body to the axon ending and vice versa. There might be a failure in the induction of autophagy or the clearance of already formed autolysosomes causing their build up in the soma of the cells. Both disturbances play an important role in neurodegeneration. The disregulation of autophagy may contribute to neuronal damage and possible therapy should be aimed at restoring the basal autophagy levels. (Hara et al., 2006)

Autophagic stress is the imbalance between the formation of AVs and their degradation. Long term state of not achieving the equilibrium means that the nonfunctional components of the cell are not eliminated as they build up in the cell causing cell death. The impaired lysosomal degradation also leads to the imbalance.

The large neurons such as motor neurons, Purkinje cells, sympathetic neurons and neurons in substantia nigra are specifically prone to autophagic stress. (Chu 2006)

7. Autophagy in the neurodegenerative diseases

7.1 Autophagy in the pathogenesis of Alzheimer's disease

There are 30 million people worldwide living with the Alzheimer's disease and the scientists predict an increase of three times the number in around 20 years. The most common form of the disease is sporadic affecting the population over the age of 65. The disease is characterised by several changes including the accumulation of misfolded proteins, oxidative damage and neuroinflammation suggesting that autophagy might be an important process for regulation. (Heneka et al., 2015)

A defining feature of Alzheimer's disease are neurofibrillary tangles and senile plaques composed of aggregated tau protein and the β -amyloid ($A\beta$) peptide. There is a plexus of dystrophic neurites (DNs) around and partly within the senile plaques. (Yu et al., 2005) The dystrophic neurites are made up of swollen segments of dendrites and axons in the affected brains regions for example posterior and anterior cingulate, hippocampus, thalamus and parietal cortex. (Langbaum et al., 2010)

Using the immuno-EM analysis, The accumulation of autophagosomes is observed in the dystrophic neurites of neuronal cells suggesting that the macroautophagy is disturbed. The fact that the autophagosomes are rarely observed in healthy neurons with basal autophagy supports the argument that autophagy is induced in Alzheimer's disease. The macroautophagy is believed to have a neuroprotective function removing the toxins as well as the aggregated proteins to prevent the outbreak of neurodegenerative disease. (Boland et al., 2008)ageing

7.1.1 Macroautophagy in *Drosophila melanogaster*

The expression of the autophagy-related genes have been studied in *Drosophila melanogaster* as a model for Alzheimer's disease. The expression of these genes might be regulated by many factors including ageing or autophagy itself. First, it was suggested that the expression of genes regulating autophagy decrease during ageing. These genes include the ATG1, ATG8 and ATG18. The

expression of ATG18 was reduced in *dfoxo* and *dsir2* mutants which means that they need to be active to sustain a required level of ATG18. (Omata et al., 2014)

To test the relationship between autophagy and Alzheimer's disease in a model of *Drosophila melanogaster*, the human A β 42 was cloned and four mutants were created. The A β 42 promotes aggregates to develop in the cells contributing to neurodegeneration. This time, the A β 42 was over-expressed in transgenic flies founding out that the expression of genes ATG1, ATG8 and ATG18 also declines with ageing. The results indicate that the expression of these genes were not affected by A β 42. However, the neuronal toxicity as a result of A β 42 over-expression was strongly enhanced by ATG1 showing the importance of this gene. There might be an auto-feedback mechanism of controlling the autophagy-related genes because the ATG1 is able to decrease the ATG8 and AT18 and itself. (Omata et al., 2014)

There is a close relationship between the lysosome activity and autophagy. Autophagy-lysosome pathway is believed to play a major role in neurodegeneration. The lysosome nutrient sensing machinery (LYNUS) monitors the level of nutrients in the cell. The mammalian target of rapamycin complex 1 (mTORC1) is part of the LYNUS machinery and phosphorylates transcription factor EB (TFEB) on the surface of the lysosome. The transcription factor does not reach the nucleus therefore the expression of autophagy-related genes as well as lysosome formation is inhibited. Indeed, the neuronal toxicity caused by increased levels of A β is enhanced when the expression of autophagy-related genes is reduced. (Omata et al., 2014)

7.1.2 Macroautophagy in the mouse brain

Induction of macroautophagy contributes to neurodegeneration

Macroautophagy is induced in early stages of sporadic Alzheimer's disease before the accumulation of the A β peptide in transgenic mouse models. There was a marked accumulation of autophagic vacuoles (AV) in those mouse models with the human mutant PS1. The amount of autophagic vacuoles was 23 times higher in the neurons of PS1 transgenic mice compared to the controls. There were early and late autophagic vesicles found in the neurons but both did not mature to the later stages. The late stage autophagic vesicles contained a visible amount of multi-vesicular bodies indicating that they became the autophagolysosomes already. Indeed, the PS1 mice had twice the amount of LC3-II in the frontal cortex than the controls. The LC3-II was present in the autophagolysosomes demonstrating the activation of autophagy (Yu et al., 2005).

Autophagy was reported to be activated in dying Purkinje cells in the cerebellum of lurcher mutant mice brains. These mice show degeneration in the cerebellar cortex mainly in first four weeks of life. The electron microscopy was used to observe autophagosomes in early and later stages of maturation. This means, that the transport of autophagosomes towards the cell body might not be impaired. In fact, glutamate receptors are believed to be able to induce autophagy thus contributing to neurodegeneration (Yue et al., 2002).

Constitutive autophagy is observed to be active in cortical neurons taken from postnatal rat pups. Rapamycin was applied to neurons causing autophagy induction in 1 hour and elevation of LC3-II up to 90% in total 24 hours. The total number of mature autolysosomes was much greater compared to controls. The placement of LC3 tagged by DsRed supports the observation that the fusion of autophagosome with lysosomes occurs right after its formation in the cell. The levels of LC3-II rose up to 444% after 24 hours and the number of autophagosomes increased compared to no rapamycin impairment. Therefore the induction of autophagy may be used as a therapeutic treatment for Alzheimer's disease because there is a massive build up of autophagosomes. Induction of autophagy may improve the efficiency in maturation of AVs thus contributing to the clearance of toxic protein aggregates (Boland et al., 2008).

Suppression of autophagy contributes to neurodegeneration

However, there are studies demonstrating that the suppression of autophagy in neural cells might cause the development of neurodegenerative disease in mice. Autophagy is less selective in comparison to ubiquitin- proteasome degradation system. The ability to survive under the starvation conditions is probably evolutionarily conserved. The deficiency of ATG5 and ATG7 genes in mice cause insufficiency of nutrients right after birth needed for normal energy metabolism in mice (Hara et al., 2006).

There is further evidence, that the impairment of autophagy might cause or at least contribute to the accumulation of abnormal nonfunctioning proteins thus causing neurodegenerative disease in mice. Neural-cell-specific ATG5 mice were crossed with mice expressing Cre recombinase causing exon 3 to be deleted. This type of recombination was successful in 90% of neuronal cells in mice. The protein 1 light chain 3 (LC3-I) could not be converted to LC3-II due to the suppression of ATG5. There was no LC3-II detected in the cells because the autophagy was suppressed. Some neurons were lost in the cerebellum including the Purkinje cells and swelling was also observed. Swelling mainly in the axon area was distinct in

many brain regions including the hippocampus, cerebral cortex, caudal pons and both anterior and posterior thalamic nucleus. Protein aggregation was also detected in the cytoplasm of neurons in the pons, medulla oblongata and thalamus (Hara et al., 2006).

These mutant mice evolved some behavioural and motor deficits before four weeks of age. The analysis of movement showed ataxic walking further supporting the motor deficit probably due to changes in the thalamus, pons and other brain regions. The behavioural deficit could be explained using the swelling in the hippocampus. The balance as well as the coordination of movement was also affected probably due to protein aggregates in medulla oblongata and swelling in the cerebellum. These changes can be seen in mouse models with neurodegenerative disease (Hara et al., 2006).

7.1.3 The role of protein aggregates in neurodegeneration

Protein aggregates are associated with neurodegeneration. To test the removal of protein aggregates using autophagy, a point leucine to proline mutation was applied to the peripheral myelin protein 22 (PMP22) in the Schwann cells causing aggresomes to develop in the cells. The Trembler (TrJ) mice with this mutation developed aggresomes that could be cleared using autophagy. The autophagosomes full of aggregates were detected in the cytoplasm of the Schwann cells of TrJ mice. The late stage of autolysosomes could be visible in the same cytoplasm as well (Fortun et al., 2003).

However, not all Schwann cells contained autophagosomes. The proteasome inhibitor lactacystin was applied to the Schwann cells of normal mice. This application results in aggresome formation but the cells recovered in normal growth medium after 24 hours. This testing suggest, that aggresomes are transient structures that can be removed by autophagy under favourable conditions. The reduction in the number of cell due to cell death was not significantly different in normal SCs cells treated with lactacystin compared to the ones that had the washout period allowing regeneration (Fortun et al., 2003).

The removal of aggresomes using autophagy is not a process unique to Schwann cells as it was observed in fibroblasts. Indeed, autophagy is an ongoing process in TrJ mice. Autophagy is the major process of the removal of aggresomes but there are probably other processes of degradation involved. After the inhibition of autophagy, up to 15% of the cells didn't have any aggregates suggesting that there are other processes of degradation active in the cells. There is an evidence of decline in macroautophagy as well as chaperone-mediated autophagy with ageing

of the animals. These pathways become less efficient probably due to their saturation. As a result, there is an accumulation of aggregates even when autophagy is still partly active in the cells (Fortun et al., 2003).

The AVs in dystrophic neurites appear in large numbers in Alzheimer's disease patients. The AVs are surrounded by double-membrane and their content is multilamellar as well as dense compacted. The brains of Alzheimer's disease patients were compared to the data in this study. There is an obvious difference between the dystrophic neurites of primary cortical neurons where the autophagy was impaired compared to dystrophic neurites in Alzheimer's disease brains. However, the AV morphology becomes very similar when the autophagosome proteolysis is inhibited in primary cortical neurons or the fusion of autophagosome with lysosomes is impaired (Boland et al., 2008).

7.1.4 Macroautophagy in the human brain

The induction of macroautophagy specimens was studied in the human brains as well. As described above, the LC3 can be used as an antibody against the AV marker protein because the LC3-II is present in the autophagosomes after the induction of autophagy. Using the Western Blot method, the levels of LC3-II were compared in grey matter of normal brains as well as in the brains with early or later stage of Alzheimer's disease. Not surprisingly, as the Alzheimer's disease proceeds, the amount of LC3-II increases almost proportionally. The normal brains showed low levels of LC3-II suggesting a low level of autophagy (Yu et al., 2005).

The human brains were further studied in the laboratory to investigate the role of autophagy in Alzheimer's disease. The specimens of neocortex were studied using biopsy to compare brains of Alzheimer's patients and healthy control brains. The specimens were studied from 7 patients using electron and immunoelectron microscopy after being incubated in primary antibody and conjugated with the secondary antibody. Active lysosomal proteases were accumulated in neurites in brains with Alzheimer's disease. Many neurites had the entire intercellular environment filled with immature autophagic vesicles. The autophagosomes with double membrane did not have hydrolases compared to mature autophagic vesicles that already fused with the lysosomes. The autophagic vesicles of different stages of maturation were not only observed in dystrophic dendrites but also in the the neurons with normal internal environment in brains with Alzheimer's disease (Nixon et al., 2005).

In general, the number of AVs observed was much higher than expected. These observations support the previous studies that autophagy is induced when

the brains show pathology of Alzheimer's disease. However, accumulation of AVs suggest that macroautophagy might be impaired later in some of the maturation stages blocking the transport of AVs to the cell body (Nixon et al., 2005).

In the control brains analysis, the number of AVs was very limited suggesting low level of autophagy. The AVs were rarely visible in the axons or the dendrites. However, they were still present, because macroautophagy is an active process in neurons providing the regeneration of neurites. Well functioning autophagy ensures were observed in neuronal perikarya, but the number were still much lower than amount in Alzheimer's disease brains. The increase in the frequency came up to twenty times higher the amount of AVs in the brains with Alzheimer's disease pathology. It is suggested, that the autophagic-lysosomal pathology is more expanded and robust in Alzheimer's disease compared to any other neurodegenerative diseases (Nixon et al., 2005).

7.2 Autophagy in the pathogenesis in Parkinson's disease

Parkinson's disease is one of the most prevalent neurodegenerative diseases worldwide. There are two main features observed in the brains; the loss of neuronal cells and presence of Lewy bodies. Lewy bodies are intracellular neuronal inclusions that are composed of α -synuclein and ubiquitin (Fujiwara et al., 2002). Apart from loss of dopaminergic neurons (DA) in substantia nigra (as a part of basal ganglia) due to oxidative stress, the two main features are observed in thalamus, hypothalamus, cerebral cortex and brainstem in the PD brains (Zhang et al., 2000).

Neurotoxins like metamphetamine (MATH) or 3-methyladenine (3MA) producing the oxidative damage might cause the changes in the brains of Parkinson's disease patients. Dysfunctional autophagy might be responsible for the neurotoxicity or neurotoxicity might disturb the process of autophagy. Even though autophagy should protect the neuronal cells from building up the Lewy bodies, aberrant induced autophagy might cause neuronal degeneration (Larsen et al., 2002).

7.2.1 Autophagy in the mouse brain

The transcription factors called the myocyte enhancer factor 2 (MEF2A to MEF2D) have an influence on neuronal cell death and have been studied together with CMA in the relevance to neurodegenerative diseases like Parkinson's disease (Yang et al., 2009). The neurons are protected from death as observed in vitro in PD mouse models when MEF2 is enhanced (Smith et al., 2006). However, the degradation of MEF2D by CMA was attenuated when pathogenic and wild-type of α -synuclein were expressed. The degradation or inhibition of MEF2s causes neuronal

death suggesting that slowing down the CMA might be beneficial for the treatment of Parkinson's disease (Yang et al., 2009).

An impaired CMA in the culture of neuronal cells from mouse models show higher sensitivity to cellular stress and potential development of Parkinson's disease. The expression of LAMP2A was blocked using specific RNAi decreasing the CMA. Further reduction in LAMP2A degradation using 3MA neurotoxin inhibited macroautophagy. However, the rate of degradation of long-lived proteins was surprisingly higher than the levels in control cells suggesting different degradation pathways activated (Massey et al., 2006).

There is an macroautophagy induction observed in transgenic mouse models with mutant A53T α -synuclein. The aggregated α -synuclein is efficiently cleared using macroautophagy suggesting a positive effect of this up-regulation. Indeed, the markers LC3-II and beclin1 significantly increased in the substantia nigra of SKO mice suggesting an increase of macroautophagy compared to the cortex where α -synuclein wasn't expressed (Yu et al., 2009).

7.2.2 Autophagy in the human brain

The regions substantia nigra pars compacta and amygdala in PD and control brain samples have been studied to demonstrate the role of chaperone-mediated autophagy. The knockdown of LAMP2A protein decreased the CMA increasing the α -synuclein half life. The levels of LC3-II increased suggesting induced macroautophagy. This means that decrease of CMA with higher age raises the α -synuclein levels and cells are more dependent on macroautophagy to restore the balance in the internal environment (Alvarez-Erviti L. et al., 2010).

To support the argument that α -synuclein is degraded by CMA, a pentapeptide sequence 95VKKDQ99 was found to be consistent with recognition motif of CMA. The long-half life of α -synuclein was confirmed to activate both CMA and macroautophagy. Therefore the presence of CMA motif on α -synuclein does not guarantee its degradation using CMA. Mutations in the 95VKKDQ99 sequence reduced the protein association with the lysosomal membrane and its translocation to the lumen (Cuervo et al., 2004).

There is a difference in the wild-type α -synuclein that is degraded by CMA compared to the pathogenic α -synuclein that shows reduced CMA degradation even though it has a high affinity to CMA receptor (Cuervo et al., 2004). Disease causing α -synuclein has point mutations for example Ala30Pro, Ala 53Thr, His50Gln causing misfolding and aggregation (Xu et al., 2016). Both types of α -synuclein increased the MEF2D levels in the brains of PD patients compared to controls (Yang et al.,

2009). Slowing down the CMA degradation activates macroautophagy, but it's not enough to prevent aggregates to build up leading to neuronal loss (Cuervo et al., 2004).

To further support the argument that this induction of macroautophagy can be fatal to the neuronal cells, the human mutant A53T and WT ASYN were expressed in neuronal cells leading to CMA inhibition and macroautophagy induction resulting in neuronal death. There was an increase in LC3-II, significant autophagosome formation and neuronal death reported probably due to the toxicity. However, the impaired CMA might still be major factor leading to loss of neurons (Xilouri et al., 2009).

The clearance of α -synuclein was promoted when macroautophagy was induced in human brain samples from Brodmann area 9 of the cerebral cortex. The LC3-II and Beclin 1 markers were increased in patients diagnosed with dementia with Lewy bodies (DLB) compared to post-mortem controls of the same age. DLB is a different form of Parkinson's disease. The glia cells show very low levels of LC3-II suggesting that macroautophagy is minimal and predominantly induced in neurons (Yu et al., 2009).

7.2.3 Disregulation of mitophagy in PD

There are autosomal dominant and autosomal recessive genes (PARK2, PARK6, PARK7) linked to the development of familial variant of Parkinson's disease. The genes are linked to dysfunction in mitochondria and the gene products like Parkin and PINK1 are involved in mitophagy contributing to its removal (Lynch-Day et al., 2012).

Mitochondria is the site of oxidative phosphorylation producing up to 90% of the energy in the cell. However, mitochondria are the major source of the reactive oxygen species that can cause oxidative damage when its production exceeds the available levels of protective antioxidants. Therefore the clearance of damaged mitochondria is necessary to prevent the neuronal death (Lynch-Day et al., 2012). One of the studies suggest that the activity of the complex I of the mitochondrial electron transport chain is reduced up to 50% in the neurons of somatosensory cortex and up to 27% in the prefrontal cortex in PD patients analysed as a postmortem tissue. Indeed, the amount of mtDNA was decreased in PD patients compared to controls probably due to mitochondria deletions and impaired mitophagy (Gatt et al., 2016).

The reduced number of mitochondria in the neurons of substantia nigra in PD patients have also been reported. The autophagy decreases as the expression of PINK1 is silenced. Further over-expression of Parkin should increase autophagy or mitophagy contributing to the mitochondria removal (Gegg et al., 2014).

The PINK1 has a neuroprotective role as it prevents the mitochondrial apoptosis when exposed to cellular stress. The mitochondria are maintained because of the serine-threonine kinase that has a mitochondrial import sequence on the N-terminal and interaction with Parkin. Silencing the PINK1 raises the oxidative stress levels and activates the mitophagy (Michiorri et al., 2010). The full-length PINK1 (PINK1-FL) was over-expressed increasing LC3-II levels suggesting activation of autophagy under starvation and even nutrient-rich conditions in neuronal cells. On the other hand, the function of Parkin acts as a downstream of PINK1 getting inside dysfunctional mitochondria mediating their elimination through mitophagy (Michiorri et al., 2010)

There is a strong interaction between PINK1 and Beclin1 involving both N- and C- terminal regions probably modulating autophagy. They are mainly observed in mitochondria and Beclin1 is also detected in ER and trans-golgi network. To demonstrate the interaction between PINK1 and Beclin1, the 3MA was applied to GFP-LC3 vacuole-positive cells blocking the autophagy. The knockdown of Beclin1 also contributes to a reduction in autophagy in the cells where PINK1 is over-expressed. However, the amount of AVs was higher than observed in control cells suggesting an activation of other types of autophagy (Michiorri et al., 2010).

7.3 Autophagy in the pathogenesis of Huntington's disease

Huntington's disease a dominantly inherited developmental and neuromuscular disorder that caused by expansion in the CAG repeats in the exon 1 on huntingtin gene (HD gene). This gene encodes a protein huntingtin but its function is not yet described. The polyglutamine (polyQ) stretch as a product of CAG repeats becomes pathological to neuronal cells when exceeding the length of 37 glutamines. The aggregates of huntingtin protein have been observed in brains of HD patients (Möncke-Buchner et al., 2002).

There are major symptoms in Huntington's disease like cognitive loss, motor disturbance, anxiety and irritability. When the onset of the disease emerges during adolescence, the symptoms become more severe, leading to death in 10 to 20

years. The loss of neurons is visible mainly in the dorsal striatum- the caudate nucleus and the putamen (MacDonald et al., 1993).

The mutant huntingtin forms aggregates in the neuronal cells increasing the apoptotic processes and leading to toxic stress. Small fragments of huntingtin protein accumulate in the cytoplasm or passively diffuse into the nucleus if their size is smaller than 47kD as demonstrated using the cell cultures. The toxicity increases as the size of polyglutamine increases or the length of the protein decreases (Hackam et al., 1998).

7.3.1 Autophagy in the mouse brain

The implication of mutant huntingtins accumulation have been studied on mouse clonal striatal neurons. The cytoplasmic vacuoles or inclusions developed in the cytoplasm causing the cells to shrink. These vacuoles contained cathepsin D which is a marker for lysosomes suggesting the involvement in the endosomal-lysosomal pathway even under normal conditions. However, the amount of cathepsin D was elevated in the huntingtin-positive cells. The elevated activation of endosomal-lysosomal pathway might be the response to the presence of mutant huntingtin, allowing its removal and restoring homeostasis (Kegel et al., 2000).

Indeed, there were early as well as late autophagosomes observed in the FLAG-huntingtin-positive vacuoles suggesting the induction in autophagy. Some autophagosomes matured into autolysosomes but the induction was not sufficient to prevent neuronal degradation (Kegel et al., 2000).

The mutant huntingtin aggregates are visible only in the axons of striatal projection neurons contributing to neurodegeneration in HD knock-in mice. The huntingtin CAG repeats are largely expanded in HD mice compared to controls. The neuropil aggregates composed of degenerated axons are present in the axonal terminals probably also containing some degenerated mitochondria. (Li et al., 2001) However, some studies suggest that the presence of mutant huntingtin has no significant effect on the autophagy. The ratio LC3-I to tubulin was alike when compared to htt-130Q cells in the brains of HD mice. Autophagy was not effective in reducing the huntingtin aggregates as demonstrated with rapamycin induction. Rapamycin treatment only increased the LC3 levels compared to control brains but the aggregates remained in the neurons. The levels of LC3 in cerebellum, striatum and cortex in 2,4 and 24 months old HD mice did not change suggesting that autophagy wasn't induced or suppressed before the development of huntingtin aggregates (Li et al., 2010).

7.3.2 Autophagy in the human brain

The aggregates of mutant huntingtin with the NH₂-terminal fragment were detected in the postmortem brain tissue of HD patients compared to control brain samples. The aggregates promotes neuronal degeneration contributing to the development of Huntington's disease (DiFiglia et al., 1997).

The induction of autophagy using rapamycin was an useful treatment for the clearance of huntingtin aggregates. The total number of aggregate-containing cells was reduced compared to the striatal cell cultures that had no rapamycin treatment. These findings suggest that the induction of autophagy might be an effective treatment of Huntington's disease (Ravikumar et al., 2002). To further support these findings, the mutant huntingtin associated with autophagosomes in clonal striatal cells (x57 cells). The mutant huntingtin fragments were also reduced when rapamycin was applied (Qin et al., 2003).

The amount of aggregates significantly increased when the autophagy inhibitor 3-MA was applied to the neuronal cells. The 3-MA prevents the formation of autophagosomes therefore the aggregates could not be cleared using this pathway. The increased amount of aggregates leading to neuronal death was observed even under N⁶,N⁶-dimethyladenosine (DMA) inhibitor. (Ravikumar et al., 2002) When bafilomycin A1 (BAF) was applied to striatal cells, the maturation of autophagosomes was precluded, contributing to the development of huntingtin aggregates (Qin et al., 2003).

7.4 Therapy

The impact of autophagy regulation have been described in many studies investigating its role in the neurodegenerative diseases. The induction of autophagy was successful in the clearance of the aggregated proteins in many cases.

Rapamycin was an effective mTOR inhibitor but other inhibitors can be used such as rapamycin analog temsirolimus that also inhibits mTOR and stimulates autophagy (Siracusa et al., 2017). Another rapamycin analog everolimus is also effective in mTOR inhibition (Dubois et al., 2014). Activators of AMPK such as metformin can be used to induce autophagy as the amount of autophagosome-positive cells increased in mice compared to controls (Buzzai et al., 2007).

IP3 inhibitors independent on mTOR such as carbamazepine can stimulate autophagy and increase LC3-II levels in hippocampi of AD mice improving their memory capacity and spacial learning (Zhang et al., 2017).

However, the therapeutic treatment is still unclear as mTOR inhibitor Torin 1 induces of autophagy contributing to neuronal death (Malagelada et al., 2010)

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, autophagy is a significant degradation process that can be used as a target for treating neurodegenerative diseases. The therapy should be aimed at restoring basal autophagy that maintains the homeostasis and is able to prevent neuronal damage (Hara et al., 2006). The common trait of the discussed neurodegenerative diseases is the aggregation of proteins that are toxic for the neuronal cells. The oxidative damage contributes to neuronal death reducing the number of neurons in specific brain areas. The damage and loss of neurons is the major cause of developing physical and psychological symptoms.

In Alzheimer's disease, the role of autophagy is not clear. Some studies suggest that induced autophagy might contribute to the development of senile plaques composed of β -amyloid ($A\beta$) peptide and tau protein causing neurodegeneration. However, autophagy can also elevate LC3-II levels and effectively remove the protein aggregates under certain conditions (Yu et al., 2005). Indeed, there is neuronal death in many brain regions under the suppression of autophagy as the aggregates aren't fully removed (Hara et al. 2006).

In Parkinson's disease, the Chaperone mediated autophagy seems to be attenuated suggesting that other degradation systems might be activated (Yang et al., 2009). Macroautophagy can be induced removing the α -synuclein in the substantia nigra protecting the neurons from degeneration (Yu et al., 2009). Indeed, mitophagy is impaired in PD as damaged mitochondria aren't fully reduced using this pathway (Gatt et al., 2016).

In Huntington's disease, autophagy is induced removing mutant huntingtin, but the degradation system isn't efficient enough to prevent neurodegeneration (Kegel et al., 2000). On the other hand, some studies suggest that the presence of mutant huntingtin has no effect on autophagy (Li et al., 2010).

We can't establish any cause and effect relationship between the autophagy and neurodegeneration. The mechanism of those processes should be studied further in more detail to be able to develop an effective therapy for treating neurodegenerative diseases.

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