

# The Reciprocal Effects of Oxidative Stress and Glutamate Neurotransmission

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## Abbreviations

4-HNE	4-hydroxynonenal
AMPA	$\alpha$ -amino-5-methyl-3-hydroxy-4-isoxazole propionic acid
ATP	Adenosine triphosphate
cGCL	Catalytic subunit of glutamate cysteine ligase
CNS	Central nervous system
COX2	Cyclooxygenase-2
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid
Drp1	Dynamamin-related protein 1
DTNB	5, 5'-dithio-bis[2-nitrobenzoic acid]
DTT	Dithiothreitol
EAAC	Excitatory amino acid carriers
Egr-1	Early growth response protein
EPSC	Excitatory post synaptic currents
ERK	Extracellular signal-regulated kinase
H <sub>2</sub> O <sub>2</sub>	Hydrogen peroxide
iNOS	Nitric oxide synthase, inducible form

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KA	Kainate
MPTP	1-methyl-4- phenyl-1,2,3,6-tetrahydropyridine
NAC	N-acetylcysteine
NFκB	Nuclear factor-kappaB
NMDA	N-methyl-D-aspartate
nNOS	Neuronal nitric oxide synthase
NO	Nitric oxide
NOX	Nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide phosphate oxidase
NOX2	NADPH oxidase
NRF1	Nuclear respiratory factor 1
Nrf2	NF-E2-related factor
O <sub>2</sub> <sup>-</sup>	Superoxide anion
ONOO	Peroxynitrite
OPA1	Optical atrophy protein 1
PKG	Protein kinase G
RNS	Reactive nitrogen species
ROS	Reactive oxygen species
SIN-1	3-morpholiniosydnonimine
Sp1	Specificity protein 1
t-BHQ	<i>tert</i> -Butylhydroquinone
t-BOOH	<i>tert</i> -Butylhydroperoxide

## 1 Introduction

Abnormalities of glutamate neurotransmission are the focus of intense research for the neurobiological approach of neuropsychiatric conditions. A large body of research has demonstrated the implication of glutamate in pathological phenomena such as neurodegeneration, excitotoxicity, and apoptosis as well as its role in neuronal trophicity, synaptic plasticity, and long-term potentiation, to name a few. As specifically regards psychiatric conditions, glutamatergic mechanisms have also received ample attention. The investigation of psychotic states induced by phencyclidine or its analogues unraveled their common property of antagonism at the N-methyl-D-aspartate (NMDA) receptors and provided the initial argument for the glutamatergic hypothesis of schizophrenia, which has since received empirical support from animal, genetic, neuroimaging, and interventional studies. Conversely, the NMDA receptor antagonist ketamine has attracted interest as a therapeutic (as opposed to psychotomimetic) agent in the field of resistant depression (Zarate et al. 2006), and glutamatergic aspects of mood disorders pathophysiology are also intensely studied (Sanacora et al. 2012).

Beside classical aspects of excitotoxicity, calcium mobilization, and programmed cell death, reactive oxygen species (ROS) or reactive nitrogen species (RNS) production upon glutamate receptors stimulation has also attracted early attention (Coyle and Puttfarcken 1993). A distinct line of investigation, the impact of oxidative stress on glutamate neurotransmission, has also produced significant advances.

One subsequent topic, which is also beginning to be addressed experimentally, is the emergence of vicious circles between ambient oxidative stress, gain of glutamatergic function, and subsequent increase in oxidative stress.

## 2 A Brief Overview of Glutamatergic Neurotransmission

Glutamate is the main excitatory transmitter in the central nervous system (CNS). Glutamate is synthesized in neurons from glutamine under the action of the enzyme phosphate-activated glutaminase (brain/kidney phosphate-activated glutaminase product of the *GLS1* gene) and from  $\alpha$ -ketoglutarate by mitochondrial aspartate aminotransferase. Within astrocytes, glutamine synthetase converts glutamate to glutamine. The newly formed glutamine is released from astrocytes and taken up by glutamatergic neurons, where new glutamate is synthesized.

### 2.1 Ionotropic Receptors

Glutamate acts through two families of receptors, namely, ionotropic and metabotropic receptors. Ionotropic receptors have been defined by their preferential ligands. **AMPA** ( $\alpha$ -amino-5-methyl-3-hydroxy-4-isoxazole propionic acid) **receptors** are usually heterotetramers (although homotetramers have been documented) of AMPA-R subunits GluR1-4 (or GluA1-4) and some bias towards the inclusion of GluA2 dimers. Functional properties such as calcium permeability, current kinetics, and pharmacology are strongly influenced by subunits composition, alternative splicing, and accessory subunits (Shepherd and Huganir 2007). AMPA receptor kinetics provide the basis for the fast, high-frequency component of excitatory postsynaptic currents (EPSC) in the CNS (Geiger et al. 1997); the control of the trafficking and membrane density of AMPA receptors is also a central mechanism in synaptic plasticity and homeostatic adjustments of EPSC strength (Shepherd and Huganir 2007). The **kainate receptors** have been nominated after their defining preferential agonist, the seaweed toxin kainic acid. They are heterotetramers formed by subunits GluR5-7 (GluK1-3) and KA1-2 (GluK4-5). GluR5-7 subunits undergo substantial editing and alternative splicing. KA1-2 subunits bear high affinity sites for kainite binding, but are unable to form homotetramers in recombinant systems, at odds with the Glu5-7 subunits. They are more sparsely distributed in the CNS than other glutamate receptor types, and their electrophysiological contribution must be “unmasked” from the larger contribution of AMPA currents. Nevertheless, they are involved in many important functions such as synaptogenesis, control of neuronal excitability (including rhythmic activity), neurosecretion (through their presynaptic component), and some forms of synaptic plasticity (Pinheiro and Mulle 2006; Jane et al. 2009). Kainate receptors also impact the properties of critical CNS networks and could play a role in the pathophysiology or treatment of epilepsy (Vincent and Mulle 2009). The **N-Methyl-D-aspartate (NMDA) receptor** has

attracted by far the most attention in the field of excitotoxicity, and in diverse aspects of normal glutamatergic neurotransmission, the most notable being its implication in long-term potentiation and other forms of neuronal plasticity. NMDA receptors are heterotetramers comprising two obligate NR1 subunits, two NR2 subunits (NR2A-D) and an accessory NR3 subunit. At normal membrane polarization, the receptor is blocked by magnesium, and a mild depolarization is necessary to relieve this block, with a half effect at  $-20$  mV. NR1 subunits bear binding sites for the obligate coagonist glycine. Besides, NMDA receptors are endowed with a rich complement of modulatory sites enabling redox, zinc, neurosteroid, and polyamine modulatory effects. The impact of subunit composition (NR2A vs. NR2B) and cellular localization (synaptic vs. extrasynaptic) on the function and neurotoxic effects of NMDA receptors is the focus of intense research (Kohr 2006).

## 2.2 *Metabotropic Receptors*

**Metabotropic receptors** are G protein-coupled receptors. The group I receptors, including mGluR1 and 5, are widespread in neurons (type 1) and/or astrocytes (type 5) and predominantly postsynaptic. They couple to  $G\alpha q/11$  to induce phosphoinositide breakdown and also signal through  $\beta$ -arrestin and extracellular signal-regulated kinase (ERK) activation (Emery et al. 2010). They enhance NMDA-mediated responses and increase neuronal excitability. Group II receptors (mGluR2-3) are pre- and postsynaptic and typically couple to  $G_i/o$ . They decrease neurotransmitter release and neuronal excitability. Group III receptors (mGluR4, 6–8) are located presynaptically (active zone) and also decrease transmitter release through  $G_i/o$  coupling.

## 2.3 *Reuptake*

Upon release, glutamate can be taken up by two neuronal excitatory amino acid carriers, EAAC1 (or EAAT3), whose quantitative contribution to the overall glutamate uptake appears quantitatively modest (Holmseth et al. 2012), but functionally important in some pathological contexts (Nafia et al. 2008; Ross et al. 2011). The main uptake process, however, is contributed by astrocytes ensheathing the synaptic process, mostly through excitatory amino acid transporter 2 (EAAT2 or GLT1) and EAAT1 (or GLAST) (Kanai and Hediger 2004).

## 2.4 *Neuroenergetics*

The disposition and metabolism of glutamate in astrocytes is a complex and compartmented process positioned at the interface of metabolic (e.g., tricarboxylic acid cycle, purine nucleotide cycle, glutathione synthesis), structural (incorporation into

proteins), or neurochemical (glutamine synthesis) functions and has been reviewed in detail (McKenna 2007). Glutamatergic and GABAergic neurons have been estimated to make up to 80–90 % of the CNS neuron complement, with glutamatergic neurons constituting the large majority. The fast turnover, energy-dependent uptake, and glutamine/glutamate recycling have been estimated to make up to 60–80 % of brain energetic consumption (Rothman et al. 2003), with significant glial contribution (including astrocytic involvement in glutamatergic “tripartite synapses”), and involve cooperation between neuronal and glial metabolic processes (notably the tricarboxylic acid cycle) and the glutamate/glutamine cycle (Serres et al. 2008).

### 3 The Impact of Oxidative Status on Glutamatergic Neurotransmission

#### 3.1 Glutamate Dynamics

##### 3.1.1 Glutamate Release

The release of glutamate due to the depletion of adenosine triphosphate (ATP), resulting from the transmembrane sodium gradient and inversion of membrane glutamate transport systems, is a defining feature of the excitotoxic component of ischemic phenomena and will not be discussed here.

Classical studies explored the effect of oxidative status modification on synaptosomal [<sup>3</sup>H]aspartate release and showed that 0.01 % hydrogen peroxide (H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>) increased depolarization-induced calcium-dependant release above 200 % of their basal values (Gilman et al. 1994). This effect could not be replicated at substantially lower (100 μM) H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> concentration, although in this preparation peroxide synergized with a sodium load achieved by veratridine, again in a fashion more relevant to ischemia/reperfusion events (Tretter and Adam-Vizi 2002). However, in addition to ischemia/reperfusion phenomena, the influence of inflammatory and oxidative/nitrative status effects has been studied in recent work. Bal-Price and Brown (2001) used a coculture model of cerebellar granule neurons and activated glia (lipopolysaccharide and interferon-γ stimulation) to demonstrate a massive neuronal death caused by neuronal glutamate release (as evidenced by MK-801 prevention) proceeding from nitric oxide (NO)-induced impairment of mitochondrial respiration (as evidenced by the preventive effect of two distinct inducible nitric oxide synthase (iNOS) inhibitors). These effects were mimicked by the NO donor NOC-18, which induced a doubling of extracellular glutamate concentrations in primary neuronal cultures, and an increase from virtually undetectable levels to ≈9 μM in neuronal/glial cocultures, as well as a decrease in ATP levels more pronounced in pure neuronal culture than in cocultures (Bal-Price and Brown 2001). Mitochondrial involvement in glutamate release induced by oxidative phenomena has been confirmed by the use of sodium cyanide (Dong et al. 2012), which inhibits mitochondrial cytochrome c oxidase (Leavesley et al. 2008). In cortical synaptosomes, cyanide elicited a strong glutamate release, which was completely reversed by the free radical scavengers melatonin and

manganese (III) 5,10,15,20-tetrakis (4-benzoic acid) porphyrin, as well as the H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> scavenger EUK134. Indeed, this effect was replicated by H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>, albeit at the considerable concentration of 600  $\mu$ M. The NMDA receptors antagonist AP5 ((2*R*)-amino-5-phosphonovaleric acid; (2*R*)-amino-5-phosphonopentanoate) prevented the effect of H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> on glutamate release, but was only partially efficient vis-à-vis the effect of cyanide, suggesting a complementary mechanism in this case. Additional results suggested that ATP synthesis inhibition was a likely mechanism to account for this discrepancy: cyanide decreased ATP synthase by more than 50 %, while the ATP synthase inhibitor 3,3'-diindolylmethane increased glutamate release. The authors suggest a role for lipid peroxidation products (also increased by cyanide) as a potential mechanism for the loss of ATP synthase activity, which seems plausible given the particular sensitivity of this enzyme to, for instance, 4-hydroxynonenal (4-HNE) modification (Perluigi et al. 2009).

Another source of reactive oxygen species (ROS) whose activity has recently been linked unequivocally to increased glutamate release is the superoxide-generating enzyme NADPH oxidase (NOX2). Acute ketamine administration in rodents is known to elicit behavioral abnormalities reminiscent of schizophrenia, to increase oxidative stress as well as glutamate release in cortical areas. Some of these effects have been convincingly linked to NOX2 activation and are indeed prevented by its inhibitor apocynin (Behrens et al. 2007). Sorce et al. have compared the effects of ketamine in wild-type and NOX2 knockout mice (NOX2-KO): compared to controls, NOX-KO mice were protected against the behavioral and neurochemical effects of ketamine, notably the hallmark increase in glutamate release (Sorce et al. 2010). Therefore, superoxide production by NOX2 is shown to be a necessary step in the behavioral and neurochemical effects of ketamine.

Overall, it appears that neuronal glutamate release can be increased in an oxidative environment by distinct pathways, namely, disruption of mitochondrial respiration, superoxide production by NOX2, and ATP synthase inhibition, the latter potentially due to lipid peroxidation products.

### 3.1.2 Glutamate Reuptake

Conversely, there is ample evidence that glutamate uptake processes are the target of redox modulation. Early work using different systems showed that glutamate uptake could be significantly inhibited by H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> (at concentrations as low as 100  $\mu$ M) or by enzymatic ROS-producing systems such as glucose oxidase or xanthine oxidase (Piani et al. 1993; Volterra et al. 1994a). This effect could be fully reversed by the reducing agent dithiothreitol (DTT), suggesting that redox-sensitive sulfhydryl groups were involved in the phenomenon (Volterra et al. 1994b). Further mechanistic insights were provided by the incubation of astrocytic cultures with the lipid peroxidation product 4-HNE, which resulted in a dose-dependent inhibition of glutamate uptake. Again, this effect could be reversed by DTT (as well as glutathione). It was associated with the formation of adducts between 4-HNE and the glial glutamate transporter GLT-1, as well as dimerization (up to four times) of the latter.

Evidence of post-translational modifications associated with oxidative stress and uptake impairment has also been obtained for the neuronal transporter EAAC1 (or EAAT3) in the 1-methyl-4-phenyl-1,2,3,6-tetrahydropyridine (MPTP) Parkinson's model. In this case, the authors demonstrated an increase in protein tyrosine nitration. Since cysteine is also a permeant of this transporter and a precursor of glutathione synthesis, a parallel decrease in cellular glutathione content was observed, further compromising cellular redox status (Aoyama et al. 2008).

While post-translational oxidative modifications are generally associated with loss of function, a more complex picture emerges from studies of transcriptional control of the same molecules. In the primary astrocytic culture model, it was shown that mRNA and protein levels for all three transporters EAAT1, EAAT2, and EAAT3 were left unchanged by peroxide or tert-butyl hydroperoxide (t-BOOH), although the same conditions led to a decrease in glutamate uptake (Miralles et al. 2001). EAAT1 levels were decreased in a rat model of thiamine deficiency and partially rescued by the antioxidant N-acetyl-cysteine (NAC) (Hazell et al. 2010). They were also downregulated by arsenic exposure, although in this case, direct evidence of oxidative stress was lacking (Castro-Coronel et al. 2011). EAAT2 was also downregulated and rescued by NAC in the thiamine deficiency model (Hazell et al. 2010); exposure of astrocyte cocultures to excitotoxic (S)-5-fluorowillardiine (and oxidative [3-morpholinosydnonimine (SIN-1)]) resulted in a biphasic response in EAAT2 levels, with an increase at 24 h followed by a decrease at 48 h (Wallis et al. 2012). Mechanistically, EAAT2 transcription seems to be under the dependence of the transcription factor nuclear factor-kappaB (NFκB), whose sensitivity to the redox status is well known (Janssen-Heininger et al. 2000). Increases of EAAT2 transcription levels have been documented after ceftriaxone incubation (which induces NFκB activation) as well as in response to tumor necrosis factor alpha (TNFα), although in this case a repressing influence was also suspected (Sitcheran et al. 2005; Lee et al. 2008). The results are less equivocal for EAAT3. Upon exposure to L-sulforaphane and tert-butylhydroquinone (t-BHQ), there was a strong upregulation of EAAT3 in C6 glioma culture. This effect could be replicated in vivo and could be ascribed to the activation of the transcription pathway NF-E2-related factor 2 (Nrf2)/antioxidant response element; this response was lost in Nrf2-KO mice and could be mimicked by overexpression of Nrf2 (Escartin et al. 2011).

### 3.2 Redox Status and NMDA Modulation

Among the many modulating influences that have been described on the NMDA receptor, the redox site has attracted early recognition and interest. In the initial description of the phenomenon, Aizenman et al. (1989) showed that currents elicited in cultured rat cortical neurons by a combination of NMDA (10–100 μM) and glycine (1 μM) were significantly enhanced by pretreatment with the reducing agent DTT, up to 250 % above basal traces. Conversely, the oxidizing agent 5,

5'-dithio-bis[2-nitrobenzoic acid] (DTNB) induced a decrease in the signal ( $-22\%$ ), which could always be restored by DTT.

Further work addressed the electrophysiological substrate of this response. Using CHO cells culture, it was shown that DTT induced an increase in opening frequencies for all three recombinant subunit combinations tested (NR1/NR2A, NR1/NR2B, or NR1/NR2C) with an increase in open dwell time only for the NR1/NR2A combination (Brimecombe et al. 1997). The redox sensitivity of NMDA receptors could be partially ascribed to two NR1 cysteines (Cys744 and 798) (Sullivan et al. 1994), whose mutation abolished the redox sensitivity of NR1/NR2C combination, and decreased that of NR2A/NR2B pairs. The coexpression of NR2A, however, rescued the redox sensitivity of mutated (C744A, C798A) NR1. This suggests that NR2A subunits also bear redox sites, which could also explain the different kinetic response (increased open dwell time) (Brimecombe et al. 1999).

Apart from the mechanistic interest of these results, recent work has also highlighted their potential pathophysiological implications. For instance, in the pilocarpine/hippocampal culture model of temporal lobe epilepsy, Di Maio et al. (2011) have shown that protracted exposure of hippocampal neurons to pilocarpine induced cellular thiol oxidation, intracellular calcium increase (ascribed to NMDA receptor activation), and resistance to further glutamate application. One plausible explanation for the latter result was that NMDA receptors were rendered resistant to glutamate because of cysteine oxidation. In support of this hypothesis, NMDA currents could be restored partially by the antioxidant NAC and more completely by the reducing agent tris(2-carboxyethyl)phosphine. These results complement earlier work using a different model of epileptiform activity elicited in hippocampal slices by low magnesium concentrations. Under these conditions, epileptiform activity appeared to be suppressed by the oxidant DNTB and restored by DTT (Sanchez et al. 2000). Therefore, in the context of epilepsy described above, it appears likely that acute reducing modulation enhances ictal activity, which in turn induces protracted oxidative phenomena and subsequent suppression of NMDA currents.

A different approach using the lipid peroxidation product 4-HNE (1  $\mu\text{M}$ , a concentration in the lower range of those achieved by *in vitro* oxidative conditions) showed a biphasic effect with an initial stimulation of NMDA currents, which resolved within 3 h and was replaced by a protracted decrease. This effect paralleled an increase in the phosphorylation levels of NR1 and NR2A subunits and a decrease in ATP levels, which were thought to underlie, respectively, the increase and decrease in NMDA currents: okadaic acid, a phosphatase inhibitor, increased NR1 and NR2A phosphorylation and accordingly enhanced NMDA function, while the mitochondrial toxin rotenone, which depletes cellular ATP levels, induced a decrease in NMDA currents. Interestingly, the authors could not demonstrate the formation of adducts between 4-HNE and NR1 or NR2A subunits, while such adducts existed for the AMPA receptor subunits GluR1-4, although the AMPA current was left unchanged under the same conditions (Lu et al. 2001).

Another well-known modulatory site—beside the redox site—of the NMDA receptor is the binding site for the obligate coagonists glycine or D-serine. The formation of the latter product depends on the enzyme serine racemase, which has

been suggested in association studies and preclinical models to contribute to schizophrenia pathophysiology (Labrie et al. 2009; Ma et al. 2012; Morita et al. 2007). Recently, it has been shown that inflammatory, oxidative, and nitrative conditions increased the formation of covalent dimers of the enzyme, which was associated with decreased activity. Indeed, the nitric oxide donor SIN-1 induced a dose-dependent decrease in serine racemase function, at concentrations actually lower than those necessary to achieve cross-linking (Wang and Barger 2012), which suggests intramolecular events distinct from dimerization per se.

### 3.3 NMDA Receptor Subunits Levels

The cellular localization and transcriptional regulation of glutamate receptors have shown varying response patterns to oxidative status across receptors, across subunits, and across experimental conditions.

Available evidence suggests a robust upregulation of the NR1 subunit in response to pro-oxidative conditions. Ischemia/reperfusion paradigms lead to an early increase in NR1 and NR2A/B expression (Won et al. 2001).

In a different context, it has been shown, in cultured cortical neurons, that neurotoxicity induced by neurotrophin-4/5 involved upregulation of NR1 and, more prominently, NR2A (Choi et al. 2004). This response seemed to be under the dependence of the redox-sensitive transcription factor early growth response protein 1 (Egr-1) (Gao et al. 2009). Although, in this case, normalization of redox status by inhibitors of NOS or NOX2 did not prevent NR2A upregulation, no data were presented on an eventual normalization of NR1 by the same agents. Hypoxic conditions designed to mimic the effects of high altitude for 3, 7, or 14 days induced unequivocal evidence of increased oxidative markers and a transcriptional activation and upregulation of the NR1 subunit, while the GluR2 subunit tended to decrease (Hota et al. 2008). Even a shorter (4 h) hypoxic treatment induced a strong increase in NR1 immunoreactivity in *nucleus tractus solitarius* neurons, which was partially prevented by  $\alpha$ -tocopherol and ascorbic acid. These two antioxidants were also able to decrease NR1 levels during normal development, suggesting that some tonic level of oxidative conditions contributes to basal expression of NR1 (Wu et al. 2011). Later work by the same group demonstrated that the upregulation of NR1 was under the dependency of the transcription factor specificity protein 1 (Sp1) and could be prevented by the antioxidant acetyl-L-carnitine (Hota et al. 2010).

Exposure of hippocampal neurons to pilocarpine for 24 h upregulated NR1 and NR2B subunits by some 40 %, an effect that could be reversed by the antioxidant NAC and the NOX inhibitors apocynin and 6-aminonicotinamide (Di Maio et al. 2011). However, other work has rather documented a downregulation of NR2 subunits by oxidative conditions: an 8 weeks exposure to the diabetes mimic streptozotocin induced a decrease in hippocampal NR2A and NR2B levels, in parallel with a well-known disruption of oxidative status (Piotrowski 2003). Polyunsaturated fatty acids normalized malondialdehyde levels and partially restored NR2A/B levels

(Delibas et al. 2004). As well, repeated injections of the psychotomimetic NMDA antagonist ketamine induced a decrease in NR2A expression in the prefrontal and cingulate cortices of wild-type but not NOX2-KO mice, while the effects of ketamine on NR2B appeared independent of NOX2 (Sorice et al. 2010).

Caracciolo et al. (2011) have provided an extensive characterization of glutamate receptor subunit response to injections of kainate in wild-type or cyclooxygenase-2 (COX2) knockout mice. Indirect markers of oxidative/inflammatory status such as NF $\kappa$ B and iNOS levels were increased in the KA/COX2-KO group. As regards NMDA receptor subunits (NR1, NR2A-D, NR3A/B), there was a general decrease, for the same group, in the cortical and hippocampal transcript levels, with the exception of increased hippocampal NR3A mRNA. As for AMPA and KA receptors (GluR1-7 and KA1/2), there was also a general trend for decreased transcripts levels in the hippocampus, while cortical expression was generally unaffected. Social isolation increases oxidative stress and has been used to mimic some features of Alzheimer's disease (among other conditions) (Hsiao et al. 2012); in this case, social isolation was associated with a decrease in the density of GluR1 and GluR2 subunits associated with the cell membrane, while the overall cellular complement of the same subunits was unchanged, and NAC was able to reverse these changes. Conversely, in the work cited earlier (Hota et al. 2010), the GluR2 subunit level was also increased by hypoxia but resisted normalization by acetyl-L-carnitine.

Overall, there appears to be consistent evidence that NR1 expression increases in response to oxidative conditions, which could be driven by at least three types of redox-sensitive transcription factors, Sp1, Egr-1, and nuclear respiratory factor 1 (NRF1) (Dhar and Wong-Riley 2009). Results for other subunits are scarcer and less consistent.

## 4 Glutamate Modulates Cellular Redox Status

### 4.1 Demonstration

The implication of ROS in the cellular effects of glutamate was initially studied in the context of excitotoxic phenomena. Coyle and Puttfarcken (1993) put forward formal criteria for such involvement.

The demonstration of ROS production after NMDA engagement was initially obtained in cultured cerebellar granule cells: NMDA increased levels of the superoxide radical  $\cdot\text{O}_2^-$  in a rapid (10 min) and transient (resolution within 40 min) manner; this response was duly abolished by the NMDA receptor antagonist MK-801, was partially calcium dependent, and was not mimicked, in this system, by KA (Lafon-Cazal et al. 1993). Similarly, NMDA increased ROS levels (as monitored by dichlorofluorescein fluorescence) in cultured cortical neurons (Reynolds and Hastings 1995). Evidence of increased  $\text{O}_2^-$  production (as evidenced by dihydroethidium fluorescence) after NMDA, KA, and AMPA administration was obtained in cultured hippocampal neurons and ex vivo slices (Bindokas et al. 1996).

The demonstration of significant oxidative damage to cellular components, another criterion for ROS involvement in glutamate effects, has been obtained for different macromolecules. Evidence of increased lipid peroxidation has been by far the most documented, notably through malondialdehyde and 4-HNE levels; all three glutamate receptor types appear to give rise to increased lipid peroxidation (Agostinho et al. 1996; Bae et al. 2002; Bruce and Baudry 1995), although some systems have yielded conflicting results (Yang et al. 2003). Similarly, all three types of receptors have been shown to induce some degree of protein carbonylation, a widely used index of protein oxidative modification (Mueller-Burke et al. 2008; Gluck et al. 2000; Tateno et al. 2004). Lastly, glutamate damage to deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) was also demonstrated in early work (Didier et al. 1996) and could play role in excitotoxic cell death, but appears to elicit efficient repair mechanisms under milder conditions (Yang et al. 2010).

The last criterion of ROS involvement in glutamate action is the prevention/reversal of (some) toxic effects of glutamate by antioxidants or ROS scavengers. Such examples abound both *in vitro* and *in vivo* and indeed constitute the test generally used to ascertain the role of ROS in biological phenomena, but have generally—and notably—not translated well in clinical applications (Isaac et al. 2008; Muir 2006).

## ***4.2 Effectors of Glutamate Redox Modulation***

Although the place of glutamate as an inducer of oxidative stress has been overwhelmingly confirmed, the precise cellular origin of ROS (or at least the relative contribution of different cellular sources) is still a matter of debate, mostly on methodological grounds, which will not be addressed here (Brennan et al. 2009; Alekseenko et al. 2012).

### **4.2.1 Mitochondrial Involvement**

It has been suggested that up to 50 % of CNS ROS originate from mitochondria, and more precisely from the reverse electron transport (Kudin et al. 2008), and early as well as more recent work has tried to unravel the interaction of glutamate (either as a neurotransmitter or as a metabolic substrate) with the complex mitochondrial dynamics.

One well-established mechanism relates to calcium homeostasis, in line with the robust calcium dependency of glutamate oxidative phenomena. Excessive cytoplasmic calcium concentrations are progressively transferred (through the calcium uniporter) to the mitochondrial matrix, exceeding the homeostatic possibilities of mitochondrial calcium cycling and reaching a threshold of calcium overload. The latter, associated with other triggering signals such as increases in inorganic phosphate concentration, ATP depletion, and oxidative stress, provokes the opening of the permeability transition pore with subsequent diffusion of large molecules and disruption

of the tricarboxylic acid cycle (Crompton 1999). Glutamate-dependent ROS production as such has been suggested to depend on dissipation of mitochondrial membrane potential (Scanlon and Reynolds 1998), uncoupling of respiration from ATP production (Panov et al. 2009), increased respiration (even at maximal uncoupling; Kumari et al. 2012), specific enzymatic sources such as the  $\alpha$ -ketoglutarate dehydrogenase complex (Chinopoulos and Adam-Vizi 2006), or lifting of oxaloacetate inhibition of complex II succinate dehydrogenase (Panov et al. 2009). Glutamate has also been shown to profoundly affect the dynamics of mitochondria, notably by promoting mitochondrial fragmentation and autophagy, by upregulating mitochondrial fission markers and promoters dynamin-related protein 1 (Drp1) and Fis1 (Kumari et al. 2012; Grohm et al. 2010).

#### 4.2.2 NOX2 Activation

Nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide phosphate oxidases (abbreviated to NOX) are a family of transmembrane which catalyze the reduction of molecular oxygen  $O_2$  to the superoxide anion  $O_2^-$  and have been initially described as giving rise to the “phagocytic oxidative burst.” The most widely studied form, in general and in the context of glutamate toxicity, is NOX2 (previously called gp91<sup>phox</sup>). NOX2 is in obligatory and stabilizing interaction with p22<sup>phox</sup>; upon phosphorylation and subsequent confirmation changes, a third subunit, the “organizer” p47<sup>phox</sup>, associates with the membrane-bound NOX2/p22<sup>phox</sup> complex and recruits to it a number of cytoplasmic factors, among which the “activator” p67<sup>phox</sup>, p40<sup>phox</sup>, and the GTPase Rac. The active NOX2 complex catalyzes the reduction of NADPH, the result of which is a transmembrane electron transfer with subsequent release of superoxide  $O_2^-$  in the luminal or extracellular space. NOX2 is an inducible enzyme, and its promoter bears binding sites for multiple redox-sensitive transcription factors. The cellular functions of NOX2 can be probed by a number of pharmacological inhibitors such as diphenylene iodonium, whose specificity is weak, or apocynin, a pro-drug which must be activated by peroxidases and prevents the translocation of cytoplasmic components (Bedard and Krause 2007). More recently, knockout NOX2 models have provided clear results to some its functions, including in the context of glutamate-induced oxidative phenomena. Cortical neurons loaded with the redox-sensitive probe dihydroethidium showed a strong increase in fluorescence levels upon NMDA application, which was restored to control levels by MK-801, apocynin, or an inhibitor of NADPH production. Oxidative phenomena (4-HNE-positive neurons) induced by NMDA were also prevented by NOX2 inhibition. To more completely assess the respective contribution of mitochondria versus NOX2, the authors used the fact that mitochondria can use pyruvate to sustain ATP levels and ROS production, while NOX2 superoxide production is dependent on glucose: providing neurons with pyruvate (at the exclusion of glucose), in the presence of NMDA, strongly decreased the number of ethidium-positive neurons, while the level of superoxide production was unaffected by providing only glucose (at the exclusion of pyruvate); on the basis of the metabolic requirements of the two

pathways, it was thus concluded that in this system, superoxide production induced by NMDA relied mostly on NOX2. Moreover, *in vivo*, NMDA-induced neuronal death was prevented in p47<sup>phox</sup><sup>-/-</sup> cells. Hippocampus neuronal degeneration induced by NMDA was also prevented by some 60 % in p47<sup>phox</sup><sup>-/-</sup> mice, as was 4-HNE induction. Subtype-specific peptide inhibitors of protein kinase C moreover suggested that NMDA activation of NOX2 relied on PKC $\zeta$  activation (Brennan et al. 2009). Similarly, Girouard et al. showed that ROS increases elicited by NMDA (as assessed by dihydroethidium fluorescence) were attenuated in NOX2-KO mice. Pharmacological assessments in cultured neurons suggested a signaling pathway between NMDA and NOX2, consisting of NO increase (mediated by the neuronal nitric oxide synthase nNOS), guanylate cyclase activation, and subsequent activation of protein kinase G (PKG) by cyclic guanosine monophosphate (cGMP) (Girouard et al. 2009). These effects have been extended, beyond cortical regions, to the striatum. After striatal glutamate injection, apocynin or NOX2 knockout decreased cell death, ROS production, and protein nitration by  $\approx$ 50–60 %, a significant but partial rescue. A direct assay of NADPH oxidase activity confirmed the stimulating effect of glutamate and its prevention in NOX2-KO and apocynin-treated animals. Pharmacological analysis also showed a significant stimulating effect of non-NMDA ionotropic receptors and metabotropic M1 (and possibly M5) receptors on NADPH oxidase activity (Gomez-Gamboa et al. 2011).

### 4.2.3 Nitratative Phenomena

The implication of increased NO production, beside ROS, has been proposed early (Lafon-Cazal et al. 1993) to account for some of the detrimental or, for that matter, neuroplastic effects of glutamate and has received ample experimental confirmation (Ishikawa et al. 1999). NO derivatives can induce S-nitrosylation (originating from NO<sup>-</sup> singlets) and react (NO<sup>-</sup> triplets) with superoxide anion O<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup> to form peroxy-nitrite ONOO. There appears to be a significant interplay with the mitochondrial aspects of ROS production and consequences (Crompton 1999; Almeida and Bolanos 2001) with possible feedforward amplifying phenomena. Interestingly, it has also been shown that NO-dependent events could link NMDA receptor engagement to NOX2 activation; therefore, beside its own interaction with ROS, NO is also linked mechanistically to the two main glutamatergic oxidant sources.

### 4.2.4 Cystine Uptake

Cystine is transported into neurons and glia by the X<sub>AG</sub> system (cysteine permeable glutamate transporter), but also, in immature neurons, oligodendrocytes and some cell lines by the X<sub>C</sub><sup>-</sup> cystine glutamate exchanger. Intracellular cystine can be converted back to cysteine and incorporated in the endogenous antioxidant glutathione. Cystine and glutamate are the two preferred substrates of this system, which normally extrudes glutamate. Increasing extracellular glutamate concentrations (which

competes with cystine for cellular entry) or decreasing extracellular cystine levels have been shown to decrease glutathione levels and induce toxicity (Murphy et al. 1989), through an original mechanism of oxidative stress that does not involve excessive ROS production but decreased antioxidant mechanisms. Interestingly, the same system is also involved in the protective effects of preconditioning: mixed neuron/glia cell culture exposed to oxygen glucose deprivation, or mice exposed to 15 min carotid artery ligation, reacted by upregulating  $X_{CT}$  (a subunit of the  $X_C^-$  transport system) and the catalytic subunit of glutamate cysteine ligase (cGCL), involved in the synthesis of glutathione. This neuroprotective glial coordinated response is under the dependence of the transcription factor NRF2 (Bell et al. 2011a, b).

### 4.3 *Antioxidant Effects of Glutamate Stimulation*

Most of the data regarding glutamate toxicity tried to mimic “catastrophic” events such as ischemia/reperfusion, apoptotic cell death, or generally neurodegenerative events, at the risk of overlooking milder effects (Yang et al. 2010) or bona fide neuroprotective actions of glutamate, which are often related to synaptic (vs. extrasynaptic) NMDA receptor engagement (Hardingham and Bading 2010). These have been recently reviewed and include activation of the protective AKT/GSK-3 $\beta$  pathway, suppression of “prodeath” FOXO transcriptional activity, and engagement of cAMP-response element binding protein, among others (Hardingham 2009). These neuroprotective mechanisms enhanced by synaptic activity also included (1) transcriptional suppression of the thioredoxin-interacting protein (which itself inhibits thioredoxin and is therefore pro-oxidative in a FOXO dependent fashion) and (2) transcriptional activation of sestrin2 and sulfiredoxin, which can reduce oxidized forms of sulfiredoxin back to their active form (Papadia et al. 2008).

## 5 **Concluding Remarks**

The investigation of the redox modulatory effects of glutamate neurotransmission enters its fourth decade and remains a very active field.

### 5.1 *Empirical Confirmation of the “Vicious Circle” Model*

The idea that glutamatergic transmission could give rise to positive feedforward (e.g., increased NMDA subunit expression) or feedback (e.g., decreased uptake) phenomena was proposed relatively early to account for the anti-homeostatic, “catastrophic” behavior of this system (Coyle and Puttfarcken 1993). In the more restricted field of glutamate-induced oxidative stress, mitochondrial disruption and NOX2 activation are attractive partners to engage in such feedbacks, but this

conceptual framework has received scant empirical confirmation in spite of its attractiveness. Recent work has indeed explored the interaction between mitochondrial dynamics and NMDA transmission (Nguyen et al. 2011). The optical atrophy protein 1 (OPA1) is an obligate step of mitochondrial fusion and is mutated (deletion) in a frequent form of optic neuropathy, associated with the loss of retinal ganglion cells through a likely excitotoxic process partially rescued by the NMDA antagonist memantine. In mice heterozygous for the mutated OPA1, mitochondria were, as expected, both shorter and more numerous, indicating that fission was favored over fusion. Antioxidant status was compromised by decreased expression of superoxide dismutase; most notably, there was significant upregulation of NMDA subunits NR1, NR2A, and NR2B, a likely consequence of the *primum movens*, disrupted mitochondrial dynamics, but also a potential amplifying factor through increased oxidative stress and upregulation of fission promoters dynamin-related protein 1 (Drp1) and Fis1 (Kumari et al. 2012; Grohm et al. 2010), as stated above.

## 5.2 Relevance to Psychiatric Disorders Pathophysiology

While the results detailed in this chapter have been used to gain a better understanding of neurological conditions such as stroke, epilepsy, or neurodegenerative disorders, their relevance for the pathophysiology of psychiatric disorders is also becoming obvious. The most salient example, the phencyclidine model of schizophrenia and its relation to GAD67 downregulation, where NOX2 implication has been formally demonstrated by M. Behrens' work, will be discussed in chapter "The Impact of Oxidative Stress on GAD67 Levels and Parvalbumin-Positive Neurons" in the present volume. In a different perspective, NOX2 has recently been implied as well in the effects of social isolation, a chronic stressor mimicking, in rodents, some aspects of diverse conditions such as depression, anxiety, suicidality, or schizophrenia, among others. The authors have taken advantage of a spontaneous mutation in rats (threonine/methionine substitution at position 153) of the NADPH oxidase organizer subunit p47<sup>phox</sup>, which reduces oxidative burst capacity by 40 %. During social isolation for at least 4 weeks, animals developed increased locomotor activity, loss of discriminating capacities in the novel object recognition test, increased glutamate levels, and loss of physiological NR2A increase. There was also a time-dependent decrease in GABAergic markers GAD67 and parvalbumin and an upregulation of NOX2 and p47<sup>phox</sup> that was restricted to pyramidal neurons. Accordingly, oxidative markers also increased in a time-dependent fashion. Interestingly, the loss of function mutation of p47<sup>phox</sup> was protective against behavioral abnormalities (locomotor activity), NR2A, and parvalbumin decrease. In another set of experiments, the authors went on to show a preventive effect of apocynin administered from weeks 4 to 7, vis-à-vis the development of behavioral abnormalities induced by social isolation.

Therefore, normalization of redox status was instrumental in attenuating some of the neurochemical and behavioral abnormalities induced by social isolation, which

shows that interrupting the feedback mechanisms between glutamatergic neurotransmission and oxidative stress could be of paramount interest in the understanding and treatment of psychiatric disorders.

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