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# Essential Aspects of Immunometabolism in Health and Disease

 Springer

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# Preface

Immunometabolism has emerged as an intersectional crossroad between metabolism and immune response. Over the past decade, it has become clear that most, if not all, of the immune cell function is undissociated from their cellular metabolism. Although seminal works have addressed the metabolic fate of immune cells during differentiation and function, the physiological status of given tissue is also critically dependent on the cell metabolism.

The dialogue between immune cells and the microenvironment modulates the cellular metabolism that can trigger the onset as well as the progression of a multitude of inflammatory-mediated diseases. Thus, uncovering the specification of the metabolism of the different immune cells types in different conditions can shed light into the development of new drugs and therapeutical strategies to treat immune-mediated diseases.

The book *Essential Aspects of Immunometabolism* was thought to give to the readers a broader view of the different angles of how metabolic pathways can influence the several types of immune cells during activation, differentiation, and function during homeostasis and diseases. Of note, the structure of the book was created thinking not only for the immunologist but also for undergraduate and graduate students, physicians, and scientific community interested in the field. We begin in chapter “[Overview of Immune Responses](#)” with an overview of the immune response, describing the components of the system and its dynamic. Chapter “[Metabolic Pathways and Cell Signaling](#)” depicts the different routes of the metabolic pathways. This section nicely explains the metabolic pathways by describing how nutrient-sensing machinery for carbohydrate, lipid, and amino acid work and how they fuel cellular metabolism. Chapter “[Mitochondrial Biogenesis and Dynamics in Health and Disease](#)” complements and dives deeper into mitochondria metabolism and describes the main transcription factors responsible for mitochondria biogenesis. The text brings to our attention the mechanisms underlying mitochondria dynamics such as fission and fusion, and how these processes are regulated and how they impact health and disease. Chapters “[Metabolic Pathways in Immune Cells Commitment and Fate](#)” “[Metabolic Profile of Innate Immune Cells](#)” and “[Metabolic Profile of Adaptive Immune Cells](#)” specify the importance of metabolic pathways in different immune cells’ activation, differentiation, function, and fate. These chapters give a

broad overview of how metabolic pathways influence innate and adaptive immune cells. Moreover, it is explained how the metabolic profile of innate immune cells in different situations is such as during phagocytosis versus efferocytosis. They also explain the different metabolic profiles in macrophages subsets, ILCs, and subtypes of dendritic cells. Finally, the metabolic profile of adaptive cells, giving the very time-frame of the metabolism of T and B cells, exactly matched with the course of adaptive immune response ranging from the ontogeny, migration, and contraction phases until memory was detailed. From that, the book starts covering the role of immune cells and metabolism in different disease conditions. The interconnection between inflammation, obesity, and metabolic syndrome, bringing different factors such as adipokines, the microbiota composition can influence adipose tissue, consequently inflammation in adipose tissue and metabolic syndrome is fully discussed. Chapter “[Metabolic Reprogramming and Infectious Diseases](#)” paves how metabolic pathways are modulated during infectious diseases, by explaining the importance of barrier tissue for homeostasis and how the metabolism of immune cells behaves facing different types of pathogens. In chapter “[Metabolic Reprogramming and Cancer](#)”, the authors elegantly explain how the metabolism of cancer cells and the pathways is triggered in the cancer microenvironment. Interestingly, most of the metabolic pathways activated in cancer cells are shared by immune cells’ metabolism. This book also brings insights into how adipocyte influences the regulation of immune cells, emphasizing how factors released by adipocytes can influence adipose-tissue-residing immune cells as well as the consequence of the adipose-tissue-residing cell activation for obesity and metabolic syndrome. Chapter “[Immune Regulation of Adipose Tissue Browning](#)” continues in immune-mediated and adipose tissue cross-talk with a deep focus on how this interaction regulates immune cells and adipocyte of the brown adipose tissue. Finally, the book ends with chapters “[Physical Exercise and Metabolic Reprogramming](#)” and “[Immunometabolism and Organ Transplantation](#)” bringing approaches to two more different conditions where immunometabolism can have an important impact. Chapter “[Physical Exercise and Metabolic Reprogramming](#)” described how different exercises influence the reprogramming metabolism of the immune cells and chapter “[Immunometabolism and Organ Transplantation](#)” covers the aspects of metabolic pathways and immune cells during the graft engraftment process from ischemia-reperfusion injury to acute and chronic transplant rejection.

The field has fortunately developed fast, and it is the great interest in the Immunology field. Thus, this book does not intend to cover all the aspects of immunometabolism but rather gets the readers an essential background to enable them follow the new reports that are coming up.

We thank all the authors that contributed to this book and hope the readers enjoy reading this book and the extent to their knowledge about how the immunometabolism impacts immune cells, homeostasis, and inflammatory diseases.

São Paulo, Brazil

Niels Olsen Saraiva Camara  
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# Overview of Immune Responses



Anderson Sá-Nunes

## 1 General Aspects of the Immune System

The immune system is classically described as the network responsible for the ‘protection’ of our body against foreign substances or microorganisms, infectious or non-infectious. The immune responses are usually initiated by products or constituents of bacteria, viruses, fungi, parasites, or any other substance recognized as non-self, although self-components are also able to trigger immune reactions under specific situations. Even though the ‘defense’ is in fact a major function, it is well known nowadays that the physiological role of the immune system is much broader and includes tissue repairment, tolerance and antitumoral immunity. All these activities depend on a process called **recognition**, that results from the interaction between soluble and cell-associated receptors—immune sensors of the microenvironment—and their respective ligands. When a receptor-ligand interaction occurs, a series of molecular signals are initiated followed by the activation of biochemical cascades that culminate with the production of effector molecules and mediators that regulate the cellular activity. The net result of these multiples interactions produces **immunity** or **tolerance** states. However, when these interactions are deregulated, they may also cause **hypersensitivity** or **autoimmune** reactions.

Didactically speaking, the most common division used to describe the immune system takes into consideration the time required to the response against an aggressor agent to be initiated. Thus, the **innate (natural, native) immunity** is responsible for the responses that occur immediately or soon after the first contact with any given microorganism or its products [24]. The cells and molecules of the innate immunity are ready to perform its functions at the time of recognition of the attacking agent, or immediately following this contact. On the other hand, the **adaptive (acquired)**

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**immunity** takes a few days to be fully developed and its effector mechanisms are mediated by cells called lymphocytes and their products [12]. In some cases, both lymphocytes and the molecules they produce are able to act directly on an extracellular microorganism or a cell infected with an intracellular microorganism. In other situations, lymphocyte-derived products amplify the effector mechanisms of the already existing innate immunity.

In this initial chapter, the reader will be presented to an overview of the cellular components of the immune system and the properties of innate and adaptive responses. It is important to make clear that, for obvious reasons, this text presents a short overview of the knowledge from immunology textbooks but does not replace them. Consequently, it is strongly recommended to the reader that, before reading this book, fundamental concepts on how the immune system works should be attained.

## 2 Cells of the Immune System

Before further development on the effector mechanisms of the innate and adaptive immune responses, we will start with a general overview on the major cells that constitute the immune system, their production in the bone marrow, release to the blood and, finally, migration to the tissues.

**Hematopoiesis**—the formation of blood cellular components—begins at early stages of the embryonic development, initially in the yolk sac (mesoblastic phase) and later in the fetal liver and spleen (hepatic phase). Around halfway of the gestation period, the bone marrow gradually assumes the blood production and becomes the exclusive hematopoietic organ by the individual birth (medullary phase), although sites of extramedullary hematopoiesis are recognized in some situations. In the first years after birth, the marrow of essentially every bone produces blood cells. However, along the body's development, this activity becomes restrict to the flat bones (e.g. sternum, pelvis) and some long bones (e.g. femur) [18].

The **hematopoietic stem cells** are multipotent and self-renewing bone marrow cells that generate all the cells in the blood, including those related to the immune system [23]. The hematopoietic stem cells are located in anatomic sites of the bone marrow associated with stromal cells, which do not present hematopoietic activity, but provide the biochemical and the contact-dependent signals required to the proliferation and differentiation of the hematopoietic stem cells. The biochemical signals are represented by growth factors from the **cytokine** family, a group of soluble molecules responsible for the 'communication' of the immune system [11]. In addition to being involved in hematopoiesis, the cytokines have essential roles in the innate and adaptive immune responses including the inflammatory process [20]. Further details will be later discussed in the chapter.

Briefly, the hematopoietic stem cells constantly divide by a process of asymmetric division producing two daughter cells. While one of the daughter cells preserves self-renewal features, the other initiates a differentiation process and develops into a **hematopoietic progenitor**. Along their development, the hematopoietic progenitors

are exposed to certain patterns of cytokines and other growth factors and further differentiate either in **myeloid** or **lymphoid precursors**. The myeloid precursors will give rise to monocytes, neutrophils, eosinophils, basophil, erythrocytes (red blood cells) and megakaryocytes (that will later generate platelets). The lymphoid precursors will give rise to T lymphocytes, B lymphocytes, natural killer (NK) cells and, possibly, some dendritic cells. In a steady-state condition, some of these cells will remain in the blood stream during their whole life (hours to days), unless the organism faces inflammatory and/or infectious challenges; other cells naturally migrate to the different tissues where they will constitute the **resident cells**; and some others will recirculate between blood and lymph and their respective draining organs, spleen and lymph nodes. Each one of these cell populations display a characteristic set of cell surface markers called **cluster of differentiation (CD)** employed to phenotype subpopulations/subsets, differentiation stages, degree of activation and metabolic states [5]. Together, these markers enable us to study different cells in vitro and in vivo and allow comparisons of experimental assays between different research groups.

### 3 Innate Immunity

A number of physical, chemical and biological barriers constitute the innate immunity and protects our body from noxious agents found in the environment. Among these barriers are the epithelial and mucosal surfaces, the airflow resulting from breathing, coughing and sneezing, the flow of fluids generated by lacrimation and urination, bodily secretions that possess a typical pH and set of enzymes, secretion of mucus and antimicrobial molecules and, finally, the microbiome present in all body's surfaces [21]. Each of these elements has a special role in maintaining the organism's homeostasis, but they are not always sufficient to keep the organism free from aggressive agents. When these initial barriers are "broken" and our body is invaded by a microorganism (pathogenic or not) or another type of aggressor, the innate immune system recognizes conserved structures of these organisms and endogenous molecules produced or released as a result of this invasion. Thus, when **pathogen-associated molecular patterns (PAMPs)** or **damage/danger-associated molecular patterns (DAMPs)** are directly recognized by soluble or cell-associated **pattern recognition receptors (PRRs)**, a series of innate immunity events are triggered [26].

Nucleic acids, proteins, lipids and carbohydrates are examples of PAMPs exclusively or differentially expressed by groups of microorganisms that signal their presence to the immune system. DAMPs, on the other hand, are products derived from cellular damage caused by infection or a result of sterile injuries caused by insufficient blood supply and by the action of chemical and physical agents such as toxins, burns, and trauma, among others [3]. In turn, PRRs present in the blood, body fluids and also associated with cells (in vesicles, in the cytoplasm or in the cell surface) recognize these PAMPs and DAMPs and promote their neutralization and removal, either

through uptake by cells known as **phagocytes** or by activation of cytotoxic mechanisms dependent on other cell types and the activation of biochemical cascades. As this is a very broad topic, more details about PAMPs and DAMPs, as well as their molecular recognition by PRRs, can be found in immunology and biochemistry scientific manuscripts [14, 27]. Among the cells of the immune system that participate in innate immunity, we highlight the **alarm cells**, **professional phagocytes** and **cytotoxic cells**. A brief summary of each category is provided below:

- **Alarm cells** are tissue-resident cells capable of directly recognizing aggressor agents and their products. Alarm cells have either preformed mediators or produce them shortly after activation, triggering tissue inflammation. Once the inflammatory process is triggered, changes in the microcirculation occurs, leading to the extravasation of soluble molecules that mediate the initial responses against these agents associated with the recruitment of inflammatory cells from the blood circulation. Tissue-resident mast cells, eosinophils and macrophages are examples of alarm cells.
- **Professional phagocytes** are cells whose main function is to engulf microorganisms, particles and other substances by phagocytosis or endocytosis, leading to their destruction. They may be resident cells (e.g.,: macrophages and dendritic cells) or recruited to the tissues during the inflammatory process (e.g.,: neutrophils and inflammatory monocytes/macrophages).
- **Cytotoxic cells** present cytotoxic granules in their cytoplasm that can be released by exocytosis upon recognition of certain group of ligands in the surface of target cells. Cytotoxic cells are able to kill other cells infected by intracellular bacteria, viruses or cells that undergo malignant transformation and that can originate tumors. The best-known cytotoxic cells of the innate immunity are “natural killer” (NK) cells, but other cells such as macrophages, neutrophils and eosinophils can become cytotoxic in certain situations.

In addition to cellular components, the innate immunity also comprises soluble mediators. The recognition of offending agents can trigger the rapid production and release of **acute-phase proteins**, **inflammatory cytokines**, **chemotactic agents** (molecules that recruit cells to the site) and **vasoactive amines** (substances that activate the vascular endothelium), in addition to the activation of biochemical cascades responsible for blood clotting and the **complement system**, whose components promotes direct lysis of microorganisms.

As said before, once the activation of innate immunity occurs either due to an infectious agent or injury by a physical, chemical or biological agent, its elements will initiate the so-called inflammatory process. Inflammation is a process that involves local vascular changes in the microcirculation such as vasodilation and increased vascular permeability, but that may progress to more serious systemic reactions. The inflammatory process is mediated by the cellular and soluble components described above, whose consequences are represented by five classic signs: **pain** (*dolor*), **heat** (*calor*), **redness** (*rubor*), **swelling** (edema or *tumor*) and **loss of function** (*functio laesa*) [17]. In this microenvironment, the elements of innate immunity work together



to contain/destroy the aggressor agent and also initiate the activation of adaptive immunity, discussed below.

For space limitations, the inflammatory process will not be described in further details, but the topic can be found in immunology, pharmacology and pathology textbooks. In addition, many immunometabolic aspects of the innate immunity and inflammation will be approached in the next chapters.

## 4 Adaptive Immunity

Invading microorganisms have varied strategies for evading immune responses. In many situations, the cells and soluble factors of innate immunity are not efficient in eradicating them from our body. In the first days following infection, the elements of innate immunity attempt to control the growth and spread of microorganisms. Meanwhile, the cells of adaptive immunity need to be activated so that they can fully exert their effector functions as soon as they are ready for that. The cells of the adaptive immunity are collectively called **lymphocytes** and will be responsible, either directly or indirectly, for the effector mechanisms against the different aggressor agents. There are two major populations of lymphocytes, known as **T cells** (or T lymphocytes) and **B cells** (or B lymphocytes). T cells were named after the discovery that the **thymus** is the organ responsible for their maturation and selection (“T” from thymus) [15]. Several subpopulations of T cells are currently known that, together, represent the **cell-mediated adaptive responses** described in more details later. Likewise, B cells were described following the observation that chickens whose bursa of Fabricius had been removed were not able to produce **antibodies** [4]. The importance of antibodies as the effector molecules of **humoral adaptive immune responses** was already known, but the role of B cells in their production was uncovered by these studies (“B” from bursa). The structure and role of antibodies will be also discussed below. Humans do not have bursa of Fabricius, and our B cells are produced, matured and selected in the bone marrow (although the spleen also participates of the process). Because the bone marrow, bursa of Fabricius and the thymus are the primary sites responsible for the production and development of lymphocytes, these organs are collectively called **primary** (or **central**) **lymphoid organs**.

Lymphocytes express receptors with high specificity and accessory molecules on their surface that allow their activation and function as markers used by researchers to characterize different lymphocyte populations and subpopulations. The lymphocyte receptors are able to recognize a very large number of microbial and non-microbial substances collectively called **antigens**. For example, **T cell receptors** (TCRs) recognize peptides resulting from the processing of extracellular or intracellular proteins, derived from our own organism or from microorganisms and their products. The processing of such proteins takes place in specialized cells known as professional **antigen-presenting cells** (APCs) which are capable of capturing, degrading and displaying fragments of these proteins on the surface linked to molecules of the **major histocompatibility complex** (MHC). There are three types of professional

APC in our organism: dendritic cells, macrophages and B cells. In summary, the T lymphocyte can only be activated when its TCR (together with accessory molecules) recognizes peptides displayed by the MHC in the APC surface [10]. On the other hand, **B cell receptors** (BCRs) are able to directly recognize antigens of different biochemical nature such as proteins, carbohydrates, lipids and nucleic acids, among others. The BCR is an antibody linked to the membrane of B cells that binds cell-associated or soluble antigens present in the extracellular *milieu*. The binding of antigens by the BCR delivers activation signals to B cells which, in turn, produce and secrete large quantities of the antibody in a soluble form.

Unlike innate immunity cells, which individually express a large number of PRRs (thus being able to recognize many different PAMP and DAMP at the same time), lymphocytes have their receptors distributed clonally. That is, a lymphocyte expresses hundreds of thousands of receptors on its surface, but in an individual cell (**clone**), all of these receptors recognize the same antigen. Therefore, although an individual has millions of lymphocytes in its circulation, only a few clones will be specific for a given antigen. The sum of all antigens capable of being recognized by lymphocyte clones present in our body constitutes an individual's **immune repertoire** [13]. As a consequence of the small number of specific clones for each antigen, once activated, lymphocytes must enter a process of **clonal expansion** in order to reach a critical number of cells capable of handling each antigen. Because it takes 8–12 h for a lymphocyte clone to complete each division cycle, a few days (typically 5–12 days) are needed until the role of adaptive immunity in an infection is perceived. However, the great advantage of the adaptive immunity is the generation of **immunological memory**, that is, once activated, part of the lymphocytes will become memory cells and will survive for months or years, even after the pathogen/antigen elimination [16, 25]. In subsequent contacts with the same agent, these cells will be present in greater numbers and will be activated more quickly, ensuring full and fast protection to our organism. For that reason, most pathogens only cause disease the first time they come into contact with our organism. This knowledge is widely explored in the development of **vaccines**, which are safe preparations capable of mimicking an infection, leading to the development of protective immune responses and immunological memory when we come into contact with the real pathogen [19].

The activation of lymphocytes is a complex process and results from the recognition of antigens by TCR or BCR, triggering intracellular signaling cascades responsible for the transduction of activation signals. Together, these signals induce activation of protein kinases, phosphorylation of biochemical substrates, increase in cytoplasmic calcium and activation of nuclear transcription factors that lead to cell proliferation and synthesis of molecules responsible for the effector mechanisms of T cells and B cells. Such cascades will be covered in this book, when appropriate, in the context of immunometabolism.

## 4.1 Cell-Mediated Adaptive Immune Responses

As mentioned before, **cell-mediated adaptive immune responses** are initiated when APCs present at the site of an infection (usually immature dendritic cells in the tissues), capture microorganisms or their products and process protein antigens for presentation by MHC molecules. The whole process is accompanied by **dendritic cell maturation**, leading to phenotypic changes and culminating in morphological and physiological changes in these cells, followed by migration to draining lymph nodes [2]. In cases where the infection occurs directly in the bloodstream, the microorganisms and their products will be drained by the spleen, where antigen processing and presentation will take place by splenic APCs. Lymph nodes, spleen and other organized lymphoid clusters known as mucosa-associated lymphoid tissue (MALT), bronchus-, larynx- and nose-associated lymphoid tissue (BALT, LALT, NALT) and gut-associated lymphoid tissue (GALT), are collectively known as **peripheral** (or **secondary**) **lymphoid organs**, and represent the places where lymphocytes accumulate during their recirculation in the body and where the activation of these cells occurs. In these lymphoid organs and tissues, newly arrived and already mature dendritic cells express high levels of MHC molecules containing peptide fragments derived from microbial proteins that will bind to TCRs, representing the **first signal of activation**. Mature dendritic cells also express costimulatory molecules that, upon interaction with their respective ligands present in T cells, will represent the **second signal of activation**. Finally, APC/T lymphocyte interactions occur in the presence of cytokines that some authors consider the **third signal of activation** [7]. Together, these molecular interactions will induce T cell proliferation and differentiation into effector cells. Once differentiated, the lymphocytes will leave the peripheral lymphoid organs/tissues and migrate to the site where the infection was originally established, thus performing its effector functions. As mentioned before, some of these cells will differentiate into memory cells.

When the antigens processed by dendritic cells are exogenous/extracellular in nature (e.g. captured by phagocytosis/endocytosis), they will be displayed by MHC class II molecules and the complex will interact with T cells that express a co-receptor called CD4. These CD4<sup>+</sup> T cells are also known as **T helper (Th)** cells. During the final stage of activation Th cells will differentiate into cytokine-producing cells that receive different terminologies according to the cytokine profile produced (e.g. Th1, Th2, Th17, Tfh) [8]. In turn, the cytokines produced by T cells will activate/modulate effector cells such as neutrophils, eosinophils, macrophages and B lymphocytes among others, responsible for battling and eradicating the microorganism/offending agent—toxins, poisons, bacteria, viruses, fungi, helminths, protozoa, and others. During this process, **regulatory T cells (Treg)** are also generated, whose role is to maintain tolerance and regulate immune responses, preventing them from becoming exacerbated or harmful [22]. On the other hand, when the antigens processed by dendritic cells are endogenous/intracellular in nature (e.g. products of viral infections or intracellular bacteria), they will be displayed by MHC class I molecules and the complex will interact with T cells that express a co-receptor called CD8. These CD8<sup>+</sup>

T cells are also known as **cytotoxic** or **cytolytic T cells (Tc)** [9]. After activation, Tc lymphocytes will differentiate into cells capable of killing other cells infected by intracellular bacteria or viruses.

## 4.2 *Humoral Adaptive Immune Responses*

Adaptive humoral immune responses are represented by antibodies, also called immunoglobulins or gammaglobulins. Antibodies are glycoproteins produced by B cells that are capable of recognizing and binding to antigens of different biochemical nature (proteins, carbohydrates, lipids, nucleic acids, among others). In mature B cells that have never found the antigen (naïve cells), antibodies are present on the membrane surface and act as BCR for these cells. A foreign invading agent and/or its antigens will be carried to secondary lymphoid organs and will be recognized by the BCR of some B cell clones that are constantly recirculating among these organs. The BCR/antigen interaction can directly activate B cells and induce their proliferation (**clonal expansion**) and differentiation into **plasma cells**, capable of secreting large amounts of that specific antibody. These antibodies will circulate in the body fluids or will be transported to mucosal surfaces, where they remain available to bind any suitable antigen for varied periods of time. This interaction, known as the **antigen-antibody reaction**, will be essential to eliminate the offending agent directly (e.g. neutralizing toxins, bacteria, viruses, etc.) or indirectly (e.g. increasing phagocytosis, activating phagocytes and the complement system, promoting antibody-dependent cytotoxicity), as described below. It is worth mentioning that in some situations B cell can also work as APCs and be activated with the help of **T follicular helper (Tfh)** cells, the so-called **T-dependent** activation [6]. In other situations, the B cell can be activated directly, without the participation of Th cells, the so-called **T-independent** activation [1]. The requirements for each type of activation will not be covered in this chapter, but will depend on the population of B cells, the nature and amount of the antigen, and other factors present in the microenvironment during activation. In addition, only T-dependent activation will be able to generate memory B cells.

Briefly, the antibody consists of two identical larger chains (**heavy chains**) and two smaller identical chains (**light chains**). The heavy chains are linked to each other by disulfide bonds and each heavy chain is linked to a light chain also by disulfide bonds. Both heavy and light chains are constituted of domains: regions with a relatively conserved sequences of amino acids that repeats throughout the molecule. The heavy chains have 4 or 5 domains each (one called a variable domain and the others called constant domains), while the light chains always have 2 domains (a variable domain and a constant domain). In the region where the two domains of each light chain are paired with the respective domains of the heavy chain, there is a portion that recognizes the antigen called, therefore, **antigen-binding fragment (Fab)**. An antibody monomer has two Fab. At the tip of each Fab there is one region formed by the outermost portions of the variable domains of heavy chain and light chain, where the interaction with the antigen effectively occurs. Therefore, this

portion is called **antigen-binding region** and concentrates most of the variability of each antibody molecule. On the other hand, the region where the two heavy chains are paired is responsible for the effector functions of the antibody. Because of its biochemical characteristics, it is called a **crystallizable fragment (Fc)**. The region that separates the Fc from the two Fabs present in a monomeric antibody molecule is called **hinge** and gives flexibility to the molecule, thus allowing a monomeric antibody to bind to two identical antigens at the same time and at different angles. Some classes of antibodies can form dimers, trimers, pentamers and hexamers, so that they can bind multiple identical antigens at the same time (four, six, ten and twelve, respectively).

It is important to note that “antibody” is a generic nomenclature that actually represents a group of related molecules that have some structural and functional differences. According to these characteristics, antibodies are grouped into five **isotypes** (or **classes**) that in humans and other mammals: IgM, IgD, IgG, IgA and IgE. In some cases, there are subclasses (e.g. IgG1, IgG2, IgG3 and IgG4 in humans) that are differentially expressed depending on the type of immune responses triggered by a given infection. In all cases, antibodies bind to antigens in a non-covalent and reversible manner, through a series of biochemical interactions that include electrostatic forces, hydrogen bonds, van der Waals forces and hydrophobic interactions. Together, these forces define the affinity of an antibody binding site to the antigen, and the overall strength of all binding sites is called avidity (as we have seen, an antibody has at least two antigen binding sites). This bond is strong enough to ensure that, once bound, the antibody will hardly detach from its respective antigen. This ensures that antibody’s effector functions can be adequately performed, including neutralization of toxins, viruses and bacteria, activation of the complement system, antibody-dependent cell cytotoxicity and opsonization (facilitation of phagocytosis).

In addition to essential effector molecules against a variety of infections, antibodies are also important for assessing the immunity developed after a vaccination and for diagnosing a range of diseases. As antibodies are present in the circulation, the collection of a small amount of blood makes it possible to assess in a patient’s serum or plasma whether he/she has already been exposed to a certain antigen. In certain cases, it is even possible to determine whether the clinical condition is due to an acute or primary infection or whether the infection has already become chronic or recurrent, based both on the isotype/class and the antibody titre (an indirect way of assessing the amount of antibodies present for a given antigen). On the other hand, the absence of one or more classes of antibodies may be indicative of **immunodeficiencies**.

Antibodies are among the most studied molecules in the biochemical field both structurally and functionally. This knowledge allowed the development of serum therapy over a century ago, still used nowadays to treat the bites of venomous animals such as snakes, spiders and scorpions; bacterial-derived toxins such as diphtheria and tetanus toxins; and even active infections such as Ebola and COVID-19. Advances in cell culture, establishment of tumoral cell lines and development of molecular biology techniques allowed the creation of **monoclonal antibodies**—identical antibodies with unique and known specificity—that can be produced in industrial scale

for research and clinical use. The monoclonal antibodies are the major representatives of the so-called **immunobiologicals**, molecules of biological origin capable of modulating the immune system and used as a treatment of several pathologies of microbial origin, cancer and autoimmune diseases. Immunobiologicals are already a reality for a number of clinical conditions and are among the blockbuster drugs for the pharmaceutical industry. However, its price is still high, which limits its access to most of the population.

## 5 Final Remarks

Now that you reviewed how immune cells are generated, how foreign agents are recognized, and how the immune responses that will fight them are initiated, the next chapters will present deeper aspects of these topics in a context of immunometabolism. You will have the opportunity to learn more details about metabolic pathways and mitochondrial physiology in health and disease. In addition, up to date knowledge on immunometabolism will be reviewed in a number of clinical conditions such as obesity, cancer, autoimmune diseases, organ transplantation and inflammatory/infectious diseases. Finally, interfaces between immunometabolism and microbiota, physical exercise, immunotherapies and translational medicine will be also approached.

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# Metabolic Pathways and Cell Signaling



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Metabolism is one of the key features of life, as it allows for the continuous rebuilding of the living structures driven by the extraction of energy from nutrients [1]. As such, metabolism can be thought of as the set of all the chemical reactions that take place in a living organism and are related to the maintenance of life. In principle, many more reactions could happen between the chemical substances that are found in living matter than the number we observe when organisms are actually alive. Those other reactions, albeit possible, would not sustain the maintenance of the living structures. So, the smaller set of reactions that do sustain life—that is, metabolism—is somehow favored among all the chemical possibilities presented by the substances found in organisms. In other words, there must be information on which reactions to promote in living matter. This information is kept in the genes that ultimately encode the proteins that favor the reactions of life—enzymes. They do so by speeding up (i.e. catalyzing) these reactions, so that the substances participating in these reactions are much less available to react otherwise.

## 1 Overview of Metabolic Pathways

Metabolism is classically divided into catabolic and anabolic reactions. Anabolism comprises the reactions that lead to the formation of the complex and organized structures of living beings from smaller and simpler chemical building blocks. For anabolism to happen, there must be a continuous and substantial supply of chemical energy. This energy supply is derived from the reactions that make up the other branch of metabolism, that is catabolism. Catabolic reactions extract energy from chemical

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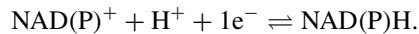
N. O. S. Camara et al. (eds.), *Essential Aspects of Immunometabolism in Health and Disease*, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-86684-6\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-86684-6_2)

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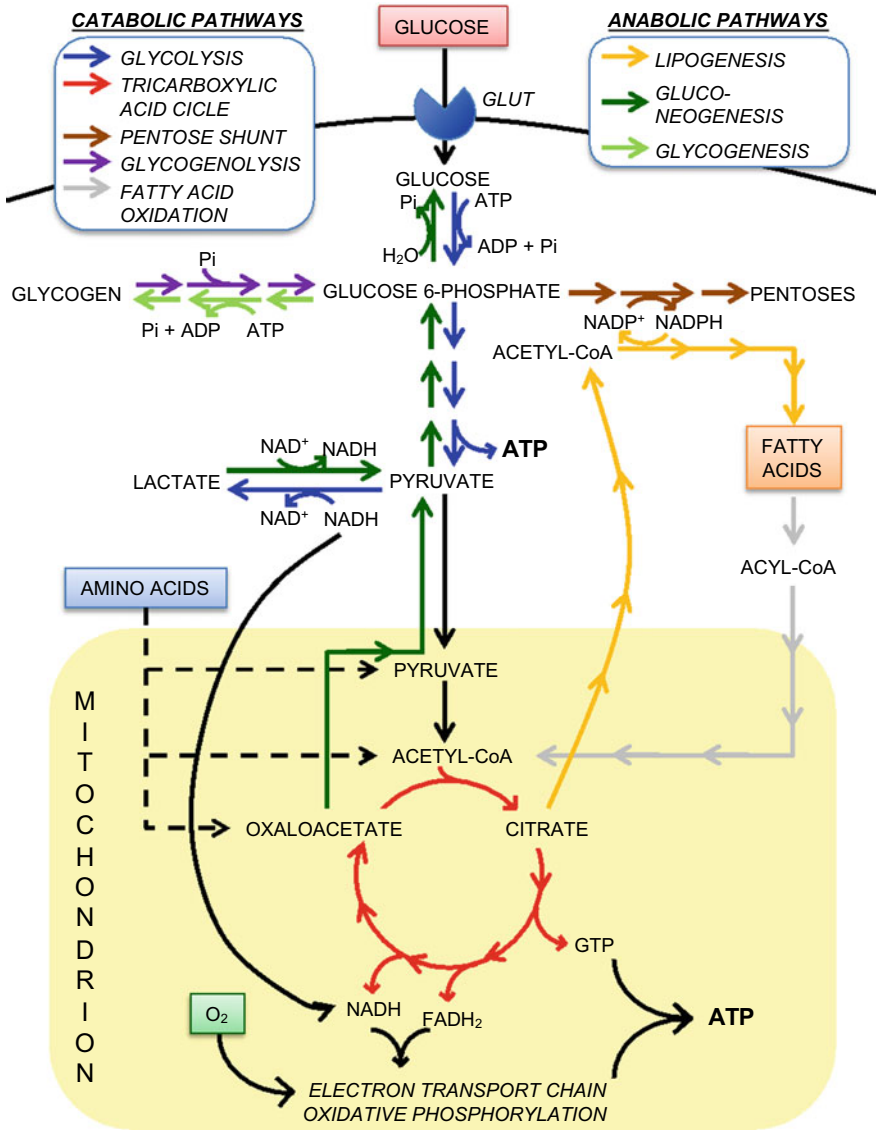
substances by selectively and orderly breaking them up into simpler ones. In this process, the energy that kept their atoms together is partially but efficiently funneled to the synthesis of specific molecules, most important among these is adenosine triphosphate (ATP). In anabolism, ATP is used in tandem reactions that involve the transfer, and later removal, of phosphate from it to other molecules, yielding in the end ADP and inorganic phosphate. In this process, enzymes couple this use of ATP and the energy it releases with the synthesis of the complex biological molecules, and thus of the structures of life.

ATP synthesis, be it via substrate-level phosphorylation in the cytosol and mitochondrial matrix or oxidative phosphorylation in the mitochondrial inner membrane, is coupled to the oxidation of substrates, whose electrons are transferred to nicotinamide coenzymes, NADH or NADPH. NADH is an important source of electrons for the electron transport chain in mitochondria and thus of free energy for the chemiosmotic synthesis of ATP [2]. Meanwhile, NADPH is a source of reducing power for reductive processes in the cell, such as fatty acid synthesis and antioxidant defenses. Both NADH and NADPH are constantly recycled in redox reactions:



The molecules that are involved in metabolism can be broadly divided into four main classes: proteins, lipids, carbohydrates and nucleic acids. Each of these classes have chemical properties and biological functions that are characteristic of themselves, and each are formed in anabolism from specific small precursor molecules. Nucleic acids are made from nucleotides, which are composed of small nitrogenated bases, a five-carbon sugar and phosphate. The main function of nucleic acids in metabolism is indirect as bearers of genetic information, although they perform a crucial function for protein anabolism in ribosomes. Additionally, one of their nucleotide components is ATP, which also has the fundamental role in metabolism we have just discussed as energetic currency between catabolism and anabolism.

Despite sharing the feature of being also structural scaffolds in the living matter, proteins, carbohydrates and lipids have different functions in energy metabolism. Carbohydrates (sugars and their digestible polymers—starches and glycogen) mostly act as hydrophilic substrates for fast (anaerobic—cytosolic, oxygen-independent) or highly efficient (aerobic—mitochondrial, oxygen-dependent) ATP production. Carbohydrate metabolism can be considered the ‘metabolic highway’ of eukaryotic cells, as it shares many ‘crossroads’ with very important metabolic pathways involved with the other main metabolic substrates (Fig. 1). For instance, carbohydrates may be converted into lipids, which are an efficient form of chemical energy storage as, being hydrophobic, lipids (particularly triacylglycerols) do not carry along themselves solvating water molecules, thus reducing the space and weight associated with energy storage, were the organism to store energy only as carbohydrates. Lipids can be mobilized from their stores (mostly from white adipose tissue) in the form of free fatty acids, which also act as highly efficient substrates for ATP synthesis, though their catabolism is restricted to aerobic metabolism.



**Fig. 1** An overview of the main enzymatic pathways involved in fuel metabolism. Both catabolic and anabolic pathways are sketched. The main substrates are highlighted in pink (glucose, the main carbohydrate), orange (fatty acids) and blue (amino acids)

As Fig. 1 illustrates, metabolic substrates are not freely interconvertible, and this is an issue particularly in the case of proteins. Proteins are not dedicated metabolic substrates, as they develop crucial functions in living organisms, as chemical (enzymes), mechanical (structural proteins), transport (channels and transporters) or communication (receptors) machines. However, their building blocks (amino acids) can yield carbohydrates and, therefore, lipids, via reactions that include the removal of their nitrogen atoms. So, between the three main metabolic substrates, only lipids cannot be converted into any of the others.

A brief analysis of Fig. 1 also demonstrates that metabolic pathways are extensively imbricated, and the final fate of substrates—or even which the substrates are—cannot be easily foreseen. However, despite the apparent complexity, metabolism is a highly dynamic but regulated process. An overview of the main instances of chemical signaling within metabolic regulation, as well as of nutrient and energy sensing by cells, is what lies ahead in this chapter.

## 2 The Mechanistic Logic of Metabolic Signaling

There are various levels and timeframes in which metabolic control can happen. The most basic type is the one that is intrinsic to a single metabolic pathway, in which the rate of catalysis of one or more enzymes is modulated by the reversible binding of intracellular molecules—usually end-products of the very same pathway—to specific non-catalytic sites of the enzyme. Upon binding, the conformation of the protein or enzyme is changed, either increasing or decreasing its affinity to the substrate(s) and/or its activity. This type of control of protein function, which is not restricted to enzymes, is known as allostery, and the molecules that mediate this phenomenon on a given protein are classified either as their positive or negative allosteric modulators depending on whether they increase or decrease its function [3, 4].

Within a metabolic pathway, allosteric modulation is the main mechanism in which feedback control happens [1]. For instance, in glycolysis, whose metabolic yield results in the net synthesis of 2 ATP molecules per glucose molecule metabolized, ATP is a negative allosteric modulator of the key enzyme phosphofructokinase 1 (PFK1). Conversely, AMP, which can be produced by the reaction of 2 ADP molecules to yield also one ATP by adenylate kinase in situations of ATP depletion, is a positive allosteric modulator of the same enzyme. However, allostery is in many cases also the framework for the integration of interconnected metabolic pathways. Here, again, PFK1 appears as an appropriate example. In situations in which metabolic flow through the tricarboxylic acid (TCA, or Krebs') cycle is much enhanced, such as in increased fatty acid oxidation, citrate can accumulate and allosterically inhibit PFK1, thus shifting ATP production from a carbohydrate to a lipid source [5]. This also stresses another common feature of metabolic control: usually the rate of catalysis of a pathway is determined by and controlled in a single or a few allosteric enzymes, which are effectively the master switches of that pathway.

Other proteins can also be the target of allosteric modulators that translate the metabolic state of the cell, with important signaling consequences within the same cell. For instance, there is a group of potassium ion channels that are allosterically modulated by the intracellular ATP/ADP concentration ratio. Aptly known as  $K_{ATP}$  channels, their open state probability is markedly decreased by raises in the  $[ATP]/[ADP]$  ratio, thus reducing potassium outflow and consequently causing membrane depolarization. This is the basis of the control of insulin secretion in pancreatic beta-cells by increased glucose availability and metabolism.

Metabolism-derived allosteric modulation of protein function is in this sense a universal feature of life as we know it. However, it is frequently taken for granted nowadays in many studies on metabolism, particularly in those focusing on multicellular organisms. This may be so because allostery could be seen as a phenomenon arising in single cells and affecting exclusively the same cells. However, the above example of  $K_{ATP}$  channel control of insulin secretion clearly demonstrates this is not always the case. In any case, allostery as it is commonly approached is a powerful and fast, but short-lived, mechanism of protein function modulation and thus of metabolic control, as it depends on the moment-by-moment levels of the allosteric modulators inside the cell.

Metabolic intercellular signaling is the domain of extracellular chemical mediators and nutrients. These molecules give rise to more perennial changes in the metabolic status of the cells upon which they act. The chemical basis of the sensing of either mediators or nutrients is, in itself, allosteric, as the proteins that first sense the signal transduce its level by changes in their own tertiary structure. However, the cascade of events downstream of this first sensing event tend to last much longer, as they imply in either covalent modifications of proteins (e.g. phosphorylation, dephosphorylation, prenylation etc.), changes in the concentration of intracellular second messengers (e.g. cyclic AMP, diacylglycerol etc.) [6], or modulation of the expression levels of specific proteins [1, 7]. This way, in metabolic intercellular signaling we are considering timeframes of several seconds to hours in principle, when considering covalent modifications and second messengers, to several minutes to days in expression modulation. However, some important intracellular metabolic sensing pathways utilize these same strategies, thus allowing individual cells to adapt to their individual energetic conditions and challenges.

Regarding covalent modifications of proteins in cell signaling, it is important to remember that the same protein may participate in distinct signaling pathways elicited by different extracellular mediators. As an example of that, consider phosphorylation. Phosphate groups from ATP can be incorporated into the structure of proteins as phosphate esters formed with sidechains of amino acids that bear a hydroxyl (OH) moiety, i.e. serine, threonine or tyrosine, in reactions catalyzed by protein kinase enzymes. There are two types of protein kinase enzymes regarding their amino acid substrate specificity: serine/threonine-kinases and tyrosine-kinases. So, a single signaling protein may be differentially modulated by phosphorylation depending on the kind of amino acid that is recognized by the protein kinase that phosphorylates it. Not only that, but within the same type of protein kinases considered, especially in the case of serine/threonine-kinases, a single protein may be phosphorylated in

different residues of the same amino acid, depending on the particular tertiary pattern each kinase recognizes.

Another often observed feature in post-translational modifications of proteins elicited by metabolic intercellular signaling is the fact that they may induce translocation of the targeted protein to different intracellular compartments. For instance, proteins of the signal transducer and activator of transcription (STAT) family dimerize and translocate from the cytoplasm to the nucleus upon specific tyrosine phosphorylation by Janus kinases (JAK). Once in the nucleus, they act as transcription factors and modulate protein expression. Hydrophobic modifications of proteins, such as prenylation or palmitoylation, are also important to localize/restrain signaling cascades to specific organelles or subcellular compartments as they tend to associate the modified proteins to specific membrane domains.

An important point that is often overlooked when discussing cell signaling in general is that, though the activated cascades last longer than the moment-by-moment allosteric modulation of enzyme activity, they do peter out. This has a clear adaptive value, as otherwise cells would be always inadvertently responding to signals and situations long gone. Various strategies of terminating signaling cascades in the absence of their stimulus exist, such as protein phosphatases, ubiquitin–proteasome degradation of activated proteins, degradation of second messengers (as is the case of phosphodiesterase-mediated hydrolysis of cyclic phosphates in cAMP and cGMP), slow intrinsic self-deactivating activity of signaling proteins (for instance the GTPase activity of the  $G\alpha$  subunits of G proteins) or the pumping out of calcium ions from the cytoplasm into either the endoplasmic reticulum (ER) or the extracellular space. Many of these strategies can be activated by the signaling cascade itself, generating negative feedback loops. Appropriately, there are even signaling pathways whose main effector proteins actually promote the deactivation of other signaling cascades, as happens in the inhibition of adenylate cyclase by  $G\alpha_i$  proteins. This also sheds light into another outstanding feature of signaling cascades: they crosstalk, again because many signaling molecules and proteins are shared by them, and so the final observed effect is in every moment the result of the balance of their activity in these signaling hubs. As we will see, crosstalk is specially true for metabolic signaling [8–10].

Within this general logic of signaling strategies, in the next sections of this chapter we will briefly overview some examples of important pathways that mediate nutrient sensing in metazoans, as well as the signaling of some crucial hormones and mediators that affect whole-body metabolism. The following discussions do not intend by any means to be exhaustive, but merely to introduce the readers to some examples of the general mechanisms that were presented in this section in the hopes they will illuminate their comprehension of the many other pathways dealt with at depth in the other chapters of this book.

### 3 Nutrient-Sensing Signaling Pathways

As cell metabolism is basically dependent on ATP availability, which is coupled to  $\text{NAD}^+/\text{NADH}$  redox cycling, it is not surprising that signaling pathways that directly sense both variables have evolved.

In the case of ATP, this is brought about by a signaling system that is centered at a multiunit enzyme called 5'-AMP-dependent protein kinase, or AMPK [9, 11–16]. In situations of ATP depletion, the reaction catalyzed by adenylate kinase:



is shifted to the right, thereby increasing intracellular AMP content (note that this is not the cyclic form of AMP, cAMP, which is the second messenger produced upon activation of adenylate cyclase by  $\text{G}\alpha_s$  proteins). AMP can bind to the regulatory  $\gamma$  subunit of AMPK and the consequent conformational change of the complex renders the catalytic  $\alpha$  subunit more susceptible to phosphorylation, and thus activation, by liver kinase B1 (LKB1). Various proteins are substrates for active AMPK. This culminates in protein post-translational modifications and gene expression modulation that favor ATP production rather than ATP consuming processes. This way, among other actions, AMPK promotes lipolysis, fatty acid oxidation, glycolysis, glucose transport and autophagy, while inhibiting protein synthesis, lipogenesis, steroidogenesis and gluconeogenesis.

Nicotinamide coenzyme sensing, however, is mediated by another family of enzymes, sirtuins. These are lysine deacetylases that consume  $\text{NAD}^+$  in their catalytic cycle, rather than reducing it to NADH as in its function of electron carrier in fuel metabolism. So, in situations in which substrate oxidation is reduced, the  $\text{NAD}^+/\text{NADH}$  ratio increases and consequently the availability of  $\text{NAD}^+$  to sirtuins. There are seven sirtuins known in mammals (SIRT1-7), with different affinities for  $\text{NAD}^+$ , subcellular localization and substrate specificities [8, 16–18]. However, the ones that appear to have  $\text{NAD}^+$ -sensing abilities in the biological range of  $\text{NAD}^+$  concentrations are the nuclear SIRT1 and the mitochondrial SIRT3 and SIRT 5. SIRT1 actions are the best described to date, and mainly involve the modulation of specific genes by deacetylation of specific transcription factors and cofactors, as well as histones. These culminate in the enhancement of mitochondrial function and overall glucose tolerance. Indeed, SIRT1 has been shown to increase the lifespan of animals subjected to high fat diets.

In eukaryotes, most of the ATP production is derived from aerobic mitochondrial metabolism. Consistently, oxygen availability also is sensed by cell signaling systems that impact on metabolism. This is mediated by a family of transcription factors known as hypoxia inducible factors (HIFs) [18–22]. Their function is controlled by an interesting mechanism in which the hydroxylation of HIF-1 $\alpha$ , HIF-2 $\alpha$  or HIF-3  $\alpha$  by prolyl hydroxylases that use  $\text{O}_2$  as substrate signal for HIF proteasomal degradation at normal  $\text{O}_2$  tensions. This way, in low  $\text{O}_2$  levels, hydroxylation of  $\alpha$  HIFs is reduced and the proteins accumulate, whereby they can migrate to the nucleus

and heterodimerize with constitutive HIF-1 $\beta$  and exert transcriptional control of hypoxia responsive element (HRE) genes. Some of these codify glycolytic enzymes and glucose transporters, thus increasing the cell capacity for anaerobic metabolism. On the other hand, it has been shown that HIF-1 $\alpha$  in parallel reduces mitochondrial metabolism, both through effects on the conversion of pyruvate into acetyl-CoA and on the activity of TCA cycle enzymes, as well as on the biogenesis of mitochondria, through the indirect downregulation of a mitochondriogenesis-promoting transcriptional coactivator, PGC-1 $\beta$ . However, HIF signaling is not restricted to that, having pleiotropic effects on a multitude of processes important for tissue homeostasis, such as angiogenesis.

Mitochondrial metabolism also creates multiple signals that can be sensed by the cell. For instance, in addition to the ER, mitochondria are important intracellular calcium stores. Calcium mitochondrial content itself is an important regulator of oxidative phosphorylation [23]. However, at high levels and in the presence of oxidants, calcium can induce the formation in the inner mitochondrial membrane of a structure called permeability transition pore which leads to massive efflux of calcium to the cytosol and mitochondrial swelling to a point in which there is also release of cytochrome C. High cytosolic calcium and the presence of cytochrome C in the cytosol are known to trigger the intrinsic apoptotic pathway, for instance. But why would mitochondria be susceptible to oxidant damage? Incomplete reduction of oxygen in sites other than the final complex (IV) of the electron transport chain (ETC) seems to be the main source of superoxide anion, a reactive oxygen species (ROS) [9]. This gets more probable if there is a mismatch between the supply of electrons to the ETC from NADH and the rate of the ETC reactions, causing electrons to accumulate in the complexes of the ETC and increasing the chances they nonenzymatically react with molecular oxygen. This may happen either if the supply of oxygen to complex IV is low, or if the supply of NADH is higher than the capacity of the ETC to draw its electrons and pump protons, which can occur for instance if fatty acid oxidation ( $\beta$ -oxidation) is proceeding at very high rates. Reactive oxygen and nitrogen species are in themselves a feature of metabolism not only as otherwise unwanted byproducts, but also are controllers as well, as they trigger multiple signaling pathways which impact metabolism.

Apart from these mechanisms that we can consider to sense overall cellular energy status, we can also find in mammal cells an array of signaling pathways that specifically sense the three main groups fuel nutrients, the principles of which we will discuss in the next three subsections.

### ***3.1 Lipid Sensing***

Cells are endowed with pathways that sense the levels of fatty acids and that sense the availability of cholesterol, both kinds of signaling having major impacts on fuel metabolism.

Fatty acid sensing is mediated both by relatively fast G protein-coupled receptors (GPCRs) [6, 24, 25] and by slower, but longer-lasting, activation of intracellular receptors that are transcription factors, the peroxisome proliferator-activated receptors (PPARs) [26–29]. Fatty acid chemical properties are critical to their ability to activate the different subtypes of each family of fatty acid receptors. Among the GPCRs, GPR40, also known as free fatty acid receptor 1 (FFA1), is activated by medium to long chain fatty acids, particularly n-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids, while saturated fatty acids are more potent to activate it the longer their hydrocarbon chains. GPR40 is coupled to  $G\alpha_q$  proteins and thus mediate its intracellular cascade via the activation of phospholipase C and thus the generation of the second messengers IP3, calcium (released from the endoplasmic reticulum) and diacylglycerol, which culminate in the activation of various enzymes, most notably C-type protein kinases (PKCs). More recently, another GPCR that is activated by long chain fatty acids has been described: GPR120 or free fatty acid receptor 4 (FFA4), whose intracellular signaling is similar to that for GPR40. However, in certain tissues GPR40 has been also shown to either stimulate or inhibit cAMP production by associating also to  $G\alpha_s$  or  $G\alpha_i$  proteins, respectively.

Meanwhile, short chain fatty acid levels, particularly acetate, propionate and butyrate, which are common byproducts of gut bacterial metabolism, are sensed by other GPCRs: GPR43, known also as free fatty acid receptor 2 (FFA2), and GPR41, alias free fatty acid receptor 3 (FFA3) [24]. While GPR43 signals via  $G\alpha_i$  and  $G\alpha_q$  proteins and GPR41 exclusively via  $G\alpha_i$ , it has been shown that GPR43 and GPR41 can heterodimerize. Interestingly, the heterodimer loses the ability to inhibit adenylate cyclase, while the raise in intracellular calcium levels is enhanced.

Long-term modulation of cell metabolism by fatty acids is mostly achieved by PPAR activation. Despite their name, PPARs do not restrict their actions only to peroxisomes, which are important organelles for the antioxidant defenses as well as for the metabolism of very long chain fatty acids in mammals and the production of fatty acid-derived signaling molecules. There are three isotypes of PPAR: PPAR $\alpha$ , PPAR $\gamma$  and PPAR $\delta$  (sometimes referred to as PPAR $\beta/\delta$ ). Their distribution is not equal between tissues, the liver being the major site of expression of PPAR $\alpha$ , while PPAR $\gamma$  is importantly expressed in adipose tissue and PPAR $\delta$  has a more widespread distribution.

PPAR $\alpha$  activation modulates gene expression in ways that enhance mitochondrial fatty acid oxidation not only in the liver, but also in muscle and adipose tissues. Moreover, fatty acid uptake is enhanced in the liver, but fatty acid export to the plasma in the form of lipoproteins is decreased, as well as cholesterol synthesis. This is the basis of the blood cholesterol-lowering effects of the PPAR $\alpha$  agonists, fibrates. On the other hand, PPAR $\gamma$  activation (which is markedly promoted by n-3 fatty acids) is an important mediator of adipose tissue expansion and lipogenesis, while reducing leptin expression, and has an overall effect of increasing the whole-body sensitivity to insulin. This has been taken in advantage for the treatment of type 2 diabetes mellitus with the use of specific PPAR $\gamma$  agonists, the glitazones, as antidiabetic drugs. Also, while PPAR $\gamma$  increases liver output of LDL-cholesterol, it also increases apo-A secretion by the gut, thus increasing in parallel the capacity of



cholesterol scavenging by HDL. Both PPAR isotypes also have positive effects on pancreatic  $\beta$  cell function and, thus, on insulin secretion. Meanwhile, PPAR $\delta$  is the least understood of the three kinds of PPAR so far, but PPAR $\delta$  agonism has been shown to increase skeletal muscle utilization of glucose and fatty acid oxidation also in muscle, liver and in adipose tissue. Regardless of the PPAR isotype, the signaling involves translocation to the nucleus, where PPAR heterodimerizes with retinoic acid receptor (RXR) to modulate gene expression.

A distinct “flavor” to PPAR signaling is the family of proteins known as PPAR $\gamma$  coactivators (PGC) of transcription [8, 22, 30–32]. Now known not to be restricted as transcriptional coactivators only for PPAR $\gamma$ , PGCs are composed of PGC-1 $\alpha$  (6 isoforms), PGC-1 $\beta$  and the PGC-1-related coactivator (PRC). Among them, PGC-1 $\alpha$  is the most researched one and has been deemed the master regulator of mitochondriogenesis. In fact, PGC-1 $\alpha$  can be considered a booster of whole-body oxygen-dependent oxidative metabolism, as it also promotes angiogenesis, muscle hypertrophy and liver gluconeogenesis.

As mentioned above, there are also sensing mechanisms for cholesterol found in mammalian cells. This is accomplished by a family of receptor transcriptional factors known as sterol regulatory element binding proteins, or SREBPs [1, 33]. Among them, we find two isoforms of SREBP-1, produced by alternative splicing of the SREBP-1 mRNA, and one of SREBP-2. The SREBP-1c isoform is mainly under the control of insulin and thus mediate the majority of the effects this hormone has on the expression of fatty acid metabolism genes in the liver and adipose tissue, mostly promoting lipogenesis. On the other hand, SREBP-2 signals for decreased cell cholesterol availability through an interesting mechanism, in which reduced cholesterol in the ER membrane renders it more available to migration to the Golgi and to proteolytic cleavage there. The N-terminal domain thus released can then migrate to the nucleus where it activates the gene expression of the LDL receptor and of enzymes of the cholesterol biosynthetic pathway.

### **3.2 Amino Acid Sensing**

Though amino acids are known to stimulate both glucagon and insulin secretion, albeit to a much lesser extent than glucose influences the secretion of these metabolism-regulating hormones, a widespread system of cell signaling has evolved in eukaryotes that integrates many intracellular and extracellular signals, including amino acid availability (particularly the essential amino acid leucine in humans). This is centered on the serine/threonine kinase known as mechanistic target of rapamycin (formerly mammalian target of rapamycin), or mTOR [15, 34–36].

Depending on the proteins mTOR associates with, the signals received and the proteins it phosphorylates can be different. Thus, two mTOR complexes are recognized in mammalian cells: mTORC1 and mTORC2. mTORC1 is the complex for which most of the signaling has been described, and integrates various signals to promote anabolic effects, such as enhanced glucose catabolism and protein, lipid and

nucleotide synthesis, while inhibiting autophagy [37]. Overall, mTORC1 actions are an important drive for cell growth. Factors that stimulate mTORC1 activation are amino acids (but also other nutrients in general that increase overall energetic availability), hormones, oxygen and growth factors, while stress signals are inhibitory. On the other hand, mTORC2 seems to be mostly responsive to growth factors and promote cell survival and proliferation, mainly by enhancing glucose metabolism and mediating cytoskeletal rearrangements.

As noted above, the fate of mTOR between these two kinds of complexes is determined by the proteins to which it is associated. In mTORC1, mTOR is bound to RAPTOR, a protein that integrates various upstream signals, as well as to FKBP12, which is the protein when bound to rapamycin inhibits mTORC1 function. In mTORC2, RICTOR plays the role that RAPTOR has of signal integration in mTORC1. Interestingly, rapamycin only decreases mTORC2 activity in chronic treatments.

### 3.3 *Carbohydrate Sensing*

Regulation of carbohydrate metabolism is mainly brought about by whole-body coordination of functions through the pancreatic islet hormones, insulin and glucagon. However, it has been shown that in cell preparations lacking either these hormones, glucose independently influences the expression of genes that promote fat storage through a pathway that is mediated by a transcription factor known as carbohydrate responsive element binding protein, or ChREBP [1]. With increased glucose availability, metabolic flux through the pentose pathway also increases, and one of its products, xylulose 5-phosphate, can now activate a protein phosphatase, PP2A, that dephosphorylates ChREBP. This way, ChREBP can then migrate to the nucleus and activate lipogenesis genes, thus favoring the conversion of the excess carbohydrate into fatty acid stores.

## 4 **Extracellular Signals that Regulate Fuel Metabolism**

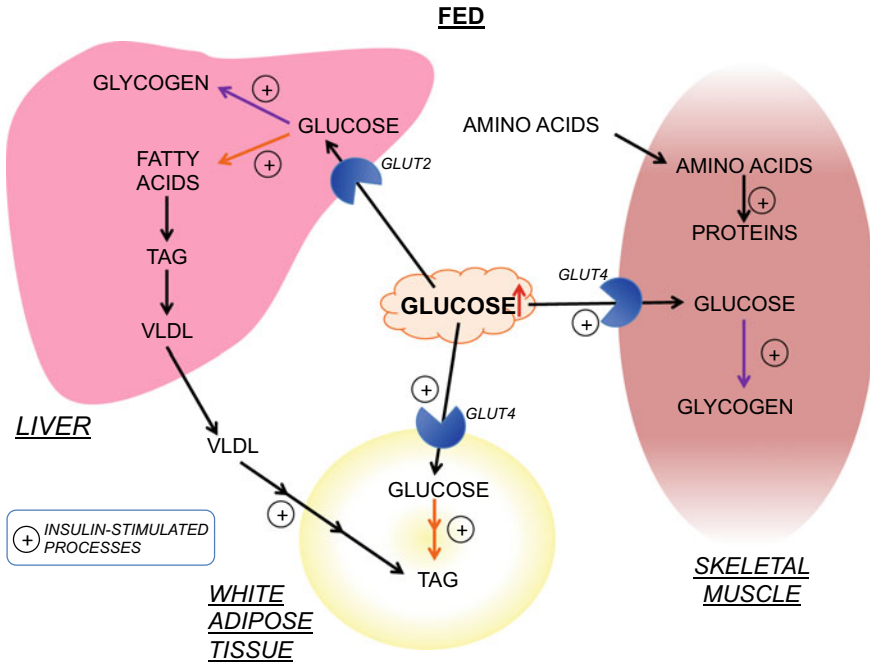
In pluricellular organisms, the concerted control of fuel metabolism in different tissues and organs certainly gave them an adaptive advantage to cope with changes in the environment that would imply either into substrate bounty or scarcity. In vertebrates, and particularly mammals, a sophisticated control system with multiple feedback loops and redundancy evolved that allows them to regulate the extracellular availability of metabolic substrates, particularly glucose, within narrow ranges of concentration. This control system integrates both the nervous and the endocrine systems, and acts via changes in feeding behavior, but most of all by changing the flux of metabolic substrates (sugars, lipids and amino acids) to and from organs

(mainly the liver, skeletal muscle and white adipose tissue) that can produce or store these substrates for their own use or for the disposal of the whole body.

But why glucose, of all the metabolic substrates, was selected by evolution to be the main surrogate for overall nutrient availability in this complex control system? For one side, amino acids are not properly storable, as their polymers are proteins, with their own individual and important functions. In addition, and crucially, there are tissues that are exclusively glycolytic, such as red blood cells, that in this way cannot depend on the mitochondrial oxidation of other substrates for ATP production. (Incidentally, in the case of erythrocytes that would be clearly an adaptive nonsense as they would consume for their own good the main substance their job is to transport across the whole body, oxygen). Moreover, the nervous tissue is in normal situations strictly dependent on glucose metabolism to supply its energetic demand. And this demand can be huge: a simple back of the envelope calculation demonstrates that the amount of glucose available in blood at any time (100 mg/dL in roughly 5 L of blood, so 5 g of glucose) would only suffice to support brain function for just one hour in the unreal situation in which the brain would be the only tissue using that glucose (the mass of glucose daily used by the central nervous system amounts to 120 g, something like a handful of sugar). This testifies to the fact that the flux of glucose to and from the blood is intense and tightly matched. Of course, other nutrients are also sensed by the nervous and endocrine system, such as bodily fat content via the proportional secretion of leptin by the adipose tissue, which signals to the hypothalamus to inhibit feeding behavior and to increase the sympathetic drive to adipose territories where it promotes lipolysis and fatty acid oxidation. Also, amino acids do stimulate insulin and glucagon secretions, albeit to a much smaller extent than the effects brought about on them by changes in blood glucose concentration.

This way, the extracellular signaling landscape can change dramatically and many times during a single day, depending on how many times we eat, what we eat, and how much. At the obvious risk of oversimplification, we can for didactic purposes consider a regular day in the life of a human from the standpoint of glucose metabolism as the alternation of periods when there is an external input of glucose through feeding, and periods when we are fasting, in which this external glucose input is no more.

In the fed state, blood glucose concentration tends to rise, and this increased glucose availability results in increased glucose uptake, metabolism and ATP concentration in pancreatic  $\beta$  cells. ATP closes  $K_{ATP}$  channels in these cells, which depolarizes them, leading to the opening of voltage-gated calcium channels and thus to the increased intracellular calcium concentration that triggers the exocytosis of preformed granules of insulin. This glucose sensing mechanism is clearly very fast, producing raises in blood insulin concentration quickly and in phase with the increases in blood glucose. Insulin signaling via its receptor is very fast too and, though it can be found in many tissues, making insulin a general growth factor, the main whole-body effects of this hormone on metabolism are due to its effects on the liver, adipose tissue and skeletal muscle, as illustrated in Fig. 2. Basically, insulin can be regarded as an anabolic hormone that promotes glycogen, protein and fat (triacylglycerol, TAG) synthesis by increasing glucose uptake and/or use in these organs as well as inhibiting glucose production in the liver and free fatty acid



**Fig. 2 Interplay between the liver, skeletal muscle and white adipose tissue in the fed state.** The colors of the pathways depicted correspond to the same pathways in Fig. 1

output. Using the biochemical jargon, insulin stimulates glycolysis and glycogenesis in liver and muscle, glucose transport in the muscle and adipose tissue, protein synthesis mainly in muscle (in part by the increased intracellular availability and metabolism of glucose), lipogenesis from glucose in liver and adipose tissue, and inhibits glycogenolysis and gluconeogenesis in the liver, and lipolysis in the adipose tissue.

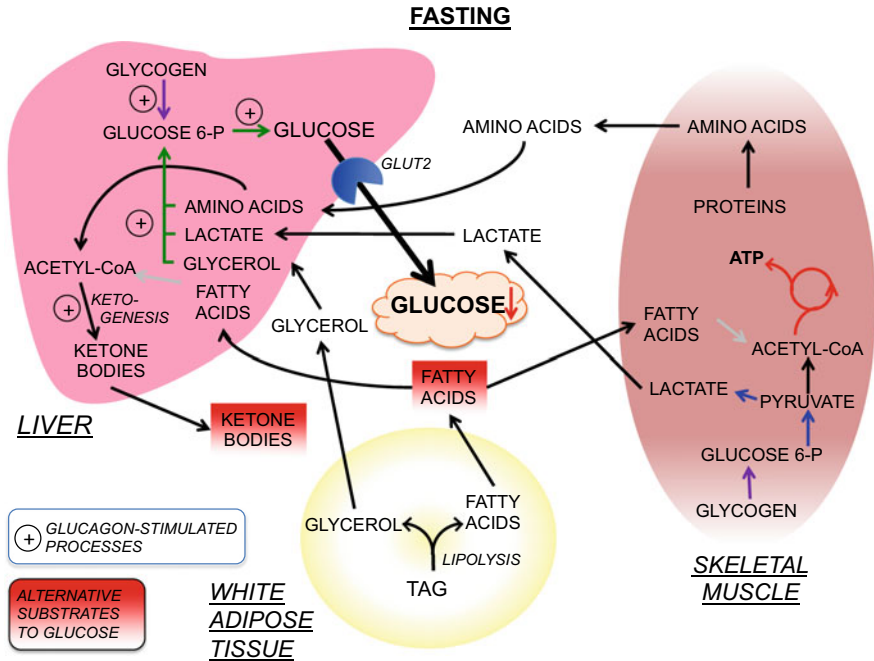
How does insulin mediate all these effects? The insulin receptor is a tyrosine protein kinase that is activated upon insulin binding. Not only does it phosphorylate tyrosine residues in specific substrates (insulin receptor substrate 1, IRS-1, and insulin receptor substrate 2, IRS-2), but it also phosphorylates itself. The phosphotyrosine motifs thus generated are recognized and bound to by proteins that bear the Src homology domain 2 (SH2). The IRS also have this domain and get recruited to the site of the insulin receptor by its autophosphorylation, as well as other proteins containing SH2, such as the p85 regulatory subunit of phosphoinositol-3-kinase (PI3K). This brings the catalytic p110 subunit of PI3K into close vicinity to the plasma membrane, where it can access its substrate, phosphatidylinositol-4,5-bisphosphate, and phosphorylate carbon 3 in the inositol moiety, producing phosphatidylinositol-3,4,5-triphosphate. This is recognized by proteins that have a domain called pleckstrin homology domain, such as the phosphoinositide-dependent kinase 1 (PDK-1). This protein thus activated phosphorylates a most important downstream protein in this

cascade, protein kinase B (PKB), more commonly known as Akt, on its threonine 308. This renders Akt partially active, what is fully achieved by concurrent phosphorylation at serine 473 by mTORC2. Akt itself is a serine/threonine protein kinase and has various possible substrates, including mTORC1 and glycogen synthase kinase 3 (GSK-3). While phosphorylation by Akt activates mTORC1, it inhibits GSK-3 activity. Despite its name, GSK-3 action is not restricted to glycogen synthase, whose phosphorylation by GSK-3 inhibits its function. Incidentally, this release from inhibition of glycogen synthase from GSK-3-mediated phosphorylation by Akt is the mechanism by which insulin induces glycogen synthesis. In addition to these examples of fast modulation of cell metabolism by insulin through Akt, insulin and Akt also have effects on gene expression, such as the aforementioned effect on SREBP-1c.

As insulin actions ensue, blood glucose levels accordingly reduce, ceasing to be a stimulus for further insulin secretion. The reduction of insulin levels itself already brings the insulin-responsive tissues to a more catabolic state. However, falling glucose levels during fasting are also detected by both the central nervous system and the pancreatic  $\alpha$  cells that culminate in the release of catabolic mediators that increase glucose levels, namely noradrenaline, adrenaline and glucagon. Other hormones exist that also raise glycemia, and their secretion can also be enhanced by reductions in blood glucose as a stress factor, such as glucocorticoids, growth hormone and the thyroid hormones. This shows that insulin faces rather unfair competition as the single glucose-lowering hormone in humans.

Both glucagon and (nor)adrenaline signal to the metabolism-controlling organs via G protein-coupled receptors associated with  $G\alpha_s$  subunits that activate adenylate cyclase to produce cAMP. Increased cAMP activates the serine/threonine protein kinase A (PKA) and, in higher concentrations, also another signaling pathway whose importance has been more recently acknowledged, mediated by cAMP-regulated guanine nucleotide exchange factors (cAMP-GEFs), also known as exchange factors directly activated by cAMP, or Epac. Though the glucagon receptor is found in other tissues, in humans its action is basically restricted to the liver, as it is secreted into the portal bed that drains into the liver, where most of the glucagon secreted is metabolized, making its systemic concentration marginally effective in adipose tissue and muscle.

Cyclic AMP signaling promotes effects that counteract those of insulin in the liver (Fig. 3). For instance, PKA activation stimulates glycogenolysis (via phosphorylation of phosphorylase kinase, which activates glycogen phosphorylase) and inhibits glycogen synthesis (through glycogen synthase phosphorylation, akin to that promoted by GSK-3). Also, gluconeogenesis is enhanced, through the increased availability of amino acids and lactate from muscle protein and glycogen catabolism, respectively. However, direct adrenaline action and cAMP signaling in muscle promotes protein synthesis rather than degradation. Another important substrate for gluconeogenesis is glycerol derived from adipose tissue lipolysis (which is also stimulated by cAMP through (nor)adrenaline). The concurrent increased free fatty acid output from lipolysis in white adipose tissue would lead to increased fatty acid oxidation in the liver, as it happens in other tissues which are thus offered an alternative to glucose as metabolic substrate, thus helping to reduce glucose consumption and thus



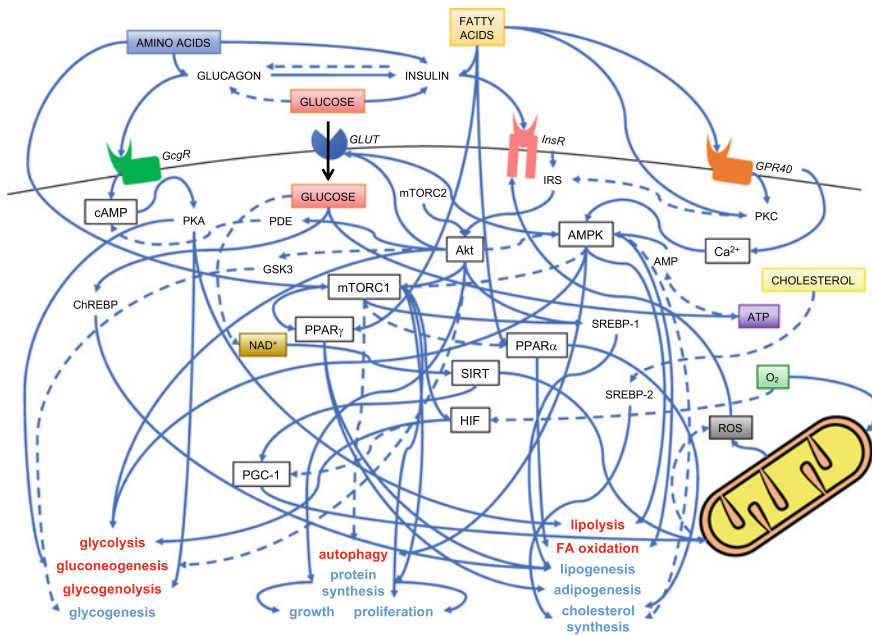
**Fig. 3 Interplay between the liver, skeletal muscle and white adipose tissue in the fasting state.** The colors of the pathways depicted here correspond to the same pathways in Fig. 1

to maintain blood glucose levels. However, as gluconeogenesis is stimulated in the liver, which uses TCA cycle intermediates as substrates, the activity of the TCA cycle is reduced, and acetyl-CoA builds up. The accumulated acetyl-CoA can be condensed into acetoacetate and  $\beta$ -hydroxy-butirate, known as ketone bodies. In prolonged fasting, as  $\beta$ -hydroxy-butirate concentration elevates, this ketone body induces the expression of its own metabolizing enzyme,  $\beta$ -hydroxy-butirate dehydrogenase, in the brain, which adapts this way its metabolism to use ketone bodies as alternative substrates to glucose. However, the increased ketogenesis leads to metabolic acidosis, which in part is compensated by the induction of proton-consuming gluconeogenesis in the kidneys, as the gluconeogenic enzymes there are induced by a curious mechanism in which the stability of their mRNA increases in low pH.

By this finely concerted interplay of tissues through metabolic signaling, humans are able to endure many weeks in fast, giving testimony to the selective pressures that prevailed in our dire evolutionary history of scarcity, rather than plenty. It is only very recently that plenty has become the norm, rather than the still sad exception, in most human societies. And so, as a species we have not had time to adapt to this excess food availability, thus explaining the sharp increase in metabolic and obesity-related diseases that will be considered in other chapters of this book [38, 39].

## 5 Pathway Crosstalk in the Regulation of Metabolism

As we have seen so far, cell metabolism is both subject to intrinsic signals in each cell itself that are derived from its own nutrient supply and to extracellular chemical mediators that integrate and signal the overall metabolic state of the organism. As expected, both these levels in signaling interact, as they may share common signaling proteins, into what is known as pathway crosstalk. Figure 4 is a crude attempt to show a very incomplete account of the possibilities of crosstalk in some of the pathways we have discussed in this chapter. The complexity of this network is evident, which could be seen maybe as an impediment to comprehension and research in this field. However, it is also a display of the robustness and sensitivity of metabolic signaling, a clear evidence of the evolutionary advance and sheer reliability it offers. With the outstanding advance in computational power, as well as the growing interdisciplinary interest that metabolism draws, systems biology approaches are steadfastly increasing our comprehension of these interactive levels of control and complexity [9, 10].



**Fig. 4 Crosstalk between pathways in metabolic signaling.** Nutrients and other signals that are sensed appear in colored boxes. The main signaling hubs are depicted in white boxes. Anabolic processes are written in blue boldface whereas catabolic processes are in red boldface. Solid arrows depict stimulatory interactions, whereas broken arrows represent inhibitory interactions

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# Mitochondrial Biogenesis and Dynamics in Health and Disease



Juliane C. Campos, Luiz H. M. Bozi, and Julio C. B. Ferreira

## 1 Introduction

Mitochondria are double-membrane-bound organelles exclusively found in eukaryotic cells and best known for its role in the generation of adenosine triphosphate (ATP) [1]. The endosymbiotic hypothesis proposes that mitochondria arise from the integration of a free-living aerobic bacterium into a host cell over a billion of years ago. In this relationship, the host cell provided a safe and nutrient-rich environment for the aerobic bacterium. It also acquired a new source of oxygen dependent-energy [2]. More recently, it has been suggested that the phagocytosed bacterium may have provided defense molecules for the host cell, also connecting the advantages of this endosymbiotic relationship to immunity [3]. Throughout evolution, a massive transfer of genes to the host cell allowed the evolvement of the endosymbiotic bacterium as a permanent organelle—the mitochondrion (mitochondria for plural) [4].

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Derived from two Greek words: “*mitos*”—thread and “*chondros*”—granule, the organelle displays two lipid bilayer-membranes enclosing two aqueous compartments. The outer mitochondrial membrane surrounds the intermembrane space, while the inner mitochondrial membrane, which contains invaginations denominated cristae, encloses the matrix compartment [5, 6]. The inner membrane accommodates the oxidative phosphorylation system (OXPHOS)—a five multimeric protein complexes (Complex I–V) that uses redox reactions to generate ATP. At the expense of oxygen as a final electron acceptor, a sequential transfer of electrons from Complex I to Complex IV generates a proton electrochemical gradient across the inner membrane, also known as membrane potential, that is used by Complex V to drive ATP synthesis [1]. The mitochondrial membrane potential also helps metabolites transport and ion homeostasis.

Often referred as the powerhouse of the eukaryotic cells, the role of mitochondria goes beyond ATP production. The organelle orchestrates a myriad of other processes including reactive oxygen species (ROS) formation [7, 8], aldehyde metabolism [9], heat production [10], ion homeostasis [11] and programmed cell death [12] that ultimately dictate cell fate. This functional versatility is intimately linked to the content, size and number of mitochondria. Their morphological complexity is controlled by the processes termed mitochondrial biogenesis and dynamics. While mitochondrial biogenesis increases the number and content of the organelles in a coordinated effort with the nucleus [13], mitochondrial dynamics drives the formation of larger or smaller organelles through the antagonist activities of fusion and fission [14].

Mitochondria are recently recognized by their dynamic nature. In order to meet the cellular requirements for ATP, the mitochondrial network are under constantly remodeling. Indeed, metabolic cues (i.e. starvation, exercise) trigger not only fusion and fission machineries in order to create elongated or fragmented mitochondria [15], but also drive transcription factors activation to increase mitochondrial mass and boost oxidative metabolism [16]. Moreover, this dynamism helps impaired mitochondria to be rescued or eliminated. In the first case, fusion events allow damaged components to be diluted throughout the network, thereby avoiding the propagation of stress that might cause mitochondrial dysfunction or collapse [17]. On the opposite way, the fission process segregates part of dysfunctional mitochondria that now can be addressed for degradation in the lysosome, a process termed mitophagy [18].

Exciting new findings have revealed mitochondria as a major intracellular signaling platform regulating immune cell function. Indeed, the cellular metabolic plasticity provided by mitochondria not only allows immune cells to grow, but it is also required during transition from a metabolically quiescent stage to a highly active state [19]. Moreover, proteins located on the outer mitochondrial membrane, as well as mitochondrial DNA can dictate immune cell activation [20, 21]. Finally, due to the reciprocal crosstalk between mitochondrial metabolism and morphology, fluctuations in shape, size and position of the organelle within the cell likely affect both phenotype and activity of immune cells [22].

Considering the extensive knowledge highlighting mitochondria as the powerhouse of the cells as well as emerging evidence placing mitochondria at the heart of immunity, this chapter reviews the general processes regulating mitochondrial

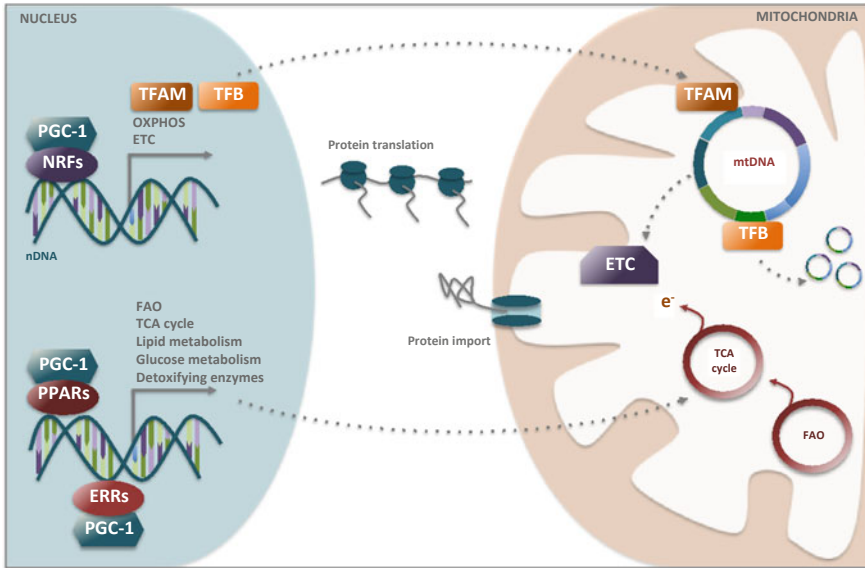
biogenesis and dynamics, and discuss the critical role of these processes in health and disease.

## 2 Mitochondrial Biogenesis

Mitochondrial biogenesis is a simplified term used to describe a complex process involving the increase in mass of pre-existing mitochondria. Due to their bacterial origin, mitochondria possess their own genetic material, which includes DNA and the translational/transcriptional system. The mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) is a circular double strand DNA molecule containing ~16.5 kb that encodes only 37 genes: 22 transfer RNA and 2 ribosomal RNA (12S and 16S) required for translating 13 messenger RNA. Moreover, maternal inheritance, lack of introns (non-coding sections of a gene) and several copies per cell (1–10 copies per mitochondrion) are among the unique features that differ mtDNA from the nuclear DNA [23].

The entire protein-coding capacity of mtDNA relies on 13 essential subunits of the electron transport chain (ETC) that are replicated and transcribed within the mitochondrial matrix: 7 subunits of NADH: Ubiquinone oxidoreductase (Complex I), 1 subunit of Ubiquinone: Cytochrome c oxidoreductase (Complex III), 3 subunits of Cytochrome c Oxidase (Complex IV) and 2 subunits of ATP synthase (Complex V) [24]. The ~1100 remaining mitochondrial proteins [25, 26] have to be transcribed in the nucleus, translated in cytosolic ribosomes and imported into the organelle (Fig. 1). Therefore, mitochondrial biogenesis faces several challenges before promoting an increase in the mitochondrial content.

The first challenge relies on coordinating the gene expression between two genomes located into distinct subcellular compartments. Indeed, to ensure a proper OXPHOS, the number of ETC subunits must be stoichiometrically balanced [27]. mtDNA occurs in the ratio of ~1000:1 copies relative to nuclear DNA [23]. Second, the majority of mitochondrial proteins are translated in the cytosol; thus, demanding a synchronized cellular machinery to properly target, import and assemble these nuclear-encoded proteins [28, 29]. Failure in addressing these proteins to mitochondria not only impairs ETC subunit stoichiometry, but also compromises mtDNA replication, which is orchestrated by the nuclear-encoded protein DNA polymerase *gamma* (POLG) [30]. For a complete description about how mitochondrial genome is replicated, transcribed and translated, please see reviews [28, 31, 32]. Finally, mitochondrial dynamics, which will be discussed above, must also be coordinated.



**Fig. 1 Summary of the transcriptional regulation of mitochondrial biogenesis.** The expression of mitochondrial genes encoded by both nDNA (nuclear DNA) and mtDNA (mitochondrial DNA) is mainly regulated by a family of transcriptional coactivators named PGC-1 [peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor (PPAR) gamma coactivator 1]. PGC-1 members bind to and coactivate NRFs (nuclear respiratory factors) to induce the expression of multiple components of the OXPHOS (oxidative phosphorylation system), ETC (electron transport chain) and mtDNA replication. NRFs also regulate the levels of TFAM and TFB (mitochondrial transcription factors A and B, respectively) involved in the expression of genes encoded by the mtDNA. Interaction between PGC-1 and specific transcription factors such as PPARs and EERs (estrogen-related receptors) control the expression of many genes involved in FAO (fatty acid oxidation), TCA cycle (tricarboxylic acid cycle), glucose and lipid metabolism, and detoxifying enzymes. Nuclear-encoded mitochondrial proteins are translated in cytosolic ribosomes and imported into the organelle

## 2.1 Transcription Factors Regulating Mitochondrial Biogenesis

The transcription of both nuclear and mitochondrial genomes is coordinated by specific proteins termed transcription factors. Transcription factors are able to modulate the rate of gene expression by binding to specific regulatory regions of DNA. These proteins contain effector domains that allow the interaction not only with other proteins essential for transcription, including the RNA polymerase, but also with other transcription factors; thereby regulating the amount of messenger RNA produced per gene [33].

Nuclear Respiratory Factors 1 (NRF-1) and 2 (NRF-2) are considered critical players in mitochondrial biogenesis. Together, these transcription factors display

DNA-binding sites for most of the genes encoding respiratory subunits. First identified in 1989 as a transcriptional activator of the cytochrome *c* gene [34], NRF-1 targeted genes are now branded for encoding subunits of all five respiratory complexes of the ETC [35]. A couple of years later, NRF-2 was discovered by its specific binding to the cytochrome oxidase subunit IV promoter [36]. Although often recognized by their power of binding to antioxidant response element (ARE) and promoting gene expression of detoxifying enzymes [37], functional NRF-2 sites have been implicated in the expression of subunits of Complex II, IV and V of the OXPHOS [38].

The regulatory network of NRFs also targets other nuclear genes whose products function in the mitochondria, including components for assembling and importing mitochondrial proteins [39], and constituents of the mtDNA transcription and replication machinery [40]. Indeed, NRF-1 is able to stimulate the expression of mitochondrial transcription factors A (TFAM) [40] and B (TFB) [41]—two nuclear-encoded transcription factors essential for replication, maintenance, and transcription of mtDNA [42, 43]. Moreover, not only TFAM and TFB have been recently added to the list of genes controlled by NRF-2 [38], but NRF-2 indirectly regulates mitochondrial biogenesis by driving the gene expression of NRF-1 [44]. Due to this essential role in coordinating bi-genomic respiratory subunits, deficiency of NRF can lead to a severe impairment of mitochondrial biogenesis [45, 46].

Members of the nuclear receptor superfamily also control the transcription of respiratory apparatus. The peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor (PPAR) family is composed by three isoforms: PPAR $\alpha$  [47], PPAR  $\beta/\delta$  [48], PPAR $\gamma$  [49]. The expression of PPAR isoforms differs among tissues and these transcription factors regulate metabolic pathways at different levels. While PPAR $\gamma$  is involved in glucose metabolism and regulation of fatty acid storage, PPAR $\alpha$  and PPAR  $\beta/\delta$  promote changes in cellular lipid metabolism by upregulating genes involved in mitochondrial fatty acid oxidation [50]. Estrogen-related receptors  $\alpha$  (ERR $\alpha$ ) and  $\gamma$  (ERR $\gamma$ ) represent another class of nuclear receptors targeting ~700 nuclear-encoded mitochondrial genes. The controlling of these transcription factors, expressed in mitochondrion-enriched tissues such as skeletal muscle and heart [51], is attached to all aspects of energy homeostasis, including mtDNA replication, OXPHOS, ion homeostasis and mitochondrial detoxifying mechanisms (reviewed in [52]). Moreover, ERR $\alpha$  can regulate the levels of PPAR $\alpha$  transcripts [53], therefore magnifying the control over mitochondrial fatty acid oxidation pathway.

Finally, a relative small number of other transcription factors have been shown to activate or repress nuclear genes encoding mitochondrial proteins, including stimulatory protein 1 (Sp1), ying yang 1 transcription factor (YY1), cAMP-responsive element-binding protein (CREB) and myocyte enhancer factor 2 (MEF-2), and a detailed consideration of those is covered elsewhere [54].

## 2.2 *The Role of Transcriptional Coactivators in Mitochondrial Biogenesis: PGC-1 Family*

As described above, mitochondrial biogenesis requires the coordination of several transcription factors to properly ensure the expression of both nuclear and mitochondrial genes. Adding complexity to this process, mitochondrial metabolism and content differs widely among cells, tissues and organs; thereby demanding an extra layer of regulation. While transcription factors bind to DNA in a sequence-dependent manner, transcriptional coactivators interact with them and amplify the activity of the transcriptional machinery by recruiting multi-protein complexes to modify chromatin folding, interact with the RNA polymerase II complex and process messenger RNA [38]. Although the fundamental mechanisms of how mitochondrial biogenesis is orchestrated are still elusive, a major breakthrough came with the discovery of a family of transcriptional coactivators termed PPAR $\gamma$  coactivator 1 (PGC-1) [55]. PGC-1 proteins have emerged as major players in the transcriptional regulatory circuits controlling mitochondrial biogenesis and function.

Conserved across many species, PGC-1 family is formed by three members that share similar domain structures to interact with nuclear receptors [56]. The first and most studied member of this family is PGC-1 $\alpha$ . First identified in brown adipose tissue during adaptive thermogenesis—a process that regulates heat production in response to cold and diet, PGC-1 $\alpha$  is considered the master regulator of mitochondrial biogenesis in mammals [55]. Similar to PGC-1 $\alpha$ , PGC-1 $\beta$  is predominantly expressed in tissues with abundant mitochondria (e.g. heart and skeletal muscle [57]). However, it is not upregulated upon cold exposure [56]. The third member of this family is the PGC-1 related coactivator (PRC). Despite the relatively low homology with the other two isoforms, PRC is ubiquitously expressed and supports mitochondrial biogenesis during early embryogenesis [58, 59]. Together, they bind to and coactivate most of the transcription factors regulating expression of mitochondrial proteins encoded by the nucleus.

Several studies have shown that PGC-1 $\alpha$  is capable of regulating virtually every aspect of mitochondrial content [60]. Indeed, by binding to and coactivating NRF-1 and NRF-2, PGC-1 $\alpha$  promotes not only a powerful induction of nuclear-encoded mitochondrial respiratory chain subunits, but also leads to the transcription of the mitochondrial genome through the induction of TFAM [61]. Moreover, the interaction between PGC-1 $\alpha$  and transcription factors such as PPAR $\alpha$  [62], PPAR $\delta$  [63], ERR $\alpha$  [64], EER $\gamma$  [64, 65], thyroid hormone receptor [66] and estrogen receptor [57, 67], controls fat and glucose metabolism. And since PGC-1 $\alpha$  and PGC-1 $\beta$  share similar molecular structures and functions, it is not surprising that the mitochondrial gene expression driven by these two coactivators overlaps [68, 69]. Interestingly, their work results in mitochondria with different metabolic features [70]; thereby suggesting that distinct upstream pathways modulate PGC-1 $\alpha$  and PGC-1 $\beta$ .

The pioneering work of Puigserver and coworkers first showed in 1998 that PGC-1 $\alpha$  is dramatically induced (up to 50-fold) upon cold exposure in brown fat and skeletal muscle [55]. Since then, many studies have determined that the expression

of PGC-1 family members are controlled by a variety of external stimuli, such as exercise, cold and nutrient deprivation, in a tissue-dependent manner (reviewed in [71]). Among the transcription factors regulating PGC1- $\alpha$  levels, CREB is responsible for integrating multiple signaling pathways in different cell types to boost mitochondrial function. For example, CREB-dependent induction of PGC1- $\alpha$  occurs in fasted liver [72], in exercised skeletal muscle [73], as well as in brown adipose tissue during cold [55]. Moreover, in a positive autoregulatory loop, PGC-1 $\alpha$  regulates its own expression when binding to some of its transcription factors targets such as MEF2 [73] and ERR $\gamma$  [74]. With equal importance of transcriptional levels, posttranslational modifications of PGC-1 $\alpha$  also control mitochondrial biogenesis.

Posttranslational modifications refer to biochemical modifications of a protein (e.g. phosphorylation, acetylation, methylation) capable of influencing not only its structure, but also its activity [75]. The fine-tuning of PGC-1 $\alpha$  activity occurs via posttranslational mechanisms. First, phosphorylation of PGC-1 $\alpha$  protein is able to triple its half-life, which is relatively short ( $\sim$ 2.3 h) [76]. Second, posttranslational modifications interfere with PGC-1 $\alpha$  signal transduction by either increasing or inhibiting its activity. In response to bioenergetics imbalance, PGC-1 $\alpha$  displays increased activity when phosphorylated by AMP-activated protein kinase (AMPK) [77] and deacetylated by Sirtuin 1 (SIRT1) [78]. On the contrary, PGC-1 $\alpha$  can be phosphorylated by glycogen synthase kinase 3 $\beta$  (GSK3 $\beta$ ) leading to its inhibition and degradation [79]. Third, most of the signaling pathways conducting these protein modifications have their gene expression regulated by PGC-1 family; thus, reinforcing the feed forward loop [80].

Finally, although the molecular mechanisms are not fully elucidated, it has been demonstrated that posttranslational modifications of PGC-1 $\alpha$  result in a preferential induction of biogenesis in a time-, tissue- and subset of mitochondrial genes-dependent manner [78, 81]. This can be explained, at least in part, by the discovery of different splicing variants of PGC-1 $\alpha$ : novel truncated PGC-1 $\alpha$  (NT-PGC-1 $\alpha$ ), PGC-1 $\alpha$ - $\beta$  and PGC-1 $\alpha$ 4. While NT-PGC-1 $\alpha$  [82] and PGC-1 $\alpha$ - $\beta$  [83] specifically affect energy metabolism by promoting mitochondrial biogenesis in brown adipose tissue and skeletal muscle, respectively, PGC-1 $\alpha$ 4 leads to skeletal muscle hypertrophy by regulating a non-mitochondrial gene program [84]. Interestingly, exercise is able to induce and activate all these variants [84, 85].

### 3 Mitochondrial Dynamics

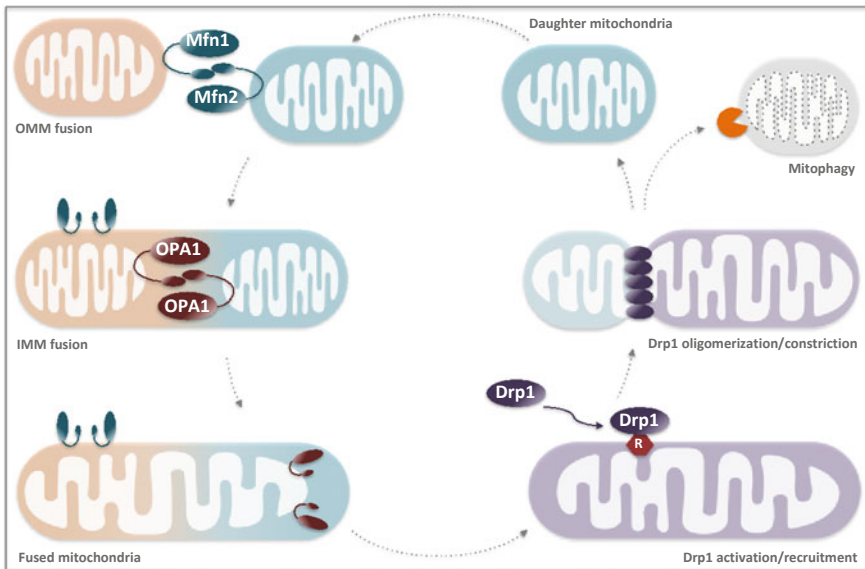
The high-resolution electron microscopy images of mitochondria, published by Palade [5] and Sjostrand [6] in the 1950s, revealed for the first time the unique ultrastructure of these organelles. Those images also showed a lack of physical connection between mitochondria; thus, suggesting that the organelle was stationary and working independently. Two decades later, descriptions of mega-mitochondria formation in tissues such as liver [86] and skeletal muscle [87] started to question this independency. In the 1990s, advances in electron microscopy along with the development



of mitochondrial-targeted fluorescent proteins allowed the observations that mitochondria can dynamically rearrange their structure over time [88, 89]. Since then, a complete set of genes driving these morphological changes was discovered (reviewed in [90]) and mitochondrial dynamics has been consolidated as a new area of study in mitochondrial biology.

Mitochondrial dynamics refers to a set of processes including the regulation of mitochondrial morphology and connectivity, as well as their position inside the cells. The mitochondrial ability to reshape, rebuild and redistribute itself is orchestrated by the opposite role of fusion and fission processes [90]. Members of a large family of dynamin guanosine triphosphatases (GTPases) use the hydrolysis of guanosine triphosphate (GTP) to create conformational changes in the mitochondrial membrane that will lead to either the union between two organelles or the division of one mitochondrion in two organelles [91] (Fig. 2).

Despite often viewed as a separate phenomenon, the recycling of mitochondria through mitophagy—a specific form of autophagy, is influenced by mitochondrial



**Fig. 2 Simplified model for mitochondrial fusion and fission.** The OMM (outer mitochondrial membrane) fuses through interaction of homo- or hetero-oligomers Mfn1 (Mitofusin 1) and Mfn2 (Mitofusin 2) of two opposing mitochondria. Following OMM fusion, OPA1 (Optic atrophy 1) drives IMM (inner mitochondrial membrane) fusion. Please note that, as membrane-bound proteins, Mitofusins and OPA1 are still present in the new fused membranes, but are now disassembled. Mitochondrial fragmentation requires activation of cytosolic Drp1 (Dynamin-related protein 1) and recruitment to the organelle via OMM-bound receptors (R). At these sites, the Drp1 oligomerizes in a ring-like structure and constricts the mitochondria into 2 daughters. Of interest, asymmetrical fission of a damaged or senescent mitochondrion produces 1 dysfunctional organelle that can either be eliminated by mitophagy or re-enter the mitochondrial network and regenerate by fusing with other healthy organelles

fission and therefore directly interferes with the dynamic nature of the organelle. To a detailed description of mitophagy, readers are referred to excellent reviews on this topic [92, 93]. Together, mitochondrial fusion-fission machinery, mitochondrial biogenesis and mitophagy comprise a well-conserved quality control axis capable of controlling the function of the organelle, and as consequence, interfering with cellular physiology [94].

### ***3.1 Mitochondrial Fusion***

Mitochondrial fusion is an evolutionary conserved process that merges two neighboring mitochondria. By allowing the exchange of mitochondrial proteins, metabolites and mtDNA, mitochondrial fusion maximizes cellular respiration [95]. It is also required for the maintenance of mtDNA integrity [96]. Moreover, the newly elongated fused organelle prevents erroneous degradation of mitochondria [17]. Considering that mitochondria have outer and inner membranes, the fusion process requires bringing together four membranes in separated events. First, mitofusin 1 (Mfn1) and mitofusin 2 (Mfn2) proteins are responsible for fusing the outer mitochondrial membrane. Later, optic atrophy factor 1 (OPA1) governs the union of the inner mitochondrial membrane [97]. As nuclear-encoded mitochondrial proteins, they need to be synthesized in the cytosol and imported into mitochondria, therefore reinforcing the connection between mitochondrial biogenesis and dynamics. Additionally, these GTPases contain a transmembrane domain that anchors part of them to the lipid bilayer, whereas their free part can physically interact with other GTPases to promote the tethering [98].

Mfn1 and Mfn2 are the major players in promoting outer membrane shape-changes. These isoforms display high homology (~80%) and initiate the fusion of the outer mitochondrial membrane by the formation of homo- (Mfn1-Mfn1 or Mfn2-Mfn2) or hetero-oligomers (Mfn1-Mfn2) between adjacent organelles [99]. Despite widely expressed and essential for embryonic development [100], Mfn1 is more abundant in heart and liver, while Mfn2 predominates in skeletal muscle, brain and adipose tissue [101]. Interestingly, each mitofusin not only differently affects mitochondrial morphology, but also plays distinct roles in cellular physiology. The absence of Mfn1 leads to highly fragmented mitochondria when compared to Mfn2 downregulation [100]. Moreover, Mfn2 also participates in calcium regulation by tethering the mitochondria to the endoplasmic reticulum [102, 103].

In order to complete the fusion process, OPA1 drives the unification of the two inner mitochondrial membranes. This intermembrane space-localized GTPase not only suffers alternative splicing—a mechanism by which different messenger RNA are generated from the same gene, but its activity is also regulated by proteolytic processing [104]. Because of that, there are at least eight variants of OPA1 in humans containing one or two proteolytic sites [105]. The mitochondrial proteases OMA1 and YME1L1 are responsible for generating long and short OPA1 isoforms, in a membrane potential dependent manner [106, 107]. Despite the fact that both

isoforms are required for full fusion events, an excessive processing of short OPA1 limits fusion; therefore, triggering mitochondrial fragmentation [108–110]. Finally, regardless governing the delicate balance between fusion and fission, OPA1 variants are able to control apoptosis by regulating the cristae morphology and consequent release of cytochrome *c*—a component of ETC that triggers programmed cell death [109, 111].

### 3.2 Mitochondrial Fission

Mitochondrial fission process is responsible for the asymmetrical segregation of portions of the organelle. Whereas this new spherical and smaller organelle facilitates motility throughout the cell, it is also involved in mtDNA replication and inheritance during cellular proliferation [112]. Fragmentation of the mitochondrial network also permits the selective removal of damaged organelles by mitophagy [18]. Unlike mitochondrial fusion, the division of the outer and inner membranes of the organelle is catalyzed by a single GTPase effector—dynamin-related protein 1 (Drp1) [113]. Unlike mitochondrial fusion-related proteins, Drp1 is a nuclear-encoded protein that resides in the cytosol as a small oligomer, thereby demanding recruitment to the mitochondrial surface. The assembly of several Drp1 oligomers forms a ring-like structure around the outer mitochondrial membrane and cut mitochondria into two separate entities in a GTP hydrolysis-dependent manner [114].

A multi-step process is required before completing mitochondrial membrane remodeling. First, Drp1 needs to be activated in order to translocate from the cytosol to mitochondria. Among the posttranslational modifications regulating Drp1 activity, phosphorylation has been extensively studied and serves as an efficient way to synchronize intracellular signaling pathways and mitochondrial metabolism. For example, protein kinase A (PKA) phosphorylation of Drp1 at serine-637 blocks fission and protects mitochondria from degradation during starvation [115]. Dephosphorylation of the same residue by the phosphatase calcineurin triggers fission in a calcium-induced mitochondrial dysfunction environment [116, 117]. Ubiquitination of Drp1 by E3 ligases can either induce mitochondrial fragmentation or inhibit fission by promoting Drp1 degradation [118, 119]. Additional posttranslational modifications of Drp1 (e.g. SUMOylation and S-nitrosylation) also dictate mitochondrial dynamics. These regulatory mechanisms are reviewed elsewhere [120, 121].

Once activated, the second step involves the recruitment of Drp1 to specific regions of the outer mitochondrial membrane. Four specific adaptor proteins, also termed Drp1 receptors, facilitate this anchoring process: mitochondrial fission 1 protein (Fis1), mitochondrial fission factor (Mff) and mitochondrial dynamics proteins of 49 and 51 kDa (MiD49 and MiD51, respectively) [113, 122, 123]. This receptor-mediated recruitment of Drp1 assists mitochondrial fragmentation by allowing the self-assembly of Drp1 into oligomeric complexes at specific sites of the outer membrane pre-constricted by the endoplasmic reticulum [124, 125]. Similar to Drp1, these receptors can be activated by posttranslational modifications. In particular, MFF

can be phosphorylated by AMPK in response to nutrient excess, favoring mitochondrial fission [126, 127]. Finally, recent evidence place another GTPase—dynamin 2 (Dyn2), as a mechanoenzyme involved in terminating membrane scission. It has been proposed that Drp1-mediated constriction allows Dyn2 assembly to complete the fission event [128].

## 4 Mitochondrial Dynamics in Health and Disease

Given the fact that mitochondrial biogenesis and dynamics interfere with a variety of intracellular processes including ATP production, ROS release and apoptosis, it is not surprising that they are critical in the context of both physiological and pathological events [129]. Disruption of mitochondrial homeostasis follows the clinical progression of a variety of chronic degenerative diseases (e.g. Heart Failure and Diabetes) [130]. Moreover, mitochondrial dysfunction is a common feature of rare inherited mitochondrial diseases, which are driven by mutations in either nuclear or mitochondrial DNA (e.g. Leigh syndrome and Friedreich's ataxia) [131]. Either way, the inability of maintaining a healthy mitochondrial population has been placed as a central determinant of several diseases. Here, we discuss mitochondrial biogenesis and dynamics in the context of cardiac, metabolic and neurodegenerative diseases, as well as in mitochondrial diseases.

Since heart contractility requires elevated and sustained levels of ATP, an overall failure of mitochondrial function has been placed as a hallmark of cardiac diseases [132, 133]. Disrupted mitochondrial morphology—characterized by increase number of smaller organelles [134], has been detected in cardiac patients suggesting imbalance between fusion and fission as critical factor for heart pathophysiology. Indeed, while absence of Mfn1 or Mfn2 [135–137], or excessive OPA1 cleavage [138] are sufficient to disrupt mitochondrial fusion leading to cardiomyopathy in mice, inactivation of Drp1 blunts excessive fission of the organelle, thus counteracting cardiac dysfunction [139]. Likewise, small molecules capable of blocking fission (i.e. Mdivi-1 and P110) [139, 140] or improving fusion (SAMβA) [141], as well as exercise [142], reestablish mitochondrial dynamics and improve clinical outcome in preclinical models of cardiac diseases. Of interest, failing hearts display loss of mtDNA along with reduced expression of mitochondrial biogenesis markers [143]. Moreover, cardiac specific ablation of PGC-1α leads to cardiac dysfunction in mice [144]. Because of that, activators of AMPK (i.e. Metformin, AICAR) capable of stimulating mitochondrial biogenesis [145], are emerging as promising therapies to treat cardiovascular diseases [146].

Metabolic disorders including type 2 Diabetes and obesity not only arises from a complex combination of genetic and environmental factors such as insulin resistance, dyslipidemia, erroneous food intake and physical inactivity [147], but also display mitochondrial dysfunction as a common feature [148]. Part of this phenotype is due to impaired mitochondrial biogenesis and dynamics in a wide spectrum of tissues. Reduced expression of PGC-1 members along with defective translation of genes

encoding subunits of respiratory chain have been observed in skeletal muscle from diabetic patients [149] and adipose tissue from obese subjects [150]. Strengthening these results, mice lacking PGC-1 $\alpha$  in adipose tissue develop insulin resistance and abnormal thermogenic response [151]. Moreover, mitochondrial biogenesis have been linked to the beneficial effects of agonists of AMPK [152, 153] and PPAR [154, 155]—widely used drugs for the treatment of type 2 Diabetes. The excessive nutrient environment observed in metabolic disorders also promotes disruption of mitochondrial dynamics. Consistent with reduction of Mfn2 levels [156, 157], mitochondrial fragmentation associated with insulin sensitivity and altered metabolism has been observed in obesity and type 2 Diabetes [15, 158].

Along with progressive loss of neuronal systems, disruption of mitochondrial homeostasis plays a role in the pathogenesis of neurodegenerative disorders such as Parkinson's, Alzheimer's and Huntington's diseases [159, 160]. Analysis of human brains from Alzheimer's patients revealed not only structurally abnormal mitochondria [161, 162], but also indicated a strong link between Drp1-mediated mitochondrial fission and neurodegeneration [163]. Indeed, blocking mitochondrial fragmentation exhibits beneficial effects in preclinical models of Huntington's [164] and Parkinson's [165] disease, and Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis [166]. On the contrary, loss-of-function Drp1 mutations leading to giant and aberrant mitochondria are often associated with lethal neurological disorders including microcephaly [167] and refractory epilepsy [168]; therefore, reinforcing the role of an exquisite balance of mitochondrial fusion and fission events in cellular physiology. In the context of mitochondrial biogenesis, deficiencies in the ETC are related to mtDNA mutations in Alzheimer's patients, which suppress mitochondrial transcription and replication [169]. Similarly, studies in animals have shown that whereas impaired mitochondrial biogenesis leads to loss of neurons [170], PGC-1 $\alpha$  upregulation protects neural cells against oxidative stress-induced death [171].

Mostly driven by loss-of-function mutations in mtDNA or nuclear DNA, mitochondrial diseases refer to a heterogeneous group of disorders triggered by mitochondrial dysfunction [172]. Regardless the disease etiology, there is an overall decrease in content and function of respiratory chain subunits [173–175]. In this context, PGC-1 $\alpha$  overexpression can boost ATP production by increasing the amount of the organelle in Leigh syndrome [174]. Inducers of mitochondrial biogenesis (i.e. AICAR) also delay the progression of mitochondrial myopathies in mice [174, 176]. Despite the fact that most of these disorders arise from defects in OXPHOS components, progressive neuronal degeneration along with aberrant mitochondrial morphology are observed in preclinical models of Leigh syndrome [175]. Progressive loss of vision observed in autosomal dominant optic atrophy disease is associated with OPA1 mutations [177]. Moreover, impaired mitochondrial fusion or fission by mutations in Mfn2 [178] and Dyn2 genes [179] cause the inherited Charcot Marie Tooth disease. Of interest, due to its involvement in mtDNA replication [112, 180], disruption of mitochondrial dynamics may increase the susceptibility to these inborn errors. Finally, highlighting the dynamic nature of mitochondria, gene therapy is the latest and attractive strategy to restore mitochondrial function and counteract clinical progression of primary mitochondrial diseases [181–184].

## 5 Concluding Remarks

The dynamic behavior of mitochondria morphology, controlled by mitochondrial biogenesis and fission-fusion machineries, are determinant for the whole-body homeostasis. Fluctuations in mitochondrial quantity, size and cellular position occur in response to numerous stress and metabolic conditions, which will lead to divergent outcomes. If transient, perturbations of mitochondrial mass and morphology enable metabolic adaptations to meet energetic requirements. On the contrary, sustained stress-induced mitochondrial dysfunction often triggers mitochondrial fragmentation and induces cell death. Moreover, due to the dynamic nature of mitochondria, studying the physiological and pathological significance of mitochondrial network in a time-, tissue- and stress-dependent manner is a challenging task. The development of advanced techniques capable of tracking fusion and fission events *in vivo*, as well as the identification of new players controlling biogenesis and dynamics will be crucial not only to overcome these obstacles, but also to open up new avenues for pharmacological interventions.

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# Metabolic Pathways in Immune Cells Commitment and Fate



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## 1 Introduction

For years, our perception of the importance of metabolic pathways for immune cell differentiation and function went unnoticed. However, in recent years, a remarkable increase in scientific findings demonstrated that metabolic pathways are crucial in modulating immune cell activation, differentiation, and function. The immune cells are important components of the immune system that work cooperatively, and along with lymphoid organs, are responsible to mount a proper response against body invaders, such as bacteria, fungi, parasites, viruses, and maintaining host homeostasis [1]. These processes sequentially involve the innate and adaptive systems, composed of monocytes, dendritic cells (DCs), macrophage (M $\Phi$ ), and B and T cells, respectively [2].

Macrophages are myeloid progenitor-derived immune cells that compose the first line of immune defense, classified as mononuclear phagocytes. They can be derived either from circulating monocytes or being established in the embryonary phase from the Yolk sac, also known as tissue-resident macrophages, being subsequently maintained in an independent manner of monocytes [3–5]. Macrophages also participate in the processing and presentation of antigens for T cells as well as the clearance of the tissue apoptotic cells playing an essential role in controlling the inflammatory response during health and disease state [6, 7]. Along with these functions, macrophages produce and secrete several pro-inflammatory cytokines, such as tumor necrosis factor (TNF), IL-1, IL-6, IL-8, and IL-12 [8, 9]. Due to its broad spectrum

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of functions and location within the tissue, macrophages are considered a heterogeneous population. Having said that, traditionally, macrophages have been classified into pro-inflammatory (M1) or anti-inflammatory (M2) macrophages, both with distinct functions in the initiation and resolution of inflammatory processes [10]. In response to extrinsic stimulation *in vitro*, IFN- $\gamma$ -stimulated bone-marrow (BM)-derived macrophages can differentiate into M1 macrophages that promote inflammation, whereas IL-4-stimulated-BM-derived macrophages turn into M2 macrophages that restrain inflammation [11]. However, recent evidence has revealed that alongside the cytokine stimuli and antigen recognition, metabolic pathways are essential for modulating macrophage plasticity [12–15]. These metabolic changes are a useful resource used by the macrophages to produce sufficient energy to support the needs required to mount a proper host immune defense and we will give some highlights about the role of these metabolic pathways in macrophage polarization and function.

B and T cells are components of the adaptive immune system being the B cells responsible for humoral immune response and presenting antigens to T cells, while the T cell is involved in cell-mediated immunity and production of cytokines [16–18]. Both B and T cells originate from hematopoietic stem cells produced in the BM [19]. In the BM, B cells remain and undergo successive selection processes to ensure proper development [20]. After the differentiation stage, B cells migrate to finish up the maturation process in the spleen. Once mature, B cells reside either in the follicles of the spleen and in lymph nodes [21]. Upon activation, these cells differentiate and give rise to either plasma cells, which produce antibodies to specific antigens, or memory B cells [22]. While B cells initiate the maturation process in BM and finish in the spleen, T cells mature in the thymus, giving rise to either CD4+ T cells, also known as helper T cells, or CD8+ T cells, cytotoxic cells, [23–25]. Given the importance of cellular metabolism for cell survival and function, it is reasonable to think that the activation and function of immune cells are under great influence of how these cells deal with the nutrients surrounding the microenvironment during activation/differentiation. Indeed, the role of how metabolic pathways alter the differentiation and function of both lymphocytes has gained special attention [26–31].

Nowadays, there is a comprehension that the transition of immune cells from quiescence to activated and differentiated stages requires the consumption of several metabolites or the redirecting of some metabolic routes [32–34]. Moreover, it has become even more evident that the basic function of immune cells can be regulated by the non-canonical function of the metabolic enzymes, placing metabolic enzymes to a new level of complexity in the regulation of the immune cell differentiation, fate, and survival [35–38].

Metabolic pathways are a group of biochemical reactions occurring in all living cells and supply energy and substrate for cell maintenance. Glycolysis is the simplest process to generate cellular energy and takes place in the cytosol. This metabolic pathway involves the conversion of glucose into pyruvate, thus generating two ATP molecules per glucose without consuming oxygen [39, 40]. At the end of glycolysis, the newly synthesized molecules of pyruvate are oxidized into acetyl coenzyme A (Acetyl-CoA), which is the initial substrate for the tricarboxylic acid cycle (TCA) of



cellular respiration [41, 42]. Next, TCA uses Acetyl-CoA and other substrates generating the reduced form of electron carriers, NADH and FADH<sub>2</sub>, also giving origin to several molecules that supply various biosynthetic processes [42]. In mitochondria, both NADH and FADH<sub>2</sub> transfer their electrons to O<sub>2</sub> by a series of electron carriers, a process called oxidative phosphorylation (OXPHOS), generating about 30 molecules of ATP for the cell [43]. Another metabolic pathway crucial for cell survival is the metabolism of fatty acids. Lipid metabolism involves two separate pathways that lead to either the synthesis or degradation of fatty acids that take place in the cytosol and within the mitochondria, respectively [44]. Fatty acid oxidation is a catabolic process that converts aliphatic compounds into units of Acetyl-CoA generating energy and substrate for TCA, whereas fatty acids synthesis creates polymeric molecules, such as triglycerides, hormones, phospholipids from monomers subunits [45–47]. In addition, amino acid metabolism is an alternative pathway that provides essential substrates for new protein synthesis which has a significant demand for proliferating cells, such as immune cells [48]. Recent evidence has demonstrated that amino acids are related to the activation and proliferation of B, T lymphocytes, and macrophages [49–52].

The contribution of metabolic molecules in controlling the activation and response of immune cells under homeostasis and during inflammatory disease remains to be fully uncovered. Here, we review the various metabolic states in immune cells and how they influence the immune cell's function, proliferation, activation, and differentiation.

## 2 Metabolic Pathway Impact on T Cell Differentiation and Function

T cell differentiation begins when the hematopoietic stem cell migrates BM to the thymus and starts its maturation. Double-negative (DN) cells in the BM have early stimulation from Notch1 receptor signaling which causes the appearance of thymic-independent T cell progenitors, blocking early B cell differentiation [53]. For this signaling, Notch promotes glucose uptake in pre-T cells and requires the PI3K-Akt pathway, important for cell growth and survival, to promote glucose metabolism [54]. Phosphatidylinositol 3-kinase (PI3K) has three classes and together they are responsible for regulating a variety of signaling pathways within the cells such as glucose homeostasis, cell metabolism, growth, proliferation, and survival, membrane traffic, and autophagy [55, 56].

Serine/threonine kinase (Akt) is an important PI3K pathway mediator [55] and in combination, PI3K/Akt maintaining activation and activity of glucose transporter 1 (Glut1) [57] which is essential in thymocytes for the beginning of the proliferative stages of the double negative cells [58]. Also, the PI3K/Akt signaling pathway engaged with the mammalian target of rapamycin (mTOR) involving many cellular functions and metabolism [59]. Interferences in PI3K signaling can directly interfere

in the T cell maturation process as PI3K subunits p110 $\gamma$  is linked with the transition Double Negative to Double Positive and, in the positive selection p110 $\gamma$  deficiency reduced CD4<sup>+</sup>/CD8<sup>+</sup> T cell differentiation [60].

Naïve T cell survival requires IL-7 signaling and TCR interaction with self-antigen, the major histocompatibility complex (MHC) class I and II, that correspond to mature TCD8<sup>+</sup> and TCD4<sup>+</sup> respectively [61]. Interleukin 7 (IL-7) is an essential cytokine for naïve T cell survival and development [50] such as its absence or deficiency in IL-7 receptor is linked with patients with severe combined immunodeficiency [62]. Notch signaling induces an IL-7-driven proliferation of CD4<sup>+</sup> single-positive cells and IL-7 can also influence Notch signaling increasing cell survival [63]. Additionally, IL-7 regulates glucose uptake depending on transcription 5 (STAT5) activity which promotes Akt activation that regulates Glut1 localization on the cell surface [64]. After thymic selection, T cells trafficking to a secondary lymphoid organ, where they can stimulate with cognate antigen and get activated. Activation of T cells requires different metabolic pathways to supply their energy needs, mainly glucose and glutamine for growth and proliferation [50].

In a second lymphoid organ, such as lymph node or spleen, naïve T cell is presented to a specific antigen, which triggers naïve T cells to undergo a clonal expansion and generate a considerable number of effector T cells, as well as produce cytokines, chemokines, and other effector molecules. To this happening, naïve T cell needs a considerable quantity of energy, so it reprograms its metabolism during the activation process to express more glucose transporters and initiate aerobic glycolysis [40].

T cells express glucose transporters from the Glut family, mainly Glut1, and it is completely dependent on the activation of intracellular pathways such as the mammalian target of rapamycin 1 (mTORC1), the oncogenic transcription factor c-Myc, and hypoxia-inducible factor 1 $\alpha$  (HIF1 $\alpha$ ) to coordinate this process [40]. For the rapid glycolysis needed after activation, all these pathways aforementioned are also triggered upon the T cell receptor (TCR) and CD28 co-stimulatory pathways activation, which culminates with the stimulate Glut1 and Akt pathway-dependent Glut1 trafficking to the cell surface increasing the glucose uptake [65]. Myc function also plays an important role in other metabolic pathways induced upon naïve T cell activation. Myc activation correlates with an increase not only of the aerobic glycolysis but also of the pentose phosphate pathway (PPP) and glutamine oxidation, suggesting that Myc is important to coordinate the induction of these pathways for T cell activation [50].

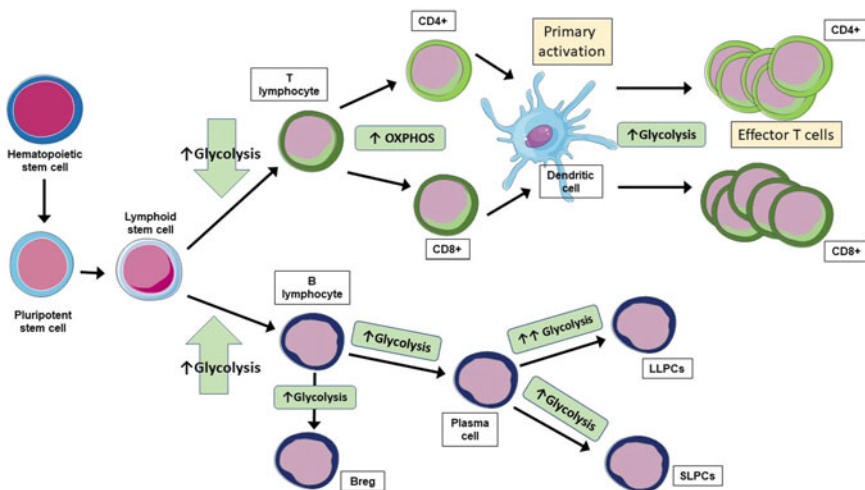
Indeed, resting and/or quiescent T cells oxidize glucose to pyruvate, together with lipids and amino acids, generating a large amount of ATP, and once T cells become activated, glycolysis and glutaminolysis increase while lipid oxidation decreases [66]. For not completely understood reason, T cells undergo activation chose to produce ATP from glucose metabolism through lactate production rather than by pyruvate oxidation into acetyl-CoA, even in the presence of oxygen, a phenomenon called the Warburg effect, first demonstrated in cancer cells [67]. It is assumed that this effect ends up supporting the T cell to generate molecules that are necessary to build organelles and other cellular structures to assure condition to T cell to proliferate. In addition, increased aerobic glycolysis in activated/effector T cells prevents the

accumulation of molecules from the glycolytic pathway, such as GAPDH, which is able to inhibit IFN- $\gamma$  production, decreasing the effector function of the CD4<sup>+</sup> T cell [68]. Moreover, aerobic glycolysis and consequently lactate production seems to increase the Acetyl-Coa pool in Th1 cells, which facilitates the histone acetylation of IFN- $\gamma$  locus, linking aerobic glycolysis with Th1 cell differentiation through an epigenetic-dependent mechanism [69].

Like T cell development and maturation, metabolic programs support CD4<sup>+</sup> T cell differentiation in Th subsets differentially and each one has a specific metabolic profile: Th1, Th2 and Th17 remain with aerobic glycolysis and have as a key regulator mTORC1, mTORC2 and mTORC1/HIF1 $\alpha$ , respectively. Unlike them, regulatory T (Treg) cells maintain lipid oxidation and AMPK as a regulator [66].

Note that mTOR although has a cross-talk with the Myc pathway during glutaminolysis [50] as an immunosuppressive drug, it helps to promote the generation of FoxP3<sup>+</sup> cells [71]. Despite the fact that mTORC1 deletion increases Treg numbers, the absence of mTORC1 specifically in Treg completely impaired its function [72]. In addition, pyruvate dehydrogenase (PDH), a metabolic enzyme that catalyzes pyruvate into acetyl-CoA beginning the TCA cycle [73], is a key bifurcation between CD4<sup>+</sup> T cells to convert pyruvate to lactate or acetyl-CoA, being an important regulatory node for Th17 and Treg. PDH inhibitor, PDHK is differentially expressed in T cells subsets and have a selective regulator for Th17/Treg balance [74].

Each cell state requires different metabolic demands with different signaling pathways to provide the energy that the cell needs in their specific development moment. (Fig. 1—superior part) illustrates only glycolysis and oxidative phosphorylation, to



**Fig. 1 Metabolic pathway influences on T and B cell differentiation.** Lymphoid stem cells during differentiation suffer stimulations from cytokines and aerobic glycolysis to differentiate in T or B cells. Naive T cells use OXPHOS for their maturation process, and sometimes glycolysis during proliferation. Naive B cells use glycolysis for their maturation process

show how complex it is for the cell to choose a better metabolic process to generate ATP during their differentiation.

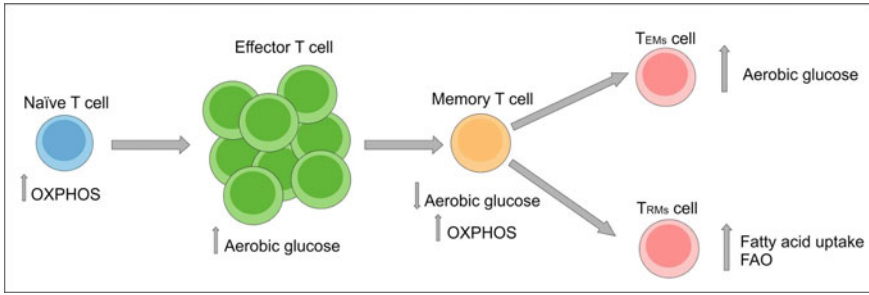
### 3 Effector Versus Memory Cells

T cells are considered naïve before their contact with its cognate antigen in a secondary lymphoid organ. Then, the cells become effectors and as the antigen is progressively decaying because of the effective immune response, antigen-specific effector T cells number decline as well and some of them will give rise to memory T cells [75]. There are three subtypes of memory cells, central memory (TCMs) and the effector memory (TEMs) and tissue-resident memory ( $T_{RM}$ s), characterized and differentiated according to specific markers and functions [76]. TCMs support reactive memory, usually do not have an effector function, but proliferate and differentiate in effectors after re-encountering with antigen, are CD45RO+, IL-2 producer, express CCR7 and CD62L that are necessary for migration to T-cell areas of the secondary lymphoid, less dependent of co-stimulation, compared to naïve T cells [77, 78]. The TEMs are characterized by the low expression of CCR7, CD62L, and high expression of CD44, produce some effector cytokines, such as IFN- $\gamma$  or IL4 and IL5 after TCR re-stimulation and TEMs CD8+ migrate to the inflamed tissue and have immediate effector function [76, 77].

At homeostasis, the naïve T cells have relatively low energetic demands and generate energy through OXPHOS [79], while TEMs rely less on OXPHOS, mainly using aerobic glycolysis [76, 80]. As mentioned before, after an antigen encounter, naïve cells begin to divert glucose from mitochondria and induce aerobic glucose through enzyme pyruvate dehydrogenase kinase 1 (PDK1), supporting the needs of proliferating effector cells [30]. In addition, some transcription factors and pathways, Akt and mTOR, c-MYC and HIF- $\alpha$ , respectively, induce transcription of metabolic genes for the correct development of these cells [76]. Indicating that aerobic glycolysis is the most important metabolic pathway for the development of effector T cells.

The process of passage from effector T cell to memory T cells is dependent on a metabolic remodeling for the cell to acquire this phenotype [76]. There is a decrease in metabolic pathway activities necessary for effector T-cell development, such as mTOR and aerobic glycolysis, governed by signaling molecules such as IL-7, IL-15 and IL-21 [71, 81]. For the maintenance and regulation of CD8+ memory cells, an increase in the mitochondrial fatty acid oxidation and spare respiratory capacity [80, 82] increases the development of CD8+ memory cells (CD8+ $T_M$ ) [77]. This FAO improves T cell survival and development of CD8+ $T_M$  cells, as well as IL-2 support OXPHOS for effector T cells ( $T_E$ ) development [82, 83]. Thus, metabolic modulation biased to mitochondrial metabolism, mainly in FAO, are fundamental for the development of  $T_M$  (Fig. 2).

In addition to these two well-described subtypes, TCMs and TEMs, more recently TRM gained focus on research on infection and metabolism [84, 85]. Unlike TEMs



**Fig. 2 Metabolic profile effector versus memory T cell.** The differentiation of effector T cells from naive T cells has specific metabolic alterations to perform their functions. Effector T cells have an increase in aerobic glucose to maintain their effector activity and increase proliferation. When they become memory T cells they do not require a large energy demand, decreasing aerobic glucose and increasing OXPHOS activity. After re-exposure to the antigen, the effector memory and tissue-resident memory T cells increase aerobic glucose and FAO, respectively

and TCMs, TRM does not circulate through the blood, remaining in the tissues for long periods [86, 87]. The TRMs triggers an immediate immune response after re-exposure to the antigen, functioning as the first line of defense in response to a specific antigen, as a bridge between the adaptive and innate immune system [87]. In regard to the metabolism of TRMs cells, it is known that it is specific to each tissue [85, 88]. For instance, TRM CD8<sup>+</sup> cell in the skin adapts to use lipid metabolism by using exogenous free fatty acid (FFAs) through the high expression of molecules related to lipid uptake, Fatty acid-binding protein 4 (FABP4) and Fatty acid-binding protein 5 (FABP5), in response to immunization by viruses [85]. Similarly to the skin, in adipose tissue, TRM cells showed high rates of lipid uptake and mitochondrial respiration, with high proliferation, suggesting that adipose tissue is an ideal metabolic environment for memory T-cell longevity [88]. In addition, intestinal CD8<sup>+</sup> TRM also has increased FFA pathways and cholesterol synthesis that can be made available for FAO [89]. In the context of tumors, dependence on fatty acids of TRM may be favorable, since tumor cells are highly glycolytic and make the environment hypoglycemic, but it is oxygen dependent and tumors typically have a hypoxic environment [90]. In gastric adenocarcinoma, the presence of TRM is a good prognosis [91], where TRM CD103<sup>high</sup> cells have higher lipid uptake and lower glycolytic capacity [92]. A recent study showed that TRM CD103<sup>high</sup> cells supplemented with FFAs increased cytokine production whereas the inhibition of fatty acid oxidation impairs TRM CD103<sup>high</sup> survival and PD-L1 blockade restored the number of TRM cells by increasing the expression of molecules related to lipid uptake FABP4 and FABP5 [92]. This data suggests the metabolic reprogramming of TRM cells is a potential therapeutic target in gastric neoplasia.

In short, naive T cells have reduced mitochondrial activity and glucose uptake generating ATP mostly from OXPHOS [93]. Once activated, these cells exit quiescent states passing through a cellular metabolism reprogramming, such as an increase in glucose, glutamine uptake, and fatty acids synthesis [50, 94, 95]. Memory T cells, in

turn, rely basically on glucose and fatty acids oxidation to support their metabolism [96, 97]. Moreover, investigating how immune and metabolic signals regulate T cell fate could unwrap new roles in T cell dysfunctions in infectious, autoimmune disease, and cancer.

## 4 B Cell Metabolism

B cells are members of the adaptive immunity, and their development occurs in the bone marrow (BM) from hematopoietic cells [98]. The entire repertoire of B-cell antibody production occurs through a gene rearrangement, known as VDJ [99]. B cells spend most of their quiescent time recirculating in lymph and blood and only after exposure to an antigen they undergo clonal expansion and ultimately differentiate into short-lived plasma cells, memory, or long-lived antibody-secreting plasma cells [100]. One of the factors that can compromise the development and maturation of B cells is cellular metabolism [101]. During the development of B cells, they suffer different energy demands, according to their size and need for proliferation. For instance, B-cell precursors increase glucose uptake, oxygen consumption, and glycolysis rate [102]. Moreover, the highest glucose uptake is observed in large pre-B cells, while small pre-B cells exhibit lower levels of lactate secretion and oxygen consumption [103]. This suggests that B cells depend on glucose for their development and in fact, deficient mice of the glucose transporter GLUT1 in B cells have a reduced number of mature B cells [104]. Inhibiting glucose at various stages of the B cell development showed that early pre-B cells are highly dependent on the glycolytic pathway [101], evidencing the importance of metabolic reprogramming of B cells during its development phases.

Comparing naive B-cell metabolism with activated B cells, we have an increase in glucose uptake, oxygen consumption, and lactate secretion in B cells upon activation [104]. Some metabolic interventions, such as treatment with 2-deoxyglucose (2-DG), a derivative of glucose that is not metabolized by the cell, which inhibits glycolysis [105] and mitochondrial respiration [106], have been shown to reduce b-cell proliferation and survival [105, 106]. The regulation of some cytokine signaling in B cells may alter the behavior of B-cell metabolism [107]. For example, IL-4 cytokine increases glucose and glucose transport in B cells, and blocking glycolysis with 2-DG leads to decreased survival of B cells [108]. One pathway involved with B cell metabolism is mTOR and when its activity is impaired, glycolysis and oxygen consumption decrease, demonstrating the importance of this pathway for adequate metabolic activity and consequently optimal cellular development [109]. In addition, glucose uptake seems to depend on different molecules [110]. B cells with high expression of oncogene MYC depend more heavily on OXPHOS [111], also, deficiency of an essential regulator of B-cell survival (TRAF3), promotes increased glucose uptake, with increased anaerobic glycolysis and mitochondrial [112]. Moreover, it is known that memory B cells can differentiate into plasmablasts [113] and

that the activation of mTORC1 and the increase in glycolysis results in this differentiation, thus, metabolic reprogramming compromises memory B-cell differentiation in plasmablasts [114]. Furthermore, homocysteine (HCY) that activates B-cell proliferation and antibody secretion, increases B-cell metabolism (OXPHOS and glycolysis) dependent on PKM2 [115]. These data suggest that metabolic reprogramming impacts the survival, maturation, and production of antibodies in B cells [105, 106, 115].

Regarding plasma cells (PCs) they have their origin in secondary lymphoid organs, spleen, and lymph nodes [116]. After contact with antigen through its BCR surface receptor, they undergo clonal expansion and differ into two long-lived plasma cells (LLPCs) and short-lived (SLPCs) subpopulations, with the former typically formed in GC [117, 118]. After re-exposure, SLPCs are found mainly in the spleen and lymph nodes and LLPCs in BM and some gut-associated lymphoid tissue (GALT) [118]. Peyer's Patches (PP) are the predominant GALT in the small intestine, and the predominant B-cell population is B naive [119]. Differentiated lamina propria (LP) IgA + PCs cells preferentially use glycolysis compared to naive B cell [120], evidencing glucose importance in plasmocyte differentiation and antibody production. This data also corroborates the inhibition of GLUT1 in B cells decreasing antibody production [121]. Moreover, IgA-producing PCs have a vitamin B dependence for differentiation [122]. While the naive B cells of PP generate ATP mainly through TCA using amino acids and fatty acids, PCs in LP use TCA through glycolysis [119]. Thus, vitamin B deficiency impairs TCA and impairs the survival of naive B cells, while LP PCs can survive through glycolysis [120]. About plasma cell metabolism, LLPCs import more glucose than short-lived plasma cells (SLPCs) in homeostasis and, under metabolic stress, LLPCs, but not SLPCs, divert glucose to form mitochondrial pyruvate [123]. Recently, a regulator of glucose metabolism, the enzyme ATP ENPP1, has been demonstrated as essential for the development and survival of LLPCs in mice [124], also, LLPCs have a higher respiratory capacity than SLPCs, suggesting differences in the respiratory capacity that may be associated with survival [123, 124].

Another subpopulation of B lymphocytes is the regulatory B-cell (Breg), identified by markers CD1d high and CD5+ [125]. Although much less studied than other types of regulatory immune cells, Breg has shown an essential role in various situations of homeostasis and inflammation [126]. Even as other regulatory immune cells, Breg produces IL-10, Transforming growth factor-beta (TGF- $\beta$ ), and IL-35, all with known regulation functions [127]. In addition, Breg can suppress pro-inflammatory leukocytes, such as TNF $\alpha$ -producing monocytes and DCs, and also induce differentiation of Treg lymphocytes [126]. Xianyi Meng [128], showed the high glycolytic potential of Bregs and, HIF- $\alpha$ -deficient Breg has a lower cell expansion, demonstrating the need for HIF- $\alpha$  expression for expansion of these cells and their glycolytic profile [128] a role observed for other immune cell population [129].

Non-Hodgkin lymphomas (NHLs) are characterized by the presence of large B cells, all with deregulated mTORC1 activity [130]. The large B cells are neoplastic cells found in diffuse large B cell lymphoma (DLBCL), a subtype of NHLs. In vitro metabolic characterization of BCR-DLBCL (large B cell) demonstrates its highly

glycolytic profile and a lower number of mitochondrial proteins [131]. Metabolism-related proteins have been associated with the severity of DLBCL, the presence of proteins related to glycolytic activity, such as monocarboxylate transporter 1 (MCT1) and monocarboxylate transporter 4 (MCT4) are associated with a more aggressive form of the disease, as well as the glucose transporter GLUT1 [130, 132]. However, genetic analysis of primary DLBCL showed the presence of genes involved in mitochondrial metabolism in 30% of patients [133], demonstrating heterogeneity in diffuse large B cell lymphoma and an important role of the metabolism of these cells in their development [130, 133].

To summarize, many studies reported that naïve B cells have a low level of metabolic activity. When these cells are activated is observed an increase in glucose uptake, oxygen consumption and lactate secretion which is related to glycolysis and OXPHOS pathways, reflecting a change in energetic and biosynthesis demands [104]. In contrast, GC B cells consume high levels of glucose in comparison to naïve B cells, also being more sensible for glycolysis inhibition suggesting that this pathway is important for the survival and proliferation of GC B cells [105, 134] (Fig. 1—inferior part). Future studies should investigate the interaction of stimuli from the microenvironment, such as cytokines and intracellular signaling pathways and metabolic regulation on immune cells in the context of metabolic disease and dysfunctions.

## 5 Macrophages M1/M2

Macrophages are cellular components of the innate immune system that reside in the most diverse tissues and play an essential role in several immune response processes such as maintaining homeostasis and regulating inflammatory processes [135]. Phenotypes of macrophages are determined by environmental stimuli and can be divided into two subgroups, depending mostly on the Th1/Th2 stimulation [136]. Inflammatory (M1) macrophages are activated by (IFN- $\gamma$ ) and lipopolysaccharide (LPS) stimulation and are associated with inflammatory response [137–139]. In contrast, alternatively-activated or (M2) macrophages are activated by IL-4 and IL-10 stimuli and are involved in anti-inflammatory response and tissue remodeling [137–140]. In fact, it is now established that the M2 is divided into four subtypes, specifically, M2a, M2b, M2c, and M2d distinguished on their inducing agent and gene expression markers [141–143]. It has been demonstrated that cellular metabolism can modulate not only the differentiation of monocytes into macrophages but also regulates the activation of macrophages and other immune cells such as DCs [144–147]. In addition, there is also data supporting the influence of the metabolic pathways in macrophage polarization [12, 15, 148, 149]. For instance, LPS-stimulated macrophages have an increase in glycolysis while IL-4-stimulated macrophages support an increase in OXPHOS. So, these metabolic changes are crucial for controlling inflammation and tissue repair responses [150, 151].



Metabolic reprogramming in macrophage phenotype was analyzed by *in vitro* polarization studies [152]. Inflammatory macrophages activation depends on aerobic glycolysis as the main source of ATP for the production of reactive oxygen species (ROS), a useful component for the host defense against microbes [153]. In contrast, regulatory macrophage activation requires FAO to boost mitochondrial oxidative phosphorylation (OXPHOS) and generate ATP [154]. Besides the impact of glycolysis in the macrophages activation, other key metabolic cascades such as the pentose phosphate pathway, oxidative phosphorylation, and amino acid metabolism can modulate this process [155, 156] and we are covering the importance of these pathways below. These studies prove that macrophage polarization can be regulated by distinct metabolites states in cellular metabolism.

It has been well established for decades that the upregulation of glycolysis is necessary for the macrophages activation. The first studies in the field of macrophages immunometabolism appeared in the 1970s. Harold et al. concluded that M1 macrophages exhibited an increase in glycolysis rate accompanied by a reduction in oxygen consumption [157, 158]. Pavlou et al. analyzed the administration of 2-DG and observed that blocking the glycolysis can inhibit M1 phenotype including secretion of the pro-inflammatory cytokine, opsonin-mediated phagocytosis, and production of ROS [158, 159]. The role of glycolysis in M2 macrophages is still unclear but some studies observed that blocking the glycolysis with 2-DG reduced the expression of the M2 differentiation markers [160–162]. In spite of, recent data suggested that glycolysis is not involved in M2 polarization as long as OXPHOS remains effective, indicating that in M2 macrophages activation OXPHOS can supply the metabolic activity in absence of glycolysis [163].

The lactate resulting from pyruvate reduction also affects the function of macrophages. Colegio et al. showed that the lactate secreted by tumor cells directs the M2 polarization toward Tumor-associated macrophages (TAM) and this phenotype helps tumor growth [165]. More recently, it was described as a non-metabolic role of lactate in epigenetic control in M1 macrophage polarization. In the late stages of M1 polarization, lactate can be used as a substrate for the lactylation of histone lysine residues which culminates in anti-inflammatory gene transcription toward an M2-like phenotype, promoting homeostasis [166].

After glycolysis, pyruvate is generated and it is converted into Acetyl-Coa, an important substrate to initiate the Tricarboxylic Acid (TCA) cycle. In addition to the changes observed in the glycolytic flux observed in macrophages activation, remarkable alterations were also described in TCA. Regulatory macrophages (M2) exhibit an intact and functional TCA cycle cooperatively with OXPHOS to generate sufficient ATP for the glycosylation of lectin and mannose receptors, which are highly expressed on M2 macrophages [167, 168]. On the other hand, the glycolytic metabolism observed in M1 macrophages is accompanied by metabolic changes in the TCA cycle. This disruption in the TCA cycle occurs mostly when macrophages are stimulated with LPS or other inflammatory mediators [13, 167] resulting in the accumulation of some metabolites such as citrate, itaconate, and succinate [148, 169]. M1 macrophages exhibit increased levels of citrate which alters the gene expression and plays an essential role in bearing the inflammatory response [169]. Briefly, citrate

is converted to isocitrate and subsequently to  $\alpha$ -ketoglutarate due to the action of the isocitrate dehydrogenase (IDH) enzyme. Besides, citrate can be exported from the mitochondrial matrix to the cytosol through the mitochondrial citrate carrier (CIC). Jha et al. reported the downregulation of IDH [167] and Infantino et al. analyzed the upregulation of CIC mRNA levels in LPS-stimulated macrophages, both of these phenomena causing direct citrate accumulation [170, 171]. Once in the cytosol, citrate appears to be critical for NO, ROS, and prostaglandin E2 (PGE2) production [170, 172]. The itaconate is the product of the citrate-derived cis-aconitate conversion through the activity of the Immune-responsive gene 1 protein (IRG1), as described by Michelucci et al. and is a metabolite with increased levels in activated macrophages [173]. Upon stimulation with LPS, some data reported the upregulation of IRG1 in cell lines and murine M1 macrophages [174]. Itaconate was found to inhibit succinate dehydrogenase (SDH), the enzyme responsible to convert succinate to fumarate, leading to the accumulation of this metabolite in activated macrophages [175, 176]. This increase in succinate levels leads to a decrease in mitochondrial respiration, ROS production, pro-inflammatory cytokine release, and inflammasome assembly during macrophage activation [177]. Moreover, Lampropoulou et al. using treatment with exogenous itaconate, concluded that itaconate acts as an anti-inflammatory by inhibiting SDH action, thus affecting the production of pro-inflammatory cytokines in macrophages *in vitro* and *in vivo* [177]. Also, itaconate prevents the degradation of the anti-inflammatory transcription factor nuclear factor erythroid 2-related factor 2 (NRF2) which accumulates and translocates to the nucleus and stimulates the transcriptional anti-oxidant and anti-inflammatory response genes [178]. In concern of M2 macrophages, the role of itaconate is not clearly understood. Despite IRG1 importance in impairing M1 macrophage response, O'Neil et al. observed that IRG1 expression is specific for M1 macrophages and has the opposite role in IL-4-dependent M2 macrophage polarization. When IRG1 is overexpressed in murine M2 macrophages or exogenous treatment with a derivative of itaconate, it inhibits M2 gene expression and blocks Stat6 and AKT pathway in IL-4-stimulated macrophages, also reducing OXPHOS in these cells. The authors suggested that itaconate inhibits phosphorylation of Janus Kinase 1 dampening the M2 activation. On the other hand, a microRNA molecule specific for M2 macrophages, miR-378a, suppresses the production of itaconate by these cells. Additionally, miR93 decreases the levels of IRG1 and itaconate in consequence of the reduction of interferon regulatory factor 9 (IRF9) which leads to an M2 macrophage polarization. These findings indicate a possible mechanism in which different concentrations of itaconate can modulate macrophage polarization.

Succinate is an intermediate metabolite of TCA and its role in the macrophages' metabolism was defined recently. Tannahill et al. described that the succinate levels were increased in LPS-stimulated macrophages and induced the activation and upregulation of pro-inflammatory genes, specifically, the IL-1 $\beta$  gene [176]. Beyond the succinate importance in the glycolysis pathway, another finding related to succinate was the identification of its function as a signaling substrate at an extracellular level. During inflammation, activated M1 macrophages release succinate which accumulates in the extracellular milieu [179]. Outside the cell, succinate can bind to the

succinate receptor GPR91, a G-protein coupled receptor sensor for extracellular succinate and can be expressed in many cell types [180]. Intriguingly, macrophages express GPR91, and in response to inflammatory stimuli occurs the transduction of pro-inflammatory phenotype and IL-1 $\beta$  production [181, 182]. This mechanism activated by succinate boosts the inflammation in an autocrine and paracrine manner to endure and intensify the inflammatory response [182, 183]. These observations demonstrate that succinate oxidation via SDH activity regulates ROS production [184]. Also, it was described that in LPS-stimulated macrophages the production of ROS can lead to DNA damage. In this situation, NAD<sup>+</sup> is consumed in a manner to activate the enzymes poly (ADP-ribose) and in consequence of this NAD<sup>+</sup> unbalance, the NAD<sup>+</sup> salvage pathway supports the NAD<sup>+</sup> flux by recycling nicotinamide into new NAD [185]. Altogether, these findings explain the reason why the NAD<sup>+</sup> salvage pathway is enhanced on inflammatory macrophages.

Following, the TCA cycle provides the necessary substrate reactions for the complexes of the electron transport chain (ETC) to generate ATP through proton flow and ATP synthase activity. The metabolic difference between M1 and M2 cells affects the way ATP is synthesized. Classically activated macrophages (M1) depend on glycolysis to produce most of their ATP while alternatively-activated macrophages (M2) utilize OXPHOS for the same purpose. Consequently, M2 macrophages sustain the electron forward ETC to generate ATP [167]. Vats et al. demonstrated the upregulation of OXPHOS diminishing the production of pro-inflammatory cytokines IL-4-treated macrophages [150]. Additionally, IL-25 and IL-10 were found to stimulate M2 polarization and increase macrophage mitochondrial respiratory activity [186, 187]. Nevertheless, in LPS-stimulated M1 macrophages, OXPHOS is diminished and, in consequence, dysregulated ETC leads to a leak of electrons that in presence of oxygen produces ROS [153, 188]. This mechanism is used by pro-inflammatory macrophages to adjust the ETC to reinforce the ROS production. Also, Van den Bossche [14] shows that nitric oxide (NO) produced by M1 macrophages inhibits OXPHOS and prevents the repolarization of M1 to M2 phenotype, and when NO production is inhibited occurs a notable rise in repolarization.

Pentose phosphate pathway (PPP) is also altered in macrophages differentiation, predominantly during the activation of M1 macrophages to supply the ATP demand [167]. This pathway is an alternative route for the oxidation of glucose-6P, in the cytosol, without generating ATP, instead of providing pentose and 5-ribose phosphate for nucleic acid synthesis but also donating electrons to the reduction of NADP<sup>+</sup> to NADPH. In fact, the PPP is upregulated in M1 macrophages [167, 176] because NADPH is the major substrate for NADPH oxidase which catalyzes the ROS production that is essential for pathogens control [189]. Baardman et al. has shown that the knockdown of 6-phosphogluconate dehydrogenase (PGD), the enzyme responsible to convert 6-phosphogluconate into ribulose 5-P, produces an impaired pro-inflammatory response in macrophages [190]. Concerning M2 macrophages, Haschemi et al. suggest that occurs a suppression in PPP due to the downregulation of sedoheptulose kinase (CARKL), a carbohydrate kinase-like protein that controls the PPP and in this case results in a defective inflammatory response [191]

Furthermore, M1 and M2 macrophages are also distinguished by specific pathways in lipid metabolism to modulate their response. In general, lipid synthesis is related to the pro-inflammatory macrophage functions. Lipid synthesis is an essential pathway to provide the substrates necessary for membrane remodeling and the generation of inflammatory mediators, such as ROS and NOS, in M1 macrophages [172, 192]. In these cells, glycolysis is upregulated and Feingold et al. showed that the carbons arising from glucose-derived were, alternatively, incorporated in fatty acid molecules [193]. In consequence, there are also data supporting a rise in citrate and lipid levels in LPS-stimulated macrophages [167, 176]. In contrast, fatty acid degradation (beta-oxidation) is associated with M2 macrophages, which take up the free fatty acid to fuel OXPHOS and to produce energy via FAO [194]. Indeed, FAO is extremely important for M2 polarization. Malandrino et al. using etomoxir, a mitochondrial carnitine palmitoyl-transferase 1 (mCPT1) inhibitor to block FAO, demonstrated that in this case the M2 activation in IL4-stimulated macrophages is blocked [195]. When the authors expressed mCPT1 exogenously in macrophages the induction of pro-inflammatory phenotype was inhibited. Despite these results, CPT1 expressed is increased in inflammatory macrophages converting FA that, in sequence, are stored in lipid droplets (LD) [196]. In LPS-stimulated macrophages, LD is related to inflammatory functions, such as IL-1 $\beta$ , IL-6 and PGE2 production, and phagocytic capacity [197]. When LD development is diminished through the inhibition of triacylglycerol synthesis the proinflammatory functions described above are dampened [197], demonstrating a physiological role for LD in inflammatory macrophages.

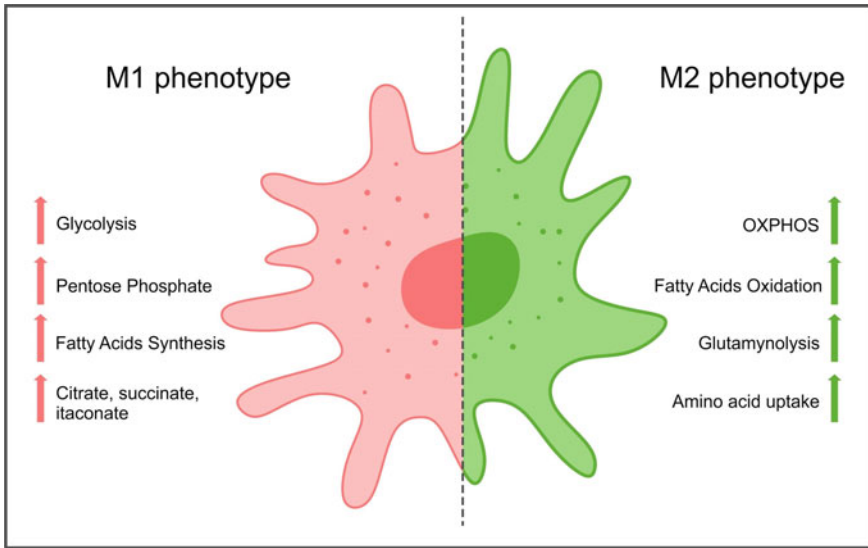
Amino acids metabolism is an important component of many cell processes, including organizing an appropriate immune response. Early in the 1980s, Newsholme et al. [198, 199] dedicated to studying the consumption of amino acids upon macrophages activation. So macrophages can adapt to changes in nutrient sources and utilize amino acids catabolism, mainly, arginine, glutamine, and tryptophan to maintain their immune response and regulate activation [148, 200]. Arginine, for example, is the substrate for NO production through the activity of inducible nitric oxide synthase (NOS). Under pro-inflammatory stimuli, like LPS, TNF- $\alpha$ , or IFN- $\gamma$  iNOS is overexpressed directing the arginine toward NO production [169, 200]. Furthermore, NO intensifies the macrophages' ability in killing intracellular bacteria during inflammation. Therefore, M1 macrophages utilize arginine and iNOS to generate pro-inflammatory NO. Van den Bossche also observed that NO plays a role in restraining M1 to M2 repolarization and once the iNOS is blocked, M1 is capable of repolarizing into M2 when stimulated with IL-4 [14]. In alternatively-activated macrophages, arginine is metabolized by enzyme arginase (ARG1) which is overexpressed in this phenotype [201]. This process generates ornithine and then is converted into proline and polyamines, important substrates for wound healing and cell proliferation, respectively [148, 169, 200]. Recently, Hardbower et al. demonstrated that the ornithine conversion limits M1 activation through histone modifications [202]. Also, ARG1 in macrophages plays a key role to activate anti-inflammatory phenotype and control T cell activation and proliferation [181, 203]. Glutamine can also modulate macrophage polarization and is the most available amino acid in the plasma [204]. During macrophages activation,

glutamine metabolism can modulate both M1 and M2 phenotype. The internalization and metabolism of the glutamine into the TCA cycle is the principal route to succinate synthesis in M1 macrophages [205] activating the transcription of glycolytic genes maintaining the glycolytic metabolism and pro-inflammatory response in these cells [176, 206]. Thus, not surprisingly, there is cooperation among metabolic pathways in promoting macrophage function. In M2 macrophages, glutamine directs M2 polarization by generating  $\alpha$ -ketoglutarate from glutaminolysis. This metabolite intensifies M2 OXPHOS and FAO, stimulates M2 phenotype by epigenetic reprogramming [207], inhibits the transcription of glycolytic genes, and induces the glycosylation of lectin or mannose receptors which is expressed in M2 macrophages [167]. Liu et al. demonstrated that glutamine deprivation impaired the expression of M2 markers even after the activation with IL-4 [207]. Alternatively, M2 macrophages can induce the glutamine synthesis from glutamate using the glutamine synthetase (GS) enzyme [169]. The expression of GS is highly detectable in M2 macrophages, mainly, after the activation with IL-10, and while in M1 macrophages GS expression is hardly measurable, as described by Palmieri et al. [208]. Tryptophan metabolism is mediated almost by the enzyme indoleamine 2,3-dioxygenase (IDO) responsible for converting tryptophan into kynurenine. Wang et al. [209] has shown when IDO is overexpressed the macrophages differentiation is directed toward the M2 phenotype and once IDO is silenced causing a pro-inflammatory response by macrophages.

The impact of metabolic pathways in macrophage polarization has been investigated in the last years. M1 macrophages rely mostly on glycolysis with a broken TCA cycle that leads to itaconate and succinate accumulation but also present an increase in PPP pathway and fatty acid synthesis (Fig. 3) [158, 167]. On the other hand, M2 macrophages metabolism depends exclusively on OXPHOS and FAO, with an intact TCA cycle [167]. These findings indicate that M1 and M2 macrophages have distinctive metabolic pathways that guarantee their functional phenotype in specific contexts. Finally, the possibility of manipulating macrophages polarization opens a possibility to new therapeutic treatment for clinical applications, although further studies are required for the development of novel therapeutic strategies.

## 6 Dendritic Cells

Dendritic cells (DC) are professional antigen-presenting cells that are fundamental for the orchestration of immune responses. They are the bridge between innate and adaptive immune responses, inducing the activation and differentiation of naive T lymphocytes [210, 211]. DCs expressed in their surface the pattern recognition receptors (PRRs) which recognize pathogens-associated molecule patterns (PAMPs) and consequently lead to the induction of a general pro-inflammatory response [212]. DCs are divided in three major subsets: conventional DCs (cDC), monocyte-derived DCs (moDC) and plasmacytoid DCs (pDC) are characterized by distinct origins, receptors, and functions [213, 214]. cDCs and pDC derive from BM-derived precursors, whereas inflammatory conditions lead to monocytes recruitment from the blood and



**Fig. 3 The metabolic difference in macrophage polarization.** During macrophage polarization, M1 macrophages undergo a metabolic reprogramming with increased glycolysis pathways, remarkably with glucose uptake and citrate, succinate and itaconate accumulation and augmented pentose phosphate pathway and fatty acids synthesis to support the proinflammatory phenotype. Whereas, M2 macrophages display enhanced uptake and oxidation of fatty acids, OXPHOS metabolism, amino acid uptake and glutaminolysis sustaining anti-inflammatory phenotype. OXPHOS, oxidative phosphorylation

differentiation into moDC in peripheral tissues like dermis, lung, and intestinal lamina propria [215, 216]. Recent data indicate that cellular metabolism is a fundamental process to regulate DC development and immune response [217, 218].

Like macrophages, DC cells can be activated by recognition of pathogens or danger signals. During the activation process, DC suffers changes in gene expression to support cytokine production and also to present the MHC molecule-loaded peptide epitopes to stimulate T cells [181]. The switch of resting DC to activated DC cells is marked by changes in cellular metabolism, with an increase in bioenergetic demands that are necessary for the maturation process [129, 219]. DC activation upon TLR stimulation causes an increase in glucose consumption, due to the upregulation of glycolysis and the rise in the conversion of pyruvate into lactate [219]. After the activation with TLR, DC promptly increase glycolysis rate [220, 221] and Everts et al. have shown that blocking the glycolysis pathway using 2-DG inhibits the whole activation of DC besides reducing the IL-12 production by DC and, consequently, impairing the ability to stimulate T cells to differentiate in Th1 cells [220–222]. The increase in glycolytic flux during DC activation supplies the citrate demand necessary for this process. After that, citrate is exported to cytosol and converted to acetyl-CoA, an important precursor for fatty acid biosynthesis [218, 223].

Indeed, fatty acid metabolism is an essential pathway for DC development due to the increase in the size of organelles involved in antigen processing and presentation and cytokines synthesis [218, 219]. As demonstrated by Ibrahim et al. immunogenicity and the expression of  $\text{TNF}\alpha$ , IL-6, and TLR are impaired when using an inhibitor of fatty acid synthesis, thus impacting the activation of CD4 T cells and NK cells [224]. Recent data suggest that beyond the synthesis of fatty acids, the storage of total lipids can influence DC function. The TLR stimulation promotes fatty acid synthesis, which increases storage in lipid droplets [221, 225]. Bougnères et al. has demonstrated that blocking the lipid droplet formation inhibits the cross-presentation function DC, impacting CD8 T cell activation [226]. Moreover, analyzes using human and mice DC showed that different concentrations of lipid alter tolerogenic DC responses [224]. DC with high levels of intracellular lipids droplets are capable of inducing more potent pro-inflammatory T cell, NK cell activation whereas DC with low lipid concentration induces regulatory T cell-mediated tolerance [224]. Besides, DC that contains high concentrations of intracellular lipids reduces the proliferation of allogeneic T cells [227, 228].

Also, DC can uptake free fatty acids and oxidize these molecules by the FAO pathway. Stelzner et al. reported that DC can consume free fatty acids, like palmitic acid and oleic acid, and increase the production of IL-23 and IL-1 $\beta$  after LPS stimulation, which could positively impact Th17 differentiation by DC exposed to free fatty acid [229]. Interestingly, the increase in FAO is due to de novo fatty acid synthesis which enhances mitochondrial metabolism [219]. It seems that lipid metabolism may have an important role in dictating the tolerogenic status of DC. Wu et al. related that fatty acids pharmacological suppression reduces the TLR-induced production of  $\text{IFN}\alpha$ ,  $\text{TNF}\alpha$ , and IL-6 by pDCs and also reduces the expression of CD86, a co-stimulatory receptor ligand, impacting in T cell priming [230]. Consistent with these results, Malinarich et al. conducted metabolic analyzes and observed that FAO is an important process for tolerogenic DC development and when this pathway is inhibited prevents the function of tolerogenic DC [231].

## 7 Concluding Remarks

Metabolism of immune cells under influence of specific external signals, such as antigen recognition, co-stimulatory, and cytokine stimulates different metabolic pathways that can modulate immune cells activation, proliferation, and differentiation [38, 107, 232, 233]. Evidence suggests that immune cell metabolism is essential for the maintenance of homeostasis and even in a disease state, such as cancer and autoimmune diseases [234, 235]. The deprivation or excess of nutrients from the microenvironment modulates both B and T cells, as well as macrophages and DC fate [169, 236, 237]. Issues of particular interest to better understand the potential of and to which extent metabolic pathways and its metabolites impact immune cells will contribute to elucidate immune cell function and even show a great possibility

to become novel therapeutic approaches to suppress several types of inflammatory disease.

The most serious challenge in comprehending the immune profile demand is to understand the metabolic complexity linked to the different immune cell types. Overall, it is increasingly evident that metabolic pathways and their products are essential for the modulation of immune cells functions and fate. Besides, this interplay between metabolism and the immune system represents a new metabolism-targeted for therapeutic strategies related to inflammation and tissue repair, homeostasis and disease progression.

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# Metabolic Profile of Innate Immune Cells



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## 1 Macrophages and Monocytes

Macrophages are immune cells broadly distributed in all tissues of the body and perform key roles in regulating inflammatory responses and tissue homeostasis. There is a large spectrum of macrophages subtypes, which is still evolving [1]. However, to simplify comprehension of how macrophages are metabolically regulated, we are going to divide macrophages in the two opposite extreme phenotypes: M1 or classically activated macrophages and M2 or alternatively activated macrophages. These subtypes are determined in response to environmental stimuli, such as soluble mediators as well as Toll Like Receptor (TLR) ligands. During macrophage polarization several metabolic changes occurs and are critical for macrophages activation and specialization [2, 3].

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## 1.1 M1 and M2 Subset Macrophages

### 1.1.1 M1 Macrophages

M1 macrophages have increased glucose uptake and rely on glycolytic metabolism for ATP production [4]. Mitochondrial respiration and oxidative phosphorylation (OXPHOS) are inhibited in M1 polarized macrophages. The impairment in electron transport chain (ETC) is triggered by nitric oxide (NO), which causes nitrosylation of the iron–sulfur-containing ETC complexes [5] and cannot be reversed [6]. This implicates that macrophages committed to being M1 cannot be reprogrammed to an M2 profile by the addition of interleukin (IL)-4, but M2 macrophages can be converted to M1 profile by stimulus with lipopolysaccharide (LPS) and interferon (IFN)- $\gamma$  [6]. Also, the activity of complexes I, II and IV are decreased during M1 polarization, which leads to loss of the mitochondrial membrane potential [7].

Upregulated expression of glucose transporter 1 (GLUT1) allows for an increased uptake of glucose [8]. Even though the yield from glycolysis is very low (two molecules of ATP per glucose), this pathway is quickly activated and is essential for ATP production in the absence of OXPHOS to preserve macrophage survival. Upregulation of glycolysis is not only important to maintain high secretory and phagocytic functions of M1 macrophages, but also to fuel the pentose phosphate pathway (PPP) [3]. PPP is essential to the generation of ribose for nucleotides, amino acids for the proteins synthesis, and Nicotinamide Adenine Dinucleotide Phosphate (NADPH) for reactive oxygen species (ROS) production by NADPH oxidase [9].

In glycolysis, the rate-limiting enzyme that converts phosphoenolpyruvate to pyruvate is pyruvate kinase. Pyruvate kinase isoform M2 (PKM2) exists in monomeric, dimeric and tetrameric form [10]. PKM2 is upregulated in M1 macrophages [11] and PKM2 dimer translocate to the nucleus and acts as transcription factor, coactivating hypoxia-inducible factor 1 alpha (HIF- $\alpha$ ) and improving the transcription of HIF-1 $\alpha$  induced genes. HIF-1 $\alpha$  preferentially induces the expression of genes that are related to the glycolytic pathway, besides the transcription of IL-1 $\beta$  and other pro-inflammatory genes [12]. By contrast, tetrameric form of PKM2, which is the catalytic form of PKM2, induced by small-molecules activators, attenuates activation of macrophages induced by LPS and IFN- $\gamma$  [10].

Pyruvate produced in glycolysis has two outcomes. First, pyruvate can be converted to lactate by the increased expression of lactate dehydrogenase (LDH), diverting metabolism away from the mitochondria. Conversely, pyruvate can also fuel the tricarboxylic acid (TCA) cycle. Activation of the pyruvate dehydrogenase kinase (PDK1) inhibits pyruvate dehydrogenase (PDH) complex by phosphorylation of the E1 subunit, which converts pyruvate in acetyl-CoA that feeds the TCA cycle. PDK1 activation induces an M1 profile in macrophages and knockdown of this enzyme attenuates glycolytic flux [13].

Most of the NAD<sup>+</sup> needed to sustain glycolysis comes from lactate production [2]. However, lactate can lead to macrophage reprogramming, once its intracellular accumulation results in a decrease in glycolytic enzymes and pro-inflammatory

cytokines, such as IL-12, as well as enhances the IL-10 production [14]. Thus, lactate is exported to the extracellular environment by increased expression of Monocarboxylate Transporter 4 (MCT4) [15].

TCA cycle in M1 macrophages is truncated in two places: after citrate and after succinate [16, 17]. Downregulation of isocitrate dehydrogenase, which converts isocitrate to  $\alpha$ -ketoglutarate [18] is responsible for the first break in TCA cycle of M1 macrophages [19], which results in high levels of citrate. Citrate is then exported from the mitochondria via the citrate transporter (CIC) and utilized for the fatty acid synthesis (FAS). The increase in FAS is critical to the inflammatory function of M1 macrophages [20], once FAS is required for the plasma membrane remodeling, for example, which is necessary for inflammatory signaling and release of large amounts of cytokines [18]. Also, fatty acids feed the pathways that generate NO and lipid mediators such as leukotrienes, prostaglandins and resolvins [21].

Citrate can also generate itaconic acid, which has direct bactericidal effects and inhibits succinate dehydrogenase (SDH), linking citrate accumulation to succinate accumulation [22]. Because citrate is used for fatty acid synthesis and itaconate production, succinate is originated mainly from glutaminolysis [23]. Succinate accumulation has a direct impact on cytokine production. Under aerobic conditions, prolyl hydroxylases (PHDs) constantly hydroxylate HIF-1 $\alpha$ , targeting this protein for proteasomal degradation by VHL E3 complex [24]. VHL deficiency upregulates glycolysis, resulting in epigenetic modifications and enhanced inflammatory and fibrotic responses [25]. However, both succinate and itaconate inhibit PHDs, which leads to stabilization and translocation of HIF-1 $\alpha$  into the nucleus even in aerobic conditions. Other consequence of SDH inhibition is the reverse electron transport (RET) [26, 27], which occurs when electrons flow back to complex I, resulting in an increased production of oxidants, which also stabilize HIF-1 $\alpha$  [7]. Yet, it has been demonstrated by several groups that succinate oxidation by SDH but not succinate accumulation is critical for inflammatory response [7]. In macrophages depleted of itaconate there is no SDH inhibition, and these cells end up releasing increased levels of IL-1 $\beta$  with higher levels of stabilized HIF-1 $\alpha$  than wild-type macrophages [28]. Similarly, macrophages lacking SDH or that received exogenous succinate are less inflammatory than wild-type macrophages [7]. Thus, it appears that HIF-1 $\alpha$  is mostly stabilized by ROS instead of succinate.

A key energy/nutrient sensor in macrophage metabolism is the mammalian target of rapamycin (mTOR), a serine/threonine kinase. Assemblage of mTOR with adapter proteins results in two mTOR complexes, mTOR complex 1 (mTORC1) and mTORC2 [29]. Protein synthesis, de novo lipogenesis and glycolysis are importantly shaped by the mTORC1-mTORC2 network [30]. There is an initial peak in protein synthesis after 4 h of LPS stimulation in macrophages that is independent of glucose uptake and glycolysis, relying mostly on phosphatidylinositol 3-kinase (PI3K)-Akt-mTORC1 pathway: after TLR4 activation by LPS, B-cell adapter for PI3K (BCAP) is recruited [31], activating the PI3K pathway, which subsequently triggers Akt and mTORC1 [32]. Activation of Akt also enhances the phosphorylation of hexokinase (HK-II), the enzyme that phosphorylates glucose into glucose-6-phosphate. This phosphorylation results in HK-II association with mitochondria,

where HK-II augments its activity and, therefore, the glycolytic flux [33]. Activation of mTORC1 drives an anabolic response. mTORC1 induces the uptake of glucose through the translocation of Hif-1 $\alpha$  and mitochondrial biogenesis. Also, mTORC1 promotes sterol regulatory element-binding proteins (SREBPs)-dependent cholesterol synthesis [34].

Macrophages subsets were first characterized by altered arginine metabolism. This pathway is crucial for macrophage polarization. In M1 macrophages, arginine fuels the NO synthetic pathway, in which inducible nitric oxide synthase (iNOS) mediate the conversion of arginine via citrulline into NO [35]. M1 macrophage polarization requires the iNOS expression and the absence of this enzyme results in defective killing of bacteria and tumor cells, despite reducing the toxicity of septic shock [36].

Several other amino acids can play a crucial role in macrophage activation. Glutamine is required for the induction of IL-1 $\beta$  by LPS-activated macrophages [37]. Stimulation of macrophages with LPS increases the levels of the glutamine transporter Slc3a2 [38]. Mature IL-1 $\beta$  production requires inflammasome activation that can also be metabolic regulated, which can be visualized by the finding that by inducing glycolysis, mTORC1 activates the NLRP3 inflammasome in M1 macrophages [38, 39]. Tryptophan catabolism plays an important role in the immune response against pathogens. In host cells tryptophan prevents the growth of bacteria and parasites [39]. The catabolic metabolism of tryptophan is controlled primarily by an enzyme called indoleamine-2,3-dioxygenase (IDO). IDO catalyzes the initial rate-limiting step of tryptophan degradation and IDO expression is increased in response to LPS stimulus as well as IFN- $\gamma$  [40, 41]. Despite tryptophan and glutamine, serine metabolism is important for macrophage activation. Serine is necessary for glutathione synthesis, since it is incorporated into glutathione through production of glycine [42]. This synthesis is required for LPS-induced IL-1 $\beta$  expression, which is impaired by serine deprivation; therefore, de novo serine synthesis is essential for the first signal in inflammasome activation [42].

### 1.1.2 M2 Macrophages

M2 macrophages have an intact TCA cycle and enhanced mitochondrial OXPHOS, which support the phenotype of these cells [43]. Inhibition of mitochondrial ATP synthase suppress IL-4-induced M2 macrophage polarization and function [43].

Mitochondrial oxidative metabolism can be maintained by fatty acid oxidation (FAO), which is preserved by de novo FAS. In M2 macrophages, the scavenger receptor CD36 is responsible to the take up of triacylglycerol-rich lipoproteins, such as LDL and VLDL, which are catabolized in the lysosome by lysosomal acid lipase [44]. Both absence of CD36 and accumulation of triacylglycerol-rich lipoproteins impair M2 activation, showing that FAO together with FAS are important for this macrophage subset [44]. This characterize what is called a futile cycle, in which the substrate is produced and consumed in an intrinsic cycle, but the intermediates have important roles [45]. Nevertheless, it was recently demonstrated that FAO is not essential to M2 polarization. Pyruvate derived from glycolysis can fuel OXPHOS in

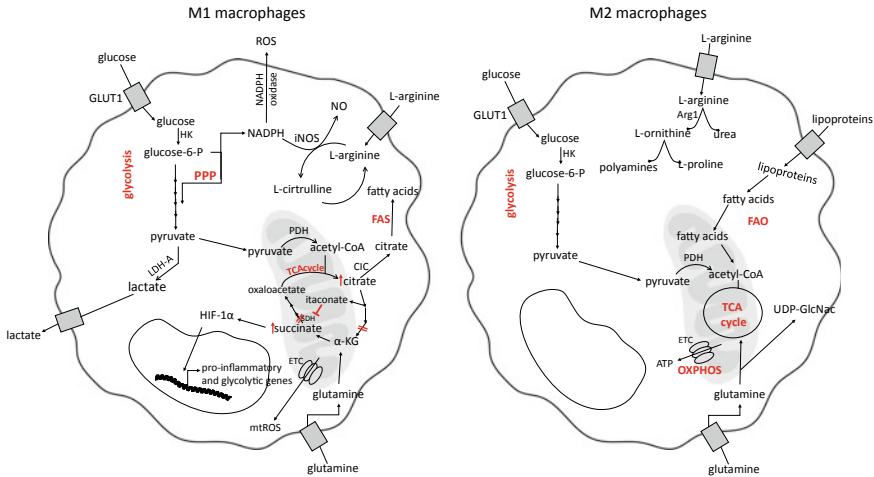


M2 macrophages [46]. Yet, it has been demonstrated that inhibition of glycolysis does not compromise M2 markers expression as long as OXPHOS remains functional [47]. This divergence can be explained by the use of 2-deoxy-glucose (2DG) as glycolysis inhibitor. 2DG is a glucose analog that after phosphorylation by HK-2, prevents the continuation of glycolysis. However, 2DG also impairs the carbon flux beyond glycolysis and has an impact on the amount of TCA cycle metabolites and subsequently on OXPHOS [47]. By contrast, galactose replacement suppresses glycolysis without other effects, providing evidence that glycolytic stimulation is not necessary for M2 polarization [47]. Additionally, glutamine can also fuel the TCA cycle under glucose depletion [26] and can also be used in the hexosamine pathway, resulting in uridine diphosphate N-acetylglucosamine (UDP-GlcNAc) synthesis [48]. UDP-GlcNAc is the substrate for glycosylation of macrophage mannose receptor CD206 and macrophage galactose binding lectin (Mgl1), which are important M2 markers [49].

IL-4 increases the glucose uptake in a time dependent manner and Akt through mTORC1 supports this glucose flux, representing essential regulators of M2 phenotype [50]. However, it has been described that improved glucose metabolism in M2 macrophages is due to IRF4 expression that requires mTORC2 and STAT6 pathway, but not mTORC1 and mTORC1 depletion enhances M2 polarization in macrophages [51]. This disagreement in the literature may be caused by the complexity of mTOR pathway, for example, Akt is downstream of mTORC2 and upstream of mTORC1 [51].

In M2 macrophages, a key nutrient sensor in the immunoregulation is the AMP-activated protein kinase (AMPK). AMPK is a conserved kinase that regulates homeostasis and energetic stress. Activation of AMPK inhibits FAS and cholesterol synthesis [52] while improving FAO and glycolysis [53]. It is described that AMPK is activated in anti-inflammatory macrophages and deactivated by pro-inflammatory stimulus. AMPK can be activated by high AMP/ATP ratio or high intracellular calcium levels. Once activated, AMPK modulates  $\text{NAD}^+/\text{NADH}$  ratio and activates Sirtuin 1, which control IL-12 production in LPS activated macrophages [54].

M2 macrophages have increased expression of arginase-1. Arginase-1 catalyze the conversion of L-arginine into urea and L-ornithine [55]. Ornithine is subsequently used to generate polyamines and proline [55]. Proline is necessary for collagen synthesis, which is instrumental to tissue remodeling and repair mediated by M2 macrophages [56]. Ornithine decarboxylase (ODC), the key enzyme in the polyamine synthesis pathway, converts ornithine in putrescine, which is posteriorly converted in spermidine and spermine [57]. ODC inhibits M1-related gene expression such as iNOS and decrease pro-inflammatory cytokine production, linking polyamine metabolism to M2 macrophage activation [58]. Besides that, several M2 markers, such as CD206, Ym1 and Fizz1 need polyamines for their IL-4-induced expression. This is due the role of polyamines in the regulation of chromatin remodeling through actions in histone methylation and acetylation [59] (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1 Metabolism of macrophage subtypes.** M1 macrophage metabolism is characterized by enhanced aerobic glycolysis, converting glucose into lactate. M1 macrophages have an increased flux through the pentose phosphate pathway (PPP), producing NADPH, used for the generation of reactive oxygen species (ROS) and nitric oxide (NO). The tricarboxylic acid (TCA) cycle of M1 macrophages is broken in two places, leading to the accumulation of citrate and succinate. Citrate is used for the generation of fatty acids and the synthesis of itaconate, which has microbicidal properties and results in accumulation of succinate. Succinate leads to HIF-1 $\alpha$  stabilization and the transcription of pro-inflammatory and glycolytic genes. Another aspect of M1 macrophage metabolism is the conversion of L-arginine to NO. By contrast, M2 macrophages mainly produce ATP through an oxidative TCA cycle coupled to oxidative phosphorylation (OXPHOS). To fuel the TCA cycle, M2 macrophages rely on glycolysis, fatty acid oxidation (FAO) and glutamine metabolism. M2 macrophages show a lowered PPP and convert L-arginine into urea and L-ornithine, which serves as precursor for L-proline and polyamines production

## 1.2 Immunometabolism in Macrophages Effector Functions

Macrophages are the most important phagocyte involved in the clearance of apoptotic cells, a process called efferocytosis, and is a role that directly contributes to tissue homeostasis. The mechanisms related to apoptotic cell phagocytosis are well described, but metabolic regulation of this process is still poorly understood [60]. Efferocytosis results in elevation of fatty acid consumption by FAO, feeding ETC and activating Sirtuin1 that is required for NAD<sup>+</sup>-dependent IL-10 production, thereby polarizing macrophages for tissue repair [61]. Also, the continued clearance of apoptotic cells depends on the reduction of mitochondrial membrane potential [62]. Mitochondrial fission occurs during efferocytosis and is essential for degradation of apoptotic cells in phagolysosomes [63]. Together, these data indicate that macrophage metabolic profile is intrinsically linked to its function.

Another important function of macrophages is their critical role for resolution of infection. Metabolic inhibition of glycolysis markedly decreases the phagocytic

activity of macrophages, which is not affected by the inhibition of oxidative phosphorylation [64]. Thus, the energy required by phagocytosis appears to derive from glycolysis rather than from oxidative phosphorylation. Similar findings are reported about alveolar and peritoneal macrophages [65].

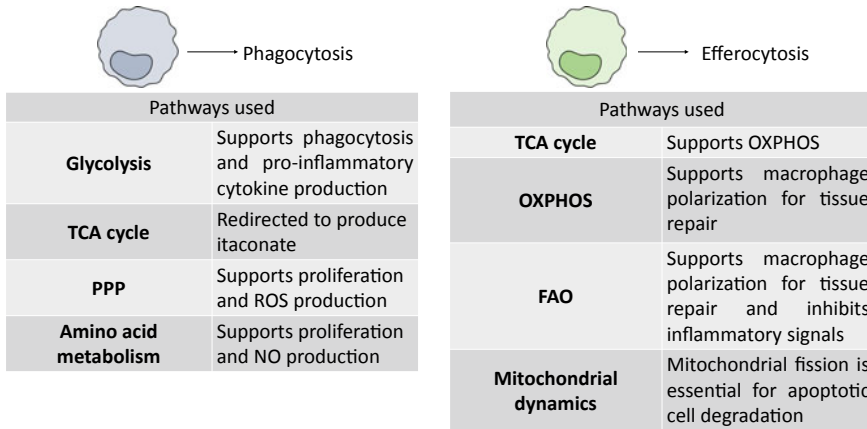
Bone marrow-derived macrophages (BMDMs) or macrophage cell lines are largely used to study metabolism and its link to macrophage function. However, some studies have demonstrated that resident macrophages have a differential behavior. Peritoneal macrophages, for example, are highly glycolytic upon LPS treatment, but also present increased OXPHOS activity, which contrasts the metabolic phenotype of BMDMs [66]. This occurs probably due to delay induction of iNOS in peritoneal macrophages and their enhanced arginase-1 expression, which limits NO production and, consequently, the NO-mediated inhibition of ETC [66]. Besides that, peritoneal macrophages have an increased TCA cycle flux than BMDMs and have a diminished FAS [66].

Alveolar macrophages have enhanced glycerophospholipid metabolism and glycolysis is the main regulator of their responsiveness during IL-4-induced alternative activation [67]. Also, alveolar macrophages have a lower basal metabolism in comparison with BMDMs and require a functional sensing of oxygen for homeostatic functions. This is observed since VHL deficiency, which results in enhanced HIF-1 $\alpha$  stabilization, impairs not only terminal differentiation of alveolar macrophages, but also their self-renewal capacity and the handling of surfactants [68].

Microglia also has lower metabolic activity at basal state and macrophages from small intestine rely on augmented cholesterol biosynthesis for their effector functions [66]. Therefore, how BMDM correlate with resident macrophage metabolism remains an open field of research (Fig. 2).

## 2 Monocytes

Monocytes leave the bone marrow, circulate within the peripheral blood and can play important functions including phagocytosis and cytokine production. In the blood, these phagocytes survey the body for sites of inflammation: monocytes rapidly activate and migrate to areas of injury where they can differentiate into macrophages [69]. In human monocytes, the shift from OXPHOS to glycolysis was observed only with LPS activation. In monocytes stimulated with TLR2 agonist, maintenance of phagocytic capacity and cytokine production were dependent on increased OXPHOS [70]. This may be due to the fact that human monocytes produce less amounts of NO when compared with mouse macrophages, therefore, the inhibition of OXPHOS is diminished [66]. The initial enhancement of glycolysis is dependent on HIF-1 $\alpha$ , stimulation of Glut1 expression and translocation to the plasma membrane and control of PDK1 activity, which interrupts the pyruvate flux to TCA cycle and favors lactate production [54]. During the progression of acute inflammation into chronic inflammation, monocytes switch their metabolism to rely on FAO [54]. This shift is



**Fig. 2 Metabolism over phagocytosis and efferocytosis.** Macrophages exhibit a reliance on distinct metabolic pathways to promote cell function. For phagocytosis, macrophages use glycolysis, the tricarboxylic acid (TCA) cycle, the pentose phosphate pathway (PPP) and amino acid metabolism to proliferate and to support the production of inflammatory cytokines. For efferocytosis, macrophages use the TCA cycle, oxidative phosphorylation (OXPHOS), fatty acid oxidation (FAO) and mitochondrial dynamics to inhibit inflammatory signals supporting the polarization for tissue repair

mediated by the proliferator-activated receptor  $\gamma$  coactivators PGC-1 $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ , which enhances CD36 and carnitine palmitoyl transferase 1 expression [54].

Different from macrophages, monocytes accumulate cholesterol esters due to lower cholesterol acyltransferase activity, therefore, these cells are more efficient in grasp cholesterol, but less effective in releasing cholesterol [71]. When compared to lymphocytes, monocytes have a lower non-mitochondrial respiration, but higher spare respiratory capacity [72].

Metabolic and epigenetic modification in innate immune system leads to long-term adaptation, which results in hyper or hyporesponsiveness of the cells. This process is called trained immunity and works as a type of innate immune memory [73]. In this context, it has been shown that the production of pro-inflammatory cytokines by monocytes is controlled by glutaminolysis, which modulates gene methylation and results in long-term control [74]. Also, fumarate, which can be generated from aspartate, induces epigenetic modifications in monocytes and together with glycolysis and cholesterol biosynthesis are indispensable for trained immunity [74] (Table 1).

**Table 1** Major metabolic pathways in macrophage subsets

	M1 macrophages	M2 macrophages
Glycolysis	Strongly induced, and supports phagocytosis and pro-inflammatory cytokine production	Induced but not crucial for IL-4-induced macrophage activation
TCA cycle	Redirected to produce citrate to promote fatty acid synthesis and succinate to promote HIF-1 $\alpha$ -induced gene expression	Support oxidative phosphorylation
OXPHOS	Impaired by NO and itaconate. Electrons flow backwards, driving ROS production	Strongly induced and crucial for IL-4-induced macrophages activation
PPP	Induced and required for ROS generation, NO production, and nucleotide and protein synthesis	Not required
FAS	Supports inflammatory signaling and increases NO and TNF production	Suggested to fuel FAO
FAO	Crucial for inflammasome activation and IL-1 $\beta$ release	Needed to M2 polarization
Amino acid metabolism	Arginine is converted to NO by iNOS. Glutamine fuels the TCA cycle enhancing the succinate accumulation	Arginine is metabolized by arginase-1. Glutamine fuels the TCA cycle and the hexosamine pathway

### 3 Dendritic Cell Subsets

Dendritic cells (DC) are leukocytes equipped with a wide diversity of pattern recognition receptors (PRRs), specialized in antigen uptake, processing and presentation to naïve T lymphocytes, acting as sentinels in peripheral tissues. These cells have a key role in coordinating both innate and adaptive immune responses. In the presence of microbial products or danger signals, DC rapidly mature, increase the expression of major histocompatibility complex (MHC) molecules as well as co-stimulatory molecules and migrate via afferent lymphatic vessels to the proximal draining lymph node. These mature dendritic cells migrate to lymph node paracortex in order to expose antigenic peptides into MHC molecules that will trigger proper naïve T lymphocytes response [75]. Additionally, under steady-state conditions, tolerogenic DC contribute to homeostasis by sampling self-antigens and promoting regulatory T-cells development [76]. Here, we will discuss the metabolic profile of different DC subsets as well as how intracellular metabolic reprogramming is crucial to determine DC maturation state and function, summarized in (Table 2).

**Table 2** Major metabolic pathways in dendritic cell subsets

Metabolic pathway	DC subset	Function
Glycogenolysis	TLR-activated GM-BMDC	To generate glucose-6-phosphate for initial glycolysis
Glycolysis	Mature GM-BMDC	To produce citrate and promote ER/Golgi membrane synthesis
PPP	Mature GM-BMDC	To generate NADPH and promote ER/Golgi membrane synthesis
Glycolysis	pDC	To support IFN- $\alpha$ production
FAO/OXPHOS	pDC	To generate ATP for DC activation
FAO/OXPHOS	Tol-DC	To induce IDO expression and to inhibit IL-12 and IL-6 production

### 3.1 *Bone-Marrow Dendritic Cells (BMDC) and Monocyte-Derived Dendritic Cells (MoDC)*

A widely used protocol to obtain and study DC in vitro consists of culturing murine bone-marrow cells or monocytes derived from peripheral blood with Granulocyte Macrophage Colony-Stimulating Factor (GM-CSF) [77]. The metabolic state of resting DCs is largely dependent on active OXPHOS and FAO [78]. When stimulated with TLR agonists, GM-CSF derived BMDC undergo rapid activation, becoming mature BMDC. After TLR activation with LPS, BMDC rapidly activate glycolysis and associated pathways, such as the PPP, which do not provide a rapid ATP source, but generates citrate and NADPH, thus supporting synthesis of fatty-acids involved in the expansion of the endoplasmic reticulum and Golgi apparatus. Also, BMDC initial switch to glycolysis after TLR stimulation seems to be important for the production and secretion of proteins related to BMDC maturation, such as secretion of IL-12 and the surface expression of MHC class II, CD86 and CCR7 molecules [33]. Although mTOR is a key regulator of anabolic and glycolytic functions [79], the early TLR-induced increase in glycolysis is independent of mTOR and reliant on signaling through TBK1 and IKK $\epsilon$ , a downstream cascade involved in TLR activation, leading to PI3K-independent AKT phosphorylation and glycolytic enzyme HK-II association with the mitochondria [33].

As potential carbon sources to fuel TCA cycle and support cell activation, BMDC rely on glucose uptake from extracellular environment, intracellular glycogen reserves or glutamine metabolism [33]. Nevertheless, glutaminolysis inhibition did not have an impact on early BMDC maturation following TLR stimulation, which suggests that this pathway is not involved in the early steps of TLR activation [33]. Moreover, glucose is captured from the extracellular milieu through GLUT1 transporter [80]. However, in BMDC, TLR-mediated glycolytic reprogramming takes place hours before GLUT1 upregulation occurs, which suggests that during TLR activation, BMDC rely on glycogen reserves to fuel TCA cycle and support early glycolytic metabolism driving BMDC maturation [81].

DC must be able to migrate towards the paracortical region of the draining lymph node to activate naïve T cells. The migration ability of BMDC occurs due to upregulation and oligomerization of chemokine receptor CCR7, the receptor for the chemokines CCL21 and CCL19 produced in the paracortical zone of lymph nodes [82]. In this manner, glycolysis seems to be essential for CCR7 surface expression and for BMDC and splenic CD11c<sup>+</sup> cDC migratory capability and motility [83].

Regarding the metabolic requirements to sustain DC maturation, LPS stimulation leads to a decrease in mitochondrial oxygen consumption and OXPHOS within 5 h after BMDC activation. This loss in mitochondrial activity coincided with BMDC upregulation of the inducible iNOS expression and NO production, which, as previously mentioned, is a potent inhibitor of the ETC components [84, 85]. In this scenario, BMDCs producing NO must commit to glycolysis to sustain ATP production and cell survival in long-term activation [85]. As previously mentioned, the production of NO is also important for HIF-1 $\alpha$  stabilization and, considering that HIF-1 $\alpha$  is crucial for the expression of genes encoding glycolytic enzymes, the axis iNOS-NO-HIF-1 $\alpha$  represents a positive feedback for glycolysis maintenance [86].

The mitochondrial protein p32 is important to maintain OXPHOS and FAO in resting immature BMDC. Interestingly, deficiency of p32, which results in mitochondrial dysfunction through lack of respiratory chain proteins, leads to reduced BMDC maturation by impaired pyruvate conversion to citrate. Mechanistically, p32 regulates pyruvate dehydrogenase activity. This indicates that mitochondria is actively involved in regulating BMDC maturation [87].

Fc receptors can also induce activation and cytokine production by human MoDC. In particular, Fc gamma receptors (Fc $\gamma$ Rs), which are receptors for the Fc region of immunoglobulin G (IgG) can synergize with TLR to potentiate DC activation. The Fc $\gamma$ R-TLR cross-talk results in transcription factor interferon regulatory factor 5 (IRF5) activation, which boosts the production of pro-inflammatory cytokines by enhancing glycolytic reprogramming in MoDCs, as evidenced by an increase in rates of extracellular acidification (ECAR) and lactate production. This is not only important for DC response and activation to opsonized microorganisms, but also unveils therapeutic targets to attenuate chronic inflammation and for diseases mediated by autoantibody immunocomplexes, such as systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) and rheumatoid arthritis (RA) [88].

Extracellular levels of metabolites and cytokines can also synergize with danger signals received through PRRs to regulate DC function. The Krebs cycle metabolite succinate can act through G protein-coupled receptor GPR91 expressed on immature human-MoDC, which can synergize with TLR activation to potentiate TNF secretion and T cell response mediated by DC activation [89]. Type I IFN are potent anti-viral cytokines and can also play an important role in cDC maturation. Type I IFN signaling through IFNAR stimulation together with TLR agonists induces HIF-1 $\alpha$  expression, which guides metabolic transition from OXPHOS to glycolysis [90]. However, contrary to a proinflammatory environment, the presence of the anti-inflammatory cytokine IL-10 leads to AMPK activation, which inhibits BMDC glycolysis and prevents cell maturation [78]. This demonstrates that DC metabolic

reprogramming can also be modulated by environmental cues such as cytokines and metabolites.

Intracellular metabolism pathways are tightly regulated by nutrient/energy sensing molecules that dictates whether anabolic or catabolic metabolism is required. Anabolic metabolism is regulated by mTOR, downstream of PI3K/Akt signaling. In prolonged DC interactions, mTOR seems to play a key role in committing DC to glycolysis and favoring immunogenic DC functions, since rapamycin-mediated mTORC1 inhibition led to impairment of DC activation and enhancement of Tregs cells development [91]. However, long-term activation of mTOR appears to have a negative effect in DC expression of maturation markers, cytokine production and function [92]. mTOR activation can be tightly regulated by the adipokine leptin secreted by adipose tissue and, in turn, mTOR also regulates leptin signaling [93]. Mature BMDC generated from leptin deficient mice expressed lower levels of co-stimulatory molecules and produced less pro-inflammatory cytokines. In this manner, leptin seems to be a crucial contributor during DC maturation, thus linking nutritional status and environmental metabolic cues as considerable influencers of DC metabolism and function [94].

mTOR is also a key regulator of HIF-1 $\alpha$  activation which, in turn, is involved in the upregulation of several glycolytic genes and tightly involved with DC activation and proinflammatory functions. Inhibition or loss of HIF-1 $\alpha$  impairs co-stimulatory molecule expression and proinflammatory cytokine production by preventing upregulation of glycolytic genes and glycolysis [95]. However, similar to mTOR, long term activation of HIF-1 $\alpha$  is also detrimental for BMDC prolonged expression of co-stimulatory molecules and ability to induce CD8 T-cell responses [86].

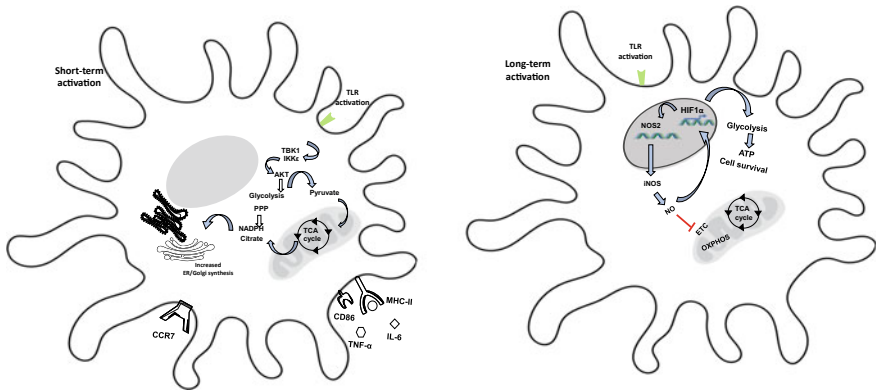
In contrast to mTOR, AMPK is an important regulator of fatty acid and mitochondria metabolism, upregulating factors involving in OXPHOS and FAO and inhibiting anabolic pathways. Thus, AMPK is suggested to control tolerogenicity of DC, since Dexamethasone/vitamin D3-induced human Tol-moDC upregulated AMPK activity and signaling. Moreover, GM-DC that lack AMPK augmented their proinflammatory phenotype and function when stimulated with LPS [96] (Fig. 3).

### 3.2 *Plasmacytoid Dendritic Cells (pDC)*

Plasmacytoid dendritic cells (pDC) are crucial to antiviral immunity, as they preferentially express PRR related to virus recognition, such as TLR7 and TLR9, which senses viral single-stranded RNA and unmethylated CpG-rich DNA, respectively [97]. When activated, mouse splenic pDC are able to produce massive amounts of type I IFN, which depends mostly on PI(3)K-mTOR induction of IRF7 phosphorylation and nuclear localization [98].

The glycolytic pathway seems to be important for pDC function in volunteers vaccinated with live attenuated influenza vaccine, which promotes increased glycolytic rates in primary human pDCs. Viral exposure enhances HIF-1 $\alpha$  activation and upregulation of several key glycolytic genes, while OXPHOS pathway genes





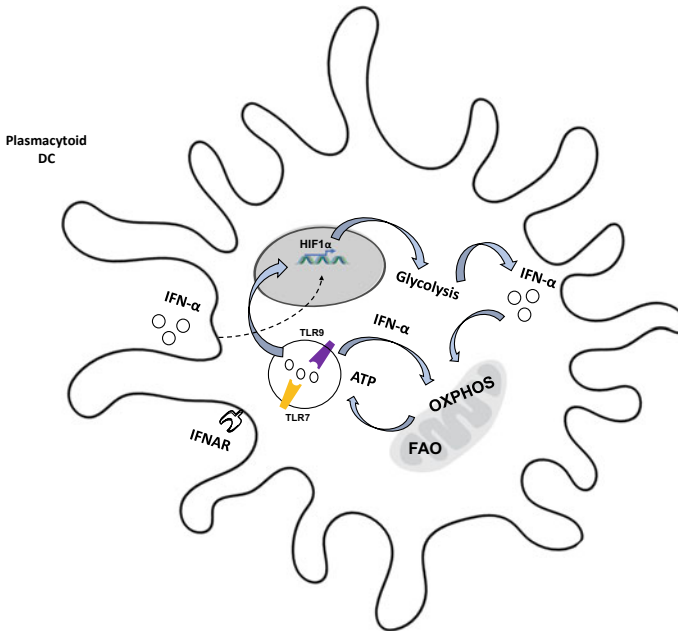
**Fig. 3 Dendritic cell depends on glycolysis to mature and survive.** Shortly after TLR stimulation, downstream signaling through TBK1 and IKKε leads to AKT phosphorylation and glycolysis/PPP activation. Pyruvate feeds the TCA cycle to generate citrate which, together with NADPH, contributes to increased ER/Golgi synthesis to support DC upregulation of maturation markers and cytokine production. Long-term activated NO-producing DC are strictly dependent on glycolysis for ATP production and survival due to NO inhibition of the electron transport chain (ETC) components and OXPHOS. NO also stabilizes HIF-1α activation, which contributes to iNOS expression and glycolysis maintenance. TLR = Toll-like receptor; PPP = Pentose Phosphate pathway; TCA = tricarboxylic acid cycle; ER = endoplasmic reticulum; NO = Nitric oxide

remains unmodulated [99]. In this manner, glycolysis is not only important for pDC upregulation of maturation markers but also for IFN-α secretion, promoting antiviral immunity. As pDCs are considered to be the main producers of type I IFN in SLE, strategies to modulate metabolic pathways in pDC could represent therapeutic targets to improve anti-virus response or even to limit type I IFN-mediated diseases such as SLE [100].

Concomitant, FAO and OXPHOS also seem to have a role in supporting the activation of pDCs sorted from FLT3-L bone marrow cultures. TLR9 agonist leads to upregulation of FAO and OXPHOS pathways, without enhancing glycolysis. The modulation of such pathways was a result from the type I IFN production, which was able to act in an autocrine/paracrine manner to increase FAO and OXPHOS and generate sufficient ATP to support anabolic demands of pDC activation [101] (Fig. 4).

### 3.3 Tolerogenic DC

While danger signal and microbial products drive DC maturation, tolerogenic signals or the uptake of self-antigens in the absence of a proinflammatory microenvironment impairs DC maturation. These tolerogenic DC (Tol-DC) are characterized by lower expression of co-stimulatory molecules, impaired ability to produce IL-12 while still



**Fig. 4 Plasmacytoid DC depends on glycolysis for type I IFN production.** Viral exposure leads to HIF-1 $\alpha$  activation and upregulation of several key glycolytic genes, which are important for IFN- $\alpha$  secretion and DC maturation. TLR9 stimulation also upregulates FAO and OXPHOS pathways through type I IFN production, contributing for ATP generation to support DC activation. IFN- $\alpha$  signaling through its receptor also induces HIF-1 $\alpha$  expression

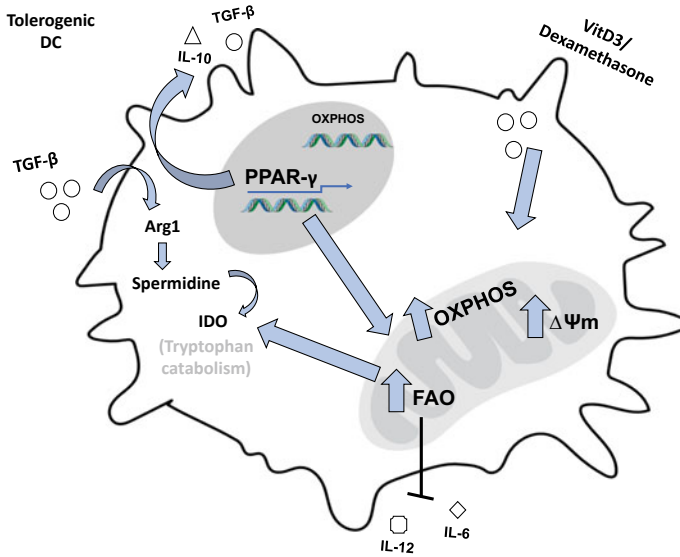
able to produce IL-10, TGF- $\beta$  and express IDO, which contributes to regulatory T cell (Treg) development, thereby promoting peripheral tolerance and maintenance of immune homeostasis [102].

As opposing to the metabolic state of immunogenic DC, the knowledge concerning the metabolism of Tol-DC is rather limited and controversial and comes from the observation of human moDC cultures treated with vitamin D3 (VitD3) and/or dexamethasone (Dex). Dex/vitD3-induced human Tol-moDC have a higher expression of OXPHOS-related genes as well as higher mitochondrial activity and maximal respiratory capacity, compared to LPS-activated MoDC. These Tol-moDC have also increased FAO, which is important to maintain tolerogenic DC function on downregulating activation of allogeneic CD4 T cells [103]. Unexpectedly, these Tol-moDC also show higher glycolytic reserve than LPS-matured moDC, suggesting that tolerogenic moDC maintain their glycolytic machinery and, under OXPHOS restriction, the cells display metabolic plasticity to produce ATP and adapt [103]. Surprisingly, it was also demonstrated that vitamin D3-induced human Tol-moDC

rely on PI3K/Akt/mTOR pathway for the induction and maintenance of their tolerogenic phenotype. In this manner, glycolysis is important for maintaining downregulation of co-stimulatory molecules expression, IL-12 production and inhibition of DC ability to induce CD4 T cell proliferation [104].

The catabolism of essential amino acids also represents a key regulator of tolerance and inflammation. Arginine is metabolized by iNOS under inflammatory conditions, but it can also be alternatively metabolized by arginase 1 (Arg1). Indeed, in response to TGF-β, Arg1 metabolites can induce IDO expression on DC and the catabolism of tryptophan, conferring immunosuppressive effects on DC [105].

The tumor suppressor liver kinase B1 (LKB1) is a key upstream activator of AMPK, which inhibits mTOR and activates catabolic mitochondrial metabolism. LKB1 is able to maintain DCs in a quiescent state by stimulating mitochondrial oxidative metabolism and reducing aerobic glycolysis [106] (Fig. 5).



**Fig. 5 Tolerogenic DC relies mostly on OXPHOS and FAO metabolism.** Tolerogenic signals such as TGF-β and dexamethasone induce PPAR-γ activation and upregulation of genes involved in OXPHOS and FAO, together with an increase in ΔΨm. FAO inhibits IL-12 and IL-6 production. PPAR-γ contributes to IL-10 and TGF-β release. TGF-β upregulates Arg1 expression, which metabolizes arginine to spermidine to induce IDO expression. FAO also contributes to IDO upregulation and tryptophan catabolism. OXPHOS = Oxidative phosphorylation; PPAR-γ = Peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor gamma; VitD3 = Vitamin D3; Arg1 = Arginase 1; IDO = 2,3-dioxygenase; Ψm—mitochondrial membrane potential; FAO = Fatty-acid oxidation

## 4 Neutrophils

Neutrophils are essential to the process of inflammation and host defense, as they rapidly migrate to the injury or infection sites. During the infection, these inflammatory cells phagocytose and kill the microorganism through different mechanisms that include the release of ROS, proteases and the formation of neutrophil extracellular traps (NET). Unlike macrophage and DC, these phagocytes are short-lived and, within a few hours or days after activation, they undergo cell death. Here, we will address the metabolic profile of activated and aged apoptotic neutrophils as well as the metabolic requirements to perform neutrophil functions.

As neutrophils represent the most abundant leukocyte in blood circulation, these cells have an advantage to arrive first at the injured tissue. Neutrophils must undergo asymmetric changes in cell morphology to migrate in response to chemoattractants in a process termed chemotaxis. Neutrophils are suggested to have fewer mitochondria than any other cell in the immune system, but a growing body of evidence has lightened the role of this organelle in several neutrophil functions. Mitochondria seems to play a pivotal role in mediating neutrophil chemotaxis, as mitochondrial calcium uptake supplies cellular energy demand by enhancing mitochondrial fission, thus providing mitochondrial access in energy-demanding areas, and F-actin accumulation, resulting in cell motility [107]. The chemotactic stimuli triggers mTOR activation, which is responsible for activating mitochondrial calcium uptake and ATP production, favoring neutrophil polarization and chemotaxis. Thus, mitochondria play an important role in host defense by controlling neutrophil chemotaxis to sites of infection and injury [108].

In the site of inflammation, neutrophils phagocytose and kill microorganisms through oxidative and non-oxidative mechanisms, such as degranulation, oxidant production or NET release, which can trap and kill some microorganisms by exposing them to high concentrations of microbicidal factors. NET are composed of DNA, histones and microbicidal peptides and mostly dependent on ROS production to be formed. Neutrophils activation is followed by NET formation and release, resulting in the so-called NETosis, which is a cell death program distinct from apoptosis and necrosis.

NET generation depends on glucose uptake by GLUT1, which expression is enhanced after neutrophil activation. In fact, the energy required for NET formation is mostly derived from glycolysis than mitochondria [109]. However, mitochondrial can also play a key role on NETosis. The NADPH-ROS axis is classically described to regulate NETosis, but there is also a mechanism independent of NADPH which relies on mitochondrial ROS generation, activated by exacerbated increase in intracellular calcium concentrations [110].

Phagocytosis and oxidative burst are also major functions of neutrophils. Mitochondrial ATP production is important for initial cell activation, but neutrophils then switch to glycolysis as the main source of ATP to sustains calcium influx to maintain neutrophil oxidative burst and degranulation [111].

Metabolic profiles of different cellular states of neutrophils showed that, in comparison to LPS-activated cells or unstimulated cells, neutrophils going into spontaneous apoptosis have decreased levels of taurine, which serves as antioxidant and also have a positive effect on neutrophil phagocytosis and killing capacity [112]. However, increased levels of  $\text{NAD}^+$  are also observed upon apoptosis with decreased levels of ATP, which might represent an enhanced energy demand or decreased energy production during apoptosis [113]. Also, apoptotic neutrophils were observed to lose their mitochondrial membrane potential before phosphatidylserine surface exposure and changes in cell morphology [114]. In fact, mitochondria do play a role in initiating neutrophil cell death, as these organelles are loaded with proapoptotic proteins, which, upon induction of apoptosis, are released into the cytosol and activate intrinsic death pathway mediated by caspase-9 activation [115] (Fig. 6).

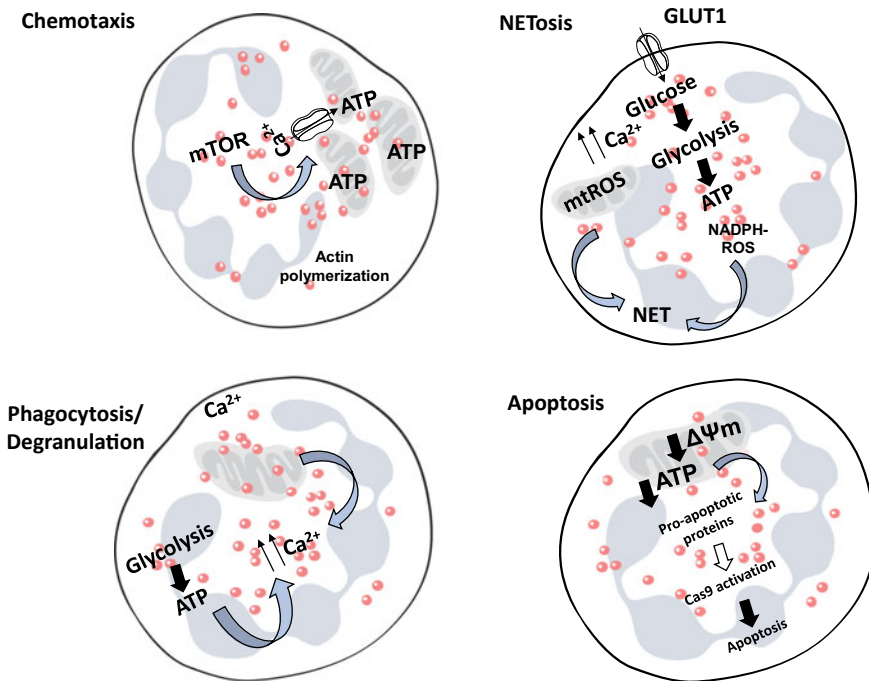
## 5 Other Granulocytes

Eosinophils are innate immune cells that play an important role against parasites but also promote allergic inflammation [116]. The release of granule proteins, cytokines, chemokines and leukotrienes accomplish a pro-inflammatory role of eosinophils [117]. Eosinophil activation and differentiation are dictated by IL-5, which also function as anti-apoptotic signal [118].

Eosinophils have bioenergetic differences compared to neutrophils, starting by the number of mitochondria present in these cells [115, 119]. Therefore, eosinophils consume more oxygen compared to neutrophils [120]. Eosinophils use glucose oxidation to fuel the TCA cycle. Human eosinophils do not require glutamine and, different from neutrophils, the activation of human eosinophils increases the respiratory capacity of these cells [120]. Therefore, it is suggested that eosinophils might contribute to local hypoxia [121]. During restricted oxygen availability, eosinophils shift to glycolysis which allow them to operate in an inflammatory environment [120]. Therefore, eosinophils are metabolically more flexible than neutrophils and can adapt faster to altered energy conditions. This metabolic profile allows eosinophil to participate in immune homeostasis besides their effect as cytotoxic cell [120] (Fig. 7).

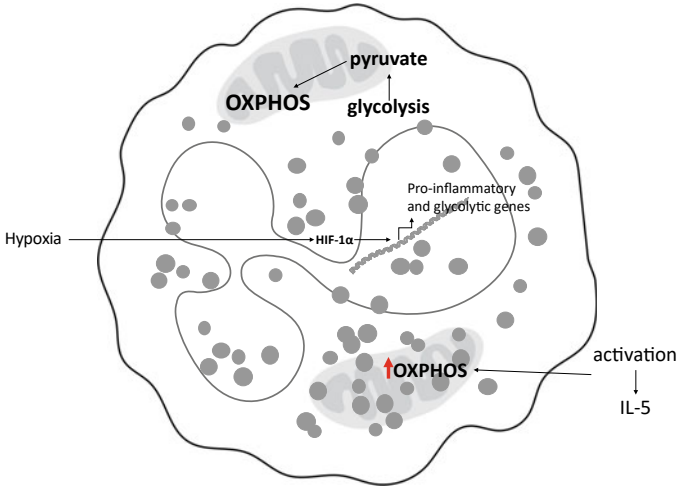
Mast cells are tissue resident myeloid cells that reside in both mucosal and connective tissue and induce inflammatory responses upon surface IgE ligands. These cells are important to perform effector functions in type 2 immunity [122] and are critical for immunity against parasites and venoms; however, they are also involved in the pathology of allergic and atopic diseases [123]. Mast cell response is multiphasic, that is, includes an early release of granules which contain prepackage histamine and  $\text{TNF-}\alpha$ , and a later phase that includes de novo formation of lipid mediators and production of multiple cytokines, chemokines and other effector molecules [124].

Mast cells use the metabolic pathways to modulate and amplify cellular immune responses and also use metabolic reprogramming to perform their effector functions. Activation of mast cells through  $\text{Fc}\epsilon\text{R}$  results in a rapidly induction of glycolysis



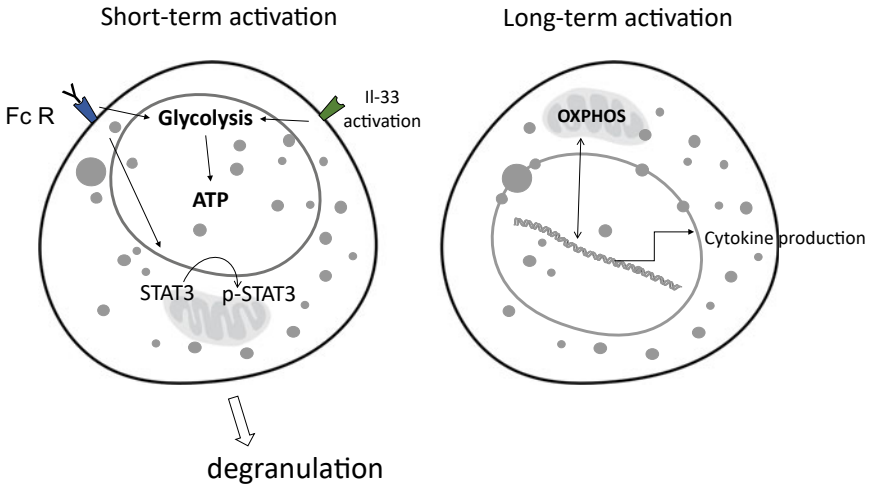
**Fig. 6 Metabolism dictates several neutrophil functions. Chemotaxis.** mTOR induced by chemotactic stimuli leads to mitochondrial calcium uptake, which enhances mitochondrial fission and ATP production to support actin polymerization and neutrophil chemotaxis. **NETosis.** The NADPH-ROS dependent NETosis is also guided by changes in metabolism, as neutrophil enhances glucose uptake by GLUT1 and glycolysis to generate ATP. The increase in intracellular calcium concentration also leads to mitochondrial ROS generation, favouring NETosis in the absence of NADPH. **Phagocytosis and degranulation.** Initial neutrophil activation depends on mitochondrial ATP production. However, glycolysis is the main source of ATP for calcium influx that supports neutrophil function. **Apoptosis.** Neutrophil apoptosis is followed by a decrease in  $\Delta\Psi_m$  and ATP production. Mitochondrial also releases pro-apoptotic proteins that activate intrinsic death pathway mediated by caspase-9 (cas9) activation

[124]. And lactate inhibits LPS-induced mast cell function by limiting glycolysis and ATP availability [125]. Besides classical activation through Fc $\epsilon$ R, mast cells function can be regulated by IL-33, a crucial cytokine in allergy and inflammation [126]. Activation with IL-33 increases glycolysis as well provides ATP and ROS for receptor signaling, cytokine production, and effector functions [127]. Direct glycolytic inhibition is sufficient to reduce cytokine production. Although OXPHOS is not required to the initial activation, it is important for mast cells cytokine production, since OXPHOS inhibition drastically decreases this effector function [124]. Similarly, mast cell mitochondria translocate to the site of exocytosis during degranulation and the phosphorylation of mitochondrial STAT3 is responsible for the induction of degranulation, OXPHOS and ATP synthesis [128]. Few mast cells are found in the



**Fig. 7 Eosinophil metabolism.** Eosinophils use glucose oxidation to fuel the TCA cycle and OXPHOS. During hypoxia, eosinophils shift to glycolysis which allow them to operate in an inflammatory environment. By contrast, activation of eosinophils increases the respiratory capacity of these cells

adipose tissue of healthy mice and this number increases in adipose tissue inflammation; however, these cells do not contribute to obesity-related metabolic dysregulation [129] (Fig. 8).



**Fig. 8 Mast cell metabolism.** Shortly after activation, mast cells upregulate glycolysis, for rapid ATP production. Phosphorylation of mitochondrial STAT3 is responsible for the induction of degranulation, ATP synthesis and OXPHOS. OXPHOS induction is important to support cytokine production in long-term activated mast cells

## 6 Innate Lymphoid Cells

As tissue-resident cells, innate lymphoid cells (ILC) correspond to T lymphocytes of the innate immune response, only they do not express classical rearranged and diversified antigen receptors like T cells and B cells. Based on their transcriptional factors and cytokine signatures, ILC were divided into 3 groups. Group ILC1s, ILC2s, and ILC3s are the innate counterparts of CD4 T helper (Th)1, Th2, and Th17 cells, respectively. The investigation of ILC metabolic requirements for preserving homeostasis and host defense is rather recent and limited and is summarized in Table 3.

### 6.1 Group 1—Innate Lymphoid Cells (ILC)-Intrinsic Metabolism

Natural killer (NK) cells, part of an ILC family, are important effector lymphocytes that are characterized for their antiviral and anticancer activities [130]. The innate cytokines that activate NK cells are IL-12, IL-15, and IL-18. They are responsible to direct cytotoxicity of target cells and are potent producers of IFN- $\gamma$  [131].

Cell-surface markers expression of CD11b and CD27 defines cell maturation in murine NK cells. To facilitate the metabolic demands of proliferation and differentiation, immature NK cells have higher uptake of glucose, higher expression of transferrin receptor and L-amino acid transporter [132]. By contrast, in mature NK cells, FAO and aerobic metabolism metabolic pathways are upregulated, while pathways associated with cell growth are downregulated [133].

Short-term activation of NK cells leads to modest changes in metabolic pathway of these cells, suggesting that, initially, NK cells are prepared to perform their effector functions without considerable metabolic changes [134]. However, the main function of NK cells is at long periods of time past the initial stimulus. Thus, when NK cells are stimulated over extended periods of time, changes in NK cell metabolism are apparent. 3–5 days activation of NK cells with IL-15 upregulates both glycolysis and OXPHOS, which a preferential increase in glycolysis. Inhibition of glycolysis leads to a decrease in NK cell effector function [134]. Despite glycolysis and OXPHOS, the role of other metabolic pathways, as FAO and glutaminolysis, is quite unexplored [134].

**Table 3** Major metabolic pathways in innate lymphoid cells subsets

ILC subset	Main metabolic pathways
Immature NK cells	Glycolysis and amino acid metabolism
Mature NK cells	FAO and aerobic metabolism
ILC2	Arginine metabolism and FAO
ILC3	Carbohydrate metabolism and glycolysis



Also, murine NK cells development and maturation has been shown to importantly rely on mTORC1. In mature NK cells, mTORC1 activity is highly upregulated in response to IL-15 or IL-2 and it is required to improved glycolysis [133]. Besides mTORC1, the transcription factor cMyc is crucial for murine NK cell metabolic and functional responses. cMyc protein levels are upregulated by amino acids: cMyc expression is rapidly lost when L-amino acid transport is blocked or when glutamine is withdrawn [135].

In human NK cells, the expression of the cell-surface marker CD56 defines cell maturation. mTORC1 is also a key regulator of metabolic responses and IL-2 can induce mTORC1 activity [136]. However, the exact role for mTORC1 in human NK cells requires more studies because it has been shown that mTORC1 is not required for IL-12/IL-15-induced metabolic responses [137].

## 6.2 Group 2—ILC-Intrinsic Metabolism

Representing a primary source of tissue IL-5, IL-9 and IL-13, ILC2 are important for mucosal barrier immunity against allergic and nonallergic threats [138]. Upon type 2 inflammation, activated ILC2 augments mitochondrial respiration together with aerobic glycolysis and accumulate in the tissue in response to IL-33 [139]. Amino acid metabolism seems to be crucial in regulating ILC2. In the lung, under resting conditions, ILC2 constitutively express Arg1 in a STAT6-independent manner [140]. Arg1 metabolizes the amino acid L-arginine to generate metabolites to sustain cell proliferation, amongst other functions. The role of Arg1 in ILC2 proliferative capacity, though, remains contradictory. Deletion of arginase-1 did not impact lung ILC2 proliferation or cytokine production during helminth infection [140]. However, an alternative strategy to delete Arg1 in ILC2 demonstrated that Arg1 deficiency reduces ILC2 optimal proliferation and cytokine production, impairing type 2 inflammation in lungs [139]. This suggests that, upon activation, ILC2 requires Arg1 expression to activate L-arginine catabolism and conversion into polyamines that support glycolysis required for cell growth, proliferation and cytokine production [139]. The differences in strategies to delete Arg1 in ILC2 might explain the opposing effects regarding Arg1 role in ILC2 proliferation and function.

VHL deficiency (which results in the accumulation of HIF-1 $\alpha$ ) impaired ILC2 development and accumulation/activation in the lung as well as attenuated the expression of the IL-33 receptor [141]. This deficiency also resulted in increased glycolysis with reduced mitochondrial respiration. Thus, VHL play a key part in regulating ILC2 activation and function through regulation of HIF-1 $\alpha$  dependent commitment to glycolysis [141].

A gene expression analysis of ILCs revealed that ILC2 expressed several genes related to lipid metabolism. In addition to maintaining mucosal immunity, ILC2 reside in visceral adipose tissue, where they can also regulate adipose tissue homeostasis [142]. Under homeostatic conditions, intestinal ILC2 capture fatty acids (FA) over glucose from the environment. Following a helminth infection, FAO blockage or inhibition of FA intestinal absorption prevented ILC2 accumulation and cytokine production, suggesting that uptake of FA and FAO are important for ILC2 activation in the context of intestinal helminth infection [143].

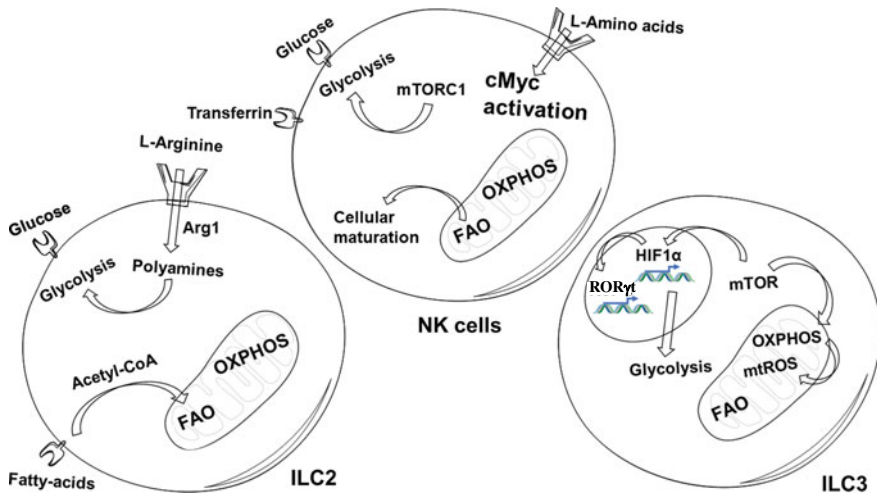
### 6.3 Group 3 ILC-Intrinsic Metabolism

Group 3 ILC are important in host defense against extracellular bacteria and fungi, as well as in the tolerance to microbiota. They can produce large amounts of IL-22, thus maintaining intestinal homeostasis. Little is known about ILC3 metabolism. Like ILC2, ILC3 cells can also capture extracellular FA [143] and, although Arg1 is also expressed on ILC3, they do not depend on Arg1 to develop and perform cellular function in the steady state or in the context of intestinal inflammation [139].

Transcriptional profiling of ILC residing in the small intestinal lamina propria revealed that ILC3 expressed a gene signature related to carbohydrate metabolism, such as fructose, mannose, and galactose metabolism in addition to glycolysis, [144], which is also a feature of effector T lymphocytes [145].

Additionally, the mTOR-HIF-1 $\alpha$  axis is important for preserving cytokine production and cell proliferation, as pharmacological inhibition or mTORC1 deletion compromises ILC3-mediated host defense against *C. rodentium* infection. Mechanistically, mTOR induces HIF-1 $\alpha$  which, in turn, favors glycolysis, ILC3 activation and Ror $\gamma$ t expression [146].

Interestingly, despite HIF-1 $\alpha$  role in decreasing mitochondrial oxidative metabolism in Th17 cells, this is not the case for ILC3. mTORC1 seems to activate mitochondrial metabolism, evidenced by increased cell oxygen consumption and mitochondrial ROS production which, in turn, supports HIF-1 $\alpha$  activity and ILC3 functions. Moreover, ILC3 do not solely depends on glycolysis, as etomoxir treatment blunted IL-17A and IL-22 production, thus ILC3 are also capable to use lipids as fuel [146] (Fig. 9).



**Fig. 9 Metabolic programs active in innate lymphoid cells.** NK cells rely mostly on glycolysis and OXPHOS for activation and cytokine production, being FAO important for cellular maturation. mTORC1 is important for maintenance of glycolysis in these cells. NK cells also have enhanced expression of transferrin and L-amino acids receptors. cMyc is crucial for functional responses of NK cells. ILC2 cells depend largely on Arg1 conversion of L-arginine into polyamines to support glycolysis, cell proliferation and cytokine production. Moreover, ILC2 residing in visceral adipose tissues are able to capture fatty acids from the environment, thus upregulating lipid metabolism and FAO to sustain ILC2 regulation of adipose tissue homeostasis. ILC3 cells depend on carbohydrate metabolism and mTOR induction of HIF-1 $\alpha$  to upregulate glycolysis and support Ror $\gamma$ t expression. mTOR also upregulates OXPHOS and mtROS production to regulate HIF-1 $\alpha$  expression and ILC3 cytokine production

## References

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# Metabolic Profile of Adaptive Immune Cells



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## 1 Introduction

Metabolism is the core process for biological systems required for energy provision and for macromolecules synthesis. The influence of metabolism in the immune system has been recognized for the last century, as malnutrition led to increase susceptibility to infection or obesity is associated with autoimmunity. The immune system has a wide repertoire of cells with specific functions and demands. Each cell type or even the same cell at different states have distinct anabolic and catabolic demands that can be fulfilled by processing specific substrates. Different studies have showed that cellular metabolism plays an important role on the fate and function of the immune cells. Thus, modulating the immune response by controlling the metabolism of the immune cells have immense therapeutics applications for inflammatory and autoimmune diseases, cancer, infection diseases and even age-related disorders [26, 31, 38, 68, 83, 88].

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Innate and adaptive branches of the immune system can be modulated by metabolism. The adaptive immunity provides the immune system with the capacity to recognize specific pathogens and other structures, generating specific immunity and memory. Adaptive immune responses are mediated by two specific compartments of the lymphoid lineage, T and B lymphocytes, which display different functional properties depending on their development and differentiation.

Adaptive immune responses require a balance between development, maintenance and tuning mediated by different profiles of effector, regulatory and memory T cells and the maturation of B cells. Each cell subset presents a distinct metabolic program depending on their activation level, and nutrient adaptations or metabolic reprogramming are closely related to the acquisition or repression of different effector or regulation functions. Metabolites derived from these metabolic conditions determine the final activation state and function of the immune cells.

Cell metabolism depends on uptake, processing and use of different nutrients, mainly glucose, amino acids, and fatty acids (FA) and some of their sub products. The availability of the different nutrients depends on the tissue composition or transient conditions of the microenvironment, suggesting that the regulation of nutrient availability through competitive uptake is an important regulation point in the control of metabolism [56]. In addition, some factors like microbiota and organs as liver, pancreas and intestine can regulate the nutrients or metabolites availability, having a final effect on the immune response [95]. The main metabolic pathways related to the behavior of immune cells are glycolysis, tricarboxylic acid (TCA) cycle, fatty acid oxidation (FAO), fatty acid synthesis (FAS), pentose phosphate pathway (PPP), and amino acid synthesis [82, 89]. Other associated pathways have been showed as immune response modulators, mainly those related to the biosynthesis of polyamines, cholesterol, hexosamines, and nucleotides [94, 95].

Lymphoid cells predominate in a naïve state with a quiescent metabolism that mainly depends on OXPHOS to obtain ATP. When an antigen is recognized, lymphocytes switch their metabolic program to fulfil higher energetic demand. Therefore, a metabolic reprogramming with enhanced glycolytic rate is needed to ensure rapid growth, proliferation and differentiation [118]. Once the pathogenic agent has been eliminated, immune cells switch once more their metabolism towards OXPHOS, acquiring a pro-resolving phenotype [105]. In this chapter, we discuss metabolic modulation of the adaptive immune response and summarize the metabolic changes that define adaptive immune cells functions and the molecular drivers of that metabolic shift.

## 2 Cellular Metabolism in T Cells

T cells are one of the main elements of the adaptive immunity and are comprised by two main subsets with diverse phenotypical plasticity and function, the CD4 and CD8 T cells. Upon antigen recognition, T cells experience substantial modifications in their metabolism, a process called “metabolic reprogramming”, to ensure energy

availability for clonal expansion and production of effector molecules [78]. Here, we will review the metabolic profile of T cells from their generation in the thymus, followed by their activation, differentiation and finally their exhaustion.

## ***2.1 T Cell Metabolism During Ontogeny and Activation***

T cells precursors are generated in the bone marrow and migrate to the thymus, to complete their development and functional selection. Early thymocyte development in the thymus is coordinated by two main extracellular signals, Notch1 and IL-7 [99]. Notch1 signaling stimulates glucose and glutamine metabolism and mediate catalytic reactions important for self-renewal of TCR- $\beta$ -selected progenitors [54]. On the other side, IL-7 promotes the growth and survival of early thymocytes, likely through mTORC1 signaling activation, increasing glycolysis and oxygen consumption during early developmental stages [54, 125].

Once naïve T cells have been selected, they exit the thymus and circulate the periphery as metabolically quiescent cells that require minimal nutrient uptake and metabolic demands for survival. In this resting conditions, naïve immune cells rely preferentially on OXPHOS to fulfil their low energetic demands [44]. Upon activation, T cells increase their size and proliferation rate, and they need to adapt their metabolism. Despite glycolysis is much less effective than OXPHOS for ATP production, it is faster and is the preferred metabolism of highly proliferating cells like effector T cells.

Upon early T cell activation, TCR signaling activates mTORC1 which supports the expression of enzymes participating in glycolysis and glutaminolysis, shifting the cellular metabolism [51, 120, 126]. In addition to glycolysis and glutaminolysis, the PPP and the hexosamine pathway are also enhanced in T cells upon activation [105]. The metabolic reprogramming induced by mTORC1 exits T cell from quiescence and is essential for CD4 and CD8 T cell development, homeostasis, differentiation and function [19, 24, 80, 91, 92, 103, 126]. This metabolic switch is mediated by the activation of the transcription factors c-Myc and HIF-1 $\alpha$ . HIF-1 $\alpha$  enhances glycolysis and PPP, promoting ATP production and increasing biosynthetic capacity of the cell [30, 109]. One of the targets of HIF-1 $\alpha$  is Glut1, which is upregulated, increasing the glucose uptake. Glut1 deficiency prevents the increase of glucose uptake and glycolysis, decreasing effector T cells survival and differentiation [72].

In addition, HIF-1 $\alpha$  activates the pyruvate dehydrogenase kinase 1 (PDK1), an enzyme that avoids pyruvate entering the TCA cycle [39, 75], promoting the conversion of pyruvate to lactate and thus enhancing glycolysis [35, 40, 89].

On the other hand, c-Myc also contributes to increase the glycolytic rate [35, 72, 120]. Deletion of c-Myc blocks both glycolysis and glutaminolysis, impairing the activation and proliferation in culturing T cells [120].

Although T cells increase their glycolytic flux during activation, they also require functional mitochondrial to support their highly proliferation rate. Signals

coming from the mitochondria, such as reactive oxygen species (ROS) generated by mitochondrial complex III are required for optimal proliferation rate [108].

As mentioned, catabolism of glutamine (or glutaminolysis) is also an important metabolic pathway for T cell activation. Glutaminolysis products go through the TCA cycle for the de novo synthesis of lipids and fuels redox and epigenetic reactions. The glutaminase catalyzes the first reaction of glutaminolysis which is the transformation of glutamine into glutamate. Lack of glutaminase has been connected with reduced T cell activation and proliferation proving an important role of glutamine metabolism in T cell function [51].

Upon activation, T cells need amino acids metabolism to obtain specific intermediates that are essential for T cell function. Amino acids uptake is mediated by the L-type amino acid transporter 1 (LAT1), which is upregulated in human T cells upon CD3/CD28 stimulation. Functional disturbance of LAT1 in T cells affects the uptake of essential amino acids, activating the DNA damage-inducible transcript 3, a DNA-mediated stress response that inhibits NF- $\kappa$ B and NFAT signaling and reduces cytokine production [43]. The metabolism of serine and glycine seems to be indispensable for T cell activation since activated T cells upregulate enzymes of the serine and glycine metabolism. Serine is necessary for optimal T cell expansion even in glucose availability conditions. The metabolism of serine supplies the necessary glycine for de novo biosynthesis in proliferating T cells, indicating that serine is a crucial immunometabolite for T cells proliferative capacity [71]. Extracellular alanine is also needed for effective transit from quiescence to activation. Alanine deprivation impairs both metabolism and function of activated T cell, reducing IL-17, IFN- $\gamma$  and IL-6 secretion [97].

FA are crucial resources for cellular energy and for generation of complex lipids such as cholesterol and membrane phospholipids. Accordingly, the abundance of FA and the signaling by intracellular lipids play a key role in T cell development [3, 46, 81]. Initiation of de novo synthesis of FA is critical for proliferation and differentiation of activated effector T cells [67]. In addition, FA offer intermediates for the TCA cycle, important for CD8<sup>+</sup> T cell survival and clonal expansion [64].

## ***2.2 T Cell Metabolism During Functional Differentiation***

Upon stimulation, CD4<sup>+</sup> T lymphocytes can be differentiated into diverse effector T subpopulations, which are pro-inflammatory cells, or into regulatory T cells (Treg). The glucose metabolism is essential for Th1, Th2, and Th17 effector subsets differentiation. Consequently, the glycolysis initiation is a lineage-decisive event for the differentiation of these effector subpopulations, which display a strong bias towards glycolysis over mitochondrial metabolism [17, 95]. mTORC1 activation promotes polarization towards Th1 and Th17 subset and inhibits Treg differentiation [22, 61, 109]. Hence, inhibition of mTORC1 prevents Th1 polarization [25], and inhibition of mTORC2 avoids Th1 and Th2 differentiation [25, 65]. Although mTORC1 deficient CD4<sup>+</sup> T cells present impaired differentiation, they present some



memory-related attributes such as surface marker expression, lower metabolic rate and increased longevity [53]. In addition, the PI3K-Akt-mTORC1 axis influences activation, survival, and proliferation of CD4<sup>+</sup> T cells after stimulation. Suppression of this axis impairs Th17 polarization by inhibiting the translocation of ROR $\gamma$ t to the nucleus [61]. HIF-1 $\alpha$  increases glycolysis promoting the polarization of CD4<sup>+</sup> T cells to the Th17 subsets by direct activation of the transcription factor ROR $\gamma$ t, and simultaneously inhibits the differentiation of Tregs in vitro by direct repression of the transcription factor FoxP3 [10, 22, 109].

Regarding CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells, while mTORC1 influences effector responses, mTORC2 activity regulates the formation of memory cells, linking the cellular metabolism to the effector function and memory generation [91]. HIF-1 $\alpha$  is necessary for CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells cytolytic function and memory generation [35].

Evidence has shown that glutaminolysis is also relevant for CD4<sup>+</sup> T cell differentiation. Glutaminase deficiency impairs Th17 differentiation, suggesting an important role of glutaminolysis for Th17 subset [51]. In vivo stimulation of naïve CD4<sup>+</sup> T cells in conditions of glutamine restriction results in biased differentiation to functional Treg [60, 79]. Metabolites resulting from glutaminolysis can modulate the differentiation as well. The  $\alpha$ -ketoglutarate ( $\alpha$ KG) is a glutamine-derived metabolite that can be incorporated into the TCA cycle. Moreover,  $\alpha$ KG plays a role as a metabolic regulator of CD4<sup>+</sup> T cell differentiation by promoting Th1 polarization. Certainly,  $\alpha$ KG activates mTORC1 signaling and induces the expression of the Th1 transcription factor T-bet, suggesting that glutamine availability controls the equilibrium between the Th1 and Treg cells [60].

Some findings also indicate that certain lipids such as cholesterol and FA are crucial components of metabolic control specially in the functional differentiation of Th17 cells. Specific lipids can be metabolized into lipidic ligands of ROR $\gamma$ , controlling its transcriptional activity [7, 11, 23, 57].

### ***2.3 T Cell Metabolism During Migration***

mTORC1 and HIF-1 $\alpha$  have a decisive role in the migration of T cells. In addition to promote the expression of glucose transporters and glycolytic enzymes, the mTORC1/HIF-1 $\alpha$  axis rules the T cell trafficking by promoting chemokines production and adhesion receptors expression. The mTORC1/HIF-1 $\alpha$  axis stimulates the delivery of T cells to the blood by the inhibition of the adhesion molecule CD62L and chemokine receptor CCR7 [35, 77]. mTORC2 is also required for Tregs migration [59]. Interestingly, migratory signals may alter the T cell metabolism by enhancing glucokinase expression and causing rearrangements in the actin cytoskeleton in Tregs [58].

## 2.4 T Cell Metabolism in the Contraction Phase

When the inflammatory process is over, T cells acquire a pro-resolving phenotype to gradually get back to a homeostatic state. Tregs and memory T cells generation are the more important processes in the resolution phase. In contrast to effector T cells, Tregs and memory T cells rely on OXPHOS and FAO [15, 84]. Consequently, impairment of OXPHOS specifically in Tregs by deletion of mitochondrial complex III produces an autoimmune syndrome and premature death [37, 122]. Conversely, a closer look into Tregs shows a mixed metabolic signature involving OXPHOS, FAO but also glycolysis [95]. Strikingly, it seems that FA are de novo synthesized instead of up taken in memory T cells [84].

FA catabolism via  $\beta$ -oxidation is essential for the differentiation of memory T cells and Tregs [67, 117]. Furthermore, increasing FAO after stimulation boosts the development of memory T cells [90]. In addition, cytokines that triggers memory phenotype in T cells, for example IL-15, promotes expression of FAO enzymes and activates mitochondrial biogenesis [116], supporting that FAO is the principal source of energy of memory T cells. Although they rely on mitochondrial metabolism, memory T cells induce the glycolytic switch faster than naïve T cells [42, 117].

The generation of Tregs and memory T cells is mediated by Bcl-6, a transcription factor that antagonizes the c-Myc and HIF-1 $\alpha$  metabolic program and drives a pro-resolving metabolism. Once the damaging agent has been neutralized, the pro-inflammatory cytokine IL-2 is decreased. When IL-2 signal is low, Bcl-6 is activated and shuts down glycolysis in T cells [85]. AMPK and TRAF6 signaling pathways also contribute to maintain this distinguishing metabolic signature of Tregs and memory T cells biased towards OXPHOS and FAO [76, 90, 96]. AMPK activation mediates the increase in FAO and inhibits mTOR, causing a reduction of glucose uptake and glycolysis, favoring Tregs generation [25, 76].

Due to mTOR is needed for effector CD4<sup>+</sup> and CD8<sup>+</sup> activation, it has been postulated as negative regulator of Tregs. However, since Tregs present higher basal levels of mTORC1 activation, mTOR must drive transcriptional and metabolic programs in activated Tregs [93, 128]. Actually, specific deletion of mTOR in Tregs provokes an autoimmune disease and premature death due to excessive stimulation of effector T cells, suggesting mTOR is essential for Tregs [101, 128]. Recently, it has been shown that the contribution of mTOR to Tregs function is through the control of the mitochondrial metabolism since mitochondrial impairment in Tregs causes the same autoimmune disorder that mTOR deletion [16]. In this context, the interferon regulatory factor 4 (IRF4), which is activated by mTOR, is necessary for glycolytic and nucleotide metabolism upregulation during Treg activation since IRF4 promotes Tregs function and homeostasis [16, 66].

Like mTOR, c-Myc works as an important factor in Treg activation and expansion, even though it is a glycolytic factor. Specific deletion of c-Myc in Tregs triggers an autoimmune syndrome portrayed by uncontrolled effector CD4<sup>+</sup> and CD8<sup>+</sup> T cell

responses, proving that c-Myc is also necessary for Treg [124]. Surprisingly, c-Myc deficiency affects only the activation of the Tregs, but they present normal survival [102].

## 2.5 T Cell Metabolism During Exhaustion

Persistent stimulation conditions, like chronic viral infections or the tumor microenvironment, cause T cell exhaustion. These conditions induce the expression of inhibitory molecules which are programmed death (PD)-1, LAG-3, CTLA-4, and TIM-3 in T cells [74, 123, 127]. Exhausted T cells are not able to produce cytokines and to initiate an inflammatory response. The metabolism of exhausted T cells presents a significant suppression of glycolysis and OXPHOS and higher FAO. In addition, exhausted T cells show decreased glucose levels due to Glut1 downregulation and alterations in mitochondrial biogenesis [2, 104]. Inhibition of OXPHOS in activated T cells is linked to T cell exhaustion. Control of mitochondrial oxidative stress during chronic T cell stimulation permitted sustained T cell proliferation and induced genes associated with stem-like progenitor T cells [119].

It has been described that PD-1 could be a metabolic regulator of exhausted T cells. PD-1 levels have been associated with some important transcription factors like T-bet, a repressor of PD-1 [55]; and FoxO1, a positive regulator of PD-1. During chronic infections, T-bet expression is downregulated and FoxO1 expression is upregulated, triggering an increase in PD-1 expression [110]. Importantly, it has been described that PD-1 from exhausted T cells interacts with PD-L1 and PD-L2, inhibiting RAS and PI3K signaling and thus protecting CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells from overstimulation by antigen [73, 130]. The blockade of PI3K signaling reduces mTOR signaling, decreasing the glycolytic capacity [1, 107] and up-regulating FAO and lipolysis [87], important characteristics of exhausted cells metabolism.

Beside the lower oxygen consumption rate, exhausted T cells display increased mitochondrial mass [5, 106], ROS production [74] and ultrastructural changes such as elongated mitochondria cristae [5].

## 3 Cellular Metabolism in B Cells

In the previous years, B cell metabolism has emerged as a very relevant process for the maturation and function of B cells, showing that different B cells subsets present distinct rate of proliferation and longevity and thus they have huge different metabolic requirements [36, 63, 100, 115].

### 3.1 *B Cell Metabolism During Ontogeny*

The development of B cells begins from bone marrow hematopoietic precursors that go through different differentiation states until they are mature B cells. During this process, cellular growth and proliferation are regulated by different transcript factors and the IL-7 and pre-BCR signaling pathways [21]. IL-7 signaling activates both mTORC1 and c-Myc, enhancing glycolysis and driving the anabolism necessary for B cell development and proliferation [47, 129]. Consequently, mTORC1-deficient B cell precursors present reduced mitochondrial mass, reduced activation of c-Myc, decreased oxygen consumption and impaired proliferation [129]. Deletion of mTORC1 in early B cell progenitors blocks the large to small pre-B cell transition [47].

Pro-B cells and large pre-B cells are highly proliferative cells and display an elevated energetic demand. They present enhanced glucose uptake, glycolysis and mitochondrial respiration contrasted to other B cells subsets [111, 129]. The EF-hand domain containing protein D1 (EFhd1) is a calcium binding protein located at the inner mitochondrial membrane. EFhd1 is highly expressed in pro-B cells but it is downregulated by the pre-BCR signal. The deletion of EFhd1 causes increased glycolysis, thus the downregulation of EFhd1 by the pre-BCR could be a mechanism to switch on glycolysis in pre-B cells [111].

AMPK is another central regulator of B cell metabolism and has been involved in B cell development. AMPK is activated in response to low nutrients availability and inhibits mTORC1, stopping the cellular growth [14]. AMPK has been associated with the acquisition of quiescence in B cell maturation [33]. Transitional B cells (an intermediate stage for maturation) display higher mitochondrial content, glucose uptake and ROS production, driven by mTORC1 activation. When B cells become fully mature, AMPK is activated and thus mTORC1 is inhibited, dampening the metabolism. Moreover, unlimited mTORC1 activation leads to reduced B cell development and absent of mature B cells in blood in both humans [14, 33, 86] and mice [6, 20]. The loss of the AMPK-mTORC1 signaling blocks the B cell ontogeny in the large pre-B cells stage [86].

### 3.2 *B Cell Metabolism During Activation in GCs*

B cells migrate to the germinal centers (GCs) in the spleen to receive presentation from presenter cells and stimuli from T cells. B cell activation leads to clonal expansion and antibody production. B cells activation in the GC requires a precise metabolic control, characterized by an increase in glucose uptake, glycolysis but also mitochondrial mass [18]. OXPHOS is essential for the initial steps of the humoral immune response [121]. Recently, the oxygen availability has been pointed as a key

factor in B cell activation. It has been shown that GCs present a hypoxic microenvironment in which HIF-1 $\alpha$  is activated and plays a key role in B cell reprogramming towards glycolysis [48]. Strikingly, sustained hypoxia or HIF-1 $\alpha$  stabilization inhibits mTORC1, impairing the proliferation and class-switching of B cells in GCs [18]. Thus, the typical physiology of GCs includes regional hypoxic areas, and HIF-1 $\alpha$ -dependent oxygen sensing to regulate critical functions of B cells.

In the GC, B cells receive two signals, CD40 and BCR stimulation, which activate mTORC1 and c-Myc to increase the metabolic activity. mTORC1 is induced in B cells by T cell co-stimulatory signals [32], driving the increase in the glucose uptake and mitochondrial mass, but it is also important for proliferation of activated B cells [32]. c-Myc is induced by both signals in a proportional manner to the amount of T cells signals [27, 34, 69], and plays an critical role in GCs formation and maintenance, driving glycolysis and mitochondrial biogenesis in B cell upon activation [12, 13, 48], however, the importance of c-Myc in the metabolic state of activated B cells requires further investigation. In a similar way than T cells, the switch of B cells towards glycolysis upon antigen presentation is PI3K dependent [28, 32]. Class I PI3K enzymes play key functions in B cell activation. Their role is to phosphorylate lipids from the plasma membrane to generate distinct phosphoinositide products [49]. The protein kinase C $\beta$  (PKC- $\beta$ ) is also required for the induction of glycolysis after BCR stimulation [9]. Accordingly, B cells deficient for PKC- $\beta$  present decreased medium acidification in cell culture but increased mitochondrial mass and ROS levels upon activation [113]. In addition, the deletion of PKC- $\beta$  decreases mTORC1 activation, impairing the formation of GC [113]. Glycogen synthase kinase 3 is activated upon the CD40 signal and has an important role on the control of B cell size, mitochondrial biogenesis, glycolysis and production of ROS [48].

The NF $\kappa$ B subunit cREL is a relevant molecule in B cell metabolism. cREL is activated upon BCR or CD40 stimuli and participates in B cell activation and GC maintenance [4, 114]. cREL drives the gene expression of the glycolytic enzymes phosphofructokinase, phosphoglycerate dehydrogenase and other enzymes involved in the oxidation of FA [45].

Importantly, as in T cells, there are anti-inflammatory B cells known as regulatory B (Breg) cells [70, 98]. These cells secrete IL-10 to shut down the inflammatory response and promote T cell differentiation towards Treg. Very recently, it has been shown that metabolism of cholesterol drives the regulatory properties of B cells since the inhibition of the cholesterol synthesis impairs Breg differentiation. This differentiation is controlled by PI3K signaling [8].

### ***3.3 Plasma Cells Differentiation and Antibody Production***

Once B cells have proliferated, they produce high amounts of antibodies to fight against pathogens. B cells requires specific metabolic conditions characterized for a proper antibody production. Surprisingly, although glycolysis and glucose uptake are increased in activated B cells, glucose restriction does not affect the antibody

production [121]. Humoral immunity requires huge quantities of amino acids to properly build and fold antibodies. The sugar glycosylation is also very important for antibody production, and the amino acids generates biosynthetic substrates to fuel the necessary endoplasmic reticulum biogenesis [63]. Plasma cells also need lipid synthesis to support the expansion of the endoplasmic reticulum [29] and high glycolytic rate [62] to produce immunoglobulins.

mTORC1 inhibition leads to a reduced expression of the immunoglobulin-binding protein and some important molecules required for protein synthesis, suggesting that mTOR signaling is crucial for plasma cell differentiation and antibody production [52]. The transcription factor Blimp1 has been found as a key molecule in differentiating the plasma cells through the control of cellular metabolism by modulating mTORC1 activity in plasma cells [112]. Strikingly, plasma cells with continuous activation of mTORC1 present an enhanced antibody secretion but shorter lifespan [41]. The let-7 miRNA controls the metabolism and function of plasma cells, by inhibition of glycolysis and antibody production [50]. Let7-deficient LPS stimulated B cells show augmented glucose and glutamine uptake and glycolytic capacity, together with higher antibody production but they do not present changes in OXPHOS.

## 4 Concluding Remarks

Cellular metabolism is organized by several crucial processes important for biomolecules synthesis and as a source of energy. In adaptive immune cells, metabolism plays an important role controlling their fate and function during their development and differentiation stages. Preservation of a specific metabolic profile is essential for mounting successful adaptive immune response to maintain T and B effector functions and to clear pathogens. Strategies targeting dysfunctional or exhausted T and B cell metabolism could be a promising option for both boosting immune response or dampening autoimmunity.

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# Obesity, Metabolic Syndrome and Inflammation



Jennifer Lee

## 1 Introduction

Initially described in the 1960s and 1970s, Metabolic Syndrome represents a clustering of medical conditions, including increased waist circumference and elevated fasting glycemia and triglycerides, which are used to predict increased risk for cardiovascular disease-associated disorders (American Heart Association, 2019). Obesity, one of the metabolic disorders that is clustered with Metabolic Syndrome, is a global health and financial burden affecting nearly 40% of adults aged 18 year and over, and 1 in 5 adolescents aged 5–19 years of age (World Health Organization). The etiology and pathophysiology underlying obesity and insulin resistance are multifactorial and complex. Genome-wide association studies (GWAS) have identified candidate genes and genetic variants that strongly associate with and may contribute to metabolic disease [3, 4, 65, 67, 75]. More recent studies using Mendelian Randomization analyses demonstrate causality of candidate genes with metabolic disease in humans [35, 42]. Preclinical studies using diet-induced and genetically obese rodent models have identified pro-inflammatory molecular culprits and their associated mechanisms that dysregulate glucose homeostasis in different metabolic tissues. Consistently, these pro-inflammatory biomarkers are elevated in humans [18, 29, 72, 83, 88]. In this review, we discuss the effects of key molecular players that contribute to Metabolic Syndrome. Despite efforts to target pro-inflammatory cells or associated molecules that initiate metabolic disease pathogenesis, the prevalence of obesity-associated metabolic disease remains a global epidemic and current therapeutic modalities are not sufficient to improve and/or sustain metabolic goals.

Classically, the immune system plays a critical role in preventing or limiting infection in the host. More recently, is it increasingly recognized that the immune

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system contributes to the onset and development of obesity and metabolic disease. Subclinical inflammation is strongly associated with increased risk for cardiovascular events in humans [18, 29, 83, 88]. This section will focus on reviewing known pro-inflammatory molecules and their mechanistic processes that alters the structure and function of white adipose tissue and the gastrointestinal tract. As well, we will examine how these diverse processes intersect and contribute to impaired metabolic homeostasis in states of obesity and insulin resistance. We will also discuss the translational potential of immune-mediated targets for treating metabolic disease and the future direction of immunometabolism research.

## **2 Adipose Tissue Inflammation and Obesity**

White adipose tissue (AT) has been largely redefined as an organ that stores excess energy in the form of lipid to become a highly heterogeneous tissue with important endocrine, thermogenic, and immune functions that contributes to systemic metabolic homeostasis. Adipose tissue synthesizes and secretes a broad repertoire of adipokines, adipocyte-secreted proteins that have pro- and anti-inflammatory properties in response to changes in their local and systemic environment. Many lines of evidence support the roles for multiple adipokines in the pathogenesis of obesity and insulin resistance. Here, we will discuss the role of three key adipokines: tumor necrosis factor- $\alpha$  (TNF $\alpha$ ), retinol-binding protein-4 (RBP-4), and leptin, as well as the role of resident macrophages and other immune cell types in adipose tissue, and their contributions to obesity-induced insulin resistance.

## **3 The Role of Tumor Necrosis Factor (TNF) in Obesity and Insulin Resistance**

The identification of adipose tissue-derived TNF $\alpha$  in obesity-associated insulin resistance in 1993 was a major discovery in the field by providing a direct link between pro-inflammatory cytokines and insulin resistance [25]. The fact that TNF $\alpha$  gene expression was elevated in adipose tissue of genetically obese animals, and systemic neutralization of TNF $\alpha$  or genetic deletion of TNF $\alpha$  in mice improved insulin sensitivity demonstrated the importance of this cytokine in regulating insulin sensitivity [25]. Subsequent studies found that adipose tissue expression of TNF $\alpha$  is elevated in obese and insulin-resistant humans [24]. As well, loss of functional TNF $\alpha$  in obese mice increased the activity of the insulin receptor tyrosine kinase in muscle and adipose tissue and increased levels of GLUT4 in muscle [61, 82]. The fact that human adipose tissue makes and secretes TNF $\alpha$  in response to lipopolysaccharide (LPS) *ex vivo* [68], and that human adipocytes express the toll-like receptor-4



(TLR4) [84], further supports the importance of TNF $\alpha$  in contributing to the low-grade inflammation seen in obesity-induced insulin resistance [70]. The identification of other cytokines, such as IL6, that are also secreted by adipocytes and are critical for regulating innate immunity [5], demonstrates the importance of adipose tissue in contributing to innate immune responses.

Altogether, pro-inflammatory, adipocyte-derived cytokines play a critical role in insulin resistance development. However, translational efforts to target TNF $\alpha$  for the treatment of obesity-induced insulin resistance have been difficult due to broad immune effects of TNF $\alpha$  in different tissue and cell types.

## **4 The Role of Retinol-Binding Protein-4 (RBP-4) in Insulin Resistance**

RBP-4 is a protein secreted predominantly from adipocytes [89] and is a clinical marker of insulin resistance and metabolic syndrome. Serum levels of RBP-4 are elevated in insulin-resistant mice, and this elevation is also observed and highly associates with insulin resistance in humans [13, 21, 89]. Serum RBP-4 is reduced with weight loss in obese people [22], and the reduction of these levels with exercise training is strongly correlated with improved insulin sensitivity [38]. Increased RBP-4 expression in insulin-resistant mice causes white adipose tissue inflammation, and this is mediated at least in part due to RBP-4 mediated activation of CD206+ macrophages and subsequent CD4+ Th1 polarization [55]. The contribution of pro-inflammatory adipose tissue (AT) macrophages to cause systemic insulin resistance is further supported by the fact that adoptive transfer of RBP-4 activated AT antigen presenting cells, including macrophages, into normal mice is sufficient to induce AT inflammation, insulin resistance and glucose intolerance [55]. In insulin-resistant mice, preventing APC activation with administration of cytotoxic T-lymphocyte antigen 4 (CTLA-4), a protein receptor on regulatory T-cells whose expression is upregulated upon T-cell activation, restored glucose intolerance and insulin, demonstrating the major contribution of AT APCs in regulating glucose homeostasis. These studies support the translational potential to target mechanisms that decrease low-grade AT inflammation to thereby restore metabolic homeostasis.

## **5 The Role of Leptin in Obesity and Insulin Resistance**

In 1995, the major discovery of leptin, the ob gene protein product, demonstrated the importance of adipose tissue as an endocrine organ that regulates energy homeostasis [23]. Leptin is an anorectic hormone that is produced primarily from adipocytes [23, 49] and whose circulating levels in mice and humans strongly associate with adiposity and serves a critical role in central regulation of systemic energy balance [19]. In

rodent models of diet-induced obesity and obese humans, circulating leptin levels are elevated yet caloric intake is not reduced with no decrease in body weight gain [19]. Similar to insulin resistance, these studies demonstrated leptin resistance in the hypothalamus and as well as in peripheral tissues. Elevated leptin levels and its associated pro-inflammatory metabolic sequelae have been implicated in the pathophysiology of obesity-related complications, including cardiovascular events and Metabolic Syndrome [7, 37]. Leptin also plays an important role in regulating immunometabolic processes by having direct effects on adaptive immune cells. For example, leptin is necessary for dendritic cell maturation to promote T cell (T helper 17 and T-regulatory) proliferation [54]. States of overnutrition and elevated leptin levels impair adaptive and innate immune responses and this contributes to the low-grade inflammation seen in obesity and insulin resistance.

## 6 Immune Cell Function Within Adipose Tissue

The immunometabolic capacity and function of immune cells that reside in adipose tissue are dependent on host nutritional status. The proportion of adipose tissue macrophages (ATMs) ranges from 10 to 50% in lean versus diet-induced obese mice and this observation is also consistent in obese humans [87]. In states of nutritional excess and obesity, resident macrophages in adipose tissue are activated by a host of metabolic stimuli [6, 69]. Polarization of macrophages to a pro-inflammatory (M1) or anti-inflammatory (M2) phenotype plays a key role in regulating adipose tissue function [69]. The proof-of-concept experiment that acute endotoxemia is sufficient to cause adipose tissue inflammation and insulin resistance in otherwise healthy adults demonstrates the major contribution of adipose inflammation in metabolic disease pathology [52]. Downstream sequelae of activated T-cells in adipose tissue includes the recruitment of pro-inflammatory M1 macrophages to the target organ, increased levels of pro-inflammatory cytokines, and the development of insulin resistance. As well, the pro-inflammatory bacterial product lipopolysaccharide (LPS) changes macrophage metabolism from oxidative phosphorylation to glycolysis and increases inflammation through a succinate-driven interleukin-1b pathway [76]. To further demonstrate the importance of the innate immune system in regulating systemic glucose homeostasis, deletion of T-cells, associated pro-inflammatory cytokines, or toll-like receptors alters glucose homeostasis in diet-induced obese mice [11]. Identification of distinct transcriptomic signatures of macrophages and other activated immune cells in adipose tissue from normal and obese mice along with functional data demonstrating changes in glycolytic metabolism in these cells supports the idea that the metabolic capacity of AT immune cells in addition to their classical immune functions are important for and affects host metabolism [6]. Furthermore, Th17 cells from diabetic humans have impaired mitochondrial function, altered cytokine production, and generate ATP through glycolysis versus the classical fatty acid oxidation [59], revealing yet another level of immunometabolic complexity underlying insulin resistance and Type 2 Diabetes pathology.

Immune cells play an important role in adipose tissue remodeling in obesity. Adipose tissue inflammation, determined as having elevated levels of ATMs and increased TNF $\alpha$  expression, increases the frequency of adipocyte death in diet-induced obese mice [74]. Crown-like structures, a histological hallmark of adipose tissue inflammation and obesity, are characterized by macrophages that surround apoptotic adipocytes [15, 58]. These ATMs serve to scavenge residual lipids from dying adipocytes and resultantly, excess lipid availability in ATMs in turn alters their cellular metabolism to preferentially increase glycolytic metabolism over the traditional TCA cycle [77]. Depending on the disease pathogenesis, metabolic reprogramming of immune cells promotes change from an anti-inflammatory to pro-inflammatory or altered metabolic state. This major observation has changed the field of immunometabolism and cancer research and has opened up a new multidisciplinary approach to identify therapeutic targets to mitigate disease progression.

Adipose-resident invariant natural killer T-cells (iNKT) are an anti-inflammatory, lipid-sensing immune cell type that plays an important role in regulating inflammatory responses. iNKT cells are reduced in obesity and cell numbers are restored with weight loss [47]. The importance of iNKT cells in regulating metabolic homeostasis is supported by the fact that mice lacking this cell type are heavier with greater adiposity and are insulin resistant, while adoptive transfer of iNKT cells into obese mice is sufficient to improve insulin sensitivity and decrease adiposity and circulating triglyceride levels [47]. Furthermore, activation of iNKT cells is required for improved glucose homeostasis and weight loss in obese mice [45]. The unique transcriptional program of iNKT cells induces an anti-inflammatory phenotype in resident ATMs to downregulate Treg proliferation in adipose tissue [46]. These data demonstrate the importance of iNKT cells in regulating adipose tissue function and metabolic homeostasis.

In summary, this section highlights the role of some key adipokines and immune cell types in adipose tissue in metabolic homeostasis and systemic inflammation. The power of next generation sequencing followed by functional characterization of previously unknown cell types and adipo-markers may lead to the identification of new therapeutic targets with which to treat or prevent metabolic disease [64]. However, attempts to translate adipose-derived molecular and/or resident immune cell targets in adipose tissue have proven difficult. More work investigating the cross-talk between adipose tissue, adipokine-responsive tissues, and the innate immune system in response to adipose-derived biomolecules is needed.

## **7 The Role of the Gut in Obesity and Inflammation**

The gastrointestinal tract is comprised of a heterogeneous population of cells with endocrine, immune and absorptive properties, altogether making the gut an important contributor to glucose homeostasis, systemic inflammation, and host metabolism. The gut microbiome, made up of trillions of functional bacteria and co-existing symbiotically with the host, plays a critical role in maintaining metabolic host health.

The microbiome is a dynamic organ that has evolved with the host to symbiotically utilize ingested nutrients and synthesize functional metabolites with physiologic effects that contribute to regulating host metabolism and homeostasis [28, 36, 63, 80, 81]. In this section, we will focus on how gut enteroendocrine cells, intestinal immune cells, and the gut microbiome respond to different nutritional states and how their function is impaired in obesity-induced insulin resistance. As well, we will highlight key molecular targets in the gut that are currently used for treating Type 2 Diabetes or have translational potential for restoring glucose homeostasis.

## 8 The Gut is an Immunoendocrine Organ

Enteroendocrine cells (EECs) within the gastrointestinal tract make up the largest endocrine organ in the body. Making up only 1% of the intestinal cell population, these specialized cells are highly dispersed along the length of the gastrointestinal tract and secrete hormones that are critical for regulating food intake and glucose metabolism. In this section, we will focus on gut hormones that play important roles in maintaining intestinal homeostasis, regulating glucose metabolism, and systemic immune responses.

### 8.1 *Proglucagon-Derived Peptides: Glucagon-Like Peptides-1 and -2 (GLP-1 and GLP-2)*

Glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) is secreted from enteroendocrine cells with beneficial incretin effects to augment glucose-stimulated insulin secretion (ref). Beyond the well-established physiological functions of GLP-1 in decreasing food intake, delaying gastric emptying, and inhibiting glucagon secretion, GLP-1 also has anti-inflammatory actions on peripheral metabolic tissues [33]. GLP-1 receptor (GLP1-R) agonists are an effective class of therapeutics for the treatment of Type 2 Diabetes as well as obesity. The associated reductions in systemic inflammation seen with GLP-1R agonist treatment in rodents and humans further highlights the importance of GLP-1 action in metabolic homeostasis. Intraepithelial lymphocytes (IELs) along the gut express GLP-1R and protect the gut from DSS-induced colitis in mice [91]. This is demonstrated by the fact that colonic expression of pro-inflammatory genes in GLP1r<sup>-/-</sup> mice treated with DSS treatment are reduced following bone marrow transplantation from wild-type mice with functional GLP-1R [91].

GLP-1R is also expressed in other immune cell types in different metabolic tissues. As mentioned previously, in adipose tissue, GLP-1 activates and augments proliferation of resident invariant natural killer T (iNKT) cells, and these beneficial effects increase weight loss in an FGF21-dependent mechanism and decreases adipose tissue inflammation in obese mice [45]. Similarly, ob/ob mice, a genetic model of

diabetes, treated with an adenovirus producing GLP-1 had attenuated adipose tissue macrophage infiltration and inflammation [34].

Moreover, the anti-inflammatory effects of GLP-1 may also be linked to the cardioprotection seen in mice treated with GLP-1R agonists. GLP-1 treatment inhibited aortic monocytic adhesion and attenuated the development of atherosclerosis in wild-type and apolipoprotein E knockout mice [2]. Similarly, GLP-1R agonists suppressed foam cell formation in human monocyte-derived macrophages [78]. Altogether, the extrapancreatic effects of GLP-1 to act on various immune cell types to decrease systemic inflammation demonstrate the broad application of GLP-1-based therapeutics beyond glucose regulation to improve metabolic outcomes.

## 8.2 *Glucagon-Like Peptide-2*

Glucagon-like peptide-2 (GLP-2) is also derived from the glucagon gene but unlike the incretin effects of GLP-1, GLP-2 is the most robust intestinotrophic hormone in the gut with nutrient absorptive effects [31, 53]. Mice chronically treated with GLP-2 have increased small intestinal villi height and crypt cell proliferation, demonstrating the direct proliferative effects of GLP-2 on gut growth [32, 51]. Acute GLP-2 treatment increases amino acid uptake in jejunal preparations from mice *ex vivo* [31]. This GLP-2-induced nutrient uptake, at least for amino acids, is due to increased expression of amino acid transporters within brush border membrane vesicles of enterocytes, the absorptive cells of the gut [31]. In patients with short-bowel syndrome, where the terminal ileum and colon have been resected, GLP-2 treatment improves nutrient absorption and nutritional status [26, 27].

GLP-2 also plays an important role in maintaining gut barrier function. High-fat diet (HFD) feeding increases gut permeability in rodents [8], which allows the gram-negative bacteria-derived endotoxin, lipopolysaccharide (LPS), to pass through the gut barrier into circulation. Elevated LPS levels contribute to the obesity-induced low-grade systemic inflammation seen in rodents and humans [8, 9]. Mice lacking functional GLP-2 receptor (GLP-2R) have increased abundances of gut microbial species, including *Firmicutes*, which are associated with worsened glucose homeostasis [32]. As well, *glp2r*<sup>-/-</sup> mice have increased intestinal expression of pro-inflammatory cytokines [32], suggesting a role for GLP-2 in helping to regulate the innate immune system in the gut. Similarly, GLP-2 treatment increases expression of tight junction proteins in the gut to improve gut barrier function and decrease gut permeability in HFD-fed mice [10]. Altogether, these studies highlight the importance of GLP-2 in maintaining gut homeostasis by interacting with multiple intestinal gut cell types and the microbiome. The beneficial intestinotrophic and absorptive properties of GLP-2 make it one of the most effective treatments for short bowel syndrome in humans. More preclinical studies are needed to fully determine whether the improvements in intestinal barrier function with GLP-2 can be translationally applied to treat metabolic disease.

## 9 The Gut Microbiome and Its Role in Obesity

Increasing evidence implicates the gut microbiome in contributing to host health and in the development of diet-induced obesity. Initial studies characterizing the microbiome signature of normal and obese rodents found that abundance levels of *Bacteroidetes* was reduced and *Firmicutes* was elevated in diet-induced and genetically obese rodents [81]. To support the causal role of the microbiome in the development of obesity, transplanting feces from obese rodents into normal lean mice caused body weight gain and increased adiposity in recipient mice [80]. Since these seminal studies, additional bacterial strains have been identified, including *Akkermansia muciniphila* and *Bifidobacteria*, all of which have a constellation of beneficial effects on improving host health and metabolism, including greater body weight loss, improved glucose homeostasis, decreased gut permeability and inflammation, and lowering of circulating lipids in rodents [30, 44, 56, 92]. Since the microbiome composition is largely determined by host diet, identifying gut species that associate with improved metabolic homeostasis may be therapeutically targeted or utilized as a supplement to treat diet-induced obesity and insulin resistance.

Gram negative bacteria generate lipopolysaccharide (LPS), a pro-inflammatory compound that is the natural ligand for Toll-like Receptor-4 (TLR4) [14, 62]. Plasma LPS levels are increased in obese rodents and humans, and this elevation is known as “metabolic endotoxemia” [8, 9]. Similarly, TLR4 expression is elevated in obese humans [1], which may be in response to elevated circulating LPS levels. Impaired gut barrier function promotes the development of metabolic disease by allowing LPS to enter into circulation and contribute to the low-grade inflammation seen in high fat diet-induced obesity [10, 39, 43]. Furthermore, the effects of LPS are seen in resident adipose tissue macrophages expressing TLR4 where under high fat diet conditions, these surveilling immune cells switch from an anti-inflammatory “M2-like” phenotype to a pro-inflammatory “M1-like” phenotype to contribute to systemic inflammation [69].

Next-generation sequencing and -omics analyses have made major advances to this growing field by moving beyond the descriptive characterization of the microbiome milieu to identify specific bacterial gene programs and their associated functional metabolites [41, 50, 60]. Microbe-derived metabolites, including serotonin and short-chain fatty acids, are synthesized in the gut and can enter circulation to impart important physiological effects [28, 48, 90]. For example, the short-chain fatty acid propionate is generated by the mucin-degrading bacterium *Akkermansia* has beneficial metabolic effects in insulin resistant mice [16, 57, 71]. One mechanism by which SCFAs improve glucose homeostasis is by binding to G-protein coupled receptors, including GPR41 and GPR43 on enteroendocrine cells, to augment GLP-1 secretion [79]. Similarly, feeding insulin resistant mice a diet high in soluble fiber increases intestinal gluconeogenesis as well as circulating levels of the short-chain fatty acids propionate and butyrate to subsequently improve glucose homeostasis in mice through a gut-brain pathway that is dependent on GPR41 [17].

Altogether, these studies highlight the translational potential of beneficially manipulating the gut microbiome through dietary supplementation of either the microbes directly or functional foods that are able to promote the synthesis of beneficial metabolites and/or microbial abundances that confer metabolic benefits to the host. Safety and tolerance for many of these potential microbial candidates remain to be validated in humans. However, pre-clinical studies and early-stage clinical trials demonstrate strong promise for using the gut microbiome as a therapeutic approach for improving metabolic homeostasis in humans. The dynamic responsiveness of the gut microbiome to diet makes this symbiotic organ an attractive therapeutic target for treating obesity, Type 2 diabetes and Metabolic Syndrome in humans.

## 10 The Role of Intestinal Immune Cells in Obesity and Insulin Resistance

Innate and adaptive immune responses to luminal stimuli in the gut are critical for maintaining both intestinal and host homeostasis. Increasing evidence supports a role for aberrant intestinal immune responses in contributing to the development of diet-induced obese insulin resistance and metabolic disease. Intestinal immune cells reside either in localized immune areas such as Peyer's Patches and the lamina propria, or they are also diffusely located throughout the gut, such as gut intraepithelial T cells. While there is a diversity of immune cell types residing in the gut that are critical for protection against bacterial infection and viruses, T-lymphocytes (helper, regulatory and cytotoxic) are critical for moderating adaptive immune responses by secreting specific cytokine signals to recruit and/or aid other immune cell types to maintain host health. Aberrations in T-cell activation and downstream cytokine signaling cascades contribute to the pathophysiology of metabolic disease.

Mucosal integrity and gut barrier function are critical for maintaining intestinal homeostasis. High fat diet feeding impairs these architectural structures and contributes to LPS-induced metabolic endotoxemia and the development of insulin resistance and metabolic disease [9]. Genetic and diet-induced obese mice have impaired IL-22 response to bacterial infection, and treatment with IL-22 to obese mice was able to restore mucosal host defense to bacterial challenge. Furthermore, mice deficient in IL-22 receptor were more susceptible to diet-induced obesity and insulin resistance, and IL-22 treatment to genetically obese leptin receptor-deficient (*db/db*) mice fed high fat diet improved glucose tolerance and insulin resistance and restored the gut mucosal barrier [86].

The most abundant CD4 T+ cell sub-type in mucosal tissues is the Th17 cell type population [40, 93]. Th17 cells secrete IL-17 and/or IL-22, cytokines that are necessary for maintaining gut homeostasis [66, 86]. HFD impairs antigen-presenting cell activation to generate Th17 cells in vitro [20]. As well, colonizing germ-free mice with the ileal microbiome from HFD mice reduced the number of Th17 cells in lamina propria of recipient mice [20]. The importance of small intestinal Th17 cell

function in regulating glucose homeostasis is further supported by studies in ROR $\gamma$ t-deficient mice lacking functional IL-17. ROR $\gamma$ t-deficient mice fed chow diet gained more weight, were glucose intolerant and hypinsulinemic independent of food intake when compared to controls [20].

Immunoglobulin A (IgA) is a B cell antibody produced by resident plasma cells in the gut lamina propria and plays a critical role in commensal bacteria tolerance and protection of the gut mucosa from surface pathogens [12, 73, 85]. IgA is important for maintaining gut barrier function, yet its role in metabolic disease has only been more recently investigated. Colonic IgA levels are reduced in diet-induced obese mice, and HFD-fed mice lacking IgA have increased gut permeability, worsened insulin resistance and increased inflammation in peripheral metabolic tissues, including increased numbers of crown-like structures in white adipose tissue [43]. Furthermore, fecal transplantation studies in germ-free recipient mice demonstrate that the impaired glucose tolerance and insulin resistance observed in HFD-fed IgA-/- mice is a transmissible phenotype [43].

Altogether, these studies demonstrate the importance of gut immune cells in contributing to the regulation of glucose homeostasis. Furthermore, identifying gut immune targets with beneficial systemic effects to decrease inflammation and improve glucose homeostasis represents an exciting and novel approach to treat obesity and insulin resistance in humans.

## 11 Conclusions

Here we have highlighted key concepts and described relevant molecular players and their mechanisms of action that regulate immunometabolism and contribute to the pathogenesis of diet-induced obesity and Type 2 Diabetes. Despite major advances in determining causality of genes and/or molecular targets in metabolic disease, additional studies in preclinical models are needed to validate translational potential and long-term safety of these putative therapeutic applications to humans. Dysregulation of these molecular pathways with changes in lifestyle factors including exercise and diet demonstrates host responsiveness to its environment. Altogether, this review aims to introduce and intersect areas of immunology and metabolism that may drive newer areas of research to reveal novel insight and targets with which to maintain metabolic homeostasis and treat human disease.

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# Metabolic Reprogramming and Infectious Diseases



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## Abbreviations

ACL	ATP-dependent Citrate Lyase
AMPK	AMP-activated protein kinase
AMPs	Antimicrobial peptides
AMs	Alveolar macrophages
Arg -1	Arginase-1
ASN	Asparagine
BCG	Baccillus Calmette-Guérin
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
DCs	Dendritic cells
FAS	Fatty Acid Synthesis
GALT	Gut-Associated Lymphoid Tissue
GAS	Group A Streptococcus
GLUT1	Glucose Transporter 1
HIF	$\alpha$ Hypoxia-Inducible Factor 1-Alpha
HK2	Hexokinase 2
IBPs	Intracellular Bacterial Pathogens
IFNs	Interferons
IgA	Immunoglobulin A
IgG	Immunoglobulin G
IL	Interleukin

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ILCs	Innate lymphoid cells
ILFs	Isolated Lymphoid Follicles
JE	Junctional epithelium
LPS	Lipopolysaccharide
MALT	Mucosa-associated lymphoid tissue
MHC	Major Histocompatibility Complex
MIF	Migration Inhibitory Factor
MS	Multiple Sclerosis
mTOR	Mammalian Target of Rapamycin
mTORC1	Mammalian Target of Rapamycin complex 1
MV	Measles Virus
NETs	Neutrophil Extracellular Traps
NK	Natural killer
NLRP3	NLR family pyrin domain containing 3
NO	Nitric Oxide
Nrf2	Nuclear Factor erythroid-derived 2
OAA	Oxaloacetate
OXPHOS	Oxidative Phosphorylation
PAMPs	PathogenAssociated Molecular Patterns
PDK1	Phosphoinositide-Dependent Kinase 1
PFK1	Phosphofruktokinase 1
PGE2	Prostaglandin E2
PI3K	Phosphoinositide-3 Kinase
pIgA	Polymeric Immunoglobulin A
pIgR	Polymeric immunoglobulin receptor
PIP3	Phosphatidylinositol-3,4,5-Trisphosphate
PKM2	Pyruvate Kinase M2
PPAR $\delta$	Peroxisome Proliferator-Activated Receptor Gamma
PPP	Pentose Phosphate Pathway
PPs	Peyer's Patches
PRRs	Pattern Recognition Receptors
ROS	Reactive Oxygen Species
SARS-CoV-2	Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2
SH2	Src Homology 2
TAC	Tricarboxylic Acid Cycle
TGF- $\beta$	Transforming growth factor- $\beta$
Th	T helper
TLRs	Toll-like receptors
Tr1	Type 1 Regulatory T cells
Tregs	Regulatory T cells
TRMs	Tissue-Resident Macrophages
UTIs	Urinary tract infections
$\alpha$ -KG	$\alpha$ -Ketoglutarate

## 1 Barrier Tissues as Major Sites for Pathogen Entrance

Barrier tissues are in close contact with the external environment and exposed to a variety of antigens. These sites are endowed with characteristics that differentiate them from the other tissues due to their protective mechanisms against external agents. Such functions place the barrier tissues as the first line of host response to changes in homeostasis, including skin, oral cavity, respiratory, genitourinary and gastrointestinal tracts. Since these sites are highly exposed to environmental antigens, commensal microbes and pathogens, a selective barrier is crucial to limit the entry of external contents to the organism. The firewall mechanisms include cells and their products that act physically or actively to protect the organism. Besides, the barrier-associated immune system promotes effective immune surveillance, preventing exacerbated inflammatory responses, as well as tolerating commensal and innocuous antigens [8]. Next, we describe the barrier components that contribute to tissue-specific immunity and how episodes of infection could influence the metabolic reprogramming of immune cells.

The different tissues comprising the host barriers share structural components such as epithelial cells connected by tight junctions controlling tissue permeability, antimicrobial peptide-secreting cells, antibody-secreting B cells and other specialized epithelial cells supporting the chemical barrier. Also, a full network of immune cells covering mononuclear phagocytes, innate and adaptive lymphocytes, is in charge of monitoring the barriers. According to the organization of such components, the mucosal tissues are classified into two types: I and II (Table 1). Type I mucosal surfaces are covered by a single columnar epithelium, as seen in the small and large intestine, pseudostratified epithelia of the respiratory tract and the female upper reproductive tract. Common features comprise mucus-secreting goblet cells and polymeric immunoglobulin receptor (pIgR) expression at the basolateral surface. The pIgR binds to polymeric Immunoglobulin A (pIgA) secreted by plasma cells and releases the secretory IgA into the lumen. Hence, IgA is the main protective antibody in type I mucosal surfaces and contributes to the immune firewall by neutralizing

**Table 1** Immune composition of barrier tissues and products that assist in the defense of the host

Components	Type I mucosa	Type II mucosa
Tissues	Intestine, respiratory tract, upper female reproductive tract	Vagina, eyes, mouth
Epithelia	Simple columnar	Stratified squamous
Mucus source	Goblet cells	Epithelial cells
IgA transport	Present	Absent
Major antibody isotype	Secretory IgA	Absent
Submucosa cells	DCs, macrophages, memory lymphocyte	Sparse network of DCs, macrophages, rare lymphocytes

*Abbreviations* Ig, Immunoglobulin; MALT, Mucosa Associated Lymphoid Tissues; DCs, dendritic cells

toxins and microbial-associated antigens [45]. Innate and adaptive immune cells in the type I mucosal tissues are classically found in the mucosa-associated lymphoid tissue (MALT), while type II mucosal surfaces are characterized by sparse clusters of immune cells in the submucosa. Type II mucosal surfaces, including the lower female reproductive tract, eyes and mouth, are characterized by a protective stratified squamous epithelial layer (keratinocytes), which shares many features with the skin. However, type II mucosal surfaces are protected by mucous and usually do not undergo terminal cornification. Also, the absence of pIgR in keratinocytes from stratified epithelial impairs IgA secretion into the lumen. Therefore, IgG is the main antibody found on the type II mucosa [44]. Despite the similarities among the firewall mechanisms, each barrier has unique characteristics providing the immune tone of tissue-specific responses, as depicted below.

### ***1.1 Skin Barrier***

In order to prevent physical insults and pathogen entrance, the body is covered by a keratinized stratified epithelium comprising the epidermis and dermis. Immuno-competent cells are located in both compartments, and the dead cells compose the stratum corneum that forms the outermost layer protecting the skin from injuries and infection. The skin surface holds a variety of microbial communities that shapes the immunological tone of the tissue [7, 69]. By controlling the expression of innate immune components by keratinocytes, e. g. cathelicidins,  $\beta$ -defensins and other antimicrobial peptides (AMPs), the skin-resident microbiota protects the host from the colonization by pathogenic species [32, 66]. Also, the skin commensals modulate the production of IL-17A and IFN- $\gamma$  by local T cells that are involved in both host defense and inflammatory diseases [68, 69]. Through the expression of Toll-like receptors (TLRs), keratinocytes favor the differentiation of CD4 T lymphocytes to the T helper (Th) 1 profile and the production of interferons (IFNs), IL-1 $\beta$ , IL-18 and IL-6 that coordinate leukocyte traffic to the skin [60]. A specialized subset of mononuclear phagocyte, the Langerhans cells, projects the dendrites towards the outermost layers to uptake antigens and stimulate the adaptive immune response. In the dermis, mast cells store large amounts of substances in granules, such as cathelicidins, histamine and proteinases, that contribute to resident dendritic cell maturation and the immune dialogue with T cells [94].

### ***1.2 Airway Barrier***

Human lungs consume up to 11, 500L of air each day, therefore exposed to an enormous amount of particulates, as dust, smoke, pollution, pollen and aerosols [86]. The immune system associated with the airways ensures that inappropriate responses are not initiated against such particulate innocuous antigens, preventing

tissue damage and inflammatory disorders [5, 86]. However, lung immunity also needs to be effective due to the massive surface of the epithelial area in contact with the environment and the intimate association of an extensive blood capillaries network, which turns the respiratory tract into a major portal for pathogen entrance.

The continuous rhythmic movements of the cilia and constant production of a thin mucous layer by goblet cells afford the first barrier protection by trapping airborne particles and removing them out of the lung. The immune system associated with the respiratory tract consists of a specialized network of lung-resident innate cells, comprising epithelial cells, macrophages, dendritic cells and innate lymphoid cells (mostly from type 1 and 2 subsets), interacting with local stromal cells. Alveolar macrophages (AMs) are thought to account for 90–95% of lung immune cells during homeostatic conditions and are critical for the phagocytosis of invading microorganisms and also for the production of transforming growth factor- $\beta$  (TGF- $\beta$ ) to maintain the homeostasis [5, 110]. AMs also phagocytose particulate matter, dying cells and cellular debris, limiting lung inflammation and promoting tissue repair after the clearance of infection. In addition to TGF- $\beta$ , retinoic acid metabolized by AMs can convert naïve or activated T cells into regulatory T cells [96], crucial to control immune responses against lung disease. Pathogens that evade the aforementioned innate mechanisms of immunity require the activation of T cell subsets for the ultimate control of infection, and DCs are crucial for stimulation and differentiation of specialized T cell subsets. In this context, surveillance of the lung environment and uptake of foreign airborne particles are controlled by lung-resident bronchial, interstitial, and alveolar macrophages, as well as by conventional, plasmacytoid, and monocyte-derived dendritic cells.

### ***1.3 Urinary Tract Barrier***

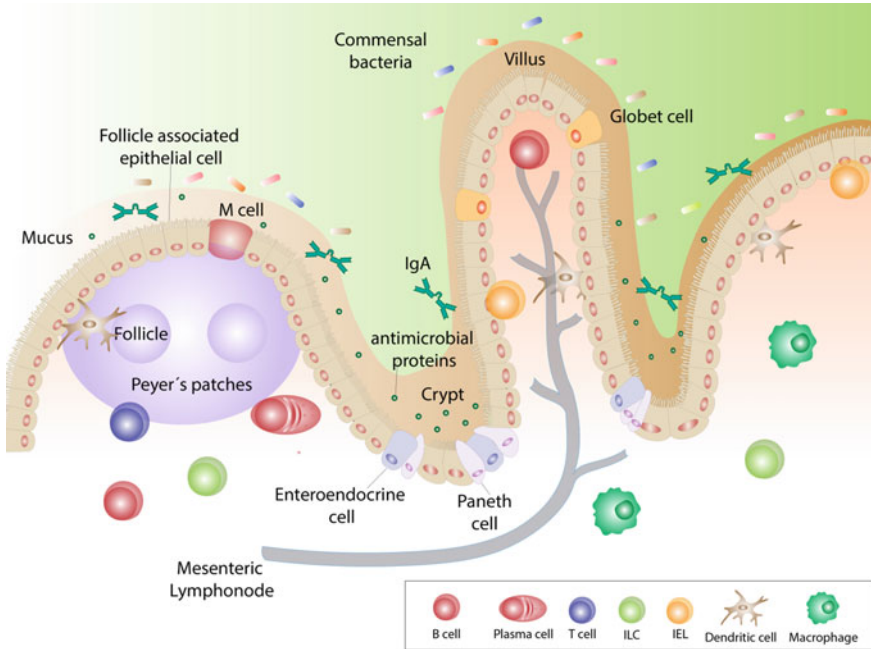
The urinary tract consists of the kidneys, bladder, ureters and urethra, and, except for the urethra, most of it is considered to be a sterile microenvironment. In addition to the anatomical barrier and mucus layer [36], as protective mechanisms, the urinary tract has soluble components secreted in the urine, such as the glycoprotein plaque uroplatin, which protect against microbial colonization. [109]. Also, epithelial and immune cells residing in the urinary tract reinforce protection against infections that, in the urinary tract, are mainly caused by intestinal microorganisms. The epithelial cells secrete several soluble components, such as the cytokines IL-1, IL-6 [95] and IL-8 [67], promoting the enrollment of phagocytes to the bladder or kidney [2], uromodulin prevents interactions between pathogens and epithelial cells and antimicrobial factors inhibit microbial growth, e. g. neutrophil gelatinase-associated lipocalin, AMPs, and pentraxins. In the early stage of urinary tract infections (UTIs), neutrophils are recruited into the bladder to promote the bacterial clearance [38]. Resident macrophages in the bladder act as sentinels secreting the chemokines such as CXC-chemokine ligand 1 and 2 and macrophage migration inhibitory factor (MIF) to recruit and stimulates transepithelial movement of neutrophils and other immune

cells to combat the pathogens [88]. Mast cells also play a pivotal sentinel role during UTIs, due to the release of pre-stored proinflammatory mediators such as TNF, histamine and several chemokines [1]. During the resolution phase of infection, mast cells secrete IL-10 that have been associated with the regeneration of the bladder epithelium [17]. Of note, while the innate cells of the urinary tract are highly reactive in the presence of microbes, the adaptive immunity, particularly in the bladder, tends to be limited. In the context of adaptive immunity, the arrival of the infectious agent in the kidneys leads to the production of specific antibodies but a robust activation of adaptive immunity is not seen in the bladder [55, 79]. The limited ability of the bladder-associated immune system to become activated and differentiate into memory cells could be a main cause for the return of UTIs, which may be linked to the increase of local IL-10 production by mast cells.

#### ***1.4 Oral and Intestinal Barriers***

The oral mucosa is lined by non-keratinized stratified squamous epithelia, while regions with mechanical stimulation or mastication injury have a protective layer of keratin. The junctional epithelium (JE) that lines the teeth is an extremely vulnerable site in the oral barrier. The JE connection to the tooth is highly permeable to the passage of fluid containing host protective factors, including plasma proteins, cytokines, immunoglobulins, and cells. Notably, the neutrophils are the main cells recruited to the gingival crevice and form a “defense wall” in the subgingival biofilm. [22]. In parallel, the gingival mononuclear phagocyte set comprises a complex network of DCs, macrophages, and recruited monocytes. Particularly, macrophages mediate the main antimicrobial functions at the gingiva but can also participate in healing and continuous tissue repair [57]. In the gingiva, also reside innate lymphoid cells (ILC), natural killer (NK) cells, B cells and T helper 17 (Th17) cells. Recently, it has been demonstrated that Th17 cells in the gingiva increase with age in response to local damage from chewing. [26]. IL-17 produced by Th17 cells is crucial for innate antimicrobial defense mechanisms, such as  $\beta$ -defensin 3, crucial for oral antifungal immunity. In addition to immune cells, saliva also comprises a plethora of antimicrobial agents, such as immunoglobulins, lysozyme, lactoferrin and peroxidases [42].

Moving forward towards the gastrointestinal tract, the intestine is specifically adapted to support (1) the colonization of commensal microorganisms, essential to promote the digestion and absorption of dietary nutrients, (2) tolerance towards innocuous environmental antigens and (3) immunity against infectious challenges. Notably, the gut epithelial and immune cells detect the microbiota components and its metabolites to maintain the tone of the tissue-specific immune response (Fig. 1). The primary firewall preventing pathogen and pathobiont invasion in the gut is the mucus layer. Ranging from a thin to a thick layer along the gastrointestinal mucosa, this multi-component structure integrates an intricate network of mucin glycoproteins along with the presence of AMPs and neutralizing IgA antibodies. Underneath



**Fig. 1 The intestinal barrier comprises physical, chemical and active structures.** The physical barrier includes the epithelium and a mucus layer. Along with epithelial cells, other cell subtypes contribute to the defense of the mucosa. The antimicrobial peptides and the immunoglobulin A (IgA) provide chemical strength to prevent the pathogen invasion and the host immune cells act as an active barrier, controlling the homeostasis and responding to invading microorganisms

the mucus layer, the intestinal lamina propria is covered by an epithelial cell monolayer. The intestinal epithelium is organized into crypts and villi, being the crypt compartment organized as invagination in the underlying lamina propria and responsible for the epithelium regeneration and microbicidal activity by AMPs-producing Paneth cells [76]. Among the enterocytes, which recognizes and respond to microbial components via pattern recognition receptors, several other cell subsets with immunological properties are found in the epithelial layer, including goblet cells (mucus producers), intraepithelial lymphocytes, DCs, macrophages, Paneth cells, Microfold (M) cells (transport of luminal particles), enteroendocrine cells (hormone producers) and tuft cells (initiation of type 2 immunity) [33, 106]. The crosstalk between this immunological compartment and the MALT is crucial for the full activation of gut immunity.

In the intestine, the MALT is named as gut-associated lymphoid tissue (GALT) and comprises subepithelial lymphoid aggregates, such as Peyer's patches (PPs) and isolated lymphoid follicles (ILFs). DCs, T and B cells in the GALT, immediately beneath the follicle-associated epithelium, are exposed to luminal antigens transported by M cells [76]. Specialized subsets of CD103-expressing DCs in the lamina propria and PPs produce high levels of IL-10, TGF- $\beta$  and retinoic acid, therefore

promoting the differentiation of regulatory T cells and the expression of gut-homing molecules CCR9 and  $\alpha 4\beta 7$  on activated lymphocytes [48, 64]. The regulatory T cells induced in the gut mucosa are essential for the tolerance towards environmental antigens and commensal microbiota. In contrast, lower concentrations of TGF- $\beta$ , and IL-6 in the mesenteric milieu induce the differentiation of Th17 cells [114]. Both, Th17 and regulatory T cells are the canonical responses in the gut mucosa shaped by the resident microbiota and its metabolites, such as short chain fatty acids [49, 50]. In contrast to the immunomodulatory effects of the regulatory T cells, the IL-17A produced by Th17 cells acts on intestinal epithelium to promote barrier function. In addition, together with IL-17F, IL-21, IL-22, TNF- $\alpha$ , IL-17 is critical in controlling extracellular infections. Th17 and regulatory T cells can also be converted into follicular T helper cells that support intestinal IgA production [40, 103]. Recently, adipose tissue depots adjacent to the intestine, particularly the mesentery, have been described as an important reservoir for memory T cells activated towards intestinal antigens [37]. As discussed later in this chapter, the adipose tissue provides a unique environment for the long-term survival of memory T cells that undergo metabolic reprogramming. In this context, the interplay between the metabolites, microbiota, epithelial and immune cells is critical to shaping the tissue-specific responses during homeostasis and in the face of infectious challenges. The disruption of this fine-tuned balance directly impacts the canonical pathways of the gut immune response and defines the outcome of infection and inflammatory diseases.

## 2 Consequences of Infection for the Tissue Immune Homeostasis

As described previously in this chapter, the barrier-associated immune system is endowed with tissue-specific mechanisms to ensure immunity, tolerance towards innocuous challenges and protection against tissue injury. However, defined pathogens can escape the firewall mechanisms and disrupt the tissue homeostasis, initiating infection and inflammatory process. Success in combating infectious disease consists of activating an innate immune response to prevent the growth of pathogens, induce an inflammatory response and promote the generation of adaptive immunity. However, pathogens are able to modulate the immune response to ensure their survival, which usually promotes a decrease in the tolerogenic response and increases the pro-inflammatory profile in the barrier tissues. For instance, years ago, several studies demonstrated that the protozoa *Leishmania* spp. has developed mechanisms to subvert macrophage killing through the modification of host cytokine expression such as IL-1 and TNF- $\alpha$ , downmodulation of major histocompatibility complex (MHC) class I and II by IFN- $\gamma$  and reduction of ROS production [15, 23, 81].

Not only protozoan but also several other pathogens are capable of subverting macrophage or neutrophil microbicidal function, including bacteria and fungi. In the urogenital tract, for instance, the uropathogenic *Escherichia coli* has been shown

to suppress NF- $\kappa$ B activation in urothelial cells, decreasing cytokine secretion and increasing apoptosis [10, 43]. *Salmonella typhimurium* infection by the oral route impairs the adaptive immune response by promoting MHC class II ubiquitination in infected DCs, decreasing antigen presentation to CD4 T cells, and favoring bacterial survival [56]. Fungal species such as *Candida* spp. are part of the microbiome, but are considered pathobionts. Of these species, *C. albicans* is the most relevant, promoting oral thrush and vulvovaginal candidiasis. Neutrophils and macrophages have a relevant role in controlling mucosal fungal infections. However, studies have shown that *C. albicans* could escape neutrophils (NETose) and extracellular neutrophil traps (NETs) that release DNase into the extracellular medium [112] and form biofilms [52], which renders fungal cells less accessible to immune cells. *C. albicans* also influence polarization of macrophages from a classic phenotype toward an alternative phenotype, thereby reducing antimicrobial response and promoting fungal survival. These are just a few examples about how pathogens evade specific cellular pathways of immunity. However, infections can compromise not only the functioning of defined immune cell subsets but also may interfere in the entire firewall mechanism.

Indeed, it has been described that a single gastrointestinal episode of infection with the bacteria *Yersinia pseudotuberculosis* can lead to chronic inflammation in several tissues, particularly the mesentery, long-term after the clearance of the pathogen. The infection impairs the immune dialog in the gut by changing the function of mesenteric lymphatic vessels. As a result, migratory DCs in the gut are deviated from the gut-lymph node migratory route, which permanently compromises the canonical regulatory responses in the mucosa, impacting mucosal immunity and promoting chronic inflammation [30]. Another example of immunological scar driven by infection, is the oral infection with *Toxoplasma gondii*. Although the systemic infection with *T. gondii* triggers a transient activation of IFN- $\gamma$ - and TNF-producing Th1 cells, essential to infection control, there is also a persistent thymic atrophy and decrease in the naïve CD4 T lymphocyte pool. The result of the loss of thymic architecture supports chronic *T. gondii* infection and compromises resistance to other pathogens [54]. In the context of immune modulation, in 2019, two complementary studies demonstrated that measles virus (MV) infection, efficiently transmitted by aerosol or respiratory droplets, diminishes preexisting antibodies to previously encountered pathogens, a phenomenon called “immunological amnesia” [62], due to depletion of expanded B cell memory clones, and inability to restore the naïve B cell pool [77], and consequently, increasing vulnerability to future infections.

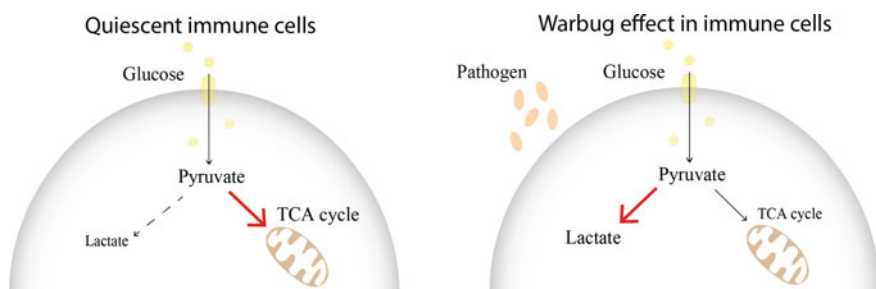
Therefore, despite the sophisticated mechanisms of barrier immunity, pathogens evolved to subvert the immune system and establish infection. For a very long time, the studies on host–pathogen interaction at barrier tissues had almost exclusively focused on the immunological aspects of the responses. However, only recently, the involvement of host and pathogen metabolic reprogramming began to be appreciated for understanding the outcome of infection. Indeed, the immune system adapts to the infectious environment to obtain nutrients used in cellular functions. The presence of pathogens at barrier sites, such as the lung and intestine, interfere with immune cell metabolism and pathogens modulate host cell metabolism to their advantage. In the next sections, will be discussed how cells of the innate and adaptive immune systems



induce a metabolic reprogramming necessary for antimicrobial molecules production and cell activation, proliferation and differentiation. Such changes also allow tissue repair and the generation of memory cells against future pathogen encounters.

### 3 Effects of Infection in the Immune Cell Metabolism

The cellular metabolic state is directly regulated by the surrounding microenvironment. Metabolic changes occur as an alternative to maintain homeostasis and control infections. However, metabolism also reflects the cell activation profile and, consequently, supports the immune response against pathogens. Metabolic processes are divided into anabolic processes, gathering macromolecules, and catabolic processes with the disruption of macromolecules. The catabolic process provides carbon and nitrogen sources, mainly through the use of glucose and glutamine, for the biosynthesis of nucleotides, amino acids, and lipids. In this way, the immune cell supports its activation and proliferation process. Each immune cell type has its own metabolic choice depending on its energy requirement and nutrient demand. For this purpose, cells have specific nutrient sensors and transcription of metabolic enzymes that assist in targeting the metabolism [58]. In the absence of glucose and glutamine, immune cells use fatty acids and amino acids as new sources of nutrients. Cellular energy is obtained through a catabolic process of high (oxidative phosphorylation) and low (glycolysis) efficiency. Quiescent cells use glucose degradation to generate pyruvate that supplies Tricarboxylic acid cycle (TCA) and oxidative phosphorylation. Unlike resting cells, classically activated M1 macrophages, DCs and effector T cells induce a metabolic reprogramming to support cellular biosynthetic processes termed “Warburg effect”, often driven by aerobic glycolysis [25] (Fig. 2). Therefore, the uptake of nutrients is crucial to supply the cell demand for energy and favor metabolic shift. Likewise, pathogens use the same nutrients for their maintenance, which drives the competition for the available glucose [102].



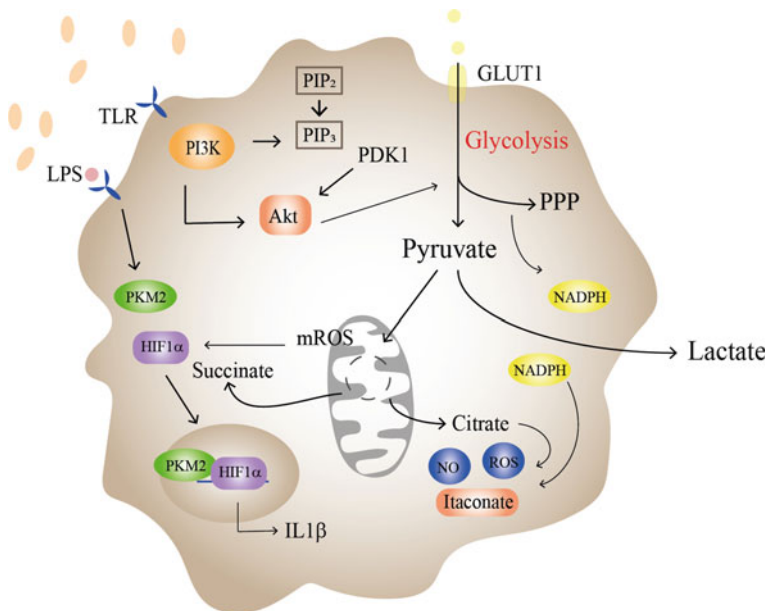
**Fig. 2 Metabolic reprogramming in immune cells during infection.** Quiescent cells maintain the glucose influx to supply the TCA cycle. Upon infection, innate immune cells increase glycolytic flux that culminate in lactate production even with oxygen availability (Warburg effect) and decrease in TCA cycle. TCA - Tricarboxylic acid cycle

Microbial compounds such as lipopolysaccharide (LPS) are recognized by Toll-like receptors (TLRs) in immune cells. This engagement induces a metabolic reprogramming in the innate immune cells to supply their current needs. In addition to microbial products, the inflammatory milieu drives cell differentiation and metabolism. Macrophage differentiation occurs according to the production of cytokines at the inflamed site into cell subsets that diverge mainly in their metabolic state. The cytokine IL-4 increases mitochondrial respiration and oxidation of fatty acids that culminate in the production of Arginase-1 (Arg-1) in macrophages named M2. However, IFN- $\gamma$  increases the glycolytic pathway and the production of antimicrobial peptides such as the superoxide burst (ROS) and reactive nitrogen intermediates (NO)[101], characterizing a population of pro-inflammatory macrophages also known as M1. Although the polarization of macrophages is important for the outcome of the infection, the front line in combating pathogens at mucosal sites are tissue-resident macrophages (TRMs) that are specialized immune sentinels. In this way, TRMs change their metabolic reprogramming according to the environment. Upon IL4 stimulation, alveolar and peritoneal macrophages can undergo STAT6 phosphorylation, but only peritoneal macrophages upregulate Arg-1 [99]. Therefore, the escape mechanisms used by pathogens in TRMs may differ depending on the entry barrier. Indeed, the TRMs metabolism is mostly unknown due to its heterogeneity in barrier tissues, making this a crucial issue that must be addressed in future studies on cell metabolic reprogramming.

Like macrophages, the activation of DCs, mast cells and neutrophils increases the glycolytic pathway and fatty acid synthesis. In addition to switching to the glycolytic pathway, metabolic reprogramming of innate immunity cells triggers several metabolic changes after the pathogen recognition. The infected cell activates the phosphoinositide-3 kinase/Akt (PI3K / Akt) pathway to induce a signaling cascade that supports metabolic reprogramming. PI3K promotes phosphatidylinositol-3,4,5-trisphosphate (PIP3) which conscripts Akt to be activated by Phosphoinositide-dependent kinase 1 (PDK1) [31]. Phosphorylated Akt prompts the glucose transporter 1 (GLUT1), hexokinase 2 (HK2), and phosphofructokinase 1 (PFK1) expression. Next, Akt induces ATP-dependent citrate lyase (ACL), which converts citrate in the cytosol into oxaloacetate (OAA) and Acetyl-CoA. The metabolic switch to the glycolytic pathway reduces pyruvate entry into mitochondrial TCA and increases lactate production. In this context, the TCA pathway is supplied by the increase in glutaminolysis, providing  $\alpha$ -ketoglutarate ( $\alpha$ -KG) and, consequently, precursors of amino acids. Thus, the citrate released into the cytosol is converted to OAA and acetyl-CoA for the synthesis of lipids and fatty acids. The citrate is also a precursor for the itaconate acid [61], which has antimicrobial functions against intracellular bacteria from lung barriers such as *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* and *Legionella pneumophila*; or intestinal barriers such as *Salmonella enterica* [59]. Still, citrate is also used to develop reactive oxygen species (ROS), nitric oxide (NO) and prostaglandins. The accumulation of succinate induced by high levels of pyruvate kinase M2 (PKM2) after LPS recognition, stabilizes hypoxia-inducible factor 1 alpha (HIF1a) allowing translocation to the nucleus and inducing IL1 transcription [100]. Oxidized succinate

induces mROS production and also assists in HIF1 $\alpha$ -mediated IL1 $\beta$  mRNA expression. In contrast, glucose 6-phosphate triggers the Pentose Phosphate Pathway (PPP), which culminates in reducing equivalent NADPH and NADH, that will be used for the generation of ROS and NO (Fig. 3).

The recognition of molecular patterns is crucial for inducing metabolic reprogramming during infection. Notably, it has been observed that defined stimuli, such as  $\beta$ -glucan and Bacillus Calmette-Guérin (BCG), recognized by innate immune cells induce long-term functional reprogramming, which is referred to as “trained immunity”, which is an innate version for immunological memory [77, 85]. The changes occur through epigenetic reprogramming due to histones acetylation and methylation in monocyte, macrophage or NK cells that culminate in an increase in cytokine production and metabolic shift [85]. Therefore, trained immunity increases responsiveness to second infections for weeks and the ability to eliminate the pathogen.



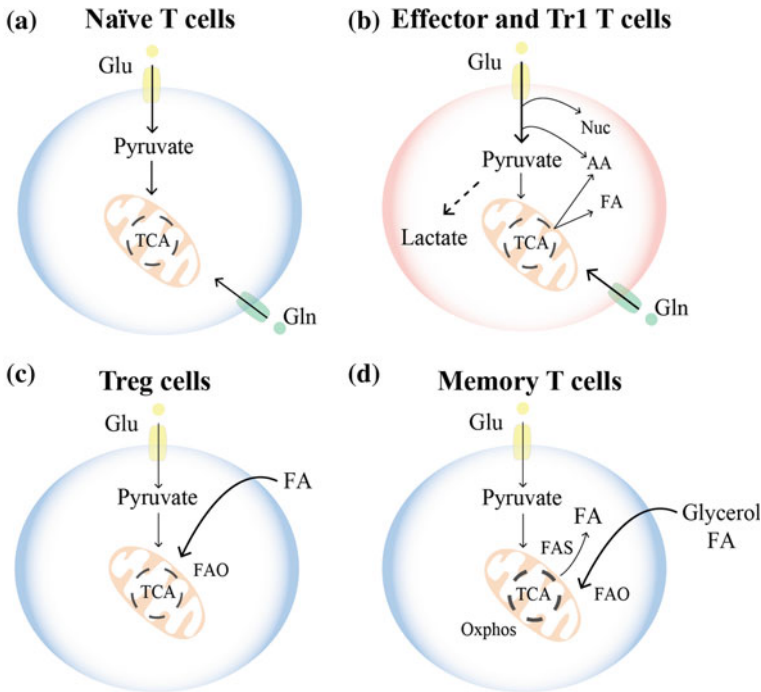
**Fig. 3 Metabolic reprogramming in innate immune cells during infection.** Microbial compounds increase glycolysis through Akt activation and induce PKM2 dimers and tetramers. PKM2 dimers translocate to the nucleus and contribute to IL1 $\beta$  expression. Accumulated succinate stabilizes HIF1 $\alpha$  to drive IL1 $\beta$  expression and citrate promotes NO, ROS and itaconate production

## 4 Metabolic Reprogramming of T Cells to Protect Against Infections

Similar to innate immune cells, activated T cells also induce metabolic reprogramming to support cell biosynthesis. After activation by antigen and costimulatory molecules, T cells increase glycolysis and oxidative phosphorylation (OXPHOS) to supply the energy demand. High expression of glucose transporters (Glut1) supports glucose uptake to maintain the functional glycolytic pathway. In addition, Glut1 expression increases T cell proliferation, cytokine production and cell survival. In naïve T cells, Glut1 expression is low and is increased after activation of TCR and CD28-mediated Akt-dependent and independent pathways [46]. T-cell glycolytic metabolism is restrained by the mammalian target of rapamycin (mTOR) complex 1 (mTORC1) activity and transcription factors targeting metabolic reprogramming, such as HIF1 and c-Myc [91, 107]. In addition, under low nutrient availability, T cells adapt to low glucose levels, increasing glutaminolysis through glutamine uptake [11]. Glutamine uptake is controlled by the ERK / MAPK pathway during T lymphocyte activation [16].

Effector T cells maintain the glycolytic pathway after differentiation, while Foxp3 + regulatory T cells decrease glucose consumption and prefer to use derived fatty acids to support oxidative metabolism [34]. Besides its own metabolism, the maintenance and generation of regulatory cells in barrier sites depend on homeostatic environmental control. The production of TGF $\beta$ , prostaglandin E2 (PGE2) and IL-10 by the mucosal epithelium, down regulates the immune response and induces regulatory T cells [4, 53, 74]. As discussed previously, the presence of regulatory T cells is essential for mucosal tolerance, and the mucosal surface portrays a complex system that must work to contain harmful pathogens, but at the same time, it must inhibit the immune response against commensal microorganisms, proper antigens and nutrients. Thereby, mucosal components provide significant metabolic changes, mainly targeting tissue hypoxia for environmental control or supporting metabolic shift in T cells. Intraepithelial cells detect the pathogen and promote metabolic changes in TCR $\gamma\delta$  intestinal intraepithelial lymphocytes, increasing the glycolytic pathway to sustain the maintenance of the intestinal epithelial barrier against enteric pathogens [41]. However, T-cell subpopulations have their own energy demand and metabolic reprogramming to perform their immune function.

Contrary to Foxp3 + regulatory T cells, type 1 regulatory T cells (Tr1) maintain the glycolytic pathway as effector T cells. Meanwhile, memory T cells predominantly use fatty acid oxidation to support oxidative phosphorylation (OxPhos), and glucose is used to generate mitochondrial citrate (Fig. 4). However, in an infectious context, the metabolic reprogramming of T cells depends on the environmental conditions and available nutrients that result in efficient activation, regulation and memory generation. Chronic infections such as *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, mitochondrial dysfunction in CD8 T cells result in greater dependence on glycolysis and show bioenergetic deficiencies [84]. However, for memory T cells generation,



**Fig. 4 Metabolic pathway in T cell subsets.** A. Naïve T cells use glucose and glutamine to maintain the oxphos pathway. B. Effector and Tr1 cells increase glycolysis and produce lactate. Intermediate components support the synthesis of nucleotides (Nuc), amino acids (AA) and fatty acids (FA). C.  $\text{Foxp3}^+$  T regs use extracellular FA to support oxphos by fatty acid oxidation (FAO). D. Memory T cells use glucose to increase TCA intermediate components to support fatty acid synthesis (FAS). Glycerol and FA are used to fuel the oxphos pathway. Blue cells show oxidative metabolism and red cells show glycolytic metabolism

the glycolytic pathway is reduced, and the AMP-activated protein kinase (AMPK) activity and OxPhos are increased for homeostatic maintenance.

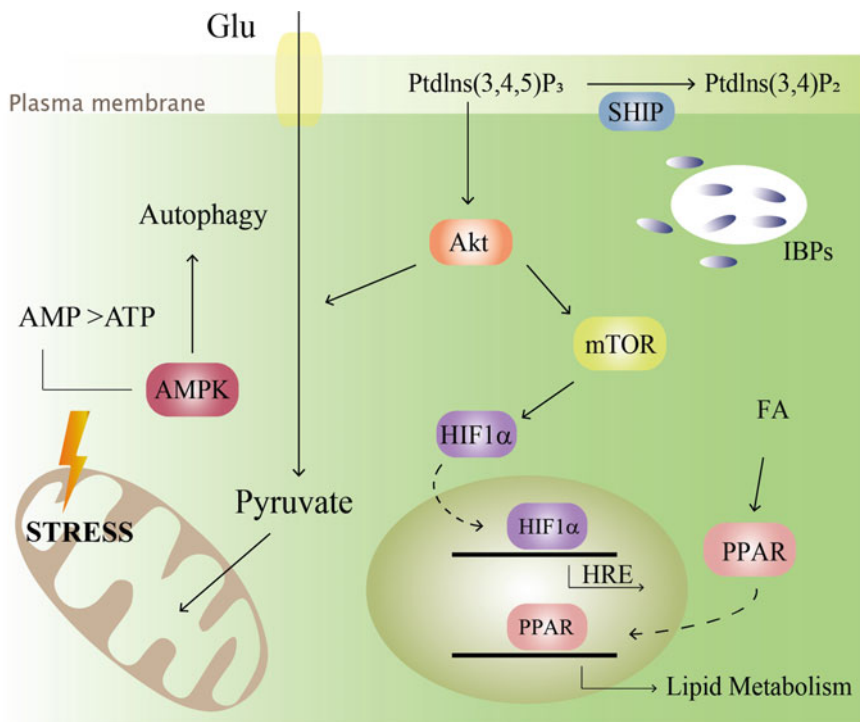
## 5 Modulation of Immune Cell Metabolism by Pathogens

As discussed previously, immune cells that compose an active barrier at sites of high exposure to pathogens control infections and maintain the body's homeostasis. For this, immune cells need to change the metabolism and provide energy even with the drop of nutrients in the environment. In contrast, pathogens have mechanisms that act as an opposite force for their survival within the host. Intracellular pathogens, such as viruses and some bacteria, are able to reprogram host cell metabolism to increase the demand for nutrients and allow their replication. Elseways, extracellular pathogens modulate the immune system to improve the production of essential metabolites for

their survival. Herein, we will discuss how pathogens modulate the metabolism of immune cells and determine their permanence during infection.

The limited resources of cellular energy during the pathogen-host interaction lead to a race against time in obtaining nutrients for the cellular machinery of both. In addition, metabolic changes in the host cell may favor the pathogen's permanence due to the evasion of the immune system. In this way, metabolic changes act as key mechanisms for the survival of some species, mainly by increasing glucose and lactate in the host cell. Some protozoa use the host's glucose as a primary carbon source, such as *Trypanosoma brucei* and *Plasmodium falciparum* [75, 89]. The extracellular pathogenic bacterium group A *Streptococcus* (GAS) causes an endoplasmic reticulum stress to host cells. This stress increases asparagine (ASN) synthetase expression that promotes GAS proliferation, while proliferation-linked genes are downregulated in the absence of ASN [6]. Another extracellular pathogen, the *Citrobacter rodentium*, modulates innate immunity and microbiota composition, impairing cellular bioenergetics [65].

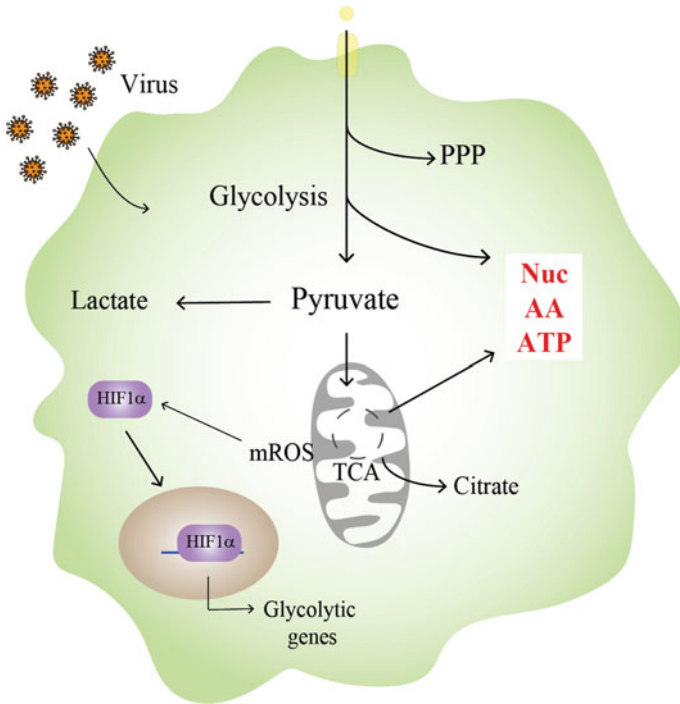
In general, the modulation of host metabolism guarantees nutrients and evasion of the immune system to increase the pathogen survival. Thereby, the metabolic shift in the host cell promotes the intracellular survival of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* [9], *Legionella pneumophila* [29], *Brucella abortus* [20] or *Chlamydia trachomatis* [83]. Cancer cells, known to induce the Warburg effect, are more susceptible to *Listeria monocytogenes* replication, suggesting that metabolic reprogramming is a favorable mechanism for the survival of this bacterium [35]. Among the many infections that interfere with the host metabolism, a group of pathogenic bacteria, known as Intracellular Bacterial Pathogens (IBPs), survive and proliferate inside vacuoles or in the cytosol for long periods. Because IBPs are heterotrophic, i.e., metabolism depends on carbon sources for energy, they use both the host carbon and nitrogen. An interesting fact is a possible association between intracellular carbon metabolism and virulence gene expression. It is known that specific regulators can control these genes that sense metabolites generated by the metabolism of carbon and nitrogen [27]. As a primary carbon source, IBPs use glucose from immune cells for their metabolic activities [13]. However, defined bacteria need a "biopartite metabolism" because they have more difficulty in using only glucose. These IBPs use several sources of carbon from the host to generate energy and stay within the host cells. Among them, it is possible to highlight TCA intermediaries such as succinate and malate, amino acids, fatty acids and also products derived from glucose such as glycerol (-3P), pyruvate and lactate [28]. Due to the evolutionary adaptation of the pathogen, some components in the metabolic reprogramming of the host cell, are used as an escape and survival mechanism. Alternatively, pathogen virulence factors interact with central regulators of host metabolism (Fig. 5). The activation of PI3K/Akt pathway is downmodulated by the Src homology 2 (SH2) domain-containing inositol-5'-phosphatase (SHIP) protein that promotes *Francisella tularensis* to escape into the cytosol [3, 19]. Still, the motility and phagocytosis of the host cell are controlled by molecular mechanisms developed by IBPs subverting the metabolism of phosphoinositides [78]. In experimental model, the infection with *Yersinia enterocolitica* led to HIF-1 in Peyer's patches [39]. Furthermore, Salmonella requires the fatty acid regulator



**Fig. 5 Intracellular bacterial pathogens (IBPs) modulate central metabolic regulators in the host cells.** Bacterial components activate or alter metabolic pathways to evade the immune system and maintain its survival. The main metabolic mediators affected by IBPs are the PI3K/Akt/mTOR pathway, HIF1 $\alpha$ , fatty acid regulators and AMPK

PPAR $\delta$  to establish a metabolic environment that favors a long-term permanence. Under cellular stress, defined metabolic strategies to obtain nutrients also promote the elimination of intracellular pathogens. These cells reach high levels of AMP/ATP by reducing the production of ATP, which in turn induces the AMP-activated protein kinase (AMPK) activation. Therefore, AMPK regulates the autophagic process, efficient autophagosome maturation [47]. Thus, autophagy is used as a self-degrading process to obtain energy, and hence intracellular pathogens can be eliminated as well. However, pathogens have machinery capable of modulating autophagy in the host, either by changing the maturation of the phagosome such as *Mycobacteria* [93], *Legionella* [90], *Brucella* [97] and *Salmonella* [108], or escaping from those vacuoles into the cytoplasm as in *Shigella* [72] and *Listeria monocytogenes* infection [63]. Therefore, pathogens evade host defense mechanisms not only by interfering in the microbicide function of immune cells, but also, in their metabolic pathways.

In general, the viruses perform both lytic cycles, with high replication and viral load, as well as latent and persistent within the cell. Therefore, these conditions have different metabolic needs of the host cell [21]. During viral replication, the



**Fig. 6 Virus infection modulates host cell metabolism to support its replication.** Viruses promote metabolic changes in host cells to increase the production of Nucleotides (Nuc), amino acids (AA) and ATP that support viral replication. Entry into the glycolytic pathway is a critical mechanism to supply the demand for viral components

virus depends on high demand for nucleotides, amino acids and ATP (Fig. 6). Therefore, changes in glycolytic pathways, fatty acid synthesis (FAS), glutaminolysis and Pentose Phosphate Pathway (PPP) are observed. The targeting of glucose to PPP supports the production of nucleotides. In addition, pyruvate can be converted to lactate or enter the TCA pathway. Citrate can be transported to the cytoplasm via the FAS pathway. On the other side, glutamine enters the infected cell and supports the TCA cycle [87]. Therefore, the catabolism of suitable carbon sources in infected cells is crucial for viral replication, enabling the synthesis of nucleic acids and the viral envelope. For instance, the infection of monocytes with acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) triggers mitochondrial ROS production, capable of HIF-1 $\alpha$  stabilization, which promotes the expression of glycolytic genes and IL-1 $\beta$ , responsible to monocytes metabolic reprogramming to aerobic glycolysis (Warburg effect) and T cell dysfunction, respectively. These data may explain how diabetic individuals with uncontrolled glucose levels are more susceptible to develop the severe form of Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), the pandemic that affected the world's population in 2020 [18].



Another example of metabolic reprogramming in the context of viral infection is the HIV. The susceptibility of different subtypes of CD4 T cells to HIV-1 infection is associated with high cellular metabolic activity. In fact, independently of their activation phenotype, CD4 T cells with high oxidative phosphorylation and glycolysis are more infected by HIV as compared to CD4 T cells harboring other metabolic profiles [105]. As exemplified above, different viruses are capable of infecting specific barrier tissues, such as COVID-19 respiratory tract infection and HIV-1 genital tract infection. However, regardless of the virus or the infected barrier site, one of the characteristics observed is the ability that these viruses to interfere within the metabolism of immune cells in favor of their survival and replication. Most of the studies regarding immune cell metabolism were performed *in vitro*, and now this knowledge needs to be integrated into the context of tissue-specific immune responses. Therefore, we need to better understand how the cellular metabolic reprogramming imposed by different types of pathogens can interfere, especially in the long-term, in the barrier immune response and its function, given the relevance of the balance between expansion and contraction of effector immune response in these tissues and their role as pathogen entrance sites.

## 6 Therapy Targeting Cell Metabolism to Control Infections

Considering that intracellular as well as extracellular pathogens can promote the metabolic reprogramming of the host immune cells, either through the modification of the cellular immune response profile or even the bioavailability of nutrients, it is plausible to suggest that therapies targeting metabolic pathways may be important to better target the immune response to fight the infectious agent and return homeostasis. In contrast to the pathogen-targeted traditional antimicrobial therapy, these therapeutic approaches would target the host metabolism.

For instance, the first line of oral drugs for controlling glucose metabolism is metformin, that activates AMP kinase, therefore lowering blood glucose concentrations by decreasing hepatic gluconeogenesis and improving glucose cell uptake. Because of this, metformin is commonly used to treat diabetes. One of the anti-inflammatory effects associated with metformin seen in LPS-activated macrophages is the inhibition ROS generation through reverse electron transport at Complex I and inhibition of IL-1 $\beta$  production [51]. Another one is to induce the inhibition of Complex I, which consequently reduces intracellular ATP production and activation of AMP-activated protein kinase (AMPK) [98, 113]. In contrast, in an AMPK-independent manner, metformin has been shown to inhibit the mammalian target of rapamycin complex I (mTORC1) in T cells and prevents the expression of the transcription factors c-Myc and Hif-1 $\alpha$  [111]. Although metformin treatment is associated with a decreased risk of developing sepsis in humans [92], in experimental model it has been suggested that metformin may increase *C. albicans* infections by reducing

macrophages responses to this opportunistic fungal infection [104]. Another anti-inflammatory drug is dimethyl fumarate, which promotes the expression of antioxidant genes by stabilizing the expression of the transcription factor Nuclear Factor (erythroid-derived 2) like 2 (Nrf2) [24] and is usually prescribed for treating multiple sclerosis (MS) [12] and psoriasis [14]. The Nrf2 regulates the pentose phosphate route in macrophages, reducing inflammatory macrophages response and induces lipid metabolism alterations in MS patients. In addition, fungal  $\beta$ -glucan administration is demonstrated to induce trained immunity characterized by increased glycolysis and partial reversion of LPS-induced immunoparalysis in monocytes isolated from human blood [71]. Moreover, oral glucan administration also demonstrated increased survival in experimental models challenged with *S. aureus*, as well as *C. albicans*, demonstrating that trained immunity is not a pathogen-specific response [82]. The world has been witnessing a constant emergence of new pathogens against which there may be no effective antimicrobial drugs. Therefore, the manipulation of metabolic cell reprogramming may represent a new promising approach for treating infectious diseases.

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# Metabolic Reprogramming and Cancer



Ana Paula Lepique, Enrique Boccardo, and Flávia Sardela de Miranda

## 1 A Brief Historical Perspective

Cancer cells display several metabolic alterations frequently described as “Warburg effect”. In 1953, the German scientist, Otto Warburg, published a paper entitled “On the origin of cancer cells” [1]. In this paper, he described observations that led him to the theory that tumor cells developed as a consequence of two key events. First, an injury to cell respiration, which could be caused by different factors such as hypoxia or drugs that inhibited or uncoupled the oxidative phosphorylation, which ultimately damaged the mitochondria and therefore energy production through the electron transport chain. Secondly, the cells, through a proliferation dependent selection process, increased fermentation, which led to the transformed phenotype [1]. This idea started with the observation that tumor cells could proliferate in hypoxic environments and maintained the same metabolic profile even if cultured in normoxia. The idea that metabolic changes caused the transformed cell phenotype has been under discussion for a long time. Studies from some research groups have produced data that support the existence of a causal relationship between mutations in homoplasmy in mitochondrial genes and cell transformation. However, this is not the accepted paradigm for the majority of cancers. Although, there is evidence that for a few types of cancer loss of function of proteins related to oxidative phosphorylation has a causal relationship with carcinogenesis. This issue will be addressed in detail later in this chapter [2, 3]. There are several evidences showing that mutations in proto-oncogenes and tumor suppressor genes modulate cell metabolism and do not necessarily involve genetic changes in genes related to the oxidative phosphorylation. For instance, Ras, Akt and Myc activity may promote, through various mechanisms, glycolysis while inhibiting oxidative phosphorylation. Moreover, loss of p53 function, which is a common event in tumors, can also lead to an increase in

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glycolysis. Another important factor that has to be taken into account is the role of the tumor microenvironment on cells behavior and metabolism. The tumor microenvironment is complex and is composed by a range of different niches according to pH, oxygen and nutrient availability, nature of infiltrating cells and other factors. Therefore, within the tumor microenvironment metabolic demands vary and may modulate the tumor cell metabolism. We will explore each of these factors through this chapter and finish by exploring the effects tumor cells exert over leukocytes and immune responses.

## 2 Cancer Cells

Cancer is a disease characterized by abnormal cell proliferation and the ability of tumor cells to invade other tissues in the body. Carcinogenic mechanisms can be direct or indirect. Genetic and epigenetic alterations that lead to proto-oncogene gain of function or tumor suppressor genes inactivation can directly initiate a carcinogenic process. Chronic inflammation causing repeated cycles of tissue injury and repair, oxidative stress, cytokine and growth factor secretion, can in time, also initiate a carcinogenic process. The carcinogenic process involves the accumulation of various genetic and epigenetic alterations. The time frame during which this occurs is usually long and the cells involved are submitted to selective pressure at all times. Among the main forces opposing tumor onset are the selective pressure from the immune system, natural competition for nutrients between actively growing cells, and intrinsic mechanisms that should lead to cell death upon cellular injury to warrant tissue homeostasis.

Cancers are composed by a heterogenous cell population containing tumor and stromal cells. Within the tumor cell population itself, there are subpopulations that exhibit different genetic profiles. This can be translated in different phenotypes characterized by diverse proliferative capacity, variable self-renewal potential, mobility and invasion capacity. Besides, there are many other cellular elements present in solid tumors. Endothelial cells, fibroblasts, leukocytes with anti-tumor phenotype as cytotoxic cells, leukocytes with pro-tumoral phenotype as alternative macrophages and regulatory T cells are also present in most tumors. Although not transformed, these cells play an essential role in tumor progression and fate [1].

### 2.1 *Oncogenes and Tumor Suppressor Genes*

Oncogenes of cellular origin are derived from activating mutations, gene amplification, translocation or other alterations that confer gain of function to normal cellular proto-oncogenes. Oncogenes drive cell cycle progression in an exaggerated manner, causing excessive proliferation which eventually favors cell transformation. Onco-proteins, coded by oncogenes, can be growth factors, growth factor receptors acting

via tyrosine kinase activity, cytoplasmic and membrane associated tyrosine kinases, serine/threonine protein kinases, GTP-binding proteins, transcription factors, or any protein with functions related to promote cellular growth, proliferation or inhibition of other proteins that negatively control the cell cycle. For example, some types of lymphoma can be triggered by the translocation that joins the immunoglobulin promoter to the c-myc coding region. This alteration leads to high constitutive c-Myc expression in the cells, which can drive transformation. The genetic alterations that cause a proto-oncogene change to oncogene are dominant (the alteration in one allele is enough to cause phenotypic changes in the cells). Oncogenes can also have viral origin. Several viruses can drive human cell transformation, through the expression of *bona fide* viral oncogenes in the host cell. This is the case of E6 and E7 oncoproteins from high-risk Human Papillomavirus. These viral factors promote, among other functions, the degradation of p53 and Retinoblastoma, pRb, tumor suppressor proteins, which are fundamental, respectively, for the maintenance of cellular homeostasis.

Tumor suppressor genes code the tumor suppressor proteins, which can control the cell cycle and even trigger apoptosis in cells with genomic alterations or unscheduled cell cycle progression due to deregulated checkpoints (see below). Usually, the expression of both alleles of tumor suppressor genes needs to be altered, by mutation or other mechanism, for the phenotype to be expressed. Examples of tumor suppressor genes are the retinoblastoma protein, p53 and BRCA1 (BREast CANcer 1) [4].

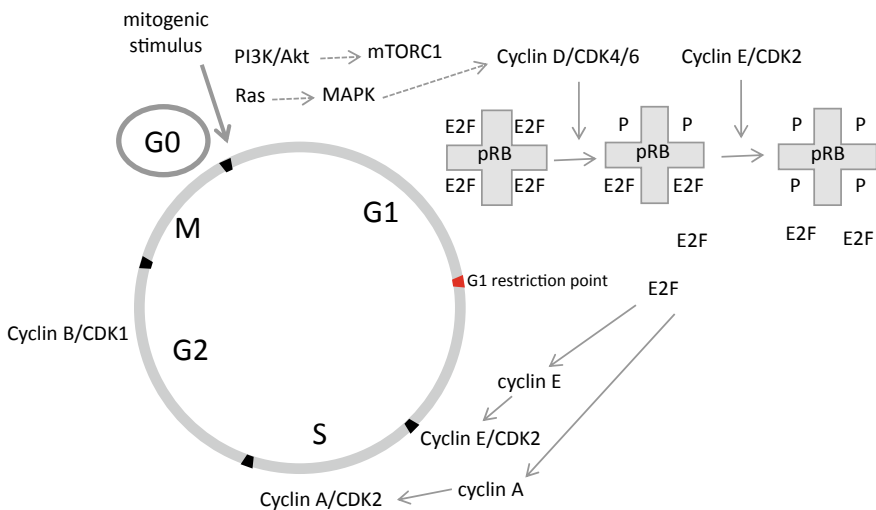
Besides the genetic and epigenetic alterations mentioned before, miRNAs are also important regulators of gene expression, through translation repression. Experimental evidence of decades of research have shown that miRNAs are directly involved in several types of human cancer, displaying roles as oncogenes or tumor suppressors. Overexpression of some miRNAs can promote cancer development by inhibiting translation of tumor suppressor genes, genes involved in cellular differentiation and apoptosis triggering. Similarly, under expressed miRNAs may promote increased expression of genes that promote cell proliferation, glycolytic metabolism and inflammation. Examples of such miRNAs are miRNA 17–92 that downregulates PTEN and pRB, while miRNA-155 upregulates c-Myc [5].

## 2.2 Cell Cycle Control

Most cells in an adult organism are quiescent and perform their functions in a non-proliferative state. Exceptions to this rule are cells from tissues that must be replenished as bone marrow, skin, mucosa and other populations with self-renewal capacity. The quiescent cells are in what is called G0 phase of the cell cycle, which means they are not proliferating, and are simply maintaining their homeostasis and executing their function in the tissue. Upon mitogenic stimulation, however, cells pass through the cell cycle to generate two daughter cells. The cell cycle is divided in 4 phases: G1, S, G2 and mitosis. The 3 first phases of the cell cycle, which correspond to the

interphase, prepare the cells for the division that happens during mitosis. During the G1 phase, or gap 1, cells accumulate mass, synthesizing organelles, biomolecules and preparing for DNA synthesis. DNA replication happens during the S phase. During the second gap phase, G2, cells gain more mass, more organelles are synthesized and organized in the intracellular space while the cell prepares for mitosis. G2 is followed by the mitotic phase, which leads to the generation of two daughter cells (Fig. 1).

The biochemical signals that trigger cell cycle usually activate cell membrane tyrosine kinase receptors. Mitogenic stimuli reorganize the cellular transcription program through signaling pathways such as Ras/Raf/MAPK, PI3K/Akt, NFkB, etc. The first genes to be expressed are known as immediate early genes (transcription independent of protein translation). Some of the products of the immediate early genes are transcription factors that will control the second gene expression wave. Among these genes, c-myc plays a central role in cell growth. Cells need to grow, gain mass and replicate organelles before they are committed to the duplication of the genome, in order to generate daughter cells. Another important pathway that promotes cellular growth is the PI3K/Akt/mTOR pathway (Phosphatidylinositol 3 kinase/Akt/mammalian Target of Rapamycin), which leads to cellular proliferation and protein synthesis, among other effects. The cellular growth during the G1 phase



**Fig. 1** Cell cycle phases and molecular steps controlling G1 progression. Upon mitogenic stimulation, through receptors that lead to activation of signaling pathways as Ras/MAPK and PI3K/Akt/mTOR, gene expression will eventually include cyclin D as a target. Cyclin D dimerizes with CDK4 or 6. This complex phosphorylates pRB, releasing E2F that mediates the expression of cyclin E and cyclin A. The proteins translated from these genes dimerize with CDK2. Several genes related to DNA synthesis will then be expressed and cells can continue the cell cycle. The restriction point, indicated in red, marks the G1 checkpoint where cells must have nutrients and mass to be able to commit to DNA synthesis

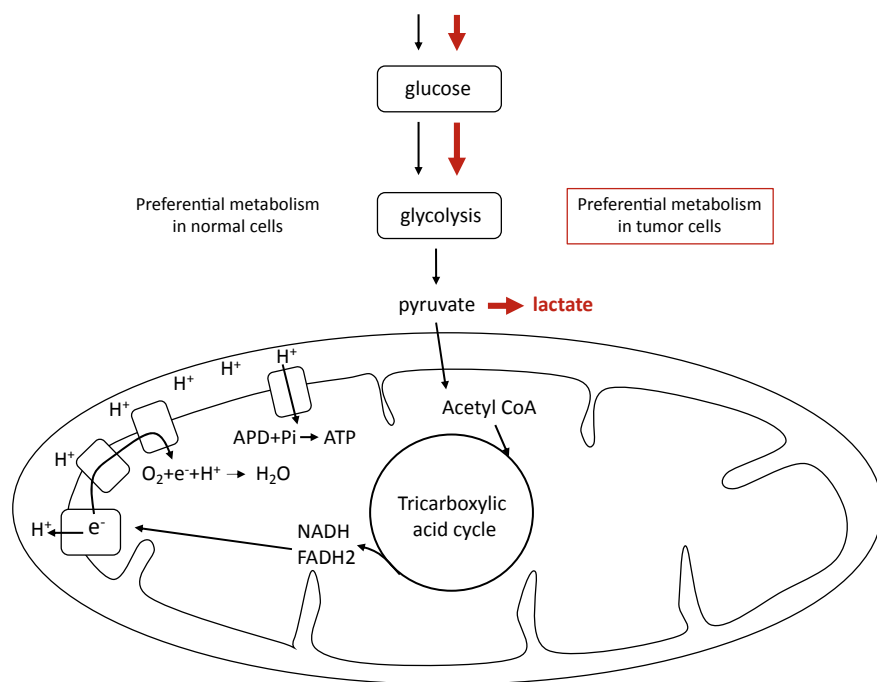
of the cell cycle is checked at the restriction point near the transition between G1 and S phases. This is an essential cell cycle checkpoint that is mainly regulated by the antiproliferative activity of the hypophosphorylated form of the tumor suppressor pRb. Molecularly, gene expression triggered by mitogenic factors induces the expression of Cyclin D (CycD), the regulatory partner of CDK4 (Cyclin Dependent Kinase 4). Once formed, the CycD/CDK4 complex phosphorylates pRb. This releases the transcription factors E2F that, in turn, stimulates the expression of several genes related to DNA synthesis including Cyclin E and Cyclin A, that will mediate the next cell cycle phases. Cyclin E will form a complex with CDK2 further phosphorylating pRb and pushing the cell cycle through the G1/S transition, while CycA/CDK2 complex will drive the S phase (Fig. 1). The G1 checkpoint, therefore, guarantees that daughter cells will be viable regarding function. As mentioned before, cancer is characterized by continuous unchecked cellular proliferation. It is common to observe that cancer cells display shorter G1 phase than normal cells. Nevertheless, they are still able to accumulate enough mass to overcome the restriction point in G1. Tumor cells are able to gain mass even with faster proliferation rates than other cells due to metabolic changes that were first described by Otto Warburg. Tumor cells behave as cells in hypoxia, using glycolysis for energy production, even when growing at normal oxygen levels. The use of glycolytic metabolism allows cells to change pathways to anabolism and macromolecules synthesis. Tumor cells, however, do not rely only on glycolysis, as will be shown later in this chapter; they can use different sources or nutrients and use more than one metabolic pathway to maintain energy levels and anabolic activity for proliferation [6].

### ***2.3 Cancer Cell Metabolism***

As briefly mentioned before, tumor cells display altered metabolism compared to normal cells. In normal cells, in the presence of oxygen, each glucose molecule processed through the glycolytic pathway generates 2 pyruvate molecules that are oxidized to 2 acetyl-Coenzyme A molecules to integrate the tricarboxylic acid cycle (TCA) to produce reduced co-factors NADH (reduced nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide) and FADH<sub>2</sub> (dihydroflavine-adenine dinucleotide). These co-factors donate their high-energy electrons to specialized protein complexes present in the inner mitochondria membrane. These protein complexes function as proton pumps and their activity generates a proton gradient between the inner and outer mitochondria membranes. This pathway is known as the oxidative phosphorylation pathway, and its final step involves the transport of a proton through the inner membrane back to the interior of the mitochondria by the ATPse pump. This process releases enough potential energy to allow for an inorganic phosphate to bind to ADP, generating ATP and CO<sub>2</sub>, at the expense of O<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>O. Using this metabolic pathway, a cell can produce 38 mol of ATP per mol of glucose. Cells also recycle oxidized co-factors to be reduced in the TCA cycle, also in a mechanism indirectly dependent on molecular oxygen.

The Warburg effect postulates that tumor cells preferentially use the glycolytic pathway, even in normoxia (Fig. 2). Today, we understand that the cancer cell metabolism is plastic and adaptable to variations in the microenvironment conditions. Cancer cells can use different substrates as sources of energy and building blocks for macromolecules including glucose, glutamine, fatty acids and even lactate, as will be explored later in this chapter.

It has been shown that oncogenes are able to drive aerobic glycolysis, where tumor cells consume 1 mol of glucose to generate 4 mol ATP through the glycolytic pathway producing lactate, without production of pyruvate to nourish the TCA. Therefore, while normal cells preferentially use glycolysis, the tricarboxylic acid cycle and oxidative phosphorylation for ATP synthesis, tumor cells preferentially use the glycolic pathway pyruvate and lactate as an end product (Fig. 2). The net



**Fig. 2** Normal and cancer cells exploit different pathways for ATP synthesis. The scheme shows a comparative description of the metabolic pathways used by normal (black) and tumor cells (red) for ATP synthesis. Normal cells use the pyruvate molecules to produce Acetyl CoA, which is completely oxidized by the tricarboxylic acid (TCA) cycle and oxidative phosphorylation. NADH and FADH<sub>2</sub>, reduced in the TCA cycle, are donors of electrons and protons to the complexes present in the mitochondria inner membrane. These complexes pump protons, forming a proton gradient between the two mitochondrial membranes, and transport electrons from complex I to III to IV, where the electrons are combined with oxygen generating H<sub>2</sub>O. The protons are pumped back into the mitochondria through complex V, a process that releases enough energy to allow for the binding of an inorganic phosphate to ADP to generate ATP. Cancer cells increase the conversion of pyruvate molecules to lactate, which is exported to the extracellular compartment

ATP production from the last pathway is just a fraction of the amount produced by the former. To compensate for this deficiency, tumor cells display high glucose uptake, mediated by the glucose transporters GLUT. The increased uptake of glucose by tumor cells has been used as a marker for detection of very small tumor masses in the body, through positron emission tomography (PET) after injection of 2-<sup>(18F)</sup>-fluoro-2-deoxy-D-glucose (FDG) in cancer patients [7].

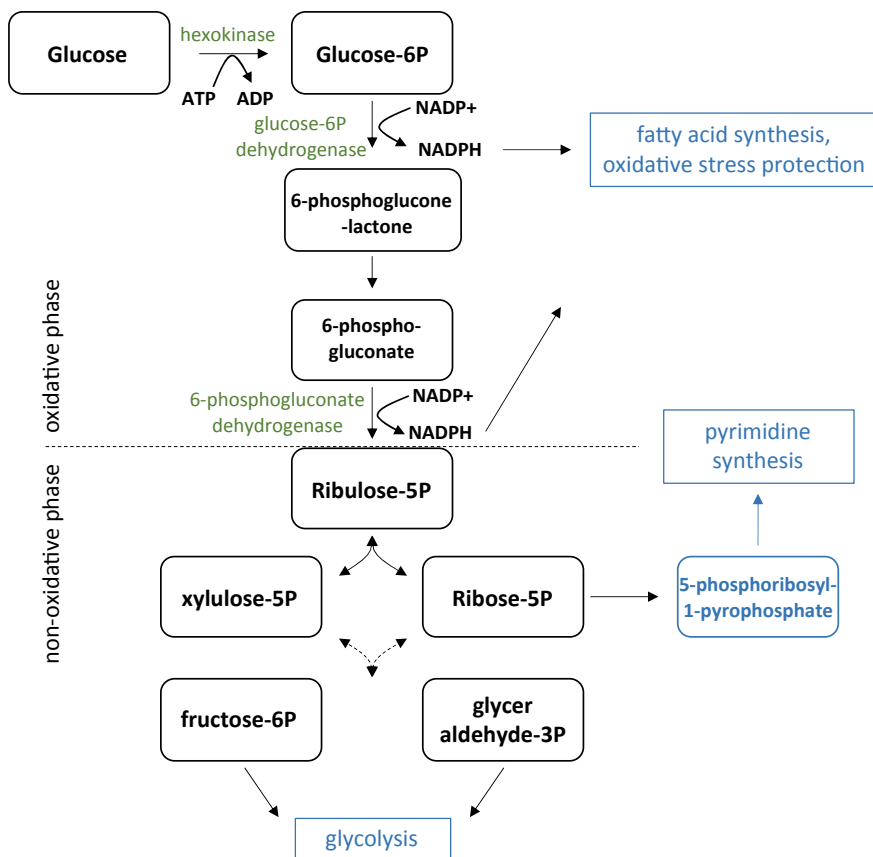
The increase in glucose uptake is paralleled by higher glycolytic pathway activity due to the upregulated expression of key enzymes in cancer cells. For instance, hexokinase (HK) is usually upregulated in cancer. This enzyme catalyzes the first irreversible step of glycolysis, the phosphorylation of glucose, a necessary step for glycolysis. There are four isoforms of HK, and HK2 is the main enzyme involved in cancer cell metabolism. It is expressed in the mitochondrial membrane, associated to the pore-like outer mitochondrial membrane protein voltage-dependent anion channel (VDAC), the inner mitochondrial membrane protein ATP synthase (ATP is another substrate to HK) and the adenine nucleotide translocator that transports ATP to the VDAC/HK-II complex. The association with this complex warrants HK2 access to ATP to allow efficient phosphorylation of glucose. There is data showing HK-II gene amplification in cancer cells. Moreover, there are several regulatory elements in the HK-II promoter responsive to HIF-1, Ras/PKC, p53 and other signaling pathways [7].

The fact that tumor cells are selected to use a less efficient metabolic pathway to produce energy may seem counterintuitive. However, this strategy confers some advantages. For instance, cancer cells can survive in low oxygen tension, which is a common condition in several tumor areas. Besides, the products of glycolysis can suppress immune responses and they also can facilitate tumor cell invasion, as will be addressed later in this chapter. The extracellular acidic pH, which results from the secretion of lactate, and lactate itself stimulate angiogenesis, while stromal cells uptake lactate, through monocarboxylate transporters, and can generate pyruvate that is used as carbon source in oxidative phosphorylation. This results in a mixed metabolic profile between tumor and stromal cells which allows cell survival and proliferation. The shift in the use of these metabolic pathways allows the synthesis of macromolecules necessary for cell growth and proliferation. Finally, but also very important, the metabolic shift can result in production of NADPH to equilibrate the redox status in tumor cells.

A metabolic pathway closely connected to glycolysis is the pentose phosphate pathway (PPP). This pathway is divided in oxidative and non-oxidative phases. In the oxidative phase, 5 mol of glucose-6P are converted in 6 mol ribulose-5P. Ribulose-5P is converted to ribose-5P, which through a series of reactions generates fructose-6P and glyceraldehyde-3P, which are intermediates of the glycolytic pathway. Depending on the metabolic demand, the PPP pathway can be directed toward production of NADPH and ribose-5P, or can favor glycolysis and pyruvate generation. In tumor cells, the pentose phosphate pathway is important for various reasons. First, it generates NADPH and ribose-5P, which are precursors for fatty acids and nucleotide synthesis, respectively. Second, as previously mentioned it can

generate glycolysis intermediates. Third, NADPH generated in this pathway is important for oxidative stress protection, which is important in all cells, but particularly in tumor cells. Therefore, in tumor cells, part of the glucose is directed to the PPP as means of production of macromolecules critical for cell growth and DNA synthesis, as well as for protection against oxidative stress (Fig. 3) [8, 9].

Besides those involved in the pathways described above, other glycolytic intermediates are also used by tumor cells for synthesis of macromolecules. Important representative examples are dihydroxyacetone that is involved in triacyl glyceride and phospholipid synthesis and pyruvate that is used as a precursor for alanine and malate synthesis. These processes are favored by the expression of the embryonic

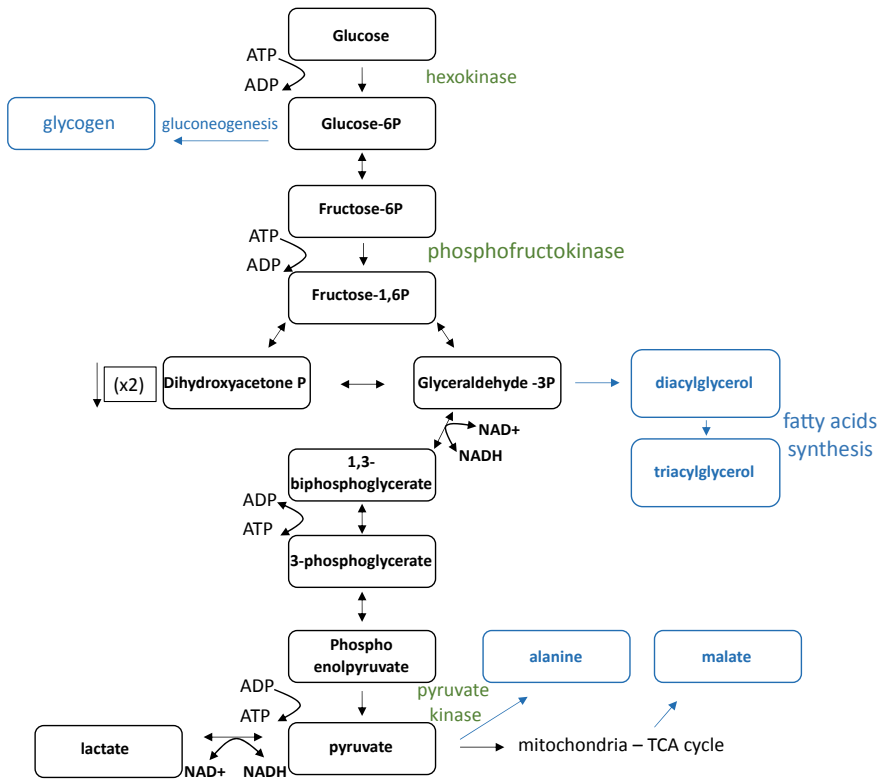


**Fig. 3** Schematic representation of the pentose phosphate pathway (PPP). This metabolic pathway uses glucose to generate NADPH and pyrimidine precursors, necessary for cell growth and DNA synthesis. Besides, NADPH is important for protection against oxidative stress. Oxidative and non-oxidative phases of the pathway are represented, as well as enzymes (in green) that regulate irreversible reactions. Biological processes downstream to PPP are represented in blue



isoform of pyruvate kinase, PKM2, in tumor cells. This isoform exhibits low enzymatic activity leading to the accumulation of glycolytic intermediates and increase the concentration of substrates for anabolic reactions. This includes phospholipid, serine and nucleotide synthesis and lactate reduction (Fig. 4). Actually, PKM2 also increases the PPP activity through the accumulation of glycolysis intermediates. PKM2 activity seems to increase due to post-translational mechanisms, as tetramerization and phosphorylation, rather than increase in expression [8]. The important role of PKM2 in cancer is highlighted by the fact that this enzyme has several non-metabolic functions, most of them associated with the regulation of gene expression [4].

The TCA cycle is also altered in tumor cells. In normal cells, Acetyl-CoA is a carbon source leading to the synthesis of the various intermediates of the cycle and to the reduction of NADH and FADH2. In turn, these co-factors donate electrons and

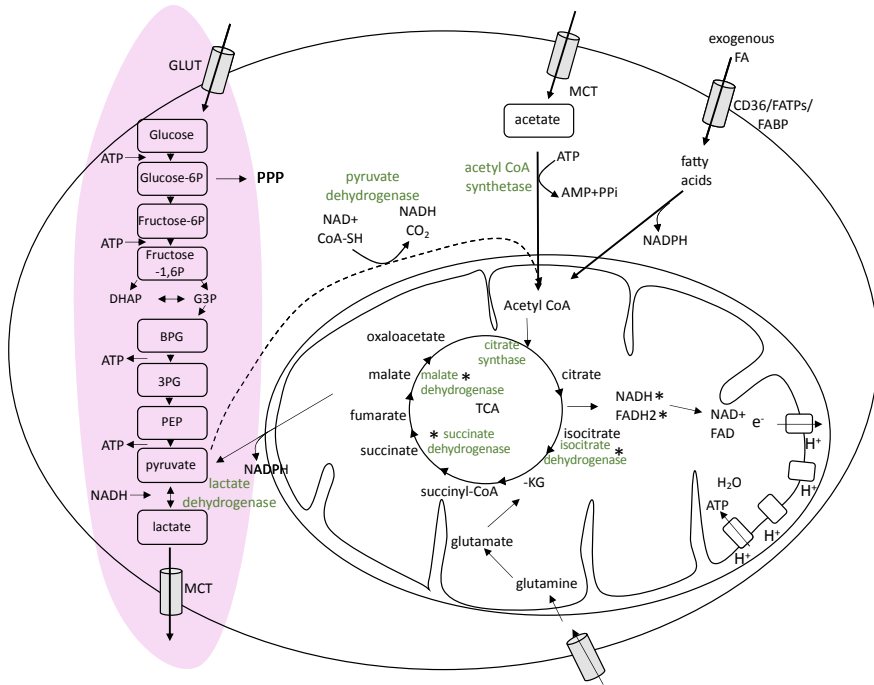


**Fig. 4** Schematic view of the glycolysis pathway (black) and anabolic reactions that use glycolytic intermediates as substrates (blue). TCA cycle corresponds to the tricarboxylic acid cycle. Enzymes depicted in green catalyze regulatory reactions in this pathway. In blue are downstream processes associated with the indicated metabolites

protons to the oxidative phosphorylation pathway. However, in tumor cells, Acetyl-CoA is not properly incorporated into the TCA. Its excess is transported to the cytoplasm, where it is used as substrate for fatty acids, cholesterol and isoprenoids synthesis. Although many tumor cells preferentially use the glycolytic pathway, data in the literature shows that many tumors can use both aerobic glycolysis and oxidative phosphorylation. Indeed, most tumor cells have functional oxidative phosphorylation pathway. Interestingly, when tumor cells use the TCA, the pathway has mostly normal function, but also has a role in amino acids and lipid synthesis. Cells in which these pathways operate simultaneously, can use glutamine as well as Acetyl CoA from the fatty acids  $\beta$ -oxidation as substrates of the TCA cycle (Fig. 5).

There is a general idea that in many tumors the tricarboxylic acid (TCA) cycle is truncated. However, available evidence supports that the TCA cycle is actually aberrant. In fact, several TCA reactions do take place in cancer cells depending on the substrates and mechanisms of uptake that are available. In this way, metabolic pathways can work together to generate both the energy and macromolecules necessary for sustained cell proliferation and to control redox conditions. The TCA is a central hub in normal cell metabolism, taking place in the mitochondrial matrix, and feeding reduced co-factors for the oxidative phosphorylation pathway, as well as metabolic intermediates to several processes in the cells. In cancer cells, glucose is shunt from the TCA cycle. However, in these conditions glutamine and fatty acids can be used as sources for the TCA (Fig. 5). Actually, recent data has indicated that tumor cells can be addicted to glutamine, relying heavily in the TCA cycle [11]. These cells can also use fatty acids to feed intermediates to this cycle, while still using aerobic glycolysis and generating lactate. Glutamine is the most abundant amino acid in the human body. It plays a role in transporting nitrogen to cells and organelles. Glutaminolysis is the process by which enzymes catalyze the conversion of glutamine to glutamate and then  $\alpha$ -ketoglutarate ( $\alpha$ -KG), which in turn is incorporated in the TCA. Therefore, glutamine is used not only as an energy source, through the TCA cycle and oxidative phosphorylation, but also for as a source of carbon backbone for the synthesis of several macromolecules, including non-essential amino acids, purines and pyrimidines. The importance of glutamine in cancer cells biology is highlighted by the fact that glutamine transporters and enzymes that catalyze glutaminolysis are up regulated in cancer cells, in a c-Myc dependent manner [10]. Interestingly, some tumor cells lines, for instance HeLa, which uses both glycolysis and oxidative phosphorylation, grow better in high glutamine concentration [11].

Another pathway reprogrammed in cancer cells and that contributes to the TCA cycle is fatty acid oxidation or  $\beta$ -oxidation. Fatty acids are the building blocks of triglycerides, phospholipids and sphingolipids. These lipids are important components of cellular and organelles membranes and, therefore, essential for proliferating cells. Besides, these molecules perform important functions acting as second messengers and energy storage. Tumor cells may synthesize fatty acids de novo from glucose, acetate and amino acids, as glutamine. However, cells can also uptake exogenous fatty acids and store them in lipid droplets. Upon need, these lipids can be used, either as sources for synthesis or energy, through the  $\beta$ -oxidation pathway, in an oxygen



**Fig. 5** Multiple metabolic pathways operate simultaneously to produce energy and macromolecules to support tumor cells growth. While tumor cells increase their glucose uptake (which is metabolized through aerobic glycolysis—pink), through upregulation and cell membrane localization of GLUT (glucose transporters), they can also uptake glutamine through one of the SCL transporters (soluble carrier family), exogenous fatty acids (FA) and acetate. While acetate can be directly converted in Acetyl CoA, the  $\beta$ -oxidation of fatty acids generates several Acetyl CoA molecules that can be promptly incorporated in the TCA. Glutamine is converted to glutamate, which is converted in  $\alpha$ -ketoglutarate ( $\alpha$ -KG), which then enters the TCA cycle to generate macromolecules and energy, through a process called glutaminolysis. Malate from the TCA can also be exported to the cytosol and converted to pyruvate through a reaction catalyzed by the NADP-dependent form of malic enzyme, also leading to NADP reduction, which is used for anabolism of macromolecules. Glutamine also can contribute with one carbon for de novo fatty acids synthesis. And finally, NADH and FADH<sub>2</sub> (steps that reduce these cofactors are indicated by \*) generated in the TCA cycle donate electrons for the oxidative phosphorylation pathway (yellow) to generate ATP. Together glutaminolysis (blue), glycolysis (pink) and  $\beta$ -oxidation can contribute to both energy generation and anabolism for cell growth and proliferation. Enzymes catalyzing the main reactions in glycolysis and TCA are displayed in green. 3PG—3-phosphoglycerate; BPG—biphosphoglycerate; DHAP—dihydroxyacetone; G3P—glyceraldehyde-3-phosphate; MCT—monocarboxylate transporter; FATP—fatty acid transport proteins; FABP—fatty acid binding protein; PEP -phosphoenol pyruvate

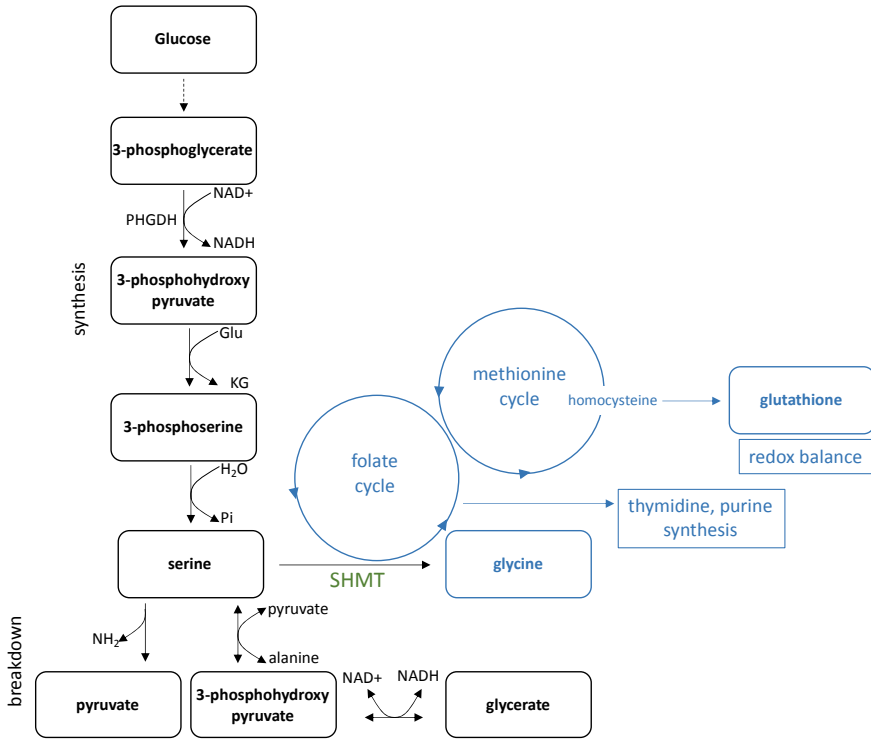
dependent process. Different transporters can uptake fatty acids from the extracellular environment. As such, it is not surprising that the expression of some of them is upregulated in cancer cells. In fact, there is indication that high expression levels of CD36, one of the main proteins involved in fatty uptake in many cell types is a poor prognostic for different types of cancer [12].

$\beta$ -Oxidation is also a source of acetyl CoA. This molecule enters the TCA cycle to generate reduced NADH and FADH<sub>2</sub>, which donate electrons to the oxidative phosphorylation pathway to generate ATP through oxidative phosphorylation. This is especially important in conditions of metabolic stress common in tumor microenvironment. Moreover, the  $\beta$ -oxidation pathway also generates NADPH, which is essential for synthesis of biomolecules and important for protection against oxidative stress. Interestingly, obesity is a risk factor for cancer. This is particularly true for renal, gastric, breast and colon carcinomas, which are tumors that grow in adipose tissue rich environments. Macrophages present in adipose tissue from obese patients display a pro-inflammatory phenotype, secreting of IL-6, IL-8, TNF $\alpha$  and VEGF, which can contribute with tumor progression. This in addition to the ready source of fatty acids presented by the adipocytes indicates how obesity can be a risk factor for cancer. In a hypoxic environment, there is little generation of Acetyl CoA from glucose. Under these circumstances, an exogenous source of fatty acids is important to sustain tumor cells growth. However, it is important to note that activated oncogenes can accelerate fatty acid uptake even in cells growing in normal oxygen concentrations.

Tumor cells also synthesize fatty acids, as well as phospholipids, and other important lipids for membrane synthesis and signaling. Data in the literature shows that oncogenes' activity induce the expression of enzymes involved in lipid biosynthesis. However, the patterns are heterogeneous and variable depending on the tumor type. The important point is that, depending on nutrients and oxygen availability and biochemical signaling by oncogenes, tumor cells can synthesize lipids, uptake them from exogenous sources, store and use these molecules to drive cell growth [13, 14].

Amino acids metabolism is also altered in cancer cells. One of the main alterations is in serine synthesis. This amino acid plays a key role in the synthesis of several macromolecules. For instance, serine is a precursor for the synthesis of glycine and cysteine. Glycine is a precursor for porphyrins and is incorporated into purine nucleotide bases. Besides, glycine is used in glutathione (GSH) synthesis, which is important for protection against oxidative stress, and participates in folate metabolism. Conversion of serine to glycine donates one carbon unit to tetrahydrofolate, which is then used in thymidine synthesis. The enzyme that catalyzes this reaction is serine hydroxymethyltransferase (SHMT), which is a transcriptional target of the proto-oncogene *c-Myc*. The conversion of serine to glycine is coupled to the folate and methionine cycles, which in turn generate reactive intermediates that provides methyl-groups for the methylation of histones or DNA, and precursors for glutathione and nucleotides biosynthesis. Finally, serine also plays a key role in the synthesis of sphingosine and phospholipids. The main pathways involved in serine metabolism are depicted in Fig. 6.

Cells can obtain serine either by uptake from the extracellular environment or synthesize it from glucose. The last strategy seems to be important for cancer cells. Serine is synthesized by cells from 3-phosphoglycerate, a glycolysis intermediate, in a pathway called serine synthesis pathway, SSP (Fig. 6). The first reaction in this pathway is catalyzed by phosphoglycerate dehydrogenase (PHGDH). The gene that codes this enzyme is located in chromosome 1p12, within a region amplified in a



**Fig. 6** Serine synthesis pathway and breakdown and link to folate and methionine cycles and consequences of activation. PHGDH—phosphoglycerate dehydrogenase; Glu—glutamate; α-KG—alpha ketoglutarate; SHMT—serine hydroxymethyltransferase

percentage of human melanomas and breast cancers. PHGDH is also upregulated by transcription factors as c-Myc and ATF4. ATF4 activation of PHGDH is a downstream effect of NFR2 antioxidant transcription factor and also of mTORC1 complex [15]. This indicates that activation of serine synthesis pathway is important for protection against oxidative stress and amino acid deficiency. In some types of cancer, high expression of PHGDH is associated with higher proliferation or higher tumor grade (triple negative breast cancer and gliomas, respectively) [16].

Cancer cells can use the oxidative phosphorylation in different levels. While some cancer cells rely mainly on glycolysis for ATP production, there are reports of cancer cells that can use both glycolysis and oxidative phosphorylation and cells that even increase the function of the last. Regarding the cells that actually rely also or mainly in oxidative phosphorylation for energy, there is a hypothesis that proposes that at a first moment, oncogenes or other alterations inhibit oxidative phosphorylation, and in a second wave, there would be recovery of oxidative phosphorylation by glutamine uptake and glutaminolysis. In this scenario, tumor cells would use both glucose and glutamine, which actually happens in a number of cancer types. Eventually, glutamine would become the main nutrient source for both energy and anabolism. In this model,

the Warburg effect would represent just a phase during cancer progression. Another hypothesis that has gained space in the literature is the symbiotic relationship between tumor cells, which will be better discussed later. Briefly, in this scenario, tumor cells from hypoxic regions strongly relies on glucose and produces lactate, which is then used by the oxygenated tumor cells as a carbon source for the oxidative phosphorylation, increasing the availability of glucose for the hypoxic cells. This model also leaves room to understand how cancer cells can adapt to different environments and nutrient availability [17]. On the other hand, the mitochondrial genome encodes 13 polypeptides that take part in oxidative phosphorylation. The mitochondrial DNA is susceptible to mutations caused by the production of reactive oxygen species, which are a necessary by product of metabolism itself. Mutations in mitochondrial DNA, both in coding and regulatory regions, have been associated with several types of cancer as thyroid, colon, ovary and others. Therefore, mutations with loss of function of proteins important of oxidative phosphorylation may play a part in metabolic reprogramming in cancer [2].

### **3 Microenvironment and Signaling Pathways Regulating Cancer Cell Metabolism**

All of the metabolic pathways described above are controlled by biochemical signals triggered by oncoproteins activity, lack of function of tumor suppressor proteins, and microenvironment conditions as hypoxia and nutrient availability. This section will summarize the main signaling pathways controlling tumor cell metabolism.

The tumor microenvironment is heterogeneous in composition. First, the whole tumor structure is composed by different tumor cells clones. Second, other cell types, including several types of inflammatory cells, infiltrate the tumor parenchyma. Third, different biochemical and physical conditions can be readily detected in different regions of the tumor mass. Tumor blood vessels are disorganized and “leaky”, therefore inefficient to transport nutrients and oxygen to tumor cells, especially to those located in the most internal parts of the tumor. Indeed, most solid tumors exhibit hypoxic areas, while pH gradients, that vary according to tumor cell metabolism, can be observed. These alterations in the microenvironment are the result of intrinsic characteristics of the tumor cells themselves. Oncoproteins drive a series of changes in cells homeostasis, contributing to metabolic reprogramming. The same can be said for alterations in tumor suppressor proteins activity or lack of it, as is the case of TP53.

### 3.1 HIF-1

One of the main regulators of cellular metabolism is the Hypoxia Induced Factor 1. This is a transcription factor, composed of two subunits, alpha and beta (Aryl hydrocarbon receptor nuclear translocator—Arnt). HIF1 $\alpha$  is the regulatory subunit, and its activity is controlled mainly at the post-translational level. Proline residues in HIF1 $\alpha$  are hydroxylated by prolyl-hydroxylases, PHDs, and target this factor for proteasomal degradation by the E3 subunit of the 26S proteasome complex containing the von Hippel-Lindau (pVHL) tumor suppressor protein. The HIF-1 transactivating activity can also be inhibited by FIH-1 (Factor Inhibiting HIF-1). This protein suppresses HIF-1 interaction with the histone acetyltransferase p300/CREB binding protein (CBP). As oxygen concentration drops in hypoxic conditions, both PHDs and FIH-1 are inhibited, leading to HIF-1 stabilization and activation. HIF-1 binds to the hypoxia-response elements, present at enhancers and promoter regions of a series of hypoxia responsive genes. HIF-1 can also be activated by cellular factors, or non-canonical mechanisms. Aberrant activation of the PI3K (phosphatidylinositol-3 kinase)/Akt pathway can induce HIF-1 $\alpha$  transcription. Moreover, deficiency of the pVHL protein decreases ubiquitination of HIF-1 $\alpha$  promoting its stabilization and increased activity. The same phenomenon is observed in the case of deficiency of other proteins involved in proteasome activity. The activity of both PHD and FIH-1 require  $\alpha$ -ketoglutarate ( $\alpha$ -KG) as well as oxygen. Therefore, alterations in the TCA cycle, due to mutations in succinate dehydrogenase or fumarate hydratase, leading to decrease  $\alpha$ -KG concentration, can also lead to stabilization of HIF-1 $\alpha$ . These non-canonical activation mechanisms can take place even in normoxic conditions.

Glucose transporter 1 (GLUT-1) is an important HIF-1 target since it allows tumor cells to increase glucose uptake. HIF-1 also increases the expression of lactate dehydrogenase, which catalyzes conversion of pyruvate to lactate, which characterizes aerobic glycolysis in normoxic regions and has an important effect on pH. Monocarboxylate transporter 4 (MCT4) is also a transcriptional target of HIF-1. This is one of the proteins responsible for the efflux of lactate to the extracellular environment, a process accompanied by the transport of a proton causing a decrease in the extracellular pH. At the same time, HIF-1 suppresses mitochondrial function. As mentioned before, pyruvate is converted to Acetyl CoA in a reaction catalyzed by pyruvate dehydrogenase, which is a complex of 3 enzymes. The activity of one of the enzymes in this complex is suppressed by phosphorylation by pyruvate dehydrogenase kinase 1 (PDK1), which is a HIF-1 target. Therefore, through activation of PDK1, HIF-1 inhibits the conversion of pyruvate to Acetyl CoA. A potential downfall for glycolysis in this case would be the decrease in regeneration of NAD<sup>+</sup>, a necessary cofactor during glycolysis, as a result of the oxidative phosphorylation. However, the activity of lactate dehydrogenase, another target of HIF-1, regenerates NAD<sup>+</sup>, therefore contributing to the high activity of glycolysis detected in cancer cells.

HIF-1 induces the expression of miR-210, which targets the iron-sulfur cluster assembly protein 1/2, necessary for the activity of enzymes of the TCA as aconitase.

HIF-1 also promotes the PPP pathway through the induction of increased PKM2 expression, which promotes the accumulation of glycolysis intermediates, since the activity of this enzyme is weaker than other pyruvate kinase isoforms, therefore generating less pyruvate and accumulating glycolysis intermediates, mainly glucose-6-phosphate [18].

### 3.2 *c-MYC*

*c-Myc* is a helix-loop-helix type transcription factor that controls the expression of several genes related to cell growth. *c-Myc* dimerizes with Max to bind to the consensus element named E-box present in the promoter of several genes, which products are important for the regulation of protein biosynthesis, cell cycle control, metabolism, cell adhesion, and cytoskeleton modifications [18]. Its expression is triggered by mitogenic signals, through tyrosine kinase receptors, and signaling pathways as RAS/MAPK, PKC, PI3K/Akt and others. *c-Myc* is a proto-oncogene overexpressed in a high percentage of human cancers. To date, *c-Myc* has more than 10.000 target genes identified in the human genome. Due to its central function in cell growth and proliferation, *c-Myc* expression is controlled at all possible levels, from transcription to post-translational modifications that regulate its half-life. As HIF-1, *c-Myc* also targets genes that promote glycolysis. This includes GLUT-1, hexokinase, lactate dehydrogenase, glucose phosphate isomerase, glyceraldehyde 3-phosphate dehydrogenase, triosephosphate isomerase, phosphoglycerate kinase 1 and enolase. On the other hand, *c-Myc* also targets several genes which products mediate anabolic metabolism. This includes the multifunctional CAD protein (carbamoyl phosphate synthetase 2, aspartate transcarbamylase, and dihydroorotase), which is essential for the pyrimidine biosynthesis pathway; serine hydromethyltransferase, which catalyzes the conversion of serine in glycine, initiating the one-carbon metabolism; fatty acid synthase, an enzyme complex that regulates the de novo biosynthesis of long chain fatty acids as palmitate from acetyl and malonyl CoA, in the presence of NADPH; ornithine decarboxylase, the enzyme that catalyzes the first step of the pathways that leads to the synthesis polyamines, small aliphatic polycations essential to cell growth and proliferation, DNA stabilization, and the regulation of transcription and translation.

Interestingly, at the same time that *c-Myc* promotes glycolysis, it can directly inhibit peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor  $\alpha$  (PGC1- $\alpha$ ) suppressing mitochondria respiration. Moreover, as described for HIF-1, *c-Myc* also induce PDK1, blocking entry of pyruvate in the mitochondria. However, *c-Myc* can also activate mitochondria biogenesis, which would be necessary to ensure viability of daughter cells. Moreover, *c-Myc* upregulates the expression of glutamine transporters, increasing glutamine uptake. Together with its effect on the flux of 3-phosphoglycerate from glycolysis to serine synthesis, it is again clear the *c-Myc* role in anabolic pathways.



c-Myc can collaborate with HIF-1 to promote metabolic reprogramming in cancer cells. Interestingly, in normal cells, HIF-1 inhibits c-Myc transcriptional activity by several mechanisms. For instance, HIF-1 binds to c-Myc and prevents its association with its transcriptional partner Max. Besides, HIF-1 activates c-Myc's antagonist Mxi-1, competes with c-Myc for consensus binding sites (5'-G/ACGTG-3' vs. 5'-CACGTG-3', respectively), and displace the transcription factor Sp1, which is essential for c-Myc promoter activation. However, these events do not occur in cancer cells, where c-Myc expression levels are elevated enough to counteract the effects described above [19].

### 3.3 PI3K/AKT/mTOR

Phosphatidylinositol 3-kinases (PI3K) is a proto-oncogene that plays an essential role in transmitting extracellular growth signals to the cell, promoting macromolecule biosynthesis, cell cycle progression and cell survival. In cases of gain of function, as is the case in many cancer cells, the PI3K pathway can promote cell growth in the absence of external mitogenic signals. PI3K phosphorylates phosphatidylinositol, a scarce phospholipid component of cell membrane generating second messengers for signaling such as inositol 1,4,5 triphosphate (IP3) and diacylglycerol. IP3, in turn, controls cytosolic  $Ca_2^+$  levels while diacylglycerol activates the serine-threonine protein kinase C (PKC). In cancer, there is mostly the involvement of class one members of PI3Ks, from the 3 known classes. The class I members are activated by insulin and other growth factors and are divided in subgroups A and B, activated by tyrosine receptors and G protein-coupled receptors, respectively. PI3K is composed by two subunits, one with catalytic activity (p110 $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$  or  $\delta$ ) and one with regulatory activity (p85  $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ ,  $\gamma$  p50 $\alpha$ , p55 $\alpha$ ). The expression of these isoforms varies among tissues and cells, with exception of p110 $\alpha$  that is ubiquitously expressed. Several types of human cancers display genetic alterations in PI3K members, from mutations to amplifications [12]. Some mutations in p85 prevent its inhibitory activity on p110 in the absence of mitogenic stimulus, leading to constitutive PI3K activation. One of the main targets of PI3K is the kinase Akt, recruited to the membrane by PIP3, generated once PI3K is activated. The recruitment of Akt to the membrane allows proximity to 3-phosphoinositide-dependent protein kinase (PDK1), which phosphorylates Akt, activating it. PI3K also activates the Mammalian target of rapamycin (mTOR) complex that also phosphorylates Akt contributing to its activation.

mTOR is a serine/threonine protein kinase that is part of two different protein complexes, mTORC1 and mTORC2. These complexes have different composition, are activated by different stimuli and activate different effector pathways. mTORC1 is activated by growth factors and nutrient availability and is composed of three core components: mTOR, Raptor (regulatory protein associated with mTOR) and mLST8 (mammalian lethal with Sec13 protein 8) and is inhibited by rapamycin. mTORC2 is composed also by mTOR, mLST8 and Rictor (rapamycin insensitive companion of mTOR), is activated by mitogenic stimuli and does not respond to acute rapamycin

treatment. One important activity of mTORC2 is activation of Akt, which has a central role in cell growth, proliferation and survival [20].

mTORC1 has a central role in the control of anabolism and catabolism in response to nutrient availability. As effector functions, mTORC1 phosphorylates the kinase S6K1 and eIF4E binding protein (4EBP), which leads to increase in protein synthesis. S6K1 activates substrates that promote initiation of mRNA translation, while phosphorylation of 4EBP releases eIF4E, allowing 5'cap-dependent mRNA translation to occur. mTORC1 promotes lipid synthesis through the sterol responsive element binding protein transcription factors (SREBP), both through S6K1 dependent and independent mechanisms. mTORC1 promotes nucleotide synthesis through activation of the folate cycle that provides one-carbon units for purine synthesis (Fig. 6). Finally, and expectedly, mTORC1 promotes glycolysis by increasing HIF-1 translation. Also, through activation of SREBP and regulation of glucose-6P-dehydrogenase, mTORC1 leads to increased flux of PPP [21]. mTORC1 is negatively regulated by the protein Tuberous Sclerosis Complex (TSC). TSC, in turn, is a target of Akt and Ras/Erk/p90<sup>RSK</sup>. When phosphorylated by these complexes, TSC is inhibited, allowing mTORC1 activation. Another negative regulator of mTORC1 is the AMP activated protein kinase (AMPK). AMPK is an energy sensor activated by cellular AMP. AMP binds directly to this kinase causing an activating conformational change that leads to the phosphorylation of several targets, including TSC leading to its activation. Due to its role in the negative regulation of mTORC1, AMPK has been considered an antitumorigenic protein.

Akt is a key protein kinase that phosphorylates several downstream targets, among them proteins involved in glucose uptake, glycogen synthesis, cell growth and cell survival. Specifically, Akt phosphorylates HK, increasing glycolysis. Also, through phosphorylation and inhibition of glycogen synthase kinase 3 (GSK3), which inhibits both c-Myc and SREBP, Akt allows expression of these factors. Moreover, through activation of mTORC1, Akt also leads to activation of HIF-1, therefore contributing to the aerobic glycolysis increase. In fact, in cells with sustained Akt activity the glycolytic metabolism prevails over oxidative phosphorylation. Since these cells are dependent on glucose for survival this observation confirms the role of Akt in metabolic reprogramming. Besides, Akt also has a role in the translocation of GLUT4 to the plasma membrane. There is also experimental evidence showing that Akt can promote GLUT1, the preferentially expressed glucose transporter in cancer cells, translocation to the membrane [22, 23]. Interestingly, constitutive Akt activation leads to increase in GLUT1 mRNA and protein, which could be mediated by c-Myc.

Both Akt and S6K can phosphorylate phosphofructokinase 2 (PFK2) to increase its activity, which results in the generation of fructose 2,6-biphosphate. This is an important allosteric activator of phosphofructokinase 1 (PFK1), the enzyme that catalyzes one of the key reactions in glycolysis (Fig. 4). The PI3K/Akt signaling axis also activates glutaminolysis through c-Myc, which increases the expression of glutamine transporters. Besides, the reaction that converts glutamine to glutamate is catalyzed by glutaminase (GLS). The reverse reaction is catalyzed by glutamine synthetase (GLUL), which condenses glutamate and ammonia in an ATP-dependent reaction to form glutamine. Both enzymes can be regulated by PI3K/Akt/mTOR

pathway: GLS is a c-Myc target gene and GLUL expression, which is increased by FoxO, is not expressed upon FoxO inactivation by Akt [24].

Besides contributing to the glycolytic metabolism, the PI3K/Akt pathway also contributes to anabolic metabolism. First through activation of mTORC1, resulting in the effects described previously in this chapter, but also through phosphorylation of ATL citrate lyase, which converts citrate to cytosolic Acetyl CoA, required for lipid biosynthesis. At the same time, Akt inhibits FoxO transcription factor, which suppresses lipogenesis when active, by downregulation of lipogenic genes expression.

An important regulator of this pathway is PTEN, a *bona fide* tumor suppressor, which removes the 3' phosphate of PIP3, shutting down downstream signaling. Loss of PTEN function, therefore, prolongs the half-life of the PI3K/Akt signaling and is associated with several types of cancer in humans.

### 3.4 *Tp53*

TP53 is probably the most famous tumor suppressor gene. Its product is a transcription factor that binds as a tetramer to the promoter regions of genes involved in apoptosis and DNA damage responses, protecting tissues from cells harboring oncogenic mutations. TP53 mutations can result in loss of function or altered function and protein stability. However, TP53 has also a role as a stress monitor: perturbations in oxygen and nutrient availability can induce TP53 expression either by protein stabilization or post-translational modifications. Therefore, in response to metabolic stress, TP53 can transactivate stress-response genes. For instance, activation of AMPK, previously discussed in this chapter can activate TP53, linking high AMP/ATP ratio to TP53 activity. Moreover, nutrient depletion can inactivate mTORC1. mTORC1 inhibits TP53, therefore, in this situation TP53 can perform transactivation activity. When nutrient availability increases, mTORC1 is activated and rapidly inhibits TP53. In concert with mTORC1 activity, Akt activates the ubiquitin ligase MDM2, which targets TP53 for proteasomal degradation. Again, the inactivity of Akt due to low nutrient availability may stabilize TP53. Interestingly, TP53 increases the expression of PTEN, which inhibits the PI3K pathway.

Mutations causing loss of function of TP53 are a very common in human cancers. Somatic mutations in this gene occur in almost every cancer type in humans, with rates varying from 30 to 50% in solid cancers as ovarian, esophageal, colorectal, head and neck, larynx and lung carcinomas. In cancers that do not display TP53 mutations, there are usually inactivation mechanisms. For example, in Human Papillomavirus associated cancers, one of the viral oncoproteins targets TP53 for proteasomal degradation [25]. Loss of TP53 function implicates in loss of its regulatory mechanisms over metabolism, which contributes to the metabolic reprogramming.

TP53 activity counteracts mTORC1 by decreasing glycolysis rate and increasing oxidative phosphorylation. That is accomplished by inhibition of GLUT1, GLUT4

and phosphoglycerate expression, and by increasing the expression of TP53-induced glycolysis and apoptosis regulator (TIGAR), an enzyme that reduces the levels of fructose-2,6-biphosphate, an allosteric activator of phosphofructokinase. TP53 also limits the expression of monocarboxylate transporters (MCT), responsible for lactate and other monocarboxylates traffic through the plasma membrane. Moreover, TP53 negatively regulates HIF-1, through competition for enhancer binding in mild hypoxia and by promoting HIF-1 proteasome degradation under severe hypoxia, and c-Myc, which transcription is directly repressed by TP53, abrogating their effect on metabolic reprogramming [26].

On the other hand, TP53 upregulates the synthesis of cytochrome c oxidase gene, one of the electron transporters of oxidative phosphorylation. TP53 also induces transcription of SCO2, a copper transporter that is critical for the assembly of cytochrome oxidase. Moreover, TP53 promotes mitochondrial integrity through expression of mitochondria-eating protein (MIEAP), which regulates mitophagy, a process important for mitochondria quality and turnover. Besides, TP53 promotes increase TCA turnover through expression of glutaminase 2 (GLS2), a mitochondrial enzyme that catalyzes conversion of glutamine to glutamate (Fig. 5), which is then converted to  $\alpha$ -KG feeding the TCA. Active TP53 can also inhibit the malic enzyme, decreasing the conversion of malate to pyruvate, and trapping malate in the mitochondria (Fig. 5).

Finally, TP53 also promotes  $\beta$ -oxidation while decreasing fatty acids synthesis. The mechanisms behind these processes include the induction of carnitine palmitoyl transferase 1C (CPT1C), promoting the import of fatty acids to the mitochondria, where  $\beta$ -oxidation occurs. It also induces the expression of acyl-CoA dehydrogenase that catalyzes the initial step of  $\beta$ -oxidation. On the other hand, TP53 suppresses SREBP1, a regulator of fatty acids synthesis, both through direct transcriptional repression and by increasing the expression levels of its inhibitor LIPIN1.

Hypoxia is an important regulator of TP53 in a complex and gradient dependent manner. Chronic hypoxia seems to lead to accumulation of inactive TP53 (lack of post translational modifications necessary for transactivation activity), mediated by HIF-1, which binds to enhancer sequences in the TP53 promoter region. On the other hand, severe hypoxia or anoxia leads to activation of TP53, resulting in induction of apoptosis. There is experimental evidence that, during chronic hypoxia transcriptionally inactive TP53, either wild type or mutated, binds to HIF-1, serving as a molecular chaperone to HIF-1. This interaction stabilizes HIF-1 binding to its responsive elements in gene promoters and affecting gene expression [9].

## 4 Effects of Tumor Cell Metabolism on Cancer Progression

It is clear by now that cancer cells uptake nutrients from the microenvironment, promote its acidification, and release lactate. This cancer conditioned microenvironment has many effects on cancer cells themselves as well as in stromal cells.

Lactate, a byproduct of glycolysis has a central role in interactions among tumor cells and between tumor cells and stromal ones. A process known as metabolic symbiosis can occur between glycolytic tumor cells in regions with lower oxygen availability and oxidative tumor cells in regions with higher oxygen available, near blood vessels. There is published data showing differential expression of MCT family members in these cell populations allowing for lactate secreted by glycolytic cells to be consumed as a substrate to oxidative phosphorylation by oxidative cells. This process would be mediated, at least in part, by HIF-1, which promotes expression of MCT4. MCT4 has low lactate affinity for lactate compared to MCT-1 and therefore, in cancer cells, where there is high lactate concentration, this transporter can export lactate. On the other hand, MCT1, expressed in cells close to blood vessels, can uptake lactate due to its high affinity to this metabolite (<2 mM), allowing its use as a nutrient [27]. Likewise, this cycle is also realized between cancer cells and glycolytic cancer-associated fibroblasts (CAFs), which can also secrete lactate and pyruvate, which are then used through the TCA in cancer cells, in the so-called reverse Warburg effect [28].

Metastasis, another hallmark of cancer cells, is the colonization of tissues adjacent or distant to the primary tumor. Metastatic cancer cells gain the ability to migrate and invade other tissues, eventually proliferating in these tissues and generating secondary tumors. The main byproducts of glycolysis are the production of lactate and acidification of the extracellular pH. Both pH acidification as lactate can activate NF $\kappa$ B signaling in tumor cells, leading to secretion and activation of hydrolases as cathepsins and matrix metalloproteinases, which are important for tissue invasion. Activation of NF $\kappa$ B has also been associated with epithelial mesenchymal transition, a cardinal feature of invasive carcinomas. Once cells detach of the basal membrane to migrate or even circulate, tumor cells seem to rely on antioxidant metabolism to survive. In this case, the flux of PPP to generate NADPH is important for matrix detached cell survival. As mentioned before, by reducing glutathione, NADPH is key in maintain redox balance in cancer cells. Finally, exosomes released by tumor cells contain miR-122, which suppresses glucose metabolism in resident cells in pre-metastatic niches, by downregulating PKM2 and GLUT1, leading to availability of glucose for metastatic seeding [29].

Besides metastasis, there is evidence that cancer cell metabolism is linked to chemo and radiotherapy resistance. For example, in cervical cancer, lactate can also reinforce DNA repair and promote resistance to chemotherapy, through inactivation of histone deacetylase. Moreover, synthesis of nucleotides in cancer cells is essential for DNA repair after extensive mutations caused by treatment. Finally, as mentioned above, NADPH role in regulating redox balance is essential in cells treated with chemo or radiotherapy, both of which induce oxidative stress.

Lactate and acidic pH can also mediate angiogenesis. Lactate, uptaken by endothelial cells through MCT1, activates NF $\kappa$ B and its target IL-8, driving endothelial cell migration and tube formation. Likewise, it activates HIF-1, even in normoxia, promoting angiogenesis, through activation of VEGFR2 and basic FGF, both growth factors necessary of endothelial cell proliferation. Finally, acidosis, in a hypoxia independent manner, modulates VEGF expression. Low pH leads to increase in VEGF

concentration at both mRNA and protein levels. Moreover, acidic pH regulates VEGF splicing favoring the angiogenic VEGF-121 [30]. Other than that, lactate, acidic pH and the competition for nutrients also have important effects over immune cells that infiltrate the tumor microenvironment, as discussed next.

Immune responses are important for controlling and eliminating tumors. Immune escape is one of the cancer hallmarks [1]. Several immune escape mechanisms have been described. Nowadays, it is clear that metabolites and microenvironment conditions caused by cancer cell metabolism also have a role in suppression of anti-tumor immune responses. Depletion of nutrients in the tumor microenvironment, can restrict T cell responses through competition for glucose and amino acids. Effector T cells have a metabolic profile similar to cancer cells, relying on glycolysis for activation and Interferon secretion, an important effector molecule for cytotoxic immune responses [31]. Other than that, macrophages with M1-like phenotype, activated dendritic cells and NK cells also rely on glycolysis to exert its antitumor activities. As tumor cells upregulate molecules that increase the uptake of nutrients from the environment, other cells are then exposed to lower nutrient concentration. Moreover, the immune cells modulated by the tumor microenvironment towards an immunosuppressive phenotype, as macrophages with M2-like phenotype, myeloid-derived suppressor cells (MDSC) and tolerogenic dendritic cells contribute to the decreased availability of nutrients, also consuming, for example, glucose, arginine, cysteine and tryptophan.

Besides the competition for nutrients, the tumor microenvironment metabolism also contributes to the impairment of antitumor responses through the products generated with the metabolic activity of the tumor and associated cells. For example, glutamine consumption leads to accumulation of glutamate, which suppresses T cell activity [32]. Tumor cells and antigen presenting cells in tumors, express an enzyme, indoleamine 2,3-deoxygenase, that catalyzes the conversion of tryptophan to kynurenines. The last ones capable of inducing regulatory T cells differentiation [33], suppressing therefore anti-tumor immune responses. Finally, a major metabolite regulating immune responses in the tumor microenvironment is lactate. Lactate inhibits cytotoxic cells as NK cells and CD8 T cells, it can promote M2-like phenotype on macrophages, and can induce tolerogenic phenotype on dendritic cells that, in turn, inhibit T cell responses or induce the differentiation of regulatory T cells. Lactate can signal to other cells either entering cells through MCTs, or by binding to G-protein coupled receptors, mainly GPR81, which increases the levels of cAMP in the cell and activates PKA (cAMP dependent Protein Kinase). Activation of GPR81 promotes regulation of immune responses through suppression of inflammatory cytokines expression [34, 35]. Lactate can also induce the expression of PD-L1 in tumor cells [36]. PD-L1 is a negative regulator of T cell responses, inducing the exhaustion phenotype. PD-L1, through Akt, increases glycolytic metabolism in tumor cells [31], leading to increase in glucose uptake and lactate secretion, enhancing the immunosuppressive environment.

## 5 Final Remarks

As expected, as researchers better understand cancer cell metabolic reprogramming and its effects on the tumor microenvironment and biology, several potential therapeutic tools have been suggested. Therapeutic possibilities targeting cancer cell metabolism are several: treatment with bicarbonate or other buffers to increase tumor pH; inhibition of glutamine metabolism either by inhibition of glutaminase (the enzyme that catalyzes the conversion of glutamine into glutamate) or by blocking the transporter alanine-serine-cysteine transporter 2 (the major glutamine transporter in cancer cells); inhibition of lipids synthesis through inhibition of fatty acids synthase (FASN) a multienzyme important in the final process of FA synthesis, or acetyl-CoA carboxylase inhibition, the enzyme that catabolizes the conversion of acetyl-CoA to malonyl-CoA, a rate limiting reaction in FA synthesis; impairment of pyruvate dehydrogenase and  $\alpha$ -KG dehydrogenase by high lipoate analog concentration can disrupt the TCA; blockade of MTCs, mainly MCT1 has been tested in clinical trials. Actually, several of these options have been tested or are in test in clinical trials [37]. Although the effects of such treatment should be taken into consideration, since anti-tumor leukocyte populations usually have similar metabolic profiles as tumor cells, the manipulation of cancer cell metabolism is clearly a promising area to be explored to treat cancer.

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# Adipose Tissue and Immuno-Metabolic Regulation



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## Abbreviations

AT	Adipose tissue
BAT	Brown adipose tissue
FA	Fatty acids
IL-6	IL-6
Interleukin 6	Interleukin 6
IRS-1	Insulin receptor substrate-1
SVF	Stromovascular fraction
T2D	T2D
Type 2 diabetes	Type 2 diabetes
Treg	Regulatory T cells
TNF- $\alpha$	Tumor necrosis factor alpha
UCP-1	Uncoupling protein-1
VLDL	Very low-density lipoproteins
WAT	White adipose tissue

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## 1 Introduction

Adipose is a dynamic tissue that is uniquely able to store and mobilize lipid. An essential function of adipose tissue is to regulate whole body energy homeostasis; this function is the domain of white adipose tissue. A second type of adipose tissue, referred to as brown fat, mobilizes lipid to dissipate its chemical energy in the form of heat. Furthermore, several other functions of adipocytes have been described and the adipose tissue as a whole contains numerous other cell types. These non-adipocyte cells are referred to as the stromovascular fraction (SVF) and include stem cells, immune cells, and vascular cells. The SVF can influence adipocytes and be influenced by adipocytes in return. In this chapter we will discuss the two principal types of adipose tissue (AT): white (WAT) and brown (BAT) and the relationship between adipocytes and immune cells in these environments.

Across evolutionary phylogeny the storage of energy as lipids is well conserved. While prokaryotes and single-cell eukaryotes store lipids in intracellular organelles known as lipid droplets, multicellular organisms developed specialized cells to store them, called adipocytes [1]. In humans lipid enters the circulation via two major pathways: (1) dietary uptake of fatty acids (FAs) that are packaged as chylomicrons and (2) triglycerides produced by the liver that are delivered into the blood as very low-density lipoproteins (VLDL) in the circulation.

Dietary FAs are absorbed in intestinal enterocytes where they are secreted as chylomicrons: a core of triglycerides surrounded by a monolayer membrane of phospholipids, and apolipoproteins. Chylomicrons are then delivered into the circulation. The liver can package its stored lipid into VLDL, a lipoprotein with a core of triglycerides and some cholesterol covered by a phospholipid and apolipoprotein coat. VLDL is then released into the circulation for transport to peripheral tissue.

## 2 Lipogenesis

Once in the circulation, chylomicrons and VLDL cannot cross the endothelium of blood vessels. To absorb the lipid cargo, adipocytes synthesize the enzyme lipoprotein lipase (LPL) and secrete it into the capillary where it can hydrolyze triglycerides into smaller FAs and 2-monoacylglycerol. These FAs enter adipocytes by passive diffusion or by active uptake through receptor proteins, including FA transport proteins, FA translocase (CD36) and plasma membrane FA binding protein. When inside the adipocytes, FAs and monoacylglycerol will be transformed to acyl-CoA, which is a key molecule in FA synthesis. Three molecules of acyl-CoA are esterified to one molecule of glycerol-3-phosphate (G-3-P), forming a triglyceride (G-3-P could be formed by glycolysis or glyceroneogenesis, both pathways could be reviewed in several textbooks and reviews as [2]). At the end of lipogenesis, triglycerides and cholesterol ester are stored in a large lipid droplet surrounded by a phospholipid monolayer and coated with many proteins. Through this process, adipose tissue

provides a temporary storage space for circulating lipids so they may be used later by the organism.

### 3 White Adipose Tissue (WAT)

As a major reserve of energy, adipocytes are a major player in the control of whole-body energy homeostasis. After feeding, when energy is plentiful, increased levels of glucose induce secretion of insulin by beta-cells in the pancreas. Insulin induces adipocytes to take up circulating glucose and FAs. This uptake is accompanied by activation of gene networks that induce more esterification of FAs and lipogenesis [3]. When food is scarce, glucagon (from alpha cells in the pancreas), glucocorticoids and catecholamines (from sympathetic nervous system) instructs adipocytes to hydrolyze lipid droplet triglycerides into FAs and glycerol. FAs enter the circulation and can be used by other cells in beta-oxidation and ATP generation. Furthermore, glycerol can be used for hepatic gluconeogenesis [4, 5]. Through the coordinated actions of hormones white adipose tissue acts as a storage depot for calories when energy is plentiful and a source of calories when it is scarce.

### 4 Brown Adipose Tissue (BAT)

Exclusively founded in mammals, BAT is named from the increased number of iron-rich mitochondria that give the tissue a brown color. Evolutionarily, researchers believe that BAT occurred very early in the evolution of mammals, through the acquisition of a new protein, uncoupling protein-1 (UCP-1). This protein is located within the mitochondria of brown adipocytes. The electrochemical gradient across the inner mitochondrial membrane is usually coupled to ATP synthesis via complex V of the electron transport chain. However, UCP-1 acts as a proton leak that allows protons to flow back to the mitochondrial matrix, leading to increased oxidation of glucose and lipids, and heat generation [6]. This pathway evolved to provide mammals with extra heat in diverse situations including postnatally, hibernation, febrile state or in a state of cold stress [7].

The genesis and activity of BAT is controlled by the central nervous system. The hypothalamus receives a spectrum of signals from the periphery, as changes in body temperature, feeding, and stress activate hypothalamic neurons which project fibers to the sympathetic nervous system. The sympathetic nervous system produces norepinephrine which activates B-adrenergic receptors on adipocytes. This causes many important changes in adipocytes including [1] lipolysis of white and brown adipocytes and (2) expression of UCP-1 (2) biogenesis of mitochondria and (4) lipid uptake by BAT [8].

BAT is primarily found in two depots: the interscapular and perirenal regions. Although the mass of BAT is much smaller than WAT in adults, newborns have a

higher percentage of BAT, presumably to protect small newborns against the cold after birth. However, recent discoveries showed that browning can be induced in white adipocytes, allowing them to take on a thermogenic capacity. The formation of these beige adipocytes is often induced by exposure to cold or  $\beta$ -adrenergic agonists [9–11]. The description of inducible browning provided a new avenue in the treatment of obesity that several groups are pursuing. Although the transplant of human beige adipocytes into obese mice leads to improvement in glucose homeostasis and reduced hepatic steatosis [12], more research is needed for brown adipose to become a feasible treatment for obesity in humans.

## 5 White Adipose Tissue and Obesity

The last 40 years have been marked by a worldwide obesity epidemic. Obesity, or a high body fat percentage, is associated with elevated levels of inflammation in many organs, including adipose tissue. Adipose tissue is responsible for storing excess nutrition and expands during obesity. Inflammation can interfere with the adipose tissue's ability to respond to the hormone insulin, which promotes the uptake of nutrients from the blood into the adipose. The decreased response to insulin, termed "insulin resistance", leads to increased risk for developing type 2 diabetes (T2D) and heart disease. In addition to its primary functions during obesity, the biology of adipose tissue plays other important roles in the development of obesity related diseases.

Earlier in this chapter we described the classical model of white adipose tissue (WAT) as a storage organ for excess nutrition to be mobilized during energy scarcity. However, it is now clear that this model is incomplete. In the last 30 years, adipose tissue has emerged as a major endocrine organ. Anatomically, WAT comprises both subcutaneous and visceral depots which are directly beneath the skin and surrounding internal organs, respectively. Visceral adipose is subdivided in mesenteric, omental, perirenal and peritoneal depots. In the section we will describe the role of adipose tissue as a source of hormone signals that orchestrate whole body energy regulation.

## 6 Adipocytes as Endocrine Cells

For a long time, adipocytes were only associated with the storage of lipids, however, in the last forty years researchers found that adipocytes can secrete hormones including: *adipokines* (leptin, adiponectin, resistin, chemerin, apelin, visfatin, plasminogen activator inhibitor 1.

(PAI1), retinol binding protein 4 (RBP4) monocyte chemoattractant protein 1 (MCP1) and *cytokines* (interleukin 6 (IL-6) and tumor necrosis factor alpha (TNF- $\alpha$ )) [1, 13]. Consequently, it is well accepted that adipose tissue is an endocrine organ

that regulates systemic metabolism and inflammation. In this topic, we will focus in the two well-characterized adipokines secreted by WAT: leptin and adiponectin.

## 7 Leptin

Leptin was the first characterized adipokine in the 1990s by Jeffrey Friedman's group as the hormone responsible for the control of food intake in the brain. Adipocytes are the main producers of leptin, however, other organs such as the stomach, intestine and muscle can also produce leptin [5]. Leptin is a small peptide (16 kDa) that is secreted into blood after feeding. It crosses the blood–brain barrier in the brain and acts mainly in the hypothalamus to cause satiety [5]. The effects of leptin are clearly demonstrated when using mice deficient in leptin expression (*ob/ob*) or receptor function (*db/db*), in both cases mice present with increased food intake and severe obesity [14, 15]. Interestingly, obesity is associated with increased levels of leptin due to hypothalamic leptin resistance [16]. In addition to its well established role in the brain, leptin can also activate many types of immune cells including dendritic cells, monocytes, macrophages, neutrophils, natural killer cells, and T cells. In this context, leptin is considered a proinflammatory adipokine that increases immune cell migration and accumulation in adipose tissue.

## 8 Adiponectin

A second well characterized adipokine is adiponectin, a 30 kDa peptide secreted by adipocytes. Adiponectin acts on adiponectin receptors 1 and 2 (AdipoR1 and AdipoR2) which are widespread throughout the body. When adiponectin binds its receptor in peripheral tissue it promotes insulin sensitivity. Furthermore, adiponectin can act in the hypothalamus to stimulate food intake [17]. Interest in adiponectin increased in the beginning of the twenty-first century, when several groups described that obese and type 2 diabetic patients have decreased levels of adiponectin in the circulation. It was hoped that adiponectin could be used as a biomarker and/or a target to treat the metabolic syndrome [18]. Indeed, one class of insulin-sensitizing drugs called thiazolidinediones (TZDs) work in part through increasing adiponectin secretion [19].

## 9 Retinol-Binding Protein 4 (RBP4)

RBP4 is a 21 kDa protein, secreted into the circulation by adipocytes and liver, where it is responsible for the retinol (vitamin A) transporter in blood. First studied in the context of ophthalmology, clinical trials described increased levels in obese and

insulin-resistant humans and mouse models. RBP4 activate macrophages, leading to proinflammatory cytokines production and activation of CD4 Th1 cells in the adipose tissue, which contribute to more inflammation.

## ***9.1 Adipose Tissue Immune Cells***

Adipose tissue is a complex environment composed of adipocytes and the immune, endothelial, and stem cells that support them. Once thought to be inert storage devices, adipocytes are now appreciated as integral sources of hormones that influence other cells in adipose tissue as well as orchestrate whole-body energy status. In the second half of this chapter we will investigate the immune cells that make up the adipose tissue microenvironment and their effect on the metabolic syndrome with an emphasis on insulin resistance.

There are multiple immune cell types, both innate and adaptive, that reside in adipose tissue and they have all been shown to affect the progression of the metabolic syndrome. However, one of the most studied of these cells is the adipose tissue macrophage. Because of its well-supported role in the development of the metabolic syndrome, we will pay particular focus to this cell type.

## ***9.2 Macrophages***

Macrophages are an incredibly dynamic cell of the innate immune system. Their discovery is credited to Elia Metchnikoff, who observed both their ability to extravasate through blood vessels and phagocytose microbes [20]. Macrophages originate primarily from the bone marrow as monocytes, however there are different populations of tissue resident macrophages that are seeded during embryonic development [21]. Bone-marrow derived macrophages will circulate as monocytes until they observe a signal of stress in peripheral tissue, which usually manifests as chemokines and adhesion molecules that allow the monocytes to adhere to the endothelial wall before migrating into the peripheral tissue [22]. Once the monocytes move from the blood into the peripheral tissue, they become macrophages and can respond to the stimuli in the environment. These stimuli cause macrophages to adopt a radical new phenotype, a process called polarization, depending on the nature of the stimulus. Polarization can be broadly split into two types: 1) pro-inflammatory classical polarization for pathogen destruction and 2) anti-inflammatory alternative activation for tissue repair.

Our understanding of macrophages in the context of infection is very thorough because it is where they were originally discovered and studied. The innate immune system, and macrophages in particular, act as a jack-of-all trades to protect the host against a wide range of pathogens and insults. This requires the macrophage to respond to a staggering variety of signals. Two broad categories of signals

are pathogen associated molecular patterns (PAMPs), indicating the presence of a microbe, and danger associated molecular pattern (DAMPs), which indicate the presence of cellular damage and stress. When they encounter signs of a pathogen macrophages can destroy them using multiple strategies including (1) sequestration of resources (2) release of cytotoxic materials and (3) direct phagocytosis and destruction of the pathogen. Macrophages can also respond to signals from the adaptive immune system in the form of antibodies and cytokines. Of primary importance in the interaction between macrophages and the adaptive immune system is their role as antigen presenting cells (APCs). Macrophages can internally process a pathogen and present a piece of it to the adaptive immune system as a kind of “wanted poster” for invading microbes. By recognizing PAMPs and DAMPs, directly killing pathogens, and alerting the adaptive immune system, macrophages are able to act as a powerful sentinel for host defense.

Recently, investigators have understood that macrophages play many more roles than host defense. Resident macrophages that make their niche in peripheral tissue have a much more long-term homeostatic role. Here they perform maintenance jobs such as identifying and clearing dying cells, promoting blood vessel growth, and remodeling the extracellular matrix [23]. Adipose tissue macrophages play such a role in both a lean and obese state. In 2003 it was found that macrophages accumulate in adipose tissue during obesity and that they are a major source of the inflammation that contributes to insulin resistance [24]. In the following sections we will explore the nature of adipose tissue macrophages during obesity and its effect on insulin sensitivity.

### ***9.3 Adipose Tissue Macrophages***

Macrophages were first studied in the context of infection which gave rise to the paradigm of classical (M1) and alternative (M2) activation. As investigators studied tissue macrophages outside of infection they attempted to place them in either of these two categories. However, it was noted that the M1 and M2 designations were not able to explain the complexity of macrophage phenotypes observed during obesity. For example, adipose tissue macrophages during obesity present a dilemma because they have characteristics of both classical and alternative activation. In this section we will discuss the evidence for both classical and alternative activation in adipose tissue macrophages and their role during obesity.

Classical activation is characterized by the coordinated movement of macrophages to a site of stress followed by inflammation and/or tissue damage. This framework holds true during obesity. As adipose tissue expands during weight gain the individual adipocytes become inflamed. This inflammation can (1) activate the nearby macrophages and (2) attract more macrophages to the area [23]. These activated macrophages produce inflammatory cytokines such as TNF- $\alpha$ , IL-6, and interleukin 1 beta (IL-1 $\beta$ ) which are characteristic of classical activation. Studies of adipose tissue macrophages before and after obesity demonstrate that they become inflamed



after weight gain. The inflammation produced by macrophages impacts insulin sensitivity in adipocytes. We know that macrophage inflammation is a critical step in this process because depleting macrophages or inhibiting their inflammation protects mice from insulin resistance [25–27]. A critical distinction between infection and obesity is the severity of inflammation. While they share common cytokines the levels of these inflammatory cytokines are almost 20 times higher in infection than obesity.

While adipose tissue macrophages, like classically activated macrophages, are inflamed they also have characteristics of alternatively activated macrophages. These M2-like characteristics include the expression of surface markers of alternative activation, remodeling of the extracellular matrix, promoting angiogenesis, and disposal of apoptotic adipocytes. During obesity, adipose tissue macrophages express cell surface markers associated with alternative activation (CD150, CD163, CD206) [28, 29]. They also produce collagen and the matrix remodeling proteins, matrix metalloproteases, associated with the reparative functions of M2 macrophages [28]. Like M2 macrophages, they respond to adipose tissue hypoxia by promoting the formation of new blood vessel networks [30, 31]. Finally, adipose tissue macrophages perform the vital function of clearing dead adipocytes and maintaining the tissue's ability to store more incoming fat [32–34]. Clearly, adipose tissue macrophages perform many beneficial functions in addition to their inflammatory pathogenic role during obesity.

Investigators have begun to understand macrophage phenotypes outside of the paradigm of M1 and M2. Adipose tissue macrophages are just one example of this trend that includes artery wall macrophages in atherosclerosis and macrophages exposed to high salt conditions, amongst others [35–37]. As mentioned above, obesity causes a phenotypic switch in macrophages that have characteristics of both classically and alternatively activated macrophages. This phenotype has been termed “metabolic activation” [37–39]. Metabolic activation (MMe) refers to the macrophage response to free FA prevalent in obese adipose tissue [37, 40–42]. The activation phenotype is proinflammatory and dependent on lysosome activity [43]. MMe macrophages promote detrimental insulin resistance while also beneficially clearing dead adipocytes. Overall, adipose tissue macrophages strive to maintain tissue homeostasis during obesity but also produce negative effects in the process.

In return, the metabolism of macrophages is affected by the status of the adipose tissue. In the M1/M2 paradigm it is well established that classically activated macrophages favor glycolytic energy sources whereas alternatively activated macrophages favor oxidative phosphorylation [44, 45]. Inhibiting glycolysis not only caused macrophages to favor oxidative phosphorylation, it reduces classical activation and inflammation [44]. Additionally, blocking FA oxidation pushes macrophages towards an inflammatory phenotype [46]. While lipid utilization and oxidative phosphorylation are associated with an anti-inflammatory phenotype, excessive lipid loading actually promotes inflammation. For example, during weight loss, when adipocyte lipolysis is elevated, adipose tissue macrophages become lipid loaded and metabolically inflamed [47]. Another major regulator of macrophage metabolism is hypoxia, prevalent in obese adipose tissue, which pushes macrophages towards

an inflammatory glycolytic phenotype [48, 49]. Overall, different metabolic pathways predispose macrophages to pro or anti-inflammatory phenotypes. While there is ample lipid available to promote oxidative phosphorylation and an anti-inflammatory phenotype, the confluence of excessive lipid loading and hypoxia pushes adipose tissue macrophages towards an inflammatory phenotype during obesity.

While macrophages are a major source of inflammation, they are not the only source. Macrophages operate in a network with other cells of the innate immune system as well as the adaptive immune system.

#### **9.4 Other Innate Immune Cells**

Innate lymphoid cells (ILCs) are a relatively recently discovered cell type. Evidence suggests that they play a role in promoting insulin sensitivity by maintaining anti-inflammatory populations of adipose tissue eosinophils and macrophages [50]. Interestingly, other works have shown that eosinophils migrate to the adipose tissue during obesity favoring the microenvironment to adipocyte maturation, Th2 cytokines (increased production of IL-4 and IL-13) and glucose tolerance [51]. On the other side of the inflammatory profile, the natural killer cells are known to infiltrate in the adipose tissue during obesity, increasing in number and producing higher concentrations of IFN- $\gamma$  [52]. It is important to note that the development of insulin resistance is very complex and is far from being fully understood. Much more investigation is needed to understand the contribution of these different cell types.

#### **9.5 B Cells**

B cells are a major cell type in the adaptive immune system with the role of manufacturing and secreting antibodies. B cell populations have been identified in adipose depots and produce anti-inflammatory cytokines in the lean state [53]. Like macrophages, their numbers increase during obesity and they appear to promote inflammation and insulin resistance during obesity. Depleting B cells from adipose tissue improves insulin signaling and adoptive transfer of B cells into B cell null mice promotes insulin resistance [54, 55]. Interestingly, eliminating the major histocompatibility complex (MHC) in B cells also reduced insulin resistance [54]. This would suggest that there may be some obesity-associated antigen that B cells are presenting to T cells.

## **9.6 T Cells**

The second major cell type of the adaptive immune system is the T cell, with the general role of eliminating infected cells. In the lean state, adipose tissue hosts a population of regulatory T cells (Tregs) that are distinct from splenic Tregs. This population of anti-inflammatory Tregs decreases during obesity [56]. However, if they are artificially maintained with exogenous cytokines the population can persist and is associated with improved insulin sensitivity [57, 58]. During obesity there is an increase in both CD4 + and CD8 + T cells in adipose tissue and both of these populations have been shown to contribute to insulin resistance [59, 60]. The driver of this T cell accumulation is still being investigated; though a combination of stress signals from adipocytes and macrophages is likely to be responsible. Infiltrating T cells promote inflammation and insulin resistance in adipose tissue.

It's well established that macrophages are very closely involved in the development of insulin resistance. However, investigations into the adaptive immune system demonstrate that it also contributes to the development of metabolic disease. From this we can conclude that adipose tissue is a complex microenvironment and that its dysfunction during obesity relies on many factors. In the final section of this chapter we will discuss the implications of inflammation in the development of metabolic syndrome in humans.

## **9.7 Adipose Tissue Inflammation**

Obesity is associated with chronic inflammation in humans. In this section we will discuss the nature of this inflammation and its contribution to the development of two aspects of metabolic syndrome: insulin resistance and heart disease. We will also discuss the current findings of clinical trials for therapies targeting this inflammation to combat the ongoing epidemic of metabolic syndrome.

## **9.8 Inflammation and Type 2 Diabetes**

T2D is a chronic disease that affects more than 500 million people worldwide and is predicted to continue to increase particularly in low-income countries [61]. T2D is characterized by a decreased response to the hormone insulin in the peripheral tissues. This decreased response requires the pancreas to overproduce insulin to maintain safe blood glucose levels [62]. The state of hyperinsulinemia with maintained normoglycemia is classified as prediabetes. As the disease progresses and insulin resistance worsens, patients develop both chronic hyperinsulinemia and hyperglycemia [62] that is characteristic of T2D. The chronic hyperglycemia of T2D increases patient risk for a wide variety of complications including, microvascular damage, sensory

neuropathy, amputation, heart attack, stroke, and death [63]. Moreover, it was found that every 1% improvement in glycemic control was associated with a 21% decrease in risk for diabetes related death [63].

Another hallmark of T2D is chronic systemic inflammation. This inflammation engages the same cytokines as infectious inflammation. However, the levels of obesity driven inflammation are much lower than the typical acute phase response to infection [64]. For example, levels of the inflammatory cytokine IL-6 levels in patients with sepsis are almost 20 times higher than patients with T2D [65, 66]. These low levels of chronic inflammation include soluble factors such as IL-6, (TNF- $\alpha$ ), C reactive protein (CRP), and monocyte chemoattractant protein 1 (MCP-1) [64]. These elevated levels of inflammation correlate with insulin resistance in patients and have been shown to disrupt the pathway of insulin signaling on a cellular level [65, 67–70].

Investigators have used the power of mouse genetics to demonstrate a mechanistic link between inflammatory pathways and insulin resistance. Knocking out inflammatory signaling pathways in mice conveyed a protection against high-fat diet induced insulin resistance [26, 71, 72]. Additionally, blocking the inflammatory cytokines themselves protects mice from hyperglycemia and insulin resistance [73, 74]. TNF- $\alpha$  is the best understood mechanism by which an inflammatory cytokine directly causes insulin resistance. In typical insulin signaling the insulin receptor phosphorylates tyrosines on insulin receptor substrate-1 (IRS-1). Elevated levels of TNF- $\alpha$  phosphorylates serines on IRS-1 that prevent the phosphorylation of the crucial tyrosines. Thus, the proper signaling cascade is halted and the cell is unable to respond to extracellular insulin. Another inflammatory cytokine that has been linked to insulin resistance is IL-1 $\beta$  which is produced by the NLRP3 inflammasome in response to signals of cellular stress [75]. Knocking out the NLRP3 inflammasome complex prevents insulin resistance in obese mice. Moreover, IL-1 $\beta$  blockade improves insulin sensitivity in obese humans [76, 77]. Similar to TNF- $\alpha$ , investigators have shown that treating adipocytes with IL-1 $\beta$  causes the downregulation of IRS-1 [78]. In both cases, inflammatory cytokines interrupted IRS-1 signaling and, as a result, impair the adipocyte's response to insulin.

Overall, obesity promotes low levels of chronic inflammation that interferes with insulin signaling to cause insulin resistance. This insulin resistance can progress over time to T2D which puts patients at risk for organ damage and early death. Investigators are now targeting these inflammatory cytokines in an attempt to slow the development of insulin resistance and organ damage in diabetic patients.

## ***9.9 Inflammation and Heart Disease***

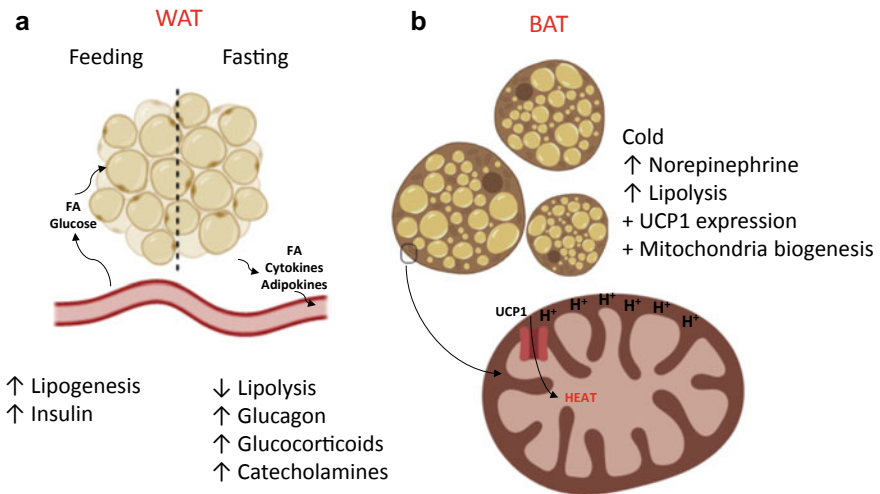
A second obesity-associated disease that makes up the metabolic syndrome is cardiovascular disease. As of 2017, cardiovascular disease was the leading cause of death for both men [1 in 4] and women (1 in 5) in the United States (79, 80). Many instances of cardiovascular disease are caused by the development of lipid plaques

within the wall of the blood vessel: termed atherosclerosis. Here we will deal with the contribution of obesity and inflammation to the development of atherosclerosis.

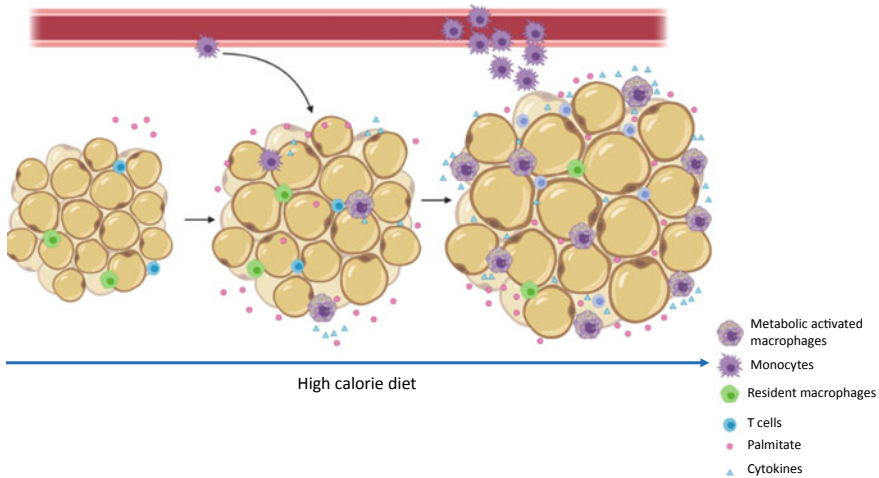
Atherosclerosis develops when lipids and lipoproteins invade the blood vessel wall and cause inflammation [81, 82]. These sites of inflammation are invaded by T cells and macrophages which can then proliferate locally in the plaque [83]. Over years of inflammation the smooth muscle of the blood vessel begins to invade the plaque which can become fibrotic [84]. Eventually, a necrotic core can develop [85]. As the plaque develops it can become unstable and susceptible to eruption which can cause life-threatening heart attacks and strokes if they occur in crucial arteries [85].

Inflammation is closely tied to the development of atherosclerosis as the initiating events involve inflammation of endothelial cells and the recruitment of inflammatory immune cells. In patients with unstable coronary artery disease high levels of C-reactive protein and interleukin 6 (IL-6) are strongly related to risk of death from cardiac issues [86, 87]. In mouse models of atherosclerosis, inflammatory cytokines promote many processes in plaque development including immune cell infiltration and fibrous cap development [88]. Preventing inflammatory immune infiltration or knocking out inflammatory cytokines protects mice from lesion development.

Overall, atherosclerosis is a complex inflammatory environment in which both systemic and local plaque inflammation interact with one another to progress the disease. Because of its prevalence and lethality, heart disease is still a major area of investigation (Figs. 1 and 2).



**Fig. 1** **a** White adipose tissue is a central metabolic organ that acts as a reserve of energy while simultaneously acting as an endocrine organ that participates in regulating systemic energy homeostasis. **b** Brown adipose tissue responds to input from the central nervous system and uses stored lipid to produce heat.



**Fig. 2** During weight gain, adipocytes secrete free fatty acids, adipokines and cytokines, which activate and recruit immune cells. Macrophages migrate to the adipose tissue increasing the inflammatory profile and phagocytosing the dead adipocytes

## 9.10 Human Trials in Anti-Inflammatories

Patients with metabolic syndrome have a predicted increased risk of all-cause mortality of 46% [89]. This substantial risk has made the development of a treatment for metabolic syndrome a high priority for investigators. For the past two decades investigators have pursued inflammation as a target in treating the metabolic syndrome because it is so tightly linked to multiple diseases within the larger syndrome. One of the earliest anti-inflammatory therapies is salicylate, also known as aspirin, which inhibits multiple inflammatory kinases. In clinical trials, patients treated with aspirin saw improvement in their blood glucose levels [90]. However, aspirin has well-known limitations including gastrointestinal irritation and blood thinning properties.

More recent drugs target specific proinflammatory cytokines or their receptors. In mouse studies blocking a handful of cytokine targets showed promising improvements in insulin sensitivity and atherosclerotic lesion development. Unfortunately, trials in humans were not consistent with those in mice. These human trials often ended with slight improvements in glucose but no change in insulin sensitivity.

For example, interleukin-1 (IL-1) antagonist treatment showed improvement in blood glucose but no difference in insulin resistance [91]. Additionally, administering an anti-interleukin 1 antibody improved incidences of non-fatal heart attack but did leave patients more susceptible fatal infection [92]. Blocking TNF- $\alpha$  similarly showed a reduced rate of cardiovascular disease events [93]. However, like IL-1 blockade, TNF- $\alpha$  blockers showed limited improvement in insulin sensitivity

in humans [94, 95]. Unlike interleukin 1, blocking IL-6 in autoimmune patients demonstrated improvements in fasting insulin [96].

The discovery of inflammation as a link between obesity and metabolic syndrome led to a new optimism about treatments. However, while mouse studies were positive for anti-inflammatory therapies, human trials were less promising. It is also important to consider their immunosuppressive effects on host defense and the danger that could pose with long term treatments. The failure of anti-inflammatory therapies to relieve metabolic syndrome does not negate the fact that the immune system is intimately involved in the development of metabolic syndrome. Obesity-associated inflammation consists of a spectrum of inflammatory cytokines and these studies confirm that blocking a single cytokine is not sufficient to reverse the metabolic syndrome. Rather, inhibiting the initiating events of inflammatory pathways to reduce the entire spectrum of inflammatory cytokines is a new promising area of research against the metabolic syndrome.

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# Immune Regulation of Adipose Tissue Browning



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## 1 Introduction

Adipose tissue is a central player in the pathophysiology of a number of metabolic diseases, including obesity, type 2 diabetes, non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) and atherosclerosis [1, 2]. The classical view of the role of adipose tissue is that it serves as a reservoir for storing energy as triglycerides, thus releasing free fatty acids by demand under negative energy balance conditions [3, 4]. This apparently simple landscape started to gain complexity in the 90's, when adipose tissue was found to secrete leptin and several other cytokines linked to insulin resistance and obesity, including tumor necrosis factor alpha (TNF $\alpha$ ) [5–9]. These groundbreaking discoveries implied that adipose tissue could at the same time serve as an endocrine organ and a source of pro-inflammatory molecules driving the development of insulin resistance.

The importance of the immune system for the maintenance of adipocyte functions is reinforced by the presence of a wide variety of immune cells within this tissue [10–13]. Indeed, several studies have reinforced the strong and causal link between adipose tissue low-grade inflammation and insulin resistance [14, 15]. As

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will be discussed in this chapter, the interactions between the immune system and adipocytes are not restricted to the immunological disbalance underlying pathological conditions, but also helps maintaining adipose tissue homeostasis during normal physiology [15, 16], and underlies the phenotypic conversion of white to the beige fat under negative energy balance conditions, such as cold stress, caloric restriction and physical exercise [17–19].

Adipose tissue is distributed throughout the mammalian body in different fat depots, which display distinct and even opposite roles in energy metabolism, depending on the metabolic demand and the adipocyte type. Opposing the energy-storing role of the classical unilocular white adipose tissue (WAT), there are, to date, two documented thermogenic competent types of adipocytes in mammals: (i) the constitutive classical brown adipocytes, which comprise the brown adipose tissue (BAT); (ii) and the inducible beige adipocytes (or brite, from “brown in white”), that develop as clusters within white fat depots upon appropriate stimulation. Both beige and brown fat have the ability to burn substrates in response to cold stress in order to produce heat and defend body temperature, as a part of adaptive thermogenesis, which ultimately leads to enhanced energy expenditure. In order to be able to generate heat, these thermogenic adipocytes take up large amounts of fatty acids and glucose from the circulation, which are then immediately utilized for (i) the activation of the uncoupling protein 1 (UCP1); (ii) to sustain anaplerotic reactions needed to replenish ATP levels; (iii) to undergo oxidation; and (iii) to be incorporated in triglycerides to temporarily accumulate more fuel for further utilization [20]. These processes are stimulated mainly by  $\beta$ -adrenergic signaling [21]. In addition to its ability to increase energy expenditure, thermogenic fat also exerts endocrine functions by regulating lipid/glucose metabolism in other tissues through the secretion of bioactive factors, including proteins, lipids and exosomal miRNAs [22–24]. Due to these unique features, the induction of thermogenic fat is a compelling therapeutic target to fight diabetes or other metabolic diseases.

Although the browning process was first documented over 35 years ago [25], the molecular regulators and developmental origins of this process started to be deeply dissected only through the last decade [26–28]. During this period, studies have also demonstrated that adult humans have a pool of functional brown adipocytes [29–31]. Although there are many lines of evidence supporting the idea that the immune system participates in beige adipocyte formation, the exact mechanisms as well as the main players are still largely unknown. The first link between immune cells and browning was described in a study by Nguyen et al. [32], which demonstrated that alternative activation of macrophages was a key and limiting phenomenon leading to neuronal-independent browning of WAT. This study suggested that a population of alternatively activated M2 macrophages possess the capacity to locally biosynthesize and release catecholamines to drive beige fat induction. However, some years later another study showed that macrophages are actually unable to synthesize catecholamines, and that the browning process does not require alternative activation of macrophages [33]. More recently, a study showed that sympathetic neuron-associated macrophages (SAMs) are able to take up norepinephrine through a solute carrier family 6 member 2 (SLC6A2) and metabolize it, thus counteracting sympathetic tone

and favoring weight gain [34]. Ablation of the *Slc6a2* in SAMs caused browning of white adipose tissue and increased thermogenesis, demonstrating that this population of macrophages actually counteracts the browning process.

Although the role of immune cells in adipose tissue remains a matter of debate, M2 macrophages and other immune cells such as type 2 innate lymphoid cells (ILC2) [35, 36] and  $\gamma\delta$ T cells have been consistently shown to contribute to beige fat biogenesis by triggering distinct pathways [37]. Moreover, a number of cytokines has also been implicated in thermogenesis and in the browning process. In the next sections we will discuss in detail the main evidence, to date, linking immune cells and their secreted factors with adipose tissue browning.

## 2 Immune Cells in Adipose Tissue

Adipose tissue consists of adipocytes and a stromal-vascular fraction (SVF) containing a heterogeneous network of cells, including endothelial cells, stem cells, preadipocytes, fibroblasts, and a wide range of immune cells [38, 39]. These leukocytes are essentially present in all fat depots, spread throughout the tissue, in between adipocytes, along blood vessels, and as part of defined lymphoid structures [40]. In this part of the chapter we will describe the immune cells found in different adipose tissue depots and how they play a role in adipose tissue function (Fig. 1).

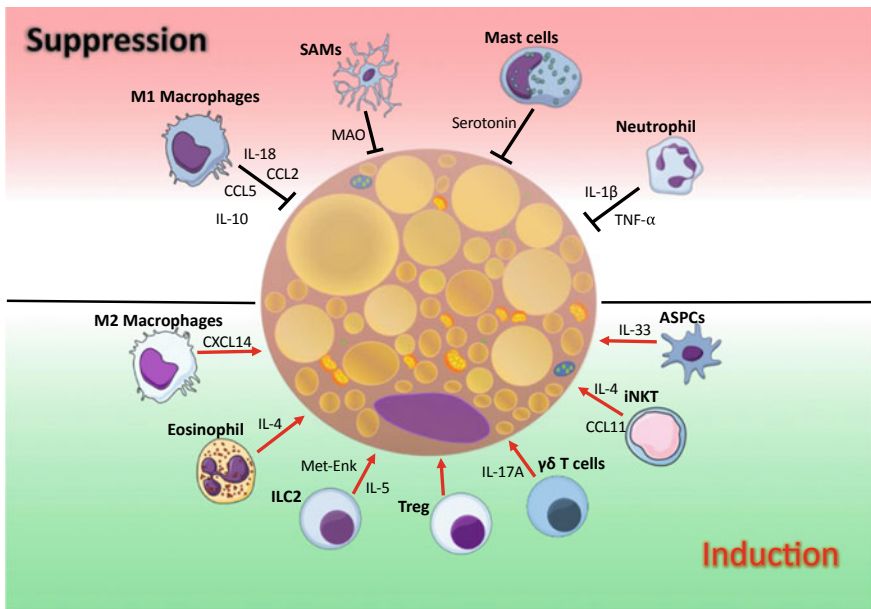


Fig. 1 Immune cells and mediators that control browning

## 2.1 Myeloid Cells

Macrophages are the most abundant immune cell type in adipose tissue. **Classically activated, pro-inflammatory M1 macrophages** are widely distributed across different WAT depots, with particular enrichment in visceral adipose tissue (VAT) during obesity [10]. Consistently, VAT accumulation strongly associates with the development of the metabolic syndrome [41–43], in part due to the pro-inflammatory nature of this depot, which is rich in **TNF $\alpha$**  and **IL-1 $\beta$**  [44–46]. This is further supported by the observation that aging results in increased accumulation of pro-inflammatory macrophages in VAT, in agreement with the notion that metabolic disease progression is exacerbated by age-related inflammatory processes, termed ‘InflammAging’, in adipose tissue [47]. On the other hand, **alternatively activated, anti-inflammatory M2 macrophages** are particularly abundant in the browning-prone subcutaneous fat depot. These macrophages are mainly stimulated by type II cytokines **IL-4** and **IL-13**, as well as by **IL-6**, which induces **IL-4R $\alpha$**  [48, 49]. **Eosinophils** are thought to be the main IL-4-expressing cells in mouse WAT, and in their absence, M2 macrophages are greatly reduced [49]. Eosinophils are recruited in response to **IL-5-mediated type 2 innate lymphoid cell (ILC2)** activation (see below), which also contributes to differentiation of beige adipocytes [36, 50, 51]. Adipose tissue of lean mice contains a large population of resident eosinophils that plays an important role in glucose homeostasis and the regulation of adiposity and systemic insulin resistance [35, 51].

Macrophages are also present in BAT but at reduced numbers if compared to WAT [52, 53]. Analysis of the association between experimental obesity and inflammatory pathways in BAT has demonstrated that the transcript levels of several pro-inflammatory cytokines are increased during obesity in this tissue. The upregulated markers include **TNF $\alpha$**  and the chemokines **CCL2 (MCP-1)** and **CCL5**, thus suggesting the recruitment of additional pro-inflammatory cells [54, 55]. Studies have indicated that cytokines such as **TNF $\alpha$**  and **IL-1 $\beta$**  inhibit  $\beta$ -adrenergic-induced *Ucp1* expression in brown adipocytes [56, 57], thus indicating that a pro-inflammatory milieu may limit the induction of thermogenesis in BAT. On the other hand, as mentioned above, anti-inflammatory pathways responsible for alternative activation of macrophages have also been reported to elicit a thermogenic response. These include **IL-4** signaling [58, 59]. Brown adipocytes also secrete factors that contribute to maintenance of thermogenesis via activation of macrophages. For example, the chemokine **CXCL14** is secreted by brown fat to sustain thermogenesis in response to cold stimulation via alternative activation of macrophages in brown and white adipose tissues [60]. Another study demonstrating the role of macrophages in BAT implicates these cells in the homeostatic maintenance of sympathetic innervation [61].

**Neutrophils** have been described in WAT, where they are present at a lower proportion (<1% of all immune cells), but increase with obesity, when they contribute to insulin resistance [62]. **Mast cells** are also increased in WAT of obese compared to lean individuals, and this is associated with impaired glucose intolerance. Conversely,

pharmacological stabilization or genetic ablation of mast cells ameliorate many effects of diet induced obesity and lead to increased energy expenditure, which has been linked to increased beige adipogenesis and expression of UCP1 in WAT [63]. This is further supported by a more recent study that demonstrated increased browning upon mast cell inactivation and consequent inhibition of **serotonin** release [64]. In contrast, recent studies have shown that mast cells in human subcutaneous adipose tissue respond to cold, release factors such as **histamine** and thus promote UCP1 expression in white adipocytes [65].

## 2.2 Lymphoid Cells

In addition to myeloid cells, adipose tissue has a wide variety of lymphocytes, including **T cells**, **B cells**, and **invariant natural killer (iNKT) cells**. When arriving in the adipose tissue from circulation, particularly during obesity, **CD8 + T cells** can be activated by inflammatory B cells to induce **IFN- $\gamma$**  and **granzyme B** production, which in turn promote macrophage accumulation and insulin resistance [66, 67]. **CD4 + T regulatory (Treg) cells** are relatively abundant in VAT, but they reduce in number in mouse models of obesity [68]. Treg cells in VAT are maintained by **IL-33** signaling through **ST2** stimulation and **PPAR $\gamma$**  activation [69]. IL-33 administration leads to Treg expansion, which associates with metabolic improvements in obese mice [69], including induced thermogenesis [36, 70]. Consistent with the protective roles of Treg cells, depletion of Tregs in lean mice impairs insulin sensitivity and increases fasting blood glucose levels [71, 72]. On the other hand, aging leads to an over tenfold increase in Tregs in mouse VAT, while depletion of adipose tissue Tregs prevents age-associated metabolic dysfunction [11]. These results indicate that Tregs have different roles in obesity and aging.

**T cells** are also found in BAT. Medrikova et al. identified a particular sub-set of **Tregs** in BAT [73] which appear to be important for BAT function, given that systemic ablation of Tregs abrogates cold-induced thermogenesis and results in accumulation of pro-inflammatory macrophages in BAT. These findings were corroborated by Kálin et al., 2017 [74], who also shown that upon cold exposure or  $\beta$ 3-adrenergic stimulation, CD4 + T cells express higher levels of Treg-related regulatory networks in a UCP1-dependent manner.

**$\gamma\delta$  T cells** are found in visceral, subcutaneous and brown adipose tissues, where they produce **IL-17A**, which in turn regulates IL-33 production by adipose stromal cells [37]. Mice lacking  $\gamma\delta$  T cells or IL-17A have less IL-33 and less Treg cells in VAT. Given the critical role of IL-33 in thermogenesis [36, 70], these mice lack the ability to regulate core body temperature at cold exposure [37].

Like T cells and macrophages, **B cells** have also been shown to infiltrate VAT and manifest phenotypic changes during diet-induced obesity [75]. B cells control systemic and local adipose tissue inflammation during obesity-related insulin resistance via antigen presentation, cytokine secretion, and antibody production [67, 75]. B cells represent up to 30% of all immune cells in mouse BAT and increase in



this tissue with obesity [76]. B cell phenotypic plasticity is influenced by both norepinephrine [77] and adenosine [78], which have been shown to activate thermogenesis in BAT. However, no clear evidence for the role of B cells in adaptive thermogenesis has been demonstrated so far.

**Invariant natural killer (iNKT) cells** are also present in WAT where they promote an anti-inflammatory phenotype [79]. In mice, activation of adipose iNKT cells with alpha-galactosylceramide administration promotes weight loss associated with increased energy expenditure and browning of white fat [80]. Part of this effect is mediated by increased **FGF21**, which upregulates **CCL11** and leads to recruitment of eosinophils to subcutaneous adipose tissue where browning takes place through the mechanisms discussed above [80].

Both human and murine WAT contain considerable levels of **type-2 innate lymphoid cells (ILC2s)**. Moreover, ILC2 content in the visceral fat inversely correlates with body mass index in both humans and rodents [36]. ILC2s constitutively express the cytokine **IL-33 receptor ST2** and are strongly responsive to **IL-33**, but also respond to a lesser extent to other cytokines such as **IL-2**, **IL-7** and **IL-25** [36, 81]. Adipose stem and progenitor cells (ASPCs) were recently found to be the main source of IL-33 in WAT, while mesothelial cells act as an additional source of IL-33 specifically in VAT [82].

### 3 Immune Cell Mediators and Their Role in Browning

Studies have extensively highlighted the importance of anti-inflammatory, **type II cytokines** in regulating adaptive thermogenesis. M2 macrophages could play a role in this context due to their ability to respond to type II cytokines such as **IL-4** and **IL-13** during conditions in which browning is stimulated, such as cold exposure and caloric restriction [19, 35, 49, 59]. Consistent with this notion, depletion of adipose tissue macrophages with clodronate liposomes abolishes browning of subcutaneous inguinal WAT in mice [83], while myeloid-specific **IRE1a** abrogation, which induces M2 macrophages in visceral and subcutaneous fat, promotes norepinephrine signaling and stimulates thermogenic markers in adipocytes [83]. Chronic cold exposure also leads to an increase in the percentage of M2 macrophages in WAT, in part due to macrophage proliferation [35, 84]. Interestingly, this seems to partially require **adiponectin** release by adipocytes, where **T-cadherin** serves as an anchor for tethering of adiponectin to M2 macrophages [84].

M2 macrophages have been proposed to induce browning via local production and secretion of **catecholamines** in response to IL-4 and IL-13 stimulation [17, 51, 59]. However, a study challenged the concept that M2 macrophages produce enough catecholamines themselves to significantly impact browning [33]. While the levels of catecholamines in macrophages may indeed be too low to sustain browning, Luo et al. propose that adrenergic signaling leads to feedforward activation of catecholamine production in adipose tissue macrophages via **CaMKII** activation [85]. In line with this idea, myeloid-specific CaMKII $\gamma$  disruption suppresses cold-induced

norepinephrine production and UCP1 expression in subcutaneous fat. Moreover, lack of CaMKII signaling attenuates IL-4/IL-13-mediated catecholamine production [85]. Therefore, while other sources of catecholamines may be more important to elicit browning, these sources may also promote macrophage catecholamine production, which in turn may contribute to the browning process.

Macrophages can also degrade local catecholamine in adipose tissue to inhibit browning. A recent study identified a population of **sympathetic-neuron-associated macrophages (SAM)** in murine adipose tissue expressing **SLC6A2** - a norepinephrine transporter - and monoamine oxidase A (**MAO**)—an enzyme that degrades norepinephrine [34]. By importing and degrading norepinephrine, these macrophages inhibit the ability of the sympathetic nervous system to stimulate browning. Interestingly, the frequency of SAM is increased in obese mice and deletion or inhibition of SLC6A2 in high fat diet-fed mice result in increased adipose tissue thermogenesis and weight loss [34].

While type II cytokines such as **IL-4** and **IL-13** have been shown by several studies to promote browning [17, 36, 49, 51], the role of **IL-10** appears to be more complex than anticipated. Rajbhandari et al. showed that IL-10 signaling represses thermogenic genes and limits thermogenesis [86]. They also found that **IL-10R $\alpha$**  expression is enriched in adipocytes and increased during obesity and aging [86]. However, another study observed that IL-10 deficiency results in structural abnormalities of BAT mitochondria, cold intolerance and impaired mitochondrial function [87].

**IL-33** is a member of the IL-1 family of interleukins which potently drives type II cytokine production by immune cells including ILC2s [36, 69, 88, 89]. IL-33 has an already well documented effect of limiting adipogenesis by means of increasing the thermogenic machinery and mediating the browning of white fat [36]. Beige and brown adipocytes of IL-33 knockout mice fail to express active UCP1, thus compromising uncoupled respiration and thermogenesis [90]. As a consequence, these animals are also more prone to develop obesity under high-fat diet [90]. Conversely, IL-33 promotes energy expenditure [36], and IL-33 treatment or transfer of IL-33-elicited ILC2s is sufficient to induce UCP1 in adipocytes [35, 36]. Notably, helminth infection protects against high fat diet-induced obesity and stimulate a white to beige adipocyte conversion through an IL-33/ILC2-dependent alternative activation of macrophages as a result of type II cytokine release [91]. Indeed, ILC2s express GATA3 and are able to produce type II cytokines in response to IL-33 [36, 51, 92]. However the requirement of type II cytokines and alternative activation of macrophages for IL-33-induced browning is still controversial. For example, while [35] found that IL-33 does not promote browning in IL4R null mice, another group found this receptor is actually dispensable for the IL-33 effect in adipose tissue [36]. In fact, the role of IL-33 in adipose tissue is at the very center of a debate that attempts to accommodate different types of cytokines, immune cells and the browning process within the same mechanistic framework. To make the matter even more complicated, new molecules and modes of intercellular communication are being discovered and seem to play a key role in the process. For instance, Brestoff et al. 2015 propose that the IL-33/ILC2 axis elicits browning of WAT via the production of an enkephalin

peptide named **methionine-enkephalin (Met-Enk)**, which binds to opioid receptors on the plasma membrane of beige precursor cells and induces UCPI [36].

The role of pro-inflammatory cytokines in the browning process may also differ depending on the condition. While **IL-1 $\beta$**  and **TNF- $\alpha$**  have been extensively reported to limit thermogenesis and desensitize  $\beta$ -adrenergic signaling [93, 94], the role of **IL-18** appears to be more complex, given that abrogation of IL-18 or its receptor (**IL18R1**) result in different phenotypes in mice [95]. **IL-6**, on the other hand, may be induced in response to exercise and cancer cachexia, and was shown to promote browning and increase energy expenditure [96, 97]. In addition to being produced by immune cells, IL-6 are expressed at a high level by the exercising muscle [98] and by beige adipocytes [99]. IL-6 was proposed to promote alternative activation of macrophages [48], which in turn leads to BAT activation and beige adipocyte recruitment. Moreover, continuous blockage of the IL-6 receptor during beige adipocyte differentiation results in downregulation of beige adipocyte markers and induction of white adipocyte-like characteristics [99]. IL-6 is considered an important myokine and this may explain why browning occurs under certain conditions upon exercise [98]. Similar to muscle, IL-6 may also act as a BATokine: *i.e.*, when different amounts of BAT are transplanted into the visceral cavity of mice, a dose-dependent improvement of glucose homeostasis is observed, while no such beneficial effects are observed when BAT-transplants are taken from IL-6 knockout mice [100]. In addition, exercise (and cold exposure) induces **meteorin-like protein (Metrl)** secretion by muscle and WAT [17]. *Metrl* is required for long-term cold exposure adaptation and promotes browning, possibly by inducing IL-4 and M2 macrophages [17].

The IL-17 family of cytokines has also been implicated in white to beige adipocyte conversion. A recent study found that **IL-25** acts via its cognate receptor IL-17 receptor B (**IL-17RB**) to promote beige adipogenesis in subcutaneous WAT upon cold or  $\beta$ 3-adrenergic stimulation [101]. Mechanistically, IL-25 induces adipose tissue innervation to allow more catecholamine production, and this occurs in part via IL-4 signaling and macrophage activation [101].

## 4 Novel Mechanisms of Intercellular Communication in Adipose Tissue

Immune cells and adipocytes communicate in ways beyond conventional cytokines. These unconventional ways of immune crosstalk may include signaling lipids [102], growth factor [103] and extracellular miRNAs [104–106]. It remains to be proven whether these molecules are required for immune cell-mediated browning, although the evidence is suggestive.

For example, succinate increases in circulation upon cold exposure and accumulates in BAT and subcutaneous WAT where it acts as a signaling molecule to promote thermogenesis [107]. Succinate also elicits an anti-inflammatory response

in macrophages by binding to the succinate receptor 1 (SUNCR1) [108]. Interestingly, myeloid-specific SUNCR1 knockout mice are prone to metabolic dysfunction and refractory to cold-induced thermogenesis [108]. Together, these results suggest that succinate may act as a signaling molecule in adipocytes and macrophages to sustain adipose tissue browning.

The role of signaling lipids in the browning process still remains elusive. Prostaglandin E2—a classical pro-inflammatory lipid mediator—has been implicated in white to beige adipocyte conversion through the Gs coupled receptor EP4 [109]. Indeed, PGE2-induced EP4 signaling involves cAMP production, which ultimately turn on the thermogenic program. However, the impact of prostaglandins in the browning process is controversial, given that while some studies reported that the upstream and rate-limiting enzyme responsible for the prostaglandins biosynthesis, cyclooxygenase-2 (COX-2), exert a pro-browning effect [110, 111], others proved this enzyme is actually dispensable for browning [112]. Since COXs are the very upstream enzyme on prostaglandin biosynthesis, it is likely that the simultaneous modulation of the other prostaglandins may mask PGE2 thermogenic effects, which may explain the discrepancies between different studies. On the other hand, the inhibition of the microsomal PGE synthase-1 (mPGES-1), a COX-2 downstream terminal synthase responsible for the biosynthesis of PGE2 [109], caused downregulation of browning determination markers in a cell culture setting. In vivo studies with conditional deletion of mPGES-1 in adipocytes and/or in macrophages are required in order to address the questions of whether the pro-thermogenic and pro-browning effects attributed to PGE2 are physiologically relevant and which is the actual source of these lipids under thermal stress or noradrenergic stimulus.

Finally, adipose tissue macrophages [104] and adipocytes [113] may secrete miRNAs in extracellular vesicles, and these miRNAs can be taken up by cells where they control gene expression [24]. Some of these miRNAs have the potential to control the browning process. For example, miR-34a has been shown to inhibit browning [114], while adipocyte-derived miR-34a-containing extracellular vesicles suppress alternative activation of macrophages [106]. Whether this mechanism is required for browning inhibition is unknown.

## 5 Conclusions

Although a vast list of studies has attributed functions for immune cells and their secreted molecules in the browning process, it appears that we are barely scratching the surface of this matter. Many studies render conflicting results and exactly how immune cells affect adipocytes remains poorly elucidated. Perhaps one of the most consistent observations in the field is the role of IL-33 and ILC2s in beige adipogenesis, but it is still not clear how they influence beige cells, whether through direct signaling or via M2 macrophages. Indeed, another burning issue in the field is the role of M2 macrophages and type II cytokines in the browning process. Whereas a substantial body of evidence supports this relationship, a publication challenged the

relevance of this mechanism to sustain thermogenesis in vivo [33]. These contradictory results may be a consequence of differences in husbandry, microbiota, genetic background, tools or simply the fact that the issue is too complex to be studied by reductionist approaches such as most applied. We believe that more studies are required to establish the exact role of the immune system in the conversion of white adipocytes to beige adipocytes and in BAT thermogenic activation, particularly studies that approach the complex nature of the issue. We are convinced that immune cells within the adipose tissue are absolutely necessary for metabolic homeostasis, and that changes in immune cell function inevitably impacts adipocyte metabolism. How the different cells and molecules participate in this process is an exciting venue for current and future research.

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# Physical Exercise and Metabolic Reprogramming



H. P. Batatinha, F. S. Lira, K. Kruger, and J. C. Rosa Neto

## 1 Metabolic Reprogramming with Aerobic and Resistance Exercise

Chronic exercise improves cardiovascular health and increases skeletal muscle hypertrophy, promoting several adaptations. In the liver, exercise reduces inflammation, resulting in improved insulin sensitivity with superior, fine-tuned endogenous glucose production; in terms of brain health, the benefits include neuroprotection and neurogenesis. This improvement promoted by regular exercise is due to the adaptations of the whole body to exercise-induced stress. These adaptations can be defined as “reprogramming.”

Metabolic reprogram is a cellular adaptation in the internal machinery via regulation of transcription factors, epigenetic alterations, mRNA expression, enzyme activity, and storage of energy substrates. This exercise-induced reprogramming depends of the type (aerobic, strength, or concurrent exercise session), volume (short or long duration), intensity (high, moderate, or low), recovery during the exercise session (passive, active, short, or long), and duration of the exercise program (2 week, 6 week, 12 week, 24 week, 48 week, 1 year, 5 year, or 10 year).

Here, we will focus on metabolic reprogramming in the skeletal muscles, adipose tissues, and immune cells after aerobic and strength training. By all of regular exercise training, strength and endurance are the most studied. Strength training improves s capacity of keletal muscle to contract, while aerobic training improves oxygen

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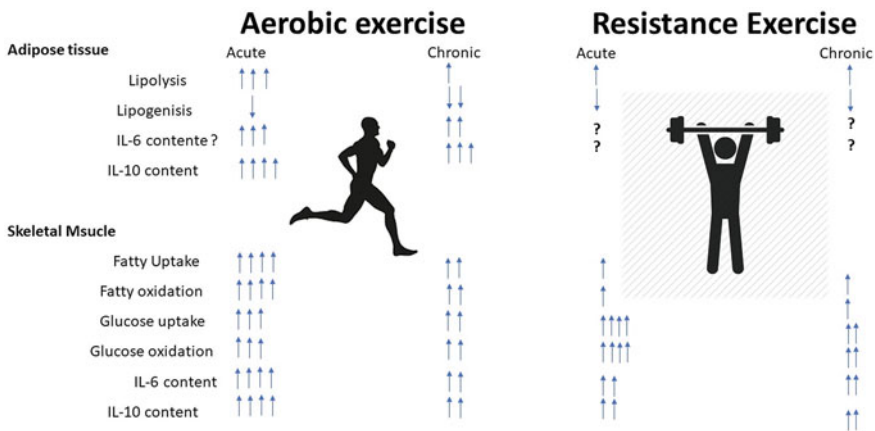
Uptake, from the blood, and delivery to the muscle. Thus, both strength and aerobic exercise training are prescribed to improve cardiovascular fitness, force production, and body composition. Independent of the exercise type, actually, exercise is considered an excellent non-pharmacological method of preventing and treating several chronic inflammatory diseases [1]. In contrast, a sedentary lifestyle is an independent risk factor in condition called the disease of physical inactivity [2].

Aerobic exercise, classically adopted for cardiorespiratory fitness and control of body fat, is usually performed as a moderate-intensity (50–70% VO<sub>2</sub>max) continuous training (MICT) (running, bike, indoor or outdoor). Recent studies have suggested that aerobic exercise can exert the same or similar adaptation when performed as high-intensity (90–120% VO<sub>2</sub>max) interval training (HIIT) in the same modalities and can be adopted in various forms. Some studies have shown that HIIT can positively impact the neuroendocrine axis, such as the leptin levels, and improve lipid metabolism in overweight/obese and lean subjects [3–6].

In order to obtain a deeper understanding about how exercise training can induce metabolic reprogramming, the acute effects of each exercise session need to be examined in detail.

Figure 1 shows main acute and chronic effects of aerobic exercise performed at different intensities on the skeletal muscle and adipose tissue.

A substantial proportion of the alterations caused by a single bout of aerobic exercise is related to neuro-endocrine axis activation. Acute exercise enhances several hormones, especially those related to lipolysis in the adipose tissue and glycogenolysis in the skeletal muscle and liver (cortisol and adrenaline) that increase the availability of energy substrates (Non-esterified fatty acids (NEFA) and glucose) for muscle workload. With aerobic exercise both, carbohydrates and fat can be utilized for oxidation, and the metabolic changes are dependent on the exercise intensity and training status of the subjects.



**Fig. 1** Different roles of acute and chronic exercise in adipose tissue and skeletal muscle

The crossover point that leads to better oxidation of carbohydrate than the fatty acid in proportion, it is approximately in 65% of  $\text{VO}_2\text{max}$ . However, the point of this bypass characterized by the predominance of carbohydrates as the major fuel for oxidation is dependent on the training levels. Sedentary subjects have a lower capacity of oxidation with exercise performed at intensities  $>45\%$   $\text{VO}_2\text{max}$ , while well-trained athletes showed this threshold at intensities of approximately 75%  $\text{VO}_2\text{max}$ . This is because fatty acid mobilization, transport, and oxidation are not easy, and athletes have superior adaptation to lipid metabolism [7, 8].

Thus, it is necessary to coordinate the mobilization of fatty acids from the adipose tissue, transport in the plasma, and fatty acid uptake by the skeletal muscle; once FA is inside the skeletal muscle, it has to be transported to the mitochondria and finally oxidized for ATP production [8]. The main adaptations involved in lipids metabolic reprogramming are associated with increased delivery of fatty acids by the subcutaneous adipose tissue (SAT) and increased fatty acid uptake by the skeletal muscle [9]. The blood flow in the SAT increases 2–3 folds in endurance athletes [9]. This is an important step in the delivery of fatty acids from the adipose tissue to the skeletal muscle; however, albumin is the other limiting factor for fatty acid transport. Moreover, fatty acid transportation from circulation to inside the skeletal muscle is carried out by CD36 transporter in the plasma membrane of myocytes. Acute exercise and training induce increase in the CD36 in the sarcolemma [10–12].

Thus, metabolic reprogramming can be observed when aerobic exercise is maintained for a long time all machinery is organizing for better efficiency for mobilization and oxidation of FA.

Well-trained individuals tend to store lipids in the skeletal muscle, similar to that found in diabetic patients; however, with exercise, fat accumulation does not harm cellular functioning, as is observed in metabolic diseases [13, 14].

Lipid storage in myofibers is mediated by perilipins, the perilipin-2, perilipin-3, and perilipin-5, the most common perilipins founded in lipid droplets (LD) in the skeletal muscle. An interesting study conducted by Daemmen et al. 2018 showed that the localization and size of the LD was different between diabetic subjects and athletes although the content of the LD was the same. In this sense, the diabetic subjects showed larger LD in type II fiber, and the athletes have smaller LD in type I fiber [15]. Moreover, athletes present lipid deposition near the mitochondria with higher expression of ATGL and CGI-58 [16]. Thus, these adaptations cause high LD turnover, optimize the energy production machinery to supply energy during exercise, and mitigate the lipotoxicity that could be generated by increased fatty acid accumulation [17].

AMP-activated protein kinase (AMPK), MAP kinase p38, calmodulin-dependent protein kinase (CAMKK), PGC-1alpha, and p53 form the axis that induces mitochondrial remodeling and increases electron chain transporters to maximize the oxidative phosphorylation. Increased  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentration via muscle contraction directly activates CAMKK [18].

In general, both types of aerobic exercise training (MICT and HIIT) promote similar metabolic reprogramming in the skeletal muscle and adipose tissue. However,

short-term (<12 weeks) exercise training is insufficient to promote these cellular adaptations, while long-term (>12 weeks) training is able to promote them [4, 19, 20].

It is noteworthy that the same pathways responsible for energy-induced metabolic reprogramming also lead to the production of proteins called myokines [21]. Myokines are a group of proteins formed by cytokines, chemokines, and growth factors produced by muscle cells that are released into the circulation and act in distant organs and different cell types [22, 23]. The most studied myokine is IL-6 [24].

IL-6 is a major moderator involved in the regulation of the acute-phase response to injury and infection. The skeletal muscle contraction induces the activation of the mitogen-activated protein kinase and Janus kinase (JAK)-signal transducers and activators of transcription cascade phosphorylation, culminating with IL-6 transcription in skeletal muscle [25]. The IL-6 produced and secreted by the skeletal muscle during contraction plays an important role in metabolism. Moreover, it induces the translocation of GLUT4, in the muscle, increasing glycogen synthesis and insulin sensitivity in the central and peripheral organs as well as augments lipid oxidation in the skeletal muscle to deliver fuel to source the skeletal muscle during exercise [22].

Prolonged and intense running on a treadmill at 70%  $\text{VO}_{2\text{max}}$  until exhaustion increased the muscle plasma levels for IL-6, and the post-run muscle glycogen concentrations were negatively correlated with modifications in muscle IL-6. Cabral-Santos et al. [26] found that during acute high-intensity interval exercise, there was a volume-dependent increase in the IL-6 levels.

IL-6 modifies the anti-inflammatory responses once it can induce anti-inflammatory cytokines production, such as IL-10 and IL-1ra [27]. IL-10 is essential in the anti-inflammatory response. It promotes the preservation of I $\kappa$ B, inhibiting the nuclear transcription factor kappa B (NF- $\kappa$ B) signaling, the main transcription factor of TNF- $\alpha$  [27]—a cytokine with a pro-inflammatory character that regulates insulin sensitivity and induces lipolysis. Cabral-Santos et al. [28] found significantly increased IL-6 and IL-10 levels after HIIE (1:1-min at  $v\text{VO}_2\text{max}$ , 5 km run), indicating a crucial role of HIIE in preventing a persistent inflammatory tendency.

Strength training also promotes metabolic reprogramming; however, the cellular mechanism and the metabolic pathways are different because strength (resistance) training induces anabolic pathways that are contrary to the catabolic pathways induced by aerobic training. The main cellular response is the increase in the cross sectional area by the induction of the hypertrophy pathway controlled by the mTOR-p70S6 axis.

Different forms can activate the mTOR-P70S6. In physiological context, the insulin and growth factors (in special IGF-1) lead to activation of mTOR toward the activation of PI3K-Akt, this pathway is upstream to mTOR. It was previously believed that the activation of exercise-induced hypertrophy was caused by increase in the anabolic hormones and the PI3k pathway; however, simulation with IGF-1 was insufficient to mimic the hypertrophy induced by mechanical induction. Currently, the principal hypothesis is that the mechanical overload activates the dissociation of TSC2 (an inhibitor of mTOR-Rheb complex) in the lysosomes assembly and allows downstream signaling with the activation of p70. However, it is unclear how TSC2

phosphorylation and dissociation of mTOR-rheb complex occur, and more studies are necessary to identify the mechanism [29, 30].

The effects of resistance training are dependent on the size of the muscle skeletal recruited during exercise; for example, training of the biceps brachial induces local adaptation; however, this effect is not endocrine, and leg exercise training induces a huge endocrine response, with increase in the production and release of myokines. The fall in the serum myokine concentration is more rapid than that with endurance training.

Intensity and recovery intervals are the fundamental factors for changes in the cytokine response, main IL-6 alterations in resistance training [31, 32]. These factors influence the number of repetitions performed in subsequent set. In this sense, Izquierdo et al. [33] verified that the amount of metabolic demand or the fatigue experienced during the strength exercise session affects the hormonal and cytokine response patterns.

Myokines, specifically IL-6, play a role in skeletal muscle tissue regeneration after exercise as well as the recruitment of neutrophils, monocytes, and lymphocytes that phagocytize debris resources. The IL-6 aids the activation, differentiation and proliferation of satellite cells, which contribute to the formation of new myonuclei. IL-6 act on mTORC1 signaling and protein synthesis in the cultured myotubes [34]. It was observed that IL-6 activates gp130-Akt and mTORC1 pathways, inducing protein synthesis, suggesting that the IL-6 response to strength exercise potentiates muscle hypertrophy [34].

A combination of strength and aerobic exercises in the same session can be called concurrent exercise. Acute and chronic concurrent sessions promote alterations in the IL-6 and TNF- $\alpha$  responses that can be associated with an acute decline in the strength performance observed when high-intensity interval aerobic exercise is performed before strength exercise. This response was related a possible role of TNF- $\alpha$  and IL-6 as a trigger to restore the energy demand by providing substrates to help maintain contractile activity in skeletal muscle [35]. Long-term (12 weeks) practice for concurrent training leads to improved cardiorespiratory fitness and maximal strength accompanied with an increased cytokines response, leading to an anti-inflammatory response after an acute session of concurrent exercise. However, the effects of concurrent training in cellular reprogramming remain unclear [36, 37].

The high-energy demand of exercise, especially in the case of long-duration and high-intensity exercise, such as that performed by long-distance runners, aquatic marathoners, and triathletes, is associated with stress hormonal response (increased catecholamines and cortisol) causing deep alterations in the immune cells.

## 2 Exercise and Immune System

The relationship of exercise and the immune system was first discussed during the late 70s and early 80s when some researchers observed that a single bolt of exercise (mainly aerobic) could cause an acute increase in the number of leucocytes in

the circulation, with the levels returning to pre-exercise levels within some hours after activity cessation [38]. At this time, researches had already established the potential role of some hormones in this relationship and proposed that cortisol could mediate the re-sequestration of the immune cells. Several years thereafter, a research group from Denmark showed that this exercise-induced leukocytosis was, in part, catecholamine-dependent once catecholamines were released during exercise and the leucocytes expressed  $\beta$ 2-adrenergic receptors [39].

Neutrophils are released in the highest amount after exercise, and their increased levels are maintained in the circulation for up to 6 h after exercise cessation. Complete recovery is generally achieved within 24 h [40]. Most of these cells are immature, less differentiated, and precursor neutrophils; thus, despite increased numbers, the function is decreased, especially after high-intensity and prolonged exercise (>2 h).

Monocytes also increase in response to high-intensity and long-duration exercise. In case of very prolonged exercise sessions, monocytosis is delayed by 1–2 h. In most cases, monocytes return to the rest levels 6 h after exercise cessation. Some studies also report a decrease in the function of these cells in response to exhaustive exercise [41].

Lymphocytes play a different role. Immediately after prolonged and/or high-intensity exercise, lymphocytes are also increased in the circulation; however, the number of lymphocytes decreases below the pre-exercise values within 30 min, returning to rest levels by up to 6 h after exercise cessation [41]. This lymphopenia is more prominent in the lymphocyte subtypes with potent effector functions (e.g., natural killer (NK) cells,  $\gamma\delta$ T cells, and  $CD8^+$ T cells). Moreover, T cells proliferation, NK cell cytotoxicity, and IgA salivary concentration are reportedly inhibited after a bout of very prolonged exercise [42].

The decrease in the function of immune cells in response to exhaustive exercise has been well documented in the literature. Two decades previously, the “open window” hypothesis was postulated proposing that up to 72 h after a high-intensity and prolonged exercise session, the host body would be more susceptible to viral infections because of immunodepression [43]. It could be due to a high concentration of cortisol in the blood in response to exercise stress and the decrease of substrates (glucose and glutamine) availability to the immune cells. This classic paradigm in the field of exercise immunology is still being understood with several contradictory results.

However, some studies, have reported a positive correlation between exhaustive exercise and upper respiratory tract infection (URTI). In 1994, Nieman [44] proposed a “J-shaped” curve relationship between the exercise workload and URTI risk. It indicates that sedentary individuals are at a higher risk of URTI than those who exercised moderately; however, those performing heavy exercise may have a higher risk than who led a sedentary lifestyle.

This “J-shaped” curve was challenged in many studies where they failed to find this relationship. Thus, an “S-shaped” curve was proposed [45], suggesting that very elite athletes are better adapted to the demands of their training and are less susceptible to URTI. It is noteworthy that this population was at a lower risk of URTI and had a better quality of recovery and nutrition, suggesting that exhaustive exercise

by itself may not promote deep immunodepression and increase URTI risk; rather, these consequences were attributable to inappropriate recovery and poor nutrition.

The inability to maintain an exercise workload can be classified as acute fatigue. It may be caused by repeated bouts of intense exercise on the same day and/or during consecutive days without adequate recovery. Athletes who aim to improve their performance are often close to this fatigue and intend to reach an “overreaching” state when performance is enhanced. Continuous intense training without proper balance between training and recovery may surpass “overreaching” and result in an “overtraining syndrome.” [46]. At this point, fatigue is persistent, performance is considerably decreased, hormonal status is disturbed, and immune functions are declined. Over-trained individuals present with a decrease in the plasma glutamine concentration and salivary IgA and are at a higher risk of URTI.

High-intensity and prolonged training can cause transient immunodepression because overreaching athletes present reduction in resting neutrophil degranulation, lymphocyte proliferation, and antibody production. However, their immune functions are restored, preventing a rise in the URTI risk. In contrast, over-trained athletes cannot recover from the overreaching stage and frequently experience upper respiratory tract illnesses and chronic decrease in immune cells cytokines and antibody production [46].

Not only exercise workload and immune system, but also nutritional status influences the exercise recovery. During the previous 30 years, scientists have investigated nutritional strategies to prevent exercise-induced immunodepression and its complications.

The energy substrate is strongly related to immune cell function. Immune cells are dependent on the substrate not only for energy generation, but also for the creation of new molecules, via the action of biosynthetic pathways.

Long-distance athletes showed reduction in the glucose and glutamine disposal to the immune cells. The skeletal muscles utilize a high proportion of the available glucose to generate ATP via the glycolytic and oxidative pathways. Furthermore, the carbon skeletons provided by amino acids generated via induction on muscle proteolysis, which is induced by stress hormones (in special cortisol), are delivered to liver to formation of glucose by gluconeogenesis (Kou et al., 2013). Thus, the disposal of glucose and glutamine to the immune cells is reduced. This reduction causes the activation of AMPK that induces anti-inflammatory signature in the immune cells. It is very interesting that metabolic reprogramming in immune cells is similar to that in the muscle cells, with an antagonist response between AMPK and mTOR activation.

AMPK has been demonstrated as a key metabolic regulator of T cells, essential for ATP homeostasis; further, it allows lymphocytes metabolic plasticity to adapt to the energy stress. However, AMPK does not play a role in cell effector function. Once activated, AMPK shuts off the anabolic pathways, including mTOR. mTOR complex 1 (mTORC1) is essential for immune cell activation and proliferation; however, its constant activation increases the reactive oxygen species and induces cell senescence. Therefore, the activation of AMPK or mTOR is essential for determining the fate of the immune cells and deciding the activation of the pro-inflammatory or anti-inflammatory profile [47].



It is unclear exactly how exercise induces the reprogramming of immune cells; however, the myokines released after exercise, increased hormonal stress (particularly cortisol levels), and substrate available due to the reduction of glucose and specific amino acids in the circulation are responsible for inducing this reprogramming [48].

Carbohydrate is the most researched nutrient, and several researches have investigated its supplementation before, during, and after a high-intensity and/or prolonged exercise. Carbohydrate ingestion during prolonged exercise can maintain the blood glucose levels and attenuate the release of stress hormones and exercise-induced cytokines. They also influence recovery by reducing the suppression of TCD4 and TCD8 lymphocytes for 24 h after exercise cessation [49].

Similar results were found when carbohydrate was consumed till up to 15 min before the exercise, preventing immunoendocrine disturbances. However, carbohydrate ingestion only during the recovery period has not shown such effects.

Carbohydrate supplementation is important for the maintenance of immune system functions during exercise and better recovery. Thus, it could be an effective strategy for decreasing the potential cumulative immunodepression over consecutive days of exercise to avoid overtraining. Researchers have found that carbohydrate ingestion during consecutive days of a heavy training regime was able to attenuate plasma cortisol levels and enhance lymphocytes proliferation and function, thus reducing exercise-induced adaptive immune depression [50].

Protein ingestion is also a concern in the immune nutrition area because it is essential for proper immune system function. A high-protein diet (3 g/kg/day) during a period of intense training decreased exercise-induced impairment in lymphocytes trafficking when compared to a carbohydrate-matched normal protein diet [51]. When supplemented for 6 days, during a heavy training period, protein ingestion decreased neutrophil degranulation during the post exercise recovery period [52]. It indicates that protein administration could be an approach to attenuate chronic immunodepression after a long period of intense training; however, it did not appear to have the same acute effect as carbohydrates.

In contrast to the immunodepression caused by high-intensity and prolonged exercise, moderate-intensity single or repeated bouts of exercise appear to exert a contradictory role. Several studies indicate that frequent participation in regular exercise can stimulate the immune system and decrease respiratory infections.

Moderate aerobic exercise appears as an effector-T cells activator, stimulating them to transmigrate to the peripheral tissues where immune surveillance is enhanced by physical stress. Recent data has shown that short-term intense exercise (30 min of cycling) increased virus-specific T cells mobilization, increasing the success of immunotherapy for viral infections. It also mobilized CD8 naïve T cells and high differentiated and EMRA CD8+ subsets [53]. Furthermore, moderate exercise may mobilize the senescent phenotype lymphocytes to undergo apoptosis in the tissues allowing “fresh” ones to take their place, thus possibly improving the immune response against infections.

A recent study showed that acute exercise mobilizes angiogenic T cells, facilitating vascular remodeling during recovery after exercise [54]. Hematopoietic stem cells

are also mobilized after aerobic exercise, and this could aid skeletal muscle repair and regeneration for exercise recovery (Kruger et al. 2015). This exercise-induced stem cells mobilization has been studied as an adjuvant therapy for hematopoietic stem cell transplantation.

Neutrophil function is also enhanced by moderate exercise. One hour of cycling at 50% of VO<sub>2</sub> max increased the neutrophil oxidative burst and during the early stage of recovery, the bacterial activity of these cells continues to increase up to 1 h after exercise [55]. Monocytes mobilized by exercise might infiltrate the skeletal muscle and differentiate into tissue-resident macrophages facilitating tissue repair and regeneration. Moreover, the expression of pathogen-recognition receptors, such as toll-like receptors, tends to decrease in response to moderate-intensity exercise that could contribute to the anti-inflammatory role of exercise training in metabolic diseases. In general, short bouts of moderate-intensity exercise might enhance cellular immune function [56].

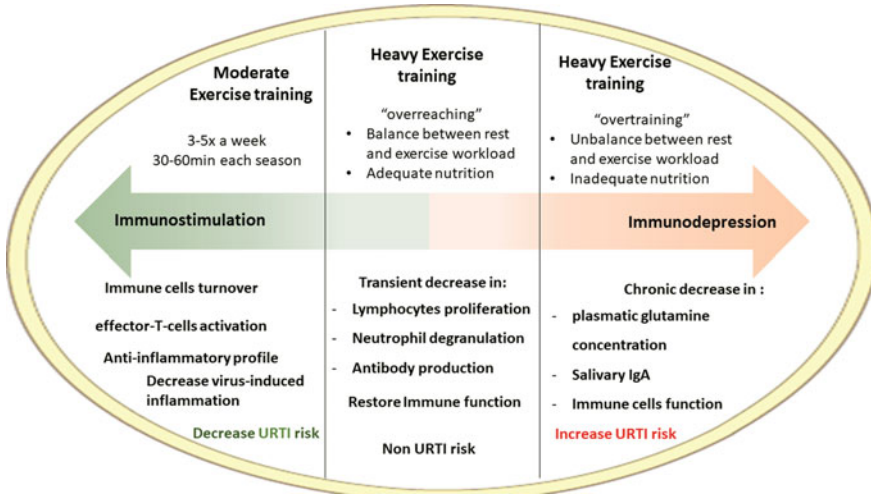
Exercise training has the ability to decrease low-grade chronic inflammation, restore antioxidant mechanisms, and stimulate immune cells response, which may reduce age-related immunosenescence [57]. In a study conducted on Judo masters athletes, it was observed that they senescent naïve and effector memory CD8+ T cells and CD4+ T cells and VO<sub>2</sub> max was positively correlated with naïve CD4+ T cells population, indicating that lifelong exercise could positively regulate immune function [58].

In studies on vaccination and exercise, physically active individuals appear to have better response than sedentary individuals. Older adults (62 years old) who performed at least 20 min of aerobic exercise 3–4 times a week showed higher anti-influenza IgG and IgM titers versus sedentary adults 2 weeks after vaccination. The exercise group also exhibited increased peripheral blood mononuclear cells in response to antigen-specific stimulation (Araujo et al. 2015). Moreover, in an animal model, mice who exercised before being exposed to the influenza virus showed lower severity of infection and inflammation in the lungs [59]. In another study, exercise before virus exposure was able to increase the survival rates in mice.

Thus, high-intensity and prolonged exercise without a proper recovery and nutrition can lead to an immunodepression and increase the risk of URTI. However, these finds indicate that exercise is a potent immunomodulator because continuous lower doses in moderate intensity can improve the immune response and decrease inflammation in metabolic diseases (Fig. 2).

### **3 Exercise for the Treatment and Prevention of Metabolic Disease**

The increased prevalence of metabolic disorders and its various features, such as obesity and type 2 diabetes (T2D), represents an enormous challenge for health systems worldwide. It affects more than 20% of the general population in most



**Fig. 2** Immune response according to exercise workload, rest and nutritional status

Western countries. In addition to genetic factors and population aging, lifestyle plays a major role in the development and progression of the “metabolic syndrome” that represents a cluster of metabolic disorders, including abdominal obesity, dyslipidemia, increased blood pressure, and increased fasting glucose levels [60].

Improved accessibility to healthcare systems and general economic developments that support population aging are believed to increase medical costs to levels no longer sustainable in Western societies. Accordingly, lifestyle modification in the prevention and treatment of metabolic disorders represents one of the most promising approaches that is affordable, nontoxic, and highly efficient compared to medications [61].

A major feature of metabolic diseases is obesity. Several clinical and experimental studies have provided evidence for an association between visceral adipose tissue mass and a condition of chronic systemic and local inflammation. It is suggested that inflammatory processes represent an important cause of many obesity-associated risk factors and metabolic diseases.

There are differences in the risk of obesity based on the heterogeneity of adipose tissue within and among individuals. High visceral and ectopic fat accumulation is shown to be associated with higher cardiovascular risk compared with subcutaneous fat. Due to this distribution of body fat, there is a small subset of apparently metabolic healthy obese individuals [3]. These individuals have preserved insulin sensitivity, low fat storage in the liver and skeletal muscle, normal adipose tissue function characterized by lower adipose tissue infiltration of leukocytes and a physiological adipokine secretion pattern. However, in most cases, excessive body fat accumulation leads to adverse metabolic effects, like adipose tissue inflammation, insulin resistance, impaired glucose tolerance, dyslipidemia, and hypertension [62].

The reason for the pathological changes in the visceral and ectopic adipose tissue is massive tissue expansion resulting from chronic metabolic overload in adipocytes.

Adipocytes represent a type of metabolic cells that not only minimally increase in number, but also increase in size. Subsequently, the chronic overload induces cellular stress pathways and inflammatory signals, including the activation of I $\kappa$ B kinase (IKK), c-jun N-terminal kinase (JNK), and protein kinase R (PKR). Downstream, the phosphorylation of I $\kappa$ B results in the dissociation of I $\kappa$ B $\alpha$  from NF- $\kappa$ B that is translocated into the nucleus inducing the expression of various inflammatory genes [63].

This signaling cascade is suggested to translate a primarily metabolic complication to immunological activation [64]. Simultaneously, the chronically enhanced calorie intake exceeds adipose tissue lipid storage capacity. The fatty acid metabolism products and advanced glycated end-products, accumulating due to hyperglycemia, activate various pattern-recognition such as the Toll-like receptors (TLRs) receptors and the NLRP3 inflammasome in hepatocytes and other tissues, thereby inducing endoplasmatic reticulum stress and aggravating cytokine production. Self-energizing inflammatory processes are initiated accompanied by increased expression and release of cytokines, such as TNF- $\alpha$ , IL-1 $\beta$ , IL-18, and several chemokines that induce the recruitment of leukocytes.

Accordingly, metabolic stress induces an inflammatory switch in the metabolic cells, such as adipocytes and hepatocytes, followed by invasion of leukocytes [63, 65]. The temporal and functional dynamics of adipose tissue residents or invading leukocytes has been partly defined. The increased concentration of pro-inflammatory cytokines and chemokines induces chemotactic recruitment of circulating monocytes that later culminates in the M1 polarization of macrophages that infiltrate the adipose tissue. The condition of chronic hyperlipidemia is also driven by excess fatty acids that bind to fatty acid-binding protein 4 (FABP4) on adipocytes or stromal macrophages in the adipose tissue microenvironment, followed by the induction of other chemokines that primarily recruit M1 macrophages [66, 67].

These cells seem to represent the most important producer of pro-inflammatory cytokines in the adipose tissue during obesity. M1 macrophages that express the surface molecule CD11c are able proliferate during obesity in a monocyte chemo-tactic protein 1 (MCP-1)-dependent mechanism. CD11c+ macrophages seem to play a major role in the development of insulin resistance and contribute to the formation of crown-like structures that represent a cluster of dead adipocytes surrounded by macrophages [68, 69].

In parallel, other immune cells, such as NK cells and lymphocytes, increase in the adipose tissue. NK cells are important producers of interferon-gamma (IFN- $\gamma$ ) that supports macrophage polarization and pro-inflammatory cytokine production [68, 70]. Regarding T cells, mainly cytotoxic CD8+ cells infiltrate the expanded adipose tissue and contribute to the recruitment, differentiation, and activation of macrophages. In contrast, the levels of regulatory T cells decrease, potentially favoring inflammatory and metabolic complications [71].

Hence, inflammation in the adipose tissue is affected by the imbalance of pro- and anti-inflammatory immune cell homeostasis toward a more pro-inflammatory status. The long-time metabolic surplus during the development of obesity leads to immunometabolic alterations in various other organs and tissues, such as the liver,

brain, skeletal and cardiac muscle, blood vessels, lung, kidney, and gut. However, the adipose tissue is suggested to be an important source of inflammation that at least partially contributes to the induction of systemic inflammatory processes via a “spill over” into circulation [72].

Here, chronically increased levels of pro-inflammatory cytokines, such as TNF- $\alpha$  and IL-6, are involved in the development of other metabolic complications, such as progressive insulin resistance in the skeletal muscle [73]. In particular, TNF- $\alpha$  reduces the level of the inhibitor of I $\kappa$ B, followed by the upregulation of NF- $\kappa$ B and JNK pathways in the muscle. Subsequently, insulin resistance increased through the inhibition of insulin receptor substrate 1 (IRS-1). Non-esterified fatty acids (NEFA) have also been shown to cause insulin resistance in the muscle tissue through increased levels of intramuscular diacylglycerol (DAG) and ceramides.

Here, insulin resistance is also promoted via the upregulation of NF- $\kappa$ B. Moreover, NEFAs induce catabolic responses in the muscle via atrophy-related signaling and protein degradation through impaired activation of the PI3K-Akt pathway [74, 75].

Lifestyle modification appears to be the most appealing approach, and physical activity and exercise represent fundamental components. In general, weight loss is necessary for reducing the cardiovascular risk in obese subjects; however, physical activity is also effective in the treatment of many diseases, irrespective of weight loss. Exercise is well proven to reduce the risk of coronary heart disease in obese subjects. Exercise burns calories and may contribute to a calorie deficit in combination with specific dietary restrictions. Therefore, physical activity plays a pivotal role in long-term weight loss or maintenance to prevent obesity or as an important therapeutic option [76].

In parallel, most exercise regimes significantly improve the functional status and physical fitness. Regular exercise training induces a graded dose response in fitness in both sedentary and obese subjects that is associated with a lower risk for all-cause and cardiovascular disease mortality. It is well known that both moderate endurance as well as resistance exercise training reduces blood pressure in hypertensive individuals. The initiation of regular activity programs in previously inactive subjects also influences dyslipidemia by reducing small, dense LDL and triglyceride particles. In contrast, LDL particle size and high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol increase. Furthermore, regular physical activity is shown to reduce the ratio of total to HDL cholesterol [77].

Regarding T2D, a considerable association between insulin resistance and low cardiorespiratory fitness has been demonstrated [78]. Data from the *Nurses' Health Study* suggests that the activity time spent per week reduces the relative risk of developing T2D. Similarly, exercise represents an effective tool for the therapeutic management of prediabetes and diabetes [79]. Based on the available data, it is recommended that at least 150 min/week of moderate to vigorous aerobic exercise should be performed in combination with one or two sessions of resistance exercise for prevention [80]. Various other studies, such as the Look AHEAD (Action for Health in Diabetes), has shown various beneficial effects of regular physical activity

in subjects with T2D. Thereby, long-term activity programs in a diabetic population have shown to improve all the aspects of metabolic syndrome, including BMI and HbA1c [81].

Epidemiological studies demonstrate a negative association between the level of physical inactivity and systemic inflammatory status in patients with metabolic diseases. Similarly, physical fitness is negatively associated with the level of inflammatory biomarkers [82]. Accordingly, physical activity, particularly endurance training or combined endurance and strength training programs, seem to interact with the immune system by exerting anti-inflammatory effects. Patients who suffer from metabolic diseases can perform exercise training to lower both systemic and local levels of inflammation that have consistently shown to lower disease activity [83]. Some exercise-effects might address inflammatory processes indirectly, such as by regulating body composition. Maintaining low visceral fat mass prevents the development of adipose tissue dysfunction and inflammation. Regulation of dyslipidemia may improve T-cell receptor signaling and the translocation of MHC molecules for antigen presentation. Furthermore, regular exercise is shown to increase the body's antioxidant defense system that prevents oxidative DNA damage to the immune cells and tissues [84].

In addition to these indirect effects, there are other direct mechanisms for exercise-immune crosstalk. During muscle contraction, various myokines are released into the circulation that exert immune-regulating effects in the circulation or organs and tissues. In response to muscular glycogen depletion, IL-6 is released from the skeletal muscle; this induces the increase of anti-inflammatory cytokines, such as IL-10, IL-1 receptor antagonist (IL-1ra), soluble TNF- $\alpha$  receptors, and inhibits the endotoxin-induced TNF- $\alpha$  production [85].

Similarly, each acute bout of exercise releases stress hormones with anti-inflammatory properties, such as cortisol and adrenaline, by activating both the SNS as well as the HPA axes [86]. While cortisol suppresses the activity of different leukocyte subpopulations, adrenaline attenuates the production of IL-1 $\beta$  and TNF- $\alpha$ . Regarding circulating leukocytes, regular exercise increases the percentage of Tregs in the blood and downregulates TLRs on monocytes and macrophages [87, 88]. Similarly, regular exercise increases the percentage of classical monocytes expressing CD14<sup>hi</sup>CD16<sup>-</sup>, while an inactive lifestyle promotes an increased percentage of non-classical monocytes characterized by the surface profile CD14<sup>low</sup>CD16<sup>+</sup> or CD14<sup>hi</sup>CD16<sup>+</sup> [89].

An important mechanism of the immune-regulating potential of exercise is energy expenditure that reduces metabolic stress. In particular, regular exercise training increases adipocyte-specific gene and protein expression of AMPK and PGC-1 $\alpha$  followed by an increased  $\beta$ -oxidation and mitochondrial biogenesis [90]. Enhanced lipid turnover decreases metabolic overload and adipocyte dysfunction, thus limiting stress signaling and pro-inflammatory cytokine production in the adipose tissue. Similarly, exercise reduces signals for ER stress-induced inflammation. In parallel, the expression of CD163, a marker for M2 macrophages, increases, suggesting a switch from M1 to M2 macrophage polarization. In line with these observations,

reduced expression of TNF- $\alpha$  and IL-6 in the adipose tissue of diabetic subjects was shown after exercise training [91].

Finally, exercise affects the type of adipose tissue that is generally composed of the following two types of adipose tissues: white adipose tissue (WAT) and brown adipose tissue (BAT). WAT plays a role storing energy and releasing hormones and cytokines that affect metabolism and insulin resistance. BAT, however, expends energy to produce heat through non-shivering thermogenesis, via mitochondrial uncoupling protein 1 (UCP-1) (Bargut et al. 2016). It is noteworthy that exercise can induce a browning process of WAT, leading to increased energy expenditure, thus aiding in the treatment of obesity. Mechanistically, the release of the myokine irisin and activity of the sympathetic nervous system seem to be involved in exercise-induced browning of the adipose tissue. However, the detailed contribution of BAT in the prevention and treatment of metabolic diseases remains to be clarified [92].

Moreover, exercise is an excellent tool for preventing and treating other metabolic and inflammatory diseases, such as neurodegenerative diseases, cardiovascular diseases, and cancer.

## 4 Exercise for the Prevention and Treatment of Cancer

Cancer is a multifactorial disease driven by chronic inflammation. Aerobic exercise training is considered a very effective tool for inducing an anti-inflammatory response. Thus, nowadays is well established that athletes of long-distance competitions showed reduced risk to many types of cancers. Moore et al. [93] showed that the duration of physical exercise is negatively correlated with the occurrence of 13 types of tumor. Exercise is able to reduce the most common tumors in Western countries, such as cancers of the breast, prostate, colon, pancreas, kidneys, and lungs [94]. It is noteworthy that exercise is less effective in murine models with deletion of p53 [95]. Thus, tumors that have a great genetic trigger and therefore, higher expressions of oncogenes, are less susceptible to exercise-induced prevention [96].

The mechanisms for reducing the risk of cancer are associated with the anti-inflammatory myokines released after exercise with a systemic effect. This anti-inflammatory milieu caused by exercise practice is enough to inhibit tumor generation and growth [97]. Hanahan and Weiberg [98] proposed that inflammation is a hallmark of cancer because the pro-inflammatory signaling can promote resistance to apoptosis and increase tumor cell proliferation.

Other mechanism related to cancer prevention in well-trained subjects is the reduction in the hormones and growth factors, such as sex hormones, insulin, and IGF-1, because exercise training increases the receptors in the target cells and improves the signaling cascade, such as that for insulin. Thus, the circulating levels of these factors can be reduced without affecting the cellular response [94] (Xi et al. 2007).

Most recently, the positive effects of exercise in the treatment of cancer have been shown. Thus, aerobic and resistance exercise can exert effects by reducing the growth of the tumor and metastasis, thus improving the life quality and expectancy [97].

The molecular mechanisms through which exercise induces this anti-tumor response are not completely clear; however, several hypotheses have been proposed. A large number of blood vessels are present in the tumor; however, it is nonfunctional, with reduction in blood flux and generation of hypoxia. Hypoxia is a characteristic of tumor cells, and these reductions in blood flux impair the delivery of immune cells and chemotherapy drugs. Aerobic exercise is able to increase VEGF and improve intra-tumoral perfusion in murine models of breast and prostate cancer [99, 100].

The cell metabolism in tumor is characterized by increased aerobic glycolysis owing to a higher proliferation ratio. Exercise can decrease the availability of energy substrate, particularly special glucose and glutamine, which reduces the supply of nutrients to the tumor. The tumors that have a high metabolic demand are most affected by exercise. In this sense, the metabolic program of tumor cells showed increased in AKT-mTOR axis [101]. Endurance exercise reduces mTOR activation in different types of solid tumors in murine models by reducing the growth factors. Moreover, exercise induces AMPK activation in tumor cells; this activation inhibits the mTOR pathway and inhibits the proliferative pathway. The role of AMPK and the activation of its enzyme is not fully understood. In many types of tumors, AMPK activation decreases tumor growth; however, others studies have shown that this enzyme effectively protects the tumor from oxidative stress and apoptosis [102, 103]. More studies are necessary to clarify the role of AMPK in cancer cells.

Catecholamine released in response to exercise and myokines are probably important for reducing tumor growth and activating the immune system. Pedersen et al. (2016) showed that in a murine model, exercise increased IL-6 and adrenaline that together mobilized NK cells, increasing its activity. It is noteworthy because the levels of IL-6 in intra-tumoral environment are associated with poor prognosis and high malignance. The results not published of our group showed that the aerobic training induces an increase in the IL-6 protein expression in the skeletal muscle and a reduction in the tumor.

The potential therapeutic role of exercise in the reduction of tumor growth (range 45%–67%) in a murine model is well documented. The incubation of several tumor cell lineages with the serum of trained animals reduces in 10%–15% tumor cells proliferation. Furthermore, well-trained athletes have a 40% lower risk of cancer mortality than the general population [94].

The strong evidence of exercise on treatment of cancer patients lead to the Exercise and Sport Science Australian published the position statement in 2019, with the guidelines about the practice of exercise in cancer patients. Several aspects must be considered, such as the type of cancer, pre-status of physical fitness, chemotherapy and radiotherapy, aging, and other co-morbidities; however, all intensities of exercise are preconized during the training. In this statement, the authors suggested at least 20 min for each session (Hayes et al. 2019).

Finally, exercise training is very important in the counter-regulation of the side effects of chemotherapy. This class of drugs causes several undesirable effects in different organs. Doxorubicin, an effective anti-tumor drug widely used in clinical practice, causes substantial toxicity in the heart, kidneys, adipose tissues, liver, and skeletal muscle. In skeletal muscle, patients suffer with proteolysis and fatigue,



mimicking sarcopenia induced by cachexia. Resistance training is an efficient method of reducing weight and skeletal muscle mass loss. Moreover, endurance training mitigates the effects of doxorubicin in the reduction of running capability in mice and protects the decline in oxidative metabolism induced by this drug in the skeletal muscle. Moreover, aerobic training improves the delivery of drugs to the tumor. Some studies have shown that aerobic training is safe and potentiates the chemotherapy treatment reducing the dosage without losing efficacy.

Thus, exercise leads to metabolic reprogramming in many tissues of the body and can prevent cancer initialization, thus reducing the cancer risk. Starting a fitness program after cancer diagnosis is safe and recommended. Several studies have shown that exercise reduces cancer growth and metastasis. Finally, exercise is extremely effective for reducing the side effects promoted by anti-tumoral drugs.

## 5 Conclusion

We discussed the metabolic pathways that induce cellular reprogramming, especially with respect to the relationship between the AMPK and mTOR in the skeletal muscle, adipose tissue, and immune cells.

This is an important way to understand how exercise induces mobilization, recruitment, polarization, and production of inflammatory mediators in immune cells. Thus, we showed the state of art in the cellular adaptations induced by acute and training exercise. However, many steps of reprogramming are unclear and need to be investigated. In sum, exercise is an excellent alternative method for prevention and non-pharmacological treatment of inflammatory chronic diseases (obesity and cancer) that have reached epidemic proportions worldwide.

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# Immunometabolism and Organ Transplantation



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## 1 Introduction

Inflammation fundamentally influences short and long-term performance of solid organ allografts. Thus, it is relevant to control inflammatory processes to maintain graft function and survival. Graft inflammation is initiated after ischemia and reperfusion injury and, later, during antigen presentation, where alloantigens are recognized by the recipient immune system, resulting in rejection [1]. Local and systemic production of cytokines and chemokines affect the graft after transplantation and amplify the alloresponse [2]. If the inflammatory response is not resolved, it becomes chronic, stimulating tissue remodeling with the result of organ fibrosis and a final loss of function and graft failure [1].

Immune cells display a range of metabolic adaptations for energetic requirements and to support growth, expansion and effector functions to maintain the homeostasis or to respond to alarmins, as in the case of inflammation. The role of metabolism in tissue homeostasis has been described in terms of tissue repair and regeneration [3, 4] and in the context of the inflammatory processes involved in organ transplantation [5–7]. Immunometabolism has been described as a pivotal mechanism, for the adaptive and innate immune regulation [8]. There is evidence that metabolic pathways are linked to cell processes like signaling and differentiation leading to different immune

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cell populations to acquire specific programs according to their state and to micro-environmental signals that will utmost drive cell fate [9].

This chapter outlines some of the metabolic features of immune cells in the context of the allogenic recognition and the immune response in transplantation. Changes in cell metabolism contributing the functional immune responses described in organ transplantation will be also briefly discussed.

## 2 Metabolic Pathways in the Context of the Immune Response in Transplantation

In homeostatic conditions, cells can use different metabolic pathways, when facing growth factors and nutrient availabilities, and participate in reducing and oxidizing reactions [10]. These changes in metabolic pathways and in generating metabolites have an important effect in the function of immune cells. The activity and importance of such metabolic pathways vary greatly depending on the type and the active state of the cell, affecting several aspects such as development, differentiation, death and cell signaling [11, 12], all of them relevant in the context of transplantation.

In general, six metabolic pathways have been studied in more details. The glycolytic pathway or glycolysis is involved in the glucose transport from extra-cellular compartment to generate pyruvate and other metabolites as a result of a series of enzymatic reactions. Pyruvate is imported into the mitochondria and consequently converted to acetyl-CoA to enter into the tricarboxylic acid cycle (TCA) to produce NADH and FADH<sub>2</sub> for ATP generation. Also, pyruvate can be metabolized by lactate dehydrogenase (LDH) into lactate, regenerating the NAD<sup>+</sup> consumed during the generation of pyruvate from glucose [13]. The pentose phosphate pathway (PPP) generates precursors for nucleotide and amino acid biosynthesis and to control oxidative stress. The PPP reactions divide into an oxidative and non-oxidative branch, the oxidative branch converts glucose 6-phosphate into ribulose 5-phosphate, carbon dioxide, and NADPH. For instance, the non-oxidative branch metabolizes the glycolytic intermediates to ribose 5-phosphate for nucleic acids and amino acids synthesis [14]. In the fatty acid oxidation pathway,  $\beta$ -oxidation of fatty acid yields large amounts of acetyl-CoA, NADH and FADH<sub>2</sub> to be used in the tricarboxylic acid (TCA) cycle and the electron transport chain to generate ATP [15]. In contrast, the fatty acid synthesis (FAS) pathway is used to generate lipids for cellular growth, membrane production and other important lipid-based components crucial for proliferation [16]. Inside the mitochondria, acetyl-CoA could be used as a precursor for citrate, which can be then exported to the cytosol and converted to malonyl-CoA and finally to palmitate, to form phospholipids, or as a substrate for proteins acylation and cholesterol biosynthesis and used to create or repair cell membranes [13].

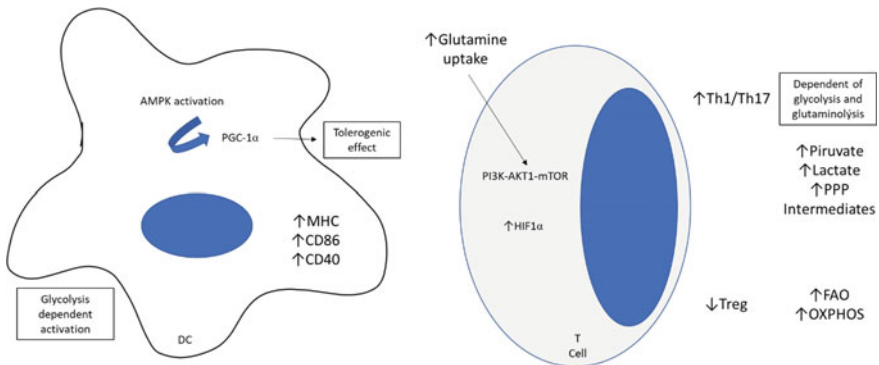
Transplantation is a therapeutic alternative that extent the quality of life of individuals with organ failure. In terms of the immune response, allograft recognition

occurs in two steps, the first one mediated by cells and compound of the innate immunity and the second one mediated by the adaptive immune system, mainly T cells, which are necessary and sufficient to induce organ transplant rejection of allografts [17]. During transplantation a cascade of signals drive the migration of dendritic cells (DCs) and lymphocytes into lymph nodes and transplanted tissues for the efficient generation of alloimmune responses [18]. Therefore, alloantigen-dependent immune responses can critically impair its success. Immune cells secrete factors that are important on microenvironment, conditions like nutrient competition, oxygen consumption, microbiota and metabolite production from several tissues have an important effect on the immune cell fate, which leads to pro-inflammatory response by immune cells and alteration into the tissues when this response happen [19, 20].

DCs link innate responses to adaptive immunity, by controlling activation and polarization of effector T helper and regulatory T cell (Treg) responses during the allogeneic recognition. During DCs maturation and activation, their metabolic profile shifts from glycolysis to oxidative phosphorylation (OXPHOS), however, some glycolytic intermediates enter into the PPP, to support protein biosynthesis and NADPH generation, and into the TCA cycle to maintain lipid and macromolecule biosynthesis [6, 21, 22] (Fig. 1.).

T cell-mediated graft alloresponses are critical for graft rejection or acceptance. Early activation steps are defined by an increased glycolytic rate, glutamine, and PPP metabolism, however, protein, lipid and nucleic acids synthesis have been demonstrated as important pathways related with the development of T cells response during graft rejection processes [6, 23].

In vitro studies have shown that glucose and glutamate are important nutrients for effector responses because glucose uptake deficiency impairs effector function and proliferation of CD4+ T cells while Tregs are enriched and functionally unaffected [24]. Glutamate metabolism has also been involved in Th1 and Th17 effector



**Fig. 1** DCs and T cells metabolic events during immunological synapse. DCs control activation and polarization of effector T helper and regulatory T cell (Treg) responses during allogeneic recognition. Glucose and glutamate are important nutrients for effector responses and they have been involved in Th1, Th17 and Treg differentiation

T cells differentiation, but apparently, it does not seem to be critical for Tregs differentiation [25]. In the context of transplantation, it was demonstrated that glycolysis and glutamine metabolism inhibition promoted allograft survival by suppression of CD4+ and CD8+ effector T cell responses and preservation of immune regulation [6, 26, 27] (Fig. 1).

### 3 Immunometabolic Events in Transplantation

#### 3.1 *Metabolic Changes in Ischemia/Reperfusion*

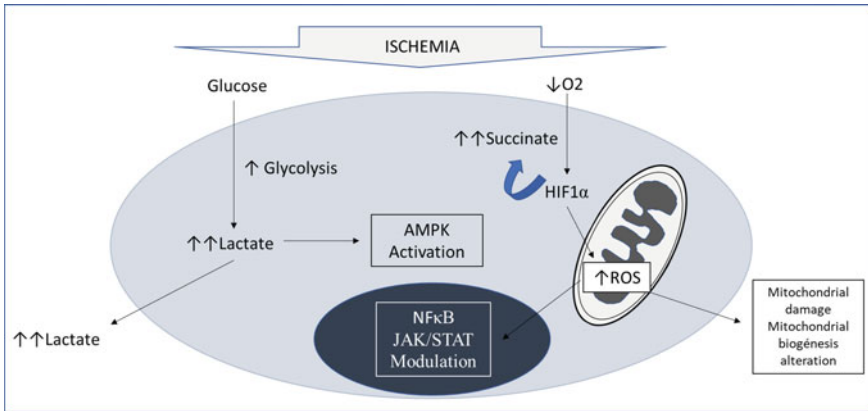
Immune system activation is an early event after organ transplantation and its close related to tissue damage and cell death in transplanted organs. However, tisular cell death is a process that contributes to increase graft inflammation and dead cells as well as the repair of damaged tissue following transplantation [28].

Ischemia/reperfusion injury is an unavoidable consequence after solid organ transplantation which influences short- as well as long-term graft outcome. Energy metabolism, cellular changes of the mitochondria and cellular membranes and cell death are underlying mechanisms involved in this injury [29].

Ischemia has been related with two major underpinning conditions: a complex metabolic shift and a response to oxygen availability. Some studies have demonstrated that ischemic conditions are related to an increasing of glucose transportation and glycolysis [30], excess of extracellular and cytosolic lactate and as, a compensatory mechanism, activation of AMPK signaling to elicit an anti-inflammatory response [31, 32]. Low oxygen rates related to ischemia have been associated with HIF1 $\alpha$  activation [33, 34], succinate accumulation and mitochondrial ROS generation [35] (Fig. 2).

Ischemia/reperfusion injury has been linked to mitochondrial damage by increasing of cytoplasmic concentrations of H<sup>+</sup>, Na<sup>+</sup> and Ca<sup>2+</sup>, associated with ATP reduction by ATPases inhibition [36, 37]. In addition, enhanced ROS generation and subsequent peroxidation of phospholipids of the inner mitochondrial membrane disrupt the electron flow, by altering the electron transport chain [38]. ROS-mediated signaling also activates innate immune responses by modulation of MAP kinases, NF- $\kappa$ B, JAK/STAT transducers and nitric oxide (NO) signaling, eventually leading to the amplification of the inflammatory response, fibrosis and loss of the organ function [39].

Increased levels of casein kinase 2 $\alpha$  (CK2 $\alpha$ ) and, consequently, mitophagy inhibition have been also related to ischemia/reperfusion injury, resulting in mitochondrial genome damage, electron transport chain complex (ETC) inhibition, mitochondrial biogenesis alteration and induction of oxidative stress and mitochondrial apoptosis [40].



**Fig. 2** Metabolic effects of ischemia in cell behaviour during transplantation. During transplantation, ischemic conditions related to alterations in glucose transportation, glycolysis and oxygen availability activate nuclear inflammatory mechanisms and generate mitochondrial alterations and mitochondrial damage

### 3.2 Metabolic Regulation During Acute Rejection

Allogenic T cell responses are considered to be critical for short and long-term outcomes for solid organ transplants [28, 41]. In transplantation, alloantigens are recognized by two main pathways, the indirect (donor-derived antigens are processed and presented by receptor's APCs) and the direct (receptor's T cells recognize alloantigen/donor MHC on donor APCs) [42].

After activation, DCs undergo a metabolic shift to glycolysis acquiring a pro-inflammatory phenotype, however, memory T cells metabolism displays similarities with Treg cells and M2 macrophages, relying on FAO to meet their metabolic demands [43].

DAMPs recognition during TLR-driven DC activation is a crucial aspect in transplantation. Diverse studies have showed that glycogen metabolism supports the initial effector functions of TLR-activated DCs [44, 45]. In addition, DCs activation is glycolysis dependent, thus, glucose blockade promotes a reduction in the expression of MHC-I and, -II and co-stimulatory molecules like CD86 and CD40, which are fundamental signals during graft antigen presentation steps [45, 46].

Some studies have demonstrated that Th17 cells together with Th1 and Th2 cells play an important role in mediating allograft rejection [47]. During acute rejection, it has been described that frequencies of Th1-Th17, as well as, levels of circulating IFN- $\gamma$  and IL-17 are increased in contrast with reduced levels of Treg cells [48–50]. During T cell differentiation and activation Th1, Th17 and Tregs display different metabolic patterns. Th1 and Th17 cells have been described more dependent of glycolysis and glutaminolysis, with high levels of pyruvate, lactate and PPP intermediates. Tregs, by their side, rely more on fatty acid oxidation and OXPHOS to supply their energetic demands [51–53].

The effect of maintained inflammation on immune cells is related to changes in cellular metabolism that shift the cells towards aerobic glycolysis, signaling via the phosphoinositide 3-kinase (PI3K–AKT1–mTOR) axis and upregulation of the transcription factors, e.g. MYC and HIF1 $\alpha$ . These processes increase amino acid and glutamine uptake to maintain glutaminolysis and glycolysis resulting in T cell activation and inflammatory cytokine production. Indeed, inhibition of glycolysis, either by blocking mTORC1 or downstream HIF1 $\alpha$  signaling, promotes a switch from Th1 and Th17 to Treg differentiation [54, 55].

Transplant recipients receive therapeutic doses of immunosuppressant drugs to maintain the integrity of tissues and organs and to avoid rejection. These drugs have important effect on the metabolic behavior of the immune cells. The calcineurin inhibitor therapy is the main immunosuppressive regimens with important effects on cellular enzymatic rate (mediate by cytochrome P450) and regulation of IL-2 production by immune cells [56]. mTOR inhibitors, trough glycolytic metabolic reprogramming and preventing cell proliferation by inhibiting of growth factor–mediated T-cell proliferation in response to IL-2 and by blocking the metabolic shift required for the Th17/Treg balance [57–59].

### ***3.3 Metabolic Features in Chronic Rejection and Fibrosis***

Chronic allograft injury is identified by vascular changes, interstitial fibrosis and organ structures' atrophy. Fibrosis causes organ damage by a series of cellular and molecular responses to sustained tissue damage. Tissue inflammation often triggers fibrosis by inducing epithelial- and endothelial-to-mesenchymal transitions [60].

Some studies described that IL-33 is released as a response of tissue damage and regulates macrophage differentiation during chronic rejection, preventing disruption of the TCA cycle that shifts macrophage metabolism to anaerobic glycolysis and generates proinflammatory metabolites [61, 62]. Macrophage stimulation by IL-33 increases OXPHOS and FA uptake, supporting reparative and regulatory myeloid cell functions [61].

During chronic rejection, alloantigens are continually processed by recipient APCs, during this process, it has been described that the metabolic profile governing these late chronic responses involves an skewed response from glycolysis and with focus on OXPHOS, what seems to be related to FAO process [55].

### ***3.4 Role of Immune Cell Metabolism in Tolerance Induction***

Tolerance, in terms of transplantation, has been defined by different aspects, highlighted between them: 1. Allograft must be accepted without chronic rejection signals, and, 2. Recipient should be able to maintain immune responses against

any other foreign antigen without affectation of the transplanted organ [63]. Transplantation tolerance maintenance is, in fact, the biggest goal in the transplantation field.

Tolerogenic DCs metabolism has been poorly studied in graft transplantation field. However, new topics linking DCs metabolism and anti-inflammatory profile were established in different models and tissues. Recently, arginine and tryptophan pathways were showed to be two important pathways in the development of an anti-inflammatory response. Thus, scientists discovered that arginase 1 (Arg1) expression and activity are important to indoleamine 2,3-dioxygenase 1 (IDO1) phosphorylation, and consequent activation of IDO1 signalling, which promotes tolerogenic and a protection profile in sensitized mice with the HY peptide (containing the H-2D<sup>b</sup> epitope of male minor histocompatibility antigen complex) [64]. Then, these findings suggested that Arg1 and IDO1 interlinked functions can be extend to transplantation model.

Regarding DCs fate, activation of AMPK signaling by peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor gamma coactivator (PGC) enhance PGC-1 $\alpha$  activity. The reduction of HIF-1 $\alpha$  activity by PGC-1 $\alpha$  increased activity has been observed as an important factor for tolerogenic DCs generation [46, 65].

PPAR $\gamma$  and Wnt/ $\beta$ -catenin, in cDCs of adipose tissue, have important immunoregulatory functions on inflammation. cDC1 and cDC2 control IL-10 and homeostasis of cDC themselves through Wnt/ $\beta$ -catenin and PPAR $\gamma$ , respectively [66]. In addition, Wnt/ $\beta$ -catenin pathway also showed to be extremely important to generate Treg, trough kynurenine secretion out at the microenvironment [67]. Both mechanisms were already seing in transplantation contexts [68], but additional interactions need to be explored in graft transplantation models.

It has been showed that tolerogenic DCs, generated by RelB (NF- $\kappa$ B subunit) silencing, have the capacity of downregulate Th1 responses, increase T cell apoptosis and generate Treg, which prevent allograft rejection and prolonged survival in a murine model of heart transplantation [69]. In addition, it has been showed that DCs treatment with an analog of vitamin D (1, 25(OH)2D3) promoted a tolerogenic phenotype, characterized by a reduced expression of costimulatory molecules, reduction of IL-12 production and enhanced IL-10 secretion. These tolerogenic DCs promoted graft acceptance in a heart transplantation murine model, associated with a higher frequency of Treg in secondary lymphoid organs [70].

## 4 Key Metabolic Sensors in Transplantation

Different cell signaling and metabolic pathways participate in the modulation of the allogeneic immune response, some of these main pathways have been described in the context of the inflammatory response and have been studied in application fields like transplantation. Several molecules are involved in every metabolic pathway; however, some factors are key for nutrient sensing and modulation of metabolic programming and reprogramming of immune cells.

mTOR pathway is interlinked to ensure coordinated regulation of cellular metabolic responses, regulating signal intensity and duration of nutrient availability and microenvironmental signaling input [71, 72]. Thus, mTOR pathway can influence proinflammatory cytokine production and Th1/Th17 polarization, by blocking the release of regulatory cytokines like IL-10 and by altering the frequencies of Treg and tolerogenic DCs, factors that promote an accelerated graft rejection [43, 44, 73, 74].

PGC1- $\alpha$  is considered as an important molecule in the context of the metabolic switch during the immune response [75–78]. In the context of transplantation, it has been shown in macrophages that PGC1- $\alpha$  expression modulate IL-1 $\alpha$  and IL-1 $\beta$  production [79], which are produced as a response by PAMPs recognition in transplantation procedures and cellular rejection response [80]. In addition, it has been described that reductions of PGC1- $\alpha$  levels in CD8+ T foster an exhausted profile, which lead to TCR signal decreased, less pro-inflammatory production and low cytotoxic efficiency, which have an important role at the graft rejection processes [81, 82]. In the same way, CD4+ T cells with low PGC1- $\alpha$  expression have a decreased in proliferation and less cytokines production [15, 79, 83, 84] and could have a pivotal role in the transplantation outcome.

The peroxisome proliferator-activated receptors (PPARs) are members of the nuclear-hormone-receptor superfamily that transduce environmental, nutritional and inflammatory signals events at gene transcription level in T and B cells, macrophages and DCs [85–87], 163]. PPAR $\gamma$  can influence the maturation of DCs, whereas PPAR $\gamma$  is functionally more activated, thereby promoting high levels of CD86. In contrast, it appears that PPAR $\gamma$  activation in DCs also decreased CD80 expression and IL-12 production [40, 85]. It has been showed that PPAR $\gamma$  activation in DCs might influence effector CD4+ T cells activation and polarization through its ability to alter their phenotype and cytokine production [88], which controls the immune response in kidney and heart transplantation models [89].

PPAR $\gamma$  negatively regulates T cells activation and proliferation by decreasing TCR stimulation, mainly through the NFAT signal inhibition and subsequent IL-2 production inhibition [90]. It has been showed that treatment with PPAR $\gamma$  agonists drugs unravel decreased T cell activation in inflammatory environments such as transplantation in mice models, in contrast, use of PPAR $\gamma$  antagonist leads to an increased IFN- $\gamma$ +CD4+ T cells and to a decreased numbers of CD4+ Foxp3+ T cells [91]. Thus, modulation of Treg/Th1 cells activation axis may help the acceptance of solid organs transplants.

Oxygen availability is one of the factors that are important in terms of cell fate or function, and “oxygen sensors” such as the HIF-1 $\alpha$ . This factor has an defined role in many checkpoints in the glycolysis pathway [92]. In DCs, HIF-1 $\alpha$  leads to metabolic reprogramming toward glycolysis, increasing the CCR7 expression, essential for migration to draining lymph nodes, as a response for alloantigens during recognition and rejection response [93]. More than ten years ago, it was observed that donors’ treatment with prolyl-hydroxylases (PHDs), a HIF-1 $\alpha$  and HIF-2 $\alpha$  inhibitor, prolonged survival in kidney transplant murine models and studies of physiological responses to hypoxia [94–96].

## 5 Sirtuins as “Metabolic Sensors and Regulators” in Transplantation

Histone deacetylases (HDACs) are biological molecules responsible for removing acetyl groups from histone’s lysine residues, resulting in chromatin condensation and repression of the transcription [97]. Sirtuins are NAD<sup>+</sup>-dependent HDACs, and they are divided into Sirtuin 1–7 (Sirt1–7) [98].

In terms of the study of sirtuins, Sirt1 and Sirt3 have been deeply studied in different cell types, specially in immune cells. Sirt1 and Sirt3 regulate NF- $\kappa$ B, a transcription factor involved in regulation of inflammation and immune cell proliferation [99–102]. By their side, Sirt3 overexpression is related to an increase of the mitochondrial oxidative capacity with a resulting reduction of ROS levels [103], having a concomitant effect on cell activation and function in the context of transplantation [104].

Sirt1 has been identified as an important molecule in cellular metabolism and in immune regulation and their activation has proved protective effects on multiple organs submitted to oxidative stress, including kidneys [105–109], by their side, Sirt1 knockout (KO) mice have been show aggravation in diabetic nephropathy and acute kidney injury [106, 110].

Although some studies have demonstrated that Sirt1 has a role in the suppression of inflammatory responses [111], others have been demonstrated an important proinflammatory role for Sirt1 mainly in the context of Th17 cell differentiation. By deacetylation of ROR $\gamma$ t and Foxp3, Sirt1 increases ROR $\gamma$ t and reduces Foxp3 activity, promoting Th17 cell development establishing favorable conditions for the development of autoimmunity and graft rejection [112, 113], some of these findings could suggest that Sirt1 inhibition may represent a potent therapeutic alternative for the treatment of Th17 cell-mediated graft rejection [114].

Some studies have showed a negative regulation of Treg activity by Sirt1 due to deacetylation of three sites on Foxp3 [115]. Strategies to inhibit Sirt1 may enhance Treg activities and provide a therapeutic approach to treat allograft rejection. Sirt1 deletion results in enhanced Foxp3 expression, increased Treg suppressive activity, and longer cardiac allograft survival from fully mismatched major histocompatibility complex (MHC) donors in a murine model. However, functionality of effector T cells was not affected as determined by proliferation, activation, or production of IL-2, IL-4, IL-17, or IFN- $\gamma$  [116]. Activated Treg cells downregulate Sirt1, to stabilize Foxp3 expression and Treg phenotypes [117], which may have clinical benefits in transplantation [118–120]. In Human DCs, Sirt1-mediated histone deacetylation of Rel family proteins to the *il12a* promoter and IL-12p70/IL-23 production, which might modulate the Th1/Th17 balance [121].

Sirt1 deletion in T cells improved allograft survival and also lead to the induction of tolerance to a subsequent heart transplantation challenge, maintaining the ability to reject third-party cardiac allografts [122]. Treg role in prevention of allograft rejection provides a rationale for Sirt1 targeting in the context of transplantation [123].



In addition, Sirt3, a mitochondrial sirtuin, promotes the deacetylation of endogenous factors that are important for autophagosome maturation inhibition and induced NLRP3 formation, two relevant components related to organ rejection [80, 124]. Other studies have been showed that T cells isolated from Sirt3 KO mice were found less activated, with reduced CXCR3 expression and ROS production, which led a reduced GVHD severity in different murine models [125].

Taken together, sirtuins, mainly Sirt1 and 3, have been showed important roles in manipulated the immune cells phenotype and function, through the metabolism. However, still exist several gaps to be answered about sirtuins and immunometabolism, highlighting the importance of new studies about these molecules on transplantation models.

## 6 Trained Immunity in Organ Transplantation

Trained immunity has been defined as the functional reprogramming of innate immune cells leading to an altered response towards a second challenge after the return to a non-activated state. These secondary response can be more or less strong than primary, conferring context- and time-adjusted responses [126].

Cellular metabolism has an important role in trained immunity [127–129]. Indeed, nutrients and metabolites modulate the epigenetic and the metabolic reprogramming increasing glycolytic cell rates mediated by mTOR, AKT and HIF1 $\alpha$  [129–131] with an enhanced responsiveness to subsequent stimulation. Also, derived metabolites from the TCA, like  $\alpha$ -ketoglutarate or itaconate, promote anti-inflammatory macrophages polarization facilitating tolerance after IFN $\gamma$ -mediated macrophage activation [126, 132–135].

Some signaling pathways have been described in context of trained immunity. These pathways could be altered or modified by different stimuli or conditions as transplantation, some of these are: (1) Dectin-1/vimentin/HMGB1, (2) infection and NOD2 [17].

Dectin-1 is a C-type lectin innate immune receptor expressed on macrophages, DCs, and epithelial cells, which recognizes  $\beta$ -glucans on common transplant-associated pathogens and recently has been described as a crucial tolerogenic receptor binding several annexins exposed on apoptotic cells [136]. Following a second stimulation, dectin-1 “trained” macrophages upregulate glycolysis and secrete elevated levels of IL-6 and TNF $\alpha$  [137], cytokines that are related to organ transplant rejection [138]. Vimentin, an endogenous protein involved in wound healing, is a dectin-1 ligand [139, 140]. Some studies have shown that vimentin is upregulated and exposed on the surface of apoptotic cells after transplantation and is associated with acute and chronic rejection [141–144]. Necrosis is a result of ischemia/reperfusion injury (IRI) [145], whereas necrotic cells release high levels of mobility group box 1 (HMGB1) protein, other important ligand for dectin-1 [146–148].

Nod-like receptor 2 (NOD2) is an intracellular sensor for bacterial components [149] and viral RNA [150], showing an important link with solid organ transplantation because infection acquisition has been associated with graft rejection [151, 152]. Early studies demonstrated that microbial components or infections induce NOD2-dependent response, which occurs via epigenetic and metabolic reprogramming of innate immune cells. It has been described that trained immune increases histone methylation at the IL-6 and TNF $\alpha$  promoters, and upregulates glycolytic pathways, both associated to an elevated secretion of these pro-inflammatory cytokines [153, 154].

## 7 Metabolic Conditioning of Microbiome in Transplantation

The “microbiome” embodies a biological ecosystem that encompasses the collective ensemble of bacteria, viruses, fungi, and other microorganisms (ie microbiota) together with their metabolites, degradative byproducts, and genomes [155]. Different studies have showed that gut microbiota has an important role in the immune system having an effect on the development and functionality of gut-associated lymphoid tissues (GALT) [156, 157]. Bacterial metabolites has the capacity to regulate immune responses, some of these molecules produced by gut bacteria are tryptophan metabolites and short chain fatty acids (SCFA) [158].

Tryptophan metabolites activate the aryl hydrocarbon receptor (AhR) present in immune cells. For T-cells, AhR activation is important for Th17 differentiation but it has a suppressor effect on Treg differentiation [159], also, AhR activation promotes monocyte differentiation into DCs over macrophages [160]. In addition, *In-vivo* assays has showed that dietary indoles have a suppressor effect on Th17 differentiation but increase Treg responses [161].

SCFAs (acetate, propionate, and butyrate), are important for Treg homeostasis and also for the control of the inflammatory response by gut macrophages, through the intracellular receptor PPAR $\gamma$ ; the surface proteins GPR41 and GPR43 in neutrophils; and the butyrate receptor GPR109a (important in the induction of IL-10 producing T cells) [162, 163]. SCFAs also regulate DCs, thus, human monocyte-derived DCs cultured with C3 or C4 were less inflammatory with decreased production of pro-inflammatory cytokines and chemokines [164, 165].

The role of microbiota in cell activation and differentiation confers it a major importance in organ transplantation because microorganisms create their own microenvironments and provide signals that render DC and T cell interactions. DCs can interact with commensal bacteria and induce tolerogenic macrophages or promote local Treg cells expansion [166].

## 8 Final Conclusions

- Metabolic conditions have an important effect on differentiation and activation of immune cells. In homeostatic or inflammatory conditions, immune cells use different metabolic pathways to supply energetic demands and to proliferate, in this context nutrient availability and uptake control the immune cell fate.
- During the initial and chronic phases of transplantation, the complex metabolic shift and the response to oxygen availability are related to an increasing of glucose transportation and glycolysis, excess of extracellular and cytosolic lactate and mitochondrial damage, suggesting interesting metabolic targets in the context of the allogenic immune response.
- Metabolic conditioning of tolerogenic DCs and Treg generation has showed a “preventive” resource for allograft rejection and prolonged survival factors in different models of transplantation.
- Epigenetic and metabolic pathways, in terms of the immune conditioning, are both close related. Sirtuins and other epigenetic factors have an important role on cell fate and could be studied deeply in terms of prevent graft rejection.

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