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Marked protection provided by therapeutic hypothermia after traumatic ischemic-hypoxic damage has been deeply studied, contributing to satisfactory clinic effects. Several physical methods to induce therapeutic hypothermia have been established, and briefly can be divided into two categories: invasive and non invasive. Recently, pharmacological hypothermia is drawing increasing attention as a neuroprotective alternative approach worthy of further clinical development. This chapter reviews the hypothermic effect of several classes of hypothermia-inducing drugs: the cannabinoids, opioid receptor activators, transient receptor potential vanilloid, neurotensins, thyroxine derivatives, dopamine receptor agonists, and cholecystokinin. Recent findings have extended our knowledge of the thermoregulatory mechanisms of the above drugs. A better understanding of the roles of the hypothermia-inducing drugs in neuroprotection may have broad clinical implications. Till date, there is few data that uniquely elicit that pharmacologically induced hypothermia is the sole or specific mechanism on neuroprotection. However, some mechanisms underlying the protection of hypothermia are overlapped with the current evidence on the intrinsic effects of the above drugs.

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15.1 Cannabinoids

There are two main receptors within the cannabinoid system: cannabinoid receptors 1 and 2. In the brain, the cannabinoid receptor 1, one of the most abundant Gi/o-protein-coupled receptors, was found in the hypothalamus responsible for regulation of temperature [1–6]. At the cellular level, cannabinoid receptor 1 is also abundant in the plasma membranes of the axon and axonal terminals, where it typically mediates the release of neurotransmitters [5]. Numerous evidences suggest that cannabinoid 1 receptors participate in the prevention of neurodegenerative disease or protection from ischemic insults [7–10]. The neuroprotective effects of cannabinoid agonists were related either to specific mechanisms played by these agonists or by a cannabinoid-induced hypothermia [11]. Among them, however, cannabinoid-induced hypothermia was the primary mechanism which was principally triggered by activation of cannabinoid receptor 1. Several neurological neurotransmitters were demonstrated to be involved, such as the release of GABA (Gamma-amino Butyric Acid, GABA) [12, 13] and the dopamine [14]. As cannabinoid-induced regulation of body temperature is, however, dose-dependent, further evidence is necessary to establish optimal application standards for the cannabinoid-based hypothermic treatment [15].

It is well documented that cannabinoids may have therapeutic potential in disorders resulting from cerebral ischemia, including stroke, and may protect neurons from injury through a variety of mechanisms [9]. The beneficial mechanisms were related to the decrease of inflammatory factors [16], reduction of apoptotic cell death, maintenance of mitochondrial integrity and functionality [17], activation of extracellular signal-regulated kinases, increase of S-100 protein, and mitigation of glutamatergic excitotoxicity, TNF-alpha release and iNOS expression [18, 19]. These effects are achieved through two parallel CB1-dependent and -independent mechanisms [20, 21].

15.2 Opioid Receptor Agonists

The opioid system was reported to be involved in thermoregulation. Indeed, naloxone has been reported to antagonize the hypothermic effects played by morphine [22–24]. The main subtype of opioid receptors involved in thermoregulation and hypothermia induction is the kappa-receptor, while the mu-receptor is related to hyperthermia. The magnitude of hypothermic effects produced by kappa- opioid agonists is related to the degree of their selectivity for the kappa-receptor [25]. The kappa-opioid receptor is primarily located outside the brain; thus peripheral application of kappa-receptor agonists could produce dose-dependent hypothermia [26, 27].

Moreover, the existence of subtypes of the different receptors may well explain the different effects of one single drug on thermoregulation [28]. Anatomical, histochemical, and pharmacological evidence suggests that the opioid system

probably interacts with the dopaminergic, adrenergic, serotonergic, cholinergic, and other transmitter systems [25–28]. Thus, it can be hypothesized that the opioid system interacts with other neurotransmitter systems known to be involved in thermoregulation. However, studies carried out so far do not present a clear picture of these interrelationships in terms of thermoregulation. In view of the recent findings that several neuropeptides play marked effects on body temperature, exploration of opioid interactions with these systems should prove to be a fruitful approach to deepen the understanding of the opioid system and its function in the thermoregulation.

Kappa-receptor agonists, have been demonstrated effective in preventing brain swelling in parallel with reducing infarction after an ischemic insult [29, 30], but the use of opioid receptor agonist is limited to the early phase of cerebral edema [31, 32]. This was related mainly to the attenuation of ischemia-evoked nitric oxide production [33], the reduction of Na(+)-K(+)-ATPase activity [34], and a significant prolonged neuron survival [35–37].

15.3 Transient Receptor Potential Vanilloid

Studies have demonstrated that many pathophysiological processes were mediated by transient receptor potential (TRP) channels, including pain, respiratory reflex hypersensitivity, cardiac hypertrophy, thermoregulation, and ischemic cell death. The superfamily of mammalian *TRP* channels consists of around 30 proteins which can be divided into six subfamilies: ankyrin (TRPA), canonical, melastatin (TRPM), mucolipin, polycystin, and vanilloid (TRPV). Till date, nine of the proteins are found highly sensitive to temperature and are referred to as the thermo-TRP channels, which include the heat-activated TRPV1 as well as the cold-activated TRPA1 and TRPM8 [38–41].

No consensus in the literature was achieved on the hypothermic response to systemically administered TRPV1 agonists. Most evidence is in support of the central mediation hypothesis: (1) the TRPV1 channel was demonstrated to be widely distributed in the hypothalamus; [42–44], (2) TRPV1 agonist was able to cross the blood–brain barrier; [45, 46], (3) the primary action mode after application of TRPV1 agonist lies on the glutamatergic preoptic anterior hypothalamus neurons; [43, 47], (4) a reduced or low hypothermic response to TRPV1 agonist was observed in rats with decreased hypothalamic sensitivity [48]. Moreover, several authors also suggested a contribution of a peripheral action of TRPV1 agonists to the hypothermic response.

However, there was no definite data illustrating that TRPV1-induced hypothermia could directly contribute to the beneficial neurologic outcomes in rat models of ischemia.

15.4 Neurotensin

At least three subtypes of receptors are involved in pathophysiologic processes of neurotensin: neurotensin-1 and neurotensin-2 receptor, both members of the heptahelical transmembrane domain G protein-coupled receptor superfamily; and neurotensin-3 receptor, which is identical to gp95/sortilin, with only a single transmembrane domain [29–31].

Neurotensin is abundant in the preoptic area of the hypothalamus [49]. Early in the 1980s, neurotensin was first reported to elicit hypothermic effect by acting on the hypothalamus in rodents [50, 51]. Neurotensin-induced hypothermia is thought to be caused by a downward shift of the physiological temperature set point (“regulated hypothermia”). Previous results using neurotensin analogs or peptide nucleic acids suggested that neurotensin receptor 1 was implicated in neurotensin-induced hypothermia, but the nonspecificity of these molecules aroused some doubt. Neurotensin normally does not cross the blood–brain barrier and is quickly metabolized when administered systemically. In terms of wide clinic application, many neurotensin analogs emerge as new options with the ability to penetrate the blood–brain barrier and prolong the hypothermia duration.

Previously, several neurotensin receptor 1 agonists were demonstrated to induce hypothermia in a dose-dependent manner without causing shivering or altering physiological parameters. These analogs ultimately reduced cerebral infarct volumes and improved neurologic outcomes [52–54]. The specific mechanisms involved would be increase in bcl-2 expression, decrease in caspase-3 activation, and suppression of cell death [53, 54].

15.5 Thyroxine Derivatives

Thyroxine is the principal secretion form of thyroid hormone (TH), constituting 95 % of all TH found in human circulation. When deiodinated and decarboxylated, thyroxine is transformed into 3-iodothyronamine (T1AM) and thyronamine (TOAM). It was reported that when injected peripherally, T1AM and TOAM rapidly induced hypothermia through a mechanism independent of gene transcription. T1AM and TOAM are agonists of trace amine associated receptor 1 (TAAR1), a G-protein coupled receptor activated by phenylethylamine, tyramine, methamphetamine, and its congeners. Although T1AM and TOAM can dose-dependently couple TAAR1 to the production of cAMP, it is not yet clear whether TAAR1 is an endogenous receptor for these molecules [55].

There has been data demonstrating that T1AM and TOAM are potent neuroprotectants in neurologic ischemia disease. Hypothermia induced by T1AM and TOAM may partially underlie neuroprotection [55].

15.6 Dopamine Receptor Agonists

Dopamine (DA) is one of the major neurotransmitters in the mammalian central nervous system (CNS). The receptors for DA have been classified into three subtypes: the D1, D2, and D3 receptor subtype [56]. There were data suggesting that hypothermia in mammals are centrally mediated by D2 receptor mechanism, and this centrally mediated D2 receptor mechanism may be modulated by the D1 receptor [57]. Furthermore, the dopamine D1 receptor agonist was also reported to produce hypothermia that was antagonized by D1 receptor antagonists, but not by the dopamine D2/3 receptor antagonists. This supports the evidence that activation of dopamine D1 receptors may play a determinant role in inducing hypothermia in rats [58]. Further evidence finally demonstrated that hypothermia did not result from a selective stimulation of the D3 receptor [59].

There is lack of evidence, however, that D1 or 2 receptor agonist-induced hypothermia would provide protective effects in neurologic ischemic diseases.

15.7 Cholecystokinin

It was first reported in 1981 that centrally administrated cholecystokinin was able to produce hypothermia in rats [38, 60, 61]. Specific mechanisms of cholecystokinin-induced hypothermia after peripheral or central application, however, remain unclear [39, 40, 60]. Hypothermia may either be produced by different mechanisms, such as inhibition of central nervous system function without specific relation to central body temperature control, interruption of afferent or efferent nervous pathways, or a decrease of regulated level of body temperature. The central action of cholecystokinin was not supported by the long latency of the thermoregulatory response observed after central administration of cholecystokinin [39, 40, 60]. An alternative explanation for the cholecystokinin-induced hypothermia after peripheral injection could be a direct skin vasodilatation. Besides, a nervous afferent mechanism, such as the vagal afferentation shown to be an important way of influencing central regulation of food intake could also play relevant roles on specific thermoregulatory sites [41]. The hypothermic action of the peptide in mammals seems to depend on cholecystokinin-1 receptors, since administration of cholecystokinin-1 receptor antagonists attenuated these hypothermic effects, while the cholecystokinin-2 receptor antagonist had no effect on this response [42–45].

Although the concept of pharmacological hypothermia induced by cholecystokinin was not widely raised, there are some data revealing that cholecystokinin to some extent plays a vital role in protecting from brain ischemia disease. Yasui M et al. demonstrated that in rats subjected to stroke, cholecystokinin prevented the dysfunction of CA1 pyramidal neurons [46]. Moreover, in a rat model of global ischemia after cardiac arrest, cholecystokinin octapeptide indeed induced hypothermia, and improved post-resuscitation myocardial dysfunction and overall neurological performance after intravenous injection of CCK8 at a dose of 200 µg/kg [47].

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