CADASIL Notch3 Mutant Proteins Localize to the Cell Surface and Bind Ligand

Talin Haritunians, Jim Boulter, Carol Hicks, Jonathon Buhrman, Guy DiSibio, Carrie Shawber, Gerry Weinmaster, Donna Nozfiger, Carolyn Schanen

Cerebral autosomal-dominant arteriopathy with subcortical infarcts and leukoencephalopathy (CADASIL) is a vascular dementia arising from abnormal arteriolar vascular smooth muscle cells. CADASIL results from mutations in Notch3 that alter the number of cysteine residues in the extracellular epidermal growth factor-like repeats, important for ligand binding. It is not known whether CADASIL mutations lead to loss or gain of Notch3 receptor function. To examine the functional consequences of CADASIL mutations, we engineered 4 CADASIL-like mutations into rat Notch3 and have shown that the presence of an unpaired cysteine does not impair cell-surface expression or ligand binding.

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The effects of these mutations on proteolytic processing and cell surface expression were assessed by transiently expressing wild-type (wt) and mutant Notch3 constructs in 293T cells. After biotinylation and immunoblotting with the 12CA5 antibody (Figure 2A), unprocessed full-length 280-kDa and processed 97-kDa polypeptides were detected in whole-cell lysates and SA precipitates from biotinylated transfected cells (Figure 2B). To ensure that detection of p280 Notch3 was not an artifact of inadvertent cell lysis, SA-precipitated proteins were probed with antibodies to the intracellular protein erk1. Although present in whole-cell lysates (Figure 2C), p44 erk1 was not detected among the biotinylated proteins (Figure 2D). Moreover, the ratio of p280 to p97 after SA precipitation was reversed relative to whole-cell lysates, indicating that the signal detected with SA precipitates is due to p280 and p97 cell surface expression. Normal processing and cell surface expression of these mutants suggest that the odd number of cysteines imposed by these mutations does not disrupt receptor maturation.

The constructs were expressed in 293T cells and tested for their ability to bind a soluble form of the rat Delta1 ligand, D1Fc. D1Fc consists of the extracellular portion of Delta1 fused to the Fc domain of human IgG and has been shown to bind and activate Notch1.15,17 D1Fc binding was detected with each Notch3 CADASIL mutant protein (Figures 3A through 3D) and appeared comparable to that detected for wt Notch3 (Figure 3E). No D1Fc binding was detected for cells transfected with the pBOS vector (Figure 3F) nor Notch3-expressing cells treated with clustered Fc CM (Figure 3G), indicating that the signal was specific for Delta1 and Notch3 sequences. Binding was also compared for D1Fc CM diluted 1:20, 1:30, and 1:50, and although binding affinities and on/off rates were not measured, no differences were detected...
with the different D1Fc CM concentrations (data not shown), suggesting that mutant and wt receptor–ligand interactions were qualitatively similar.

Our data suggest that CADASIL mutations act downstream of ligand binding, perhaps through disruption of ligand-induced shedding/clearance of the N3ECD, a process important for receptor activation. Notch3 accumulation in CADASIL vessels has been reported, although accumulation was not detected with HEK cells expressing CADASIL mutant Notch3 forms in the absence of DSL ligands. Determination of whether ligand binding by these CADASIL mutants results in productive signaling is not straightforward, because ligand-induced Notch3 signaling has yet to be reported and both positive and negative activities have been reported for N3ICD. Nonetheless, experiments are in progress to determine whether abnormal accumulation or shedding of mutant ECD or disruption of Notch3 signaling underlies the pathogenesis of CADASIL.

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