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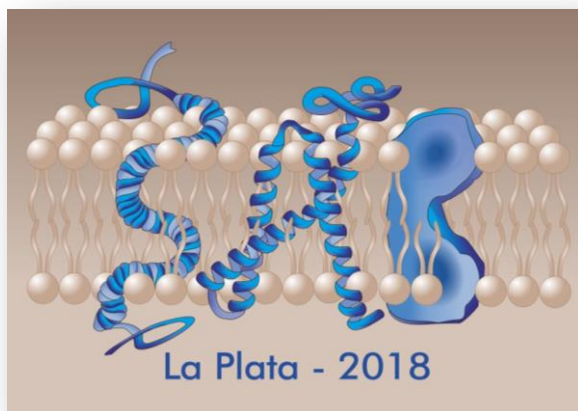
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Molecular Modulation of Human $\alpha 7$ Nicotinic Receptor by Amyloid- β Peptides

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Amyloid β peptide ($A\beta$) is a key player in the development of Alzheimer disease (AD). It is the primary component of senile plaques in AD patients and is also found in soluble forms. Cholinergic activity mediated by $\alpha 7$ nicotinic receptors has been shown to be affected by $A\beta$ soluble forms. To shed light into the molecular mechanism of this effect, we explored the direct actions of oligomeric $A\beta_{1-40}$ and $A\beta_{1-42}$ on human $\alpha 7$ by fluorescence spectroscopy and single-channel recordings.

Fluorescence measurements using the conformational sensitive probe crystal violet (CrV), which shows different affinities for resting and desensitized states, revealed that $A\beta$ induces $\alpha 7$ concentration-dependent conformational changes. At 100 pM, $A\beta$ displaces CrV Kd value for the resting state towards that of the desensitized state from which $\alpha 7$ is still reactive to carbamylcholine (Carb). These observations are compatible with the induction of active/desensitized states as well as of a novel conformational state in the presence of both $A\beta$ and Carb. At 100 nM $A\beta$, $\alpha 7$ adopts a resting-state-like structure which does not respond to Carb, indicating the stabilization of $\alpha 7$ in a blocked state. In real time, we found that $A\beta$ is capable of eliciting $\alpha 7$ channel activity either in the absence or presence of the positive allosteric modulator PNU-120596. Activation by $A\beta$ is favored at picomolar or low nanomolar concentrations and is not detected at micromolar concentrations. At high $A\beta$ concentrations, the durations of the activation episodes elicited by ACh are significantly reduced, an effect compatible with slow open-channel block. We conclude that $A\beta$ directly affects $\alpha 7$ function and acts as an agonist and a negative modulator: activation of $\alpha 7$ by low $A\beta$ concentrations may be involved in beneficial physiological effects, and the reduced $\alpha 7$ activity in the presence of higher $A\beta$ concentrations may contribute to the cholinergic signaling deficit and may be involved in the initiation and development of AD.