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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Role of Dopamine D2 receptors and Oxidative Stress in the Pathogenesis of Hypertension

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ABSTRACT

Globally, hypertension is the number one risk factor for death, affecting more than 1 billion people. Hypertension is the result of the interactions among genetics, epigenetics, environment, and lifestyle. The long-term regulation of blood pressure rests on renal and non-renal mechanisms. The impaired renal sodium handling in hypertension is caused by aberrant counter-regulatory natriuretic/anti-natriuretic pathways. The sympathetic nervous and renin-angiotensin systems are anti-natriuretic pathways. A counter-regulatory natriuretic pathway is the renal dopaminergic system. Aberrant dopaminergic regulation of renal sodium transport in hypertension is caused by a decrease in renal dopamine synthesis and/or dysfunction of any of the 5 dopamine receptors (D1R, D2R, D3R, D4R, & D5R). Normally, an increase in sodium intake increases while a decrease in sodium intake decreases blood pressure, albeit transiently until sodium balance is achieved. However, ~50 % of hypertensive and ~26% of normotensive subjects have increased blood pressure on high sodium intake, a case of salt sensitivity, while ~20 % have increased blood pressure on a low sodium intake, a case of inverse salt sensitivity. Low and high sodium intakes are associated with increased incidence of cardiovascular events/mortality. In humans with inverse salt sensitivity, there is a linear relationship between the number of single nucleotide polymorphisms in DRD2 (rs6276 and 6277) and decreased renal D2R expression. The increase in blood pressure on a low sodium diet may be due to increased activities of the renin-angiotensin and sympathetic nervous systems that cannot be counteracted by D2R. Hypertension may be a cause or consequence of inflammation or oxidative stress. Deficient D2R function causes renal inflammation independently of the increase in blood pressure. Subjects carrying DRD2 single nucleotide polymorphisms have increased inflammation, mediated by decreased regulation of the miR-217-Wnt5a-Ror2 pathway. The D2R, via paraoxonase2 and sestrin2, maintains normal redox balance and blood pressure. In summary, the D2R is important in the maintenance of normal blood pressure by regulating renal sodium transport, vascular reactivity, inflammation, and redox balance.

Introduction

Globally, hypertension is the number one risk factor for death, affecting more than 1 billion people. Hypertension is the 13th leading cause of death in 2019¹ and the 12th leading cause of death in the US in 2021². In 2019, essential hypertension and hypertensive renal disease were the 10th cause of deaths in non-Hispanic blacks and non-Hispanic Asians, 13th in Hispanics, and 14th in non-Hispanic whites³. Hypertension increases the risk for cardiovascular and renal diseases⁴⁻⁶. Hypertension is the result of the interactions among genetics, epigenetics, environment, and lifestyle⁴⁻¹⁵. Multiple genes influence an individual's blood pressure¹²⁻²⁰ and genetic risk scores for hypertension have been calculated^{11,13,16,17}.

The long-term regulation of blood pressure rests on non-renal and renal mechanisms^{14,20-41}. The impaired renal handling of sodium in hypertension and salt sensitivity is caused by aberrant counter-regulatory natriuretic/anti-natriuretic pathways^{14,21-40}. The sympathetic nervous system^{4-6,39-49} and renin-angiotensin-aldosterone system (RAAS)^{4-6,50-54} are anti-natriuretic pathways. A counter-regulatory natriuretic pathway is the renal dopaminergic system, aberrations of which cause hypertension^{22,24,54-64}. In this article we reviewed the role of renal dopamine receptors, in particular the D2R, in the maintenance of normal blood pressure by regulating renal sodium transport, vascular reactivity, inflammation, and redox balance.

Role of G protein-coupled receptor kinase (GRK), GRK2, and GRK4 and dopamine in hypertension.

Dopamine is synthesized by the kidney⁶⁵⁻⁶⁹, specifically by the renal proximal tubule (RPT)²⁴,

and therefore, aberrant renal dopaminergic regulation of renal sodium transport in hypertension may be caused by a decrease in dopamine synthesis in the RPT^{24,66-69} and/or dysfunction of any of the 5 dopamine receptor subtypes (D₁R, D₂R, D₃R, D₄R, & D₅R)^{22,70-76}. Dysfunctions of D₁R and D₃R in hypertension are caused by their desensitization, due to increased GRK4 expression^{71,77-79} in rodents, or GRK4 gene variants^{23,50,80-92} in humans. GRK2, per se⁹³⁻⁹⁵, or by impairing D₁R^{71,79,96} is also involved in the pathogenesis of hypertension. The D₂R is regulated by GRK2, GRK3, GRK5, and GRK6⁹⁷⁻¹⁰¹. GRK4 is not in genome-wide association studies and hypertension, maybe because except for Illumina Human 1 M beadchip, not all the GRK4 variants are in the chips⁸².

Salt sensitivity and Inverse Salt Sensitivity (ISS).

An increase in sodium intake usually increases while a decrease in sodium intake usually decreases blood pressure^{4-6,11,24,25,37,39,54,57,58,61,62,73,75,78,81,84,102-106}. However, there are some humans whose blood pressures increase with a low sodium intake¹⁰⁶⁻¹²¹ and after acute waterloading¹²². The hypertensive effect of low sodium intake occurs in a minority of the hypertensive (11-28%) and normotensive (15-41%) human population, with an overall prevalence of 10-20%¹¹⁹. However, the prevalence of ISS is greater in those with normal than high BMI¹¹⁹. These would be the individuals who would be prescribed anti-hypertensive treatment and advised to decrease their sodium intake. In patients with ISS, their blood pressure would increase. Thus, the need to identify individuals with ISS, by genetic and clinical testing. A low sodium intake can also

be associated with increased incidence of cardiovascular events^{116,121,123-126}, chronic kidney disease^{113,130}, or mortality^{116,125,126,127,128,129,130}, in the presence or absence of vascular disease, diabetes, or hypertension. The association between low sodium intake and risk of cardiovascular disease or death remains after "extensive statistical adjustment for confounders and extensive efforts to avoid reverse causation¹³¹". ISS has also been reported to occur in non-genetically modified rodents. Sprague-Dawley rats with two kidneys¹³²⁻¹³⁴ or one kidney^{135,136} fed a low salt diet (0.04% NaCl or 0.004 +/-0.001 mEq sodium/gram body weight) also developed hypertension. Nonetheless, the existence of ISS continues to be disputed¹³⁷⁻¹⁴⁰. The increased mortality with low sodium intake can be counteracted by a high protein intake¹²⁸.

D2R salt sensitivity and ISS

In mammals, there are two D2R isoforms, *DRD2* short, *DRD2* long, the former is mainly presynaptic while the latter is mainly postsynaptic¹⁴¹⁻¹⁴³. There are three D2R isoforms in teleosts¹⁴⁴. The renal D2R isoform is the *DRD2* long¹⁴⁵. *DRD2* variants are associated with hypertension^{55,146-148}.

Germline deletion in the kidney of aromatic amino acid decarboxylase which synthesizes dopamine²⁴ or any of the dopamine receptor subtype genes^{22,54,55,70,73,74,76,150,151}, including *Drd2*^{55,149,151-155}, causes salt-sensitive hypertension¹⁵³. Renal-selective *Drd2* silencing using *Drd2* siRNA also increases blood pressure, but salt sensitivity was not tested^{70,149}. The D2R also regulates renal dopamine production; renal amino acid decarboxylase activity is decreased in 20-30-week-old *Drd2*^{-/-} mice¹⁵². Ozono et al reported that *Drd2*^{-/-} mice fed 0.01% or 0.1% NaCl diet are normotensive,

but blood pressure also increased when fed 4% NaCl diet, which was related to insufficient increase in sodium excretion^{152,153}. The effect of mouse strain on salt sensitivity has to be taken into consideration. Ozono et al used C57Bl/6J x DBA/2J mice that were fed the diets for 8 weeks, starting at 6 weeks of age^{152,153}. C57/Bl/6J mice have high catechol-o-methyl transferase activity whereas DBA/2J mice have low catechol-o-methyl transferase activity^{156,157}. DBA/2J mice have been reported to develop salt-sensitive hypertension when they are fed a low magnesium diet¹⁵⁸. C57Bl/6J mice may^{159,160} or may not¹⁶¹⁻¹⁶⁴ have salt-sensitive hypertension, which may be strain-dependent¹⁶⁰. It is also possible that age is a factor involved in ISS; in humans, younger than older individuals are more likely to have ISS while the converse is true for salt sensitivity^{109,165}. Indeed, the ISS of blood pressure (increase in blood pressure on low salt diet and decrease in blood pressure on high salt diet) in Sprague-Dawley rats was manifested as early as 6 weeks of age¹³². The blood pressure of *Drd2*^{-/-} mice can be influenced by sodium intake; high NaCl intake increases blood pressure that is normalized by a normal NaCl intake but increased again by a low sodium intake, a case of both salt sensitivity and ISS¹⁶⁶⁻¹⁷¹.

There is a linear relationship between the number of single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) in the *DRD2* (*rs6276* and *6277*), and decreased expression in urine-derived renal proximal tubule cells in humans with ISS, suggesting the involvement of *DRD2*^{170,171}. The D2R negatively interacts with angiotensin type 1 receptor (AT1R) in several tissues^{172,173}, other than the kidney, which may be related to D2R and AT1R heterodimerization, at least in the rat striatum¹⁷³. The D2R also negatively

interacts with AT1R in the kidney¹⁷⁴, e.g., renal proximal tubule^{149,155,175}. Dopamine^{54,62,64,174-180}, via D1R^{62,63,181-183}, D3R^{73,184-187}, D4R^{74,186,188}, and D5R^{75,76,136,137}, also interact with the renin-angiotensin system in the kidney. *DRD2* gene variants that decrease D2R expression and/or function impair the ability of the D2R to impede AT1R function and probably the α -adrenergic receptor function⁵⁴, as seen in Sprague-Dawley rats which have ISS¹³²⁻¹³⁶. The hypertension in *Drd2*^{-/-} mice on normal sodium diet (0.6% NaCl) is due to increased activity of the sympathetic nervous system^{151,189} but not the renin-angiotensin system¹⁵¹. However, in rats fed a low sodium diet, the increase in blood pressure may not¹³³ or may be due to an increase in the renin-angiotensin system^{43,132,134,135} and sympathetic activities^{43,132}, including an increase in renal nerve activity and norepinephrine content¹³⁵, but the genes involved in this process are not known.

D2R, inflammation, and oxidative stress

Dopamine and all its receptors in the kidney, as related to their role in maintaining normal blood pressure, also involves their ability to regulate inflammation¹⁸⁹⁻¹⁹¹ and prevent oxidative stress¹⁹². However, oxidative stress can also cause dopamine receptor, e.g., D1R, dysfunction¹⁹³. Excessive stimulation of the D2-like but not D1-like receptors can also increase the production of reactive oxygen species¹⁹⁴. High concentrations of dopamine (50-500 μ M), via D2R can cause death of brain striatal neurons and peripheral blood lymphocytes that has been related to increased production of reactive oxygen species^{195,196}. Low concentrations of dopamine (1-1000 nM) can also increase the production of reactive oxygen species in the mitochondria of opossum

kidney cells¹⁹⁷. However, a low concentration of dopamine (1 μ M), via D1-like receptors, can also decrease the production of reactive oxygen species in peripheral blood lymphocytes¹⁹⁶. Pharmacological studies have shown that D2-like receptors, D2R^{195,198-202}, D3R^{198,200,203-206}, and D4R^{200,207-209} are protective of neurons, oligodendrocytes, mesencephalic cells, retina, vascular endothelial cells, and mouse, rat, and human renal proximal tubule cells against oxidative stress.

The D2R keeps the blood pressure in the normal range¹⁵¹⁻¹⁵⁵, in part by regulating renal inflammation¹⁵⁵, renal production of reactive oxygen species¹⁵⁴, and renal sodium handling¹⁵². Germline deletion of *Drd2* in mice results in enhanced vascular reactivity to α -adrenergic and ETB receptors but not to AT1R²¹⁰ but this is different from studies that have reported D2R and AT1R interaction in the kidney (renal proximal tubule cells¹⁴⁹, kidneys from obese rats¹⁷⁴ or kidneys after renal denervation¹⁸⁷) and other tissues, such as the ventricular myocytes¹⁷², and brain striatum^{173,211}. Germline deletion of *Drd2* in mice also causes reactive oxygen species-dependent hypertension¹⁵⁴. The renal-selective silencing of *Drd2* by the renal subcapsular infusion of *Drd2* siRNA into the left kidney but not the right kidney in 8-10-week-old C57Bl/6J mice increased systolic and diastolic blood pressures⁷⁰. The left renal-selective silencing of *Drd2* in right nephrectomized mice by the left ureteral infusion of AAV-9 carrying *Drd2* siRNA also increased their blood pressures. The lack of *Drd2* in the kidneys of these mice was associated with increased expression of proinflammatory and profibrotic factors and serum creatinine. The increased blood pressure and renal proinflammatory and pro-fibrotic factors were

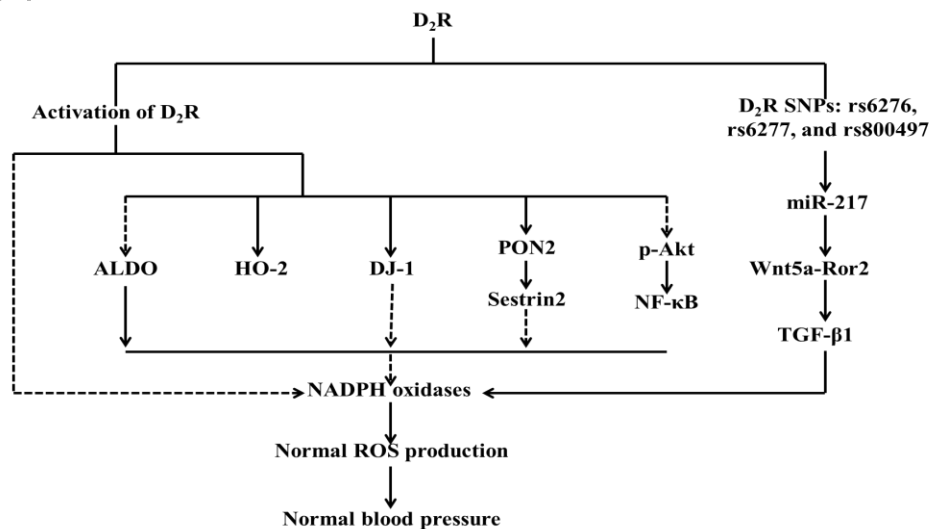
mitigated or normalized by the rescue of *Drd2* with the retrograde ureteral infusion of AAV-9 virus carrying the normal *Drd2*. However, the role of oxidative stress in these experiments was not determined.

Oxidative stress has been shown to be important in the pathogenesis of hypertension²¹²⁻²¹⁵. This occurs when there is an imbalance in the production and quenching of reactive oxygen species. Reactive oxygen species are generated by the activity of NADPH oxidase, cyclooxygenases, xanthine oxidases, lipogenesis, iron-catalyzed Fenton reaction, and nitric oxide synthases²¹³. NADPH oxidase is responsible for about half of the production of reactive oxygen species and the mitochondria is responsible for the remaining half, at least in the kidney²¹⁵. It should be recognized, however, that normal generation of reactive oxygen species is important in cellular signal transduction²¹².

As aforementioned, germline deletion of *Drd2* in mice causes reactive oxygen species-

dependent hypertension¹⁵⁴. The D2R keeps reactive oxygen species in “normal” state by increasing the activity of anti-oxidant enzymes, e.g., DJ-1²¹⁶, paraoxonase 2²¹⁷, and sestrin²¹⁸ and decreasing the activity of oxidant enzymes, i.e., NADPH oxidases^{151,216,217} (Figure). There are seven NADPH oxidase homologs, four (Nox1, Nox 2, Nox4, and Nox5) are expressed in the vasculature and the kidney²¹⁹⁻²²²; they are the major sources of reactive oxygen species^{220,221}. Nox5 may be responsible for the oxidative stress in renal proximal tubules in human essential hypertension²²². The neuroprotective effect of D2R has been reported to be related to DJ-1 (aka Park 7)²¹⁶. The D2R normally regulates DJ-1 expression in renal proximal tubules cells²¹⁶. The ability of D2R to regulate the production of reactive oxygen species is related, in part, to an increase in DJ-1 expression. Renal-selective silencing of *Dj-1* in mice increases Nox4 expression and NADPH oxidase activity, production of reactive oxygen species, and blood pressure.

Figure 1



Schematic representation of the role of renal D2R on the regulation of oxidative stress. The broken lines indicate inhibitory effects, whereas the solid lines indicate stimulatory effects. ALDO, aldosterone; D2R, dopamine D2 receptor; HO-2, heme oxygenase-2; NF-kB, nuclear factor-kB; NRF2=nuclear factor

erythroid factor 2-related factor 2; rs=reference SNP; SNP=single nucleotide polymorphism, SOD=superoxide dismutase, TGF- β 1, transforming growth factor-beta 1 (adapted from Yang J, Villar VAM, Jose PA, et al. Renal Dopamine Receptors and Oxidative Stress: Role in Hypertension. *Antioxid Redox Signal*. 2021; 34(9):716-735. doi: 10.1089/ars.2020.8106).

The nuclear factor erythroid factor 2-related factor 2 (Nrf2), which by itself does not have antioxidative function²²³, participates in the defense against oxidative stress in many tissues, including the kidney²²⁴⁻²²⁶ by regulating the expression of several antioxidant genes²²³, including NO²²⁷. Nrf2 is downstream of D2R and DJ-1^{202,228-230}. DJ-1 is regulated by D2R²³⁰. DJ-1 induces superoxide dismutase 2 (SOD2) expression in the kidney²²⁹. SOD may be downstream of Nrf2²¹⁶. SOD inhibits NADPH oxidase 5 in human renal proximal tubule cells, the expression of which is increased in hypertension²²². In addition, germline deletion of *Drd2* in mice increases the expression of Nox1, Nox2, and Nox4¹⁵⁴. Germline deletion of *Drd2* in mice increases blood pressure^{151,210} that is salt-sensitive^{152,153}. This may be related in part to the lack of impairment in the suppression of aldosterone secretion when D2R expression/function is impaired¹⁵⁴; D2R is expressed in the adrenal zona glomerulosa²³¹ and germline deletion of *Drd2* increases aldosterone production¹⁵⁴. Aldosterone secretion in humans can be negatively regulated by D2R agonists and *DRD2* expression the adrenal cortex is decreased in aldosterone-producing adenoma^{231,232}. Aldosterone stimulates the production of reactive oxygen species by stimulating NADPH oxidase activity²³³. An aldosterone antagonist, spironolactone normalized the blood pressure and the production of reactive oxygen species but did not affect *Drd2* expression in D2^{-/-} or D2^{+/+} mice, indicating that the aldosterone effect is downstream of D2R¹⁵⁴.

Monoamine oxidase which catalyzes the degradation of dopamine to homovanillic acid²³⁴ can also increase the production of reactive oxygen species²³⁵ but not affected by dopamine receptors in the kidney²³⁶. Thus, dopamine can also induce oxidative stress, involving H₂O₂ produced by monoamine oxidase²³⁷. However, a reduction of dopamine catabolism by suppression of monoamine oxidase B which increases dopamine levels increases the activity of D2R and decreases the deleterious effects of reactive oxygen species²³⁸. Nitric oxide synthase activity can also be regulated by D2R^{239,240}. Oxidative stress and nitric oxide deficiency have been linked to the pathogenesis of hypertension²⁴¹. These pharmacological and rodent genetic studies related to the D2R have human relevance because as aforementioned, variants of *DRD2* are associated with human essential hypertension^{55,146-148}.

D2R SNPS and miR-217 pathway

Synonymous mutations in the human dopamine receptor D2 (*DRD2*) affect mRNA stability and synthesis of the receptor²⁴². Several common single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) of *DRD2* are associated with decreased D₂R expression/function, increased vulnerability to renal inflammation and injury⁵⁶. *DRD2* rs6276, rs6277, and rs180047 (*Taq1*) are associated with increased blood pressure and hypertension^{56,148}. *DRD2* rs7952106 and miR4301, that reside in an intron of *DRD2* and can negatively regulate *DRD2* expression²⁴³, are associated with increased systolic blood pressure in children with sickle cell disease^{244,245}.

D2R positively regulates the expression of miR-217; subjects carrying DRD2 SNPs that decrease D2R expression have increased inflammation (TGF β 1) that is related to decreased regulation of the miR-217-Wnt5a-Ror2 pathway. In the kidney, miR-217-5 mimic decreases the expression of TGF β 1²⁴⁶. In macrophages, miR-217 impairs activated STAT-1-induced inflammation and oxidative stress caused by smog-induced acute lung injury²⁴⁷ and intestinal damage, related to oxidative stress in ducklings²⁴⁸. However, there are organ specific effects. For example, in the brain, miR-217 may increase inflammation and oxidative stress²⁴⁹. In septic lung injury, miR-217 also aggravates inflammation and oxidative stress²⁵⁰.

Conclusion

Normally, an increase in sodium intake increases while a decrease in sodium intake decreases blood pressure, albeit transiently until sodium balance is achieved. However, ~50 % of hypertensive and ~26% of normotensive subjects have increased blood pressure on high sodium intake, a case of salt sensitivity, while ~20 % have increased blood pressure on a low sodium intake, a case of ISS. These individuals would be prescribed anti-hypertensive treatment and advised to decrease their sodium intake. However, in patients with ISS, their blood pressure would increase. Thus, the need to identify individuals with ISS, by genetic and clinical testing. In humans with ISS, there is a linear relationship between the number of SNPs in DRD2 (rs6276 and 6277) and decreased renal D2R expression. The increase in blood pressure in mice with decreased expression of D2R, e.g., *Drd2*^{-/-} mice,

on a low sodium diet may be due to an increase in the renin-angiotensin system and sympathetic activities. The ability of dopamine and all its receptors in the kidney to maintain a normal blood pressure also involves not only their ability to increase sodium excretion but also to regulate inflammation and prevent oxidative stress. The D2R keeps blood pressure and redox balance in the normal state by increasing the activity of anti-oxidant enzymes, such as DJ-1, paraoxonase 2, and sestrin2, and decreasing the activity of antioxidant enzymes, such as NADPH oxidase. Deficient D2R function can cause renal inflammation independently of high blood pressure. Subjects carrying DRD2 SNPs have increased inflammation that is mediated by decreased regulation of the miR-217-Wnt5a-Ror2 pathway. Thus, the D2R is important in the maintenance of normal blood pressure by regulating renal sodium transport, vascular reactivity, inflammation, and reactive oxygen species.

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