The authors then investigated correlations between schizophrenic symptoms and these perception-evoked effects on oscillations. There was no notable correlation between the stimulus-locked oscillation and schizophrenic symptoms. However, the occipital response-locked effect correlated significantly with conceptual disorganization, visual hallucinations, thought withdrawal and global thought disorders; the parietal response-locked effect correlated with the total negative symptoms and social inattentiveness.

These findings indicate that the occipital response-locked oscillation might underlie the processes of conscious perception in response to stimuli in both healthy individuals and those with schizophrenia. Furthermore, abnormal γ -band synchrony in patients with schizophrenia might reflect neural circuit dysfunction that is related to the symptomatology of this disorder.

Jane Qiu

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WEB SITE

McCarley's laboratory:

<http://www.hmcnet.harvard.edu/psych/redbook/166.htm>

might underlie their ability to induce hypothalamic tissue? One possible explanation comes from the finding that Axin1 seems to facilitate Nodal signalling — a pathway that is known to be required for the development of the floor plate and ventral hypothalamus. The authors found that both Nodal pathway activation and Axin1 expression promoted the insertion of cells into the ventral midline.

Kapsimali *et al.* propose that the principal role of Axin1 is to inhibit Wnt/ β -catenin signalling. However, its additional effects on Nodal signalling might increase the likelihood that cells are in the right place at the right time to respond to Wnt inhibitors. The next challenge will be to identify the sources of the Wnt signals and inhibitors, so that we can obtain a clearer view of the precise sequence of events that leads to specification of hypothalamic tissue at the ventral midline.

Heather Wood

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PAIN

The GluRA, B, C of pain

It is becoming increasingly clear that synaptic plasticity in pain-sensitive pathways has many features in common with better understood forms of synaptic plasticity, such as hippocampal long-term potentiation. Now Hartmann and colleagues have shown that AMPA (α -amino-3-hydroxy-5-methyl-4-isoxazole propionic acid) receptors, which are vital mediators of hippocampal plasticity, are also important modulators of inflammatory pain and of synaptic plasticity in the spinal nociceptive system.

Most AMPA receptors in the central nervous system — those that contain the GluRB subunit together with GluRA, C or D subunits — have low permeability to Ca^{2+} . However, receptors that lack the GluRB subunit have much higher Ca^{2+} permeability, and many of these receptors are found in the spinal dorsal horn. AMPA receptors in the dorsal horn are also unusual in that they are found presynaptically on the axon terminals of primary sensory afferent neurons, and activation of these receptors depolarizes the afferent neurons and thereby reduces neurotransmission from afferent fibres to second-order neurons in the spine.

Hartmann *et al.* set out to investigate the possible importance of Ca^{2+} -permeable AMPA receptors in the dorsal horn in nociceptive plasticity and inflammatory pain, using mutant mice that lack the GluRA, B or C subunits. Basal levels of neurotransmission and acute responses to painful stimuli were normal in these mice, but the Ca^{2+} permeability and ion conductance properties of the AMPA receptors in the dorsal horn were not: in *GluRA*^{−/−} mice there were fewer Ca^{2+} -permeable AMPA receptors and the AMPA channel currents were reduced, whereas the opposite was true in *GluRB*^{−/−} mice.

To study the effects of these subunits on spinal plasticity, the authors used phosphorylation of ERK1/2 (extracellular receptor-activated MAP kinase 1 and 2) as a marker for synaptic plasticity. In wild-type and *GluRB*^{−/−} mice, high-frequency activation of C-fibre inputs in the dorsal root led to increased phosphorylation of ERK1/2, but this did not occur in *GluRA*^{−/−} mice (which have fewer Ca^{2+} -permeable AMPA receptors). So GluRA-containing AMPA receptors are essential for synaptic plasticity reflected by ERK1/2 phosphorylation in the spinal cord.

What is the significance of these findings for pain perception *in vivo*? Although the mutant mice showed normal responses to acute painful stimuli, *GluRB*^{−/−} mice showed significantly more hyperalgesia than either wild-type or *GluRA*^{−/−} mice in a model of chronic inflammatory pain that involved injecting the hindpaw with an irritant. Moreover, in a test of rapid sensitization of pain pathways, *GluRA*^{−/−} mice showed less sensitization and *GluRB*^{−/−} mice showed more.

The results of this study show that the GluRA and GluRB subunits of AMPA receptors, which control the Ca^{2+} permeability of the receptors and can also influence their trafficking and synaptic availability, have opposing effects on synaptic plasticity in spinal pathways *in vitro* and on inflammatory pain *in vivo*. These findings add to our understanding of pain perception, and might help to drive the development of treatments for chronic pain conditions.

Rachel Jones

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