



COMMENTARY

Aminotetralin Drugs and D₃ Receptor Functions

WHAT MAY PARTIALLY SELECTIVE D₃
RECEPTOR LIGANDS TELL US ABOUT DOPAMINE D₃ RECEPTOR FUNCTIONS?

Daniel Lévesque*

DEPARTMENT OF PHARMACOLOGY, FACULTY OF MEDICINE, LAVAL UNIVERSITY, CITÉ UNIVERSITAIRE,
QUÉBEC, G1K 7P4 CANADA

ABSTRACT. The dopamine D₃ receptor gene was identified by Sokoloff and colleagues in 1990. This finding rapidly gained the interest of the scientific community because this unexpected dopamine receptor subtype may play an important role in the antipsychotic activity of neuroleptic drugs. It recognizes most neuroleptics with a high affinity, and its brain distribution is restricted mainly to the ventral part of the striatal complex. However, the characterization and the subsequent identification of functions of the D₃ receptor were hampered initially by at least four important factors that are still partially unresolved: (1) the absence of selective drugs that can discriminate between the D₂ and D₃ receptor subtype functions *in vivo*, (2) the lack of apparent coupling with GTP-dependent proteins, (3) the absence of effects on second messenger systems, and (4) the low level of expression of this receptor in brain tissue; these factors have contributed to tempering the interest of scientists. However, this situation has begun to change with the identification of [³H]7-hydroxy-*N,N*-(di-*n*-propyl)-2-aminotetralin ([³H]7-OH-DPAT), the first selective ligand for the dopamine D₃ receptor. Although its binding selectivity for the D₃ versus the D₂ receptor is somewhat artificial, the potentially important impact of identification of a function for the D₃ receptor encouraged scientists to use this aminotetralin compound for *in vivo* studies with, however, limited success. This commentary is focused on the impact and controversies generated by the use of 7-OH-DPAT and its congeners, on new conceptual views that may arise from this research, and on what partially selective D₃ receptor ligands may tell us about dopamine D₃ receptor functions. *BIOCHEM PHARMACOL* 52;4: 511–518, 1996.

KEY WORDS. 7-OH-DPAT; aminotetralin; dopamine D₂ receptor; dopamine D₃ receptor; autoreceptor; locomotion; cocaine; rat

[³H]7-OH-DPAT AS A D₃ RECEPTOR SELECTIVE LIGAND

The identification of a D₃ receptor ligand was an important challenge because its pharmacology, as observed using heterologous expression in transfected cells [1], is similar to the pharmacology of the D₂ receptor and also because D₃ receptor expression is estimated at 1–10% of the total D₂-like receptor protein expression in the forebrain [2–4]. 7-OH-DPAT† is not a new drug. It was synthesized in the early 1980s and identified as a D₂-like autoreceptor-preferring

agonist [5–9]. However, we have identified a new property of the drug, i.e. its ability to selectively bind to the D₃ receptor in specific binding conditions [3]. It is important to emphasize the fact that the selectivity of 7-OH-DPAT for the D₃ receptor in radioligand binding assays is totally dependent on assay conditions. Magnesium ions should be absent and EDTA must be added in both tissue homogenate and binding assay buffers. This is the most critical point to achieve the selectivity observed [3]. Moreover, Tris buffer does not perform as well as HEPES buffer for the binding assay (unpublished observation), and keeping a moderate concentration of NaCl (not above 50 mM) is also required [3]. Under these conditions, the binding of 7-OH-DPAT to the D₂ receptor is abolished almost completely [3, 10], and it is not necessary to add a non-hydrolysable GTP analog to convert the high affinity state into the low affinity state of the D₂ receptor. Extensive washes of tissue homogenate preparations, as well as of tissue sections in autoradiography studies, are also essential to dissociate the endogenous dopamine from the D₃ receptor binding site [3, 11]. Neglect of these prerequisites may lead to false interpretations. For example, a receptor capacity as high as 125 fmol/mg of protein has been reported for D₃ receptors, and 4 months of exposure in receptor autoradiography were re-

* Correspondence: Dr. Daniel Lévesque, Molecular Endocrinology Laboratory, CHUL Research Centre, 2705 Blvd. Laurier, Québec (Québec), G1V 4G2 Canada. Tel (418)654-2296; FAX (418)654-2761; E-mail: Daniel.Levesque@crchul.ulaval.ca

† Abbreviations: 7-OH-DPAT, 7-hydroxy-*N,N*-(di-*n*-propyl)-2-aminotetralin; NEM, *N*-ethylmaleimide; [¹²⁵I]R(+)-7-OH-PIPAT, [¹²⁵I]R(+)-7-hydroxy-2-(*N,n*-propyl-*N*-3'-iodo-2'-propenyl)aminotetralin; [¹²⁵I]R(+)-5-OH-PIPAT, [¹²⁵I]R(+)-5-hydroxy-2-(*N,n*-propyl-*N*-3'-iodo-2'-propenyl)aminotetralin; EEDQ, *N*-ethoxycarbonyl-2-ethoxy-1,2-dihydroquinoline; 6-OHDA, 6-hydroxydopamine; [³H]S(+)-PD-128,907, [³H]4aR, 10bR-(+)-*trans*-3,4,4a,10b-tetrahydro-4-propyl-2H,5H-[1]benzopyrano[4,3-*b*]-1,4-oxazin-9-*o*1; (+)-S-14297, (+)-[7(*N,N*-dipropylamino)-5,6,7,8-tetrahydro-naphtho(2,3-*b*)dihydro-2,3-furane]; Nafadotride, *N*-[(*n*-butyl-2-pyrrolidinyl)methyl]-1-methoxy-4-cyano-naphthalene-2-carboxamide; (–)DS121, S-(–)-3-(3-cyanophenyl)-*N,n*-propyl piperidine; U99194A, 5,6-di-methoxy-2-(dipropylamino)indanhydrochloride; and Gpp(NH)p, guanosine 5' [β-γ-imido]triphosphate.

quired because of the presence of MgCl_2 in tissue homogenate preparations and, possibly, insufficient washing procedures, respectively [12, 13]. The D_3 receptor binding site has also been claimed to be modulated by pretreatment with the alkylating agent NEM [13]. However, the binding capacity of D_3 receptors obtained in the presence of NEM (about 25 fmol/mg of protein) is somewhat similar to the D_3 receptor levels in the absence of NEM reported by others [3, 14–16]. The inappropriate binding assay for selectively labeled D_3 receptor with [^3H]7-OH-DPAT and binding capacities obtained with and without NEM suggest that the effect observed in this study mostly reflects the actions of NEM on the D_2 high affinity state that is labeled by [^3H]7-OH-DPAT under these conditions [13]. D_3 receptors are, in fact, resistant to the effect of *in vivo* NEM treatment. This interpretation is consistent with the result showing that D_3 receptors are affected modestly by administration of *in vivo* EEDQ, another non-selective alkylating agent that produces irreversible inactivation of aminergic receptors [17].

The affinity of [^3H]7-OH-DPAT for the σ_1 binding site [16, 18] can be easily overcome by maintaining a low concentration of radioligand. In autoradiographic studies, for example, a concentration that is not over 1.0 to 2.0 nM is recommended. The use of a pure selective dopamine agent for evaluation of non-specific binding is also required because the sigma binding site appears "beyond the maximal inhibition of [^3H]7-OH-DPAT binding produced by dopamine" [18]. For saturation or competition studies where higher than 10 nM concentrations of labeled or unlabeled 7-OH-DPAT are used, the addition of a sigma blocker is recommended [16]. Interestingly enough, most D_3 receptor ligands investigated show good affinities for the sigma binding site. On the contrary, the formerly identified sigma selective drug $R(-)$ -PPAP [$R(-)$ - N -(3-phenyl-1-propyl)-1-phenyl-2-aminopropane], previously shown to be devoid of dopaminergic activity, displaces binding to D_3 receptors [16]. In addition, the sigma binding site labeled with [^3H]pentazocine in human cerebellum homogenates is not affected by MgCl_2 or GTP analogs [19], two characteristics shared with the D_3 receptor binding site. In the human brain, the D_3 receptor binding site is not restricted to cerebellar lobules 9 and 10, as in the rat cerebellum [20]. Hence, is [^3H]pentazocine binding really selective for the sigma binding site? More extensive and systematic analyses of sigma ligand affinities for D_3 receptors are needed in order to understand the relationship between these two binding sites. On the other hand, addition of a GTP analog or the absence of MgCl_2 in binding assays for D_3 receptor, as well as the restricted expression of this receptor in brain structures that cannot be easily dissected out, is probably responsible for an underestimation of D_3 receptor binding sites.

The magnitude of the GTP effect on the agonist affinity states of the D_3 receptor in transfected cells is generally small or absent [1, 21–25]. Moreover, no consistent coupling of the receptor with known second messenger path-

ways has been observed in a variety of heterologous expression systems [1, 23, 24, 26–28]. When a coupling with second messenger pathways was observed, such as inhibition of forskolin-stimulated cyclic AMP or calcium current, the intensity of the effect was small [22, 29, 30]. However, a recent study showed a very strong effect of the D_3 receptor stimulation on cyclic AMP levels in a transfected neuroblastoma/glioma hybrid (NG108-15) cell clone [31]. The appropriate G protein that coupled to the D_3 receptor may not be expressed in all the cell lines studied, but pertussis toxin-sensitive intracellular responses can be observed in some cell lines [22, 28, 32], and stimulation of the D_3 receptor in transfected HEK-293 cells increases [^{35}S]GTP γS binding [33]. Moreover, in brain tissue, in conditions that favor the high affinity state of D_2 -like receptor subtypes as well as the effect of GTP, i.e. in the presence of MgCl_2 and NaCl, and using [^{125}I]iodosulpride binding in rat cerebellum (a D_3 prototypic brain area), a complete conversion of the high into the low affinity state of the receptor was observed (Fig. 1) [3]. A similar complete conversion of the high affinity state has also been observed in the NG108-15 cell line transfected with the D_3 receptor [28]. The effect, however, is somewhat masked by closer values of the high and the low affinity states, as compared to the D_2 receptor (see Fig. 1). Thus, a shift of GTP analogs, in the appropriate environment, has been observed, and it is total. This suggests that the D_3 receptor can couple

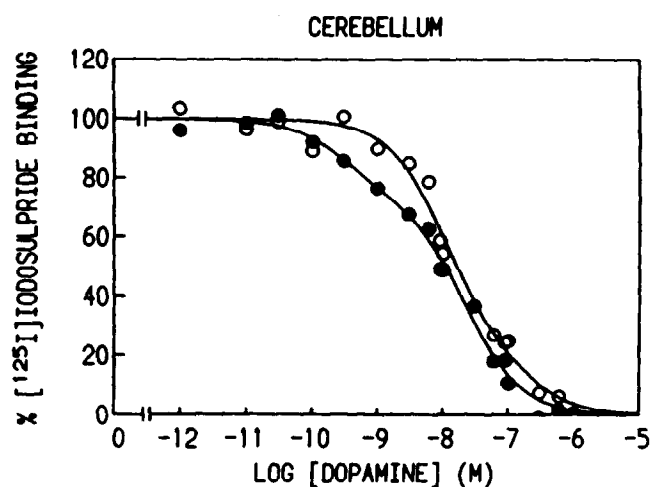


FIG. 1. Effect of Gpp(NH)p (100 μM) on inhibition of [^{125}I]iodosulpride binding by dopamine in archicerebellum (lobules 9 and 10 of the cerebellum) tissue homogenates, a D_3 prototypic structure [3]. [^{125}I]iodosulpride was used at 0.35 nM in a buffer containing 50 mM Tris-HCl (pH 7.5), 5 mM KCl, 2 mM MgCl_2 , 2 mM CaCl_2 , 50 μM 8-hydroxyquinoline, 0.005% ascorbic acid, 0.1% bovine serum albumin, and 120 mM NaCl. Nonspecific binding was estimated by using 5 μM (-)-sulpride. Key: (○) with Gpp(NH)p; and (●) without Gpp(NH)p. The curve obtained without Gpp(NH)p was best fit by a two-component biophasic curve with K_i values of 0.33 ± 0.15 nM (30% of sites) and 20.2 ± 0.1 nM, and this biphasic curve was totally converted to a monophasic curve in the presence of Gpp(NH)p with a K_i of 10.5 ± 1.5 nM. These results partially come from Ref. 3.

with G proteins, but the nature as well as the mode of interaction between both proteins may be distinct from that of the D₂ receptor subtype. The intensity of conformational changes of a receptor, as observed by the GTP-induced high into low agonist affinity state shift, may not be directly proportional to the intensity of the signal that is transmitted into the cell. Indeed, the effect on mitogenesis in the D₃ receptor transfected NG108-15 cells is stronger than in the D₂ transfected cells [34]. The high affinity of the D₃ receptor for dopamine, the small effect of GTP analogs, and its low level of expression in restricted brain areas may indicate that this receptor is constitutively desensitized in resting conditions. Hence, it will be only in certain situations or environments that its function can be observed. Recent theoretical considerations, based on properties of mutated adrenergic receptors that are constitutively activated, suggest the possibility of additional permitted conformations for the receptor-G protein complex. This has led to the proposition of an extended version of the ternary complex model, named the allosteric ternary complex model [35]. According to this model, receptors that displayed greater constitutive activities would have an increased affinity for endogenous agonists associated with a reduced fold apparent stimulation due to a high basal activity. Those characteristics resemble D₃ receptor properties. These mutated receptors are also constitutively phosphorylated and desensitized [36, 37]. Such a constitutive activity has been proposed recently for the naturally occurring D_{1B} receptor [38].

OTHER D₃ RECEPTOR LIGANDS

[³H]7-OH-DPAT binding gave us the first direct measurement of the dopamine D₃ receptor binding site [3]. This has been confirmed by many studies using a variety of ligands. For example, [³H]quinpirole binding in the presence of Gpp(NH)p [2, 39-42], and [³H]quinelorane [15], [³H]pramipexole [43] as well as the iodinated derivative of 7-OH-DPAT, [¹²⁵I]R(+)-7-OH-PIPAT, bindings gave similar results [44-46]. This confirms the restricted brain distribution of the D₃ receptor, previously observed at the level of its mRNA, and confirmed that the pharmacological profile observed in transfected cells is similar to that of brain tissues [1, 3, 47]. The newly synthesized iodinated aminotetralin derivatives [¹²⁵I]R(+)-7-OH-PIPAT and [¹²⁵I]R(+)-5-OH-PIPAT may represent interesting alternatives for labeling the D₃ receptor binding site, but despite their higher specific activity, their advantage over [³H]R(+)-7-OH-DPAT is limited because they also bind the high affinity state of the D₂ receptor as well as 5-hydroxytryptamine_{1A}, and sigma receptor subtypes [44-46, 48-50]. The recently developed ligand [³H]S(+)-PD-128,907 possesses the highest binding and functional selectivity for D₃ receptors in *in vitro* models [34], but binding studies using brain tissue homogenates or sections have never been reported [51]. Thus, to date the labeled stereoselective isomer R(+) of 7-OH-

DPAT is still the best characterized and available ligand for the D₃ receptor [52, 53]. Despite its limitations and when it is used in appropriate conditions, this ligand is a very useful tool to follow the expression of the D₃ receptor binding site in forebrain (for example, see Ref. 54). We are awaiting the next generation of ligands, including selective antagonists, that are under characterization by a number of research teams in order to fully understand the function of the D₃ receptor binding site in brain.

AMINOTETRALINS AND D₃ RECEPTOR FUNCTIONS

The *in vivo* selectivity of R(+)-7-OH-DPAT may be dramatically different because, as mentioned before, its selectivity for the D₃ receptor is optimized by manipulating binding assay conditions [3]. Indeed, the selectivity of R(+)-7-OH-DPAT in *in vitro* functional models based on the capacity to increase mitogenesis (as measured by [³H]thymidine incorporation) or medium acidification by D₃ receptor stimulation in transfected cells is much less apparent. These studies indicated that R(+)-7-OH-DPAT is poorly selective (at most 7-fold) for the D₃ receptor in those *in vitro* functional models [22, 34, 55]. The range of selectivity obtained is somewhat similar to the binding selectivity when comparing the high affinity state of the D₂ receptor with D₃ receptor affinities [10, 56]. Indeed, most studies using 7-OH-DPAT failed to clearly ascribe functions to the D₃ receptor [57-64]. There is, however, an important caveat that has been omitted. As shown in Fig. 1, a significant fraction of D₃ receptors (30% of the total population) exists in a very high affinity state for dopamine in brain tissue [3]. To which extent this very high affinity state represents a functional state of the D₃ receptor remains to be determined. Also, agonists previously identified as partially selective *in vitro* may retain some selectivity *in vivo*. There are, in fact, other factors that may explain the lack of selectivity of (+)-7-OH-DPAT *in vivo*. Experimental designs and intrinsic properties of this drug indicate that the situation is probably more complex than previously thought.

Recent data on the regulation of the D₃ receptor expression give us some clues that may explain the lack of selectivity of 7-OH-DPAT in *in vivo* studies. In paradigms using reserpinized animals as well as after deafferentation using mechanical or chemical 6-OHDA unilateral lesions, the dopamine D₂ receptor becomes up-regulated, whereas D₃ receptor expression is not affected or is decreased, respectively [54]. In these conditions, a partially selective drug has little chance to reveal D₃ receptor activity, as was reported [60, 64-66]. On the other hand, other conditions may have favored D₃ receptor selectivity. This may be the case following *in vivo* irreversible receptor inactivation with administration of the alkylating agent EEDQ. Indeed, since D₃ receptors are probably more occupied by dopamine *in vivo* than D₂ receptors, and this can be evidenced if the tissue is not washed sufficiently before radioreceptor assay

[11], or if trying to label D₃ receptor *ex vivo* [67], the effect of inactivation by EEDQ may be less important at D₃ than D₂ receptors. In fact, EEDQ is almost inactive on the D₃ receptor *in vivo*, whereas it showed similar effects on both receptors *in vitro* [17]. Thus, after EEDQ the population of remaining dopamine receptors is probably enriched in D₃ receptors, and the functional consequence of its activation could be observed [68]. On the other hand, we cannot rule out the possibility of a mixture of effects at remaining dopamine D₂-like receptor populations.

It is interesting to note that the large receptor reserve seen at D₂ autoreceptor functions (modulation of synthesis and release of dopamine) has been seen in the presence of EEDQ [69, 70], as well as regional differences of receptor reserve between substantia nigra and the ventral tegmental area [71]. Thus, this receptor reserve may not be as important as expected, because the effect observed on autoreceptor functions in the presence of EEDQ could be attributed to D₃ receptors [68]. This helps us to understand the growing body of evidence demonstrating that the dopamine D₃ receptor may affect dopamine metabolism [72]. It is not clear, however, if these autoreceptor functions are initiated at somatodendritic [73, 74] or nerve axon [68, 75] terminals or even at postsynaptic locations via negative-feedback loops [76]. Considering the extremely low level of D₃ receptor expression in dopamine neuron cell body areas [77], the effects of D₃-preferring drugs on autoreceptor functions are quite astonishing. On the other hand, D₃ autoreceptor functions may remain silent in resting conditions, as recently proposed by Gobert and colleagues [78].

It has been proposed recently that R(+)-7-OH-DPAT may act as a partial agonist at D₃ receptors [22, 34, 79]. The intrinsic activity of the drug may be low in the presence of the endogenous ligand and contributes to a decrease in the apparent selectivity for the D₃ receptor *in vivo*. (+)-UH232, which has been identified previously as a D₃ receptor-preferring antagonist [1], also possesses partial agonist properties [31]. In fact, most aminotetralins that showed selectivity for the D₃ receptor have a chemical structure somewhat similar to dopamine itself [80]. Therefore, it would not be surprising to find similar results, i.e. partial agonist properties to the D₃ receptor, with other aminotetralin derivatives previously identified as dopamine agonists or antagonists. Finally, aminotetralins are very potent drugs, but their *in vivo* half-life is short due to rapid liver glucuronidation in the rat [81]. 7-OH-DPAT has been shown to be the most sensitive molecule to glucuronidation enzyme of the aminotetralin series that show dopaminergic activity, 5-OH-DPAT being less susceptible to glucuronidation and 8-OH-DPAT not glucuronidated at all [81]. Thus, the concentration of the drug that may reach the brain should be very low. Estimation of the interstitial free concentration of 7-OH-DPAT in the striatum, after intraperitoneal administration, is consistent with this assumption [82]. Again, this may have contributed to decreased functional responses from D₃ receptor stimulation by the drug, but also

may have favored D₃ receptor selectivity of these drugs in the brain.

AMINOTETRALINS AND LOCOMOTION

In normal non-habituated rats, R(+)-7-OH-DPAT and a series of D₃ preferring agonists produce biphasic effects on spontaneous locomotor activity, i.e. suppression at low doses, followed by a gradual increase in motor activity at higher dosages [55, 83–85]. A similar but opposite biphasic effect is observed with D₃ receptor-preferring antagonists, like (+)-UH232 and (+)-AJ76. This property, however, has been attributed to preferential autoreceptor selectivity of these drugs [86]. But, results obtained with recently developed partially selective D₃ receptor antagonists are in agreement with the hypothesis that the locomotor inhibitory component of these drugs is mediated through a postsynaptic D₃ receptor (i.e. independently of autoreceptor functions) (U99194A, Nafadotride), and that blockade of D₃ receptors may not be associated with catalepsy ((+)-S-14297, Nafadotride) [83, 84, 87–93].

AMINOTETRALINS AND DRUGS OF ABUSE

Aminotetralins exert extremely potent activities on behaviors associated with drugs of abuse and reward [94–101]. 7-OH-DPAT decreases cocaine self-administration at doses that were not by themselves reinforcing [94], but also lowers the minimum effective dose of cocaine, suggesting that 7-OH-DPAT may enhance the reinforcing properties of cocaine [96]. Dopamine D₃ receptor-preferring antagonists such as (+)-AJ76, (+)-UH232, and the recently developed (–)-DS121 also decrease the rate of cocaine intake [98, 100]. But, unlike other dopamine antagonists, they also delay the onset of responding to cocaine, similar to the effect of a dopamine agonist [100]. Beside the fact that the involvement of the dopamine D₃ receptor remains to be established as well as the exact location at pre- or postsynaptic receptors of these drug effects [101], the partial agonist property of 7-OH-DPAT [34], as well as (+)-UH232 [31], may explain these apparent discrepancies.

CONCLUSION

Despite the possibility that partially selective agonists may retain their selectivity for the D₃ receptor in certain conditions *in vivo* (in the presence of EEDQ, for example), we need confirmation of the involvement of the D₃ receptor in autoreceptor functions, locomotor inhibition, as well as in cocaine intake using more selective drugs or using alternative strategies. Nevertheless, aminotetralin drugs are extremely interesting agents. Indeed, such partial agonist properties shown by D₃ receptor-preferring aminotetralins may have a therapeutic advantage over pure agonists or antagonists in the treatment of cocaine addiction, for example, because they can regulate the elevated dopaminergic

tone observed during cocaine administration (antagonist property) as well as the dopamine hypoactivity observed during withdrawal or craving (agonist property) [102]. These characteristics may also be useful in the treatment of neuropsychiatric diseases where hyper- and hypodopaminergic activities can be observed. The rapid glucuronidation of these drugs limits, however, the use of the aminotetralins, although human glucuronidation of these drugs seems less efficient than that in rats [81]. On the other hand, pure agonists and antagonists with high D₃ receptor selectivity must be developed in order to clearly understand the physiological role of this enigmatic dopamine receptor and to test the therapeutic impact of the selective blockade or stimulation of the dopamine D₃ receptor subtype.

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