

# Contribution of Serotonergic Transmission to the Motor and Cognitive Effects of High-Frequency Stimulation of the Subthalamic Nucleus or Levodopa in Parkinson's Disease

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**Abstract** Although they are effective at treating the motor impairments that are the core symptoms of Parkinson's disease, current treatments, namely L-3,4-dihydroxyphenylalanine (L-DOPA), the gold standard medication and high-frequency stimulation of the subthalamic nucleus (HFS-STN), can lead to cognitive and mood alterations. Many of these side effects, such as depression, anxiety and sleep disturbances, could be related to abnormal functioning of the serotonergic system, but much basic research remains to be done. Molecular studies in humans and animal models of the disease have reported diverse drastic changes to the serotonergic system. It has also been shown that the serotonergic system both plays a major role in the mechanism of action of the current therapies and is altered by the therapies. It has been reported that HFS-STN decreases serotonin release in several regions, mostly via inhibition of serotonergic neuron activity. The involvement of serotonergic neurons in L-DOPA treatment is even more significant. First, serotonergic neurons, able to convert exogenous L-DOPA to dopamine, are a major site to release dopamine throughout the brain. Second, the substitution of serotonin by newly synthesized dopamine in serotonin neurons leads to acute and chronic alteration of serotonin release and metabolism. Therefore, both therapeutic approaches, via distinct mechanisms, decrease serotonergic system activity and, rather than alleviating cognitive or mood disorders, tend to aggravate them. Molecular strategies targeting the serotonergic system are being developed and could be decisive in limiting L-

DOPA-induced dyskinesia, as well as mood and cognitive symptoms produced by antiparkinsonian therapies.

**Keywords** Parkinson's disease · Serotonin release · Serotonin function · Dopamine release · L-DOPA · High-frequency stimulation of the subthalamic nucleus

## Serotonergic System in Parkinson's Disease

Parkinson's disease is classically viewed as a neurological condition characterized by bradykinesia, postural instability, rigidity and tremor at rest. These motor symptoms have been associated with the destruction of the nigrostriatal dopaminergic (DA) tract, though tremor has been linked to serotonergic (5-HT) dysfunction. The 5-HT system, due to its known implication in mood and cognitive dysfunctions, is also thought to be implicated in the development of non-motor symptoms occurring in Parkinson's disease patients including depression and anxiety [1]. It has been reported that 30–50% of patients experience depression or anxiety, which is higher than age-matched controls [2, 3]. Depression has been observed before the onset of Parkinsonism [4, 5] and impairs the efficacy of antiparkinsonian treatments [6].

5-HT neurons innervating the whole encephalon are located in the dorsal (DRN) and median raphe nuclei (MRN) [7]. Postmortem neurochemical studies in Parkinson's disease patients have reported conflicting results with respect to 5-HT markers, although most studies report a decrease [8, 9]. In these studies, the levels of striatal 5-HT and its metabolite 5-hydroxyindole acetic acid (5-HIAA) are reduced by up to 50% [10–12], and the 5-HT transporter density is decreased in multiple brain regions [11, 13, 14], though in a region-dependent manner [15, 16]. The density

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of 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> receptors has been reported to be reduced by 27% in the DRN [17]. All these changes support a putative loss of 5-HT neurons in parkinsonian patients [8, 18–20]. It is difficult in humans to understand whether this effect is due to the progressive neurodegenerative process of the disease or to the pharmacological treatments received by the patients [8, 11].

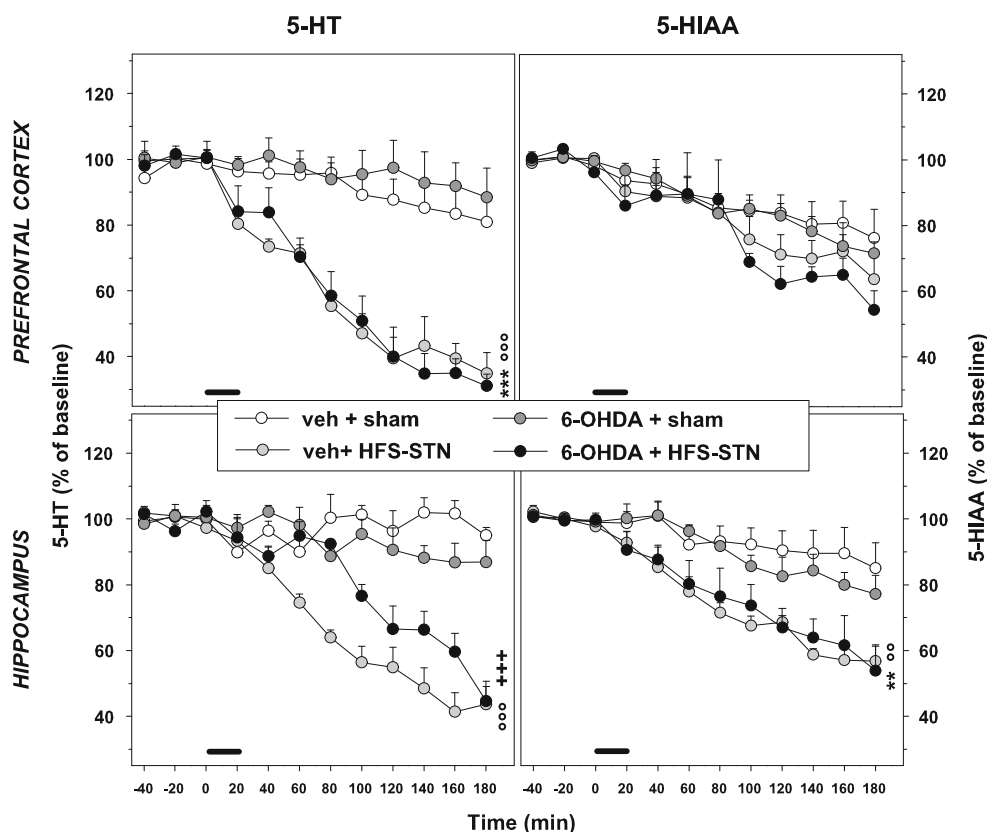
Compared to the human situation, the alteration of the 5-HT system differs in animal models of the disease including 1-methyl-4-phenyl-1,2,3,6-tetrahydropyridine (MPTP)-treated monkeys and mice, the 6-hydroxydopamine (6-OHDA)-induced DA lesion in mice and rats and the genetic mice model of the disease. The 6-OHDA-lesioned rat model of Parkinson's disease is the most popular model used to assess the effect of L-3,4-dihydroxyphenylalanine (L-DOPA) since the unilateral lesion of the nigrostriatal DA pathway generates a functional asymmetry that allows testing of the anti-parkinsonian effect of L-DOPA, i.e. a rotational behaviour contralateral to the lesion [21, 22]. The motor benefit of L-DOPA has been attributed to an increase in the extracellular levels of DA that binds to hypersensitive DA receptors, thus leading to increased motor responses ([23, 24]; for review, see [25]). Furthermore, chronic treatment with L-DOPA induces dyskinesia in 6-OHDA-lesioned rats and MPTP-treated monkeys or mice, a common motor complication that also develops with long-term DA replacement therapy in Parkinson's disease patients [26, 27]. Dyskinesia is thought to emerge as a consequence of abnormal fluctuations in synaptic DA levels induced by L-DOPA treatment [28–31]. These side effects due to L-DOPA medication may, however, impair the evaluation of mood and cognitive effects in behavioural tests.

The neurotoxin MPTP has been shown to decrease 5-HT tissue brain concentrations in addition to a drastic lesion of catecholaminergic neurons [32–34]. Modification of basal 5-HT release in the striatum of MPTP-treated monkeys depends on the functional territories considered and the status of the animal [35]. In MPTP-treated mice, changes in 5-HT concentrations are less consistent regarding the brain region examined and the MPTP treatment protocol and survival periods used [36–39]. Sprouting in 5-HT afferents into the striatum has been observed in adult MPTP-treated mice [40]. Several studies have shown that the unilateral destruction of DA neurons in adult rats using 6-OHDA does not alter 5-HT tissue levels [41–43]. Changes of 5-HT system activity consequent to the destruction of the nigrostriatal tract have been reported, but the data are controversial. Some studies have shown an overall hyperactivity of the 5-HT system with a hyperinnervation of forebrain 5-HT fibres in the striatum [44], elevated brain tissue levels of 5-HT [45] and hyperactivity of DRN and MRN 5-HT neurons [46–50]. However, some studies have reported a significant reduction in 5-HT innervation in the striatum [51] and a decreased activity of DRN 5-HT neurons [52].

## High-Frequency Stimulation of the Subthalamic Nucleus Decreases the Activity of Serotonergic Neurons

HFS-STN is the best surgical approach to Parkinson's disease, and its efficacy against the core and motor symptoms of the disease is even better than classical medication. As with pharmacological treatment, however, HFS-STN is associated with some side effects that could be related to impairment of 5-HT transmission including depression [53–57], mania [58], attempted suicide [56, 59, 60] and cognitive dysfunctions such as speed of mental processing, working memory, phonemic fluency, encoding of visuospatial material and long-term consolidation of verbal material [61].

In the 6-OHDA rat model of Parkinson's disease, HFS-STN induced a “depressive-like” behaviour in the forced swimming test [47]. The increased immobility time, representative of the depressive-like behaviour, was reversed by pre-treatment with the selective 5-HT reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) citalopram. In line with a putative impaired 5-HT tone, HFS-STN decreased the firing rate of 5-HT neurons in the DRN during the stimulation. However, this effect was not blocked by pre-treatment with SSRI [47]. Moreover, HFS-STN reduced the release of 5-HT in the prefrontal cortex (PFC), the hippocampus (HIP) and the striatum ([56, 62]; Fig. 1). The decrease in 5-HT release occurs in intact and 6-OHDA-lesioned rats like the inhibition of DRN neurons. The effect was also seen whether the rats were anaesthetized with isoflurane or chloral hydrate or were freely moving. This decrease in 5-HT neuron firing induced by HFS-STN could contribute to the decrease in 5-HT release. Indeed, the inhibitory effect of HFS-STN on 5-HT release is not additive to that induced by 8-OHDPAT, a 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> agonist known to inhibit 5-HT release via a decrease in 5-HT neuron firing [62], suggesting that both treatments share the inhibition of 5-HT neuron firing in their ability to decrease 5-HT release. It is noteworthy that the inhibition of 5-HT neuron firing is almost immediate and continues after the period of stimulation whereas the inhibitory effect on 5-HT release is not immediate, as it appears 40–60 min after the end of the HFS-STN. Thus, although the decrease in 5-HT neuron firing probably contributes in the effect of HFS-STN, we and others have reported small differences in 5-HT release between sampled brain regions (magnitude of effect, delay of appearance, anaesthesia, sensitivity to the 6-OHDA lesion, interaction with L-DOPA, see point IV and Fig. 1) suggesting that other factors may also play a part. This idea is further supported by extracellular levels of the 5-HT metabolite 5-HIAA. HFS-STN did not alter 5-HIAA extracellular level in the PFC or the striatum [62, 63] but decreased it in the HIP (Fig. 1). 5-HT neurons projections are not uniform in terms of molecular determinant, regulatory mechanisms or raphe nuclei of origin [64–67]. This feature



**Fig. 1** Effect of high-frequency stimulation of the subthalamic nucleus (HFS-STN) on 5-HT and 5-HIAA extracellular levels in the prefrontal cortex and hippocampus of sham-lesioned and 6-OHDA-lesioned rats. Dialysis experiments were performed 21–28 days after the injection of 6-OHDA or its vehicle (*veh*) in the median forebrain bundle. HFS-STN (130 Hz, 30  $\mu$ A) or sham stimulation (*sham*) was applied for a 20-min period as indicated by the horizontal bar. Data represent the mean  $\pm$  SEM (standard error mean) percentages of baseline in each sample ( $n=$

4–5 rats/group) along the time course of the study.  $^{\circ\circ}p<0.01$ ;  $^{\circ\circ\circ}p<0.001$  for veh+HFS-STN group versus veh+sham group and  $^{**}p<0.01$ ,  $^{***}p<0.001$  for 6-OHDA+HFS-STN versus 6-OHDA+sham group (Fisher's PLSD test after a significant one-way ANOVA);  $^{+++}p<0.001$  for the 6-OHDA+HFS-STN group versus the veh+HFS-STN group (Fisher's PLSD test after a significant two-way ANOVA). Figure adapted from Navailles et al. [62]

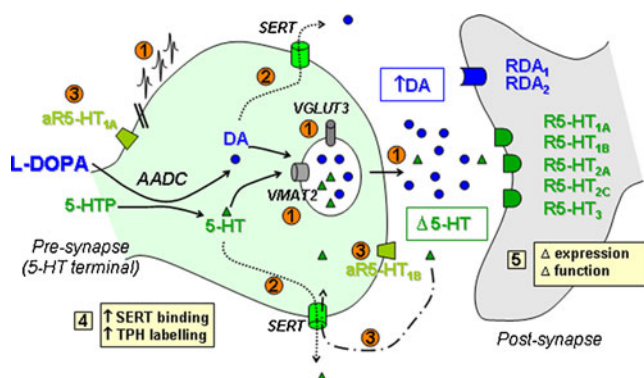
of 5-HT transmission may well play a role in the distinct regional sensitivity of 5-HT terminals to HFS-STN.

The mechanism involved in the inhibitory influence of HFS-STN on 5-HT function is not clear. Part of this effect could be related to antidromic activation of DRN induced by HFS-STN [68]. However, deep brain stimulation of the nucleus accumbens shell enhances 5-HT content in the shell, making less likely the hypothesis that antidromic activation of 5-HT fibres leads to decreased 5-HT output [69]. Alternatively, this inhibitory effect could be related to outputs from the STN influencing the activity of 5-HT neurons. It has been suggested that STN could activate inhibitory interneurons in the raphe, indirectly inhibiting the activity of 5-HT cells [70]. The activation of raphé interneurons by HFS-STN could possibly occur via the medial prefrontal cortex or the lateral habenula [63]. Additional data are needed to determine the precise mechanism of this inhibitory influence as well as to determine the contribution of this inhibition to the benefits and side effects of HFS-STN.

### Mechanism of Action of L-DOPA and 5-HT Neurons

Since the mid-1960s [71], L-DOPA has been used as the gold standard medication for treating motor symptoms in Parkinson's disease. L-DOPA is the metabolic precursor of DA, and its therapeutic efficacy has long been attributed to its ability to restore DA content in the striatum of parkinsonian patients through spared DA neurons [23, 24, 72]. However, this picture has become more complicated. Growing evidence has progressively discarded a prominent role for DA neurons in the ability of L-DOPA to increase DA extracellular levels. First, the fewer DA neurons that are spared, the more pronounced is the release of DA induced by L-DOPA [73, 74]. Furthermore, although the feedback inhibitory controls of DA neurons involving  $D_2$  receptors are still functional in DA-depleted rats [75–78], L-DOPA-induced DA release is not sensitive to DA autoregulatory processes (DA- $D_2$  autoreceptor stimulation and blockade of DA transporter) [73, 78]. Second, the decarboxylation of L-DOPA by aromatic amino

acid *l*-decarboxylase (AADC) into DA occurs in various brain areas, including regions that are sparsely innervated by DA neurons physiologically [79]. AADC is not specific to DA neurons and is found in numerous cell types including endothelial and glial cells, as well as in various neuronal systems [80, 81]. Indeed, 5-HT neurons that express AADC to convert L-DOPA into DA and the vesicular membrane transporter type 2 (VMAT2) that packages DA into exocytosis vesicles [82–85] have been shown to store the newly synthesized DA from cell bodies and terminals ([83, 86–88]; see Fig. 2).



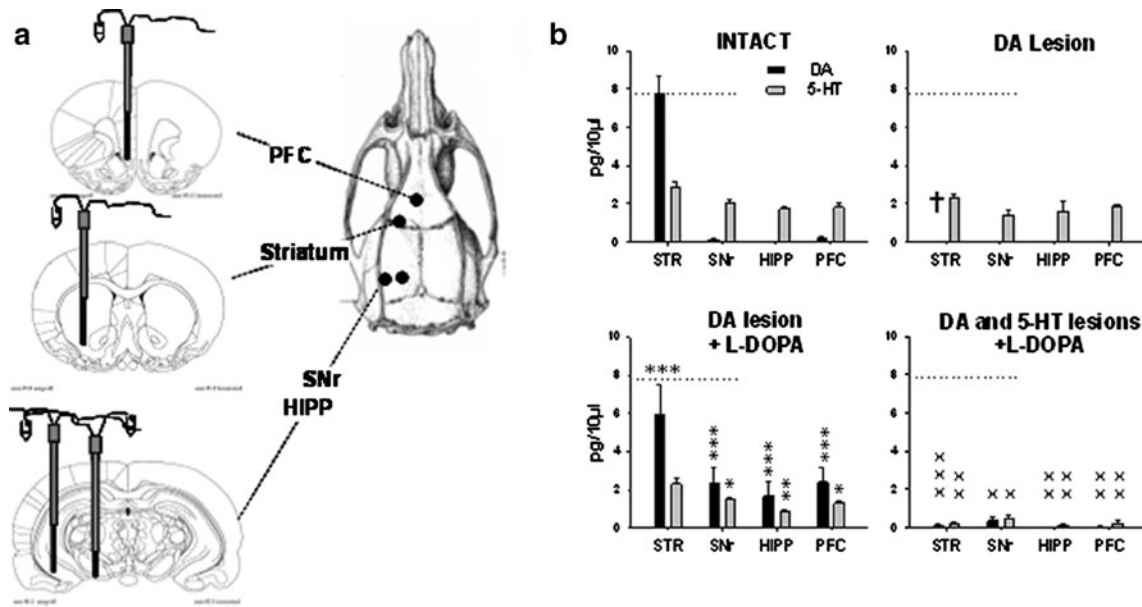
**Fig. 2** Consequences of L-DOPA decarboxylation in 5-HT neurons. In the absence of DA neurons in advanced stages of Parkinson's disease, exogenous L-DOPA competes with 5-hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) to be decarboxylated into dopamine (DA) by the amino acid decarboxylase (AADC) inside serotonergic neurons. 1 The newly synthesized DA together with serotonin (5-HT) are stored inside exocytosis vesicles through the VMAT2 (reserpine-sensitive process) and is co-released with 5-HT by exocytosis (tetradotoxin- and calcium-dependent process) in the synaptic cleft. In a subset of 5-HT terminals, other membrane proteins such as the vesicular glutamate transporter 3 (VGLUT3) participate with VMAT2 to a vesicular-filling synergy that enhance the efficiency of monoamine storage capacity and the quantum of monoamines released [64]. 2 A non-exocytotic release of DA and 5-HT also occurs whose relative contribution to total monoamine extracellular levels may depend on the dose of L-DOPA administered. Competition between DA and 5-HT at the level of VMAT2 increases the 5-HT cytosolic pool which can be cleared by inversion of the 5-HT transporter (SERT). Huge amounts of newly synthesized DA in the cytosol are also cleared via the SERT, an effect that can be blocked by selective inhibitors of SERT like citalopram [89]. 3 L-DOPA-induced DA release is sensitive to 5-HT autoregulatory mechanisms involving 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> autoreceptors (aR5-HT<sub>1A</sub>) at 5-HT cell bodies, 5-HT<sub>1B</sub> autoreceptors (aR5-HT<sub>1B</sub>) at 5-HT terminals and blockade of SERT. Overall, the entry of L-DOPA inside 5-HT neurons leads to a massive increase in extracellular DA levels in all brain regions innervated by 5-HT neurons while 5-HT release is altered in a region-specific manner depending on the anatomic-functional heterogeneity of 5-HT fibres [62, 89, 95, 105]. 4 While chronic L-DOPA treatment homogeneously reduces 5-HT biochemical indexes (reduction of tissue and extracellular levels of 5-HT and its metabolite 5-hydroxyindolacetic acid, 5-HIAA), numerous region-dependent changes occur at the level of 5-HT terminals (increased sprouting and changes of 5-HT varicosities morphology) and 5-HT receptors (changes of expression and sensitivity to 5-HT compounds). The profound alteration of 5-HT transmission together with the dysregulated DA transmission throughout the parkinsonian brain may participate in the emergence of the numerous motor and non-motor side effects of L-DOPA

Three recent arguments have demonstrated that 5-HT neurons are responsible for L-DOPA-induced DA release. First, a selective lesion of 5-HT neurons with the neurotoxin 5,7-dihydroxytryptamine (5,7-DHT) abolished the increase in DA extracellular levels induced by a wide dose range of L-DOPA (3–100 mg/kg) ([89, 90]; Fig. 3). The hypothesis that other cellular systems participate significantly in the conversion of L-DOPA and the release of DA was discarded because the magnitude of the decrease in L-DOPA-induced DA release was dependent on the percentage of 5-HT denervation [89]. Second, 5-HT auto-regulatory mechanisms triggered through the stimulation of 5-HT<sub>1A/1B</sub> autoreceptors [91, 92] and blockade of 5-HT transporter [89, 93] strongly decrease L-DOPA-induced DA release (see Fig. 2). Third, L-DOPA induces an ectopic release of DA in a pattern that follows the widespread innervation of the entire forebrain by 5-HT raphe neurons [7, 94]. Using four microdialysis probes implanted ipsilaterally (Fig. 3a), we found that L-DOPA-induced DA release is not restricted to the striatum but also occurs in the PFC, HIPP and substantia nigra pars reticulata (SNr) [62, 89, 95]. This effect is sensitive to 5-HT lesion and 5-HT pharmacological manipulation ([89, 92]; Fig. 3b). All these brain regions display various levels of 5-HT terminal density and express DA receptors [96] on which the newly synthesized DA can exert its numerous effects and promote DA transmission. It is noteworthy that the magnitude of the increase in extracellular DA concentration induced by a therapeutic dose range of L-DOPA (3–12 mg/kg) is far higher in extrastriatal brain regions than in the striatum compared to the physiological situation (Fig. 3b). In other words, while the striatum constitutes the prime locus for DA transmission in physiological conditions, its contribution to the effects of L-DOPA may be counterbalanced by the increase in DA transmission in other brain regions in parkinsonian conditions. A deeper analysis of the neurochemical and behavioural results questions the functional role of striatal DA release in the effect of L-DOPA. Briefly, 5,7-DHT lesion dramatically reduces 6 mg/kg L-DOPA-induced dyskinesia without altering the motor score [97]. A correct motor score in rats could therefore be achieved with L-DOPA in a situation in which striatal DA extracellular levels are barely detectable (40 times lower than in intact rats), as shown in Fig. 3b (last image). Alternatively, these data suggest that the decrease in 5-HT function could also facilitate the therapeutic effects of L-DOPA. Taken together these data indicate that 5-HT neurons, by mediating the effects of L-DOPA, create a new system state in DA transmission throughout the parkinsonian brain [98].

#### Modifications of 5-HT Transmission by Acute and Repeated L-DOPA Treatment

Along with the crucial involvement of 5-HT neurons in the action of L-DOPA, it is necessary to consider that the offside





**Fig. 3** Widespread effect of L-DOPA on DA and 5-HT releases in the brain via 5-HT neurons. **a** Drawings representing the simultaneous implantation of four microdialysis probes (2 or 4 mm of membrane length) in the ipsilateral prefrontal cortex (PFC), the striatum (STR), the hippocampus (HIPP) and the substantia nigra (SNr). **b** Extracellular levels of DA and 5-HT (in pg/10  $\mu$ l  $\pm$  standard error of the mean) measured in these regions in intact rats (upper left panel), in 6-hydroxydopamine (6-OHDA) rats (upper right panel), in 6-OHDA receiving 6 mg/kg L-DOPA (+15 mg/kg benserazide) (lower left panel), in 6-OHDA and 5-HT-lesioned rats using the 5-HT neurotoxin 5,7-dihydroxytryptamine and receiving 6 mg/kg L-DOPA (+15 mg/kg benserazide) (lower right panel). The extracellular levels of striatal DA

obtained in intact rats (dotted line) are reported in all panels. Upper panels correspond to baseline levels measured before drug treatment if any. Lower panels correspond to the mean of the quantity of DA and 5-HT extracellular levels averaged for 3 h monitoring after L-DOPA treatment. Statistics correspond to the followings: \* $p$ <0.05 and \*\*\* $p$ <0.001 with respect to extracellular levels obtained in saline treated 6-OHDA rats;  $^x p$ <0.05,  $^{xx} p$ <0.01,  $^{xxx} p$ <0.001 with respect to DA or 5-HT extracellular levels obtained in rats receiving L-DOPA and bearing the lesion of DA neurons;  $^+ p$ <0.001 with respect to values obtained in intact rats. Adapted from Navailles et al. [62, 95] and unpublished observations

effects due to L-DOPA may not solely be attributed to an imbalanced DA transmission but also to profound changes of 5-HT transmission throughout the parkinsonian brain. These changes of 5-HT transmission are poorly known, but they could condition the benefit and side effects of L-DOPA.

The presence of massive amounts of newly synthesized DA inside 5-HT neurons could account for the drastic alteration of 5-HT neuronal function [62, 99–102]. Accumulating evidence since the 1970s shows that L-DOPA-derived DA displaces 5-HT from exocytosis vesicles thus increasing the cytosolic pool of 5-HT ([83]; see Fig. 2). This substitution process could result in a decrease in 5-HT exocytotic release but also in a non-exocytotic efflux of 5-HT from 5-HT transporters (SERT) ([1, 103, 104]; for review, see [105]). A non-exocytotic efflux of 5-HT induced by L-DOPA is possible as the SERT reversal likely contributes to the impulse-independent release of DA induced by L-DOPA from 5-HT neurons [89, 92, 105]. This pharmacological issue is important to take into an account in elaborating therapeutic strategies because it implies that a full control of the excitability of 5-HT neurons using 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> and/or 5-HT<sub>1B</sub> agonists will have a partial influence on the secretion of DA and 5-HT induced by L-DOPA. Moreover,

the reversal of the SERT could become a technical limit when going deeper into the mechanism of action of L-DOPA using intracerebral microdialysis. Indeed, extracellular levels of monoamines measured by intracerebral microdialysis correspond to the equilibrium between neuronal uptake and microdialysis probe uptake. The blockade or the reversion of uptake sites introduces a bias towards the probe uptake, indirectly magnifying impulse-dependent release of the monoamine [106]. The relative contribution of exocytotic and non-exocytotic mechanisms of 5-HT release is therefore unknown and may depend on the dose of L-DOPA used (high doses favouring the non-exocytotic process) and the regional heterogeneity of 5-HT terminals [105] characterized by the variable expression of numerous regulatory proteins (SERT, VGLUT3 etc...; [64]). Thus, we have found that 6 mg/kg L-DOPA decreases 5-HT extracellular levels in the SNr, the HIPP, the PFC but not the striatum (Fig. 3b, levels of 5-HT in “6-OHDA” compared to “6-OHDA+L-DOPA”). At 12 mg/kg, a biphasic effect was observed in the HIPP and no effect in the striatum [62, 95].

This region-dependent effect is also observed after chronic L-DOPA treatment [95]. The inhibitory effect of L-DOPA on 5-HT release was potentiated in the SNr and HIPP of L-

DOPA-treated rats but not in the PFC. In the striatum of L-DOPA-treated rats, 5-HT release remained unaltered by L-DOPA [92, 95]. Importantly, this region-dependent reactivity of 5-HT terminals to L-DOPA has a direct impact on the ability of L-DOPA to increase DA release [95]. While L-DOPA-induced DA release is preserved in the striatum, it is greatly decreased in the SNr where 5-HT terminals display the highest sensitivity to L-DOPA. These data have to be considered together with the fact that a chronic L-DOPA treatment at 12 mg/kg decreases basal extracellular levels of 5-HT and its metabolite 5-HIAA and also tissue concentrations of 5-HT and 5-HIAA [95, 97, 100], suggesting a negative impact of L-DOPA on 5-HT neuron integrity [95]. However, these neurochemical changes in 5-HT levels vary depending on whether animals develop dyskinesia or not. A positive correlation between L-DOPA-induced dyskinesia and tissue levels of DA has been reported in the striatum [102] while the severity of L-DOPA-induced dyskinesia is negatively correlated with striatal tissue levels of 5-HT [107]. Lindgren and colleagues [92] reported higher basal extracellular and tissue 5-HT levels in the striatum, but not the SNr, of awake dyskinetic animals compared to non-dyskinetic animals. These authors suggested that the denser 5-HT innervation in the striatum of dyskinetic animals could account for the higher 5-HT levels and the stronger response on DA release induced by L-DOPA although Lundblad et al. [108] could not establish a correlation between the level of 5-HT nerve density in lesioned striata and the magnitude of DA release. The relationship between 5-HT levels and L-DOPA-induced dyskinesia may also depend on the dose of L-DOPA used. Chronic treatment with L-DOPA at 12 mg/kg, which elicits dyskinesia in all animals, homogeneously decreased 5-HT and 5-HIAA extracellular and tissue levels in multiple brain regions [95]. At 6 mg/kg, chronic L-DOPA treatment also decreased tissue levels of 5-HT, but not 5-HIAA, in the striatum of both dyskinetic and non-dyskinetic animals [92]. These results suggest that L-DOPA may have detrimental effects on 5-HT neurons even at moderate doses.

These data fit with numerous clinical studies reporting a decrease in 5-HT markers [8–14, 17–20]. This putative loss of 5-HT neurons in Parkinson's disease could be attributed to the progressive neurodegenerative process of the disease [109, 110] and/or to pharmacological treatments [8, 11]. Long-term L-DOPA use has been shown to produce a larger decrease in 5-HT markers in some [101] but not all studies [14]. When considering its toxic properties [111–114], L-DOPA may constitute a contributing factor to neuronal damage of 5-HT neurons along with the progression of the disease. Quinones formed from L-DOPA and newly synthesized DA inactivate tryptophan hydroxylase (TPH) [115], the initial enzyme in the biosynthesis of 5-HT, by converting TPH to a redox-cycling quinoprotein that may participate in 5-HT neuronal toxicity [6, 116, 117]. These mechanisms

could be involved in the overall decrease in 5-HT function observed in the parkinsonian brain. A reduction of 5-HT metabolism (reduced 5-HIAA/TPH ratio) has been reported in parkinsonian patients and DA-depleted rats receiving L-DOPA treatment [118]. In line, chronic L-DOPA treatment reduced tissue 5-HT and 5-HIAA concentrations in multiple brain regions [95, 97, 98, 119] and TPH expression in the DRN of animals with a bilateral and partial DA depletion [6].

#### Changes in 5-HT Reactivity Induced by L-DOPA

As well as the issue of whether L-DOPA has a toxic effect on 5-HT neurons [6], numerous studies have shown evidence for alteration of 5-HT transmission after chronic L-DOPA treatment, as revealed by changes in 5-HT receptor expression, sensitivity and changes in 5-HT terminal morphology and plasticity (see Fig. 2).

Most (if not all) 5-HT receptors are sensitive to chronic alteration of DA transmission, though in a region-dependent manner [48, 49, 120–125]. Beyond changes induced by the loss of DA neurons in parkinsonian patients and experimental models of Parkinson's disease, chronic L-DOPA treatment has been shown to further alter the expression and function of some 5-HT receptors in a region-specific manner. While the loss of nigrostriatal DA neurons decreases the responses to 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> receptor stimulation of both raphe neurons [48] and pyramidal neurons of the medial PFC [49] in 6-OHDA rats, it increases 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> receptor binding in the neocortex of parkinsonian patients [126] and in the putamen [127], caudate nucleus and middle layers of premotor–motor cortices of MPTP-treated monkeys [128]. Chronic treatment with L-DOPA further increases 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> receptor binding in the caudate nucleus of MPTP-lesioned monkeys [128]. No alteration in 5-HT<sub>1B</sub> binding has been observed in the striatum and substantia nigra of parkinsonian patients [129] or 6-OHDA rats [130], although an increase in 5-HT<sub>1B</sub> receptor expression in these brain regions has been reported after chronic L-DOPA treatment in 6-OHDA-lesioned rats [131]. Contradictory effects have been observed for 5-HT<sub>2A</sub> receptors depending on the experimental Parkinson's disease model used. While 5-HT<sub>2A</sub> receptors in interneurons [132] and pyramidal neurons [50] of the medial PFC are downregulated by unilateral 6-OHDA lesion in rats, an increase in 5-HT<sub>2A</sub> receptor expression is observed in the striatum, which is reversed by L-DOPA treatment [133]. Li et al. [134] have reported a decrease in 5-HT<sub>2A</sub> receptor binding in the insular, prefrontal, cingulate and primary somatosensory cortices, as well as in the caudate nucleus of 6-OHDA-lesioned rats. The loss of DA neurons induced by MPTP in monkeys has no effect on 5-HT<sub>2A</sub> expression while chronic L-DOPA treatment specifically increases 5-HT<sub>2A</sub> receptor binding in the dorsomedial caudate nucleus of MPTP-treated monkeys [135].

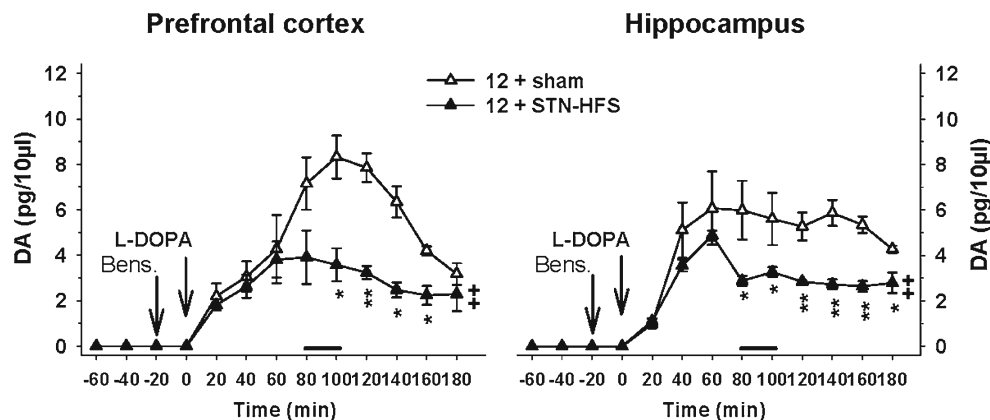
Concerning 5-HT<sub>2C</sub> receptors, their expression is decreased in the striatum but not in the STN of 6-OHDA rats without any change after L-DOPA treatment [133]. Interestingly, the increased expression of 5-HT<sub>2C</sub> receptors in the SNr of parkinsonian patients [136] appears to participate in the overactivity of this brain region by dampening the antiparkinsonian action of DA drugs in 6-OHDA rats primed with L-DOPA [123, 124]. Changes of 5-HT<sub>3</sub> receptor have also been reported after unilateral 6-OHDA lesion in rats showing a dysfunction and/or downregulation of 5-HT<sub>3</sub> receptors expressed on interneurons and pyramidal neurons of medial PFC [125, 137], but the effects of L-DOPA on these receptors have not yet been investigated.

All these receptors have been identified as putative therapeutic targets to improve L-DOPA therapy by reducing motor and non-motor side effects induced by L-DOPA [105, 122, 138–144]. Clinical studies have reported the ability of 5-HT<sub>2A</sub> antagonists to reduce hallucinations and psychosis induced by L-DOPA [145–148] in line with an increased 5-HT<sub>2A</sub> receptor binding in the ventral visual pathway, bilateral dorsolateral PFC, medial orbitofrontal cortex and insula of parkinsonian patients developing visual hallucinations [128, 145]. 5-HT<sub>2A</sub> antagonists have also been shown to alleviate L-DOPA-induced dyskinesias in parkinsonian patients [149] and MPTP-treated monkeys [150] and to improve motor impairments in MPTP-treated mice [151]. 5-HT<sub>2C</sub> antagonists have been proposed to reduce depression and improve motor function in depressed parkinsonian patients [138, 152]. The use of 5-HT<sub>3</sub> antagonists could help reducing excess cortical transmission

induced by L-DOPA in psychotic episodes without altering the motor score of patients [143, 144].

Other changes in 5-HT indexes have been associated with L-DOPA treatment and more specifically with motor side effects such as L-DOPA-induced dyskinesias (LIDs) [98]. In particular, studies in rats and marmosets [153, 154] have shown that chronic L-DOPA treatment alters the morphology of 5-HT neurons (increased SERT binding densities and sprouting of 5-HT varicosities with high synaptic incidence), an effect that underlies a maladaptive synaptic plasticity of 5-HT terminals that may predispose to dyskinesia [102, 153–158]. By using SERT binding and TPH immunolabeling, studies have consistently described a sprouting of 5-HT axon terminals in the DA-lesioned striatum and motor-premotor cortices of dyskinetic rats [153] and in caudate nucleus and putamen of MPTP-treated monkeys that develop LIDs [153, 154]. In parkinsonian patients, SERT binding levels are also significantly increased in both the putamen and globus pallidus of dyskinetic patients [153]. The 5-HT hyperinnervation and/or the marked hypertrophy of 5-HT axon varicosities could participate in the fluctuations of synaptic DA levels induced by L-DOPA treatment. The fluctuation of synaptic DA has been proposed to be responsible for the emergence of peak-dose dyskinesia in parkinsonian patients [28, 29, 92, 97, 108, 153].

In conclusion, the present data demonstrate that 5-HT neurons are the prime target of L-DOPA in the parkinsonian brain. This pathophysiological scenario results in an ectopic release of DA induced by L-DOPA together with an overall decrease in 5-HT transmission that occurs in a time- and



**Fig. 4** High-frequency stimulation of the subthalamic nucleus (STN-HFS) reduces L-DOPA-induced DA release in the prefrontal cortex and hippocampus of 6-OHDA-lesioned rats. The intraperitoneal administration of L-DOPA at 12 mg/kg (preceded by the intraperitoneal administration of the inhibitor of peripheral decarboxylase benserazide (Bens.) at 15 mg/kg; see vertical bars) increases DA extracellular levels in the prefrontal cortex (left panel) and the hippocampus (right panel) of 6-OHDA-lesioned rats. STN-HFS (130 Hz, 30 µA) applied for 20 min and starting 80 min after the injection of L-DOPA

significantly reduces L-DOPA-induced DA release in both brain regions ( $^{++}p < 0.01$  for 12+STN-HFS group versus 12+sham group, Student's *t* test). This effect of STN-HFS could be related to its inhibitory action on 5-HT neuronal activity in line with the ability of 5-HT<sub>1A/1B</sub> agonists to reduce L-DOPA-induced DA release through a reduction of 5-HT firing rate [91, 92].  $^{*}p < 0.05$ ,  $^{**}p < 0.01$  for each time point of the 12+STN-HFS group versus the corresponding time point of the 12+sham group, Student's *t* test. Figure taken from Navailles et al. [62]

region-dependent manner with L-DOPA medication, with changes of 5-HT receptor expression and 5-HT terminal morphology. These modifications have been associated with the emergence of numerous side effects, which has validated the use of 5-HT drugs (5-HT antagonists, SSRI...) in an attempt to reduce LIDs and/or cognitive, depressive and psychiatric complications in parkinsonian patients.

### HFS-STN and L-DOPA

In most parkinsonian patients, a resistance to dopatherapy and/or DA agonists and an aggravation of side effects induced by antiparkinsonian drugs develop over time, prompting the alternative use of the surgical approach of HFS-STN [159–162]. HFS-STN and L-DOPA are often concomitantly used in parkinsonian patients, which reduces L-DOPA-induced motor fluctuations [163–166]. The mechanisms underlying the improvement of motor symptoms remain unclear [167–169] despite the fact that this surgical strategy allows the discontinuation or large reduction in daily doses of L-DOPA or DA agonists [164, 170–172]. Of particular importance is the ability of HFS-STN to decrease LIDs in parkinsonian patients [159, 165, 166], although this has not been consistently reproduced in animal models, showing an exacerbation [173], a reduction [174] or no alteration [175] of LIDs.

According to the hypothesis that large fluctuations in synaptic DA levels are responsible for the emergence of peak-dose dyskinesias [29], clinical data have shown that the efficacy of HFS-STN to alleviate LIDs may rely on its ability to stabilize striatal synaptic DA concentrations in parkinsonian patients [176]. Preclinical studies have also reported either a prolongation of the increase in striatal DA release induced by a high dose of L-DOPA (50 mg/kg) in partially 6-OHDA-lesioned rats [177] or a dampening of the peak increase in DA release induced by a therapeutic dose of L-DOPA (12 mg/kg) in the PFC and HIPPO of fully 6-OHDA-lesioned rats ([62]; see Fig. 4). It has been proposed that the effects of HFS-STN and L-DOPA may rely on their ability to reduce central 5-HT transmission [62]. Both antiparkinsonian approaches reduce 5-HT release in the PFC, HIPPO and striatum through distinct mechanisms (cf. paragraphs II and III; [62]), an effect that may participate in the emergence of cognitive and depressive complications [9, 56, 178]. The combination of both approaches did not further inhibit 5-HT release in limbic structures [62] suggesting that it may not exacerbate the occurrence of these unwanted non-motor side effects associated with a decreased 5-HT function while limiting cognitive side effects such as pathological gambling or psychosis associated with excessive DA transmission [179–181].

### Conclusions

HFS-STN and L-DOPA therapies impact the 5-HT system. Both strategies tend to lower 5-HT release in various brain regions via different mechanisms. The decrease in 5-HT function occurs in a context of altered expression of various 5-HT receptors in the brain of parkinsonian patients and animal models of the disease. The 5-HT system being involved in virtually all functions attributed to the brain, and it is likely that it plays a pivotal role in the success of these two antiparkinsonian therapies. It cannot be excluded that the decrease in 5-HT function participates in the clinical superiority of these antiparkinsonian treatments compared to other medications. Nonetheless, the clinical and preclinical data suggest rather that the decrease in 5-HT function may lead to mood and cognitive disorders.

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