Effects of capsaicin on the metabolism of rheumatoid arthritis synoviocytes in vitro

M Matucci-Cerinic, S Marabini, S Jantsch, M Cagnoni, G Partsch

Abstract

The effects of capsaicin, the ingredient of hot pepper, on rheumatoid arthritis synoviocytes have been studied. Capsaicin was shown to have a direct action on the metabolism of synovial cells. Thus at $10^{-6}$ mol/l cell proliferation was noted while at $10^{-8}$ mol/l and at higher doses DNA synthesis was restored to the control level. Capsaicin at both doses induced an increase in the synthesis of collagenase and at the lower concentration ($10^{-8}$ mol/l) only of prostaglandin E₂.

These results indicate that the different effects of capsaicin on cellular proliferation and on metabolic activities are dependent on dose. The responses seen in rheumatoid arthritis synoviocytes in vitro might not be mediated by tachykinins if the synovial tissue is still able to produce neuropeptides in the absence of neuronal afferents. These results suggest that capsaicin, in addition to its direct action on the afferent nerve fibres and the consequent release of tachykinins, may also have a direct action on the cells. The mechanisms by which capsaicin stimulates DNA synthesis and production of collagenase and prostaglandin E₂, in a manner dependent on dose, remain to be determined.

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a disease characterised by chronic synovial inflammation leading to cartilage destruction, which is believed to result from the production of metabolites of arachidonic acid and proteases. 1, 2

Explants of RA synovial tissue are now in widespread use for in vitro culture of synoviocytes. These cultures, deprived of nervous system control, provide a useful experimental tool to study the cellular metabolism and the response to substances that may interfere with the inflammatory process.

Capsaicin, a homovanillic acid derivative (8-methyl-N-vanillyl-6-nonenamide), has been used as an experimental tool to investigate the functional and neurochemical characteristics of peptide containing primary sensory neurones. 3, 4 Recently, it has been used on humans for topical treatment of cluster headache, 5 herpes zoster, 6 and vasomotor rhinitis. 7

Systemic administration of capsaicin to newborn rats results in an irreversible, selective degeneration of a distinct population of small size B type primary afferent neurones located in spinal and cranial sensory ganglia. 8 Likewise, capsaicin given systematically to adult rats induces reversible damage in the same fibres. 9 One of the most important neurotoxic responses to capsaicin is the damage of mitochondria and the change of the nuclear shape. These modifications and the dilatation of endoplasmic reticulum and Golgi apparatus have been shown in a major subpopulation of B type neurones. 10, 11 The toxic effects of capsaicin have also been described in endothelial cells. 12

In rats with adjuvant arthritis subcutaneous pretreatment with capsaicin has been shown to moderate synovitis 13 and attenuate the increase in substance P content, due to arthritis, in various nervous tissues. 13, 14 Inman and coworkers showed that intra-articular capsaicin can moderate the severity of synovitis in cats. 15 On the other hand, acute administration of capsaicin to adult rats results in a substantial depletion, from primary afferent fibres, of substance P and other tachykinins 16, 17 that are considered the putative mediators of neurogenic inflammation. 18, 19

Yaksh showed that when capsaicin was given intra-articularly in vivo in the cat substance P like immunoreactivity was evoked in the synovial fluid. 20

It thus seems that (a) tachykinins are present in the synovial fluid, (b) they can be released by capsaicin, and (c) capsaicin treatment has beneficial effects in adjuvant arthritis. But is there a correlation between depletion of tachykinins and the beneficial effect of capsaicin? Might capsaicin have a direct action on the synovial tissue independent of its effect on afferent fibres? At present there are no published results on the effects of capsaicin on RA synovial cell cultures.

In our study we investigated the effect of capsaicin on various metabolic functions of RA synoviocytes, studying both DNA and RNA synthesis and also the production of collagenase and prostaglandin E₂ (PGE₂).

Materials and methods

RADIOLABELLED SUBSTANCES

Methyl [³H]thymidine (specific activity 3·1 TBq/mmol, 5·1·H]uridine (specific activity 1·1 TBq/mmol), and 1·1·Claccteic anhydride (specific activity 370 MBq/mmol), all from NEN Chemicals, USA, were used.

PREPARATION OF SYNOVIAL CELLS

Synovial tissue was obtained from patients with definite RA undergoing reconstructive joint surgery.

Cultures of synovial cells were grown in Parker 199 medium (supplemented with 2 mM L-glutamine, 100 U/ml penicillin, 100 μg/ml
Effects of capsaicin on rheumatoid arthritis synoviocytes

DNA SYNTHESIS
The mitogenic effect of capsaicin was measured according to Partsch et al.21 with [3H]thymidine as a precursor for DNA. Briefly: 2×10^6 cells in 100 μl medium were seeded into microwell plates. After 24 hours the Parker 199 medium was changed and replaced by new medium. Capsaicin (10 μl) was added to obtain the final concentrations shown in the figures. After 24 hours, synoviocytes were labelled with 37 kBq [3H]thymidine and incubated for a further 18 hours. The medium was discharged, the cells were washed several times with Hank’s solution and then covered with 100 μl of 10% trichloroacetic acid for 20 minutes. Methanol (100 μl) was added, removed after 10 minutes, and the cells were dried by a stream of air. The cells were then lysed in 100 μl 0-5 N NaOH for three hours at 37°C, the supernatant was well mixed, and the radioactivity in 50 μl of supernatant was measured by a Packard scintillation counter using Instagel (Packard, USA).

RNA SYNTHESIS
RNA synthesis was evaluated by increasing [3H]-uridine incorporation into confluent synovial cells according to the methods of Partsch et al21 and Schmid et al22 with some modifications. Cells (2×5×10^6) were seeded in 24 well culture plates (0-5 ml medium) and kept for six days until they were confluent. The medium was changed at day 3. Confluent cells were held for one hour in 0-5 ml of a protein free medium (Hanks’s solution), which was replaced by 0-5 ml of medium (Parker 199 plus 2 g/l human albumin and 1 μM uridine: Sigma Co, USA). The substances under study (50 μl) were added and the cells incubated for four hours. Cells were labelled with 37 kBq [3H]uridine and incubation continued for 18 hours. Trichloroacetic acid treatment and washing were the same as for the DNA experiments. The cells were then lysed in 0-3 ml N NaOH for two hours at 37°C, the solution was diluted with 0-7 ml distilled water, and 0-9 ml solution used for the measurement of radioactivity (Instagel; Packard, USA).

COLLAGENASE
Preparation of radiolabelled collagen
Collagenase release from RA synoviocytes cultured in medium, in the presence of capsaicin, was studied according to the method of Johnson-Wint.23

Collagenase assay
Release of collagenase was measured in the medium of six RA synoviocyte cultures. Cells (10^6) were plated in 24 well tissue culture plates, as described by Lotz et al.24 After six days of culture the cells were washed three times with Hank’s solution and replaced by 0-5 ml medium (Parker 199) free from fetal calf serum. After the addition of 50 μl of capsaicin (final concentration as given in ‘Methods’) cells were incubated for a further 48 hours. The supernatants were centrifuged at 12 000 rpm and frozen at -70°C. The supernatant (500 μl) was treated with 5 μl trypsin (100 μg/ml medium, type III; Sigma, USA) for 10 minutes at 25°C to activate latent collagenase. Then 10 μl soybean trypsin inhibitor (type I-S; Sigma, USA) was added and the solution left for 20 minutes at room temperature. Portions of the solution (200 μl) were placed in the wells coated with [14C]labelled collagen. After an incubation of three hours at 37°C the radioactivity in 150 μl was counted by liquid scintillation spectrometry using Instagel (Packard, USA). Fresh culture medium that had been treated in the same way was used as control. The disintegrations per minute of the control were subtracted from the mean values obtained from the synoviocyte supernatant.

PROSTAGLANDIN
The influence of capsaicin on the PGE2 synthesis of synoviocytes was studied by the method of Lotz et al,24 with some modifications.

Cells for culture were kept in 24 well Nunc plates with 0-5 ml medium. Cells (2×10^6) were inoculated in medium plus 15% fetal calf serum and HEPES (N-2-hydroxyethylpiperazine-N'-2-ethanesulphonic acid). The next day the medium was replaced by fresh medium and the cells cultivated for one week up to confluency. The medium was then changed and replaced by fresh medium containing capsaicin (50 μl). The cells were incubated for a further 48 hours and then the medium was collected and centrifuged. Cell free supernatant (450 μl) was put into polypropylene tubes and stored at -70°C for further treatment. Extraction of PGE2 was as follows: 450 μl of the medium were brought to pH 3-5 with 0-5 N HCl. Ethyl acetate (2 ml) was added, the samples shaken for 30 seconds, and
centrifuged at 1500 g. From the organic phase 200 μl were taken and evaporated to dryness. The residue was dissolved in 600 μl distilled water and from this solution 20 μl used in a radioimmunoassay kit (NEN Products, West Germany). The radioactivity was measured in a gammacounter. Standard PGE₂ was also added to the medium and extracted in the same way as the samples. Recovery of PGE₂ was about 96%. The counts were calculated by a standard curve and the results expressed as a percentage of the control PGE₂.

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS
The statistical significance of the results for the six cultures was examined with a parameter free Wilcoxon signed rank test. The course of the individual cultures and their mean values are both shown in the figures.

Results
NUCLEIC ACID SYNTHESIS
DNA synthesis
Cell proliferation was studied by measuring thymidine incorporation into synoviocytes in the presence of increasing concentrations of capsaicin (10⁻⁸ to 10⁻³ mol/l) (fig 1). In comparison with baseline controls the maximal significant (p<0.05) increase of thymidine incorporation was obtained with capsaicin at 10⁻⁶ mol/l. Concentrations of capsaicin 10⁻⁵ mol/l and higher did not induce a statistically significant thymidine incorporation.

RNA synthesis
The results indicate that capsaicin did not cause any statistically significant change in uridine incorporation at any of the concentrations tested.

COLLAGENASE
Each concentration of capsaicin from 10⁻⁸ to 10⁻³ mol/l significantly increased the release of collagenase from synoviocytes into the medium (fig 2). The highest stimulation occurred at a capsaicin concentration of 10⁻⁶ mol/l (p<0.05). Stimulation of collagenase synthesis was less but still significant at higher doses of capsaicin also (p<0.05).

PROSTAGLANDIN E₂
Figure 3 shows the results for PGE₂ production. Clearly, rising concentrations of capsaicin increased the synthesis of PGE₂ by RA synoviocytes. In comparison with controls maximal stimulation of PGE₂ production occurred at a capsaicin concentration of 10⁻⁵ mol/l (p<0.05).

Higher concentrations caused a statistically significant progressive reduction of PGE₂ synthesis when compared with 10⁻⁸ mol/l. A peculiar inhibition of PGE₂ synthesis in comparison with controls was found at 10⁻³ mol/l.
Effects of capsaicin on rheumatoid arthritis synoviocytes

Discussion

This study shows that capsaicin exerts a direct action on the metabolism of synovioblasts obtained from RA. The data suggest that capsaicin can induce cell proliferation at low concentrations (10^-6 mol/l) while higher concentrations restore the cellular DNA synthesis to the level of controls. Capsaicin at low concentrations (10^-8 mol/l) has also been shown to increase the synthesis of collagenases and prostaglandins. At higher concentrations the release of collagenases and prostaglandins into the culture medium by rheumatoid synoviocytes was reduced. These results suggest that capsaicin may have different actions on cellular proliferation and on metabolic activities. Inflamed synovial tissue is known to proliferate rapidly and to produce high concentrations of collagenases and prostaglandins.1

Collagenase is a major product of fibroblasts,2 6 and it is apparent that fibroblasts have multiple mechanisms which regulate the activity and synthesis of the enzyme.4 27 28

Cultures of RA synovial tissue produce large amounts of collagenase, which can initiate breakdown of types I, II, and III interstitial collagens, thus giving this enzyme a major role in the degradation of connective tissue in both normal and pathological conditions. 2

Therefore production of collagenase and PGE2 by RA synoviocytes is of potential importance in the degradation of articular cartilage and adjacent joint structures. Indeed, PGE2, an inflammatory lipid mediator, may have an additional role in provoking several effects, one of which might be inducing bone resorption.

Other authors have shown that capsaicin can induce PGE2 release in homogenates of seminal vesicles.29 In particular, it has been shown that capsaicin induces PGE2 release after chronic denervation of the rabbit ear, suggesting that capsaicin may exert other effects besides those mediated through sensory nerve stimulation.30

Capsaicin and its analogues deplete tachykinins in primary sensory neurons causing vasodilatation and neuronal plasma extravasation.31 These effects may be due, at least in part, to the release of substance P and other tachykinins. Recently, it has been suggested that substance P activates RA synoviocytes32 to produce collagenase and PGE2 and cytokines.33 Furthermore, other authors34 35 36 have suggested that neurogenic inflammation might have a role in the pathogenesis of RA. For tachykinins it is interesting that this treatment with somatostatin, which is known to inhibit the release of substance P from peripheral terminals of primary afferent neurons,35 is effective in RA36 and psoriatic arthritis.37 38

In our study the modifications induced by capsaicin in RA synoviocytes are, as far as we know, not mediated by tachykinins as they were found in isolated synoviocytes in the absence of neuronal tissue. We cannot, however, exclude the possibility that synoviocytes themselves might be able to produce neuropeptides. These results suggest that capsaicin, in addition to its direct action on the afferent nerve fibres with consequent release of tachykinins, also acts directly on synovial cells. An increase of sodium influx, intracellular accumulation of NaCl, and the consequent osmotic changes have been implicated as the mechanisms responsible for the neurotoxic action of capsaicin in cultured sensory neurons.39 40 The mechanism by which capsaicin stimulates DNA synthesis and production of collagenase and PGE2, however, in a manner dependent on dose, remains to be determined.

The authors thank Professor D Regoli, department of pharmacology, the University of Sherbrooke, for his helpful advice and for text corrections.

This work was supported by CNR, Rome, Italy (Progetto Finalizzato Chimica Fine Seconda). It was partly supported by the Austrian National Bank (Funds No. 2951).

References

18 Lembcke F, Hoklev P. Substance P as a neurogenic mediator of antinociception and plasma extravasation. Naunyn Schmiedebergs Arch Pharmacol 1979; 310: 75-183.


