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STUDIES OF AMYLOID PRECURSOR PROTEIN TRAFFICKING AND PROCESSING

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Studies of amyloid precursor protein trafficking and processing

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ABSTRACT

Alzheimer's disease (AD) is the most common form of neurodegenerative disease that slowly impairs memory and thinking abilities. Abnormal accumulation and aggregation of amyloid β peptides ($A\beta$), derived from proteolytic cleavage of the amyloid precursor protein (APP), is thought to be one of the critical triggers in the pathogenesis. The trafficking and processing of APP is a complex process which can be regulated by many proteins. This thesis aims to expand our understanding of mechanisms that regulate processing and trafficking of APP.

Study I aims to characterize the synaptic distribution of APP. We found that under normal conditions APP primarily distributed as fragments at synapses. Deletion of BACE1 led to an accumulation of APP C-terminal epitopes at synapses where APP N-terminal epitopes are present. A similar co-localization between APP N-terminals and C-terminals was also induced by pharmacological BACE1 inhibition. Moreover, proximity ligation assay revealed that the accumulation of APP C-terminals occurred in the presynaptic compartment. These results suggest that APP is primarily delivered to synapses as cleaved fragments, while full-length APP can be transported to the presynaptic compartment under conditions of reduced BACE1 activity.

Study II aims to evaluate mechanisms for how exercise and BDNF regulate α -cleavage of APP. It has been suggested that regular exercise can reduce $A\beta$ production. Moreover, exercise was suggested to enhance cognitive capacity, in which BDNF may contribute. We found that while the production of $A\beta$ was reduced, the levels of sAPP α and BDNF were increased by exercise in a transgenic AD mouse model. Moreover, BDNF treatment was found to reduce $A\beta$ production by regulating α -secretase activity. These results suggest that exercise and BDNF reduce $A\beta$ production by enhancing α -secretase processing of APP.

Study III and **IV** involve two members from the protein family of sorting nexins (SNXs), which have diverse functions in protein sorting and trafficking.

Study III aims to elucidate the role of SNX3 in APP trafficking and processing as well as in $A\beta$ production. In this study, the expression of SNX3 was manipulated by overexpression. We found that overexpression of SNX3 reduced the formation of $A\beta$. Moreover, SNX3 overexpression disturbed the association between APP and BACE1, and reduced APP internalization. While no change in BACE1 levels was found, APP levels were significantly decreased by SNX3 overexpression. These results suggest that overexpression of SNX3 decreases $A\beta$ production by reducing internalization of APP.

Study IV aims to test the involvement of SNX7 in $A\beta$ production and APP processing. We found that overexpression of SNX7 decreased the levels of APP derived fragments, including $A\beta$. The cell surface and steady-state levels of APP, but not BACE1 were decreased by SNX7 overexpression. Moreover, the reduction of steady-state levels of APP was prevented by lysosomal inhibitors. Taken together, these results suggest that overexpression of SNX7 reduces $A\beta$ production by enhancing lysosomal degradation of APP.

In summary, we have examined mechanisms that regulate APP trafficking and processing, which may help develop novel therapeutic strategies for AD.

LIST OF SCIENTIFIC PAPERS

- I. Saket M. Nigam, **Shaohua Xu**, Frauke Ackermann, Joshua A. Gregory, Johan Lundkvist, Urban Lendahl, Lennart Brodin.
Endogenous APP accumulates in synapses after BACE1 inhibition. *Neurosci Res.* 2016 Aug;109:9-15.
- II. Saket M. Nigam, **Shaohua Xu**, Joanna S. Kritikou, Krisztina Marosi, Lennart Brodin, Mark P. Mattson.
Exercise and BDNF reduce A β production by enhancing α -secretase processing of APP. *J Neurochem.* 2017 Jul;142(2):286-296.
- III. **Shaohua Xu**, Saket M. Nigam, Lennart Brodin.
Overexpression of SNX3 decreases amyloid- β peptide production by reducing internalization of amyloid precursor protein. *Manuscript.*
- IV. **Shaohua Xu**, Lu Zhang, Lennart Brodin.
Overexpression of SNX7 reduces A β production by enhancing lysosomal degradation of APP. *Biochem Biophys Res Commun.* 2017 Nov 2.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AD	Alzheimer's disease
ADAM	A disintegrin and metalloproteinase
ADP	Adenosine diphosphate
AICD	APP intracellular domain
AP-2	Adaptor related protein complex 2
APBA	APP binding family A
APLP	APP-like protein
ApoE	Apolipoprotein E
APP	Amyloid precursor protein
ARF6	ADP ribosylation factor 6
A β	Amyloid β
BACE1	Beta-site APP cleaving enzyme 1
BAR	Bin-Amphiphysin-Rvs
BBS	α -bungarotoxin-binding site
BDNF	Brain derived neurotrophic factor
BiFC	Bimolecular fluorescence complementation
CHL1	Neural cell adhesion molecule L1-like protein
CTF	C-terminal fragment
ER	Endoplasmic reticulum
GGA	Golgi-localized, γ -adaptin ear-containing, ADP ribosylation factor binding protein
GTPase	Guanosine triphosphate hydrolase
HEK293T	Human embryonic kidney cells 293T
L1	L1 cell adhesion molecule
LDLR	Low density lipoprotein receptor
LRP	Low density lipoprotein receptor related protein
NADPH	Nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide phosphate
NMDA	N-Methyl-D-aspartate
NRG1	Neuregulin 1
PI3P	Phosphatidylinositol 3-phosphate

PI(3,4,5)P3	Phosphatidylinositol (3,4,5)-trisphosphate
PI(3,5)P2	Phosphatidylinositol 3,5-bisphosphate
PI(4,5)P2	Phosphatidylinositol 4,5-bisphosphate
PLA	Proximity ligation assay
PX	Phox homology
RA	Retinoic acid
SAP97	Synapse-associated protein 97; also known as discs large MAGUK scaffold protein 1 (DLG1)
SH3	Src Homology 3
SNX	Sorting nexin
SV2	Synaptic vesicle glycoprotein 2
TGN	<i>Trans</i> -Golgi network

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE (AD)

Alzheimer's disease (AD) is the most common form of dementia in the elderly that slowly impairs memory and thinking abilities. Since its first description in 1906 by Dr. Alois Alzheimer, many efforts have been placed on the investigation of underlying mechanisms and on the development of therapeutic approaches. However, the pathological mechanisms of AD remain incompletely understood and no treatment is so far available to cure the disease.

AD is mainly featured by two pathological hallmarks: amyloid plaques and neurofibrillary tangles, as well as by synapse loss [1, 2]. Amyloid plaques are extracellular deposits largely composed of amyloid β peptides ($A\beta$), and neurofibrillary tangles are intracellular accumulations of abnormally phosphorylated tau protein. The relationships between the pathological features and the underlying mechanisms of AD have been controversial, and several hypotheses have been proposed, such as the amyloid cascade hypothesis, tau hypothesis, oxidative stress hypothesis and inflammation hypothesis [3]. Although no single hypothesis can fully explain the pathogenesis of AD, the amyloid cascade hypothesis is the most renowned proposal.

In the amyloid cascade hypothesis, abnormal accumulation and aggregation of amyloid β peptides ($A\beta$) is thought to be a critical trigger in the pathogenesis of AD [4, 5]. Amyloid β ($A\beta$) is generated through sequential cleavage of the amyloid precursor protein (APP). Multiple $A\beta$ peptides with different lengths have been described. The predominant peptide has 40 amino acids ($A\beta_{40}$ or $A\beta_{1-40}$), whereas $A\beta_{42}$ is more prone to aggregate. $A\beta$ can exist in several different assembly forms, of which three major groups are monomers, soluble oligomers, and insoluble fibrils [6]. The mechanism of $A\beta$ aggregation is not fully understood, but it has been suggested that this process can be modulated by $A\beta$ concentration, $A\beta$ mutations and lengths, chemical modifications, lipid composition of membrane, and

cofactors such as the cholesterol carrier protein ApoE and metals [7, 8]. Soluble oligomers are believed to be the most toxic form, and they can induce numerous toxicities. For instance, it was found that A β oligomers can induce hyperphosphorylation of tau [9]. Tau is a microtubule associated protein which can stabilize the microtubule network. Abnormal hyperphosphorylation of tau promotes the protein to dissociate from the microtubules and to aggregate into neurofibrillary tangles [10]. Moreover, it has been suggested that A β oligomers can disrupt the function of a number of receptors, such as the NMDA receptor, the NGF receptor, and the cellular prion protein (PrPC), leading to synaptic dysfunction and neuronal death [11]. Synapses are specialized structures in neurons that propagate signals, and synapse loss correlates strongly with the cognitive decline in AD [12].

It is also important to note that A β , which is present at a low concentration in healthy individuals [13], is a physiological product. A β has been ascribed several physiological functions such as regulation of synaptic activity and involvement in memory formation [14, 15]. In AD, because A β accumulates at a much higher level, it is prone to aggregate into deleterious oligomers.

AD is a multifactorial brain disorder. It has been suggested that genetic, environmental, and life-style factors can contribute to the development of disease. Inherited familial AD has been mainly linked with three genes: APP, PSEN1 and PSEN2; and an additional copy of chromosome 21, where the APP gene resides, can cause AD type pathology. In addition, several genetic risk factors have been linked with AD, including ApoE ϵ 4 [16]. Exercise, among other life-style factors, was found to reduce the risk of developing AD [17].

Moreover, it has been suggested that exercise can enhance cognitive capacity by increasing the mRNA and protein levels of BDNF (brain derived neurotrophic factor), a neurotrophic protein which is involved in the regulation of long-term potentiation and synaptic plasticity [18].

1.2 AMYLOID PRECURSOR PROTEIN (APP)

Amyloid precursor protein (APP), together with APP-like proteins (APLPs) APLP1 and APLP2, belongs to an evolutionarily conserved protein family. These proteins have a similar domain structure, and share partially overlapping functions. They can also exhibit distinct functions: by analyzing different knockout mice (single knockout, double knockout, triple knockout), it has become clear that loss-of-function in one gene can not be fully compensated by others [19]. Notably, among them APP is the only one that can give rise to A β .

APP is a type I transmembrane protein with multiple functional domains. It has a large extracellular region, in which several domains have been described to be implicated in functions such as dimerization and cell adhesion [20]. In the short cytoplasmic tail of APP, there is a YENPTY motif which contributes to the internalization of APP and also to interactions with adaptor proteins [2]. APP has multiple isoforms, the three major ones being APP₆₉₅, APP₇₅₁ and APP₇₇₀. APP₆₉₅ is the one that is predominantly expressed in neurons [2]. APP can undergo sequential cleavages to produce several different APP fragments (see section 1.2.1).

In addition to the functions mediated by its fragments, APP, as a full-length protein, has been ascribed a number of functions. It was found that APP at the cell surface can form *trans*-dimers with APP or its homologs to promote cell-cell adhesion [21], suggesting that full-length APP may serve as a cell adhesion molecule. It has been proposed that APP may resemble a cell surface receptor [22, 23], and that the potential transsynaptic interaction between presynaptic and postsynaptic APP may promote synaptogenesis [24]. Moreover, fibrillar A β can bind to the cell surface APP [25], and the homodimerization of full-length APP can be induced by soluble A β [26], indicating that full-length APP may contribute to the signaling of A β toxicity. These findings suggest that APP can exhibit certain important functions as a full-length protein. However, its physiological functions largely remain unclear.

1.2.1 APP processing

APP can undergo sequential cleavages in two routes: the non-amyloidogenic pathway and the amyloidogenic pathway [27, 28]. APP processing mainly involves three secretases: α -, β -, and γ -secretase. As shown in Fig. 1, in the non-amyloidogenic pathway, APP is initially cleaved by α -secretase within the extracellular region to release a soluble N-terminal fragment, sAPP α ; the remaining membrane-tethered C-terminal fragment, CTF α , can be further cleaved by γ -secretase to produce P3 peptides and an APP intracellular domain (AICD). Alternatively, in the amyloidogenic pathway, APP cleavage by β -secretase yields sAPP β and CTF β , the latter subsequently being cleaved by γ -secretase to generate A β and AICD.

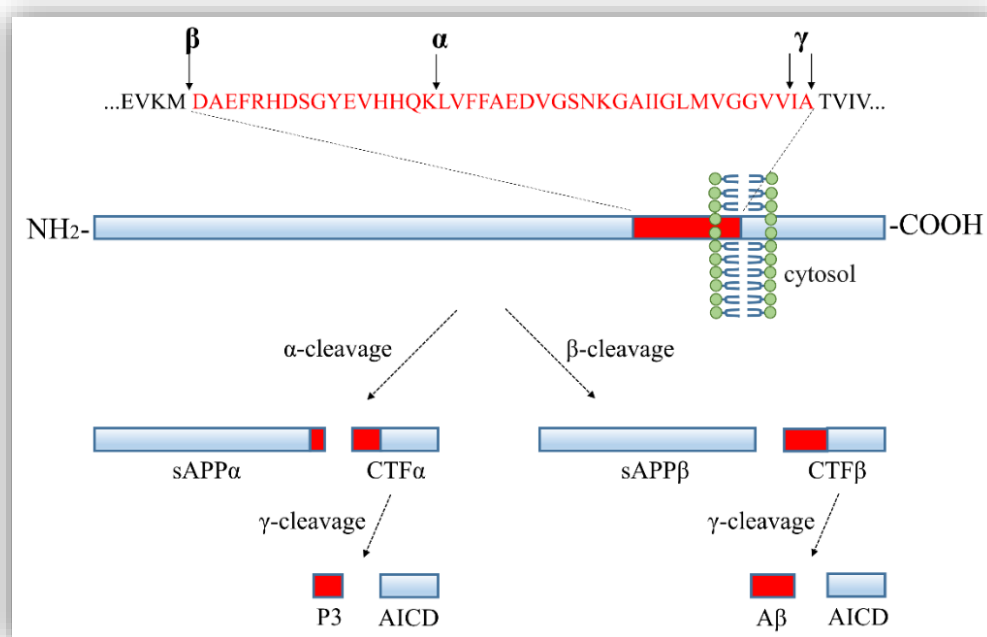


Fig. 1. Schematic diagram of APP processing. APP is a single-pass transmembrane protein with a large extracellular region and a short cytoplasmic tail. APP processing by α -, β -, and γ -secretase can occur in two routes to generate different APP derived fragments [27, 28]. The A β region is highlighted in red, and the secretase cleavage sites are shown along with the amino acid sequence of A β .

1.2.2 APP derived fragments

sAPP α and sAPP β

sAPP α is generally thought to be beneficial to neurons [29]. It was found that sAPP α can facilitate neuritogenesis and LTP (long-term potentiation) [30]. Moreover, it has been shown that sAPP α can attenuate most of the deficits of APP knockout mice [31]. It may also be involved in cell proliferation [29, 30] and some other functions [32]. Recently it was found that sAPP α can inhibit β -cleavage of APP and A β production [33], suggesting that the neuroprotective functions of sAPP α may be partially dependent on pathways which are controlled by the APP β -cleaved fragments. sAPP β is short of the C-terminal 16 amino acids in sAPP α . Similar to sAPP α it may also exhibit neuroprotective functions, but the effect is much less prominent [30] and may even be absent [29].

CTF α and CTF β

Both CTF α and CTF β are intermediate products during APP processing. CTF α can be derived by α -cleavage of APP as well as of CTF β [34]. At present, the physiological function of CTF α is not clear. CTF β was suggested to be neurotoxic [35]. In addition to being the precursor of A β , it has been implicated in endocytic dysfunction [36] and lysosomal pathology [37] independent of A β .

P3 and AICD

Possibly P3 can exhibit certain toxicity [38], but its physiological functions remain to be explored. AICD is considered to be involved in the regulation of transcriptional activity, in which the YENPTY motif and interactions with adaptor proteins may be essential [35, 39]. Importantly, it has been suggested that AICD targets genes including APP and BACE1 [39], suggesting that there may be a feedback mechanism for the regulation of APP processing.

1.2.3 Subcellular trafficking of APP

APP trafficking is a complex process which is spatially and temporally regulated [28, 40-43]. After synthesis and initial modifications in the ER (endoplasmic reticulum), APP is transported to the Golgi apparatus and *trans*-Golgi network (TGN) where it undergoes full maturation involving multiple posttranslational modifications. A fraction of APP is delivered from the TGN to the plasma membrane where α -cleavage can take place. Non-cleaved APP is internalized via clathrin-mediated endocytosis to endosomes where β -cleavage predominantly occurs. From endosomes, remaining APP can be sorted into three routes [42]: retrograde transport to the TGN, recycling back to the cell surface, and delivery to lysosomes.

The retrograde transport of APP can be regulated by many proteins, one significant factor of which is the retromer complex. The retromer is a multiprotein complex that regulates protein retrieval from endosomes to the TGN. Interestingly, it has also been implicated in protein recycling back to the cell surface [44]. It is believed that in mammals the retromer complex contains a cargo recognition subunit composed of VPS26, VPS29 and VPS35, and a SNX dimer subunit formed by different dimeric combinations of SNX1 or SNX2 with SNX5 or SNX6 [45]. In addition, at least two alternative retromer complexes may exist: SNX27-retromer and SNX3-retromer [44, 46]. It has been found that these retromers are involved in retrograde trafficking of different cargos [46], and some of them have been implicated in APP trafficking [47, 48]. The recycling of APP back to the cell surface is not fully understood, and recently it was found that SNX15, in addition to SNX27 [47], may be involved in this process [49]. The degradation of APP occurs in lysosomes [50].

The trafficking of APP can be regulated by many other proteins, such as proteins in the Rab GTPase family, in the LDLR (low density lipoprotein receptor) family and in the APBA/MINT family [41, 43]. Importantly, several SNXs (sorting nexins) have been implicated in APP trafficking by different mechanisms (see section 1.4.4).

1.3 SECRETASES FOR APP

1.3.1 α -secretase

It was proposed that in neurons the α -secretase cleavage of APP is constitutively executed by ADAM10 [51], a member of the ADAM (A disintegrin and metalloproteinase) family [52]. In addition, α -secretase cleavage of APP may be induced above the basal level by stimuli, which is referred to as regulated α -secretase cleavage [53]. Although not fully examined, several ADAMs have been implicated in regulated α -secretase cleavage. For instance, ADAM17 was found to contribute to the phorbol ester PMA stimulated APP α -cleavage [54]; and interestingly ADAM10 has also been involved in regulated APP α -cleavage by stimulation with the neuropeptide pituitary adenylate cyclase-activating polypeptide (PACAP) [55], and the drug acitretin [56]. The above findings indicate that ADAM10 plays a significant role in the α -secretase cleavage of APP. It has been suggested that regulated α -secretase cleavage of APP primarily occurs in the TGN, while constitutive α -cleavage takes place at the cell surface [57-59].

Although little is known about the intracellular trafficking of ADAM10, several proteins have been found to be involved in α -cleavage of APP. For instance, SAP97 (synapse-associated protein 97) was found to regulate ADAM10 trafficking and α -secretase activity by a protein interaction through its SH3 (Src Homology 3) domain [60]. Moreover, it was revealed that the intracellular region of ADAM10 can interact with many SH3 domain-containing proteins, such as SNXs and PACSINs [61], suggesting that these proteins may also influence ADAM10-mediated cleavage. Indeed, for example, one of these proteins, SNX33, was found to promote α -cleavage of APP [62]. However, the functions of these proteins in ADAM10 trafficking and in ADAM10 cleavage of APP remain to be explored.

1.3.2 β -secretase

With its β -secretase activity first reported in 1999 [63-66], BACE1 is now widely accepted as the principal β -secretase in the brain. BACE1 is a type I transmembrane aspartic protease with multiple domains including a cytosolic domain which contains an acidic cluster-dileucine (ACDL) motif (DXXLL, where X denotes a nonconserved residue).

After synthesis BACE1 is delivered to the plasma membrane. BACE1 can be internalized from the cell surface to early endosomes, and from endosomes it can undergo retrograde transport to the TGN, recycling to the cell surface, and delivery to lysosomes [67].

It was found that internalization of BACE1 to early endosomes is controlled by the small GTPase ARF6 (ADP ribosylation factor 6) [68], which is clathrin-independent. Moreover, it has been proposed that BACE1 internalization can also occur through clathrin/AP-2-dependent endocytosis [69, 70]. The ACDL in BACE1 (DISLL), which has been implicated in the internalization of BACE1 [71], appears to be mainly responsible for the association between BACE1 and the AP-2 complex [69]. In both the above cases, the dileucine motif was revealed to be essential in targeting BACE1 to early endosomes [68-70]. In addition, the ACDL motif was found to be involved in the interactions with the VHS domains in GGAs (Golgi-localized, γ -adaptin ear-containing, ADP ribosylation factor binding proteins) [72], which are a group of clathrin adaptors implicated in protein trafficking between endosomes and the TGN [73]. Therefore, it is not surprising that the retrograde transport of BACE1 can be regulated by GGAs [74, 75]. The associations between the dileucine motif and GGAs are enhanced by phosphorylation on the serine residue in ACDL (DISLL) [72, 76]. And it was suggested that phosphorylation on the ACDL motif can promote the retrograde transport of BACE1, whereas non-phosphorylated BACE1 is sorted to the plasma membrane [74]. Recycling of BACE1 back to the cell surface was recently found to be regulated by the GTPase Rab11 [77]. It is thought that the degradation of BACE1 can occur via the lysosomal

pathway [78] as well as the proteasomal pathway [79]. It is important to note that the trafficking of BACE1 involves many other proteins, including SNXs. It has been shown that SNX6, SNX12 and SNX4 can regulate BACE1 trafficking by different mechanisms (see section 1.4.4).

The activity of β -secretase was found to be increased in the AD brain [80]. Given that BACE1 cleavage of APP is the initial and putatively rate-limiting step in A β production [81], it has been viewed as a prime drug target for AD therapy. However, besides APP, BACE1 has numerous substrates [82], including CHL1 (neural cell adhesion molecule L1-like protein), NRG1 (neuregulin 1) and SCN2B (sodium channel subunit β -2), suggesting that it can display many different physiological functions by processing its substrates. Indeed, it has been revealed that BACE1^(-/-) mice exhibit complex neurological defects, such as axon guidance defects, hypomyelination and seizures, in which different BACE1 substrates may be involved [83, 84].

BACE1 activity has an acidic pH optimum, and it is primarily localized in acidic intracellular organelles, such as TGN and endosomes [84]. Endosomes are considered to be the site where β -cleavage of APP mainly takes place [77, 85]. Moreover, BACE1 cleavage of APP, but not NRG1 and L1 whose cleavage appears to be endocytosis-independent, was found to be selectively inhibited by an endosomally targeted β -secretase inhibitor [85]. Therefore, specifically targeting BACE1 activity in endosomes could be a promising therapeutic strategy.

After the identification of BACE1, a homolog, BACE2 [86], was described. BACE2 has a low neuronal expression and preferred cleavage site within the A β sequence, making it unlikely to be a major β -secretase in the brain [83]. Instead, it was suggested to be involved in Down syndrome (DS) given that the gene is located on chromosome 21 and its expression is increased in DS patients [84].

1.3.3 γ -secretase

The γ -secretase is a multiprotein complex which is composed of presenilin (PSEN1 or PSEN2), nicastrin (NCT), anterior pharynx defective-1 (APH-1), and presenilin enhancer-2 (PEN-2) [87]. The assembly, maturation and trafficking of γ -secretase is a very complex process [88, 89].

γ -secretase has been shown to be a challenging drug target for AD therapy in that it has a wide range of substrates [90]. APP can be cleaved by γ -secretase at multiple sites to generate A β species with different C-terminals, ranging in length from 34 to 43 residues. Another significant substrate is the Notch protein, which has been implicated in numerous developmental and homeostatic processes [91]. Clinical trials have shown that γ -secretase inhibitors can cause significant side effects [92], possibly due to interference of cleavage of non-APP substrates, such as Notch. The activity of γ -secretase can be regulated by many proteins [93], one of them is the γ -secretase activating protein (GSAP) [94]. It was found that GSAP can influence A β production without affecting the cleavage of Notch [94]. These results indicate that γ -secretase may cleave its substrates by different mechanisms, suggesting that γ -cleavage of APP can be selectively modulated. Indeed, it was reported that some compounds can selectively inhibit the activity of γ -secretase in A β production while leaving the proteolysis of Notch intact [95]. Moreover, it was found that a class of compounds, referred to as the γ -secretase modulators, can shift A β production from A β 42 to less pathogenic forms without changing the total amount of A β [93, 96]. It has been proposed that two strategies based on modification of the γ -secretase activity can be applied to develop treatments for AD [59]: 1) to develop γ -secretase inhibitors which are substrate-selective for APP; and 2) to develop efficient γ -secretase modulators.

1.3.4 Interplay of the α -, β -, and γ -secretase

γ -cleavage occurs following α - or β - cleavage of APP. However, the activities of α -, β -, and γ -secretase are not absolutely separated. It was revealed that in neurons inhibition of BACE1 is coupled with increased ADAM10 cleavage of APP [97]. ADAM10 was found to interact with γ -secretase [98]. Moreover, it has been shown that NCT and PSEN1 can bind to BACE1, and possibly regulate its maturation and activity [99-101]. But no interaction between ADAM10 and BACE1 was found [98]. These findings suggest that α - and β -secretase can form different complexes with γ -secretase to regulate different sequential cleavages of APP.

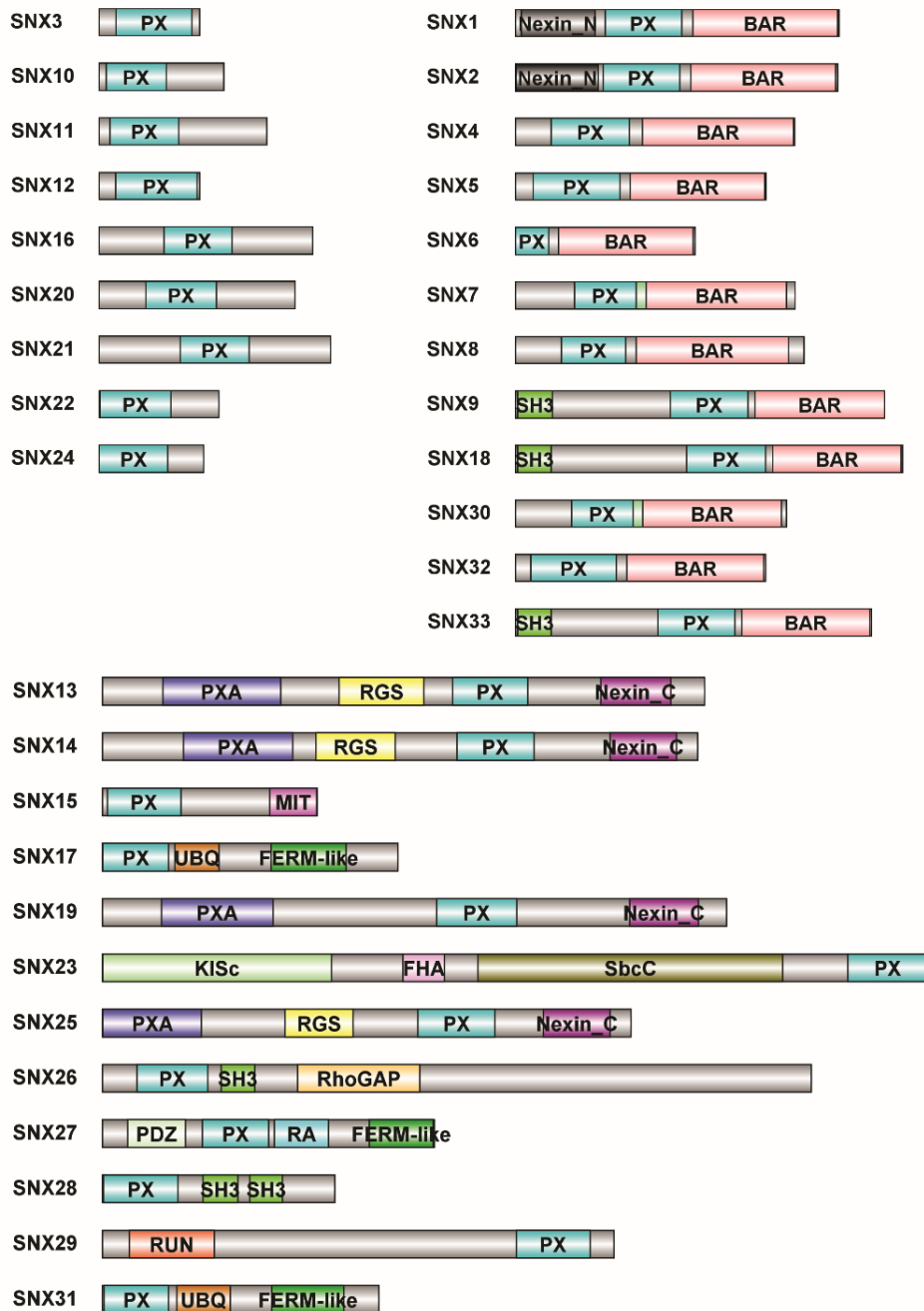
Therefore, it may be a good strategy to target the association between secretases while leaving the secretases activity unimpaired. Indeed, it has been reported that A β production and A β -related pathology can be reduced by blockade of the interaction between BACE1 and PSEN1 [102]. In addition, the association between APP and its secretases is an important prerequisite for APP cleavage, which may also serve as a target. Taken together, the associations between the secretases and secretase/substrate may represent a promising target for AD therapy.

Although not discussed in this thesis, it is interesting to note that there may be additional secretases for APP processing, such as the η -secretase [103] and the δ -secretase (asparagine endopeptidase) [104] which have been described recently.

1.4 SORTING NEXINS (SNXS)

Sorting nexins (SNXs) are a family of evolutionarily conserved proteins which are characterized by the presence of a PX (phox homology) domain. The PX domain was first described in p47^{phox} and p40^{phox}, two subunits of the NADPH oxidase (nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide phosphate-oxidase) complex [105]. It is now clear that the PX domain is also present in many other proteins, including members of the PLD (phospholipase D) superfamily, CISK (cytokine-independent survival kinase), and SNXs [106]. The PX domain, approximately 120 residues long, is a phosphoinositide-binding module [106]. It has been shown that the PX domain primarily interacts with PI3P, but can also bind to other phospholipids, such as PI(3,5)P2, PI(4,5)P2 and PI(3,4,5)P3 [107]. The different phosphoinositide-binding properties possibly allow targeting of PX domain-bearing proteins to distinct cellular membranes. Moreover, the PX domain has been implicated in interactions with other domains and proteins [108], suggesting that it may coordinate membrane recognition and protein complex assembly. Among the mammalian PX domain-bearing proteins, a group of homologous proteins are referred to as SNXs.

The original family member of SNXs, SNX1, was identified in 1996 [109] and since then more than 30 putative human SNXs have been described. SNXs have been implicated in diverse functions, many of which relate to vesicular trafficking and protein sorting [110]. Based on structural similarities, SNXs can be divided into three subfamilies [111]: 1) PX-only SNXs; 2) PX-BAR SNXs; and 3) PX-other SNXs (Fig. 2).



PX: Phosphoinositide binding Phox Homology domain

BAR: Bin/Amphiphysin/Rvs domain

FHA: Forkhead-associated domain

MIT: Domain contained within Microtubule Interacting and Trafficking molecules

Nexin_C: Sorting nexin C terminal

PDZ: PSD 95/discs large/zonus occludens1

RA: RAS-associated domain

RhoGAP: RhoGAP (GTPase-activator protein [GAP] for Rho-like small GTPases) domain

SbcC: DNA repair exonuclease SbcCD ATPase subunit

UBQ: Ubiquitin-like proteins

FERM-like: band4.1/ezrin/radixin/moesin (FERM)-like domain

KISc: Kinesin motor, catalytic domain

Nexin_N: Sorting nexin, N-terminal domain

PXA: Domain associated with PX domains

RGS: Regulator of G protein signaling domain

SH3: Src Homology 3 domain

Fig. 2. Schematic diagram of the domain organization of putative human SNXs. Domain

structures of 33 putative human SNXs. SNXs are divided into three subfamilies [111]: 1) PX-only

SNXs (upper left); 2) PX-BAR SNXs (upper right); and 3) PX-other SNXs (lower group).

1.4.1 PX-only SNXs

Proteins in this subfamily have only a PX domain without any other recognized domains.

They are SNX3, SNX10, SNX11, SNX12, SNX16, SNX20, SNX21, SNX22 and SNX24.

SNX10 and SNX11

SNX10 was found to selectively interact with PI3P [112]. It can induce the formation of giant vacuoles in multiple mammalian cells, suggesting a fundamental role in the regulation of endosome homeostasis [113]. SNX11 can interact with PI3P and PI(3,5)P2 [114], and it has been implicated in protein trafficking from the plasma membrane to lysosomes [115].

SNX16

Although preferentially binding to PI3P [116], SNX16 was found to widely distribute in recycling endosomes, early endosomes, late endosomes and lysosomes [116, 117]. It has been shown that SNX16 is implicated in protein targeting to the lysosome [117] and recycling to the plasma membrane [118]. It is also involved in the regulation of late endosome dynamics [119] and synaptic growth signaling [120]. Moreover, SNX16 was proposed to be a negative regulator in cell migration and tumorigenesis [121].

SNX20, SNX21, SNX22 and SNX24

The phospholipid-binding property of SNX20 is elusive, in that some researchers showed its interactions with PI4P, PI5P and PI(3,5)P2 [122] whereas others indicated its bindings to PI3P and PI(4,5)P2 [123]. It was found that SNX20 can directly interact with the glycoprotein PSGL-1 and affect its subcellular localization [122]. The function of SNX21 is poorly studied, although its predominant expression in liver suggests an involvement in the development of this organ [124]. SNX22 was found to be involved in the CD4 downregulation by HIV-1 in T cells [125], while SNX24 was shown to be a regulator of vascular inflammation [126].

1.4.2 PX-BAR SNXs

SNXs in this subfamily have, in addition to a PX domain, a C-terminal BAR domain, which can sense and induce membrane curvature [127, 128]. This subfamily includes SNX1, SNX2, SNX4, SNX5, SNX6, SNX7, SNX8, SNX9, SNX18, SNX30, SNX32, and SNX33.

SNX1, SNX2, SNX5 and SNX6

SNX1 was first identified in a yeast two-hybrid screen for the binding partners of EGFR [109]. It has an N-terminal Nexin_N domain which appears to be specific to SNX1 and SNX2. SNX1 and SNX2 share some redundant functions [129], but they can play distinct roles in protein trafficking [130]. SNX5 was found to interact with SNX1 [131], and SNX6 can form heterodimers with SNX1 and SNX2 [132], suggesting that these proteins may coordinately regulate intracellular protein trafficking. SNX1, SNX2, SNX5 and SNX6 have a variety of functions, one of which is that they control protein transport by serving as subunits of the retromer complex [45].

SNX8

SNX8 was suggested to regulate retrograde protein transport [133], and cholesterol homeostasis [134]. Its *C. elegans* homolog was found to be a modifier of A β toxicity [135]. However, whether human SNX8 can exhibit similar effects, and if so by which mechanisms remain unknown.

SNX9, SNX18 and SNX33

Besides a PX and a BAR domain, these three SNXs have an additional N-terminal SH3 domain, which is a protein interaction domain that can bind proline-rich ligands.

SNX9 was found to have a variety of interaction proteins, including the AP-2 complex, clathrin and dynamin, and was suggested to play an important role in clathrin-mediated endocytosis [136-138]. SNX9 was also shown to be involved in the regulation of actin

assembly and membrane remodeling by its interactions with N-WASP and the Arp2/3 complex [139]. Moreover, it has been implicated in cell invasion and cell division [140].

Like SNX9, SNX18 can interact with dynamin and N-WASP [141], and was found to be involved in membrane remodeling [142]. In addition, SNX18 was shown to have an important role in the formation of autophagosomes [143]. SNX33 has been implicated in endocytosis and shedding of the cellular prion protein [144].

SNX9, SNX18 and SNX33 may share some redundant functions, as evidenced by that SNX9 and SNX18 can compensate the loss-of-function of each other in clathrin-mediated endocytosis [141]. However, they also have irreplaceable functions, as supported by, for example, that all of them are essential for cell progression and completion of mitosis [145].

SNX30 and SNX32

The functions of SNX30 and SNX32 are presently unclear.

1.4.3 PX-other SNXs

The rest of the SNXs are grouped into the PX-other subfamily, and they contain different domains (other than BAR domains) in addition to a PX domain. This subfamily consists of 12 members: SNX13, SNX14, SNX15, SNX17, SNX19, SNX23, SNX25, SNX26, SNX27, SNX28, SNX29 and SNX31.

SNX13, SNX14, SNX19 and SNX25

These SNXs have a PX domain, a PX associated domain (PXA) and a conserved C-terminal region (Nexin_C); an additional Regulator of G protein signaling (RGS) domain was identified in SNX13, SNX14 and SNX25. The functions of PXA and Nexin_C domains are unclear, and some RGS proteins have been implicated in G protein signaling by serving as GTPase activating proteins [146]. The domain organization of SNX13, SNX14 and SNX25 suggests that they may provide a link between protein sorting and G protein signaling.

The PX domain in SNX13 can bind to PI3P [147]. SNX13 can interact with the G protein subunit *Gαs* and regulate *Gαs*-mediated signaling [148], and it has been implicated in lysosomal protein degradation [148, 149]. In addition, SNX13 was found to play an essential role in embryonic development [150].

The PX domain in SNX14 mainly associates with PI(3,5)P₂ [151], but not with PI3P [147]. SNX14 was found to be localized in lysosomes, suggesting that it plays a role in the regulation of lysosomal function. Indeed, it was shown that mutations in SNX14 were associated with lysosomal dysfunction [151]. Moreover, SNX14 has been implicated in the regulation of normal neuronal excitability and synaptic transmission [152], and genetically linked with intellectual disability [151, 153].

SNX19 has broad phospholipid-binding properties [154] and it has been suggested to be involved in the regulation of lysosomal function and formation of membrane vesicles [155].

Furthermore, it was found that SNX19 is implicated in the regulation of cell proliferation [156] and apoptosis [154].

SNX25 has been implicated in lysosomal degradation [157], and its expression was found to be increased in temporal lobe epilepsy [158]. Interestingly, SNX25 was suggested to be associated with age at onset in AD [159], but its functions remain largely unknown.

SNX23

SNX23 is also known as kinesin-like protein KIF16B. Transport of membranous vesicles and organelles along microtubules is driven by motor proteins, one type of which is the kinesin superfamily proteins (KIF). SNX23 is a member of the kinesin superfamily, and has been implicated in the relocation of early endosomes [160, 161], possibly by direct interaction between the PX domain and early endosome-enriched PI3P [162].

SNX26

SNX26 is also known as Rho GTPase-activating protein 33. Rho GTPase-activating (GAP) proteins can inactivate Rho GTPases by inducing GTP hydrolysis. SNX33 exhibits GAP activity in vitro [163], suggesting it may play a role in Rho GTPase signaling. SNX26 was found to be involved in the trafficking of the BDNF receptor TrkB [164]. Moreover, it can interact with PSD-95 [165], and has been implicated in neurite outgrowth [166] and synapse development [167].

SNX28

SNX28 is also known as NADPH oxidase organizer 1 (NOXO1), which is a regulatory subunit of the NADPH oxidase complex. NADPH oxidase (NOX) is an important source of reactive oxygen species (ROS). Human NOX has seven members: NOX1, NOX2, NOX3, NOX4, NOX5, as well as two dual oxidases DUOX1 and DUOX2 [168]. Each member is different in their membrane-bound and cytosolic regulatory subunits, which are composed of

p22phox, p40phox, p47phox, p67phox, Rac, NOXA1, and NOXO1 [169]. It was found that NOXO1 can induce the activity of NOX1 [170] and NOX3 [171]. The PX domain in NOXO1 can interact with PI4P, PI5P and PI(3,5)P₂, and is involved in the activation of NOX1 [172].

SNX29

SNX29 is also known as RUN domain containing 2A (RUNDC2A). It has, in addition to a PX domain, an N-terminal RUN domain. Many RUN domain proteins have been proposed to be involved in Ras-like GTPase signaling and vesicle traffic [173, 174]. Although SNX29 has been associated with some diseases including schizophrenia [175], its function remains to be explored.

SNX31

SNX31, as well as SNX17 and SNX27, has a C-terminal 4.1/ezrin/radixin/moesin (FERM)-like domain. A Ras GTPase-binding property has been attributed to the FERM-line domain, with which many proteins were proposed as adaptors in the endosomal trafficking and signaling [176, 177]. SNX31 preferentially binds to PI3P [178], and has been implicated in protein distribution at the cell surface [179].

1.4.4 SNXs in APP trafficking and processing

An association between SNXs and APP processing was first supported by the observation that SNX17 regulates APP turnover. Subsequently, several studies have linked other SNXs with different aspects of APP processing.

SNX17 and SNX15

SNX17 was identified as an intracellular adaptor for APP [180]. It has been found that SNX17 can interact with the NPXY motif of several proteins, including LDLR [181] and LRP [182]. Therefore, it is not surprising that SNX17 was found to directly bind to the YXNPXY motif of the APP cytoplasmic domain. Moreover, it was shown to colocalize with APP in early endosomes [180]. The gene expression of SNX17 was found to be decreased in an established APP transgenic mouse model [183], and it was revealed that SNX17, which can regulate A β production, influences APP turnover [180].

SNX15 is widely expressed in rodent tissues [49]. It has been shown that SNX15 regulates the morphology of several endosomal compartments [184]. SNX15 can directly bind to clathrin [185], and it has been implicated in endocytosis of several proteins, including transferrin [184]. Unlike SNX17, SNX15 was shown to regulate A β generation by influencing APP recycling back to the cell surface [49].

SNX33

SNX33, which primarily promotes α -cleavage, inhibits the endocytosis and increases the cell surface levels of APP [62]. These results suggest that SNX33 may facilitate APP α -cleavage by increasing the association between APP and α -secretase at the cell surface. SNX9, a homolog of SNX33, was shown to also increase α -cleavage of APP [62]. However, it is also important to note that SNX33 knockdown did not alter APP cleavage, possibly due to compensatory functions of the homologous SNX9 and SNX18, as proposed in the study.

Although SNX33 can influence APP endocytosis and shedding, it is unclear whether A β production is altered.

SNX6, SNX12 and SNX4

SNX6, which can reduce the production of sAPP β and A β , was demonstrated to serve as a negative regulator of the retrograde transport of BACE1 [186]. SNX6 can directly interact with BACE1, and it has been suggested as a component of the multiprotein retromer complex [187]. Therefore, it is possible that SNX6 controls the retrograde transport of BACE1 by linking it to the retromer complex.

Compared to SNX6, SNX12, which can also interact with BACE1, regulates A β production by a different mechanism in that SNX12 influences the endocytosis of BACE1 [188].

SNX4 was shown to be a positive regulator of A β production by influencing BACE1 degradation [189]. It can interact with BACE1, and direct BACE1 away from the lysosomal degradation pathway, thereby increasing the half-life and steady-state levels of BACE1. Moreover, SNX4 can also increase BACE1 levels at the plasma membrane. It has been previously reported that SNX4 can interact with clathrin [190] and is involved in endocytosis [191]. But it remains unclear whether the effect of SNX4 on BACE1 also involves the process of endocytosis. Interestingly, SNX4 protein levels were found to be reduced in brain samples of AD patients [189], which may reflect a rescue strategy to reduce A β production. However, the mechanisms that regulate SNX4 levels in AD remain unknown.

The above results suggest that different SNXs may control different steps of BACE1 intracellular trafficking.

SNX27

SNX27 is distinct from other SNXs in that it bears a unique PDZ (postsynaptic density 95/discs large/zonus occludens 1) domain, which is a protein interaction module present in

many scaffold proteins [192]. SNX27 was suggested to be a subunit of the SNX27-retromer complex [193]. It has been mainly involved in endosome-to-cell surface protein trafficking [193, 194]. Moreover, SNX27 has recently been suggested to be implicated in endocytosis [195]. It has been shown that SNX27, which reduces A β production, influences the assembly and activity of γ -secretase complex by interaction with PSEN1 [196]. Furthermore, it was demonstrated to affect APP cleavage by regulating the endosome-to-cell surface recycling of APP [47]. These studies suggest that SNX27 can affect APP processing by multiple mechanisms.

SNX3 and SNX7

SNX3 is primarily localized in early endosomes. SNX3 can interact with VPS35 [197, 198], and clathrin [190], suggesting that it may be involved in several stages of endocytic trafficking. Indeed, SNX3 has been shown to be able to prevent protein delivery to lysosomes [199, 200], and to enhance protein transport to recycling endosomes [199] and the TGN [200]. It may also participate in endocytosis as it can regulate cell surface protein levels [197, 199, 201]. SNX3 mRNA is expressed in several vulnerable brain regions in AD, such as the cerebral cortex and hippocampus [202]. Moreover, SNX3 was found to be enriched in the rodent postsynaptic density fraction [203], and it has been implicated in neurite outgrowth [204], a process that is compromised in AD [205]. In addition, it was found that single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) in SNX3 are associated with AD [206].

SNX7 preferentially interacts with PI3P [199]. It was reported that SNX7 downregulation can induce the activation of caspase 8 [207], an alteration observed in AD brain [208]. Moreover, it has been shown that SNX7 is genetically associated with AD [209], and expression of the SNX7 gene was found to be decreased in AD subjects [210].

It becomes clear that SNXs have emerged as key regulators in APP processing and trafficking. SNX3 and SNX7 have been linked with AD, but whether they can influence APP

processing and A β production remains unknown. In Study III and IV, we have examined the roles of SNX3 and SNX7 at the cellular level.

2 AIMS

The general aim of this thesis is to characterize the synaptic distribution of APP, and to investigate mechanisms that regulate APP trafficking and processing.

Specific aims of the constituent papers are:

- 1) to examine the fate of APP at synapses.
- 2) to evaluate mechanisms for how exercise and BDNF regulate α -cleavage of APP.
- 3) to elucidate the role of SNX3 in APP trafficking and processing as well as in A β production.
- 4) to test the involvement of SNX7 in A β production and APP processing.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 ENDOGENOUS APP ACCUMULATES IN SYNAPSES AFTER BACE1 INHIBITION (PAPER I)

Synapse loss is one of the key features in AD which correlates strongly with the cognitive decline in this disease [12]. Although the exact mechanism for the synaptic deficits is unclear, accumulating evidence indicates that A β derived from the proteolytic cleavage of APP plays a critical role [5]. APP has a number of functions in addition to giving rise to A β . It has been proposed that APP, as a full-length protein, is implicated in several synaptic functions, such as synaptogenesis [2, 24]. While the trafficking and processing of APP has been extensively studied in non-neuronal cells, the fate of APP in neurons and especially at synapses remains incompletely understood. The major β -secretase, BACE1, is an initial and putatively rate-limiting enzyme in A β production. In study I, we combined immunocytochemistry and perturbation of BACE1 activity to examine the synaptic distribution of APP.

Using antibodies directed to APP N-terminal epitopes (N-t1 and N-t2) and C-terminal epitopes (C-t1 and C-t2), we performed immunocytochemical characterization of APP on primary hippocampal neurons. In neurons derived from wild-type (BACE1^(+/+)) mice, APP N-terminal labeling predominantly overlapped with synaptic markers, whereas the APP C-terminal labeling was largely separated from synapses, suggesting that APP primarily exists as fragments at synapses under normal conditions (Fig. 3). However, in neurons from BACE1^(-/-) mice, while the N-terminal labeling remained similar to that in BACE1^(+/+) neurons, C-terminal labeling showed a significant increase of co-localization with synaptic markers. These results suggest that more APP may distribute as a full-length protein at synapses when the activity of BACE1 is deficient. This idea was supported by the results that full-length APP levels were increased in the brains from BACE1^(-/-) mice as compared to those from BACE1^(+/+) mice.

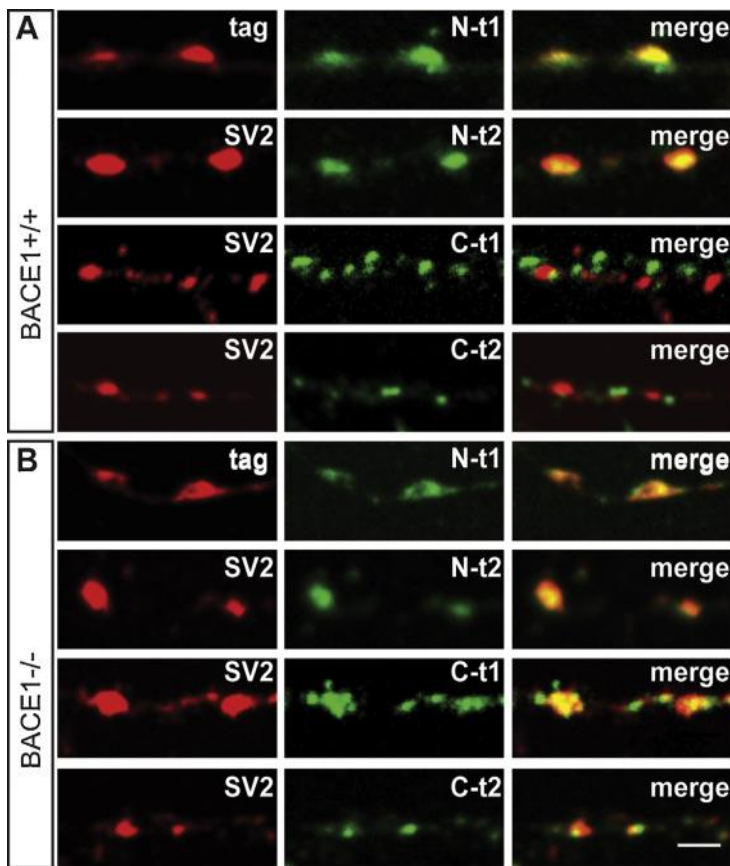


Fig. 3. Deletion of BACE1 leads to co-accumulation of APP N-terminal and C-terminal epitopes in synaptic regions [211]. (A, B) Double staining was performed with synaptotagmin (tag) or SV2 antibodies and antibodies against the N-terminus of APP (N-t1, N-t2, upper panels) and C-terminus of APP (C-t1, C-t2, lower panels) on primary hippocampal neurons from BACE1^{+/+} mice (A) and in BACE1^{-/-} mice (B). Scale bar = 2 μ m.

To confirm these results, we applied a pharmacological approach to inhibit BACE1 activity in rat hippocampal neurons. Similarly, APP N-terminal labeling showed a strong co-localization with synaptic markers under both normal and the reduced BACE1 activity conditions. BACE1 inhibition led to a significant increase of the synaptic distribution of APP C-terminal epitopes, and thus more co-localization was found between the APP N-terminals and C-terminals after BACE1 inhibition. Taken together, these results indicate that full-length APP accumulates at synapses after inhibition of BACE1.

To examine whether the above accumulation can occur in the presynaptic compartment, we took advantage of proximity ligation assay (PLA) which has a spatial resolution of about 40 nm. Antibodies against the APP C-terminal and the synaptic vesicle marker SV2 were used for detection. A significant increase in PLA signals was found after BACE1 inhibition, suggesting that the above accumulation takes place in the presynaptic compartment [211].

Our results indicate that at synapses APP mainly occurs as cleaved fragments, while a fraction of full-length APP can be transported to synapses, the latter process being enhanced

by reducing BACE1 activity. These results are in line with previous findings that APP secretases can be found in synaptic vesicles [212]. However, the role of the presynaptic compartment in APP processing remains to be elucidated.

3.2 EXERCISE AND BDNF REDUCE A β PRODUCTION BY ENHANCING α -SECRETASE PROCESSING OF APP (PAPER II)

It has been suggested that regular exercise, among other life-style factors, can reduce the risk of developing AD [17], and running wheel exercise can decrease A β production in AD transgenic models [18, 213]. Moreover, exercise has been suggested to enhance cognitive capacity by increasing the mRNA and protein levels of BDNF (brain derived neurotrophic factor) [18], a protein which has been implicated in APP processing and sAPP α production [214]. However, the exact mechanisms by which exercise can decrease A β production remain incompletely understood. In study II, we examined the relationship between exercise, BDNF and APP processing.

Consistent with previous results showing that exercise can reduce A β levels in other AD mice models [213, 215], we found that runner mice showed a reduction of A β levels in hippocampi compared with sedentary control mice in a 2xTg AD (APP/PS1 double-mutant transgenic) mouse model. Moreover, the levels of both sAPP α and BDNF were increased in runner mice as compared to control mice.

Previous studies indicate that BDNF can regulate sAPP α production [214]. To test whether BDNF may alter A β production by a mechanism involving α -cleavage of APP, we treated the differentiated SH-SY5Y cells with BDNF and/or the α -secretase inhibitor batimastat.

Inhibition of the α -secretase activity led to an increase of both A β 40 and A β 42. BDNF treatment caused a significant reduction of A β levels. However, the effect of BDNF was occluded by batimastat, suggesting that the BDNF-induced reduction of A β levels was dependent on the α -cleavage.

Since ADAM10 has been suggested to be the constitutive α -secretase, we examined whether BDNF treatment can alter its levels and distribution. Protein levels of ADAM10 were revealed by Western blot, and no change was found. However, the cell surface levels of ADAM10 were significantly reduced upon BDNF treatment. These results together suggest that BDNF treatment may shift the distribution of ADAM10 from the cell surface to intracellular compartments where regulated α -secretase activity mainly takes place [216].

Taken together, these results show that exercise can decrease $A\beta$ production and increase sAPP α as well as BDNF levels, and suggest that BDNF plays an important role in the production of $A\beta$ by regulating α -secretase activity. However, it is still unclear whether exercise regulates $A\beta$ production through the pathways mediated by BDNF. In future studies, it will be of interest to examine whether exercise can still regulate $A\beta$ generation when the function of BDNF is removed.

3.3 OVEREXPRESSION OF SNX3 DECREASES AMYLOID-B PEPTIDE PRODUCTION BY REDUCING INTERNALIZATION OF AMYLOID PRECURSOR PROTEIN (PAPER III)

The trafficking and processing of APP is a complex process which can be regulated by many proteins. Among them sorting nexins (SNXs) have emerged as key players [41]. SNXs, characterized by a PX (phox homology) domain, is a family of evolutionarily conserved proteins [108, 111]. SNXs have diverse cellular functions many of which relate to protein trafficking and sorting [110]. SNX3, a member of the SNXs family, has a number of functions in protein sorting and trafficking [199, 200]. It was recently found that single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) in SNX3 are associated with AD [206]. However, whether SNX3 directly affects APP processing and $A\beta$ production remains unclear. In this study we provide a first test of this possibility.

Overexpression of SNX3 together with APP in HEK293T cells significantly decreased the levels of both $A\beta_{40}$, $A\beta_{42}$ and sAPP β as compared to empty vector control, whereas

overexpression of another SNX family protein, SNX29, did not lead to any alteration. Moreover, BACE1 levels were not altered by SNX3 overexpression. These results suggest that SNX3 can decrease amyloidogenic cleavage of APP.

The association of APP with BACE1 is an important prerequisite for its β -cleavage. To test whether SNX3 can disrupt this association, we employed a bimolecular fluorescence complementation (BiFC) assay [217]. In this assay, APP is tagged with the non-fluorescent N-terminal fragment of the Venus protein (VN), while BACE1 is tagged with the non-fluorescent C-terminal fragment of the Venus protein (VC) (Fig. 4). When APP and BACE1

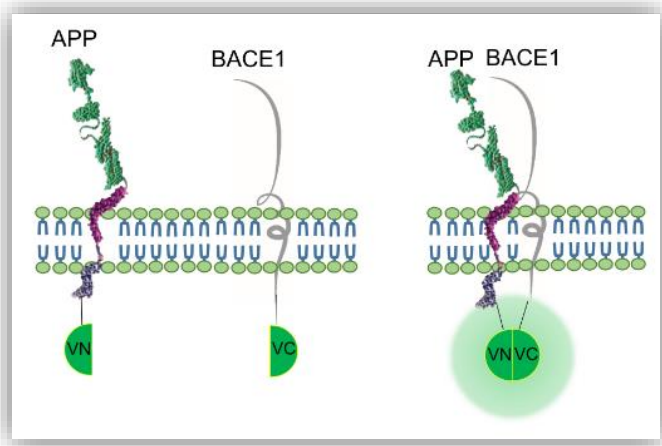


Fig. 4. Principle of BiFC for the detection of association between APP and BACE1. APP and BACE1 are C-terminally tagged with VN and VC fragment, respectively. Association between APP and BACE1 leads to formation of a functional Venus protein that produces a fluorescent signal. Adapted from Ref. [217].

are in proximity, a functional Venus protein that produces a fluorescent signal is reconstituted. We found that overexpression of SNX3 resulted in a small but significant reduction in the association between APP and BACE1. These results suggest that SNX3 overexpression may decrease β -cleavage of APP by interference with the association between APP and BACE1.

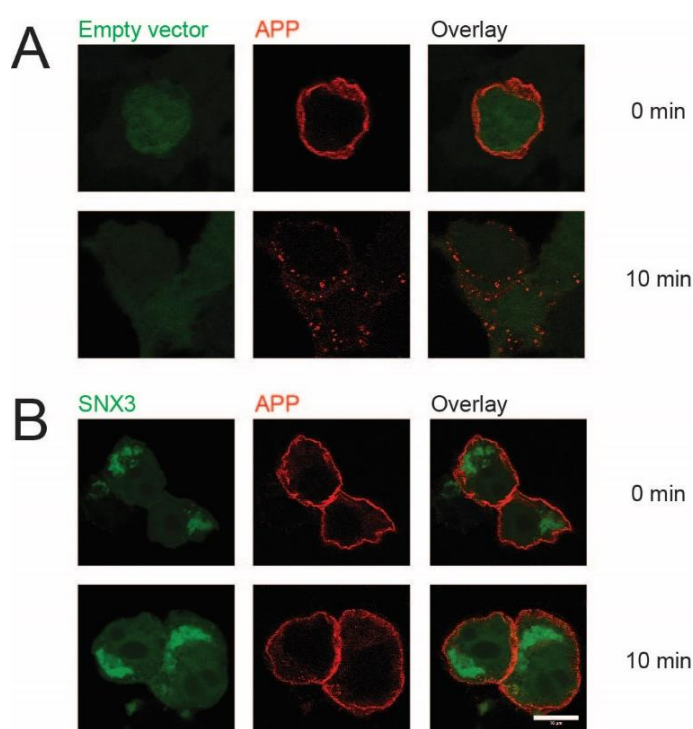


Fig. 5. SNX3 overexpression inhibits APP

internalization. HEK293T cells were co-transfected with empty vector (pEGFP-C1) or pEGFP-C1_SNX3 and BBS-APP, and internalization of cell surface APP was examined. Scale bar = 10 μ m.

Since many lines of evidence indicate that APP encounters BACE1 in endosomes following its internalization [218, 219], we sought to test whether SNX3 affects the internalization of APP by using a well-established internalization assay [220]. APP was N-terminally tagged with an α -bungarotoxin-binding site (BBS). Internalization of APP was examined by monitoring cell surface BBS-APP labeled by incubation with α -bungarotoxin conjugated with Alexa Fluor[®] 555. We observed that overexpression of SNX3 decreased APP internalization (Fig. 5).

Therefore, it would be expected that the cell surface distribution of APP would be enhanced by SNX3. Indeed, we found that the cell surface levels of APP, measured by flow cytometry, were significantly increased by SNX3 overexpression. These results together suggest that overexpression of SNX3 decreases A β production by reducing internalization of APP.

These results coincide with previous findings suggesting that SNX3 may be involved in endocytosis of other cargo molecules [197, 201]. The precise role of SNX3 in endocytosis is unclear. However, it is interesting to note that SNX3 can interact with the heavy chain of clathrin [200], suggesting that it may directly regulate the clathrin machinery. Our results suggest that SNX3 overexpression can affect A β production by influencing the association between APP and BACE1 as well as APP internalization. Therefore, modulation of SNX3

may be an interesting approach to regulate amyloidogenic processing of APP while leaving the β -secretase activity unimpaired.

3.4 OVEREXPRESSION OF SNX7 REDUCES AB PRODUCTION BY ENHANCING LYSOSOMAL DEGRADATION OF APP (PAPER IV)

Many SNXs have been implicated in APP trafficking and processing. In this study, we extended the investigation to another protein, SNX7. SNX7 has, in addition to a PX domain, a C-terminal BAR domain, which can sense and induce membrane curvature [127, 128]. It was found that SNX7 downregulation can induce the activation of caspase 8 [207], an alteration observed in AD brain [208]. Moreover, it has been shown that SNX7 is genetically associated with AD [209], and expression of the SNX7 gene was found to be decreased in AD subjects [210]. However, it is still unclear whether SNX7 can influence APP processing and A β production.

We found that overexpression of SNX7 in HEK293T cells decreased the levels of both A β 40 and A β 42 as compared to empty vector control. Overexpression of another protein, SNX29, did not cause any change. Since β -secretase processing of APP is the putatively rate-limiting step in A β production [221], we next examined whether overexpression of SNX7 altered β -cleavage. We found that SNX7 overexpression reduced the production of sAPP β , suggesting that it may alter the β -cleavage of APP. The other β -cleavage product, CTF β , was also examined. We found that SNX7 overexpression caused a significant decrease of both CTF β and CTF α .

It has been shown that SNX12 [222] and SNX4 [189] which influence processing of APP, can affect the cell surface levels of BACE1. To test whether SNX7 has a similar effect, we examined the cell surface distribution of BACE1 by confocal microscopy and flow cytometry. We found that SNX7 overexpression did not alter the cell surface levels of BACE1. In addition, no change of the steady-state levels of BACE1 could be detected by

overexpression of SNX7. These results suggest that overexpression of SNX7 does not influence A β production by affecting the cellular trafficking of BACE1.

We then examined whether SNX7 can influence the trafficking of APP. As in the experiments above, the cell surface distribution of APP was examined by confocal microscopy and flow cytometry. We found that the cell surface levels of APP were decreased by SNX7 overexpression. Moreover, the steady-state levels of APP were also prominently reduced by overexpression of SNX7. These results suggest that SNX7 may alter A β production by influencing APP trafficking and processing.

It has been shown that SNX4, which has a similar domain organization to SNX7, can influence protein trafficking to the lysosomal degradative pathway [189]. Therefore, it is possible that SNX7 overexpression affects APP levels by altering its degradation. To test this possibility, we used two compounds, NH₄Cl [157, 223] and Bafilomycin A1 (Baf) [50, 189] to prevent protein degradation. As shown in Fig. 6, NH₄Cl and Baf treatment both caused a significant increase of the APP levels, as expected by the known dependence of APP degradation on lysosomal pH [50, 224]. Consistent with the above results, SNX7 overexpression reduced the APP levels. However, when NH₄Cl or Baf was added, the effect of SNX7 overexpression was occluded, suggesting that the SNX7-induced reduction of APP was dependent on the degradative pathway [225].

This study has provided a first examination of the role of SNX7 in APP processing and A β production. We found that the levels of A β , sAPP β , CTFs, cell surface APP and steady-state APP were decreased by SNX7 overexpression, which can all be explained by increased APP degradation. We do not, however, exclude the possibility that SNX7 additionally takes part in internalization of APP from the cell surface, a role linked with SNX33 [62] and SNX3 (observations in Paper III). Taken together, these results suggest that overexpression of SNX7 enhances APP degradation, thereby reducing A β production.

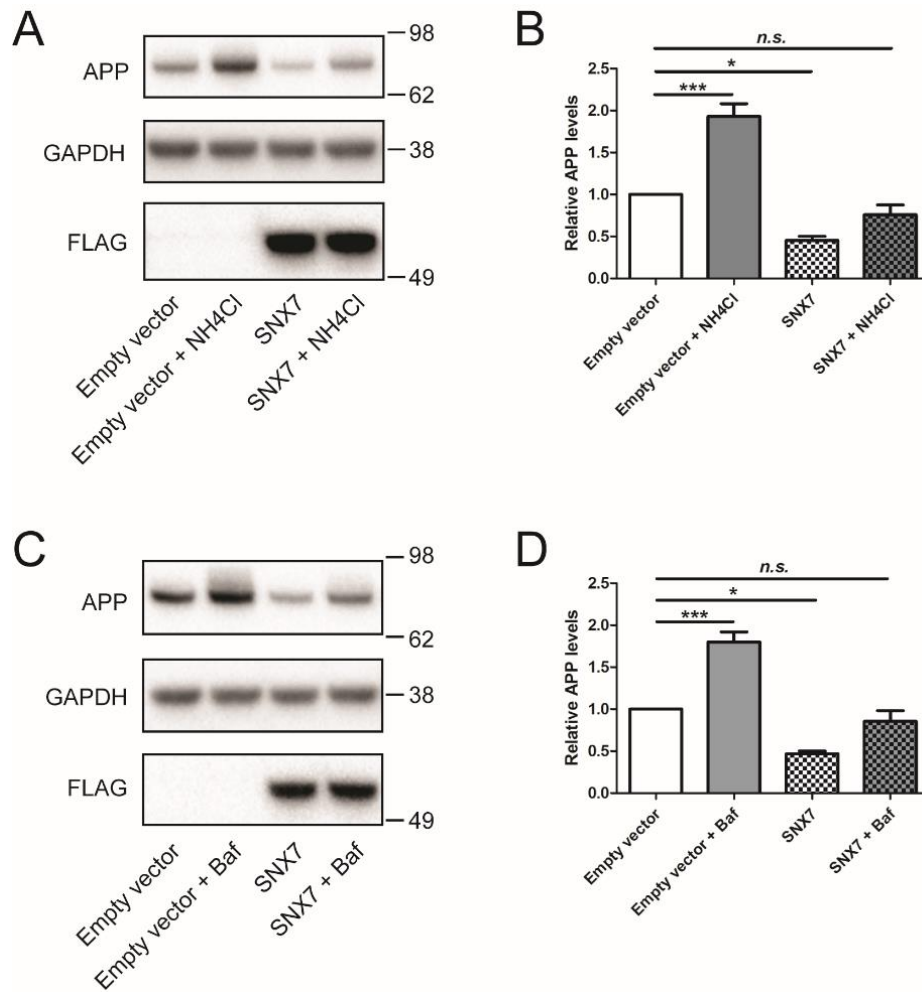


Fig. 6. Lysosomal inhibitors prevent the reduction of APP levels by SNX7 overexpression [225].

A-D. HEK293T cells were co-transfected with either empty vector or FLAG-SNX7 together with Myc-APP. The cells were cultured for a total of 48 h after transfection. NH₄Cl or Bafilomycin A1 (Baf) was applied to the cultures 6 h before harvest. APP levels were examined by Western blot with anti-Myc antibody. Representative blots from NH₄Cl treatment (**A**) and Baf treatment (**C**) experiments are shown. **B.** Quantification of APP levels in the NH₄Cl treatment experiment. **D.** Quantification of APP levels in the Baf treatment experiment.

4 SUMMARY AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

The trafficking and processing of APP is a complex process which is spatially and temporally regulated. Interference with the trafficking and subsequent localization of APP strongly influences APP processing, and thus A β production. This thesis aims to expand our understanding of mechanisms that regulate processing and trafficking of APP. We found that:

1) APP mainly distributes as cleaved fragments at synapses under normal conditions.

However, a pathway for the transport of full-length APP also exists, which can be revealed by reduction of BACE1 activity. 2) Exercise and BDNF can reduce A β production by enhancing α -cleavage of APP, and these effects were possibly regulated by ADAM10 distribution and activity. 3) Overexpression of SNX3 can disturb the association between APP and BACE1, as well as APP internalization, thereby reducing A β production. 4) SNX7 overexpression can decrease A β production by enhancing APP degradation.

Considering that all the major secretases for APP have a number of substrates, it would possibly be very challenging to target them without any side-effects. In this thesis, we have shown that increased expression of SNX3 can decrease toxic A β production. Interestingly, while BACE1 levels were not altered, SNX3 can disturb the association between APP and BACE1, as well as APP internalization. The association between APP and BACE1 is an important prerequisite for β -cleavage and A β production. In principle specific targeting of the association would reduce A β production while leaving BACE1 activity intact. Therefore, the association between APP and BACE1 may be a promising therapeutic target.

We provided a first examination of the role of SNX3 and SNX7 in APP processing and A β production using HEK293T as a cell model. In future studies it will be of interest to examine whether these results apply also to other cell types, including primary neurons.

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