AUS DEM LEHRSTUHL FÜR INNERE MEDIZIN II Prof. Dr. Lars S. Maier

DER FAKULTÄT FÜR MEDIZIN DER UNIVERSITÄT REGENSBURG

SR CA2+-LEAK AND DISORDERED EXCITATION-CONTRACTION COUPLING AS THE BASIS FOR ARRHYTHMOGENIC AND NEGATIVE INOTROPIC EFFECTS OF ACUTE ETHANOL EXPOSURE

Inaugural – Dissertation zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades der Medizin

der Fakultät für Medizin der Universität Regensburg

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Einleitung und Fragestellung des Projektes

In der vorliegenden Arbeit wurden Effekte von Ethanol auf isolierte Kardiomyozyten, insbesondere die elektromechanische Kopplung und das diastolische Kalziumleck untersucht. Diese Zusammenfassung beleuchtet die wichtigsten Ergebnisse dieser Studie, zudem soll ein Ausblick auf mögliche Anschlussarbeiten und klinische Implikationen geliefert werden, der in der Originalarbeit aus editorialen Gründen kürzer gehalten war. Da in dieser Zusammenfassung auch eine Interpretation und Wichtung der beobachteten Effekte stattfinden soll, werden Daten teilweise in anderer Reihenfolge als im Manuskript der Publikation diskutiert.

Der Konsum von Alkohol als Genussmittel ist in vielen Kulturen weit verbreitet. Während der schädliche Einfluss von Ethanol auf Organe wie Leber und Gehirn auch populärwissenschaftlich weithin bekannt ist, existieren nur wenige Daten zur toxischen Ethanolwirkung auf das Herz - insbesondere die molekularen Mechanismen sind nur unzureichend verstanden (1,2).

Zudem muss bei der Untersuchung der Ethanolwirkung auch zwischen akuten und chronischen Effekten auf das Myokard differenziert werden, da chronischer Stress am Herzen oftmals mit einem kardialen Remodelling einhergeht (3–6).

Ausgangspunkt der vorliegenden Arbeit war die klinische Beobachtung, dass nach einem akutem Alkoholexzess vermehrt Vorhofflimmern auftritt (7–9), das so genannte holiday-heart-Syndrom, und dass interessanterweise bei bis zu 62 % der Patienten bei Erstdiagnose eines Vorhofflimmerns ein unmittelbar zurückliegender Alkoholkonsum stattgefunden hat (1). Zudem ist bekannt, dass Alkoholexzesse jenseits der chronischen Schädigung des Herzenz eine akut negative inotrope Wirkung haben können und auch ventrikuläre Arrhythmien auslösen können (7,8,10– 12).

Auf Ebene des einzelnen Kardiomyozyten ist für das Vorhofflimmern eine Dysregulation der zellulären Kalziumhomöostase bekannt (13).

Ein zentraler Regulator des kardiomyozytären Kalziumhaushalts ist hierbei die Kalzium/Calmodulin-abhängige Kinase II (CaMKII), eine Serin-Threonin-Proteinkinase. Es sind gegenwärtig vier Isoformen und über 30 verschiedene Spliceformen der CaMKII bekannt (14–16). Der generelle Aufbau der CaMKII ist zwischen den Isoformen vergleichbar. N-Terminal ist eine katalytische Kinase-Domäne mit ATP-Bindungsstelle und Proteinsubstratbindungsstellen angesiedelt. Nachfolgend befindet sich eine autoregulatorische Domäne mit Calmodulin-Bindungsstelle und der für die Enzymaktivität wichtigen Autophosphorylierungstelle Threonin 287 (15,16). C-Terminal befindet sich die Assoziationsdomäne, welche wichtig für die Faltung und Ausbildung des Nativzustands des Holoenzyms bzw. von Holoenzymkomplexen ist.

Das Enzym ist im Nativzustand durch die autoregulatorische Domäne inhibiert, die als so genanntes Pseudosubstrat die katalytische Domäne blockiert. Calmodulin (CaM) weist vier Kalziumbindungstellen auf - die Bindung von Kalzium erhöht die Affinität zu Bindungszielen, z.B. der CaMKII. Zunächst kommt es durch Ca²⁺-Calmodulin-Anlagerung an die CaM-Bindungsstelle der CaMKII (Threonin 206 und Threonin 207) zu einem Konformationswechsel des Enzyms, infolge dessen die katalytische Domäne disinhibiert und die autoregulatorische Domäne freigelegt wird. Die CaM-Bindung an ein CaMKII-Monomer erhöht die Affinität anderer Kinasemonomere für CaM (auch Kooperativität genannt (17)). CaM fungiert nach Enzymbindung als allosterischer Aktivator, der die inhibitorische Potenz der autoregulatorischen Domäne als Pseudosubstrat senkt. Ein Substratzugang zur katalytischen Untereinheit wird ermöglicht. Sofern ATP und Mg²⁺ vorhanden sind, ist bedingt durch die multimere Struktur des Enzyms und die Konformationsänderung ("Streckung") der CaMKII eine so genannte Intersubunit-Phosphorylierung möglich: hierbei wird der Threoninrest 287 der autoregulatorischen Domäne durch die Kinase-Domänen anderer CaMKII-Moleküle phosphoryliert (16). Die Phosphorylierung des Threoninrests bewirkt zum einen eine Erhöhung der Affinität für CaM um den Faktor 1000, zum anderen verhindert diese Autophosphorylierung ein Wiederanlagerung von katalytischer und autoinhibitorischer Domäne auch nach Dissoziation des CaM. Damit wird das Enzym kalziumunabhängig i.e. autonom aktiv, zumindest so lange es nicht zu einer Abspaltung des Phosphatrests kommt.

Auch die Amplitude des systolischen Kalziumtransienten scheint eine Rolle für die Dauer der autonomen Aktivität zu spielen (19). Neben der "klassischen", Ca²⁺-Calmodulin-vermittelten Aktivierung sind auch weitere Aktivierungswege der CaMKII bekannt: das Enzym kann auch durch Oxidation (20) oder Glykosylierung (21) aktiviert werden und dann Zielproteine phosphorylieren.

Insbesondere bewirkt eine CaMKII-abhängige (Hyper-)Phosphorylierung des Kalziumkanals des sarkoplasmatischen Retikulums, des Ryanodinrezeptor Typ 2 (RYR2), ein verstärktes diastolisches Kalziumleck, welches einen typischen Befund

für das Vorhofflimmern, aber auch für ventrikuläre Arrhythmien und die Herzinsuffizienz darstellt (13,22–25). Eine oxidative Aktivierung der CaMKII kann im Herzen durch reaktive Sauerstoffspezies (ROS) vermittelt sein, die im Herzen vor allem durch die NADPH-Oxidase 2 (NOX2) gebildet werden (20,26). Interessanterweise ist eine Aktivierung der NOX2 durch Ethanol mit gesteigerter ROS-Produktion in der Leber vorbeschrieben (27,28). Zudem konnte in einem Modell der chronischen alkoholischen Kardiomyopathie eine vermehrte Aktivität der NOX2 gezeigt werden (29).

Folgende Hypothesen wurden in meiner Publikation untersucht:

1) Ethanol bewirkt in isolierten Kardiomyozyten eine akute Aktivierung der NOX2 mit gesteigerter Produktion von ROS.

2) Ethanol bewirkt durch eine gesteigerte ROS-Bildung eine oxidative Aktivierung der CaMKII.

3) Ethanol induziert CaMKII-vermittelt ein gesteigertes diastolisches Kalziumleck aus dem sarkoplasmatischen Retikulum.

4) Eine Inhibition der CaMKII, die Verhinderung der CaMKII-Oxidation, sowie ein transgener knock-out der NOX2 können das durch Ethanol pathologisch erhöhte diastolische Kalziumleck signifikant absenken und stellen somit mögliche Therapieansätze dar.

Methoden

Für die vorliegende Arbeit wurden humane rechtsatriale Gewebeproben von Patienten verwendet, welche aus operationstechnischen Gründen bei Bypass-Operationen entnommen wurden. Eine Einwillung der Patienten war im Vorfeld der Operation eingeholt worden (nach positivem Ethikvotum). Aus den Biopsien wurden Herzmuskelzellen nach etablierten Verfahren mittels enzymatischem Verdau des Gewebes isoliert und für zelluläre Untersuchungen eingesetzt. Zudem wurden Mauskardiomyozyten zur weiteren mechanistischen Untersuchung der Ethanoleffekte aus C57BL6-Wildtypmäusen und zwei transgenen Modellen (s.u.) isoliert. Da Ethanol wie bereits ausgeführt sowohl im Vorhof (Vorhofflimmern), als auch im Ventrikel (negative Inotropie, ventrikuläre Arrhythmien) Effekte hat, untersuchten wir neben atrialen auch ventrikuläre Kardiomyozyten. In den unten genannten Experimenten wurde immer, wenn nicht anders beschrieben, unvergällter Ethanol 99%. Firma Roth) (Reinheit > mit Kontrolllösung (Normaltyrode/physiologischem Medium) verglichen. Die Konzentrationen von 1, 3 und 6 ‰ Ethanol wurden hierbei von mir nach klinischen aber auch mechanistischen Gesichtspunkten ausgewählt. Bei der Literaturrecherche hatte ich festgestellt, dass eine akute Intoxikation vor allem im Bereich von ca. 1-6 ‰ Ethanol klinisch apparent wird, bzw. zur stationären Aufnahme führt. Auch präklinisch werden, soweit hierzu Daten verfügbar sind, vor allem Konzentrationen > 1 ‰ erfasst (30–34). Zudem wird der akute Alkoholexzess ("binge drinking") als eine akute Intoxikation >0.8 ‰ definiert (1), welcher nach aktuellen Daten regelmäßig von bis zu 24% der amerikanischen Bevölkerung betrieben wird (1). Die Wahrscheinlichkeit eines Vorhofflimmerns nach Alkoholkonsum, also einem "holiday heart syndrome", nimmt interessanterweise mit jedem zusätzlich aufgenommenen alkoholischen (Standard-) Getränk um ca. 8 % zu (35). Somit sollte im Konzentrationsbereich von 1-6 ‰, sowohl ein klinisch relevantes Kollektiv erfasst sein, als auch eine mechanistische Untersuchung mit ausgeprägter Aktivierung pathophysiologischer Signalkaskaden möglich sein. Eine Schlüsselmethode für meine Untersuchungen war die Bestimmung des diastolischen SR Kalziumlecks mittels konfokaler Laserscanmikroskopie Line-scan-Verfahren. Hierfür im wurden isolierte Kardiomyozyten mit 10 µmol/L des fluoreszierenden Kalziumsensors Fluo-4-AM ((36), Firma Invitrogen) beladen, der nach endogener Deesterifikation im Zytosol Ca²⁺-Ionen bindet und durch Laserimpulse (488 nm Anregungswellenlänge) angeregt werden kann. Durch Messung eines bestimmten, örtlich eng begrenzten Zellareals Erfassung über eine bestimmte Messdauer diastolischer kann eine Kalziumfreisetzungsereignisse (Kalzium-"Sparks") aus dem sarkoplasmatischen Retikulum erfolgen. Diese Sparks wurden gezählt und normiert auf Zellbreite und Messdauer, um die Sparkfrequenz zu erhalten (unter zu Hilfenahme des Sparkmaster-Programms (37)). Zudem berechnete ich die Sparkgröße als Sparkamplitude * halb-maximale-Sparkbreite * halb-maximale-Sparkdauer, woraus sich in Kombination mit der Sparkfrequenz das diastolische Kalziumleck berechnen lässt. Aus technischen Gründen wurden nur Zellen mit Sparkereignissen in die statistische Analyse mit aufgenommen. Weiterhin setzte ich die Epifluoreszenzmikroskopie mit Fluo-4-AM und zusätzlich dem ratiometrischen Kalziumsensor Fura-2-AM (ebenfalls 10 µmol/L, Firma Invitrogen) ein, um die systolische Kalziumfreisetzung und die diastolische Kalziumwiederaufnahme in

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isolierten Kardiomyozyten zu erfassen. Die Abfallskinetik von Fluo-4-Kalziumtransienten wurde dabei als Maß der SERCA2a-Funktion untersucht (38). Da in Mauskardiomyozyten allerdings auch die Transportfunktion des NCX ca. 10% der Relaxation des Kalziumtransienten ausmacht (38), berechnete ich zusätzlich aus dem Kalziumtransientenabfall in Kombination mit der Kinetik des zu dieser Zelle gehörenden Koffein-induzierten Kalziumtransienten (Surrogatparameter für die NCX-Funktion), das so genannte tau_{SERCA2A} (39) als

 $tauSERCA2a = \frac{1}{\frac{1}{tau \, Kalzium transient} - \frac{1}{tau \, Koffein transient}}}$

Zudem führte ich Western Blot Experimente durch, des Weiteren erfolgten durch uns Muskelstreifen-Kontraktiliätsmessungen und Patch-Clamp-Untersuchungen.

Ergebnisse und Diskussion

Ein Hauptergebnis meiner Publikation war der Befund eines erhöhten diastolischen SR Kalziumlecks in humanen atrialen Kardiomyozyten nach Behandlung mit 6 ‰ Ethanol im Vergleich zu ethanolfreier Kontrolllösung (Fig. 1A und 1B), welches ich mittels konfokaler Ca²⁺-Sparkmessung erheben konnte.

Da humane Kardiomyozyten nur eingeschränkt zur Verfügung stehen, verifizierten wir diesen Befund zunächst in murinen ventrikulären und atrialen Kardiomyozyten (Fig. 1C-E bzw. Suppl. Fig. 2 respektive) und konnten hierbei zudem eine positivkorrelierte Abhängigkeit von der Ethanolkonzentration (0, 1, 3 und 6 ‰ Ethanol) nachweisen. Zur weiteren Verifikation des erhöhten diastolischen Kalziumlecks unter Ethanol wendeten wir in der Publikation zudem die etablierte Tetracaine-shift-Methode an (40), die mittels Epifluoreszenzmikroskopie auch Anteile des Kalziumlecks erfassen kann, die durch konfokale Sparkmessungen nicht nachweisbar sind (41). Wie erwartet zeigte auch dieses Verfahren unter 6 ‰ Ethanol ein signifikant erhöhtes diastolisches Kalziumleck (Suppl. Fig. 1B). Ich konnte zeigen, dass das erhöhte diastolische Kalziumleck unter Ethanol in murinen Kardiomyozyten auch mit einer gesteigerten Inzidenz von so genannten Kalziumwaves assoziiert war (Fig. 1F), die ebenfalls diastolische SR Kalziumfreisetzungen sind und ein proarrhythmogenes Substrat darstellen (41,42).

Wir konnten dabei zeigen, dass Ethanol zur vermehrten Aktivierung der CaMKII (Autophosphorylierung an Thr-287), exemplarisch untersucht für die Konzentration

von 3 ‰, führt. Das diastolische Kalziumlecks kann über eine elektrogene Aktivierung des membranständigen Natrium-Kalziumaustauschers (NCX) und konsekutiven elektrogenen lonenaustausch eine atypische Zelldepolarisation (und somit Arrhythmien) bewirken. Weiterhin kann das diastolische Kalziumleck zu einer kontraktilen bedingt durch Dysfunktion, Depletion der systolischen Kontraktionsamplitude, führen (22,41). Insofern ist der Befund eines erhöhten diastolischen Kalziumlecks mit vermehrten Kalziumwaves unter Ethanol von hoher pathophysiologischer Relevanz, da hierdurch insbesondere der o.g. Mechanismus der NCX-Aktivierung mit nachfolgenden proarrhythmogenen späten Nachdepolarisationen (delayed afterdepolarizations, DADs) in der Zelle ausgelöst werden kann. Späte Nachdepolarisationen sind ein etablierter Surrogatparameter für eine verstärkte Arrhythmieneigung von Kardiomyozyten (43) und wir konnten zeigen, dass diese in der Tat unter Ethanol signifikant vermehrt auftraten (Suppl. Fig. 3A).

Interessanterweise ist die systolische Kalziumfreisetzung aus dem sarkoplasmatischen Retikulum durch Ethanol vermindert: die Amplitude des systolischen Kalziumtransienten, welche ich mittels Epifluoreszenzmikroskopie ermittelt habe, wurde durch 6 ‰ Ethanol in murinen Kardiomyozyten signifikant niedriger (Fig. 3A). Dies stellt eine mögliche Erklärung für die klinisch beobachtete negative Inotropie von Alkohol im Tiermodell und im Menschen dar (10-12,44,45). Spannenderweise war jedoch die Kalziumkonzentration im Kalziumspeicher der Kardiomyozyten, dem sarkoplasmatische Retikulum, in zunächst scheinbarer Diskrepanz zum Befund der erniedrigten Kalziumtransienten, unter Ethanolexposition nicht signifikant niedriger im Vergleich zur Kontrolllösung (siehe Textabschnitt 3.2 im Manuskript). Ein möglicher Erklärungsansatz ist hierbei eine gesteigerte Kalziumwiederaufnahme unter Ethanolbehandlung über die sarkoplasmatische endoplasmatische Kalzium-ATPase (SERCA2a), die tatsächlich mittels Analyse der Kalziumtransientenrelaxation nachgewiesen werden konnte (Fig. 3C). Um einen Einfluss des NCX auf Abfallskinetik des Kalziumtransienten zu exkludieren, berechnete ich zudem tausercaza (39), welches ebenfalls eine signifikant stärkere SERCA2a-Funktion (i.e. ein kleineres tauserCA2a) ergab (Suppl. Fig. 5). Nebenbefundlich ergab sich hierbei eine signifikant gesteigerte Funktion des NCX unter Ethanol (Fig. 3E).

Passend zur gesteigerten Kalziumtransientenrelaxation war auch die CaMKIIabhängige Phosphorylierung des endogenen SERCA2a-Inhibitors Phospholamban

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an Threonin-17 signifikant erhöht unter Ethanol (Suppl. Fig. 7). Phosphoryliertes Phospholamban dissoziiert von der SERCA2a, sodass es zu einer Desinhibition der SERCA2a kommt. Zudem bestätigt die vermehrte Phospholamban-Phosphorylierung an der CaMKII-spezifischen Thr-17-Stelle die Beobachtung einer gesteigerten CaMKII-Aktivität unter Ethanol.

Wir bestimmten als Parameter der SERCA2a-Funktion die Abfallskinetik des Kalziumtransienten und maßen nicht direkt die Transporterfunktion, z.B. mittels ⁴⁵Ca²⁺-Oxalat-Wiederaufnahme-Assay. Für derartige direkte Transporterassays müssten Kardiomyozyten membranpermeabilisiert werden, was die Interpretation der Wirkung von Ethanol auf die Zelle verkomplizieren würde, daher entschieden wir uns für diese Studie gegen diese Verfahren. Die in unserer Studie unter Ethanol gesteigerte NCX-Funktion sollte allerdings zukünftig auch mittels Patch-Clamp-Messungen evaluiert werden, um Einflüsse des (in unseren Experimenten möglicherweise variablen) Membranpotentials auf die NCX-Messungen zu minimieren. Des Weiteren würde dies eine Evaluation der zytosolischen Natriumkonzentration ermöglichen, die ebenfalls durch eine verstärkte CaMKII-Aktivierung unter Ethanol beeinflusst werden könnte (46,47) (erste eigene präliminäre Untersuchungen der zytosolischen Natriumkonzentration unter Ethanol mittels Fluoreszenzmikroskopie stützen diese Vermutung, siehe Zusammenfassung und Ausblick). Negativ inotrope Effekte akuter Ethanol-Exposition waren in vivo beobachtet worden (11,12,45). Wir konnten dies auf zellulärer Ebene nachvollziehen und konnte zeigen, dass Ethanol dosisabhängig die Kontraktionsamplitude von Kardiomyozyten erniedrigt (Fig 2D). Auch in multizellulären Präparaten (humane atriale Muskelstreifen) war dieser negativ inotrope Effekt feststellbar (Abnahme der Kontraktionskraft, Fig. 2B). Dieser deutliche negativ inotrope Effekt ist durch die nur etwas reduzierte Amplitude der Kalziumtransienten nur teilweise zu erklären. Die Untersuchung von Hysterese-Schleifen für Kalziumkonzentration und resultierende Sarkomerlängen während des Kontraktionszyklus ermöglichte es die Kalziumsensitivität in Ethanol-exponierten Zellen zu untersuchen. Hier stellte ich fest, dass die Empfindlichkeit der Myofilamente für Kalzium durch Ethanol abgesenkt wird (Hystereseschleifen in Fig. 3F und Quantifizierung (48) in 3G). Dies ist in Zusammenschau mit der o.g. erhöhten CaMKII-Aktivität unter Ethanol erklärbar - in anderen Studien konnte bereits eine Absenkung der Myofilament-Kalziumsensitivität

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nach CaMKII-Aktivierung, unter anderem durch Phosphorylierung des regulatorischen Myofilamentproteins Titin, gezeigt werden (49,50).

Es verblieb zu klären, über welchen Mechanismus Ethanol diese Effekte auf die CaMKII und die elektromechanische Kopplung herbeiführt. Wie oben bereits beschrieben werden in Kardiomyozyten ROS klassischerweise vor allem durch die NOX2 gebildet (51) und Ethanol führt in anderen Geweben zu einer NOX2-Aktivierung (27). Zur Evaluation der ROS-Produktion nach Ethanolexposition setzten wir den allgemeinen ROS-Fluoreszenzsensor CMH₂-DCFDA in murinen Kardiomyozyten ein und konnten eine vermehrte ROS-Produktion (i.e. CMH₂-DCFDA-Fluoreszenzsteigerung) unter 3 ‰ Ethanol nachweisen (Fig. 4B).

Um die NOX2-Abhängigkeit des Ethanol-induzierten diastolischen Kalziumlecks zu evaluieren, bediente ich mich eines transgenen Mausmodells, in welchem die NOX2-Untereinheit gp91phox ausgeknockt ist (NOX2 KO, (26,52,53)), wodurch die NOX2 funktionsunfähig wird.

In isolierten ventrikulären und atrialen Kardiomyozyten aus diesem Modell konnten selbst 6 ‰ Ethanol keine Erhöhung des diastolischen Kalziumlecks bewirken (Fig. 4D und Suppl. Fig. 8B respektive). Ich konnte zeigen, dass bei Verlust der NOX2 Ethanol nicht mehr zur Aktivierung der CaMKII führt, i.e. die CaMKII-Autophosphorylierung in Ethanol-behandelten NOX2 KO Kardiomyozyten nicht durch Ethanol erhöht wurde.

Zudem stellte ich fest, dass Kalziumtransienten und SERCA2a-Funktion (Kalziumtransientenrelaxation) in NOX2 KO Kardiomyozyten nicht durch Ethanol verändert waren (Fig. 8C und 8D respektive). Somit erscheinen die von mir beobachteten Effekte von Ethanol durch NOX2-generierte ROS vermittelt zu sein.

Spannenderweise konnte ich nachweisen, dass auch die Myofilament-Kalziumsensitivität im NOX2 KO unter Ethanol nicht mehr nicht mehr signifikant beeinträchtigt wird.

Um die Bedeutung von ROS für die kontraktile Dysfunktion unter Ethanol noch stärker zu beleuchten, führten wir Versuche mit dem ROS-Fänger (Antioxidanz) N-Acetylcystein (NAC) durch. Dieser verhinderte eine Verringerung der Kontraktionskraft unter 3 ‰ Ethanol im Vergleich zur alleinigen Ethanolapplikation (Fig. 2B).

Um nachzuweisen, dass das diastolische Kalziumleck durch Ethanol tatsächlich durch die CaMKII vermittelt wird, setzte ich überdies den CaMKII-Inhibitor AIP (autocamtide-related inhibitory peptide 2) ein. Dieser reduzierte in Wildtypkardiomyozyten das durch Ethanol (6 ‰) hervorgerufene diastolische Kalziumleck tatsächlich deutlich (Fig. 4G).

Zu klären galt noch der Mechanismus der CaMKII-Aktivierung. Es existiert ein Antikörper zum direkten Nachweis der Oxidation der CaMKII an den Konsensusstellen Methionin 281 und 282 (20). Dieser Antikörper ist unserer Erfahrung nach insgesamt eher geeignet für den gualitativen Nachweis einer Oxidation, als deren exakte Quantifizierung, sodass letztlich die Autophosphorylierung der CaMKII der entscheidende Readout für ihre Aktivierung ist. Diesen qualitativen Nachweis einer gesteigerten CaMKII-Oxidation konnte ich in der Tat erbringen (siehe Abbildung Z1 am Ende dieser Zusammenfassung, ANOVA p<0.05, n=3 Mäuse). Um weiter zu bestätigen, dass die oxidative Aktivierung der CaMKII eine zentrale Rolle für die Ethanol-Effekte spielt, untersuchte ich ein transgenes Mausmodell, in welchem die CaMKII nicht mehr durch Oxidation aktiviert werden kann (Met281/282Val-Mutation, "MMVV"-Modell (20,54)). In ventrikulären und auch atrialen Kardiomyozyten aus diesen Mäusen führt Ethanol nicht mehr zu pathologischem diastolischen Kalziumleck (Fig. 41 und Suppl. Fig. 9A respektive). Auch stellte ich fest, dass die systolische Kalziumtransientenamplitude und Kalziumtransientenrelaxation unter Ethanol in MMVV-Kardiomyozyten nicht beeinträchtigt war (Suppl. Fig 9B und 9C respektive).

Wie auch im NOX2 KO konnte ich zudem für die MMVV-transgenen Kardiomyozyten eine unveränderte Myofilament-Kalziumsensitivität zeigen (Supp. Fig. 8E und 8F).

Zusammenfassung und Ausblick

In meiner Publikation wird erstmals ein erhöhtes diastolisches Kalziumleck aus dem sarkoplasmatischen Retikulum als Folge einer akuten Ethanolexposition von isolierten Kardiomyozyten gezeigt. Zudem wird dieses u.a. durch Nutzung zweier transgener Mausmodelle als Folge einer ROS-vermittelten oxidativen CaMKII-Aktivierung mechanistisch aufgeklärt. Den Schlüsselbefund eines erhöhten diastolischen Kalziumlecks konnte ich zudem in humanen atrialen Kardiomyozyten validieren, was die Relevanz der Befunde für die klinisch hochrelevanten akuten Ethanoleffekten unterstreicht (1).

Hierbei ist jedoch zunächst zu berücksichtigen, dass meine Experimente auf zellulärer Ebene valide, jedoch eine direkte klinische Übertragbarkeit in die in vivo Situation nicht zwingend gegeben sein muss. Neben den direkten Effekten von Ethanol auf die Herzmuskelzellen könnten in vivo auch Effekte wie z.B. eine Volumenüberladung oder Störungen des Elektrolythaushaltes und vegetative Effekte einen wichtigen Beitrag zur toxischen Ethanolwirkung leisten. Auch am Herzen ist nicht auszuschließen, dass andere Mechanismen (z.B. Mitochondriopathien) zu den chronischen Effekte von Ethanol beitragen.

Dennoch wäre in Zukunft für Patienten mit Vorhofflimmern nach Ethanolintoxikation die Entwicklung einer Therapie mit neuartigen, auch oral verfügbaren CaMKII-Inhibitoren ein auf diese Arbeit aufbauender möglicher neuer pharmakologischer Ansatz. (25,39).

Eine Wirksamkeit vieler dieser Inhibitoren ist für Modelle des Vorhofflimmerns (humane atriale Kardiomyozyten und *in vivo* Tiermodelle) bereits gezeigt (25) und ich konnte in der aktuellen Publikation die Wirksamkeit eines dieser Inhibitoren, AIP, auch für die Ethanol-vermittelte CaMKII Aktivierung validieren: Behandlung von Ethanol-exponierten Kardiomyozyten mit AIP führte zu einer signifikanten Reduktion des diastolischen Kalziumlecks (unpublizierte Daten aus unserer Arbeitsgruppe zeigen dies auch für einen weiteren CaMKII-Inhibitor [SMP-114]).

Eine Therapie mit Antioxidanzien (z.B. NAC) wäre ebenfalls denkbar, um die gesteigerte Ethanol-induzierte ROS-Produktion zu antagonisieren. Jedoch hat sich in den letzten Jahren gezeigt, dass ein unkritischer Einsatz dieser Substanzen auch mit unerwünschten Ereignisse, wie z.B. einer beschleunigten Progression und Entstehung von Tumorerkrankungen assoziiert ist (55). Möglicherweise wäre die direkte Inhibition der NOX2 eine Therapiealternative: erste vielversprechende NOX2-Inhibitoren befinden sich in der Entwicklung (56,57).

Für die Zukunft sind weitere Untersuchungen der kardialen Ethanolwirkung im Lichte der hohen Prävalenz ethanolinduzierter Herzerkrankungen (1) von großer Relevanz. Eine CaMKII-Aktivierung kann auch Alterationen der zellulären Natriumhomöostase bewirken z.B. über eine Verstärkung des späten Natriumstroms (latel_{Na}; (46,47)). Dies kann zudem eine Verstärkung des diastolischen Kalziumlecks im Sinne eines *circulus vitiosus* (25,47) bewirken.

Dieses Feld möchte ich in Anschlussarbeiten an meine Dissertation weiter untersuchen. In ersten Folgearbeiten konnte ich tatsächlich bereits einen signifikanten Anstieg der zytosolischen Natriumkonzentration nach Ethanolexposition zeigen (Abbildung Z2, Fluoreszenz des Natriumfarbstoffs SBFI, Kontrolle/CTRL versus 3 ‰ Ethanol, 2-Wege-ANOVA p<0.05). Ich werde daran mit Untersuchungen wichtiger Natriumtransporter unter Ethanol mittels Patch-clamp anschließen, um weitere therapeutische Optionen, wie z.B. eine Inhibition des späten Natriumstrom oder eine NCX-Blockade zu evaluieren. Langfristig soll aufbauend auf diese Arbeit eine Translation in ein in vivo Modell erfolgen und die antiarrhythmische Wirksamkeit der CaMKII-Inhibition mittels transjugulärer Rechtsherzkatheter mit Arrhythmieinduktion in Mäusen getestet werden.

Abbildungen der Zusammenfassung

Z1:







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Original article

SR Ca²⁺-leak and disordered excitation-contraction coupling as the basis for arrhythmogenic and negative inotropic effects of acute ethanol exposure



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ABSTRACT

Aims: Ethanol has acute negative inotropic and arrhythmogenic effects. The underlying mechanisms, however, are largely unknown. Sarcoplasmic reticulum Ca^{2+} -leak is an important mechanism for reduced contractility and arrhythmias. Ca^{2+} -leak can be induced by oxidative stress and Ca^{2+} /Calmodulin-dependent protein kinase II (CaMKII). Therefore, we investigated the influence of acute ethanol exposure on excitation-contraction coupling in atrial and ventricular cardiomyocytes.

Methods and results: Isolated human atrial and murine atrial or ventricular cardiomyocytes were preincubated for 30 min and then superfused with control solution or solution containing ethanol. Ethanol had acute negative inotropic and positive lusitropic effects in human atrial muscle strips and murine ventricular cardiomyocytes. Accordingly, Ca^{2+} -imaging indicated lower Ca^{2+} -transient amplitudes and increased SERCA2a activity, while myofilament Ca^{2+} -sensitivity was reduced. SR Ca^{2+} -leak was assessed by measuring Ca^{2+} -sparks. Ethanol induced severe SR Ca^{2+} -leak in human atrial cardiomyocytes (calculated leak: 4.60 ± 0.45 mF/F₀ vs 1.86 ± 0.26 in control, $n \ge 80$). This effect was dose-dependent, while spontaneous arrhythmogenic Ca^{2+} -waves increased \sim 5-fold, as investigated in murine cardiomyocytes. Delayed afterdepolarizations, which can result from increased SR Ca^{2+} -leak, were significantly increased ROS-stress in ethanol treated cells. ROS-scavenging with *N*-acetylcysteine prevented negative inotropic and positive lusitropic effects in human muscle strips. Ethanol-induced Ca^{2+} -leak was abolished in mice with knockout of NOX2 (the main source for ROS in cardiomyocytes). Importantly, mice with oxidation-resistant CaMKII (Met281/282Val mutation) were protected from ethanol-induced Ca^{2+} -leak.

Conclusion: We show for the first time that ethanol acutely induces strong SR Ca^{2+} -leak, also altering excitationcontraction coupling. Acute negative inotropic effects of ethanol can be explained by reduced systolic Ca^{2+} release. Mechanistically, ROS-production via NOX2 and oxidative activation of CaMKII appear to play central roles. This provides a mechanism for the arrhythmogenic and negative inotropic effects of ethanol and suggests a druggable target (CaMKII).

Non-standard abbreviations RvR2 Ryanodine receptor type 2 Sarcoplasmic reticulum Ca²⁺-ATPase type 2a SERCA2a SR Sarcoplasmic reticulum BAC Blood alcohol content CaMKII Ca²⁺-/Calmodulin-dependent protein kinase II 1. Introduction Na⁺/Ca²⁺-exchanger NCX NADPH oxidase 2 NOX2 Recent research [1] highlights the importance of ethanol abuse for PLN Phospholamban heart failure and atrial fibrillation, the incidence of both is more than ROS Reactive oxygen species

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doubled independent of other risk factors. In fact, chronic ethanol consumption, especially of large quantities, is a leading cause of dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM) [2] and chronic consumption of only moderate amounts of alcohol already impairs left ventricular ejection fraction [3]. Importantly, recent data shows that occasions of binge drinking might be more harmful for the heart than the underlying chronic consumption [4], indicating the relevance of acute effects of high ethanol doses. Interestingly, of the 53% of Americans who consume alcohol regularly, 44% partake in frequent binge drinking [5]. Thus, ~24% of all Americans likely frequently experience blood alcohol contents (BACs) of 0.8‰ or higher. Strikingly, 20-30% of people admitted to cardiology departments (and general hospital) are reported to be alcohol abusers [6,7]. In a study investigating admissions for acute ethanol intoxication, the mean blood alcohol content was 2.5‰, while BACs of up to 6‰ were measured [8]. Other studies investigating clinical and pre-clinical settings similarly found BAC-ranges of 1-6% common for acute intoxication [9-12].

Malignant ventricular arrhythmias occur more frequently in alcoholic cardiomyopathy than in idiopathic dilated cardiomyopathy [13], suggesting a specific arrhythmogenic substrate. Indeed, the risk for ventricular fibrillation in the context of ST-elevation myocardial infarction is considerably higher in persons who consume alcohol compared to non-drinkers [14] and 19% of non-ischemic sudden cardiac deaths in Finland have been attributed to alcoholic cardiomyopathy [15].

Aside from chronic effects, ethanol consumption can acutely induce atrial fibrillation [16,17] also in people who do not habitually drink [18], the so-called "holiday heart syndrome". Strikingly, 35-62% of admissions with a first diagnosis of atrial fibrillation had consumed ethanol before the onset of symptoms [5]. Furthermore, recent ethanol consumption has been associated with sudden cardiac death [19] and higher acute doses of ethanol have been found to favor the inducibility of experimental ventricular tachycardia and fibrillation [20]. Besides arrhythmias, ethanol acutely has negative inotropic effects [21-24] even in healthy human subjects independent of the autonomic nervous system [25] and also beginning at relatively low concentrations of ~1.3‰ ethanol [24,26]. This is also true in isolated myocardium in the absence of any in vivo systemic regulators [27]. Even mildly intoxicating levels of ethanol acutely impair cardiac function [22-24]. While the overall systemic effect of acute ethanol consumption in healthy persons is an increase in cardiac output (potentially due to vasodilation and increased heart rate [28]), alcohol acutely impairs cardiac index and stroke index in patients with heart failure [29]. Thus, acute ethanol consumption impairs cardiac function and provides an arrhythmogenic substrate.

In chronic ethanol consumption, mechanisms such as disrupted myofibrillar architecture, apoptosis, mitochondrial alterations, and imbalances in fatty acid metabolism are emerging as important pathomechanisms [30]. While indications of ethanol effects on Ca²⁺-homeostasis have been reported [31], the mechanisms by which ethanol acutely impacts cardiac function and promotes arrhythmogenesis are so far still not well understood.

Cardiac contraction is strongly dependent on cardiomyocyte Ca²⁺homeostasis. Central regulators of cardiac excitation-contraction coupling are protein kinase A (PKA) and Ca²⁺/Calmodulin-dependent protein kinase II (CaMKII). Besides activation by the Ca²⁺/Calmodulin complex, CaMKII can be activated by oxidation (at Met281/282). CaMKII overactivity in heart failure has been show to induce sarcoplasmic reticulum (SR) Ca²⁺-leak through the ryanodine receptor (RyR2) and is believed to cause SR Ca²⁺-depletion and to be centrally involved in impaired contractility [32]. CaMKII-induced SR Ca²⁺-leak has also been implicated in cardiac arrhythmias [33], which appears to be especially true for atrial fibrillation [34–36]. Thus, we speculated that alterations in Ca²⁺-handling, including SR Ca²⁺-leak, might be involved in acute effects of ethanol on cardiomyocyte function. Specifically, as it is has been reported that ethanol induces the generation of reactive oxygen species (ROS) [37], we set out to investigate whether ROS might be involved in effects of ethanol also in the heart and whether CaMKII might be a mediator of these effects.

2. Methods

An extended methods section can be found in the supplement.

2.1. Isolation of murine and human cardiomyocytes

Murine atrial and ventricular cardiomyocytes were isolated as previously described [38,39]. Explanted hearts were retrogradely Langendorff-perfused with solution containing 7.5 mg/mL liberase[™] (Roche) and trypsin 0.6% and hearts were then mechanically dissociated. NOX2 KO mice ("gp91^{phox-/-}") [40] were kindly provided by Prof. Ajay M. Shah. Mice with the CaMKII Met281/282Val mutation [41,42] were kindly provided by Prof. Mark E. Anderson. All mice were on the C57BL/6 background. All investigations conformed to Directive 2010/63/EU of the European Parliament and to local institutional guidelines.

Human atrial cardiomyocytes were isolated from human right atrial appendages using the chunk-isolation technique in a spinner flask with 0.775 mg/mL collagenase type I (370 U/mL; Worthington) and 0.4 mg/ mL protease type XXIV (Sigma-Aldrich), as described before [43]. Right atrial appendages from human patients were obtained during coronary artery bypass or cardiac valve surgery. Written consent had been given by the donors and approval had been granted by the ethics committee to this investigation that conforms to the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. Patient data can be found in Suppl. Table 1.

2.2. Experimental solutions & (pre)-treatment of isolated cardiomyocytes

Normal Tyrode's solution (NT) was used, consisting of (in mmol/L) 140 NaCl, 4 KCl, 5 HEPES, 1 MgCl₂, 10 glucose, 2 CaCl₂ (pH 7.4 at 37 °C with NaOH). Loading buffers for Ca²⁺-fluorescent dyes Fluo-4 and Fura-2 loading consisted of NT with Pluronic F-127 0.2 mg/mL in addition to the dye.

As preliminary experiments had indicated that a certain duration of exposure to ethanol was required before the onset of experiments in order to attain effects, isolated cells were pre-treated with ethanol or with control solution for 30 min before starting experiments. Ethanol exposure was then continued with superfusion. $2 \mu mol/L$ myristoylated AIP (myrAIP) was used to specifically inhibit CaMKII.

2.3. Epifluorescence and sarcomere length measurements

Ca²⁺-epifluorescence and sarcomere length were simultaneously measured using an epifluorescence setup (IonOptix Corp) [44]. Myocytes were loaded with either Fluo-4 AM or Fura-2 AM (10 $\mu mol/L,$ Molecular Probes). All experiments were performed at 37 °C. Fura-2 fluorescence-ratio was calculated using alternating (240 Hz) excitation at 340 nm and 380 nm. For better evaluation of transient decay kinetics, experiments using Fluo-4 (which is not as strong a Ca²⁺-buffer as Fura-2) were used, and F/F_0 of the fluorescence signal was calculated to assess amplitudes. Myocytes were field-stimulated at a basal frequency of 1 Hz (increased to 2 Hz to investigate frequency-dependence). SR Ca^{2+} -content was estimated by caffeine pulse (10 mmol/L). The monoexponential time-constant τ ("tau") of the caffeine-induced transient was calculated to estimate NCX function. To investigate ROS production, cells were loaded with 10 $\mu mol/L$ CM-H_2DCFDA and the (linear) percental change of the fluorescence signal over 30 s was used as a measure of ROS production [45].

2.4. Ca²⁺-spark measurements

Cardiomyocytes were incubated with 10 µM Fluo-4 AM. All

experiments were performed at 37 °C. Ca²⁺-sparks were recorded using an LSM 5 (for Fig. 4D) and LSM 7 (for all other experiments) with laserscan excitation at 488 nm. Ca²⁺-sparks were detected and quantified using Sparkmaster [46] with visual confirmation of sparks detected. Ca²⁺-spark frequency (CaSpF) was calculated from this and normalized to scanned myocyte width and scanning interval. Ca²⁺-spark size (CaSpS, calculated as: amplitude * half-maximum-width * half-maximum-duration) was added for all sparks within a cell to calculate the SR Ca²⁺-leak for this cell. Only cells displaying Ca²⁺-sparks were included in the statistics.

2.5. Muscle strip experiments

Muscle strip experiments were performed as previously reported [47]. Thin trabeculae were isolated from human right atrial appendages and connected to a force transducer (World Precision Instruments) for isometric force recordings. Contractions were induced by electrical field stimulation (1 Hz, 5 mA). After 30 min of equilibration, the trabeculae were stretched until reaching the maximum steady-state twitch force to improve comparability. After recording steady state basal contractions, the superfusion was switched to solution containing 3‰ ethanol. Ethanol effects were recorded in steady state after 30 min. To explore the role of ROS for ethanol effects, experiments utilizing 10 mmol/L of the ROS-scavenger *N*-acetylcysteine in the superfusate were performed.

2.6. Blinding & statistics

For all experiments, investigators were blinded with respect to the intervention substance used and/or genotype. All data are presented as mean \pm SEM. Statistical analyses were performed using Student's *t*-test for unpaired or paired values, one-way ANOVA, two-way repeated measures ANOVA or Fisher's exact test, as appropriate. Values p < .05 were considered as statistically significant.

3. Results

3.1. Ethanol effects on SR Ca^{2+} -leak and Ca^{2+} -waves

SR Ca²⁺-leak was investigated by measuring Ca²⁺-sparks. Ethanol acutely induced SR Ca²⁺-leak in human atrial cardiomyocytes (original registrations in Fig. 1A, mean data in 1B). Dose-dependence of SR Ca²⁺-leak was investigated in wildtype murine ventricular cardiomyocytes, in which ethanol dose-dependently induced SR Ca²⁺-leak at concentrations of 1, 3, and 6‰ (original registrations in Fig. 1C, mean data in 1D), with the highest leak measured at 6‰. This was driven by an increase in Ca²⁺-spark frequency (Fig. 1E), while Ca²⁺-spark size was unaltered (Suppl. Fig. 1A). To verify the central result of increased SR Ca²⁺-leak upon ethanol, we also employed tetracaine-measurements as another approach to determine leak [48,49] upon 6‰ of ethanol, which could confirm the increased Ca²⁺-leak (Suppl. Fig. 1B).

Furthermore, we found that acute alcohol exposure increased the incidence of spontaneous arrhythmogenic Ca^{2+} -waves, which was 4.5-fold higher upon 6% ethanol with 13.4% of cells showing spontaneous waves (original registrations for CTRL and 6% in Fig. 1F, mean data in Fig. 1G). We could confirm increased SR Ca^{2+} -leak upon 1, 3, and 6% of ethanol also in WT murine atrial cardiomyocytes (Suppl. Fig. 2).

Increased SR Ca²⁺-leak can induce pro-arrhythmogenic delayed afterdepolarizations via NCX-dependent membrane depolarization [35]. Indeed, we could verify this in WT murine atrial cardiomyocytes, where 3‰ of ethanol induced delayed afterdepolarizations in 87.5% of investigated cells versus 0% in CTRL cells (7/8 vs. 0/6 cells, original registrations in Suppl. Fig. 3A, mean data in B).

3.2. Ethanol effects on Ca^{2+} -handling

Investigation of healthy human atrial intact muscle strip

preparations showed clear negative inotropic (impaired contraction force amplitude, Fig. 2B) as well as positive lusitropic (i.e. faster relaxation time RT80, Fig. 2C) effects of ethanol, as illustrated in the original recording in Fig. 2A. (Absolute values were also significantly different, Suppl. Fig. 4A&B).

Ethanol effects on ventricular isolated cardiomyocyte contractility were investigated using murine cells in the absence of Ca^{2+} -sensitive dyes (as these would buffer Ca^{2+}). Here, we found that ethanol acutely impaired myocyte contractility by trend at a concentration of 1‰ (8% reduction in contractility), and clearly and significantly so at concentrations of 3‰ (19% reduction) and 6‰ (21% reduction; Fig. 2D). Positive lusitropic effects of ethanol were also present in the isolated cardiomyocytes (again by trend at 1‰, but significantly at 3‰ and 6‰, Fig. 2E).

Ethanol effects on systolic Ca^{2+} -release (Ca^{2+} -transient amplitudes) were investigated using the ratiometric Ca²⁺-sensitive dye Fura-2 in the murine ventricular cells. Ethanol clearly reduced systolic Ca2+transient amplitudes, as shown in Fig. 3A and depicted in Ca²⁺-traces in Fig. 3B. Diastolic Ca²⁺-elimination is 90% due to SERCA2a in murine cardiomyocytes [50], so that SERCA2a function can be measured by analyzing Ca²⁺-transient decay kinetics. Thus, we performed experiments using the non-ratiometric dye Fluo-4 (which is a less strong Ca²⁺-buffer and has a much better temporal resolution than Fura-2) to investigate SR Ca2+-reuptake by SERCA2a. As shown in Fig. 3C and illustrated by original registrations in Fig. 3D, we found much faster transient decay upon ethanol, suggesting higher SERCA2a activity and thus higher SR Ca²⁺-reuptake. NCX activity was investigated by analyzing the decay of caffeine-induced transients, which revealed higher NCX activity upon ethanol (Fig. 3E). Increased NCX activity could influence the measurement of SERCA2a-function from the decay of electrically stimulated Ca2+-transients. To exclude the effect of NCX, we therefore calculated $tau_{SERCA2a}$ [49] from cells for which both Ca^{2+} transient relaxation and caffeine transient relaxation was available. TauserCA2a was significantly shorter in ethanol-exposed cells (Suppl. Fig. 5). Also, SR Ca²⁺-leak could influence transient decay. To exclude this confounder as well, we determined in paired experiments tau after rapid addition of tetracaine (to block Ca²⁺-leak through the ryanodinereceptor [48,49]) as well as under control conditions. These experiments again showed significantly lower tau in ethanol-treated cells (Suppl. Fig. 6). Thus, our findings indicate increased SERCA2a-function upon ethanol exposure.

SR Ca²⁺-content was also measured using caffeine-induced SR Ca²⁺-release, but using Fura-2 (instead of Fluo-4) to quantify transient amplitudes. These experiments revealed unaltered SR Ca²⁺-content in the ethanol treated cells (Fura-2 ration ethanol 6‰ 0.385 \pm 0.039 vs. control 0.408 \pm 0.031 n = 20 vs. n = 12, n.s.).

Myofilament Ca^{2+} -response (" Ca^{2+} -sensitivity") was explored in murine WT ventricular cardiomyocytes by investigating hysteresis loops for Ca^{2+} -concentration (i.e. Fura-2 ratio) and corresponding sarcomere length, as shown in the loops averaged from all experiments in Fig. 3F. These indicate a clear shift towards longer sarcomere lengths (i.e. reduced myofilament response to Ca^{2+}) upon ethanol treatment. To substantiate this, we employed the method of Howarth and Qureshi [51] and analyzed the final phase of the relaxation (200–400 ms after electrical stimulation), during which the myofilaments come into quasiequilibrium with cytosolic Ca^{2+} . This analysis confirmed significantly less myofilament Ca^{2+} -response upon ethanol exposure (Fig. 3G).

3.3. Role of oxidative CaMKII-activation by reactive oxygen species (ROS) for ethanol effects

We had speculated that ethanol could induce activation of CaMKII via increased generation of ROS. Using the fluorescent ROS-sensor CM- H_2DCFDA , we could demonstrate higher ROS generation in ethanol exposed cells (original registration in Fig. 4A, mean data in 4B).

Accordingly, we found a significant increase in Thr287-



Fig. 1. SR Ca^{2+} -leak and Ca^{2+} -waves: Original recordings (A) and mean data (B) show induction of SR Ca^{2+} -leak by ethanol in human atrial cardiomyocytes (CTRL n = 93, 6% n = 80 cells, n = 4 patients). Effects of different concentrations of ethanol were tested in murine ventricular cardiomyocytes, demonstrating that SR Ca^{2+} -leak was induced at concentrations of 1, 3, and 6% ethanol (original recordings in C, mean data for Ca^{2+} -leak in D, CTRL n = 25 cells, 1% n = 26 cells, 3% n = 21 cells, 6% n = 27 cells, n = 5 mice), which was mainly driven by an increase in Ca^{2+} -spark frequency (E). Also, arrhythmogenic Ca^{2+} -waves were potently induced by ethanol (original recording in F, mean data in G, CTRL n = 67 cells, 6% n = 69 cells, n = 5 mice).

autophosphorylated (and thus active) CaMKII already at a relatively low concentration of 3‰ ethanol (Suppl. Fig. 7) in isolated WT murine ventricular cardiomyocytes. Furthermore, phosphorylation of the most unequivocal CaMKII target, phospholamban (PLN), at the CaMKII- specific Thr17 site was also significantly increased upon ethanol (pT17/ PLN-ratio, Suppl. Fig. 7), confirming increased CaMKII-activity and supporting the increased lusitropy observed in Fig. 3C.

NADPH oxidase 2 (NOX2) is the main source for ROS generation in

A:Original contractions of human atrial muscle strips



400 ms







D: Cardiomyocyte twitch Amplitude for WT murine ventricular CM

E: Cardiomyocyte twitch relaxation for WT murine ventricular CM



Fig. 2. Contractile function and relaxation: In paired experiments using human atrial muscle strips (n = 9 muscle strips, n = 9 patients, original recordings in Fig. A), ethanol clearly impaired contractile force (B), but accelerated relaxation (C). These negative inotropic (D) and positive lusitropic (E) effects were also observed in isolated single murine ventricular cardiomyocytes at doses ranging from 1 to 6‰ ethanol (CTRL n = 39 cells, 1‰ n = 29 cells, 3‰ n = 29 cells, 6‰ n = 39 cells, n = 8 mice).

cardiomyocytes [52]. We used NOX2-knockout (KO) mice to investigate the role of ROS for ethanol effects and found that KO of NOX2 prevented CaMKII-activation and CaMKII-dependent phospholambanphosphorylation upon ethanol (Suppl. Fig. 8A), suggesting a critical role of NOX2 for CaMKII-activation due to ethanol. We furthermore found that NOX2-KO consistently prevented induction of SR Ca²⁺-leak even at 6‰ both in ventricular cardiomyocytes (original registrations in Fig. 4C, mean data in 4D) as well as atrial cardiomyocytes (Suppl. Fig. 8B). Also, Ca²⁺-transient amplitude (Suppl. Fig. 8C), and SERCA2a-function (Ca²⁺-transient decay as RT 80%, Suppl. Fig. 8D) were not altered in murine NOX2-KO ventricular cardiomyocytes even by 6‰ ethanol. Thus, ethanol-induced alterations of Ca^{2+} -handling seem to depend on ROS-generation via NOX2. Interestingly, myofilament Ca^{2+} -response was also not altered upon 6‰ ethanol in NOX2-KO ventricular cardiomyocytes (averaged hysteresis-loops in Suppl. Fig. 8E, myofilament Ca^{2+} -response in F), suggesting a role of ROS also for this ethanol effect.

To further investigate the role of ROS and explore the potential of antioxidative strategies to treat ethanol effects, we performed muscle strip experiments with healthy human atrial tissue using the ROS scavenging compound *N*-acetylcysteine (NAC), which completely prevented the negative inotropic (Fig. 4E) and positive lusitropic (Fig. 4F)



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Fig. 3. Cardiomyocyte Ca²⁺-handling: As investigated in murine ventricular cardiomyocytes using the Ca²⁺-dye FURA-2, ethanol diminished systolic Ca²⁺-release (A, CTRL n = 24 cells, 6% n = 31 cells n = 5 mice), as illustrated in original recordings (B). Ca²⁺-transient decay, i.e. mainly SR Ca²⁺-reuptake via SERCA2a, was accelerated by ethanol (C, separate investigations using Fluo-4 for kinetics, CTRL n = 19 cells, 6% n = 23 cells, n = 4 mice), as illustrated in amplitude-matched original Ca²⁺-transients (D). Also cytosolic Ca²⁺-extrusion via NCX was faster upon ethanol (E, CTRL n = 12 cells, 6% n = 8 cells, n = 4 mice). Myofilament Ca²⁺-response is significantly reduced upon 6% ethanol as illustrated in averaged hysteresisloops (F) and quantified according to the method by Howarth and Qureshi (G).

effects of ethanol. ROS can directly activate CaMKII. Our experiments using the CaMKII inhibitor AIP showed that CaMKII-inhibition potently reduces SR Ca²⁺-leak in ethanol-treated wildtype murine cardiomyocytes (Fig. 4G), suggesting that CaMKII plays an important role for ethanol-induced Ca²⁺-leak.

To investigate the role of oxidative activation of CaMKII, we used mice with oxidation resistant CaMKII (Met281/282Val mutation, MMVV TG). In ventricular cardiomyocytes from this mouse model, even 6‰ of ethanol could not induce SR Ca2+-leak (original registrations Fig. 4H, mean data Fig. 4I), which we could also confirm for isolated atrial cardiomyocytes from these mice (Suppl. Fig. 9A), suggesting that ROS-mediated CaMKII-activation is the critical mechanism for SR Ca²⁺leak. We also found that in the ventricular MMVV TG cardiomyocytes, Ca2+-transient amplitude and Ca2+-transient decay as a marker of SERCA2a-function were unaltered (Suppl. Fig. 9B&C), further supporting the hypothesis of oxidative activation of CaMKII upon ethanol being central to disturbed Ca²⁺-handling. Interestingly, myofilament Ca²⁺-response was not altered by ethanol in the MMVV TG ventricular cardiomyocytes (averaged hysteresis-loops in Suppl. Fig. 9D, myofilament Ca²⁺-response in Suppl. Fig. 9E), suggesting that CaMKII plays a role also for altered myofilament Ca²⁺-sensitivity [1,2].

4. Discussion

The mechanisms by which ethanol acutely impairs cardiac contractility and induces arrhythmias are incompletely understood. We investigated the acute effects of ethanol on excitation-contraction coupling in isolated cardiomyocytes. We found that ethanol acutely affected EC-coupling and especially induced SR Ca²⁺-leak through the RyR2 and enhanced SR Ca²⁺-reuptake via SERCA2a. Correlating with higher SR Ca2+-leak, ethanol dramatically increased the incidence of arrhythmogenic spontaneous Ca2+-waves and delayed afterdepolarizations (DADs). This could provide a substrate for the arrhythmogenic effects of ethanol - especially in the acute setting, such as holiday heart syndrome. Moreover, we found that the acute negative inotropic effects of ethanol can be attributed to lower systolic Ca²⁺transients, but also to myofilament Ca2+-desensitization. Our mechanistic investigations suggest a central role of ROS for the acute effects of ethanol and implicate CaMKII in mediating these ROS-effects. Of note, our experiments were performed in the absence of in vivo confounders which might otherwise have masked direct ethanol effects on the cardiac muscle, such as effects on vasotone (e.g. less peripheral resistance [53] due to vasodilatation [54]) and sympathetic activity (e.g. increased heart rate [53]), which could increase cardiac output in spite of per se impaired cardiac contractility. Also, we can exclude for



our experiments that effects were caused by systemic ethanol metabolites rather than ethanol itself.

4.1. Ethanol acutely affects cardiomyocyte Ca²⁺-handling

We found that ethanol had acute negative inotropic and positive lusitropic effects on human cardiac muscle strips and thus investigated excitation-contraction coupling in isolated cardiac myocytes from wildtype mice.

Electrically stimulated Ca²⁺-transients showed reduced systolic Ca²⁺-release upon ethanol exposure. As in the muscle strips, single cardiomyocyte twitch relaxation was significantly faster upon ethanol. Our measurements using fluorescent Ca²⁺-indicators showed that the reason for this is faster diastolic decay of cytosolic [Ca2+] due to

Fig. 4. Role of oxidative CaMKII-activation by reactive oxygen species (ROS) for ethanol effects: Increased production of ROS as assessed using the ROS-sensitive dye CM-H2DFDA was observed even at moderate ethanol concentrations (original recordings in A, mean data in B, CTRL n = 35 cells, 3% n = 29 cells, n = 8 mice). In cells lacking NADPH oxidase 2 (NOX2, the major generator of ROS in cardiomyocytes), ethanol even at high concentrations did not induce SR Ca²⁺-leak (original registrations C, mean data in D, CTRL n = 54 cells, 6% n = 92 cells, n = 4mice). Accordingly, the ROS-scavenger N-acetylcysteine (NAC) prevented the negative inotropic (E) and positive lusitropic (F) effects of ethanol in human atrial muscle strips (n = 5 muscle strips, n = 5 patients). Specific inhibition of CaMKII potently reduced ethanol-induced SR Ca^{2+} -leak (G, CTRL n = 24 cells, 6‰ + AIP n = 21 cells, n = 3 mice). Also, cardiomyocytes with CaMKII resistant to oxidation (Met281/282Val mutation MMVV CTRL n = 50 cells, 6‰ n = 49 cells, n = 4 mice) were completely protected from ethanol-induced SR Ca2+-leak even at high concentrations (original recordings in H, mean data in I).



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6 ‰

induction of SERCA2a function in the ethanol treated cells. Accordingly, we found an increase in stimulatory Thr17 phosphorylation on PLN upon ethanol, which would relieve inhibition of SERCA2a by PLN. These acute effects of ethanol on SR Ca²⁺-reuptake are quite in contrast to chronic effects, where SERCA2a function has in fact been reported to be decreased due to mechanisms so far not unraveled (e.g. altered SERCA2a expression versus modification of SERCA2a function) [55]. Furthermore, we found that ethanol also strongly increased NCX activity. While the decreased Ca2+-transients alone could explain at least in part the observed reduction in contractility upon ethanol, we also found myofilament Ca²⁺-sensitivity to be significantly reduced. The observation of lower Ca2+-transient amplitudes, however, prompted us to investigate diastolic SR Ca2+-leak.

4.2. SR Ca^{2+} -leak, spontaneous Ca^{2+} -waves, and delayed afterdepolarizations provide a cellular basis for arrhythmogenic effects of ethanol

In fact, the prominent finding of our investigations was strongly increased SR Ca²⁺-leak upon ethanol exposure. At first sight, this result may conflict with a previous publication, in which the data shown for Ca^{2+} -sparks at 19‰ (i.e. 1.5% wt/vol) of ethanol are not significantly different from control [31]. In an own set of experiments at 19‰, we were able to reproduce that at this high concentration of ethanol, Ca^{2+} sparks are in fact not increased (Suppl. Fig. 10). The explanation for this appears to be that at this clearly unphysiologically high concentration of ethanol, SR Ca²⁺-content is severely depleted, as reported by the same authors [31]. As SR Ca²⁺-leak is dependent not only on the principal "leakiness" of the RyR2, but also strongly on SR Ca²⁺-load ("leak-load-relationship") [48], this lower SR Ca²⁺-load by itself should counterbalance the principally leak-inducing properties of ethanol on the RyR2. In this manner, SR Ca2+-leak could be normal despite increased propensity for Ca2+-sparks due to lower SR Ca2+-load. In contrast, in our experiments investigating up to 6‰ of ethanol, SR Ca²⁺-content was preserved due to simultaneous SERCA2a activation counterbalancing SR Ca²⁺-leak, so that our experiments compared cells with similar SR Ca²⁺-load. In this more physiologic range of up to 6‰, we did observe a clearly dose-dependent induction of SR Ca²⁺-leak with a ceiling-effect appearing to be reached at about 6‰. Importantly, we could also verify our findings in human atrial cardiomyocytes.

SR Ca²⁺-leak has repeatedly been shown to be arrhythmogenic, with the main mechanism proposed being induction of transient inward currents (I_{Ti}, by exchange of leaking Ca²⁺ for Na⁺ via NCX) high enough to cause membrane depolarizations that reach the threshold required to cause propagating excitation to neighboring cells [33]. Not only did ethanol strongly induce SR Ca²⁺-leak, the increased NCX activity should potentially further facilitate the occurrence of I_{Ti}, which can promote delayed afterdepolarizations. In accordance, we found the incidence of spontaneous Ca²⁺-waves and delayed afterdepolarizations, which are regarded as strong drivers of arrhythmogenicity [56–58], to be significantly increased upon ethanol exposure. Thus, our findings for the first time show alterations in cellular Ca²⁺-handling that could form the basis for the increased propensity for arrhythmias upon acute ethanol exposure.

4.3. Preserved SR Ca^{2+} -content despite increased SR Ca^{2+} -leak

Despite the strong diastolic SR Ca^{2+} -leak upon ethanol, we found that SR Ca^{2+} -content was not significantly impaired by this leak, at least in the acute setting of our experiments. Our data indicate that the Ca^{2+} -loss from the SR was compensated for by enhanced SR Ca^{2+} -reuptake due to increased SERCA2a function upon ethanol.

4.4. Oxidative CaMKII-activation by reactive oxygen species stress is centrally involved in ethanol effects

It is well know that ethanol induces ROS, while the mechanisms are debated. We confirmed higher ROS stress also for acute ethanol exposure in our myocytes using the general oxidative stress indicator CM-H₂DCFDA. The main source for ROS in the cardiomyocyte is superoxide production by the NADPH oxidase 2 (NOX2) [52]. And indeed, in our mice with knockout of NOX2, ethanol did not induce SR Ca²⁺-leak – even at a high concentration of 6‰. Also, Ca²⁺-transient amplitudes were unaffected by ethanol in these mice, suggesting a causal relationship between SR Ca²⁺-leak and impaired Ca²⁺-transient amplitude. (Of note, recent reports by another group in a different model with chronic ethanol exposure show a pronounced protection from the development of cardiomyopathy in NOX2-knockout mice [59].) Moreover, we found in human cardiac muscle strips that the negative inotropic as well as the positive lusitropic effects of ethanol appear to be

ROS-mediated as well, as pretreatment of the muscle strips with the ROS-scavenger N-acetylcysteine completely prevented the occurrence of these effects upon ethanol exposure. In line with this, ethanol did not alter myofilament Ca²⁺-sensitivity in NOX2 KO cardiomyocytes. CaMKII is a (if not "the") well-established potent inducer of SR Ca²⁺leak [32]. Thus, we hypothesized that CaMKII might be centrally involved in the ethanol effects on diastolic Ca^{2+} -leak and SR Ca^{2} -reuptake we observed. This notion was supported by our observation that ethanol increased Ca2+-spark frequency, but not spark size, which appears to be typical for CaMKII-mediated effects [34,39,47]. In fact, in our functional experiments using the specific CaMKII-inhibitor AIP, CaMKII-inhibition potently reduced the Ca2+-leak in ethanol treated cells, suggesting that CaMKII is involved in ethanol-induced SR Ca²⁺leak. Importantly, we found activation of CaMKII (Thr287 autophosphorylation) to be significantly increased by ethanol in wildtype, but not in NOX2-knockout cardiomyocytes. ROS can directly activate CaMKII by oxidation at Met281/282 [60]. We hypothesized that ROS generated upon ethanol might lead to oxidative activation of CaMKII which accordingly induces SR Ca2+-leak. This hypothesis was investigated using cardiomyocytes from mice with oxidation-resistant CaMKII (MMVV-mutation). Cardiomyocytes from MMVV mice were indeed completely protected from ethanol-induced SR Ca²⁺-leak. CaMKII-activation furthermore is a known reason for decreased myofilament Ca2+-sensitivity [51,61], and in fact, myofilament Ca2+-response was also unaltered in MMVV TG cells. We propose that upon ethanol, ROS are generated via NOX2, and that oxidative activation of CaMKII by these ROS is a critical mediator for acute ethanol effects, notably by inducing SR Ca^{2+} -leak.

4.5. Limitations

We would like to point out that while our data are qualitatively valid, some of our readouts might not represent the exact quantitative activity of transporters involved. For example, due to Ca^{2+} -buffering properties of Ca^{2+} -sensitive dyes, measurements using fluorescence microscopy can never represent the exact activity of Ca^{2+} -transporters. Also, for example, NCX activity inferred from caffeine-induced Ca^{2+} -transients does not take into account possible influences of ethanol induced alterations of membrane potential, which might affect the magnitude of difference in NCX activity to some degree. We also would like to mention that results from the cellular level, while of course having implications on whole organ function, cannot be immediately translated into in vivo effects, since in vivo other factors such as cardiac geometry and preload will play a role. Thus, while having clinical implications, our data can of course not be immediately translated into clinical practice.

4.6. Summary & conclusion

In summary, we show for the first time that ethanol induces SR Ca2+-leak in cardiomyocytes and that ROS-induced activation of CaMKII appears to be involved in mediating this effect. This is associated with more spontaneous Ca²⁺-waves in ethanol-treated cardiomyocytes and increased delayed afterdepolarizations, revealing a cellular mechanism for arrhythmogenic effects of ethanol. Furthermore, we found evidence for increased SERCA2a function upon ethanol, leading (in combination with increased NCX function) to positive lusitropic effects and compensating for SR Ca2+-leak with respect to SR Ca²⁺-content. Our investigations suggest a central role of NOX2, ROS stress and CaMKII as mediators of acute ethanol effects, as ethanol effects could be prevented by either ROS-scavenging, knocking out NOX2 as the main source of ROS, and by oxidation-resistant CaMKII. Importantly, we were able to show these mechanisms in the absence of in vivo systemic confounders. Our key findings stem from experiments using human cardiomyocytes and human muscle strips. We replicated these findings in murine atrial and ventricular cardiomyocytes and

performed further mechanistic experiments in these (more readily available) cells. Notably, as we found ethanol effects to be mediated by ROS, therapies either using antioxidative compounds (such as *N*-acetylcysteine in our experiments) or strategies reducing ROS production by targeting the NOX-axis [62] might prove valuable to prevent detrimental cardiac effects of ethanol abuse. However, while *N*-acetylcysteine was effective in our investigations in vitro, it has often failed as an antioxidative strategy in clinical use and pharmacological strategies to specifically target NOX2 are lacking. Since we could show that preventing activation of CaMKII by ROS completely protects cells from detrimental SR Ca²⁺-leak, CaMKII may be a promising and, importantly, druggable target. Novel oral CaMKII inhibitors approach human trials [33] and may be useful in the treatment of acute and/or chronic cardiac effects of ethanol abuse, especially with respect to arrhythmogenesis.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

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