1	Neurochemical mechanisms underlying acute and chronic ethanol-
2	mediated responses in zebrafish: the role of mitochondrial
3	bioenergetics
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31 Ethanol (EtOH) is a socially-accepted drug, whose consumption is a risk factor for non-intentional injuries, development of pathologies, and addiction. In the brain, 32 EtOH affects redox signaling and increases reactive oxygen species (ROS) production 33 after acute and chronic exposures. Here, using a high-resolution respirometry assay, we 34 investigated whether changes in mitochondrial bioenergetics play a role in both acute 35 and chronic EtOH-mediated neurochemical responses in zebrafish. For the first time, we 36 showed that acute and chronic EtOH exposures differently affect brain mitochondrial 37 function. Acutely, EtOH stimulated mitochondrial respiration through increased 38 39 baseline state, CI-mediated OXPHOS, OXPHOS capacity, OXPHOS coupling efficiency, bioenergetic efficiency, and ROX/ETS ratio. Conversely, EtOH chronically 40 decreased baseline respiration, complex I- and II-mediated ETS, as well as increased 41 42 ROX state and ROX/ETS ratio, which are associated with ROS formation. Overall, we observed that changes in mitochondrial bioenergetics play a role, at least partially, in 43 44 both acute and chronic effects of EtOH in the zebrafish brain. Moreover, our findings reinforce the face, predictive, and construct validities of zebrafish models to explore the 45 neurochemical bases involved in alcohol abuse and alcoholism. 46

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48 Keywords: alcohol-mediated responses; high-resolution respirometry assay;
49 mitochondrial bioenergetics; neuroscience; zebrafish.

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55 **1. Introduction**

Ethanol (EtOH) is one of the most socially-accepted addictive drug worldwide (Gneiting and Schmitz, 2016). Alcohol consumption is a risk factor for accidents, development of pathologies, as well as addiction and alcoholism (Rehm, 2011). Alcohol-related chronic disorders constitute a substantial health and economic burden due to the occurrence of different types of diseases, including neuropsychiatric conditions (Ridley et al., 2013). These disorders contribute to the alcoholism-related high morbidity and mortality (Shield et al., 2013).

Evidence shows that acute and chronic ethanol exposures affect redox signaling 63 64 and increase free radicals production in the central nervous system (CNS), which impairs proteins, carbohydrate, and fatty acid metabolism (Manzo-Avalos and 65 Saavedra-Molina, 2010). Mitochondria play a key role in energy production via aerobic 66 67 metabolism, and mitochondrial electron transport chain has been widely recognized as an endogenous source of reactive oxygen species (ROS) (Bolisetty and Jaimes, 2013). 68 69 EtOH oxidation can affect mitochondria physiology, which culminates in the overproduction of ROS (Almansa et al., 2009). EtOH also impairs the membrane 70 potential, decreases Ca²⁺ intracellular levels (Goodlett and Horn, 2001), and affects the 71 72 mitochondrial electron transport system, thereby reducing ATP production and triggering neuronal death (Bailey et al., 1999; Cunningham and Van Horn, 2003; Guo et 73 al., 2013). 74

In translational neuroscience research, the zebrafish (*Danio rerio*) is an emergent vertebrate tool for modeling human-related disorders (Fontana et al., 2018; Stewart et al., 2015). This species shares a high genomic conservation when compared to humans (Howe et al., 2013), and presents an evolutionarily conserved physiology (Holzschuh et al., 2001; Horzmann and Freeman, 2016; MacRae and Peterson, 2015). In zebrafish, EtOH-mediated effects on behavior are concentration- and time-dependent, and redox imbalances occur following acute and chronic exposures (Muller et al., 2017; Rosemberg et al., 2012). Although EtOH modulates redox signaling and induces oxidative stress in this species, there are no data regarding whether such responses are due to changes in mitochondrial bioenergetics. Thus, the goal of this study was to verify whether changes in mitochondrial bioenergetics play a role in EtOH-mediated effects on the CNS of zebrafish using a high-resolution respirometry assay.

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88 2. Materials and methods

89 *2.1. Animals*

Subjects were adult (4–6 months-old) short fin wild-type zebrafish (Danio rerio) 90 of mixed genders (50:50 male:female ratio). Fish were obtained from a local supplier 91 92 (Hobby Aquários, RS, Brazil) and acclimated in 40-L tanks for two weeks in a maximum density of four fish per liter. Tanks were filled with non-chlorinated water 93 94 under constant mechanical, biological, and chemical filtration. Water temperature, pH, and conductivity were set at 28 ± 1 °C, 7.2 ± 0.5 , and 400 ± 50 µS, respectively. 95 Ammonia, nitrite, and nitrate values were kept lower than 0.2 ppm, 0.05 ppm, and 0.05 96 97 ppm, respectively. Animals were kept on a 14/10 light/dark photoperiod cycle (lights on at 7:00 am), water dissolved oxygen equal or above 95% saturation and fed with a 98 commercial flake fish food (Alcon BASIC®, Alcon, Brazil) twice daily. All protocols 99 were approved by the Ethics Commission on Animal Use of the Federal University of 100 Santa Maria (process number 026/2014). 101

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103 *2.2. Alcohol exposure protocols*

We used two protocols to investigate whether EtOH modulates mitochondrial 104 105 bioenergetics. To evaluate the acute effects of EtOH, fish were individually exposed to 1.0 % (v/v) EtOH (Merck, Darmstadt, Germany) for 1 hour (n = 5-7 animals per 106 group), a concentration that induces sedative/depressant-like behavior and impairs 107 oxidant processes in the zebrafish brain (Chatterjee and Gerlai, 2009; Rosemberg et al., 108 2012). Chronically, EtOH was administered as described previously, using the 109 110 intermittent exposure protocol (Mathur and Guo, 2011; Muller et al., 2017). Briefly, zebrafish were kept in housing tanks and exposed to 1.0 % (v/v) EtOH for 8 consecutive 111 days (20 min per day) and euthanized at 9th day. For both protocols, control fish were 112 113 handled in a similar manner, except that no EtOH was added. Importantly, no physical abnormalities were observed during the exposure period. After euthanasia, the brains 114 115 were dissected and samples were prepared to further biochemical analyses.

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117 2.3. Mitochondrial respiration assays

Mitochondrial activity was measured by high-resolution respirometry using an 118 119 Oxygraph-2k (O2k, Oroboros Instruments, Innsbruck, Austria). Briefly, 2–3 brains (~12 mg of tissue) were pooled per sample and homogenized in 120 µL of medium 120 121 containing 5 mM Tris-HCl (pH 7.4), 250 mM sucrose, and 2 mM EGTA. Samples were homogenized gently with a pestle and 100 µL of homogenate was further transferred to 122 2 mL respiration buffer (115 mM KCl, 10 mM KH₂PO₄, 2 mM MgCl₂), 3 mM HEPES, 123 1 mM EGTA, essentially fatty acid-free BSA (0.2%, pH 7.2). The experiments were 124 performed at 28 °C using DatLab 4.0 software (Oroboros Inc., Austria), with continuous 125 126 stirring at 750 rpm (de Carvalho et al., 2017).

Using titration protocols (Aw, 2016; Carvalho et al., 2013), we assessed the
influence of various substrates and inhibitors in mitochondrial function as reflected in

different respiration states. Glutamate + pyruvate + malate and succinate were used as
oxidizable substrates. We determined the changes in mitochondrial respiratory chain
complexes, respiratory rates, and the production of oxidative oxygen species.

After signal stabilization, the baseline respiration supported by endogenous 132 substrates was measured. The complex I (CI)-mediated leak (LEAK; L(n)) respiration 133 was determined using 5 mM pyruvate, 5 mM glutamate and 1 mM malate. CI-mediated 134 135 oxidative phosphorylation (OXPHOS) was tested using 2.5 mM ADP. The convergent 136 electron flow during the maximal OXPHOS respiration (CI + CII_{OXPHOS}) was determined with substrates of CI and CII (10 mM succinate). To induce LEAK state, we 137 138 added 2 µg/mL oligomycin, an inhibitor of ATP synthase by blocking its proton channel. The electron transport system (ETS) respiration represents the uncoupled 139 respiration, which was measured using carbonyl cyanide 4-(trifluoromethoxy) 140 141 phenylhydrazone (FCCP) as uncoupler (optimum concentration reached between 0.5 and 1.5 μ M); CI + CII-mediated ETS respiration (CI + CII_{ETS}) was determined in the 142 143 presence of FCCP, while CII-mediated ETS respiration (CII_{ETS}) was measured in the 144 presence of 0.5 µM rotenone. The addition of 2.5 µM antimycin A was performed to 145 inhibit complex III activity, which abolished mitochondrial respiration. Then, the 146 residual oxygen consumption (ROX) with small contributions from electron leak in the uncoupled state was measured. We also determined the magnitude of residual oxygen 147 consumption relative to the maximum oxygen consumption (expressed as fold change 148 of ROX/ETS ratio), ETS/OXPHOS ratio, OXPHOS capacity, and OXPHOS coupling 149 efficiency, which is based on the ratio of free to total OXPHOS capacity (1-L/P). 150 Mitochondrial bioenergetics capacity was quantified by subtracting the ADP-induced 151 CI_{OXPHOS} values from the CI_{LEAK}. Moreover, the respiratory control rates (RCR) were 152 measured as indicators of the mitochondrial coupling state (RCR = CI_{OXPHOS}/CI_{LEAK} 153

ratio), as well as the succinate control factor ($CI_{P}/CI+CII_{O}$, fold change). Substrate control ratio (SCR) (CI_{OXPHOS}/CII_{ETS} ratio) was quantified to evaluate the effects of EtOH on mitochondrial respiratory control.

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158 *2.4. Statistics*

Normality of data and homogeneity of variances were analyzed by Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Bartlett's tests, respectively. Because results were normally distributed and homoscedastic, data were expressed as means \pm standard error of the mean (S.E.M.) and the effects on mitochondrial activity were analyzed by unpaired Student's *t* test, considering $p \le 0.05$ as significant.

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165 **3. Results**

166 *3.1. EtOH acutely stimulates mitochondrial O₂ consumption*

Fig. 1. depicts the acute effects of 1.0% EtOH exposure on the mitochondrial 167 bioenergetics. EtOH-exposed group showed higher baseline respiration ($t_{(0.05; 8)} = 3.991$, 168 p = 0.004) and complex I- induced oxidative phosphorylation (CI_{OPHOX}) ($t_{(0.05:8)} = 3.265$, 169 170 p = 0.0114) than control. However, CI_{LEAK} respiration, and complex I- and II-induced 171 oxidative phosphorylation (CI + CII_{OPHOX}) did not change between groups. When the respiration was uncoupled by FCCP (CI + CII_{ETS}) no differences were observed. 172 173 Moreover, the C_{IIETS} respiration and ROX values did not show significant differences between groups. EtOH exposure also increased ROX/ETS ratio ($t_{(0.05; 8)} = 3.639$, p =174 0.0066) (Fig. 2A) and decreased ETS/OXPHOS ($t_{(0.05; 8)} = 6.088, p = 0.0006$) (Fig. 2B). 175 176 The OXPHOS capacity ($t_{(0.05; 8)} = 2.391$, p = 0.0438) (Fig. 2C), OXPHOS coupling efficiency $(t_{(0.05; 8)} = 3.017, p = 0.0116)$ (Fig. 2D), bioenergetic efficiency $(t_{(0.05; 8)} =$ 177 2.695, p = 0.0273) (Fig. 2E), RCR ($t_{(0.05; 8)} = 2.791$, p = 0.0235) (Fig. 2F) increased after 178

EtOH exposure. Succinate control factor was lower ($t_{(0.05; 8)} = 2.528$, p = 0.0353) (Fig. 2G) in EtOH group, while SCR increased ($t_{(0.05; 8)} = 3.037$, p = 0.0161) following acute EtOH regimen (Fig. 2H).

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183 *3.2. EtOH chronically impairs mitochondrial respiration*

Fig. 3 shows the effects of 1.0% chronic EtOH exposure on mitochondrial 184 185 respiration. EtOH decreased the baseline state ($t_{(0.05:10)} = 2.783$, p = 0.0193), while no changes in CI_{LEAK} respiration, as well as in complex I- and II-induced oxidative 186 phosphorylation (CI_{OPHOX}, CI + CII_{OPHOX}) were verified. EtOH-exposed fish showed 187 188 decreased CI + CII_{ETS} ($t_{(0.05; 10)} = 2.817$, p = 0.0183) and C_{IIETS} ($t_{(0.05; 10)} = 4.048$, p =0.0023) and higher ROX values ($t_{(0.05; 10)} = 3.84$, p = 0.0033) and ROX/ETS ratio ($t_{(0.05; 10)} = 3.84$, p = 0.0033) 189 $_{10}$ = 3.696, p = 0.0031) than control (Fig. 4A). Although the ETS/OXPHOS (Fig. 4B), 190 191 OXPHOS capacity (Fig. 4C), OXPHOS coupling efficiency (Fig. 4D), bioenergetic efficiency (Fig. 4E), RCR (Fig. 4F), and succinate control factor (Fig. 4G) did not 192 193 change, SCR was increased ($t_{(0.05; 8)} = 2.593$, p = 0.0268) after EtOH exposure (Fig. 194 **4H**). Fig. 5 shows a schematic representation of the energy metabolism of acetate from 195 EtOH catabolism (Fig. 5A) and the main effects of acute and chronic EtOH exposures 196 on mitochondrial bioenergetics described (Fig. 5B).

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198 4. Discussion

Evidence has shown that EtOH can modulate redox signaling and induce oxidative stress in the zebrafish brain (Muller et al., 2017; Rosemberg et al., 2012). Oxidative stress is one of the main mechanisms associated with the harmful effects of EtOH in the brain (Augustyniak et al., 2005; Pereira et al., 2015; Sun et al., 2001; Sun and Sun, 2001), and mounting data support a crucial role of mitochondrial dysfunction

in alcohol-related neurotoxicity in various animal models (Pereira et al., 2015; Wu and 204 205 Cederbaum, 2003; Yang and Luo, 2015; Zimatkin et al., 2006). However, there are no data reporting whether redox alterations in the CNS occur due to changes in 206 mitochondrial respiration or via direct action of EtOH and its toxic metabolite 207 acetaldehyde in zebrafish. While the acute EtOH exposure overstimulated mitochondrial 208 O₂ consumption, EtOH chronically decreased mitochondrial respiration by negatively 209 210 modulating the ETS activity. Therefore, our novel findings demonstrate that both acute and chronic EtOH exposures affect mitochondrial function by different mechanisms 211 212 depending on the administration protocol.

213 EtOH acutely stimulated mitochondrial respiration through increased in baseline respiration and CI_{OXPHOS}. OXPHOS capacity (directly related to CI electron flux), 214 coupling efficiency, and bioenergetics efficiency also increased after acute EtOH 215 216 exposure, reinforcing the EtOH stimulatory effect on mitochondrial O₂ consumption. The enhanced baseline respiration and CI_{OXPHOS} may be related with EtOH metabolism 217 pathway in the brain, which increases NADH levels during the oxidation process 218 219 (Deitrich et al., 2006; Hipolito et al., 2007). The acetate from EtOH metabolism can be incorporated into acetyl-coenzyme A (acetyl-CoA), a substrate of the Krebs cycle, 220 221 which increases the formation of reducing equivalents (Deng and Deitrich, 2008; Lieber, 2005). NADH plays a role in ATP generation during the OXPHOS, facilitating 222 ATP production. However, excessive NADH formation may overstimulate CI complex, 223 224 thereby generating the leak of electrons (Vinogradov and Grivennikova, 2016). This phenomenon may reflect higher mitochondrial O₂ consumption, which facilitates ROS 225 226 formation (e.g., O₂, H₂O₂) (Bailey and Cunningham, 2002; Bailey et al., 1999; Hoek et al., 2002). Importantly, the reduction of NAD⁺/NADH ratio as a consequence of EtOH 227 metabolism can disrupt fatty acid oxidation and induce ketogenesis, lactic acidosis, and 228

hypoglycemia (Cunningham and Bailey, 2001; Haorah et al., 2013; Lieber, 2005; 229 230 McGuire et al., 2006). Based on our findings, the increased OXPHOS following EtOH exposure does not result from changes in complex II activity. Although EtOH can 231 232 acutely decrease ATP production (Budd and Nicholls, 1996; Liu et al., 2014), the mitochondrial overstimulation could facilitate ROS formation in the CNS (Hoek et al., 233 2002), corroborating the higher ROX/ETS ratio observed here. These results support a 234 235 role of mitochondria in mediating oxidative stress in zebrafish, which showed impaired 236 brain antioxidant enzyme activities and increased lipid peroxidation in our previous report (Rosemberg et al., 2010). 237

238 In addition to the acute exposure protocol, we explored the chronic effects of EtOH in zebrafish. Chronically, EtOH-exposed group showed a reduced baseline 239 respiration as well as an impaired ETS, reflected by the lower CI + CII- and CII-240 241 mediated ETS. A dysfunction of CII-mediated respiration may overload other mitochondrial complexes, thereby affecting ETS and accentuating endogenous ROS 242 243 formation. Importantly, the increased SCR suggest a main involvement of complex I in 244 ETS. Moreover, the higher ROX state and ROX/ETS ratio corroborate with the increased ROS levels and pro-oxidant effects in the zebrafish brain described elsewhere 245 (Muller et al., 2017). Thus, we suggest that part of the O_2 is not being consumed by 246 mitochondria, but rather by other EtOH detoxification pathways (e.g., catalase and 247 CYP450 enzymes), which are directly involved in EtOH metabolism (Moghe et al., 248 2011). Oxidative damage after chronic EtOH exposure can alter the fluidity of the 249 mitochondrial membrane (Kowaltowski et al., 2009; Tapia-Rojas, 2018), disrupt the 250 mitochondrial membrane potential (Karadayian et al., 2015), and reduce the 251 mitochondrial complexes I, III, and IV activities, which are necessary for ATP 252 formation (Bustamante et al., 2012; Karadavian et al., 2015). 253

In conclusion, our novel findings show that EtOH affects the mitochondrial 254 255 respiration in the zebrafish brain. Bioenergetic alterations in the CNS could be related to multifactorial mechanisms (e.g., pro-oxidant properties of EtOH, ROS generation, and 256 257 deregulation of OXPHOS), playing a central role in EtOH-mediated neurotoxicity. Due to the similarity of zebrafish CNS physiology with those of rodents and humans, this 258 259 species can provide robust and translational data regarding the neurobiological bases of 260 alcohol abuse and addiction, contributing to unravel novel therapeutic strategies. Moreover, this study also demonstrates the feasibility of the high-resolution 261 respirometry assay as a promising strategy to assess mitochondrial bioenergetics in 262 263 zebrafish models with high predictive, face, and construct validities.

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265 **Conflict of interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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425 Fig. 1. Mitochondrial O_2 consumption in the zebrafish brain following acute 1.0% (v/v) 426 EtOH exposure. Mitochondrial functions are presented with the abbreviation(s) of the complex(es) involved followed by the state of respiration measured in the presence of 427 endogenous substrates (baseline), pyruvate + malate + glutamate (CI_{LEAK}), + ADP 428 429 (CI_{OXPHOS}), + succinate (CI+ CII_{OXPHOS}), + FCCP (CI + CII_{ETS}), + rotenone (CII_{ETS}), + 430 antimycin A (Ama) used to correct for residual O₂ consumption (ROX). Data were expressed as mean \pm SEM and analyzed by unpaired Student's *t*-test (* p < 0.05, n = 5431 432 per group).

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Fig. 2. Acute effects of 1.0% (v/v) EtOH on residual oxygen consumption (ROX/ETS) 434 435 ratio, fold change) (A), ETS/OXPHOS (B), OXPHOX capacity (C), OXPHOS coupling efficiency (D), bioenergetic efficiency (by subtracting the ADP-induced CI_{OXPHOS} 436 437 values from the CI_{LEAK}) (E), respiratory control rate (RCR = CI_{OXPHOS}/CI_{LEAK} ratio) (F), 438 succinate control ratio (CI_P/CI+CII_O, fold change) (G), and substrate control ratio (SCR) 439 $(CI_{OXPHOS}/CII_{ETS}$ ratio, fold change) (H). Data were expressed as mean \pm SEM and analyzed by unpaired Student's *t*-test (* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001, n = 5 per 440 441 group).

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Fig. 3. EtOH (1.0%, v/v) chronically alters mitochondrial O_2 flow in the zebrafish brain. Mitochondrial functions are presented with the abbreviation(s) of the complex(es) involved followed by the state of respiration measured in the presence of endogenous substrates (baseline), pyruvate + malate + glutamate (CI_{LEAK}), + ADP (CI_{OXPHOS}), + succinate (CI+ CII_{OXPHOS}), + FCCP (CI + CII_{ETS}), + rotenone (CII_{ETS}), + antimycin A 448 (Ama) used to correct for residual O₂ consumption (ROX). Data were expressed as 449 mean \pm SEM and analyzed by unpaired Student's *t*-test. Data were expressed as mean \pm 450 SEM and analyzed by unpaired Student's *t*-test (* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, n = 6 per 451 group).

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Fig. 4. Effects of 1.0% (v/v) chronic EtOH exposure on residual oxygen consumption 453 (ROX/ETS ratio, fold change) (A), ETS/OXPHOS (B), OXPHOX capacity (C), 454 455 OXPHOS coupling efficiency (D), bioenergetic efficiency (by subtracting the ADPinduced CI_{OXPHOS} values from the CI_{LEAK}) (E), respiratory control rate (RCR = 456 457 CI_{OXPHOS}/CI_{LEAK} ratio) (F), succinate control ratio (CI_P/CI+CII_O, fold change) (G), and substrate control ratio (SCR) (CI_{OXPHOS}/CII_{ETS} ratio, fold change) (H). Data were 458 expressed as mean \pm SEM and analyzed by unpaired Student's *t*-test (* p < 0.05, n = 6459 460 per group).

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Fig. 5. Schematic representation of the production of reduced equivalents via EtOH
catabolism (A) and mechanisms underlying the effects of acute and chronic EtOH
exposure in the zebrafish brain mitochondria (B). EtOH acutely stimulates CI-mediated
OXPHOS, while the chronic exposure decreases complex I- and II-mediated ETS.









