

Title

Role of macrophage migration inhibitory factor in NLRP3 inflammasome expression in otitis media

Short running head

Role of MIF in NLRP3 inflammasome production

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6 Abstract

7

8 Hypothesis: Macrophage migration inhibitory factor plays an important role in the
9 expression of interleukin (IL)-1 β and the nucleotide-binding oligomerization
10 domain-like receptor protein 3 (NLRP3) inflammasome in lipopolysaccharide-induced
11 otitis media.

12 Background: NLRP3 inflammasome and macrophage migration inhibitory factor are
13 critical molecules mediating inflammation. However, the interaction between the
14 NLRP3 inflammasome and macrophage migration inhibitory factor has not been fully
15 examined.

16 Methods: Wild-type mice and macrophage migration inhibitory factor gene-deficient
17 (MIF^{-/-}) mice received a transtympanic injection of either lipopolysaccharide or
18 phosphate-buffered saline. The mice were sacrificed 24 h after the injection.

19 Concentrations of IL-1 β , NLRP3, ASC (apoptosis-associated speck-like protein
20 containing a caspase recruitment domain and a pyrin domain), and caspase-1 in the

21 middle ear effusions were measured by enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay. Temporal
22 bones were processed for histologic examination and immunohistochemistry.

23 Results: In the immunohistochemical study using the wild-type mice, positive staining
24 of macrophage migration inhibitory factor, NLRP3, ASC, and caspase-1 were observed
25 in infiltrating inflammatory cells induced by lipopolysaccharide in the middle ear. The
26 number of inflammatory cells caused by lipopolysaccharide administration decreased
27 remarkably in the MIF^{-/-} mice as compared with the wild-type mice. The concentrations
28 of IL-1 β , NLRP3, ASC, and caspase-1 increased in the lipopolysaccharide-treated
29 wild-type mice. The MIF^{-/-} mice with lipopolysaccharide had decreased levels of IL-1 β ,
30 NLRP3, ASC, and caspase-1 as compared with the wild-type mice.

31 Conclusion: Macrophage migration inhibitory factor has an important role in the
32 production of IL-1 β and the NLRP3 inflammasome. Controlling the inflammation by
33 modulating macrophage migration inhibitory factor and the NLRP3 inflammasome may
34 be a novel therapeutic strategy for otitis media.

35

36 Keywords:

37 infection; Toll-like receptor; NOD-like receptor; cytokine; interleukin; inflammation

38

39

40 Text

41

42 Introduction

43

44 Otitis media is one of the most common diseases, especially in children. Otitis
45 media associated with bacterial infection is frequently treated with antibiotics all over
46 the world (1). Repeated use of antibiotics for frequent recurrence of otitis media might
47 be related to microbial antibiotic resistance (2). Multiple inflammatory mediators have
48 been reported in the pathophysiology of otitis media, and regulation of these factors
49 may become a novel therapeutic option for otitis media without the administration of
50 antibiotics (3,4). Interleukin (IL)-1 β is a pro-inflammatory cytokine with important
51 roles in the innate immune system. IL-1 β is involved in the pathogenesis of otitis media,
52 and activated caspase-1 is required for the processing of pro-IL-1 β into mature IL-1 β
53 (3).

54 The inflammasome is a protein complex, and several subtypes of

55 inflammasome have been reported. The nucleotide-binding oligomerization domain

56 (NOD)-like receptor protein 3 (NLRP3) inflammasome is an important inflammatory
57 factor discovered at the beginning of the 2000s (5,6). The components of the NLRP3
58 inflammasome are NLRP3, ASC (adaptor apoptosis-associated speck-like protein
59 containing a caspase activation and recruitment domain (CARD) and a pyrin domain
60 (PYD)), and pro-caspase-1 (7). The NLRP3 inflammasome controls the production of
61 IL-1 β and IL-18 in collaboration with Toll-like receptors and nuclear factor kappa B
62 (NF- κ B). When the NLRP3 inflammasome is formed, it causes caspase-1 activation,
63 resulting in the maturation of IL-1 β (8). The role of the NLRP3 inflammasome has been
64 extensively examined in numerous diseases, and has also been reported as a critical
65 factor controlling inflammation in otitis media, both in human and animal models
66 (9-12).

67 Macrophage migration inhibitory factor is an inflammatory and
68 stress-regulating cytokine with multiple functions (13). The significant role of
69 macrophage migration inhibitory factor in middle ear and inner ear diseases has been
70 reported (14-19). The reduction in macrophage migration inhibitory factor activity by
71 intraperitoneal injection of a macrophage migration inhibitory factor antagonist can

72 decrease inflammatory responses in the middle ear cavity in lipopolysaccharide-induced
73 otitis media (20). The inhibition of macrophage migration inhibitory factor pathway
74 reduces cytokine production (13). However, the mechanism of inflammation through
75 macrophage migration inhibitory factor has not been fully revealed.

76 To the best of our knowledge, only two recent studies have reported the
77 interaction between the NLRP3 inflammasome and macrophage migration inhibitory
78 factor (21,22). In addition, no previous study has shown the role of macrophage
79 migration inhibitory factor in expression of the NLRP3 inflammasome in otitis media.
80 Using macrophage migration inhibitory factor-deficient (MIF^{-/-}) mice, the purpose of
81 this study is to reveal the definitive effect of macrophage migration inhibitory factor in
82 the induction of the NLRP3 inflammasome in lipopolysaccharide-induced otitis media.

83

84 Materials and Methods

85

86 *Induction of otitis media by lipopolysaccharide*

87 Male BALB/c mice at 6-10 weeks of age were used in this study. Through

88 targeted disruption of the macrophage migration inhibitory factor gene, MIF^{-/-} mice in
89 the BALB/c background were established (23). The study was performed in accordance
90 with the relevant animal protection rules, and the Animal Research Control Committee
91 approved the study (application number, OKU-2016541; the name of the principal
92 investigator, S.K.). Before the experiment, an otoscopic examination was performed on
93 the ears of all the mice to ensure that the tympanic membranes were normal and that no
94 middle ear inflammation was present. An intraperitoneal injection of a mixture of
95 ketamine (100 mg/kg body weight) and xylazine (10 mg/kg body weight) was
96 administered for anesthesia during all experimental procedures. Both the wild-type mice
97 and MIF^{-/-} mice were randomly divided into two groups. The otitis media group
98 received lipopolysaccharide (1.0 mg/mL; 10 µl/ear; both ears in each mouse;
99 Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, Missouri, USA) via transtympanic injection using a 30-gauge
100 needle. Phosphate-buffered saline (PBS) (10 µl/ear) was injected into both middle ears
101 of the animals in the control group. The mice were sacrificed 24 hours after injection of
102 the lipopolysaccharide or PBS. The middle ears were then washed transtympanically
103 using 200 µl of PBS. The collected washings from the middle ear lavage were

104 centrifuged. The supernatant was transferred to microcentrifuge tubes (Treff AG,
105 Degersheim, Switzerland) and stored at -30°C until analysis. The temporal bones were
106 removed immediately after sacrifice and processed for histologic examination.

107

108 *Levels of IL-1 β , NLRP3, ASC, and caspase-1*

109 The concentrations of IL-1 β , NLRP3, ASC, and caspase-1 in the supernatant
110 of the middle ear lavage (otitis media group, n=6; control group, n=6) were measured
111 using enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) (IL-1 β , 559603, BD OptEIA
112 Mouse IL-1 β ELISA Set, BD Biosciences, San Jose, CA, USA; NLRP3,
113 CSB-EL015871MO, Mouse NLRP3 ELISA Kit, CUSABIO, College Park, MD, USA;
114 ASC, CSB-EL019114MO, Mouse Apoptosis-associated speck-like protein containing a
115 CARD (PYCARD) ELISA kit, CUSABIO; Caspase-1, SEB592Mu, ELISA Kit for
116 Caspase 1, Cloud-Clone Corp., Houston, TX, USA). All samples were examined in
117 duplicate, and measured values were averaged.

118

119 *Histologic examination*

120 Temporal bone specimens from both the wild-type mice and MIF^{-/-} mice
121 (otitis media group, n=4; control group, n=4) were placed in 4% paraformaldehyde for
122 72 hours and decalcified in 10% ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid for 3 weeks at 4°C.
123 After dehydration, the specimens were embedded in paraffin and sectioned at a
124 thickness of 10 µm, then mounted on glass slides, processed using hematoxylin and
125 eosin staining, and evaluated under light microscopy.

126

127 *Immunohistochemistry*

128 The paraffin-embedded temporal bone specimens from the wild-type mice
129 (otitis media group, n=6; control group, n=6) were sectioned at a thickness of 4 µm and
130 mounted on glass slides. The sections were deparaffinized and rehydrated. Endogenous
131 peroxidase activity was quenched with 0.3% hydrogen peroxide in methanol for 30
132 minutes at room temperature. Antigen retrieval was performed by microwave heating.
133 Goat serum albumin (S-1000, Vector Laboratories Inc., Burlingame, CA, USA) was
134 used for 1 hour at room temperature to block non-specific protein binding. Rabbit
135 anti-macrophage migration inhibitory factor antibody (sc-20121; Santa Cruz

136 Biotechnology, Inc., Santa Cruz, CA), rabbit anti-NLRP3 antibody (bs-10021R, Bioss
137 Antibodies Inc., Woburn, MA, USA), rabbit anti-ASC antibody (NBP1-78977, Novus
138 Biologicals, Littleton, CO, USA), and rabbit anti-caspase-1 antibody (NB100-56564,
139 Novus Biologicals) were applied overnight at 4°C as the primary antibodies for
140 immunohistochemical staining. Rabbit Immunoglobulin Fraction (X0903, Dako,
141 Glostrup, Denmark) was used as a negative control. For visualization, a VECTASTAIN
142 Elite ABC Kit (PK-6100, Vector Laboratories Inc.) and 3,3'-diaminobenzidine (DAB)
143 reagent (K3467, Dako) were used according to the manufacturers' instructions.

144 The reaction was assessed by blinded investigators under light microscopy
145 according to the method of previous study (24). Briefly, the rating score was classified
146 as: (-), no positive reaction; (+), 1-10 positive cells; (++) , 11-100 positive cells; and
147 (+++), over 100 positive cells per high power field (×400).

148

149 *Statistical analysis*

150 Data are presented as median ± standard error. For statistical analysis, the
151 non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was used for comparison of continuous variables

152 between the two groups. The chi-square test was applied to compare categorical
153 variables. Significant differences were established at a level of $P < 0.05$ (IBM SPSS
154 Statistics; IBM, New York, USA).

155

156 Results

157

158 *Expression of macrophage migration inhibitory factor and NLRP3 inflammasome by*
159 *lipopolysaccharide*

160 Lipopolysaccharide is a component of the outer membrane of gram-negative
161 bacteria that is a major causative pathogen of otitis media, and it is a potent
162 inflammatory molecule (14). Lipopolysaccharide induces an increased infiltration of
163 inflammatory cells in middle ear (25). As a first step, we examined the expression and
164 localization of macrophage migration inhibitory factor, NLRP3, ASC, and caspase-1 in
165 the middle ear cavity as induced by lipopolysaccharide in wild-type mice.

166 Strong positive immunostaining was found for macrophage migration
167 inhibitory factor in the infiltrating inflammatory cells as well as mucosal epithelium in

168 the middle ear of the lipopolysaccharide-injected wild-type mice. NLRP3, ASC, and
169 caspase-1 were also observed in inflammatory cells and middle ear mucosa of the
170 lipopolysaccharide-treated wild-type mice. There was no significant immunostaining in
171 the middle ear in the negative controls using Rabbit Immunoglobulin Fraction in the
172 PBS-treated wild-type mice (Figure 1).

173 The rating scores of immunopositive cells for macrophage migration
174 inhibitory factor, NLRP3, ASC, and caspase-1 were summarized in Table 1. The
175 lipopolysaccharide-injected wild-type mice had the increased number of
176 immunopositive cells as compared with PBS-injected control mice (macrophage
177 migration inhibitory factor, $P<0.05$; NLRP3, $P<0.05$; ASC, $P<0.05$; caspase-1, $P<0.05$).

178

179 *Role of macrophage migration inhibitory factor in lipopolysaccharide-induced otitis*
180 *media*

181 Next, we examined the effect of deficiency of the macrophage migration
182 inhibitory factor gene in lipopolysaccharide-induced otitis media. Administration of
183 lipopolysaccharide into the middle ear cavity induced remarkable infiltration of

184 inflammatory cells (polymorphonuclear leukocyte and monocyte) in the middle ear in
185 wild-type mice (Figure 2A). In contrast, a small number of infiltrating inflammatory
186 cells was detected in the middle ear in lipopolysaccharide-treated MIF^{-/-} mice (Figure
187 2B). No significant number of inflammatory cells was found in the middle ear in either
188 the wild-type mice or MIF^{-/-} mice in the PBS-injected control group.

189

190 *Quantification of IL-1 β and NLRP3 inflammasome*

191 The histological findings showed the inflammatory response reduced in MIF^{-/-}
192 mice by lipopolysaccharide as compared with wild type mice. Thus, we examined the
193 levels of IL-1 β , NLRP3, ASC, and caspase-1 in lipopolysaccharide-induced otitis media.
194 The protein levels of IL-1 β , NLRP3, ASC, and caspase-1 in the supernatant of the
195 middle ear lavage from both the wild-type mice and MIF^{-/-} mice are shown in Figure 3.

196 Compared with the PBS-injected wild-type mice, the
197 lipopolysaccharide-injected wild-type mice showed a significant increase in the protein
198 concentration of IL-1 β in the middle ear ($P < 0.05$). In the MIF^{-/-} mice,
199 lipopolysaccharide induced a lower level of IL-1 β than in the wild-type mice. There was

200 a significant difference in the concentration of IL-1 β between the lipopolysaccharide
201 group and PBS group of MIF^{-/-} mice (Figure 3).

202 Compared with the PBS-injected wild-type mice, the
203 lipopolysaccharide-injected wild-type mice showed significant up-regulation of NLRP3
204 ($P < 0.05$), ASC ($P < 0.05$), and caspase-1 ($P < 0.05$) in the middle ear. There were
205 significant differences between the wild-type mice and MIF^{-/-} mice in the concentrations
206 of NLRP3 ($P < 0.05$), ASC ($P < 0.05$), and caspase-1 ($P < 0.05$) induced by
207 lipopolysaccharide. In addition, no statistically significant difference was observed in
208 the concentrations of NLRP3, ASC, and caspase-1 between the lipopolysaccharide
209 group and PBS group of MIF^{-/-} mice (Figure 3).

210

211 Discussion

212

213 Otitis media is one of the most common middle ear diseases, and patients with
214 otitis media frequently have hearing impairment. Numerous factors are associated with
215 the onset and development of otitis media. The presence of upper respiratory diseases

216 and Eustachian tube dysfunction are important factors, and inflammatory cytokines and
217 chemokines including IL-1 β are also involved in the pathogenesis of otitis media (3).

218 Lipopolysaccharide from gram-negative bacteria activates Toll-like receptor 4,
219 and induces IL-1 β production through the NF- κ B pathway (26). In addition, the
220 maturation of pro-IL-1 β protein into the secreted bioactive form of IL-1 β requires a
221 second signal via NLRP3 inflammasome (27). Lipopolysaccharide has been detected in
222 the middle ear in almost all patients with otitis media (17). The expression of Toll-like
223 receptor 4 in the middle ear tissues of patients with otitis media has been reported, and
224 Toll-like receptors have been suggested to have an important role in the pathogenesis of
225 otitis media (4,28,29). Recent studies have reported that NLRP3 was detected in middle
226 ear tissues in patients with otitis media (9,11). In an animal model of otitis media, the
227 NLRP3 inflammasome was induced by lipopolysaccharide in mouse middle ear, and
228 ASC-deficient mice had reduced middle ear inflammation (10,12).

229 Macrophage migration inhibitory factor is a cytokine expressed in various
230 cells, and has been associated with a multitude of diseases (30). Macrophage migration
231 inhibitory factor has been reported to have a possible role in middle ear diseases and

232 hearing function (14,19). Inhibition of macrophage migration inhibitory factor resulted
233 in the reduction of inflammatory responses in experimental otitis media (20). However,
234 the mechanism was not revealed. This study shows for the first time that production of
235 IL-1 β and the NLRP3 inflammasome by lipopolysaccharide is remarkably suppressed in
236 MIF^{-/-} mice. There were several limitations in this study including small sample size and
237 the use of a single time point. However, our findings suggest that the reduced
238 inflammation in histological findings and the decreased secretion of IL-1 β in MIF^{-/-}
239 mice are the result of down-regulation of the NLRP3 inflammasome.

240 Investigations are just starting to examine the relationship between
241 macrophage migration inhibitory factor and the NLRP3 inflammasome. A recent study
242 showed that macrophage migration inhibitory factor is required for the interaction
243 between NLRP3 and the intermediate filament protein vimentin, which is critical for
244 NLRP3 activation (22). Another study showed that macrophage migration inhibitory
245 factor has an upstream role in the inflammatory pathway by regulating NLRP3
246 inflammasome activation (21). The possible mechanism of macrophage migration
247 inhibitory factor and NLRP3 inflammasome on the induction of IL-1 β is shown in

248 Figure 4. In this study, the concentration of IL-1 β induced in the middle ear by
249 lipopolysaccharide was low in the MIF^{-/-} mice as compared with the wild-type mice.
250 Down-regulation of the caspase-1 may be the major factor in the reduced production of
251 IL-1 β in the MIF^{-/-} mice. However, there was still a significant difference in the
252 expression of IL-1 β between the lipopolysaccharide-injected MIF^{-/-} mice and
253 PBS-injected MIF^{-/-} mice. Lipopolysaccharide may also induce IL-1 β through a
254 different signaling pathway independent of macrophage migration inhibitory factor and
255 the NLRP3 inflammasome.

256 Otitis media is a common disease, and the management of intractable otitis
257 media is a challenging problem. Macrophage migration inhibitory factor and NLRP3
258 inflammasome have an important role in immune response. For example, the inhibition
259 of macrophage migration inhibitory factor activity attenuated lethality in endotoxic
260 shock (31). In addition, macrophage migration inhibitory factor genetic variants are a
261 clinically important risk factor for the development of several diseases (32). Currently,
262 there is no clinically available targeted therapy that can effectively inhibit macrophage
263 migration inhibitory factor and/or NLRP3 inflammasome. However, macrophage

264 migration inhibitory factor as well as NLRP3 inflammasome may be promising factors
265 in future treatment strategies for otitis media.

266 In summary, the expression of IL-1 β is markedly induced by
267 lipopolysaccharide in mouse middle ear, and is significantly suppressed in MIF^{-/-} mice
268 as compared with wild-type mice. The induction of NLRP3 inflammasome by
269 lipopolysaccharide is also reduced in the MIF^{-/-} mice. Our findings suggest that
270 regulation of macrophage migration inhibitory factor and the NLRP3 inflammasome
271 may become a new therapeutic target for control of the inflammation from a different
272 point of view.

273

274

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281 Disclosure of Interest

282 The authors report no conflict of interest.

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373

374 Figure Captions

375

376 Figure 1

377 Immunohistochemical staining for (A) macrophage migration inhibitory factor, (B)

378 nucleotide-binding oligomerization domain-like receptor protein 3 (NLRP3), (C)

379 apoptosis-associated speck-like protein containing a caspase recruitment domain and a

380 pyrin domain (ASC), and (D) caspase-1 in lipopolysaccharide-injected wild-type mice.

381 Strong positive staining (brown color) was observed in inflammatory cells (black arrow).

382 (E) Immunohistochemical staining using Rabbit Immunoglobulin Fraction in

383 phosphate-buffered saline (PBS)-treated control mice. (*, middle ear cavity; Scale bar,

384 100 μ m)

385

386 Figure 2

387 Histological findings of the middle ear cavity in (A) wild-type mice and (B) MIF^{-/-} mice

388 with transtympanic injection of lipopolysaccharide. Numerous inflammatory cells

389 (polymorphonuclear leukocyte and monocyte) infiltrated into the middle ear cavity in

390 the lipopolysaccharide-injected wild-type mice. In contrast, a small number of
391 inflammatory cells were found in the lipopolysaccharide-injected MIF^{-/-} mice.
392 (Hematoxylin and eosin staining; scale bar, 100 μm) (black arrow, inflammatory cells; *,
393 middle ear cavity; MIF, macrophage migration inhibitory factor).

394

395 Figure 3

396 Concentrations of (A) interleukin-1β (IL-1β), (B) nucleotide-binding oligomerization
397 domain-like receptor protein 3 (NLRP3), (C) apoptosis-associated speck-like protein
398 containing a caspase recruitment domain and a pyrin domain (ASC), and (D) caspase-1
399 in lipopolysaccharide (LPS)-injected and phosphate-buffered saline (PBS)-treated mice.
400 (n = 6 (12 ears); median ± standard error; *, *P* < 0.05) (MIF, macrophage migration
401 inhibitory factor; n.s., not significant).

402

403 Figure 4

404 Potential molecular mechanism of macrophage migration inhibitory factor and NLRP3
405 inflammasome on the production of IL-1β. Signal 1 (Toll like receptor/NF-κB pathway)

406 is needed to induce pro-IL-1 β . Signal 2 with macrophage migration inhibitory factor,
407 vimentin, and NLRP3 inflammasome has a critical role in the production of caspase-1.
408 The active caspase-1 released from the NLRP3 inflammasome is responsible for the
409 conversion of inactive IL-1 β precursor into its biological active form.

410 LPS: lipopolysaccharide

411 TLR4: Toll-like receptor 4

412 NF- κ B: nuclear factor-kappa B

413 NLRP3: the nucleotide-binding oligomerization domain (NOD)-like receptor protein 3

414 ATP: adenosine triphosphate

415 PAMPs: pattern-associated molecular patterns

416 DAMPs: danger-associated molecular patterns

417 ROS: reactive oxygen species

418 MIF: macrophage migration inhibitory factor

419 ASC: adaptor apoptosis-associated speck-like protein containing a caspase activation
420 and recruitment domain (CARD) and a pyrin domain (PYD)

421

Figure 1

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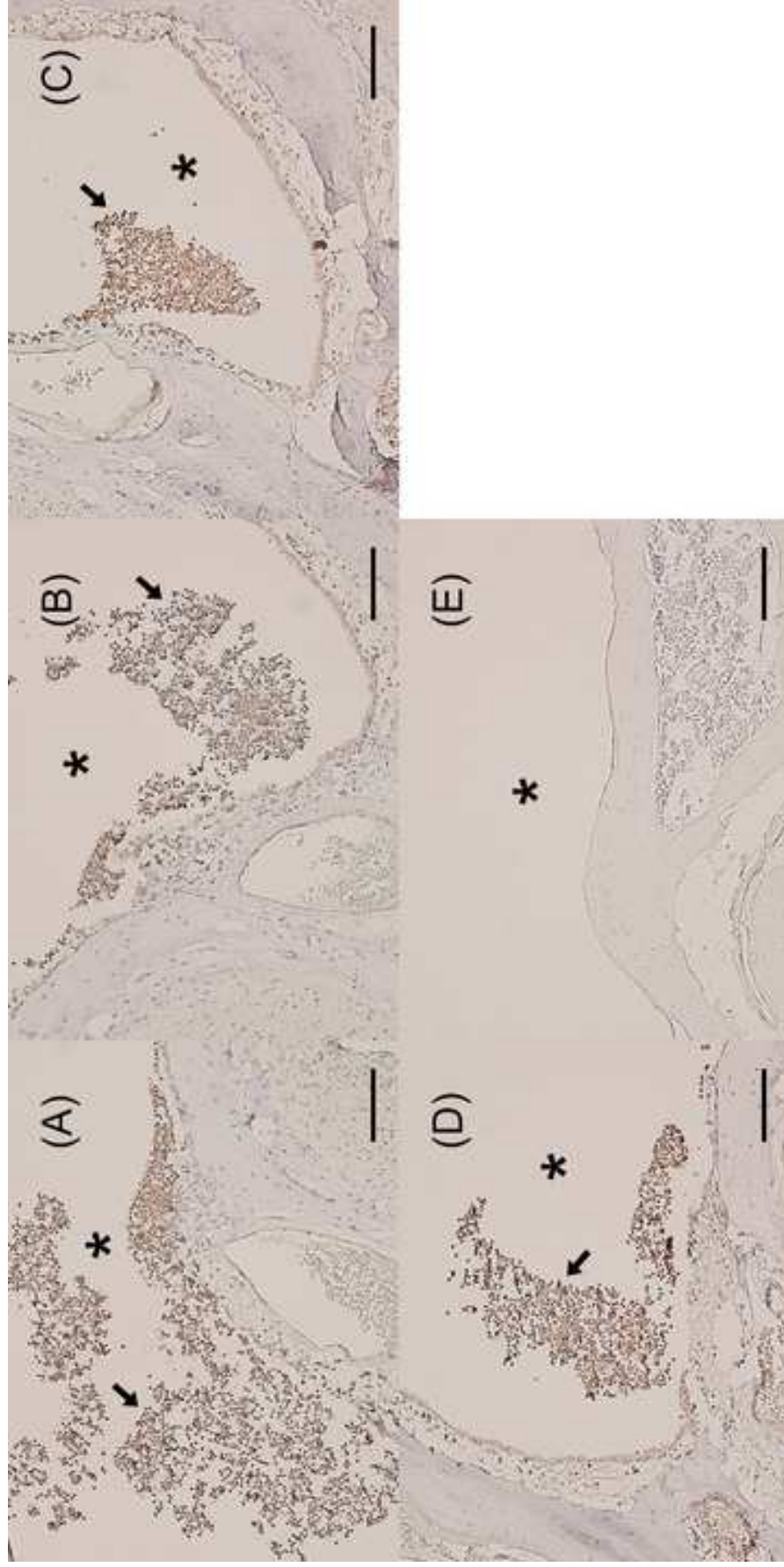
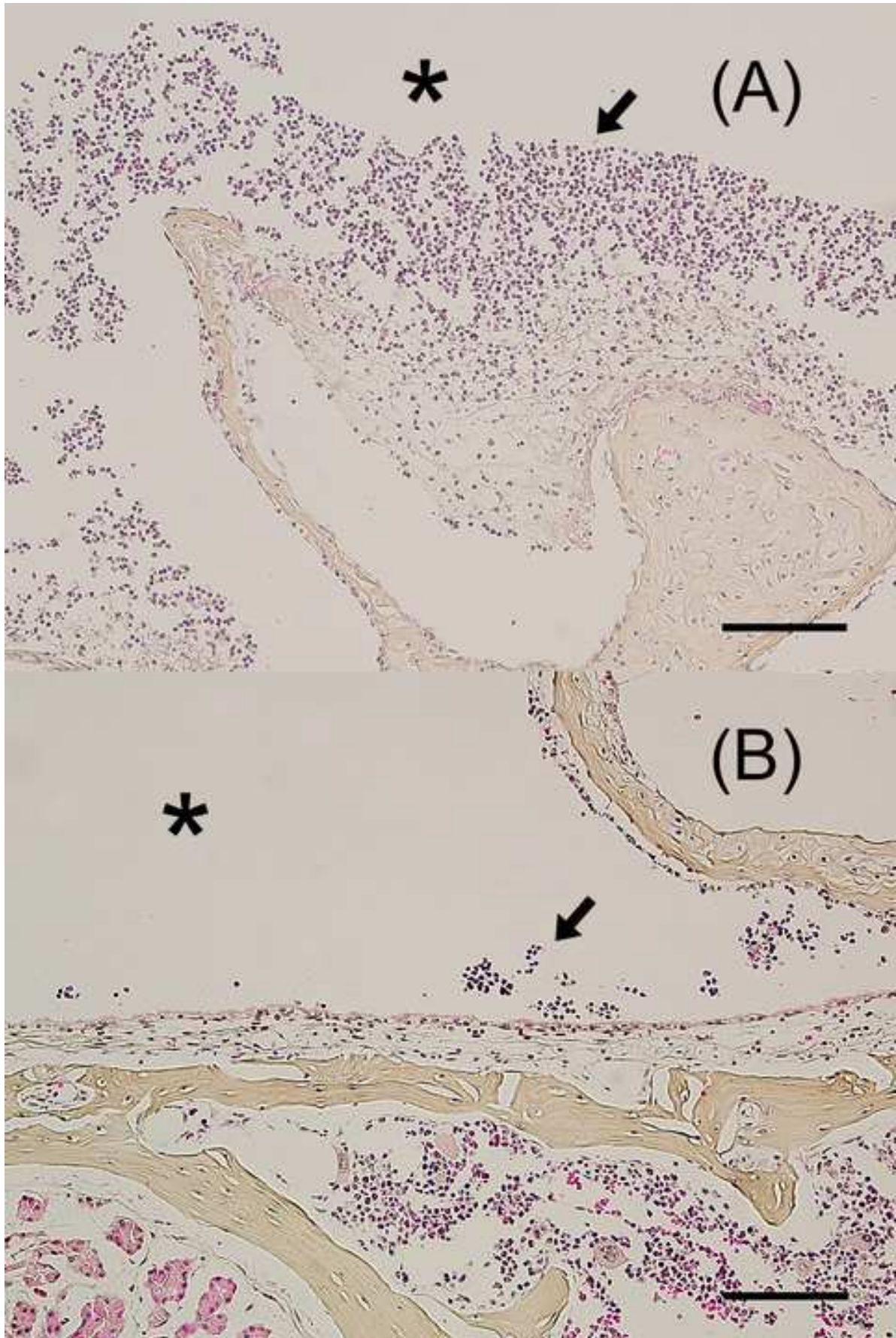


Figure 2

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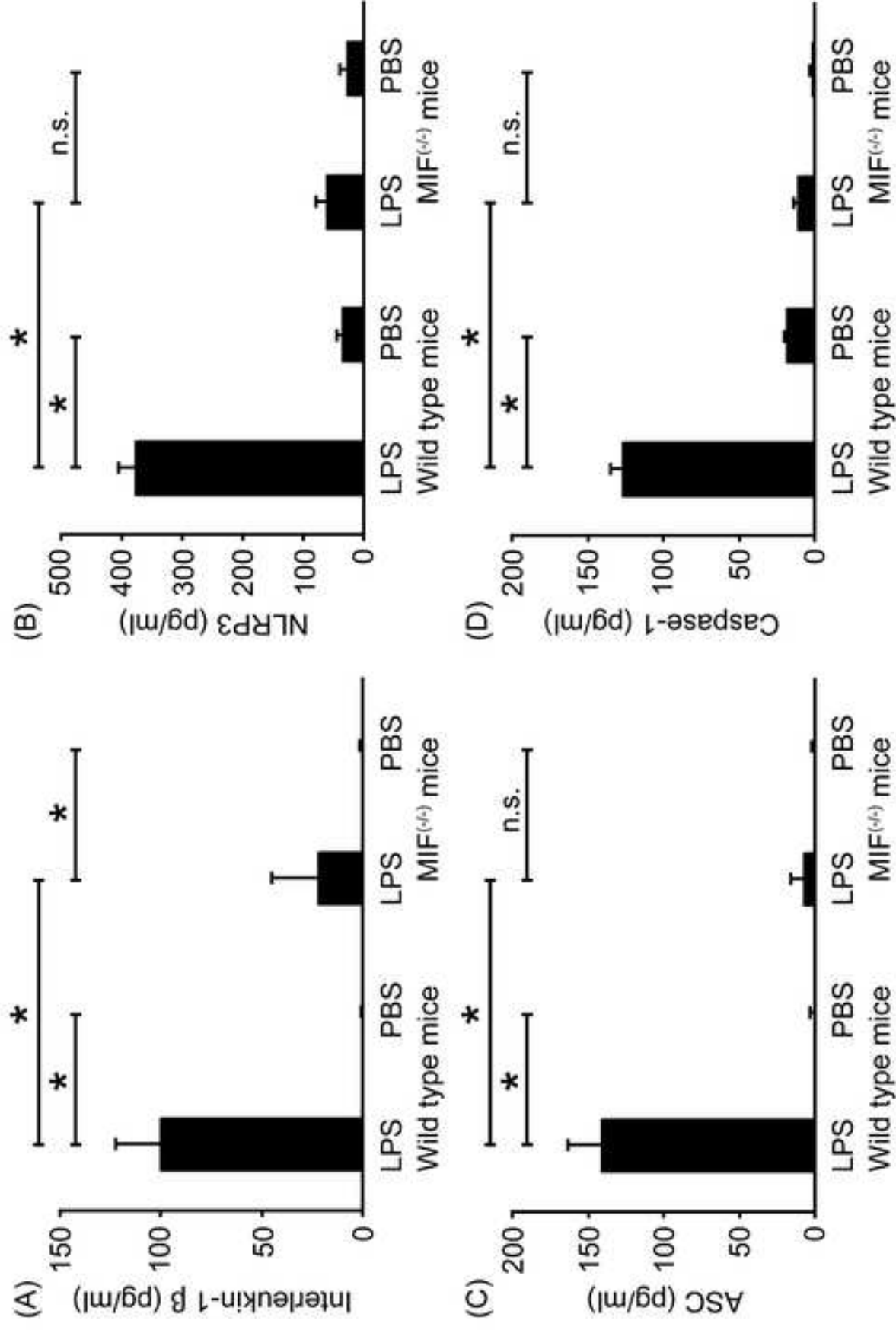


Figure 4

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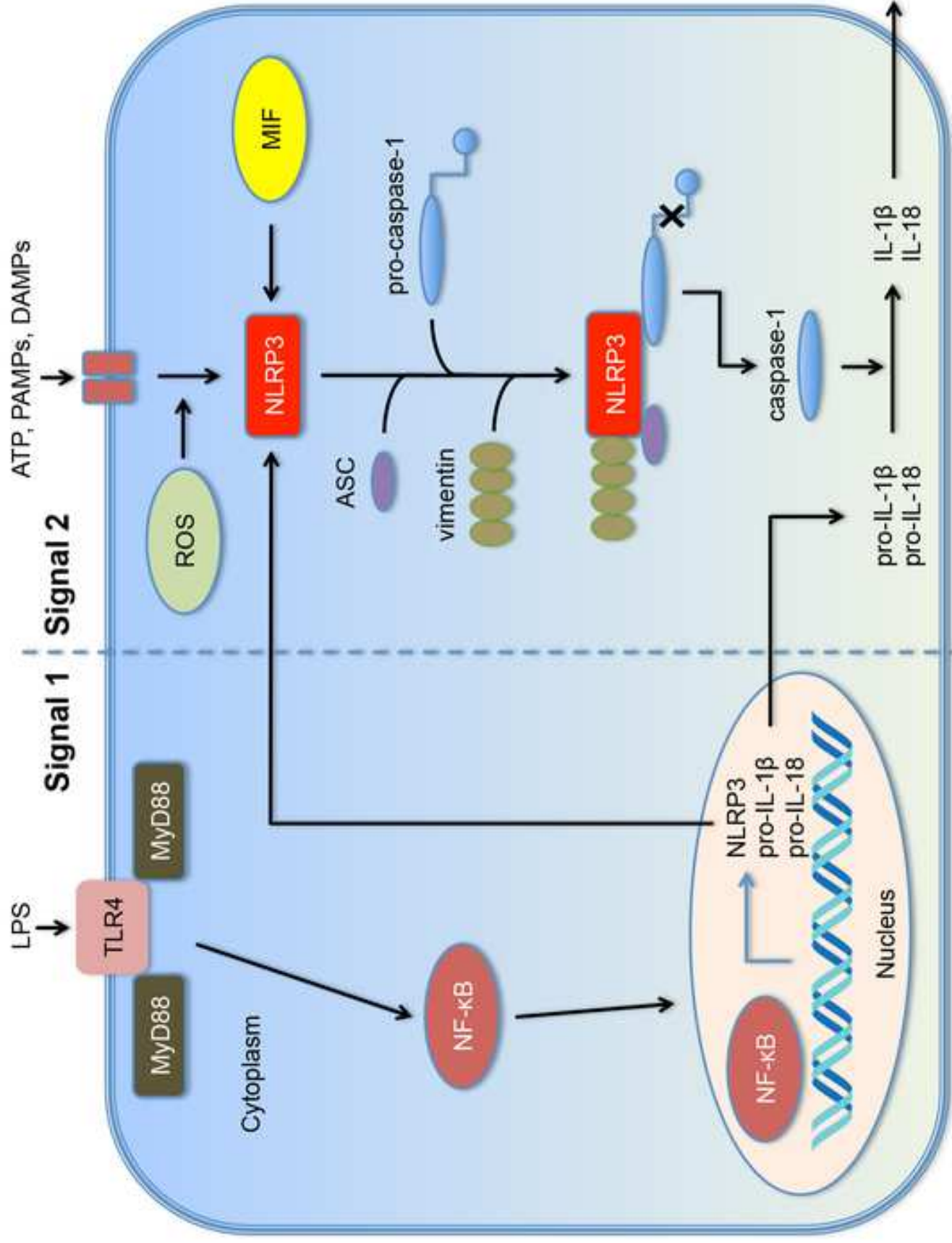


Table 1: The rating scores of immunostaining for each protein in lipopolysaccharide (LPS)- or phosphate buffered saline (PBS)-injected wild-type mice.

score	MIF		NLRP3		ASC		Caspase-1	
	LPS	PBS	LPS	PBS	LPS	PBS	LPS	PBS
	(n=6)	(n=6)	(n=6)	(n=6)	(n=6)	(n=6)	(n=6)	(n=6)
-	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
+	0	6	0	5	0	5	0	6
++	1	0	1	1	1	0	2	0
+++	5	0	5	0	5	0	4	0

The rating score: (-), no positive reaction; (+), 1-10 positive cells; (++) , 11-100 positive cells; and (+++), over 100 positive cells per high power field ($\times 400$).

MIF, macrophage migration inhibitory factor

NLRP3, The nucleotide-binding oligomerization domain (NOD)-like receptor protein 3

ASC, adaptor apoptosis-associated speck-like protein containing a caspase activation and recruitment domain (CARD) and a pyrin domain (PYD)