

Insertion of a SNS-specific tetrapeptide in S3–S4 linker of D4 accelerates recovery from inactivation of skeletal muscle voltage-gated Na channel $\mu 1$ in HEK293 cells

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Abstract Na channel subunits α SNS (PN3) and $\alpha\mu 1$ (SkM1) produce slowly inactivating/TTX-resistant and rapidly inactivating/TTX-sensitive currents, respectively. α SNS (PN3) current recovers from inactivation (repriming) rapidly. Sequence alignment identified the tetrapeptide SLEN, in the S3–S4 linker of D4, as α SNS-specific. To determine whether SLEN endows Na channels with slow kinetics and/or rapid repriming, we analyzed the transient Na current produced by a chimera $\mu 1$ SLEN in HEK293 cells. Neither kinetics nor voltage dependence of activation and inactivation was affected. However, repriming was twice as fast as in the wild type at -100 mV. This suggests that SLEN may contribute to the rapid repriming of TTX-resistant Na current.

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Key words: Voltage dependence; Na current kinetics; Channel repriming; TTX

1. Introduction

Voltage-gated sodium channels consist of a large, 260 kDa, pore-forming, α -subunit and one or more auxiliary β -subunits [1,2]. The α -subunit polypeptide chain consists of four homologous domains (D1–4), each with six predicted transmembrane segments (S1–6) joined by cytoplasmic and extracellular loops [1]. Except for the loop joining domains III and IV (D3–4 linker), which contains the conserved inactivation particle [3,4], the amino acid sequences of these loops and the N- and C-termini are less conserved than those of the transmembrane segments [5,6]. The amphipathic S4 segment of each domain with its positively charged residues is thought to be the voltage sensor [1,7,8]. Two types of Na currents are produced by these α -subunits: slow inactivating, TTX-resistant (slow/TTX-R) and fast inactivating, TTX-sensitive (fast/TTX-S) [1]. The α -subunits from human and rat skeletal muscle, SkM1 and $\mu 1$, respectively, produce fast/TTX-S Na currents [9–12]. Recently, two groups have cloned an α -subunit SNS (PN3) which produces a slow/TTX-R Na current when expressed in *Xenopus* oocytes [13,14]. Studies on dorsal root ganglion (DRG) neurons have provided strong evidence that SNS produces the slow/TTX-R current in these cells [15,16].

A number of cDNAs encoding α -subunits have been cloned [6]. Amino acid residues that are proposed to play specific roles such as voltage sensors, inactivation particle, ion selec-

tivity filters and toxin binding sites are conserved in these subunits [5,6,17]. In K channels, activation involves the movement of the N-terminal portion of S4 into the extracellular space from a position inside the membrane at rest [7]. The TTX-R current in C-type DRG neurons, which appears to be encoded by SNS [13,18], is characterized by slow activation and inactivation kinetics [19–21] and by rapid recovery from inactivation (repriming) [16,21]. We reasoned that sequence variation in or around the voltage sensor, S4, may contribute to the slow kinetics and rapid repriming of the SNS/PN3 current. Alignment of the amino acid sequence of the linker joining S3 and S4 of domain 4 (D4S3–S4) and D4S4 of SNS shows a non-conservative substitution of an invariant amino acid residue followed by a tripeptide insertion compared to the rest of the mammalian α -subunits. This difference is intriguing because this region appears to be crucial for coupling activation to fast inactivation [22,23], slowing down inactivation and accelerating repriming of SkM1 [24,25]. Therefore we constructed a chimera $\mu 1$ construct carrying the SNS-specific tetrapeptide at the analogous position in the D4S3–S4 linker and analyzed the Na current produced by this chimera in HEK293 cells.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Plasmid construction

The plasmid $\mu 1$ -RBG4 [10] was used to generate a chimera construct for this study. One wild type primer pair (F1 and R1) and one mutagenic pair (M1 and M2) were used to introduce the insertion into the S3–S4 linker. Wild type forward primer F1 (5'-CGGTGGTCAA-CAACAAGTCCG-3') and reverse primer R1 (5'-ATGCCGAA-GATCGAGTAGATG-3') correspond to nucleotides 4030–4050 and 4910–4930, respectively. Mutagenic primers M1 (5'-CACAAAGTTT-TCCAGTGATTTCTGTATCAAGTCAGAGAG-3') and M2 (5'-C-AGAAATCACTGGAAAACCTTTGTGTCACCCACGCTGTC-3') correspond to nucleotides 4725–4754 and 4740–4770, respectively, plus the extra 12 nucleotides (underlined). PCR was performed in 60 μ l volume using 3 μ M of each primer and 1.75 units of Expand Long Template DNA polymerase enzyme mixture in buffer 3 (Boehringer Mannheim). Amplification was carried out in two stages for a total of 30 cycles, as previously described [26], using a programmable thermal cycler (PTC-100, MJ Research, Cambridge, MA).

A PCR-based mutagenesis and cloning method [27] was used to produce $\mu 1$ SLEN-RBG4 plasmid. Two separate PCR reactions were performed using 10 ng $\mu 1$ -RBG4 as template and F1/M1 and M2/R1 primer pairs, respectively. The two PCR products were band isolated and used as a mixed template for PCR using primer pair F1/R1. The resulting PCR product, exchanged Y¹⁴³³ with the tetrapeptide SLEN in the S3–S4 linker, was cloned using pCR-Script vector (Stratagene) to produce plasmid pSLEN. The insert in pSLEN was sequenced to confirm the nucleotide changes. Plasmid $\mu 1$ SLEN-RBG4 was constructed by replacing the unique *AclI*/*BspEI* fragment, which corresponds to nucleotides 4067–4836, from the wild type construct $\mu 1$ -RBG4 with that of the mutant construct pSLEN.

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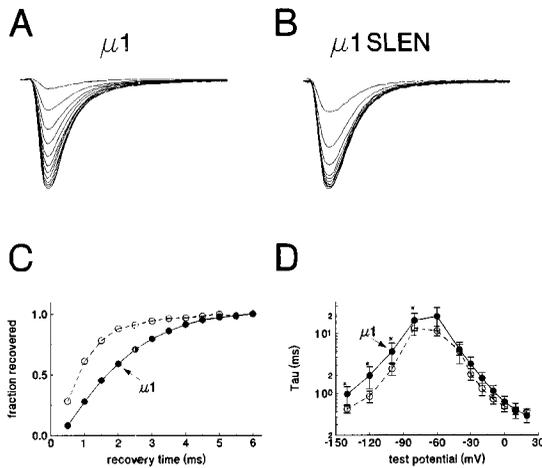


Fig. 3. Recovery from fast inactivation is quicker for μ 1SLEN currents than μ 1 currents. A, B: Family of traces from cells expressing μ 1 (A) and μ 1SLEN (B) currents showing the rate of recovery from inactivation. The cells were prepulsed to -10 mV for 20 ms to inactivate all of the current, then brought back to -120 mV for increasing recovery durations prior to the test pulse to 0 mV. The recovery time at -120 mV ranged from 0.5 ms to 6 ms in increments of 0.5 ms. C: Recovery from inactivation time course for the μ 1 (filled circles) and μ 1SLEN (open circles) currents shown in (A,B). The μ 1SLEN current recovers about twice as fast as the μ 1 current. D: Comparison of μ 1 ($n=6$) and μ 1SLEN ($n=7$) inactivation kinetics as a function of voltage. Time constants were measured from the rate of decay (test potentials between -50 and 20 mV) or from the time course for the recovery from fast inactivation (test potentials between -150 and -50 mV).

We reasoned that this dramatic sequence difference in this linker may impact the kinetics of D4S4 and/or D4S3 conformational transitions, hence the current properties. We tested the possibility that this difference may contribute to the slow kinetics and/or rapid repriming of the SNS/PN3 current by characterizing the current properties of the μ 1SLEN chimera in HEK293 cells.

Sodium currents were recorded from cells expressing either the μ 1 (Fig. 2A) or the μ 1SLEN channels (Fig. 2B). The peak current density was slightly larger in cells expressing μ 1SLEN channels (728 ± 616 pA/pF, $n=20$) than in cells expressing μ 1 channels (515 ± 517 pA/pF, $n=23$).

In DRG neurons, the TTX-R current activates at potentials that are 10–15 mV more depolarized than the TTX-S current [16,19,21,31]. Activation kinetics are also much slower for TTX-R currents than for TTX-S neuronal or skeletal muscle sodium currents. Kostyuk et al. [19] estimated that the time constant of activation is about 5–10 times slower for the TTX-R current than for TTX-S currents. The SLEN mutation, however, did not alter activation of μ 1 channels. We found no difference in the voltage dependence of activation (Fig. 2C) or in the rate of activation (Fig. 2D). At -35 mV, the time constant for activation was 0.46 ± 0.05 ms ($n=11$) for μ 1 and 0.43 ± 0.07 ms ($n=15$) for μ 1SLEN currents.

TTX-R currents in DRG neurons also exhibit very different inactivation properties from TTX-S currents. The midpoint for steady-state inactivation (V_h) is near -35 mV, which is about 30 mV more depolarized than what is typically observed for most TTX-S currents, including μ 1. The V_h for recombinant SNS channels expressed in oocytes, which are TTX-R, is near -30 mV [13]. However, no difference was observed in the voltage dependence of steady-state inactivation

of μ 1SLEN and μ 1 currents (Fig. 2C). The rate for the development of inactivation was, if anything, slightly faster for μ 1SLEN than for μ 1 currents (Fig. 2D). At -35 mV the time constant for fast inactivation was 3.5 ± 1.0 ms ($n=11$) for μ 1 and 2.7 ± 0.8 ms ($n=15$) for μ 1SLEN currents.

Repriming is much quicker for TTX-R currents in DRG neurons than for TTX-S currents [16,21]. At -120 mV, μ 1SLEN currents reprimed faster than did μ 1 currents (Fig. 3A,B,C). The time constant for repriming was about twice as fast for μ 1SLEN currents ($\tau=0.9 \pm 0.2$ ms, $n=11$) than for μ 1 currents ($\tau=2.0 \pm 0.8$ ms, $n=9$), and this difference was highly significant ($P < 0.001$). The rate of repriming was faster for μ 1SLEN currents at all voltages tested (Fig. 3D).

These data indicate that the D4S3–S4 linker is an important determinant of repriming in sodium channels. The accelerated rate of repriming may indicate a SLEN-induced destabilization of the closed-inactivated state of the channel, perhaps by affecting the conformational transition of D4S3 and/or D4S4. This is consistent with an earlier study [25] which concluded that D4S3 was an important determinant for repriming and suggested that repriming may be influenced by interaction between D4S3 and D4S4, such as sliding past each other. Notably, the SLEN insertion did not slow the onset of inactivation or shift steady-state inactivation to more depolarized potentials. Thus the alteration of an otherwise highly conserved D4S3–S4 linker appears to focally effect repriming. This observation may indicate a lower tolerance for substitution of residues within the membrane [25] compared to those within loop sequences.

Except for recovery from inactivation, the SLEN substitution did not seem to alter the properties of μ 1 channels in HEK293 cells. A recent study suggested that the S3–S4 linker might be a determinant of activation kinetics of the potassium channel α -subunit [32]. Our data indicate that the D4S3–S4 linker does not play the same role in sodium channels. It remains unclear what causes the markedly slower kinetics in the TTX-R current and SNS recombinant channels. Because of the high degree of conservation of D4S1–S6 sequences, it is unlikely that these regions are responsible for the difference. The D3–4 linker, which has been implicated as the inactivation particle, is also highly conserved between SNS and other sodium channel isoforms. It is possible that the SLEN sequence in the SNS subunit interacts with other sequences in the native channel to slow down the movement of S4 in the membrane, thus impacting the kinetic properties of the current. Although the SLEN substitution is not sufficient to induce the dramatic changes in gating kinetics or voltage dependence that are observed with SNS channels, it appears to contribute to rapid repriming in these channels.

Acknowledgements: This work was supported in part by grants from the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, the Medical Research Service, Department of Veterans Affairs. We thank B.R. Toftness for technical assistance.

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