Corticotropin-releasing factor mediated muscle atonia in pons and medulla

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(Accepted 29 October 1991)

Key words: Decerebrate; REM sleep; Nucleus magnocellularis; Peri-locus coeruleus a; Pontine inhibitory area; Lateral tegmental field; Reticular formation

The dorsolateral pontine inhibitory area (PIA) and medial medullary reticular formation (MMRF) have been found to mediate the muscle atonia of REM sleep. Our previous studies have shown that acetylcholine (ACh) microinjection in the PIA and in the nucleus paramedianus of the medulla produces muscle atonia. Glutamate microinjection in both PIA and nucleus magnocellularis (NMC) of the medulla also produces muscle atonia. Since immunohistochemical studies have identified corticotropin-releasing factor (CRF) as a potential dorsolateral pontine and NMC transmitter, the present study was undertaken to determine whether this transmitter could produce suppression of muscle tone. Experiments were performed on unanesthetized, decerebrated cats. CRF was microinjected into the same sites in PIA and NMC at which electrical stimulation produced bilateral inhibition of muscle tone. We found that CRF produced a dose-dependent muscle tone suppression. At 10 nM concentration, the latency and duration of muscle inhibition produced by CRF injection were comparable with those of L-glutamate, at 18.8 s and 4.1 min, respectively. This CRF-induced muscle inhibition was blocked by the CRF antagonist, a-helical [Glu\textsubscript{10}], at 50 nM concentration, the latency and duration of muscle inhibition produced by CRF injection were comparable with those of L-glutamate, at 18.8 s and 4.1 min, respectively. This CRF-induced muscle inhibition was blocked by the CRF antagonist, a-helical [Glu\textsubscript{10}], at 50 nM concentration.

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of muscle atonia in REM sleep was first reported by Jouvet et al.\textsuperscript{17}. REM sleep atonia is produced by motoneuron hyperpolarization\textsuperscript{7}. The neuronal circuitry involved in this REM sleep atonia includes several regions in the ponto-medullary reticular formation. Carbachol injection into the area ventral to the locus coeruleus corresponding to peri-locus coeruleus alpha (peri-LCa)\textsuperscript{15} and adjacent lateral tegmental regions, produces REM sleep-like activity\textsuperscript{20,34,35}. Electrical or chemical stimulation in this pontine inhibitory area (PIA) and in the medial medulla produces bilateral inhibition of muscle tone in the acute, decerebrate cat\textsuperscript{22,27}.

Electrophysiological and HRP studies have shown that neurons in the PIA project to the medial medulla\textsuperscript{36,37,42}, which in turn projects to the spinal cord\textsuperscript{52}. Lesions of the dorsolateral pons produce the syndrome of REM sleep without atonia\textsuperscript{16} as do lesions of the medial medulla\textsuperscript{38}.

Unit recording studies have localized populations of cells that are selectively active in REM sleep and periods of reduced muscle tone in waking, to the PIA and medial medulla\textsuperscript{53,54,46}. Medullary REM sleep-on neurons have been shown to be active during the loss of muscle tone seen in cataplectic attacks in narcoleptic dogs\textsuperscript{45}.

Corticotropin-releasing factor (CRF) has been found in the hypothalamus\textsuperscript{2,41,12} and in extra-hypothalamic regions\textsuperscript{3,3,19,50}. Functionally, CRF is not only related to pituitary adrenocorticotropic neuron release\textsuperscript{34,53}, but also affects the sympathetic nervous system\textsuperscript{12,13} and behavior\textsuperscript{3,4,25,26}.1,4,9,51 H\textsubscript{1} (neuro) uncertain if CRF plays a role in the sleep-waking cycle or in muscle tone control. Since CRF neurons and fibers have been found in the PIA\textsuperscript{32} and project to the atonia related nucleus magnocellularis (NMC) of the medulla\textsuperscript{26}, the present study was designed to investigate the role of CRF in these regions in the control of muscle tone.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Experiments were performed on 26 adult cats of either sex. Cats were decerebrated at the precollicular-postmammillary level. Tra-cheostomy, ligation of carotid arteries, cannulation of both right femoral artery and vein, and decerebration were done under halothane-oxygen anesthesia. Halothane anesthesia was discontinued after decerebration. Neck, triceps brachii, and gastrocnemius

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muscles in the left leg were implanted with bipolar electrodes for electromyographic (EMG) recording. Eye movement was recorded with a pair of screw electrodes placed in the caudal orbit. Blood pressure was recorded with a Statham pressure transducer through polyethylene tubing placed in the femoral artery. Rectal temperature was maintained at 38 ± 1°C through a thermostatically regulated heating pad.

The inhibitory sites in both pons and medulla were identified by electrical stimulation through a stainless-steel monopolar microelectrode (A & M systems), with 500 ms trains of 0.2 ms, 20-100 μA rectangular cathodal pulses at 100 Hz, as previously described[20]. Once the area was identified, 0.5 μl of CRF solution, whose concentration ranged from 0.01 nM to 10 nM, was microinjected through a 1-μl Hamilton (25 sG) microsyringe over a period of 60 s. Injections were also made in some lateral medulla sites according to stereotaxic parameters without prior electrical stimulation. In antagonist studies, α-helical [Glu²⁷] corticotropin-releasing factor 9-41 (α-helical CRF 9-41) was injected 5 min prior to CRF injection at the same site. EMG activity, integrated EMG, and blood pressure were recorded on a Grass Model 78D polygraph. EMG activity change was defined as a change of >30% in integrated EMG magnitude within 1 min of the end of microinjection. Iron was deposited at the injection sites through a stainless-steel monopolar microelectrode at the end of experiments. Brain tissues were sectioned at 60 μm, stained with Neutral red and counterstained with ferrocyanide to identify iron deposits. Stimulation sites were reconstructed according to Berman[4].

CRF was dissolved in either Ringer saline or phosphate buffer, pH 7.2 (Sigma). α-Helical CRF 9-41 (500 nM) was dissolved exclusively in phosphate buffer solution. Kainic acid (KA, 0.2 mM), quisqualic acid (QA, 10 mM), L-glutamic acid diethyl ester (GDEE, 0.2 M), and y-D-glutamylglycine (DGG, 10 mM) were dissolved in Ringer saline.

RESULTS

Electrical stimulation in pons and medial medulla including the PIA, the region medial to the cuneiformis nucleus (CNF), the dorsal nucleus of the lateral lemnis-

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Fig. 1. Location of corticotropin-releasing factor (CRF) injections in pons and medulla. Data is summarized from 26 decerebrated cats. Injections were made in both sides of brainstem. Electrical stimulation produced bilateral inhibition of the muscle tone at all tested sites in pons and medial medulla. The sites in lateral medulla were chosen according to stereotaxic parameters without electrical stimulation. (D), decrease; (A), increase; (O), no change in muscle tone after CRF injection; (ii), decrease of muscle tone after both CRF and non-NMDA agonists injection. 4V, fourth ventricle; 7, facial nucleus; BC, brachium conjunctivum; CNF, nucleus cuneiformis; IC, inferior colliculus; IO, inferior olive; LC, nucleus locus coeruleus; MLB, medial longitudinal bundle; NGC, nucleus gigantocellularis; NMC, nucleus magnocellularis; NPM, nucleus paramedianus; PT, pyramid tract; SO, superior olive.
Fig. 2. Dose-dependent effect of CRF on muscle tone. Magnitude was calculated with reference to integrated EMG amplitude in 2 min baseline period. Concentration of CRF was varied from 0.01 nM to 10 nM in counterbalanced order. Injection value was 0.5 /A. Each point is based on the mean activity in the 6 recorded muscles in 6 experiments.

Fig. 3. Effect of CRF on muscle activity. CRF injection in the NMC produced atonia. Control vehicle phosphate buffer solution (PBS) injection did not induce any change of muscle tone 6 h after CRF injection. a-Helical corticotropin-releasing factor 9-41 (CRF 9-41), a CRF antagonist, produced a slight increase in one (RTB) muscle and blocked the effect of CRF on muscle tone which was injected 5 min after it. All injections were made in the same site of NMC. LOS and ROS, left and right occipitoscapularis; RTB, right triceps brachii.
Defecation was occasionally induced by CRF injection in the pons.

Microinjection of CRF into inhibitory areas identified by electrical stimulation located outside of PI A, vFTP and areas medial and lateral to the CNF produced no change in muscle tone (Fig. 1), although electrical stimulation induced suppression of muscle tone. In inhibitory sites in the nucleus paramedianus of the caudomedial medulla, CRF injection induced no change (10/13) or decreased tone (3/13). Injections in sites in the lateral medulla at which electrical stimulation was not applied, produced no change (5 sites in ventral portion) or increased tone (2 sites in dorsal portion).

Injection of 0.5 μl of the CRF antagonist, a-helical CRF 9-41, 5 min prior to CRF injection, significantly (P < 0.01, t-test) attenuated the CRF effect on muscle activity in both PI A and NMC (Fig. 3), with CRF reducing tone to 6 ± 4.2% of baseline levels, while CRF after antagonist injection reduced tone to 92 ± 3.6% of baseline levels. Injection of the CRF antagonist itself produced no significant effect with no change in (6/9 of trials) or slightly increased (3/9 of trials) muscle activity. Control phosphate buffer or Ringer saline injection did not produce any change in EMG activity.

Five cats received both CRF and non-NMDA agonist injections at the same sites in the pons (9 sites) and NMC (6 sites). The result is shown in Fig. 4. Both CRF and non-NMDA agonists including KA and QA produced muscle atonia bilaterally. The interval between CRF and prior non-NMDA agonist injections in the same site could be as short as one hour. This was much shorter than the minimum interval between two consecutive CRF injections with undiminished effects on EMG.

DISCUSSION

The present studies demonstrate that CRF application produces atonia in areas that converge anatomical and physiological data indicate are part of the REM sleep atonia circuit. This CRF-induced muscle atonia could be blocked by CRF antagonist, a-helical CRF 9-41. Furthermore, both CRF and non-NMDA agonist injection into the same sites in PI A and NMC produced muscle atonia. Muscle tone suppression induced by CRF injection was not blood pressure or heart rate related as is the case with glutamate (Glut) and acetylcholine (Ach) atonia induced under the same conditions.

The behavioral response to CRF infusion in chronic, intact animals depends on the site of injection and the environment in which the animals were tested. Lateral ventricle (ICV) infusion of CRF produces a dose-dependent decrease in locomotor activity compared with control saline infusion in the freely moving rat. In rhesus monkeys, CRF induced lying-down behavior when the animals were in their home cage, while behavioral arousal was found when animals were chair-restrained. Low doses of CRF infused ICV produced dose-dependent EEG desynchronization in the freely moving rabbit.
jection through the same route in the REM sleep-deprived rat increased REM sleep duration. Although CRF alone produced a small but non-significant decrease in REM sleep, CRF infusion restored REM sleep suppressed by interleukin-1 infusion. The extent to which these systemic effects are mediated by the pontine and medullary sites identified in the present work remains to be determined.

ICV infusion of CRF has been found to increase neuronal activity in locus coeruleus and hippocampal pyramidal neurons. Using the iontophoresis technique and extracellular recording, Eberly et al. found that CRF excited most of the neurons in the cortex and hypothalamus and inhibited neurons in the thalamus and lateral septum. Furthermore, all the neurons in the cortex and diencephalon responding to CRF were also excited by glutamate. We have similarly found both glutamate and CRF effects at the same sites in PIA and NMC in the present study. This suggests that these agonists are either acting on neurons with both CRF and Glut receptors, or on co-localized groups of cells having these receptors.

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Acknowledgement. Supported by the Medical Research Service of the Veterans Administration, and PHS Grants HL41370 and NS14600.


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