# Antimigraine Drug Interactions with Serotonin Receptor Subtypes in Human Brain

Stephen J. Peroutka, MD, PhD

The interactions of antimigraine agents with serotonin (5-hydroxytryptamine, 5-HT) receptor subtypes were analyzed in human frontal cortex membranes. The drugs studied included 5-HT antagonists, beta-adrenergic antagonists, and calcium channel blockers. At 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> sites labeled by <sup>3</sup>H-8-hydroxy-2-(N,N-dipropylamino)-tetralin, (-)pindolol, alprenolol, (-)propranolol, methysergide, cyproheptadine, and pizotifen are similar in that they display affinities of approximately 100 nM for this receptor. By contrast, only methysergide displays relatively high affinity (120 ± 60 nM), whereas all other drugs have affinities greater than 1,000 nM for non-5-HT<sub>1A</sub> sites labeled by <sup>3</sup>H-5-HT in human cortex. Finally, at 5-HT<sub>2</sub> receptors labeled by <sup>3</sup>H-spiperone, cyproheptadine, methysergide, and pizotifen are extremely potent agents (affinity constants of 1 to 10 nM), whereas amitriptyline (23 ± 4 nM), verapamil (140 ± 50 nM), and nifedipine (320 ± 80 nM) are moderately potent. All other drugs are inactive at concentrations below 1,000 nM. These data demonstrate that most antimigraine drugs display high affinity for the 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> and/or 5-HT<sub>2</sub> receptor subtypes in human brain. However, antimigraine efficacy cannot be explained by drug interactions with a single 5-HT receptor subtype.

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Serotonin (5-hydroxytryptamine, 5-HT) has been implicated in the pathogenesis of migraine [1–4]. Depending on the vascular tone, 5-HT may cause either vasodilation or vasoconstriction of intracranial vasculature [5, 6]. 5-HT is also an important neuromodulator of pain pathways, as evidenced by its ability to lower pain thresholds in inflamed tissues [7]. Moreover, 5-HT terminals have been identified in both cerebral blood vessels [8, 9] and central pain pathways [10–12]. Indeed, the first major class of prophylactic antimigraine agents were 5-HT antagonists such as methysergide [13], cyproheptadine, and pizotifen [14].

However, antimigraine agents do not appear to share a common mechanism of action [2, 3, 6, 15]. Thus, 5-HT antagonists, beta-adrenergic antagonists, and calcium channel blockers have all been reported to be effective in the prophylactic treatment of migraine [15, 16]. It has recently been reported that (–)propranolol and several 5-HT antagonists share a similar affinity for the 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> subtype of 5-HT receptor in the central nervous system of the rat [17]. These data suggested that interactions with 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> receptors may be an important action of migraine prophylactic agents. In the present study we therefore analyzed a variety of migraine prophylactic agents at the 3 known 5-HT receptor subtypes in human frontal cortex.

# Materials and Methods

Radioligand binding studies were performed as described previously [18, 19]. Briefly, human frontal cortex samples from 4 patients dying of nonneurological causes (32- and 70year-old women; 52- and 58-year-old men) were obtained post mortem from the Department of Pathology, Stanford University Medical Center. Tissue samples were obtained within 8 to 11 hours of death and rapidly frozen and stored at -70°C until needed. On the day of study, the samples were thawed in TRIS-HCl buffer. Tissues were homogenized in 20 volumes of TRIS-HCl buffer (pH 7.7 at 25°C) using a Brinkmann Polytron and then centrifuged in an IEC B20A centrifuge at 45,000 g for 10 minutes. The supernatant was discarded and the pellet was resuspended in the same volume of TRIS-HCl buffer and incubated at 37°C for 10 minutes before a second centrifugation at 49,000 g for 10 minutes. The final pellet was resuspended in 80 volumes of TRIS-HCl buffer containing 10 µM pargyline, 4 mM calcium chloride, and 0.1% ascorbic acid. The suspensions were immediately used in the binding assay. Radioligand binding studies consisted of 0.1 ml <sup>3</sup>H-radioligand (0.4 nM <sup>3</sup>H-8hydroxy-2-[N,N-dipropylamino]-tetralin {OH-DPAT}; 2 nM <sup>3</sup>H-5-HT; 0.7 nM <sup>3</sup>H-spiperone), 0.1 ml buffer or displacing drug, and 0.8 ml tissue suspension. After incubation at 25°C for 30 minutes, the samples were rapidly filtered under vacuum through no. 32 glass fiber filters (Schleicher and Schuell, Keene, NH) with two 5-ml washes using 50 mM TRIS-HCl buffer. Radioactivity was measured by liquid

From the Departments of Neurology and Pharmacology, Stanford University Medical Center, Stanford, CA 94305.

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Page 1 of 5



Drug Potencies at Serotonin Receptor Subtypes in Human Frontal Cortex<sup>a</sup>

| Drug                        | Receptor Affinity (Ki, nM) |                        |                    |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
|                             | 5-HT <sub>1A</sub>         | Non-5-HT <sub>1A</sub> | 5-HT <sub>2</sub>  |
| 5-HT Antagonists            |                            |                        |                    |
| Methysergide                | $59 \pm 10$                | $120 \pm 60$           | $5.7 \pm 3$        |
| Cyproheptadine              | $99 \pm 3$                 | $5,600 \pm 1,000$      | $2.2 \pm 0.6$      |
| Pizotifen                   | $200 \pm 40$               | $2,200 \pm 700$        | $3.6 \pm 0.5$      |
| Amitriptyline               | $1,800 \pm 300$            | $4,300 \pm 800$        | $23 \pm 4$         |
| Beta-adrenergic antagonists |                            |                        |                    |
| (-)Pindolol                 | $4.5 \pm 0.4$              | $13,000 \pm 3,000$     | $22,000 \pm 3,000$ |
| Alprenolol                  | 93 ± 7                     | $2,800 \pm 5,000$      | $5,100 \pm 700$    |
| (-)Propranolol              | $160 \pm 60$               | $29,000 \pm 7,000$     | $4,100 \pm 700$    |
| (+)Pindolol                 | $1,100 \pm 400$            | > 100,000              | $38,000 \pm 7,000$ |
| (+)Propranolol              | $1,900 \pm 300$            | $80,000 \pm 6,000$     | $9,000 \pm 500$    |
| Timolol                     | $2,500 \pm 700$            | > 100,000              | > 100,000          |
| Atenolol                    | > 100,000                  | > 100,000              | > 100,000          |
| Calcium channel antagonists |                            |                        |                    |
| Verapamil                   | $2,100 \pm 300$            | $41,000 \pm 5,000$     | $140 \pm 50$       |
| Nifedipine                  | > 100,000                  | $12,000 \pm 4,000$     | $320 \pm 80$       |
| Diltiazem                   | > 100,000                  | > 100,000              | $2,400 \pm 600$    |

<sup>\*</sup>Radioligand studies were performed as described in Materials and Methods. Data shown are the mean ± SE of 3 or 4 experiments, each performed in triplicate on individual brain samples.

scintillation spectroscopy in 5 ml of 3a70 Counting Cocktail (Research Products International, Mt Prospect, II.) at 54% efficiency. Specific binding was defined as the excess over blanks taken in the presence of 10<sup>-5</sup> M 5-HT for 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> sites labeled by <sup>3</sup>H-8-OH-DPAT, 10<sup>-5</sup> M 5-HT for non-5-HT<sub>1A</sub> sites labeled by <sup>3</sup>H-5-HT + 100 nM 8-OH-DPAT, and 10<sup>-6</sup> M cinanserin for 5-HT<sub>2</sub> sites labeled by <sup>3</sup>H-spiperone.

All drugs were diluted and dissolved in assay buffer with the exception of calcium channel blockers, which were dissolved in ethanol at 10<sup>-3</sup> M and then diluted in assay buffer. Drug sources were as follows: <sup>3</sup>H-radioligands (Dupont-New England Nuclear, Boston, MA); alprenolol, amitriptyline, cyproheptadine, 5-HT, methysergide (Sigma, St Louis, MO); cinanserin (Organon, West Orange, NJ); (-)pindolol, (+)pindolol, pizotifen (Sandoz, East Hanover, NJ); (-)propranolol (Herck, Sharp and Dohme, Rahway, NJ); atenolol (Stuart, Wilmington, DE); verapamil (Knoll, Whippany, NJ); nifedipine (Pfizer, Brooklyn, NY); diltiazem (Marion, Kansas City, MO); 8-OH-DPAT (Research Biochemicals, Waltham, MA).

IC<sub>50</sub> values were determined by log-logit analysis of drug competition studies.  $K_i$  values were determined by the equation  $K_i = IC_{50}/(1 + [1]/K_D)$ , where  $K_D$  was 1.0 nM for  $^3$ H-8-OH-DPAT; 3.2 nM for  $^3$ H-5-HT, and 0.71 nM for  $^3$ H-spiperone. Each experiment was performed in triplicate and repeated 3 or 4 times.

## Results

Drug Interactions with <sup>3</sup>H-8-OH-DPAT Binding to 5-HT<sub>IA</sub> Receptors

The majority of antimigraine drugs analyzed in the present study display high to moderate affinity for 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> receptors labeled by <sup>3</sup>H-8-OH-DPAT in human frontal cortex (Table). As previously reported in

rat brain membranes, methysergide, cyproheptadine, and pizotifen are essentially equipotent at  $5\text{-HT}_{1A}$  receptor sites ( $K_i$  values = 59 to 200 nM). Amitriptyline displays moderate to low potency for this site (1,800  $\pm$  300 nM).

Putative beta-adrenergic agents vary widely in their affinity for the 5-HT $_{1A}$  receptor. (–)Pindolol is the most potent drug studied, with a  $K_i$  value of 4.5  $\pm$  0.4 nM. Alprenolol and (–)propranolol are 21- and 36-fold, respectively, less potent than (–)pindolol at the 5-HT $_{1A}$  receptor. (+)Propranolol, (+)pindolol, and timolol display similar, moderate affinity for the 5-HT $_{1A}$  site. By contrast, atenolol is inactive at concentrations below  $10^{-4}$  M. Verapamil ( $K_i=2,100\pm300$  nM) is the only calcium channel blocker that is active at the 5-HT $_{1A}$  site at concentrations below  $10^{-4}$  M.

Drug competition data for methysergide, (–)propranolol, and verapamil are shown in the Figure (A). Methysergide is the most potent agent; displacement of specific  $^3\text{H-8-OH-DPAT}$  to the 5-HT $_{1A}$  site is first noted at concentrations above  $10^{-9}$  M. (–)Propranolol is slightly less potent, with the majority of competition occurring between concentrations of  $10^{-8}$  M and  $10^{-5}$  M. Verapamil is the least potent of the three agents and competes for specific  $^3\text{H-8-OH-DPAT}$  to 5-HT $_{1A}$  sites at micromolar concentrations.

Drug Interactions with <sup>3</sup>H-5-HT Binding to Non-5-HT<sub>1A</sub> Receptors

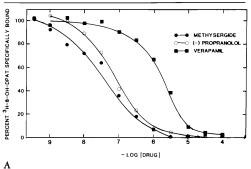
In human frontal cortex, non-5-HT<sub>1A</sub> binding has been defined using <sup>3</sup>H-5-HT in the presence of 100 nM

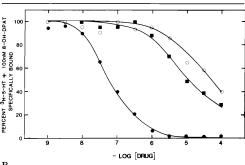
Peroutka: Migraine and 5-HT Receptors 501

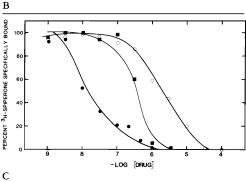
Page 2 of 5



<sup>5-</sup>HT = serotonin.







Drug competition studies of methysergide, (—) propranolol, and verapamil with serotonin (5-HT) receptor subtypes in human brain. Drug competition studies were performed as described in Materials and Methods. Data given are the results from a single experiment, performed in triplicate. Each experiment was repeated 3 to 5 times. (A) Drug competition with specific <sup>3</sup>H-8-bydroxy-2-(N,N-dipropylamino)-tetralin binding to 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> receptors. (B) Drug competition with specific <sup>3</sup>H-5-HT + 100 nM 8-0H-DPAT binding to non-5-HT<sub>1A</sub> receptors. (C) Drug competition studies with specific <sup>3</sup>H-spiperone binding to 5-HT<sub>2</sub> receptors.

8-OH-DPAT. Non-5-HT $_{1A}$  sites in human frontal cortex are composed almost exclusively of the 5-HT $_{1D}$  binding site subtype (Peroutka S. J., unpublished observations). With the exception of nifedipine, each of the antimigraine agents is one to two orders of magnitude less potent at non-5-HT $_{1A}$  binding site subtypes than at 5-HT $_{1A}$  sites. (+)Pindolol, timolol, atenolol, and diltiazem are totally inactive at the non-5-HT $_{1A}$  site at concentrations below  $10^{-4}$  M.

Methysergide is the only agent that competes for specific binding to the non-5-HT $_{1A}$  site at concentrations below  $10^{-6}$  M. As shown in the Figure (B), methysergide competition for non-5-HT $_{1A}$  binding begins at a concentration of  $10^{-8}$  M. At approximately  $10^{-7}$  M methysergide, 50% of specific  $^3$ H-5-HT binding is displaced. Essentially all specific binding to the non-5-HT $_{1A}$  site is eliminated by methysergide concentrations above  $10^{-5}$  M. By contrast, both (–)propranolol and verapamil are considerably less potent in competing for non-5-HT $_{1A}$  binding. Drug concentrations greater than  $10^{-5}$  M are needed to compete for 50% of specific  $^3$ H-5-HT binding.

# Drug Interactions with <sup>3</sup>H-Spiperone Binding to 5-HT<sub>2</sub> Receptors

A number of antimigraine agents interact potently with 5-HT<sub>2</sub> receptors labeled by <sup>3</sup>H-spiperone in human brain membranes (see Table). For example, methysergide, cyproheptadine, and pizotifen display nanomolar affinity for this 5-HT receptor subtype. Amitriptyline is only slightly less potent ( $K_i = 23 \pm 4$  nM), whereas verapamil and nifedipine display apparent affinities of 140  $\pm$  50 and 320  $\pm$  80 nM, respectively. Diltiazem and the majority of beta-adrenergic agents display micromolar affinity for the 5-HT<sub>2</sub> site. Only timolol and atenolol are inactive at this receptor below a concentration of  $10^{-4}$  M.

Drug competition studies with the 5-HT $_2$  binding site are shown in the Figure (C). Methysergide begins to displace specific  $^3$ H-spiperone binding at concentrations above  $10^{-9}$  M. All specific  $^3$ H-spiperone binding is eliminated by methysergide concentrations above  $10^{-6}$  M. Verapamil is approximately two orders of magnitude less potent than methysergide, with displacement of specific  $^3$ H-spiperone binding occurring between  $10^{-8}$  and  $3 \times 10^{-5}$  M verapamil. (–)Propranolol is the least potent of the three agents analyzed by drug competition studies, with approximately 50% displacement of the radioligand observed at a drug concentration of  $2 \times 10^{-6}$  M.

# Discussion

The major finding of the present study is that the majority of prophylactic antimigraine agents displays a relatively high affinity for 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> and/or 5-HT<sub>2</sub> receptors in human brain. Since a satisfactory animal model

502 Annals of Neurology Vol 23 No 5 May 1988

Page 3 of 5



for migraine does not exist, attempts to determine a common mechanism of action for effective antimigraine agents may be of benefit in elucidating the pathogenesis of this neurological syndrome. However, the present study demonstrates that a single 5-HT receptor subtype in brain membranes is unlikely to mediate antimigraine drug efficacy.

Since the demonstration in 1959 [13] that methysergide was an effective migraine prophylactic agent, a number of serotonergic agents have been shown effective in the treatment of migraine [14]. Recently, the observation that (–)propranolol, methysergide, cyproheptadine, and pizotifen were equipotent agents at the 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> receptor site in rat brain led to the suggestion that this receptor may play a role in the pathogenesis of migraine [17]. The 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> site can be radiolabeled with <sup>3</sup>H-8-OH-DPAT [18, 20] and has a distinct regional localization in human brain [21]. 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> sites are most dense in the raphe nuclei and hippocampus [21].

The 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> receptor has been shown to mediate 5-HT-induced contractions of the canine basilar artery [22, 23]. Perhaps more important, 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> selective agonists inhibit intrinsic raphe cell firing. The inhibitory effects of 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> agonists such as 8-OH-DPAT can be blocked by (–)propranolol [24]. As shown in the present study, methysergide, cyproheptadine, pizotifen, and amitriptyline all interact with 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> receptors in human brain.

In addition, a number of effective beta-adrenergic antimigraine agents such as (-)propranolol and timolol display moderate affinity for the 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> site [15, 25]. On the other hand, (-)pindolol is the most potent beta-adrenergic agent at the 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> receptor with a K<sub>i</sub> value of 4.5 ± 0.4 nM. Clinical studies of pindolol in the prophylactic treatment of migraine have produced conflicting results. In three published reports, the drug was found to be effective in one clinical trial [26], possibly effective in a small subgroup of patients in a second study [27], and ineffective in a third study [28]. In addition, atenolol is totally inactive at all three 5-HT receptor subtypes yet has been reported to be effective in two independent clinical trials [29, 30]. As a result, the antimigraine efficacy of certain beta-adrenergic agents cannot derive solely from antagonism of the 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> receptor.

In comparison to their 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> and non-5-HT<sub>1A</sub> potencies, methysergide, cyproheptadine, pizotifen, and amitriptyline are even more potent antagonists of the 5-HT<sub>2</sub> receptor in human brain. Indeed, it has been hypothesized that the 5-HT<sub>2</sub> receptor, which is most densely present in Layer IV of the cerebral cortex, might play a key role in one of the biochemical events of migraine [3, 15]. The 5-HT<sub>2</sub> receptor has been shown to mediate contraction of smooth muscle in many vascular beds [31]. In addition, Coughlin and

colleagues [32, 33] have demonstrated that 5-HT can stimulate production of prostacyclin and other products of arachidonic acid metabolism in smooth muscle cells in vitro [32, 33]. This action of 5-HT appears to be mediated by 5-HT<sub>2</sub> receptors, since methysergide, cyproheptadine, and pizotifen potently prevent this effect. The importance of this finding is that modulation of prostacyclin and arachidonic acid metabolism may have important effects on vascular tone [32] and/or local inflammation [15].

Calcium channel blockers are the newest class of antimigraine prophylactic agents. Initial studies have demonstrated that a variety of calcium channel blockers are effective in migraine prophylaxis. Previously, their antimigraine efficacy had been attributed to their protective effects during anoxia [34] and/or their ability to block intracranial vasoconstriction, irrespective of the constricting agent [35]. It is surprising that the present study demonstrated that calcium channel blockers display moderate affinity for the 5-HT2 receptor. Previously, verapamil and D600 were the only two calcium channel blockers that had been reported to affect 5-HT2 sites [36, 37]. Their ability to block 5-HT<sub>2</sub> receptors in human brain must now also be considered as a possible therapeutic effect of these drugs.

Therefore, the present study demonstrates that a large number of migraine prophylactic agents share an ability to interact with 5-HT receptor subtypes in human brain. More specifically, antimigraine drugs display high or moderate affinity for 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> and/or 5-HT<sub>2</sub> receptors in human brain membranes. However, we could not identify a single site of action for all antimigraine agents.

At the same time, these data do offer a novel approach to the analysis of antimigraine agents. Drugs could be selected for use in clinical migraine studies based on their selectivity for a specific 5-HT receptor subtype. For example, an agent that displays both high affinity and selectivity for 5-HT<sub>1A</sub> receptors could be clinically evaluated. Its effectiveness, or lack thereof, would indicate the importance of the specific 5-HT receptor site in the pathogenesis of migraine.

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Peroutka: Migraine and 5-HT Receptors 503

Page 4 of 5



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504 Annals of Neurology Vol 23 No 5 May 1988

Page 5 of 5

