Neuropeptides Found and their Functions Characterized in Crinoid Echinoderms

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Abstract

Being one of the most extensive and varied groups of signaling molecules found in mammals, neuropeptides control a wide range of physiological functions and behavior. The discovery of genes producing neuropeptide precursor proteins in species from an expanding range of taxa, including bilaterian and non-bilaterian animals, has been made possible by genome and transcriptome sequencing. Deuterostome invertebrates like the phylum Echinodermata, which has a phylogenetic position that has made it easier to reconstruct the evolution of neuropeptide signaling systems in Bilateria, are of special interest. However the majority of what we know about neuropeptide signaling in echinoderms comes from bioinformatics and experimental study of eleutherozoans, particularly Asteria (starfish and brittle stars) and Echinozoa (sea urchins and sea cucumbers). There is little information on neuropeptide signaling.

Keywords: Neuropeptide signalling

Introduction

In order to create the first thorough identification of neuropeptide precursors in crinoids, we have investigated transcriptome/genome sequencing data from three species of feather stars: *Anneissia japonica, Antedon mediterranea,* and *Florometra serratissima.* There are numerous putative crinoid neuropeptide precursors among them, as well as members of bilaterian neuropeptide precursor families. We have examined the expression of a few neuropeptides in larvae (*doliolaria*), post-metamorphic pentacrinoids, and adults using A. mediterranea as an experimental model, revealing novel details on the cellular structure of crinoid nervous systems. As a result, F-type SALMF amide precursor transcripts were discovered utilizing mRNA in situ hybridization in a hitherto unidentified population of peptidergic cells situated dorso-laterally in *doliolaria*.

Also, using immunohistochemistry, it was discovered that adults' ectoneural and entoneural compartments of the nervous system had calcitonin-type neuropeptides as did pentacrinoids' circumoral nerve ring, oral tube foot, and aboral nerve centre. Additionally, functional analysis of a neuropeptide of the vasopressin/oxytocin type (crinotocin), which is expressed in the brachial nerve of the arms of A. mediterranean, revealed that this peptide alters the mechanical behavior of arm preparations in vitro in a dose-dependent manner. This is the first known biological effect of a neuropeptide in a crinoid. Finally, our findings lay the groundwork for further investigation of neuropeptide production and function in crinoids, a sister group to eleutherozoan echinoderms. They offer fresh insights on neuropeptide signaling in echinoderms.

The diversity of neuropeptides that have been found in bilaterian and non-bilaterian phyla reflects the fact that neuronal secretion of peptides that serve as intercellular signaling molecules (neuropeptides) is an evolutionary old trait of nervous systems. Moreover, it has been suggested that neuropeptide signaling has a pre-metazoan origin. The bigger precursor proteins that become neuropeptides feature an N-terminal signal peptide that directs the molecules to the endoplasmic reticulum lumen for release. One or more neuropeptides that are surrounded by monobasic or dibasic cleavage sites can be found in the precursor proteins. Furthermore, post-translational changes of neuropeptides can take place during the processing of neuropeptide precursors. The most frequent of these modifications is the transformation of a glycine residue at the C-terminus into an amide group, which protects against carboxypeptidases.

Additional post-translational changes of neuropeptides include tyrosine sulfation, intramolecular and/or intermolecular production of disulphide bridges between cysteine residues, and conversion of an N-terminal glutamine to pyroglutamate, which is protective against aminopeptidases. Typically, neuropeptides operate on other cells by attaching to certain G-Protein Coupled Receptors (GPCRs), modulating synaptic transmission locally and/or functioning systemically as hormones. Neuropeptides' cellular effects become apparent at the organ/organismal level, where they influence physiological processes and/or behavior. Consequently, neuropeptides have a crucial role in controlling activities including eating and digesting, osmoregulation, growth, locomotion, and reproduction.

Transcriptome/genome sequencing has made it much easier to study the development of neuropeptide signaling networks. Initially, this was limited to commonly studied "model" species like humans, mice, the nematode Caenorhabditis elegans, and the insect Drosophila melanogaster. Comparison and functional characterization of neuropeptide signaling systems in these species provided important insights into the relationships between neuropeptides and the evolutionary origins of various neuropeptide types. Yet, as transcriptome/genome sequencing has expanded to include a larger range of animal species, significant new insights into the evolution of neuropeptides have been discovered.

The phylum Echinodermata is one of the animal groups that have proved crucial for reconstructing the evolutionary history of neuropeptide signaling systems (e.g., starfish, brittle stars, sea urchins, sea cucumbers, feather stars). Echinoderms and hemichordates are classified as ambulacrarian deuterostomes in the phylum Chordata, which includes vertebrates, urochordates, and cephalochordates. As such, they serve as an important evolutionary link between studies on neuropeptide systems in protostome invertebrates (such as arthropods, nematodes, mollusks, and annelids) and vertebrates. The application of antibodies to neuropeptides found in other phyla allowed for the first time the visualization of neuropeptide expression in echinoderm nervous systems (e.g., the molluscan cardio active peptide FMRF amide).