

# The Effects of Rifampicin on Neuronal Survival

## Rifampisinin Nöronal Sağkalım Üzerine Etkileri

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### ABSTRACT

Neurodegenerative diseases are characterized by the formation of insoluble aggregates of misfolded proteins in the central nervous system. The  $\beta$ -amyloid protein in Alzheimer's disease and  $\alpha$ -synuclein formation in Parkinson's disease (PD) may be given as examples. In addition to  $\alpha$ -synuclein accumulation in Parkinson's disease, mechanisms such as oxidative stress, dysfunction of mitochondria, inflammation response, and apoptosis are known to be involved in the disease process. Since the mechanisms underlying these diseases are partially known, the drugs developed are intended to slow the disease process rather than cure them. Rifampicin is an antibiotic commonly used in humans and known to easily penetrate into the brain after oral intake. Studies have shown that rifampicin suppresses mitochondrial oxidative stress, eliminates  $\alpha$ -synuclein fibrils and inhibits inflammation in *in vitro* and *in vivo* disease models. In this study, we reviewed recent studies on the neuronal protection of rifampicin and the effects of rifampicin on the pathophysiological mechanisms of PD.

**Keywords:** Parkinson's disease, rifampicin,  $\alpha$ -Synuclein, SUMOylation, inflammation, autophagy

### ÖZ

Nörodejeneratif hastalıklar, merkezi sinir sisteminde yanlış katlanmış proteinlerin çözünmeyen agregatlarının oluşumu ile karakterizedir. Bunlara örnek olarak; Alzheimer hastalığında  $\beta$ -amyloid protein ve Parkinson hastalığında  $\alpha$ -sinüklein oluşumu verilebilir. Parkinson hastalığında  $\alpha$ -sinüklein agregasyonuna ek olarak, oksidatif stress, mitokondri fonksiyon bozukluğu, inflamatuvar cevap, apoptoz gibi mekanizmaların hastalık sürecine katıldığı bilinmektedir. Bu hastalıkların altında yatan mekanizmalar tam olarak bilinmediği için, hastalığa ilişkin geliştirilen ilaçlar, hastalığı iyileştirmekten çok, hastalığın seyrini yavaşlatma eğilimindedir. Rifampisin insanlar tarafından sıkça kullanılan bir antibiyotiktir ve ağız yoluyla alındıktan sonra beyne kolaylıkla penetre olmaktadır. Rifampisin *in vivo* ve *in vitro* hastalık modellerinde mitokondriyal oksidatif stresi baskıladığı,  $\alpha$ -sinüklein fibrillerini ayrıştırdığı, inflamasyonu inhibe ettiğini gösteren çok sayıda çalışma mevcuttur. Biz bu çalışmada, rifampisin nöronal korunumu üzerine raporlanan çalışmaları ve Parkinson hastalığı'nın patofizyolojik mekanizmaları üzerine rifampisin etkilerini derledik.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Parkinson hastalığı, rifampisin,  $\alpha$ -Sinüklein, SUMOlaşım, inflamasyon, otofaji

### INTRODUCTION

Although rifampicin is a widely used antibiotic in the treatment of tuberculosis and leprosy, studies have increasingly shown that rifampicin has therapeutic benefits for acute brain injury and chronic neurodegenerative diseases (1-5). Among the neurodegenerative diseases, Parkinson's disease (PD) and Alzheimer's disease are the two major diseases where the therapeutic benefits of rifampicin have been shown. PD is the second most common neurodegeneration disease in the world and is caused by the loss of dopaminergic neurons in the substantia nigra compacta region of the brain. Many pathological mechanisms proposed for PD include mitochondrial dysfunction, increased oxidative stress, protein misfolding-aggregation, apoptosis, inflammatory response and glutaminergic excitotoxicity, and nitrosative stress (6).

There are studies showing that rifampicin significantly increases the viability of neurons in *in vitro* models of PD (7). However, rifampicin inhibited apoptosis in neurons by activating glucose-regulated protein 78 (GRP78), an endoplasmic reticulum stress marker, and inhibiting the expression of  $\alpha$ -synuclein multimers (8, 9). There are also studies showing that rifampicin has the ability to suppress inflammation by inhibiting the nuclear transfer of Nf-kB and the release of IL-1 $\beta$ , TNF- $\alpha$  and other inflammatory factors in microglia (10). Accordingly, rifampicin has been shown to protect neurons by different mechanisms including its effects on oxidative stress, autophagy, and mitophagy,  $\alpha$ -Synuclein aggregation and SUMOylation (Figure 1). Here, we have reviewed recent studies on the effects of rifampicin on the mechanisms involved in the pathophysiology of PD.

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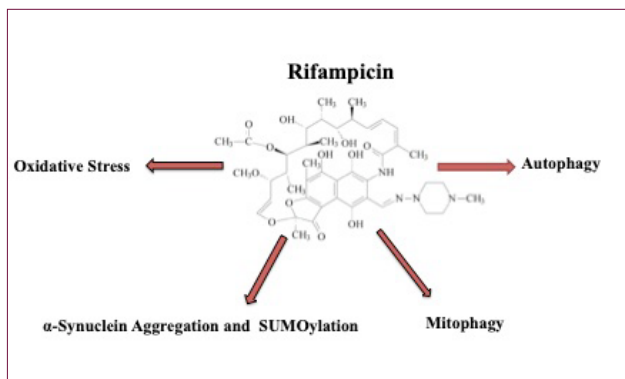


Figure 1. Rifampicin has been shown to protect neurons by different mechanisms including its effects on oxidative stress, autophagy, and mitophagy,  $\alpha$ -Synuclein aggregation and SUMOylation

### Rifampicin and Oxidative Stress

Researchers have shown that mitochondrial dysregulation plays an important pathological role in dopamine loss in various PD models (11, 12). It is known that PD-causing chemicals, such as rotenone and MPTP, inhibit mitochondrial complex I in dopaminergic neurons, reduce ATP production, and cause increased reactive oxygen species (ROS), as well as oxidative stress (13-16). Mitochondrial dysfunction can result from both increased damage and a reduced ability to repair or clear damaged mitochondria (17).

One of the common ways described in experimental models of neurodegenerative diseases is oxidative/nitrosative stress (OS/NS). This event triggers a series of harmful actions involving the primary formation of reactive oxygen and nitrogen species (ROS/RNS), affecting the structure and function of different biological molecules, leading to specific toxic processes that endanger cell redox status (18, 19). Mitochondria have been shown to be the main source of ROS and responsible for oxidative stress-induced cell death in neurodegeneration (20, 21).

Being the first-line antituberculosis, rifampicin is recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). However, hepatotoxicity which is the main limiting factor for eliminating the clinical use of rifampicin is accepted to be the major side effect in the treatment of tuberculosis. Although rifampin alone has low hepatotoxicity it may show additive/synergistic hepatotoxicity when it is used with isoniazid during the treatment of tuberculosis (22). Accordingly, rifampicin has been shown to cause liver damage through the induction of cholestasis, with a serious increase in serum bilirubin levels. As oxidative stress is sometimes related to cholestasis and suggested to have a role in the endocytosis of envelope proteins; rifampicin has also been related to oxidative stress in the liver (23). Moreover, Xu et al. showed that rifampicin decreased multidrug resistance-associated protein 2 levels through the induction of oxidative stress in HepG2 cells (23).

In contrast, rifampicin has been shown to act differently in the neuronal system. It has been shown that rifampicin-treated animals had decreased oxidative stress in the nigrostriatal dopaminergic neuronal pathways and provided neuronal protection (24). As rifampicin has been reported to reduce ROS release and secondary brain injury in *Streptococcus pneumoniae meningitis*, it can be a potential treatment for the disease (25). In *in vitro* studies, rifampicin pretreatment protected PC12 cells against rotenone-induced cell death and inhibited the formation of  $\alpha$ -synuclein multimers as well. Qualitative and quantitative analyses showed that rifampicin significantly prevented rotenone-induced apoptosis by relieving mitochondrial oxidative stress (26). As the oxidative process changes mitochondrial respiration and leads to changes in the permeability of the transition pores in the mitochondria of the brain; prevention of oxidative stress by rifampicin may have important functions for the development of new treatment strategies.

### Rifampicin and Autophagy

Mitochondrial dysfunction is related very closely with the pathogenesis of PD. It may be the result of impaired mitochondrial biogenesis, high ROS formation, impaired mitophagy and electron transport chain dysfunction as well as alterations in the dynamics of mitochondrial functions and calcium homeostasis. Neuroinflammation is a mitochondrial and autophagic dysfunction, associated with the pathophysiology of PD. In order to remove damaged proteins and the mitochondria, a very well regulated lysosomal-mediated autophagy pathway is needed. This autophagy pathway integrates various signals including nutrient availability, cellular stress and oxidized proteins and lipids (27).

Rifampicin inhibits the formation of  $\alpha$ -synuclein multimers and neuronal apoptosis by the activation of GRP78 via the PERK-eIF2 $\alpha$ -ATF4 pathway (8, 9). Furthermore, rifampicin administration is useful for lipopolysaccharide (LPS)-stimulated microglia-damaged neurons by suppressing the nuclear factor kappa B activation, phosphorylation of MAPKs and the toll-like receptor-4 (TLR-4) pathway (10, 28).

Studies have shown that inhibition of autophagy, in particular, mitophagy, leads to a reduced degradation of damaged mitochondria and an increased production of ROS (29). Previous studies have shown that pre-administration of rifampicin inhibits neuroinflammation by the suppression of 26S protease regulatory subunit 7 (MSS1). Thus, the production of inducible nitric oxide synthase, TNF- $\alpha$  and IL-1 $\beta$  are reduced (30). Chloroquine treatment, an autophagy inhibitor, inhibits the effect of rifampicin pretreatment on rotenone-stimulated IL-1 $\beta$  and IL-6 secretion. This indicates that rifampicin inhibits inflammation by modulating autophagy (31). In recent studies, various effects of rotenone have been shown on autophagy depending on the different dosages used and the cellular systems analyzed. In one study, rotenone reduced all autophagy but increased mitophagy in neurons (32), while in another study it was shown that rotenone increased autophagy and stimulated ROS induced autophagic cell death (33).

Removal of damaged mitochondria is necessary to protect cells from ROS and pro-apoptotic molecules released by dysfunctional mitochondria. In a study, it was found that pre-treatment of rifampicin partially reduced mitochondrial membrane potential (MMP) induced by rotenone and partially reversed ROS production. Moreover, the protective effect of rifampicin on mitochondrial function is suppressed after the addition of the autophagy inhibitor. These results convince us that rifampicin leads to a reduction in ROS production through a tendency towards mitophagy (31).

### **Rifampicin, $\alpha$ -Synuclein Aggregation, and SUMOylation**

$\alpha$ -Synuclein is the main protein component of Lewy Body in PD brains (34, 35) and is a protein of 140 amino acids.  $\alpha$ -Synuclein aggregation is a critical step in the pathogenesis of PD. There is a strong association between  $\alpha$ -synuclein upregulation and increased cytotoxicity and neurodegeneration (36). The aggregation of  $\alpha$ -synuclein has been suggested to be one of the mechanisms linking mitochondrial dysfunction, another important pathway leading to PD pathogenesis (37).

Pathological forms of  $\alpha$ -synuclein, which are spread in the parenchymal tissue of the brain, can contribute to the disease process by stimulating inflammatory-type reactions through microglial cells (38). In one study, by using pure microglial cell culture, the inflammatory potential of three different forms of  $\alpha$ -synuclein was tested and TNF- $\alpha$  and IL-6 release as inflammation markers were examined (39). As a result, a fibril form of  $\alpha$ -synuclein was found to be the most inflammatory form of protein. This result shows us that the inflammatory potential of  $\alpha$ -synuclein is dependent on the aggregation state of the protein.

In another study,  $\alpha$ -synuclein fibrils were reported to activate the THP-1 monocyte cell line and activate the release of IL-1 $\beta$  by TLR-2 and NLRP3 activation (40). In another study,  $\alpha$ -synuclein fibrils in microglial BV-2 cell culture were shown to be more effective in increasing the production and release of proinflammatory cytokines than in monomeric and oligomeric species (41). In previous studies, it has been shown that rifampicin can increase neuronal survival by inhibiting the inflammatory process induced by LPS-activated microglial cells (10, 28). Recent studies have shown that posttranslational modification by the small ubiquitin-like modifier called SUMOylation regulates mitochondrial dynamics. This mechanism is accepted to be one of the underlying mechanisms of PD (42, 43). Some of the proteins encoded by the genes involved in genetic changes in PD are regulated by SUMO.

Covalent binding of SUMO protein to the lysine residue of the target protein is an important control process in eukaryotic cells and regulates the function of hundreds of proteins in many different pathways. SUMOylation causes different results depending on the pathway in which it is located, but the basic principle is to change the interactions between substrate proteins for the molecule and between molecules (protein or DNA). Thus, it regulates the activities, localization,

and stability of the substrates (44, 45). SUMO also affects cytoplasmic and membrane proteins, including ion channels and receptors (46-48), so that SUMOylation not only acts in the nucleus but also in different cellular processes including cell signaling, plasma membrane depolarization and signal transduction (45, 49).

SUMOylation of proteins has been shown to play an important role in synaptic transmission, plasticity and neuron conservation (50). Decreasing solubility and pathological accumulation of specific disease-related proteins such as  $\alpha$ -synuclein is a common feature among neurodegenerative diseases such as PD. Cytoplasmic filamentous inclusions, whose main component is  $\alpha$ -synuclein (51), are abundant in the neurons of PD patients that exhibit other important pathological features. In PD brains and Lewy Body disease (LB) with dementia, SUMO-1 is located in the outer part of LB, which is colocalized by  $\alpha$ -synuclein (52).  $\alpha$ -synuclein is a SUMO target and SUMOylation occurs on 2 lysine residues K96 and K102 on the protein, this was confirmed by transgenic mice expressing His6-tagged SUMO-2 (53). Reduced  $\alpha$ -synuclein SUMOylation by mutation of SUMO-modified lysines, has been found to increase  $\alpha$ -synuclein aggregation and toxicity in heterogeneous cells and in dopaminergic neurons of substantial nigra in PD rat models (53).

In a different study, the relationship between rifampicin and SUMOylation was evaluated. It was reported that rotenone-stimulated PC12 cells were prevented from increased apoptosis by increasing the SUMOylation of  $\alpha$ -synuclein by pretreatment of rifampicin. In this study, pretreatment of rifampicin caused an early increase in SUMOylation, thereby increasing the solubility of  $\alpha$ -synuclein, aggregates-prone neurodegeneration-related proteins. Subsequent treatment of rotenone-stimulated cells with rifampicin resulted in less formation of damaged and misfolded  $\alpha$ -synucleins. However, the late generation of SUMOylation in cells has been found to cause a more difficulties in the reversal of toxicity from  $\alpha$ -synuclein accumulation (54).

### **Rifampicin (Rif) and its Oxidated Product (RifQ)**

Although many studies have shown the anti-inflammatory effects of rifampicin, there have been only a few studies performed using the oxidative product of rifampicin. It was found that when rifampicin was dissolved in aqueous solution, as a result of the spontaneous oxidation reaction, different oxidized species are produced - such as the rifampicin quinone (RifQ). This molecule differs from rifampicin in that the naphthyl core structure is converted into a naphthoquinone (Figure 1). This confers to the molecule's distinctive biochemical properties.

Rifampicin is defined as a potential immunosuppressive agent in rats, but these effects were obtained only with stocked solutions of the antibiotic, not with freshly prepared solutions. Therefore, the anti-inflammatory effects of rifampicin are attributed to the oxidant product RifQ of rifampicin (55). In addition, other studies have indicated that the oxidation product of rifampicin inhibits  $\alpha$ -synuclein fibrillation and strengthens the disaggregation of formed fibrils (56).

Rifampicin and its oxidized derivative, RifQ, have been shown to inhibit the activation of primary microglial cells induced by  $\alpha$ -synuclein fibrils, which are inflammatory factors in PD (39, 57). RifQ has been shown to have the potential to inhibit neurotoxic effects induced by microglial cells activated by  $\alpha$ -synuclein fibrils.

## CONCLUSION

Numerous *in vivo* and *in vitro* studies suggest that rifampicin may have therapeutic effects in PD treatment. These results suggest that rifampicin may slow down the process by reducing oxidative stress, inhibiting inflammation, inhibiting the formation of  $\alpha$ -synuclein aggregates, and separating the resulting aggregates and providing neuronal protection. Thus, rifampicin may be a novel method of therapy in the treatment of PD and may be used in the treatment of neurodegenerative diseases which have similar mechanisms.

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