**K_ATP channel activity and slow oscillations in pancreatic beta cells are regulated by mitochondrial ATP production**

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Handling Editors: Peying Fong & Kyle McCommis

The peer review history is available in the Supporting Information section of this article (https://doi.org/10.1113/JP284982#support-information-section).

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**Abstract**

Pancreatic beta cells secrete insulin in response to plasma glucose. The ATP-sensitive potassium channel (K_ATP) links glucose metabolism to islet electrical activity in these cells by responding to increased cytosolic [ATP]/[ADP]. It was recently proposed that pyruvate kinase (PK) in close proximity to beta cell K_ATP locally produces the ATP that inhibits K_ATP activity. This proposal was largely based on the observation that applying phosphoenolpyruvate (PEP) and ADP to the cytoplasmic side of excised inside-out patches inhibited K_ATP. To test the relative contributions of local vs. mitochondrial ATP production, we recorded K_ATP activity using mouse beta cells and INS-1 832/13 cells. In contrast to prior reports, we could not replicate inhibition of K_ATP activity by PEP + ADP.
However, when the pH of the PEP solutions was not corrected for the addition of PEP, strong channel inhibition was observed as a result of the well-known action of protons to inhibit K\textsubscript{ATP}. In cell-attached recordings, perfusing either a PK activator or an inhibitor had little or no effect on K\textsubscript{ATP} channel closure by glucose, further suggesting that PK is not an important regulator of K\textsubscript{ATP}. In contrast, addition of mitochondrial inhibitors robustly increased K\textsubscript{ATP} activity. Finally, by measuring the [ATP]/[ADP] responses to imposed calcium oscillations in mouse beta cells, we found that oxidative phosphorylation could raise [ATP]/[ADP] even when ADP was at its nadir during the burst silent phase, in agreement with our mathematical model. These results indicate that ATP produced by mitochondrial oxidative phosphorylation is the primary controller of K\textsubscript{ATP} in pancreatic beta cells.

(Received 5 May 2023; accepted after revision 16 October 2023; first published online 17 November 2023)

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Abstract figure legend The intracellular mechanisms that control K\textsubscript{ATP} channel activity in insulin-secreting pancreatic beta cells were investigated. From inside-out and cell-attached electrophysiological recordings, we found that K\textsubscript{ATP} activity was not significantly affected by ATP synthesized by pyruvate kinase. However, in intact beta cells perfused with high glucose concentrations, we observed a dramatic increase in K\textsubscript{ATP} channel activity when mitochondrial produced ATP was inhibited by NaN\textsubscript{3} or rotenone (two inhibitors of the electron transport chain). These results confirm that the ATP synthesized by oxidative phosphorylation is the main factor responsible for K\textsubscript{ATP} modulation in beta cells. This mechanism was also supported by simulations of the Integrated Oscillator Model for beta cells. The top trace in the figure corresponds to a cell-attached recording of K\textsubscript{ATP} obtained from mouse beta cells under the indicated conditions.

Key points

- Phosphoenolpyruvate (PEP) plus adenosine diphosphate does not inhibit K\textsubscript{ATP} activity in excised patches. PEP solutions only inhibit K\textsubscript{ATP} activity if the pH is unbalanced.
- Modulating pyruvate kinase has minimal effects on K\textsubscript{ATP} activity.
- Mitochondrial inhibition, in contrast, robustly potentiates K\textsubscript{ATP} activity in cell-attached patches.
- Although the ADP level falls during the silent phase of calcium oscillations, mitochondria can still produce enough ATP via oxidative phosphorylation to close K\textsubscript{ATP}.
- Mitochondrial oxidative phosphorylation is therefore the main source of the ATP that inhibits the K\textsubscript{ATP} activity of pancreatic beta cells.

Introduction

ATP-sensitive potassium channels (K\textsubscript{ATP}) couple increased glucose level with insulin release (Ashcroft & Rorsman, 1989; Cook & Hales, 1984; Nichols, 2006; Rorsman & Trube, 1985). Many observations have supported this view: K\textsubscript{ATP} is the dominant resting conductance of the beta cell (Ashcroft & Rorsman, 1989; Nichols, 2006; Satin et al., 2015), mutations in the channel are strongly linked to metabolic diseases (Ashcroft et al., 2017; Pipatpolkai et al., 2020) and drugs targeting K\textsubscript{ATP} are oral anti-diabetic agents (Ashcroft et al., 2017). K\textsubscript{ATP} is the main link connecting glucose metabolism to the membrane depolarization that activates voltage-gated calcium channels. This increases the intracellular calcium concentration, which in turn evokes the release of insulin.
Mitochondrial ATP regulates $K_{ATP}$ activity.

$K_{ATP}$ is spontaneously active, and its activity is directly blocked by ATP and increased by ADP, as shown by recordings of channel activity in inside-out membrane patches (Bokvist et al., 1991; Cook & Hales, 1984; Rorsman & Trube, 1985). Therefore, the cytosolic ratio of ATP and ADP concentrations (referred to as $[ATP]/[ADP]$) is an important regulator of $K_{ATP}$ activity and, by extension, of calcium oscillations and insulin release. Furthermore, as we have recently shown, oscillations in $K_{ATP}$ drive oscillations in islet electrical activity (Marinelli et al., 2022).

Although the high density of mitochondria present in beta cells (Kaufman et al., 2015; Rutter et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2021) and the efficient production of ATP by oxidative phosphorylation make mitochondrially derived ATP a probable candidate as the source of ATP that closes $K_{ATP}$ physiologically, this has been challenged recently by the finding that, in excised membrane patches from beta cells, application of the glycolytic intermediate phosphoenolpyruvate (PEP) in the continuous presence of ADP leads to channel closure (Foster et al., 2022; Lewandowski et al., 2020). The reports proposed that a local pool of ATP at the plasmalemma is responsible for $K_{ATP}$ closure and is produced by glycolytic enzymes such as pyruvate kinase (PK) co-localized with $K_{ATP}$ (Foster et al., 2022; Lewandowski et al., 2020). Based on these observations, it was suggested that local rather than bulk or mitochondrially derived ATP closes the channel, triggering cell depolarization, calcium influx and insulin secretion from beta cells. Furthermore, mutations in particular PK isoforms were subsequently shown to alter islet calcium signalling and secretion, although the phenotypes observed in PK knockout mice were mild (Foster et al., 2022).

To evaluate this hypothesis, we recorded the activity of single $K_{ATP}$ channels from mouse beta cells and INS-1 832/13 cells in two different electrophysiological configurations: inside-out and cell-attached patches. Using inside-out recordings, we were unable to reproduce the reported inhibition of $K_{ATP}$ activity by ADP and PEP applied to the cytoplasmic face of the membrane. However, an inhibitory effect of PEP solutions was observed when the pH was not corrected, confirming that PEP can inhibit $K_{ATP}$ channels as a result of protons, a well-known mechanism (Fan et al., 1994; Misler et al., 1989; Proks et al., 1994). These and other findings from our inside-out patch experiments thus fail to support the hypothesis that local glycolysis controls $K_{ATP}$ activity in beta cells.

Another key pillar of the local glycolytic hypothesis is the assumption that mitochondrial oxidative phosphorylation (OxPhos) is shut off during the silent phase of beta-cell oscillations because of ADP deprivation and therefore cannot be solely responsible for OxPhos driven calcium oscillations (Foster et al., 2022; Merrins et al., 2022). To test this hypothesis, we mimicked the free running oscillatory activity of islets normally observed in saline containing 11 mm glucose at the same time as measuring dynamic changes in $[ATP]/[ADP]$ in mouse islets expressing perceval-HR. In contrast to the local glycolytic hypothesis, we found that OxPhos remains active throughout the beta cell oscillatory cycle.

Thus, the two sets of experiments presented here support mitochondria, and not glycolysis, as the main physiological source of ATP that regulates $K_{ATP}$ activity and calcium oscillations in beta cells. Further support was provided by simulations of the data using the Integrated Oscillation Model (IOM) (Bertram et al., 2018).

Methods

Ethical approval

To ensure the humane treatment and responsible and judicious use of animals, all experimental procedures of the present study were performed under the regulation and supervision of The Institutional Animal Care & Use Committee (IACUC) of the University of Michigan (protocol PRO00011164). Swiss Webster mice were purchased from Charles River Laboratory (Raleigh, NC, USA) and maintained under a 12:12 h light/dark photoperiod at 20–24°C with food and water available ad libitum. Mice aged ~3 months and weighing 25–35 g were killed by CO$_2$ asphyxiation followed by cervical dislocation, and the pancreas was removed to isolate the islets.

Chemical compounds

ATP, ADP (Cayman Chemical Company, Ann Arbor, MI, USA) and PEP (phosphoenolpyruvate monopotassium salt; P7127; Sigma-Aldrich, St Louis, MO, USA) solutions were freshly prepared on the day of the experiments. PKa (TEPP-46; #505 487; EMD Millipore, Burlington, MA, USA), PKi (PKM2-IN-1; HY-103 617; MedChemExpress, Monmouth Junction, NJ, USA), rotenone (R8875; Sigma-Aldrich) and Na$_2$N (Sodium azide; S2002; Sigma-Aldrich) were prepared from frozen stock solutions.

Mouse pancreatic islets isolation

Mouse islets were isolated using previously described methods (Merrins et al., 2016). Briefly, Swiss Webster mice aged ~3 months and weighing 25–35 g were killed with CO$_2$ asphyxiation followed by cervical dislocation and, after pancreas removal and collagenase digestion, islets from a given mouse were isolated by hand-picking and cultured in standard RPMI 1640 medium containing...
11 mM glucose, 10% fetal bovine serum, 10 mM HEPES, 1% penicillin/streptomycin and 1% sodium pyruvate.

Cell culture

INS-1 832/13 cells were grown in RPMI 1640 medium containing 11 mM glucose, 10% fetal bovine serum, 1% penicillin/streptomycin, 10 mM HEPES and 1% sodium pyruvate. Cells were grown in 10 cm culture dishes at 37°C in a 5% CO₂ humidified atmosphere.

Electrophysiology

Patch clamp electrodes were pulled in a horizontal puller (P-97; Sutter Instruments, Novato, CA, USA) from borosilicate glass capillaries (Warner Instruments, Hamden, CT, USA), coated with sylgard (Dow Corning, Midland, MI, USA) and fire polished in a microforge (MF-830; Narishige, Tokyo, Japan) up to a final tip resistance of 5–10 MΩ. Single-channel events were recorded from cells in intact mouse islets or INS-1 832/13 cells in the cell-attached or inside-out configurations at room temperature (20–24°C). One patch was studied per islet. The pipette solution contained (in mm): 140 KCl, 2 MgCl₂, 2 CaCl₂ and 10 HEPES, pH 7.2, adjusted with KOH. For both configurations seals having resistances > 2 GΩ were obtained in regular bath solution containing (in mm): 140 NaCl, 3 CaCl₂, 5 KCl, 2 MgCl₂, 10 HEPES, and 0 or 2.8 glucose, pH 7.2, adjusted with NaOH. Single-channel activity in the cell-attached configuration were recorded at 0 mV of holding potential immediately after the giga-seals were established.

For inside-out recordings, the bath solution was changed to a solution containing (in mm): 140 KCl, 2 MgCl₂, 1 EGTA and 10 HEPES, pH 7.2, adjusted with KOH (BS-1) (Cook & Hales, 1984). Some inside-out experiments were recorded using different pipette and bath solutions to match those reported in (Lewandowski et al., 2020). For these experiments the pipette solution contained (in mm): 130 KCl, 2 CaCl₂, 10 EGTA, 10 sucrose and 20 HEPES, pH 7.2, adjusted with KOH. The bath solution contained (in mm): 130 KCl, 2 CaCl₂, 10 EGTA, 0.9 free Mg²⁺, 10 sucrose and 20 HEPES, pH 7.2, adjusted with KOH (BS-2). The free Mg²⁺ concentration was calculated using the WEBMAXC server (https://xppaut.uchicago.edu/xpp/WEBMAXC/WEBMAXC.E.html) and was held constant in every solution that was prepared in BS-2. ATP, ADP and PEP solutions were prepared in either BS-1 or BS-2, and pH was adjusted to 7.2 with KOH, unless otherwise indicated. After a giga-seal was obtained and the bath solution was replaced, patches were pulled off of the cell to obtain the inside-out configuration, and single-channel activity was recorded at a holding potential of −50 mV.

Channel activity was low-pass filtered at 2 kHz and then digitized at 20 kHz using an EPC-10 USB amplifier (HEKA Instruments, Westfield, MA, USA). Single-channel openings were idealized by the half amplitude threshold criterion using QuB, version 2.0.0.28 (www.qub.buffalo.edu) using a digital low-pass filter with an fₙ of 2 kHz. After single-channel recordings were made, channel openings were idealized, and the open-time durations were estimated using the maximal interval likelihood function in QuB with a dead time of 0.1 ms. N_P corresponds to the open channel probability of more than one channel calculated from 50 s segments collected from each experimental condition, where N is the number of channels in the patch and P_o is the open probability of a single channel. N_P was expressed as N_P = I/i, and calculated by measuring the total current that flows through the open channels (I), obtained from the event amplitude histogram created with QuB, and the amplitude of the unitary current (i) (Yakubovich et al., 2009). N_P determined for each experimental condition was expressed as relative to that obtained with 0.1 mM ATP + 0.5 mM ADP (referred to for brevity as ADP below) from the same recording.

[ATP/ADP] measurement

The ratio of ATP to ADP concentrations (referred to as [ATP]/[ADP]) was monitored in the cytosol of islet beta cells using perceval-HR, a genetically encoded fluoroprotein sensor that changes its fluorescence in response to changes in [ATP]/[ADP] (Marinelli et al., 2022; Tantama et al., 2013). Adenoviral delivery was used to transiently express the probe in mouse islets, as described in Merrins et al. (2016).

Statistical analysis

Data are expressed as the mean ± SD, unless otherwise specified, and differences between two or more groups were analysed using one-way analysis of variance (Prism, version 9; GraphPad Software Inc., San Diego, CA, USA) with post hoc multiple comparison by Tukey’s procedure. P < 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Mathematical modelling

The IOM was simulated using the ode15s function in Matlab 2022b (The MathWorks Inc., Natick, MA, USA). The program code defining the model in both Matlab and xppaut (https://sites.pitt.edu/~phase/bard/hardware/xpp/xpp.html) compatible files are included in the Supporting
information (File S1) and are posted at Figshare https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.24545830.

Results

**PEP does not reduce $K_{ATP}$ activity in excised patches**

To test the hypothesis that glycolytically generated local ATP can close nearby $K_{ATP}$, we recorded single-channel activity from mouse beta cells and insulin-secreting INS-1 832/13 cells using the patch clamp technique in the inside-out configuration (see Methods). We initially recorded channel activity using pipette and bath solutions that closely matched those previously reported (BS-1), similar to Cook & Hales (1984).

After excising membrane patches from mouse beta cells, single-channel openings were observed as downward deflections of $\sim 3$ pA (at a holding potential of $-50$ mV) that had a mean open time of $\sim 2.2$ ms (Fig. 1A and B). These events were confirmed as corresponding to $K_{ATP}$ activity because they were reversibly inhibited by exposing the cytoplasmic face of the patches to a solution containing 1 mM ATP, observed as a dramatic reduction in $N_P$ (where $N$ is number of channels and $P_o$ is open probability) and the channel open-time duration (Fig. 1A and B). During patch exposure to the ATP solution, channel activity mainly appeared as isolated events of $\sim 1$ ms ($P = 0.0057$) with $\sim 90\%$ reduction in $N_P$ ($P = 0.0016$) compared to that observed under ADP perfusion (Fig. 1B). Switching to a solution containing 0.1 mM ATP and 0.5 mM ADP (referred to as ADP below) provoked strong channel reactivation consisting of events of $\sim 2.2$ ms grouped into long bursts. The $N_P$ corresponding to this condition was considered to reflect maximal channel activity, and all other $N_P$ values are given relative to this (see Methods).

When 5 mM PEP was applied in combination with ADP, no inhibition of $K_{ATP}$ channel activity was apparent, even after 5 min of continuous perfusion of ADP + PEP (Fig. 1A). Channel activity was almost identical to that observed in the presence of ADP alone (Fig. 1A and B), with similar $N_P$ ($P = 0.633$) and open-time durations ($P = 0.999$, $n = 4$ islets from two mice) (Fig. 1B). Similar results were observed from INS-1 832/13 cells (Fig. 1C and D), with a clear reduction in $N_P$ ($P < 0.0001$) and open-time duration ($P < 0.0001$) after 1 mM ATP perfusion (Fig. 1D) but no effect when perfusing ADP + PEP ($P = 0.783$ for $N_P$ and $P = 0.662$ for open-time duration, $n = 10$).

Three PK isoenzymes are expressed in beta cells: PKM1, PKM2 and PKL (DiGruccio et al., 2016; Mitok et al., 2018). Although PKM1 is a tetramer that is constitutively active,

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**Figure 1. $K_{ATP}$ activity is not affected by PEP in the continuous presence of ADP**

$K_{ATP}$ activity evaluated in the presence of the different modulators from mouse beta cells (A and B, $n = 4$ islets from two mice) and INS-1 832/13 cells (C and D, $n = 10$). Single-channel activity was obtained in the inside-out configuration at $-50$ mV of holding potential. Sections indicated with numbers (1 to 3) from each top trace in (A) and (C) are shown at an expanded time resolution. Channel openings are shown as downward deflections and the dashed lines represent the baseline (zero current). The effect of perfusion of the different compounds was quantified as $N_P$ and open-time duration (B and D). Values are shown as the mean ± SD, with $P$ values indicated.
PKM2 and PKL exist as dimeric structures that need to be allosterically converted to their tetrameric forms to be active (Prakash & Bamezai, 2018; Zhang et al., 2019).

To evaluate if a PK isomorph closely associated with the membrane needs to be allosterically activated, we next tested whether TEPP-46 (referred to here as PKa), an activator of the PKM2 isomorph (Anastasiou et al., 2012), could reveal the inhibitory effect of PEP on K\textsubscript{ATP} reported by Lewandowski et al. (2020). K\textsubscript{ATP} activity was again monitored in inside-out patches excised from INS-1 832/13 cells. Patches were then acutely perifused with ADP + PEP solutions in the presence of 10 \( \mu \)M PKa, or after a preincubation period (Fig. 2A). Under these experimental conditions, channel activity was again unaffected by PEP and the further addition of PKa had no apparent potentiating effect \((n = 5)\) (Fig. 2A and B).

In summary, we were unable to confirm modulation of K\textsubscript{ATP} activity by PK in inside-out patches.

**PEP addition can inhibit K\textsubscript{ATP} if solution pH is not corrected**

PEP is a monocarboxylic acid that is almost fully deprotonated when dissolved in water. When 5 mM PEP was prepared in BS-1 (see Methods), the solution pH was reduced to pH 4.0. Using the PEP solution of Lewandowski et al. (2020), the pH of the solution was 5.5.

Because protons strongly inhibit K\textsubscript{ATP} (Allard et al., 1995; Misler et al., 1989; Proks et al., 1994; Xu et al., 2001), we recorded single-K\textsubscript{ATP} activity in inside-out patches by perifusing ADP + PEP with and without pH correction (Fig. 3). Similar to that shown in Fig. 1, ADP + 5 mM PEP did not inhibit K\textsubscript{ATP} when the solution pH was buffered (Fig. 3A) because channel activity was almost identical to that observed in the presence of ADP alone (Fig. 3B), with similar \( N\textsubscript{P} \) \((P = 0.146)\) and open-time durations \((P > 0.999, n = 9\) islets from three mice) (Fig. 3C). However, using PEP solutions without a pH correction inhibited K\textsubscript{ATP} (5 mM PEP, pH 5.5) (Fig. 3A and C), observed as a reduction in \( N\textsubscript{P} \) \((P = 0.0002)\) and open channel duration \((P < 0.0001, n = 8\) islets from two mice) (Fig. 3C). Similar results were observed from INS-1 832/13 cells \((n = 8)\) (Fig. 3D–F). Identical results were obtained in mouse beta cells and INS-1 832/13 cells using BS-1 (data not shown).

In a total of 35 excised membrane patches containing K\textsubscript{ATP}, we never observed K\textsubscript{ATP} inhibition by ADP + PEP once pH was adjusted to 7.2. Thus, PEP solutions only inhibited K\textsubscript{ATP} activity in excised patches when pH was uncorrected. Importantly, the pH effect was a result of PEP alone because the addition of ADP to the PEP solutions when pH was unbalanced made no difference to the degree of inhibition seen (data not shown).

Mitochondrial oxidative phosphorylation is the main mechanism controlling K\textsubscript{ATP} activity in mouse beta cells

We next evaluated K\textsubscript{ATP} activity in cell-attached patches made using mouse beta cells (see Methods), a more intact model system than the excised patches used above. Cell-attached patches preserve the physiological characteristics of the beta cell, more than excised inside-out patches (Rorsman & Ashcroft, 2018).

K\textsubscript{ATP} were identified in cell-attached recordings by their characteristic gating pattern and sensitivity to the glucose concentration of the bath solution (Fig. 4). K\textsubscript{ATP} activity was clearly observed at low bath glucose concentrations, and raising the glucose concentration led to a dramatic reduction in K\textsubscript{ATP} open probability and the expected appearance of biphasic deflections originating from K\textsubscript{ATP} closure-induced action potentials (Fig. 4) (Ashcroft et al., 1984; Larsson et al., 1996; Rorsman & Trube, 1985).

During perifusion with a 2.8 mM glucose solution, the addition of 10 \( \mu \)M PKa did not result in any significant reduction in \( N\textsubscript{P} \) \((P > 0.999, n = 6\) islets from one mouse) (Fig. 4A and B). By contrast, switching to a bath solution containing 20 mM glucose caused a 95% reduction in \( N\textsubscript{P} \).
with respect to that observed in 2.8 mM glucose. To test whether this reduction in channel activity was due to a PK isoform that is closely associated with the membrane, we perifused PKM2-IN-1 (PKI), a PK inhibitor for which the IC$_{50}$ values for the different PK isoforms are ~17 μM for PKM1, ~3 μM for PKM2 and ~8 μM for PKL (Ning et al., 2017). The combined perfusion of 20 mM glucose with 10 μM PKI failed to significantly change K$_{ATP}$ activity compared to the activity observed in the presence of 20 mM glucose alone: $P > 0.999$, $n = 6$ islets from one mouse (Fig. 4A and B); $P = 0.931$, $n = 4$ islets from two mice (Fig. 4C and D); and $P > 0.999$, $n = 2$ islets from one mouse (Fig. 4E and F). These results are consistent with the conclusion that PK is not an important regulator of K$_{ATP}$ in cell-attached patches, and by extension in intact beta cells.

In contrast, K$_{ATP}$ channels measured in cell-attached patches were robustly and reproducibly activated by the addition of sodium azide (NaN$_3$), an inhibitor of mitochondrial cytochrome $c_1$ (Larsson et al., 1996; Misler et al., 1989). After reducing K$_{ATP}$ activity by raising the bath glucose concentration to 20 mM, the addition of 4 mM NaN$_3$ provoked a rapid and dramatic reactivation of K$_{ATP}$, observed as a ~33-fold increase in NP$_o$ with respect to its value at 20 mM glucose ($P < 0.0001$, $n = 8$ islets from two mice) (Fig. 4C and D). A similar level of K$_{ATP}$ reactivation was observed when NaN$_3$ was perifused in the presence of 10 μM PKA, resulting in a ~44-fold increase in NP$_o$ ($P < 0.0001$, $n = 8$ islets from two mice) (Fig. 4C and D).

The effect of NaN$_3$ was mimicked by rotenone, another mitochondrial inhibitor (Chan et al., 2005) ($P = 0.998$ for 20 mM glucose + 0.2 mM rotenone with and without PKA, $n = 2$ islets from one mouse) (Fig. 4E and F). To confirm that the increase in channel activity we observed was not due to a direct effect of NaN$_3$ on K$_{ATP}$, we again recorded K$_{ATP}$ activity in excised patches ($n = 3$ islets from two mice).

**Figure 3.** The reduction in pH provoked by PEP is responsible for K$_{ATP}$ inhibition

K$_{ATP}$ modulation by perifusing PEP in combination with ADP prepared with BS-2 with and without pH correction. PEP solutions showed a pH of 5.5 when prepared at 5 mM concentration and K$_{ATP}$ inhibition was not observed when pH was adjusted to 7.2 (A, from $n = 9$ islets from three mice, and D, from $n = 8$ INS-1 832/13 cells). Sections indicated with numbers (1 and 2) from each top trace in (A) and (D) are shown at an expanded time resolution (B and E). C and F, NP$_o$ and open-time duration obtained from the corresponding single-channel recordings. Holding potential, −50 mV. Values are shown as the mean ± SD, with $P$ values indicated.
mice) and confirmed that the addition of 4 mM NaN₃ did not directly modulate channel activity (data not shown).

The robustness and reproducibility of NaN₃ or rotenone action to open K_ATP in cell-attached but not excised patches contrasted sharply with the weak actions of the PK modulators that we tested in the present study and provide further support for the consensus model in which mitochondrial regulation of the [ATP]/[ADP] ratio indeed predominates in intact beta cells. The access of the two PK modulators into beta cells was confirmed by measuring intracellular Ca²⁺ oscillations in mouse islets loaded with fura2-AM during continuous perifusion of 11 mM glucose in the absence or the presence of 10 μM PKa or 10 μM PKi (data not shown).

**Mitochondrial oxidative phosphorylation is active during the islet silent phase**

In addition to experiments with PEP, the local glycolysis hypothesis rests on the assumption that ADP decreases so much during the silent phase of each oscillatory burst that mitochondrial OxPhos is unable to generate sufficient ATP to trigger the next active phase of the oscillation. Instead, it was proposed that the required ATP is produced by pyruvate kinase (Foster et al., 2022; Lewandowski et al., 2020).

Using the IOM (Bertram et al., 2018; Merrins et al., 2016), we simulated a protocol designed to isolate ATP consumption from ATP production at the same time as removing the complexity introduced by spontaneous bursting activity. We set glucose to 11 mM and simulated the effect of diazoxide by reducing the K_ATP affinity for ATP, then simulated two 5 min pulses of KCl to mimic burst active phases. The model assumes that ATP is mainly synthesized by mitochondrial OxPhos and that [ATP]/[ADP] drops during the KCl pulses because of calcium-influx induced ATP consumption and a concomitant ADP rise produced by plasmalemmal calcium ATPases (Marinelli et al., 2021, 2022). As can be seen in Fig. 5A, [ATP]/[ADP] recovers during the silent phase because OxPhos continues. Following the second KCl pulse, we simulated the suppression of OxPhos by NaN₃, which shows that [ATP]/[ADP] is predicted by the model to fall in response to the poison even during the silent phase, as expected if OxPhos is still on during this period, and not fully off as predicted in Merrins et al. (2022).

To test the model predictions, we used islets expressing the [ATP]/[ADP] sensor perceval-HR in their beta cells (Marinelli et al., 2022; Merrins et al., 2016; Tantamia et al., 2013) (Fig. 5B). We applied two 5 min square pulses of 30 mM KCl in the continual presence of 200 μM diazoxide. To probe for OxPhos activation, we applied 10 mM NaN₃ after the second KCl test pulse. At this dose, NaN₃ rapidly and reversibly reduces [ATP]/[ADP], as confirmed in previous experiments (Marinelli et al., 2022). As shown in Fig. 5B, once the pulse of KCl was applied to mimic the active phase of calcium entry, [ATP]/[ADP] dropped (Marinelli et al., 2022). When KCl was removed to mimic a silent phase, [ATP]/[ADP] recovered. Repeating the KCl pulse application to mimic a second burst active phase again resulted in a clear drop in [ATP]/[ADP]. However, when we restored KCl to 5 mM to mimic a silent phase but added NaN₃ at the same time, [ATP]/[ADP] did not recover and actually fell below the...
Mitochondrial ATP regulates $K_{\text{ATP}}$ activity. Level observed during the previous active phase. Washing off NaN$_3$ resulted in the full restoration of [ATP]/[ADP] after several minutes. These results agree with the model predictions in Fig. 5A, indicating that OxPhos contributes substantially to [ATP]/[ADP] between the KCl pulses.

These results were observed in 21 islets obtained from a total of four mice. They strongly refute the hypothesis that OxPhos is disabled during the burst silent phases and are in support of the consensus model of islet stimulus-secretion coupling and oscillatory secretion.

To demonstrate the connection between the above pulsed KCl protocol and spontaneous bursting, we used the IOM to simulate spontaneous bursting at 11 mM glucose (Fig. 6A). During burst active phases, calcium rises and causes increased ATP hydrolysis, and the continued ATP production as a result of glycolysis and OxPhos allows recovery of ATP during the silent phases when calcium drops, as described above. The result is a characteristic sawtooth-shaped oscillation in [ATP]/[ADP], as has been previously reported (Lewandowski et al., 2020; Li et al., 2013; Marinelli et al., 2022; Merrins et al., 2016). The levels of [ATP]/[ADP]...
reached during these oscillations were similar to those observed in Fig. 5A during KCl pulses, with a mean value during the active and silent phases very close to the mean value over three complete periods (Fig. 6A, horizontal dotted line). We provide experimental confirmation of this characteristic oscillation in Fig. 6B, which shows a representative recording of spontaneous sawtooth-shaped oscillations in perceval-HR from islets exposed to 11 mm glucose (tracing shown was representative of more than 40 islets from 10 mice). As in the model simulation, the mean values of perceval-HR observed during the active and silent phases were very close to the overall mean (Fig. 6B, horizontal dotted line).

**Discussion**

In the present study, we have addressed the question of whether the main source of the ATP that regulates K$_{ATP}$ activity is oxidative phosphorylation in the mitochondria or glycolysis in a cytosolic compartment in close proximity to K$_{ATP}$. The context for this question is specifically the oscillations in K$_{ATP}$ conductance that underlie the oscillations in cytosolic calcium, which in turn drive oscillations in insulin secretion (Marinelli et al., 2022; Merrinset al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2020).

Mitochondria produce the vast majority of the ATP in the cell as a whole and inhibition of mitochondrial metabolism completely abolishes calcium oscillations and insulin secretion (Wiederkehr & Wollheim, 2008). After being taken up by beta cells, glucose is metabolized by glycolysis and mitochondrial OxPhos, leading to a large rise in [ATP]/[ADP]. According to the consensus model, this increase in [ATP]/[ADP] causes closure of K$_{ATP}$, which depolarizes the plasma membrane and in turn activates voltage-gated calcium channels. The increase in intracellular free calcium that results triggers the exocytosis of insulin from beta cells (Corkey et al., 1988; Klec et al., 2019). However, this model has been challenged recently (Foster et al., 2022; Lewandowski et al., 2020; Merrins et al., 2022) based on two main lines of evidence. First, it was demonstrated that application of PEP and ADP to excised patches could close K$_{ATP}$, indicating that glycolysis in principle can mediate this function. Second, it was argued that OxPhos turns off when the ADP concentration is low during the silent phase of bursting, although there is no direct experimental evidence that confirm this is the case.

We addressed these assertions in turn. To evaluate the hypothesis that local, glycolytically produced ATP closes K$_{ATP}$ rather than mitochondrially derived ATP, we recorded K$_{ATP}$ activity from mouse beta cells and INS-1 832/13 cells. Application of ADP in combination with PEP did not provoke a clear closure of K$_{ATP}$, in contrast to previous studies (Foster et al., 2022; Lewandowski et al., 2020). However, we observed that K$_{ATP}$ channels were inhibited by PEP + ADP if pH was not corrected. We then demonstrated that the reduction of pH that results from PEP application is necessary for the inhibition of K$_{ATP}$ observed in excised patches. This is consistent with prior data showing that protons inhibit K$_{ATP}$ activity (Allard et al., 1995; Misler et al., 1989; Proks et al., 1994; Xu et al., 2001).

It was not indicated in previous studies (Foster et al., 2022; Lewandowski et al., 2020) whether or not the pH was controlled, although a more recent paper from the same group (Ho et al., 2023) states that they rebalanced pH after PEP was added. It is therefore difficult to account for the differences between our results and these others. Based on the experiments that we have conducted, all we can say is that we were unable to reproduce their results using standard methods for assessing channel function by the patch clamp technique. More importantly, even if the conclusions of previous studies (Foster et al., 2022; Ho et al., 2023; Lewandowski et al., 2020) suggesting that glycolytic enzymes are co-localized with K$_{ATP}$ and can generate sufficient ATP to close the channels are correct, local glycolytic activity in those studies was not demonstrated to be required to close K$_{ATP}$ in intact beta cells. In situ, the much larger ATP production by mitochondria may dominate.

We therefore made cell-attached patch recordings using 2.8 or 20 mm glucose in the bathing solutions rather than using PEP as fuel. We observed that K$_{ATP}$ activity was little affected by exposing the cells to a PK activator or inhibitor (PKa and PKi, respectively). The ability of these compounds to cross the beta cell plasma membrane was confirmed in separate studies (data not shown). By contrast, perifusion of NaN$_3$ or rotenone immediately and robustly increased K$_{ATP}$ activity. We consider these results to be incompatible with the hypothesis that K$_{ATP}$ are primarily closed by ATP locally produced by PK action.

In a final set of experiments, we tested the recent claims that OxPhos is incapable of causing the K$_{ATP}$ channel closure that ends each silent phase and initiates the next active phase of bursting because ADP is too low at that time (Foster et al., 2022; Lewandowski et al., 2020; Merrins et al., 2022). We note that this is probably untrue because measurements of [ATP]/[ADP] (Lewandowski et al., 2020; Li et al., 2013; Merrins et al., 2016) show that [ATP]/[ADP] rises during the silent phase and declines during the active phase in a sawtooth pattern. Consequently, mean [ATP]/[ADP] is the same during the active and silent phases, as shown quantitatively in Fig. 5. Therefore, if ADP is too low during the silent phase, it would have to be too low during the active phase as well. Lewandowski et al. (2020) suggested a way around this by arguing that OxPhos is reactivated during the active phase because the calcium increase that occurs during that time activates calcium pumps, thereby raising ADP.
This too is improbable because OxPhos turns on fully at the beginning of the active phase, long before ADP has risen appreciably (Lewandowski et al., 2020; Merrins et al., 2022). The one system parameter that undergoes a rapid change from the beginning of the active phase is cytosolic calcium, which plausibly activates OxPhos through mitochondrial dehydrogenases.

We therefore tested the hypothesis that OxPhos is shut down during the silent phase, focusing on the modulatory effects of calcium by raising and lowering calcium with KCl in the presence of diazoxide to suppress the endogenous oscillations of metabolism. These experiments (Fig. 5B) decisively refuted the hypothesis because [ATP]/[ADP] readily recovered from its nadir when calcium was low, unless OxPhos was blocked with azide or rotenone, in which case [ATP]/[ADP] dropped below the nadir reached during the low calcium phase. The drop below nadir provides independent evidence that OxPhos was active during the silent phase of a burst even when its substrate ADP was low.

The above considerations are succinctly captured by the IOM mathematical model for islet calcium oscillations (Figs. 5A and 6A). The model shows that ADP does fall during the silent phase, but not very much, and predicts that ATP production continues throughout the silent phase at only a slightly reduced level. Finally, the representative trace of [ATP]/[ADP] shown in Fig. 6B conforms to many other experimental recordings of the [ATP]/[ADP] ratio using perceval-HR. All show the same sawtooth-shaped oscillations predicted by the model (Lewandowski et al., 2020; Li et al., 2013; Merrins et al., 2016).

Taken together, our results support mitochondria as the physiologically important source of ATP in beta cells, as predicted by the IOM model, and also raise questions about the reproducibility of the previous study (Lewandowski et al., 2020) suggesting that PK plays a central role in K<sub>ATP</sub> regulation in these cells.

**References**


### Additional information

#### Data availability statement

Data are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

#### Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.
Author contributions

J.C. and B.T. performed experiments and analysed data. P.A.F. performed model simulations. R.B., A.S.S. and L.S.S. provided supervision and resources. All authors contributed to writing the paper.

Funding

This research was supported by the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases grants RO1 DK46409 and U01 DK127747-01 (to LSS). RB was partially supported by grant number DMS 2 324 962 from the National Science Foundation. PAF and ASS were supported by the Intramural Research Program of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIH) under ZIA DK013027-16.

Acknowledgements

We thank Chanté Liu for contributing the data shown in Fig. 6B and for her help isolating islets.

Keywords

[ATP]/[ADP] ratio, beta cells, glucose response, insulin secretion, \( K_{\text{ATP}} \) channels, oxidative phosphorylation, pH modulation, pyruvate kinase

Supporting information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the HTML view of the article. Supporting information files available:

Statistical Summary Document
Peer Review History
Supplementary Materials