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Calcium sensing receptor activation in THP-1 macrophages triggers NLRP3 inflammasome and human preadipose cell inflammation

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**Title: Calcium sensing receptor activation in THP-1 macrophages triggers NLRP3 inflammasome and human preadipose cell inflammation**

**Running title:** Calcium sensing receptor in adipose crosstalk

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## Abstract

Excess adipose tissue (AT) associates with inflammation and obesity-related diseases. We studied whether calcium-sensing receptor (CaSR)-mediated NLRP3 inflammasome activation in THP-1 macrophages elevates inflammation in LS14 preadipocytes, modeling deleterious AT cell crosstalk. THP-1 macrophages exposed to Cinacalcet (CaSR activator, 2 µM, 4h) showed elevated proinflammatory marker and NLRP3 inflammasome mRNA, pro-IL-1β protein and caspase-1 activity, whereas preincubation with CaSR negative modulators prevented these effects. The key NLRP3 inflammasome component ASC was silenced (siRNA) in THP-1 cells, and inflammasome activation was evaluated (qPCR, western blot, caspase-1 activity) or they were further cultured to obtain conditioned medium (CoM). Exposure of LS14 preadipocytes to CoM from cinacalcet-treated THP-1 elevated LS14 proinflammatory cytokine expression, which was abrogated by THP-1 inflammasome silencing. Thus, CaSR activation elevates THP-1-induced inflammation in LS14 preadipocytes, via macrophage NLRP3 inflammasome activation. Modulating CaSR activation may prevent deleterious proinflammatory cell crosstalk in AT, a promising approach in obesity-related metabolic disorders.


**Keywords:** Calcium sensing receptor, preadipocytes, macrophages, crosstalk, NLRP3 inflammasome[1]

[1] Abbreviations: AT: adipose tissue; CaSR: calcium sensing receptor; CoM: conditioned medium

## 1. Introduction

Obesity is a worldwide health problem, aggravated by the associated risk of developing cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, hypertension and certain types of cancer, among other disorders. Adipose tissue (AT) is an important endocrine organ whose dysfunction has a critical role in obesity-induced metabolic alterations (Guzik, Skiba, Touyz, & Harrison, 2017; Vegiopoulos, Rohm, & Herzig, 2017). In obesity, excess AT expansion can lead to increased secretion of proinflammatory cytokines such as interleukin 1β (IL-1β), tumor necrosis factor α (TNF-α), IL-6 and chemokines such as chemokine ligand 2 (CCL2), and relatively lower anti-inflammatory adipokines such as adiponectin. This proinflammatory secretion profile induces macrophage infiltration and further inflammation (Guzik et al., 2017; Kusminski, Bickel, & Scherer, 2016), a phenomenon that is key in the pathogenesis of whole body metabolic alterations observed in obesity (Gerner, Wieser, Moschen, & Tilg, 2013). Macrophage infiltration in AT triggers a relevant paracrine communication (Sorisky, Molgat, & Gagnon, 2013). *In vitro*, macrophage-secreted factors induce adipocyte inflammation and insulin resistance (Permana, Menge, & Reaven, 2006), promote a profibrotic phenotype (Keophiphath et al., 2009), and impairs adipogenesis (Lacasa, Taleb, Keophiphath, Miranville, & Clement, 2007), events that are associated with AT dysfunction, lipotoxicity and the systemic chronic low grade inflammation associated with obesity (Guzik et al., 2017; Sorisky et al., 2013).

Our laboratory has studied the activation of the extracellular calcium sensing receptor (CaSR) as one possible factor favoring AT dysfunction (Bravo-Sagua, Mattar, Díaz, Lavandero, & Cifuentes, 2016). The CaSR is a G protein-coupled receptor first cloned in

1993 as a regulator of parathyroid hormone secretion, with a crucial role maintaining circulating calcium homeostasis (Brown et al., 1993). This receptor is located in multiple other tissues, where it is able to respond to different stimuli (polyvalent cations, aminoacids, ionic strength, pH) besides its main agonist $Ca^{2+}$, evidencing its unique ability to integrate and respond to multiple metabolic signals (Wellendorph, Johansen, & Bräuner-Osborne, 2010). The CaSR is expressed in AT (Cifuentes, Albala, & Rojas, 2005), the human preadipose cell line LS14 (Cifuentes et al., 2012), human monocytes (Olszak et al., 2000) and THP-1 macrophages (Xi et al., 2010). Activation of CaSR mediates the expression and secretion of several proinflammatory factors in primary and LS14 adipose cells (Cifuentes et al., 2012; Rocha et al., 2015), and mediates the expression and activation of the Nod-like receptor, pyrin domain-containing 3 (NLRP3) inflammasome in LS14 preadipocytes through ERK 1/2 signaling (D'Espessailles, Mora, Fuentes, & Cifuentes, 2018). Different roles have been described for the CaSR in numerous physiological processes involving gene expression, ion channel activity and cell fate, as well as diseases and conditions, including diabetes, Alzheimer's disease, infertility, cardiovascular disease, certain cancers and inflammation (Díaz-Soto, Rocher, García-Rodríguez, Núñez, & Villalobos, 2016; Riccardi & Kemp, 2012; Ward, Magno, Walsh, & Ratajczak, 2012). An important and emerging aspect of CaSR pathophysiology is its ability to generate proinflammatory signaling and elevate its own expression upon proinflammatory conditions (Hendy & Canaff, 2016), thus generating a positive feedback loop that perpetuates inflammation.

The inflammasomes are signaling platforms assembled in response to numerous signals, which leads to activation of the cysteine protease caspase-1 and subsequent

maturation and secretion of interleukins such as IL-1β and IL-18 (Schroder & Tschopp, 2010). The NLRP3 inflammasome responds to metabolic stress signals present in obesity, such high glucose (Zhou, Tardivel, Thorens, Choi, & Tschopp, 2010), saturated fatty acids (Reynolds et al., 2012) and oxidative stress (Zhou, Yazdi, Menu, & Tschopp, 2010). Accordingly, the NLRP3 inflammasome has been associated with obesity-related chronic inflammation, insulin resistance and diabetes (Rheinheimer, de Souza, Cardoso, Bauer, & Crispim, 2017). To assemble the inflammasome, NLRP3 interacts with the adapter protein apoptosis-associated speck-like protein (ASC), which has a caspase activation recruitment domain (CARD) that binds to the CARD domain of procaspase-1. The ensuing self-cleavage of procaspase-1 activates caspase-1 and subsequently converts pro-IL-1β and pro-IL-18 into their mature secreted forms (Stienstra et al., 2011). In 2012, Rossol et al reported the activation of NLRP3 inflammasome after CaSR stimulation in primary human monocytes and the human monocyte cell line THP-1 (Rossol et al., 2012), findings that were consistent with those of Lee et al. (G.-S. Lee et al., 2012) in mouse bone marrow-derived macrophages. Later, Liu et al. (Liu et al., 2015) confirmed that CaSR stimulation upregulated NLRP3 inflammasome components and induced proteolytic processing and IL-1β secretion in M1-polarized (proinflammatory) THP-1 macrophages.

It has been proposed that local paracrine interactions within dysfunctional AT generate a positive feedback loop that perpetuates the inflammatory condition (Guzik et al., 2017; Lacasa et al., 2007), particularly in the hypoxic and high glucose environments associated with obesity (Avila-George et al., 2017; Peshdary, Gagnon, & Sorisky, 2016). In this context, infiltrated proinflammatory macrophages may produce signals

that trigger a proinflammatory phenotype in preadipocytes. Previous research suggests that the activation of the NLRP3 inflammasome may be relevant mediating and/or enhancing this effect, as its activation has been linked with dysfunctional inflammation of the AT and the development of diseases associated with obesity (Rheinheimer et al., 2017). We aimed to study whether the specific positive allosteric CaSR modulator cinacalcet mediates the activation of NLRP3 inflammasome in human THP-1 macrophages, and if this in turn has an effect elevating inflammatory marker expression in the human preadipocyte cell model LS14, as an *in vitro* dysfunctional cell communication model that would further exacerbate AT inflammation.

## 2. Material and Methods

### 2.1. Cell line culture

*THP-1.* THP-1 cells (ATCC Cat# TIB-202, RRID:CVCL_0006) were purchased at ATCC (Manassas, VA, USA) and grown in RPMI medium (Sigma, St Louis, MO, USA) with 10% fetal bovine serum (FBS). THP-1 monocytes were differentiated into macrophages with 100nM PMA (phorbol miristate acetate, Sigma) for 24 hours. Cells then were washed with phosphate-buffered saline solution (PBS) and fresh medium without FBS was used. After an overnight period, when indicated, cells were exposed for 3h to 100 ng/ml lipopolysaccharide (LPS, (Sigma)) to enhance their proinflammatory phenotype. After washing the cells to remove LPS, cells were incubated with fresh RPMI with 2,5 % FBS and pretreated for 40 minutes with pharmacological CaSR inhibitors (1 μM NPS2143 (Tocris Bioscience, Bristol, UK) or 10 μM Calhex 231 (Sigma)) and/or the

132 calcimimetic cinacalcet (Selleckchem, Houston, TX, USA) 2μM for 4 hours. As these
133 agents are allosteric CaSR modulators, the experiments were performed in presence of
134 physiological calcium concentrations (1mM), achieved by supplementing RPMI medium
135 (that contains 0.4 mM $Ca^{2+}$) with 0.6 mM $CaCl_2$. This supplementation had no effect on
136 any of the variables evaluated. After treatment, THP-1 cells were either lysed (for PCR
137 or Western Blot) or gently and thoroughly washed with PBS to remove all
138 pharmacological agents and then incubated with fresh medium for 24 hours to obtain
139 the conditioned medium (CoM) to be used to stimulate LS14 preadipocytes (see below).

140 *LS14.* The human preadipose cell line LS14 (RRID:CVCL_DH87), is derived from a
141 metastasic liposarcoma, and able to differentiate into lipid-laden adipocytes that express
142 mature adipocyte genes (Hugo et al., 2006). Preadipose LS14 cells were seeded on
143 plastic culture dishes (Nunc, Rochester, NY, USA) and grown in DMEM:F-12 (1:1)
144 medium (Sigma) supplemented with 10% FBS and antibiotics (penicillin-streptomycin)
145 at 37ºC in a controlled atmosphere incubator (5% $CO_2$). The medium was replaced
146 every 2-3 days. LS14 preadipocytes were exposed for 24 hours with CoM from treated
147 or non-treated THP-1 cells. CoM was added in 1:1 ratio with fresh DMEM:F-12 medium
148 to provide cells with an adequate nutrient environment. Fresh DMEM:F-12 and RPMI
149 exposed to the culture atmosphere without cells for 24 hours were used in ratio 1:1 as
150 vehicle conditions for control cells. LS14 fresh medium (DMEM:F-12) was used in
151 preliminary experiments a second control to evaluate possible effects of the
152 RPMI:DMEM:F-12 medium mixture and no effects were observed (not shown). At
153 experiment conclusion, LS14 preadipocytes were lysed to analyze proinflammatory
154 cytokine gene expression.

155

156 **2.2. ASC silencing**

157 ASC-specific and non-targeting control small interfering RNAs (siRNAs) were obtained
158 from Santa Cruz Biotechnology, Inc. (Dallas, TX, USA). The siRNAs were transfected at
159 a final concentration of 40 nM. THP-1 monocytes were pelleted at 150 g for 5 minutes,
160 washed and resuspended in PBS. Transfection with siRNAs was performed by
161 electroporation using the Gene Pulser Xcell System (BioRad, Hercules, CA, USA) with
162 a pulse of 90 V and 950 µF capacitance. Cells were then resuspended in warm culture
163 medium with 10% FBS, seeded, and allowed to grow overnight. THP-1 monocytes were
164 then washed and 100 nM PMA was used for 24 hours to induce differentiation into
165 macrophages. After differentiation, the cells were washed and treated as described
166 above.

167

168 **2.3. Isolation of total RNA, Reverse Transcription, and qPCR analysis**

169 Cultured cells were lysed with Trizol® reagent (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA, USA) and
170 RNA was extracted using the E.Z.N.A.®Total RNA Kit I (OMEGA Bio-tek, Norcoss, GA,
171 USA) according to the manufacturer's indications. Reverse transcription was performed
172 using the High Capacity cDNA Reverse Transcription kit (Applied Biosystems, Foster
173 City, CA, USA). mRNA expression was evaluated using the Step-one Real-time PCR
174 System using the SYBR® FAST qPCR Kit (Applied Biosystems). The thermal cycling
175 conditions consisted of a 20 sec preincubation at 95ºC followed by 40 cycles at 95ºC for
176 3 s and 60ºC for 30 sec. The results were normalized by the reference gene GAPDH

177 and the expression was calculated using the Pfaffl model (Pfaffl, 2001). Sequences for
178 PCR primers are shown in **Suplementary Table S1**.

179

180 **2.4. Western Blot**

181 THP-1 cells were homogenized at 4°C in lysis buffer (50 mM HEPES, pH 7.4, 50 mM
182 NaCl, 2 mM MgCl2, 2 mM EGTA, 1% Triton X-100, 10% glycerol) supplemented with 1
183 mM sodium orthovanadate (Sigma), 1.5 µM pepstatin A (Sigma) and Complete®
184 protease inhibitor cocktail (Roche, Basilea, Switzerland). Protein concentration of the
185 lysate was determined by a method based on bicinchoninic acid (Pierce, Rockford, IL,
186 USA). Fifty µg of protein were heat denatured in SDS-PAGE loading buffer (240 mM
187 Tris-HCl, pH 6.8, 8% SDS, and 40% glycerol, 20% 2-mercaptoethanol). Proteins were
188 electrophoresed on 15% polyacrylamide gels and electrotransfered to polyvinylidene
189 difluoride (PVDF) membranes using a buffer containing 24 mM Tris, 194 mM glycine
190 and 20% methanol. The immunoreaction was achieved by incubation of the
191 membranes, previously blocked with a 5% BSA solution in Tris-buffered saline (TBS)
192 with 0.05% Tween 20 (Sigma) with anti CaSR (Santa Cruz Biotechnology Cat. #47741,
193 RRID:AB_626774), anti-IL-1β (Santa Cruz Biotechnology Cat# sc-7884,
194 RRID:AB_2124476) and anti-caspase-1 (Abcam Cat# ab108362, RRID:AB_10858984)
195 antibodies. β-Actin (AC:15) (Santa Cruz Biotechnology Cat# sc-69879,
196 RRID:AB_1119529) was used as internal control. Detection of immune complexes was
197 performed by incubation with peroxidase-conjugated secondary antibodies, followed by
198 incubation with the substrates of the enzyme using the gel documentation system C-

DiGit Blot Scanner (LI-COR Biosciences, Lincoln, NE, USA). The images were digitized, and the band densities were quantified using UN-SCAN-IT Graph Digitizer Software (RRID:SCR_013725) (Silk Scientific Inc., USA).

### 2.5. Caspase-1 activity

Caspase-1 activity was measured in cultured THP-1 cells with Caspase-Glo® 1 Inflammasome Assay (Promega Corporation, Madison, WI, USA) by bioluminescence following the manufacturer's instructions.

### 2.6. Statistical analysis

To compare parameters between controls and treated cells, variables were evaluated using the non-parametric Wilcoxon signed rank test, Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed rank test, and Kruskal-Wallis with Dunn's post-hoc test, as appropriate. Data are shown as individual experiments in the figures, and a p-value less than 0.05 was considered significant.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. PMA and LPS exposure elevate proinflammatory cytokine expression in THP-1 cells

Our first approach was to characterize the expression of CaSR and proinflammatory cytokines as well as NLRP3 inflammasome components upon PMA-differentiation of

THP-1 monocytes, with or without LPS (100 ng/ml, 3 hours) in our hands. CaSR was expressed in undifferentiated THP1 cells however at a lower level than in PMA-differentiated and LPS-exposed THP1 macrophages (**Supplementary Figure S1**). As expected, differentiation of THP-1 monocytes into adherent macrophages elevated *IL-1β* mRNA expression almost 600-fold. Moreover, LPS treatment exacerbated this response an additional 80%, reaching almost 1000 times the monocyte levels (**Supplementary Figure S2**). At a lower scale, PMA-differentiation increased mRNA expression of *CCL2* (~12-fold), *TNF-α* (~5-fold) and *IL-6* (~15-fold) compared to undifferentiated THP-1, and LPS treatment consistently elevated this response by 100-200%. LPS treatment did not induce an increase of the mRNA expression of the NLRP3 inflammasome components.

### 3.2. CaSR stimulation increases inflammatory marker expression and NLRP3 inflammasome activation in LPS-treated THP-1 cells

After confirming the expected increase in mRNA expression of inflammatory factors in PMA-differentiated THP-1 cells, we studied the effect of CaSR activation with 2 μM cinacalcet (in 1mM final $Ca^{2+}$concentration) for 4 hours on the expression of proinflammatory cytokines and NLRP3 inflammasome components. Under these conditions, cinacalcet did not affect mRNA expression of the evaluated cytokines (*IL-1β, TNF-α, CCL2* and *IL6,* **Supplementary Figure S3A**) nor the NLRP3 inflammasome markers pro-IL-1β (**Supplementary Figure S3B**) or pro-CASP-1 (**Supplementary Figure S3C**).

To evaluate the effect of CaSR activation in activated THP-1 macrophages, we pre-exposed the cells to LPS (100 ng/ml, 3 hours) before the treatment with the CaSR positive modulator. As depicted in **Figure 1**, CaSR stimulation in LPS-treated THP-1 macrophages increased mRNA expression of *IL-1β* and *CCL2* ($p<0.05$, n=7), with a trend towards the same effect for *TNFα* (P=0.06, n=6). No effect was observed on IL-6 expression upon CaSR activation. Pre-exposure of LPS-treated THP-1 macrophages to the pharmacological CaSR inhibitors calhex-231 or NPS2143 abolished these effects, confirming the specificity of the involvement of the CaSR. The inhibitors had no effects *per-se* on the expression of these factors in THP-1 macrophages.

To further evaluate the inflammatory effect of CaSR activation on LPS-treated THP-1 macrophages, we analyzed whether cinacalcet treatment affects the expression of the NLRP3 inflammasome components. We observed an increase in the expression of *NLRP3* and *ASC* mRNA ($P<0.05$) compared with vehicle-exposed cells (dotted line, **Figure 2**). Pharmacological inhibition of CaSR abolished these increments. CaSR stimulation did not induce variation of *CASP-1* expression in this model.

We then evaluated the effect of cinacalcet on inflammasome NLRP3 activation in THP-1 cells with or without LPS pre-exposure. As shown in **Figure 3**, exposure to the CaSR positive modulator in “naïve” (not LPS-exposed) THP-1 cells did not affect caspase-1 *activity* (an indicator of NLRP3 inflammasome assembly). However, in cells whose

inflammatory response was enhanced by LPS pre-exposure cinacalcet elevated caspase-1 activity by 45% ($P<0.05$).

To verify the specific role of the NLRP3 inflammasome on the induction of caspase-1 activity by cinacalcet in THP-1 cells, we used siRNA to silence the expression of its key component ASC. A ~60% reduction in ASC mRNA expression after siRNA transfection was confirmed by qPCR (**Supplementary Figure S4**). Consistent with our previous observations, in control silencing experiments (with a random siRNA sequence, siCTL), LPS-treated THP-1 cells exposed to cinacalcet 2µM, showed an elevation in caspase-1 activity (**Figure 4)**. This elevation was abolished in cells that were transfected with siRNA against ASC, confirming previous observations (Lee et al., 2012) and thus indicating a key involvement of the NLRP3 inflammasome.

### 3.3. Effect of cinacalcet-mediated NLRP3 inflammasome activation in THP-1 macrophages on inflammatory marker expression in LS14 preadipocytes

After showing that cinacalcet exposure in LPS-treated THP-1 cells enhances proinflammatory cytokine expression and NLRP3 inflammasome activity, we sought to evaluate whether media conditioned by THP-1 cells under these stimuli exert a proinflammatory effect on other metabolically relevant cell type in obesity, such as preadipocytes, using the human preadipose LS14 cell line. THP-1 cells were exposed to the different experimental conditions and CoM was collected according to the protocol described in materials and methods for 24 hours after concluding the treatments. As expected, THP-1 macrophage CoM elevated mRNA expression of proinflammatory

287 cytokines in LS14 preadipocytes (**Supplementary Figure S5**). Notably, THP-1 CoM
288 from cinacalcet-exposed THP-1 cells elevated *CCL2*, *IL-6, TNF-α* and *IL-1β* mRNA
289 expression (P<0.05) beyond the effect of the CoM itself (dotted line, **Figure 5**).
290 Interestingly, CoM from THP-1cells where ASC expression was silenced (siASC, **Figure**
291 **5**) abolished the effect of cinacalcet, strongly suggesting that cinacalcet-induced
292 production of inflammatory mediators in THP-1 macrophages is mediated by NLRP3
293 inflammasome activation. As shown in **Figure 6**, media that was conditioned by THP-1
294 cells pre-exposed to the specific CaSR negative allosteric modulator calhex 231 before
295 and during cinacalcet treatment was not able to exert the same proinflammatory
296 expression profile in LS14 cells as compared to CoM prepared by cinacalcet-exposed
297 THP1 cells, further supporting a role for CaSR activation in THP1 cells.
298

299 **4. Discussion**

300 The results from the present work show that exposure of LPS-activated THP-1
301 macrophages to the CaSR activator cinacalcet induces mRNA expression of the
302 proinflammatory factors IL-1β and CCL2, as well as the NLPR3 inflammasome
303 components NLRP3 and ASC, together with the activation of the NLPR3
304 inflammasome. Our observations suggest that CaSR activation in THP-1 macrophages
305 induces the secretion of factors that elevate the expression of inflammation markers in
306 LS14 preadipocytes. Interestingly, our results indicate that this process depends on the
307 cinacalcet-induced activation of the NLRP3 inflammasome within the macrophages. The
308 present findings support previous reports of CaSR-induced proinflammatory effects in
309 monocytes, macrophages and THP1 cells (Xi et al., 2010, G.-S. Lee et al., 2012, Rossol

et al., 2012, Liu et al., 2015), however to the best of our knowledge, this is the first report using the calcimimetic cinacalcet.

Consistent with our findings, Lacasa et al. (Lacasa et al., 2007) showed that human primary preadipocytes exposed to medium conditioned by macrophages (*in vitro*-differentiated or isolated from human AT) showed a dysfunctional phenotype, evidenced by a proinflammatory response in addition to impaired adipogenesis (Lacasa et al., 2007). The authors proposed TNF-α as the main macrophage secretion product responsible for the proinflammatory effects in preadipocytes. Our results indicate that the proinflammatory effect of CaSR-stimulated macrophage CoM on LS14 preadipocytes is dependent on CaSR-induced NLRP3 inflammasome activation, whose main secretion product related to obesity pathophysiology is IL-1β (Rheinheimer et al., 2017). It is possible that this CaSR-induced factor acts in concert with TNF-α in THP1 CoM, which is consistent with the fact that CaSR stimulation was able to increase the effect of THP1 CoM on LS14s beyond an already large effect of the CoM from vehicle-treated THP1-cells.

We and others have described a functional role of the CaSR in adipose cells influencing different aspects of AT physiology and promoting inflammation (Bravo-Sagua et al., 2016; Y. H. He et al., 2012; Y. He et al., 2013). Although we do not yet fully understand the physiological role of CaSR in AT, it may be relevant in the pathophysiological context of obesity. As in other inflammation scenarios, CaSR-induced inflammatory response may initially be part of the homeostatic response to the metabolic challenge of energy surplus. However, upon continuous positive energy balance in obesity, the adaptive capacity is surpassed, leading to deleterious chronic inflammation and tissue

dysfunction, resulting in metabolic alterations such as insulin resistance (Caputo, Gilardi, & Desvergne, 2017). Under dysfunctional AT conditions, inflammation and cell damage or death may induce high local extracellular calcium concentrations (Colella, Gerbino, Hofer, & Curci, 2016; Kaslick et al., 1973), which may exacerbate CaSR activation. Other endogenous CaSR agonists are likely elevated in obese states, such as polyamines (Codoñer-Franch, Tavaŕez-Alonso, Murria-Estal, Herrera-Martiń, & Alonso-Iglesias, 2011), making CaSR a suitable novel target in obesity-related AT inflammation and dysfunction.

Negative allosteric modulators of the CaSR (calcilytics) have shown *in vitro* to be promising agents to treat inflammatory-related diseases (J. W. Lee et al., 2017; Zeng et al., 2016), and recent studies have highlighted their potential as therapeutic tools in allergic asthma (Penn, 2015; Yarova et al., 2015). Riccardi and colleagues have proposed that endogenous CaSR agonists such as polycations, whose levels are increased with inflammation and airway hyper-responsiveness, may be activating the CaSR and thus triggering airway hyper-responsiveness and inflammation (Yarova et al., 2015). Calcilytics were initially developed for osteoporosis therapy, however they failed in clinical trials due to lack of efficacy. These trials showed that calcilytics are safe and well tolerated, and they are currently being considered for other purposes such as hypocalcemic conditions, asthma and pulmonary arterial hypertension (Nemeth, Van Wagenen, & Balandrin, 2018). Our work provides the rationale to consider an additional potential application for calcilytics in the context of the low-grade inflammation characteristic of AT dysfunction, thus representing a tool to prevent the ensuing obesity-related cardiometabolic disorders.

The present work evaluated NLRP3 activation upon CaSR stimulation in THP1 cells exposed to LPS in order to enhance their inflammatory phenotype. Our experiments aimed to model obesity conditions, where activated proinflammatory ("M1") macrophages infiltrate AT (Guzik et al., 2017). Under these circumstances, the CaSR activator cinacalcet induced an increase in THP1 inflammatory marker expression and inflammasome activation beyond the effect of LPS stimulation. In addition, our data indicate that CaSR activation in THP-1 cells is able to elevate the ability of their CoM to induce a proinflammatory phenotype in preadipose cells. Previous studies have reported that macrophage CoM prevents adipogenesis and elevates preadipocyte proliferation (Sorisky et al., 2013). Even though the present study did not evaluate these parameters, a putative scenario of lower adipogenesis and higher proliferation, would yield an excess proinflammatory preadipocyte population within AT, thus aggravating the inflammatory condition. This evidence, together with our previously-reported direct effect of CaSR activators elevating the chemokine CCL2 in LS14 and human primary preadipocytes (both of which express the CaSR) (Cifuentes et al., 2012; Rocha et al., 2015), which is expected to enhance macrophage recruitment within dysfunctional AT, suggests that in the pathophysiological condition within obese AT, CaSR activation may induce an additional detrimental macrophage-preadipocyte crosstalk.

Overall, the CaSR-dependent NLRP3 inflammasome activation in human THP-1 macrophages shown in the present work, together with the same effect previously shown in LS14 preadipocytes (D'Espessailles et al., 2018) represent a new model whereby CaSR activation participates in the development of a positive feedback loop and paracrine crosstalk that perpetuates AT inflammation and dysfunction, consistent

with our proposed model of CaSR involvement in metabolic events associated with obesity (Bravo-Sagua et al., 2016). Modulating CaSR activation in AT inflammation may be a promising new approach in preventing obesity-related metabolic disorders associated with AT dysfunction.

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## 6. Conflict of Interests

There are no conflicts of interest for any of the authors.

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Figure legends

**Figure 1. CaSR stimulation in LPS-treated THP-1 macrophages increases mRNA expression of proinflammatory cytokines.** LPS-stimulated (100 ng/ml, 3h) THP-1 macrophages were exposed to cinacalcet (cina) 2 µM for 4 hours after pre-treatment with vehicle, 10 µM calhex 231 or 1mM NPS 2143 (all in 1mM final $Ca^{2+}$concentration) for 40 min. mRNA expression of *IL-1β, CCL2, TNF-α* and *IL-6* was evaluated by qPCR (n=6), using each sample's GAPDH expression as the internal reference gene, and reported as fold of control untreated cells (value of 1, represented by the dotted line). Dots represent each independent experiment. *P<0.05, (*)=0.06 for the difference versus control (untreated) value 1, Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test.

**Figure 2. CaSR stimulation in LPS-treated THP-1 macrophages increase mRNA expression of NLRP3 inflammasome components.** THP-1 macrophages were treated with 10 µM calhex 231 or 1µM NPS 2143 for 40 min before treatment with cinacalcet (cina) 2 µM (1mM final $Ca^{2+}$concentration) for 4 hours. mRNA expression of *NLRP3, ASC* and *CASP-1* was evaluated by qPCR (n=6-7), using each sample's GAPDH expression as the internal control gene, and reported as fold of untreated cells (value of 1, represented by the dotted line). Dots represent each independent experiment. *P<0.05 for the difference versus control value, Wilcoxon Rank Test.

**Figure 3. CaSR stimulation increases caspase-1 activity in LPS-treated THP-1 macrophages.** THP-1 macrophages were treated with cinacalcet (cina) 2 µM (in 1mM final $Ca^{2+}$concentration) for 4 hours with or without LPS pretreatment. Caspase-1 activity was evaluated in cultured cells by a bioluminescence assay. Dots represent each independent experiment (n=6), *P<0.05 for the difference between groups, Kruskal-Wallis with Dunn's post-hoc test. ATP (5 mM, 4 hours) was used as positive control for NLRP3 inflammasome activation (open circles, not included in the statistical analysis). RLU= relative luminescence units.

**Figure 4. *Asc* silencing in THP-1 macrophages suppresses the effect of cinacalcet elevating caspase-1 activity.** Caspase-1 activity (luminiscence, n=6) was measured in LPS-activated THP-1 macrophages exposed to cinacalcet (2 µM, 4h) or vehicle. mRNA silencing of *ASC* (siASC) or control (scrambled sequence, siCTL), was performed 48h prior to the experiments. Dots represent the cinacalcet/vehicle value for each independent experiment. *P<0.05 for the differences compared to the respective vehicle-treated cells. (value of 1, dotted line), Wilcoxon signed Rank test. RLU= relative luminescence units.

**Figure 5. Conditioned medium (CoM) from cinacalcet-treated THP-1 cells expressing NLRP3 inflammasome elevates proinflammatory cytokine expression in LS14 cells.** mRNA expression of *CCL2, IL-1β, TNF-α* and *IL-6* in LS14 preadipocytes exposed for 24h to CoM from LPS-activated NLRP3 inflammasome-expressing (siCTL) or NLRP3 inflammasome-silenced (siASC) THP-1 macrophages treated 2µM cinacalcet (in 1mM final $Ca^{2+}$concentration), expressed as fold from the respective vehicle-treated siCTL or siASC THP-1 cells (dotted line, value of 1). mRNA expression in LS14 preadipocytes was evaluated by qPCR using GAPDH as the internal reference gene. Dots represent each independent LS14 CoM exposure experiment (n=5-6). *P<0.05 for the differences vs. exposure to vehicle-treated THP-1 CoM (value 1), Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test

**Figure 6. Exposure of THP-1 cells to the negative allosteric CaSR modulator Calhex 231 abolishes the effect of the CoM elevating proinflammatory cytokine expression in LS14 preadipocytes.** mRNA expression of *CCL2, IL-6 , TNF-α* and *IL-1β* in LS14 preadipocytes exposed for 24h to CoM from LPS-activated THP-1 macrophages previously treated with 2µM cinacalcet for 4h (in 1mM final $Ca^{2+}$concentration) or cinacalcet in addition to 40 min pre-exposure to the negative alosteric modulator calhex 231 (10µM). mRNA expression in LS14 preadipocytes was evaluated by qPCR using GAPDH as the internal reference gene. Dots represent each independent LS14 CoM exposure experiment (n=5). *P<0.05 denotes the difference from exposure to the non-conditioned RPMI-DMEMF12 control mixture (same proportion as for the CoM-exposed cells), represented by the dotted line on value 1, Friedman Test and Dunn's multiple comparison for the three conditions (non-conditioned medium-Cinacalcet-Cinacalcet+Calhex).

Figure 1

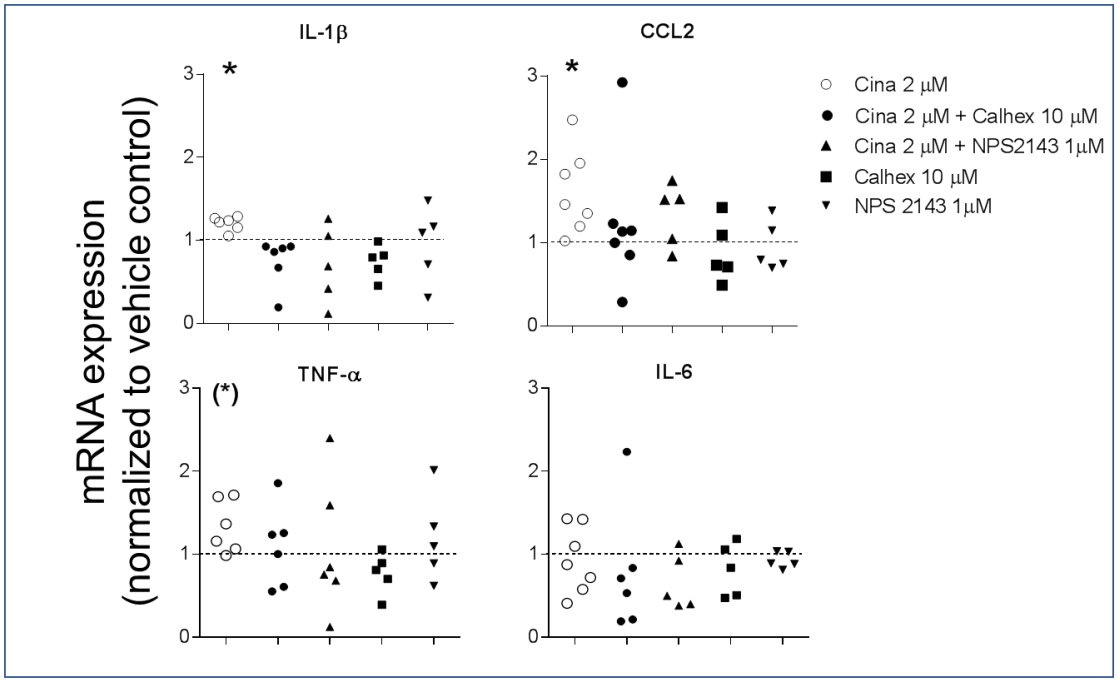

IL-1β
CCL2
TNF-α
IL-6
mRNA expression
(normalized to vehicle control)
*
*
(*)
Cina 2 μM
Cina 2 μM + Calhex 10 μM
Cina 2 μM + NPS2143 1μM
Calhex 10 μM
NPS 2143 1μM

Figure 2

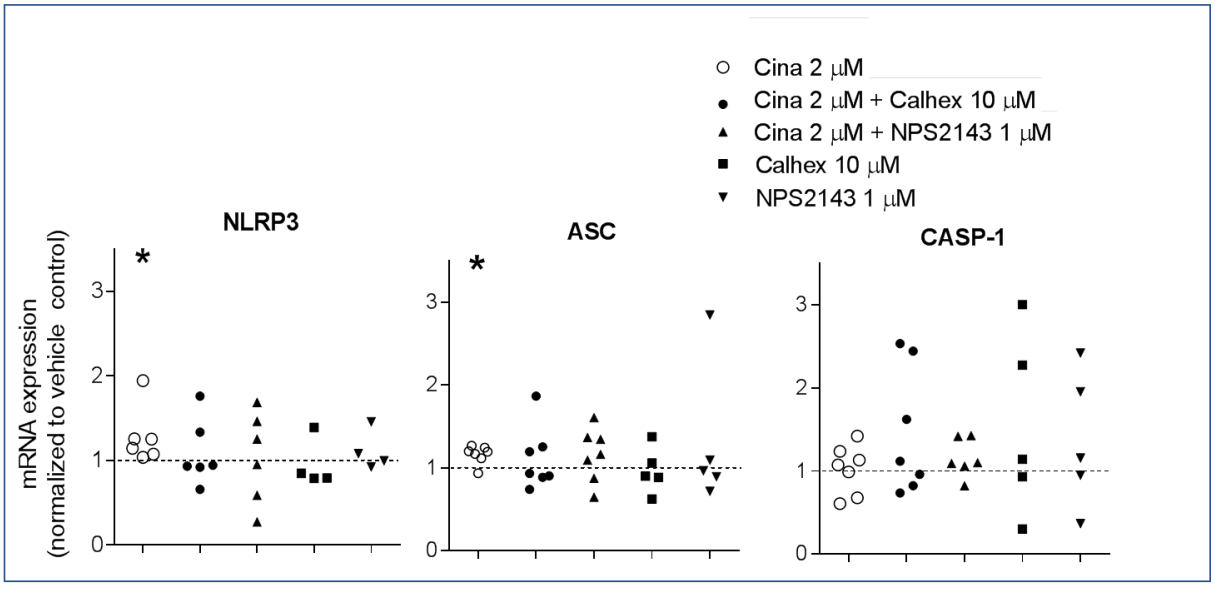


Figure 3

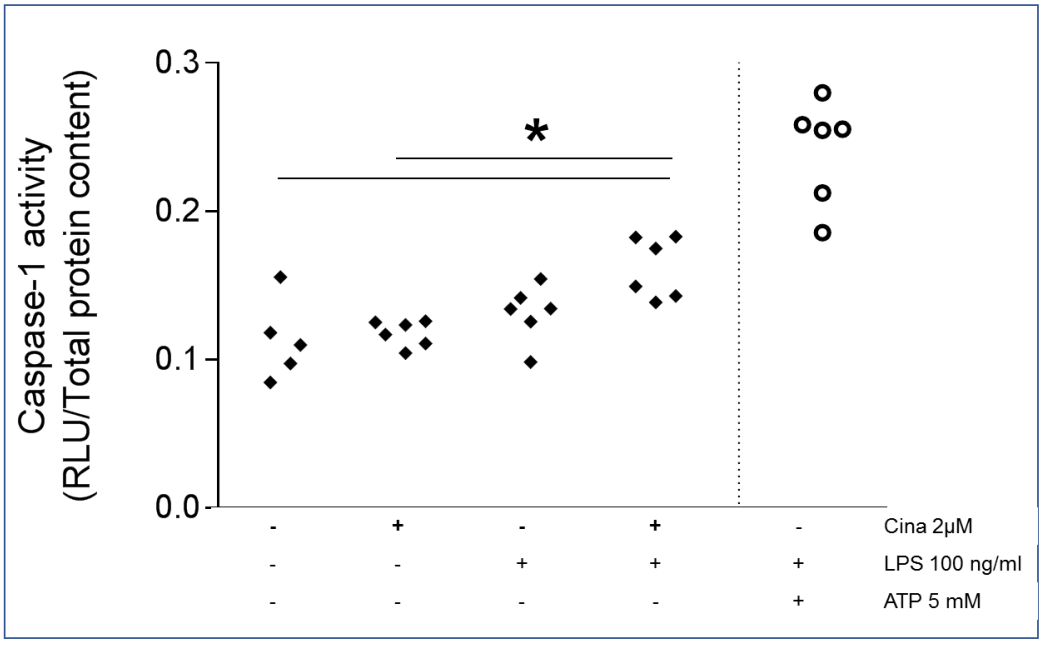


Figure 4

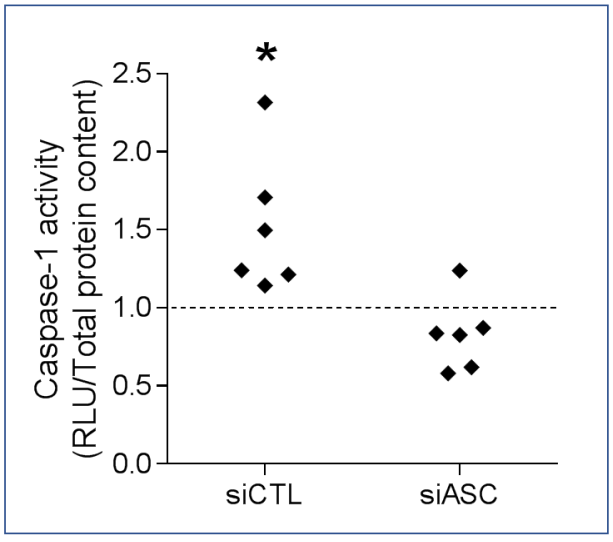


Figure 5

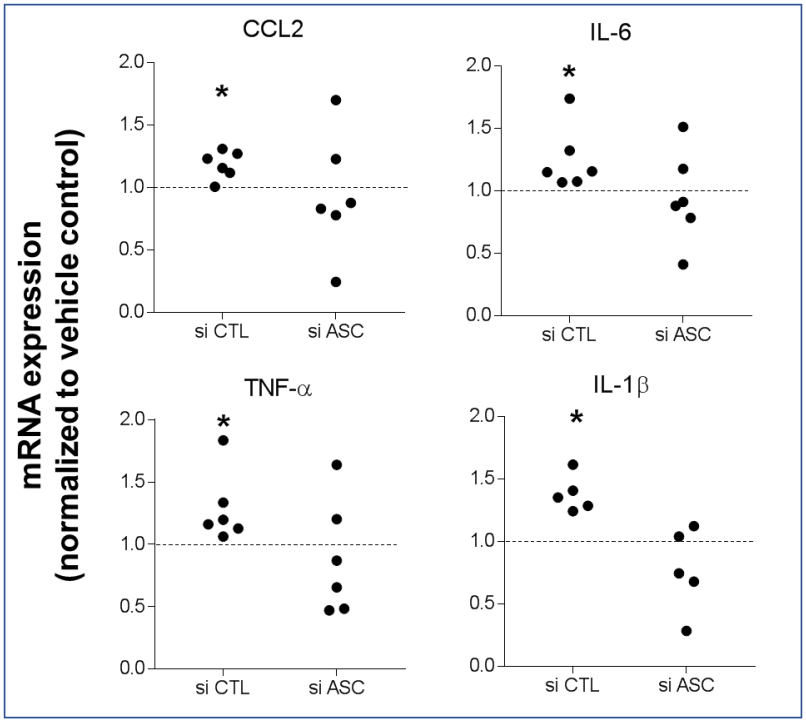
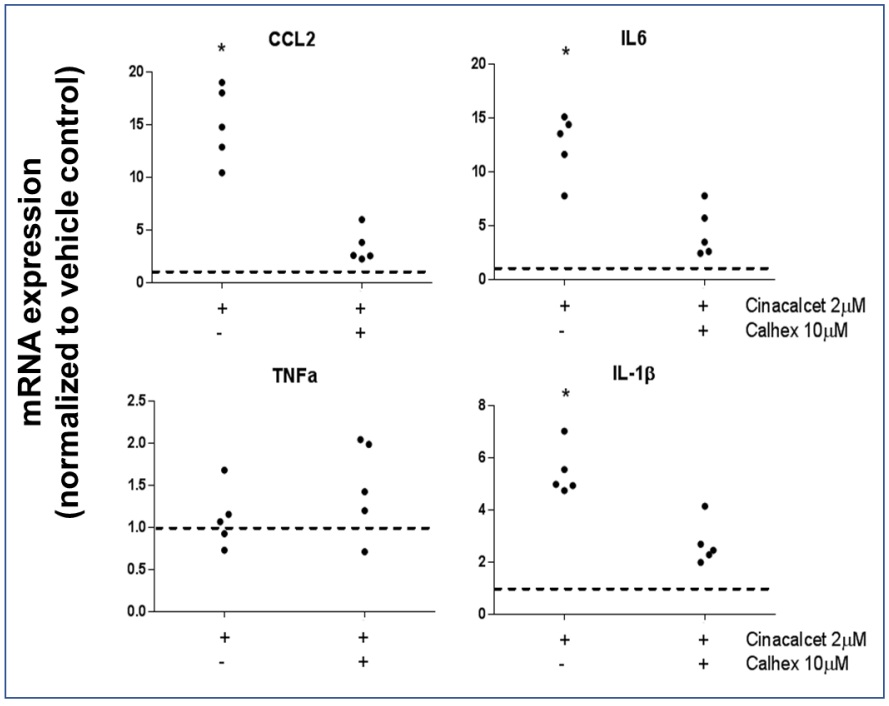


Figure 6



D’Espessailles et al. Highlights

- CaSR activation by cinacalcet in THP-1 macrophages activates NLRP3 inflammasome
- Cinacalcet-treated THP-1 products elevate LS14 preadipocyte proinflammatory markers
- CaSR-induced THP-1 inflammasome activation is required for LS14 inflammation
- CaSR may participate in a paracrine crosstalk that perpetuates fat inflammation