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EDITORIAL

THE THERAPEUTIC POTENTIAL OF TARGETING ER STRESS IN DIABETES TREATMENT

Prawej Ansari[1,2,3]*, Nushrat Jahan Ansari[4], Sanjay Kumar Sah[4], Peter R Flatt[3]

[1]Department of Pharmacology, National Medical College, Nepal.
[2]Comprehensive Diabetes Center, Heersink School of Medicine, University of Alabama, Birmingham (UAB), Birmingham, AL 35233, USA
[3]Centre for Diabetes Research, School of Biomedical Sciences, Ulster University, Coleraine BT52 1SA, UK
[4]Journal Editor, Medphoenix, Journal of National Medical College, Nepal.

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The endoplasmic reticulum (ER) is a critical cellular organelle responsible for protein folding, maturation, and secretion.[1]The ER lumen provides an oxidizing environment, crucial for disulfide bond formation and proper protein folding. It also serves as the primary intracellular calcium store, regulating calcium signaling pathways.[1] Disruptions in ER homeostasis, known as ER stress, have been implicated in a wide range of diseases, including diabetes.[2]Endoplasmic reticulum (ER) stress, a cellular response to the accumulation of unfolded or misfolded proteins, has emerged as a critical player in the pathogenesis of diabetes.Pancreatic β-cells, responsible for insulin production, are particularly susceptible to ER stress and oxidative stress due to their high secretory demands and relatively weak defense pathways, including catalase and SOD.[1] In recent years, research has shed light on the complex interplay between ER stress and the development and progression of diabetes.[1,2]

When β-cells are exposed to chronic stress, such as high glucose levels, they experience increased protein folding demands. This can lead to the accumulation of unfolded or misfolded proteins in the ER, triggering a cellular response known as the unfolded protein response (UPR).[1] The UPR is a complex signaling pathway that aims to restore ER homeostasis. However, chronic or severe ER stress can overwhelm the UPR, leading to β-cell dysfunction and apoptosis. Impaired insulin secretion is a hallmark of both type 1 and type 2 diabetes, and ER stress may play a significant role in this process.[1,2]

A growing body of evidence suggests that targeting ER stress may offer a novel therapeutic approach for diabetes. Several strategies have been proposed, including:

Chemical Chaperones: These compounds can facilitate protein folding and reduce ER stress. [1,2]

Modulation of UPR Signaling: Targeting specific UPR pathways, such as the PERK, IRE1α, and ATF6 pathways, may alleviate ER stress and improve β-cell function.[1,3]

Antioxidant Therapies: Oxidative stress contributes to ER stress. Antioxidants can protect β-cells from oxidative damage and reduce ER stress.[1,3]

While significant progress has been made in understanding the role of ER stress in diabetes, several challenges remain.[3] Identifying specific molecular targets and developing effective therapeutic agents that can selectively target ER stress without causing adverse effects is crucial. Moreover, a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between ER stress, inflammation, and oxidative stress is necessary to develop effective therapeutic strategies.[3]

Proteins/ Genes	Mode of action/s	Reference
GRPs	Glucose-regulated proteins (GRP-78 and GRP-95) are glucose-responsive proteins that regulate glucose metabolism in cultured cells.	[3]
BiP	BiP, an ER chaperone, binds to unfolded proteins, preventing aggregation and facilitating their proper folding.	[3,4]
IRE1	IRE1, an ER stress sensor, activates the unfolded protein response (UPR) by splicing XBP1 mRNA, leading to increased protein folding capacity and reduced protein synthesis.	[1,3]
PERK	PERK, an ER stress sensor, phosphorylates eIF2α, leading to a global translational attenuation, thereby reducing the protein load on the ER.	[1,3]
ATF6	ATF6, a transmembrane protein, translocates to the Golgi apparatus under ER stress, where it is cleaved, releasing its cytosolic domain to the nucleus, where it acts as a transcription factor to upregulate genes involved in protein folding and degradation.	[1,3]
CHOP	CHOP is a transcription factor that regulates the expression of genes involved in apoptosis, promoting cell death under conditions of prolonged ER stress.	[3]
eiF2α	eIF2alpha phosphorylation regulates global protein synthesis and promotes the translation of specific stress response genes.	[3]
XBP1s	XBP1s, a transcription factor activated by ER stress, upregulates genes involved in protein folding, degradation, and lipid biosynthesis, thereby restoring ER homeostasis.	[1,3]

ATF4	ATF4, a transcription factor activated by ER stress, upregulates genes involved in amino acid metabolism, autophagy, and oxidative stress response.	[3,5]

In conclusion, ER stress emerges as a critical factor in the pathogenesis of diabetes. By unravelling the intricate relationship between ER stress and β-cell dysfunction, researchers may develop novel therapeutic approaches to prevent and treat diabetes. Continued investigation into this area is essential to improve the lives of millions of people affected by this chronic disease.

Identification of Novel ER Stress Markers: Developing biomarkers to identify individuals at risk for diabetes due to ER stress.

Combination Therapies: Exploring the synergistic effects of targeting ER stress with other therapeutic approaches, such as insulin sensitizers or GLP-1 receptor agonists.

Personalized Medicine: Identifying patient subgroups that may benefit most from ER stress-targeted therapies based on genetic or metabolic factors.

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