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Targeted activation of cholinergic interneurons accounts for the modulation of dopamine by striatal nicotinic receptors

Katherine R. Brimblecombe^a, Sarah Threlfell^{a,b}, Daniel Dautan^{c,d}, Polina Kosillo^a, Juan Mena-Segovia^{c,d} and Stephanie J. Cragg^{a,b}

^aDepartment of Physiology, Anatomy and Genetics, Sherrington Building, Oxford, UK

^bOxford Parkinson's Disease Centre, University of Oxford, Oxford OX1 3PT, UK

^cMRC Anatomical Neuropharmacology Unit, Department of Pharmacology, Oxford, UK

^dCenter for Molecular and Behavioral Neuroscience, Rutgers University, Newark, New Jersey, USA

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Correspondence should be addressed to: Professor Stephanie J Cragg, Department of Physiology, Anatomy and Genetics, University of Oxford, OX1 3PT, UK. E-mail: Stephanie.cragg@dpag.ox.ac.uk

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34 **Abstract**

35 Striatal dopamine (DA) is a major player in action selection and reinforcement. DA release is under strong
36 local control by striatal ACh acting at axonal nicotinic ACh receptors (nAChRs) on DA axons. Striatal nAChRs
37 have been shown to control how DA is released in response to ascending activity from DA neurons, and they
38 also directly drive DA release following synchronized activity in a small local cholinergic network. The source
39 of striatal ACh has been thought to arise solely from intrinsic cholinergic interneurons (ChIs), but recent
40 findings have identified a source of cholinergic inputs to striatum from brainstem nuclei, the
41 pedunculopontine nucleus (PPN) and laterodorsal tegmentum (LDT). Here, we used targeted optogenetic
42 activation alongside DA detection with fast-scan cyclic voltammetry to test whether ChIs alone and/or
43 brainstem afferents to the striatum can account for how ACh drives and modulates DA release in rat
44 striatum. We demonstrate that targeted transient light activation of rat striatal ChIs drives striatal DA
45 release, corroborating and extending previous observations in mouse to rat. However, the same light
46 stimulation targeted to cholinergic brainstem afferents did not drive DA release, and nor did it modulate DA
47 release activated subsequently by electrical stimulation, whereas targeted activation of ChIs did so. We were
48 unable to obtain any evidence for DA modulation by PPN/LDT stimulation. By contrast, we could readily
49 identify that striatal ChIs alone are sufficient to provide a source of ACh that powerfully regulates DA via
50 nAChRs.

51

52 **Significance statement**

53 Striatal acetylcholine (ACh) can powerfully regulate striatal dopamine (DA). Until recently, cholinergic
54 interneurons were thought to be the only source of striatal ACh, but brainstem cholinergic neurons have
55 now been revealed to innervate striatum. Here, we use targeted optogenetic activation in rats to explore
56 which input accounts for the rapid regulation of striatal DA release. We find that targeted activation of
57 striatal cholinergic interneurons in rat striatal slices can reproduce how striatal ACh drives and modulates
58 dopamine release in mouse, but we could not find comparable evidence for a role for brainstem cholinergic

59 inputs. Activation of cholinergic interneurons alone can reproduce the previously documented effects of
60 activating all striatal ACh systems on DA release.

61

62 **1. Introduction**

63 The striatum is the primary input-receiving nucleus of the basal ganglia, and the modulation of
64 information flow through the striatum is crucial to basal ganglia function including motor control and
65 reward-driven behaviors. Two key striatal neuromodulators are dopamine (DA) and acetylcholine (ACh).
66 Striatal ACh plays powerful roles not only in regulating excitability of striatal neurons, but also in directly
67 regulating DA transmission (Cachope et al., 2012; Cragg, 2006; Rice and Cragg, 2004; Threlfell et al., 2010;
68 Threlfell et al., 2012; Zhang and Sulzer, 2004; Zhou et al., 2001). Activation of $\beta 2$ -containing nAChRs on
69 dopaminergic axons (Jones et al., 2001) promotes DA release probability, but in turn subsequently leads to
70 short-term depression of further release, making DA release insensitive to depolarization frequency (Rice
71 and Cragg, 2004; Wang et al., 2014; Zhang and Sulzer, 2004). It has therefore been proposed that *in vivo*,
72 when striatal cholinergic interneurons (ChIs) pause their firing in response to salient and conditioned stimuli
73 (Aosaki et al., 1994; Apicella et al., 1997), or when nicotine causes receptor desensitization, nAChRs will turn
74 off and allow DA release to better reflect the frequency of activity in DA neurons (Cragg, 2006; Rice and
75 Cragg, 2004). In addition, synchronized activation of a small network of striatal cholinergic inputs can directly
76 drive DA release via activation of striatal nAChRs, bypassing activation of DA neurons in the midbrain
77 (Cachope et al., 2012; Threlfell et al., 2012).

78 The source of striatal ACh has long been thought to be exclusively striatal ChIs which constitute only
79 approximately 1-2% of all striatal neurons (Kawaguchi et al., 1995; Rymar et al., 2004). Despite being few in
80 number, ChIs have an extensive influence throughout the striatum through their extended dendritic and
81 axonal arbors (Descarries and Mechawar, 2000; Graveland and DiFiglia, 1985; Hoover et al., 1978;
82 Kawaguchi, 1993). However, recent work has revealed an additional source of ACh inputs to striatum in rats
83 that arise from the pedunculopontine nucleus (PPN) and laterodorsal tegmental nucleus (LDT) of the
84 brainstem. These inputs project respectively to CPU and NAc (plus medial CPU), express the vesicular ACh

85 transporter (vAChT) and give rise to striatal synapses (Dautan et al., 2014). The identification of this
86 brainstem input has led to the question of whether these inputs provide a source of ACh that might mediate
87 the previously documented effects of ACh on striatal DA.

88 Previous studies of DA regulation using strategies that target optogenetic constructs to striatal ChIs
89 (Cachope et al., 2012; Threlfell et al., 2012) have primarily used an AAV serotype (AAV5) which does not
90 select for anterograde over retrograde expression, and thus intrinsic striatal ChIs as well as any ACh afferent
91 inputs will have expressed channelrhodopsin2 (ChR2) in those studies. Therefore, we explored here the roles
92 of cholinergic brainstem afferents versus ChIs as sources of the striatal ACh that drives and modulates
93 striatal DA release (Cachope et al 2012; Exley et al., 2008; Exley et al., 2012; Rice and Cragg 2004; Threlfell et
94 al 2010; Threlfell et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2009; Zhou et al., 2001), by targeting expression of ChR2 to
95 striatal ChIs or to cholinergic brainstem neurons. We used rats as a species of choice because brainstem
96 cholinergic input has been best described in this species (Dautan et al., 2014) and also, to validate the role of
97 ACh in DA regulation across rodent species.

98

99 **2. Methods**

100 *2.1 Stereotaxic surgery*

101 Adult (250-350g) male Long Evans ChAT::cre+ rats were maintained on a 12h light/dark cycle (light on at
102 07:00 am) and had *ad libitum* access to water and food. All procedures were performed in accordance with
103 the Society of Neuroscience policy on the use of animals in neuroscience and the Animals (Scientific
104 Procedures) Act, 1986 (UK) under the authority of a Project Licence approved by the Home Office and the
105 local ethical review committee.

106 All surgical procedures were performed during deep isoflurane anesthesia (2% in O₂, IsoFlo,
107 Schering-Plough). ChAT::cre+ rats were injected in each hemisphere with adeno-associated virus (AAV) of
108 serotype 2 for anterograde-specific expression (Dautan et al., 2016; Salegio et al., 2013), carrying the fusion
109 genes for the enhanced yellow fluorescent protein (eYFP) and channelrhodopsin (ChR2) (AAV2-EF1a-DIO-

110 Chr2-eYFP, Gene Therapy Center Virus Vector Core, University of North Carolina). The viral vectors were
111 injected in the right brainstem (3 injections of 500 nl each in the LDT: AP-8.5, ML +1.0, DV-6.0, the caudal
112 part of the PPN: AP -7.8, ML +1.8, DV -6.8, and the rostral part of the PPN: AP -7.3, ML +1.8, DV: 7.2) and in
113 the left striatum to target ChIs (4 injections of 500 nl each in the ventral DLS: AP +0.5, ML +3.0, DV -5.0;
114 dorsal DLS: AP +0.5, ML +2.0, DV -4.0; ventral DMS: AP +0.5, ML +2.0, DV -5.0; dorsal DMS: AP +0.5, ML +3.0,
115 DV -4.0). All injections were made using a 1 μ l syringe (Neuros 7001, Hamilton) at a rate of 50 nl/min and left
116 to diffuse for 5 min before retraction of the syringe. Animals were monitored during recovery. LDT/PPN
117 injections result in Chr2-eYFP expression in $66 \pm 7\%$ of LDT/PPN cholinergic neurons, with $91.4 \pm 0.5\%$ of
118 Chr2-eYFP neurons being immunopositive for ChAT. Light activation of these inputs can successfully drive a
119 cholinergic output from terminals in VTA (Dautan et al., 2016).

120 2.2 Slice preparation

121 Six-to-eight weeks after AAV2 injections, rats were killed by decapitation under isoflurane induced
122 anesthesia and brains were rapidly removed and 300 μ m coronal striatal sections were taken in ice-cold
123 buffer containing in mM: 120 NaCl, 20 NaHCO₃, 6.7 4-(2-hydroxyethyl)-1-piperazineethanesulfonic acid
124 (HEPES) acid, 5 KCl, 3.3 HEPES salt, 2 CaCl₂, 2 MgSO₄, 1.2 KH₂PO₄, 10 glucose, saturated with 95% O₂/5% CO₂.
125 Slices were kept at room temperature in HEPES-based buffer for at least 1 hour.

126 2.3 Fast-scan cyclic voltammetry (FCV)

127 DA release was monitored in acute slices using FCV. Slices were superfused in a recording chamber with
128 bicarbonate-buffered artificial cerebrospinal fluid (aCSF) containing in mM: 124.3 NaCl, 26 NaHCO₃, 3.8 KCl,
129 2.4 CaCl₂, 1.3 MgSO₄, 1.23 KH₂PO₄, 10 glucose, saturated with 95% O₂/5% CO₂ at 31–33 °C. Evoked
130 extracellular DA concentration ($[DA]_o$) was monitored using fast-scan cyclic voltammetry (FCV) at 7-10 μ m
131 diameter carbon-fibre microelectrodes (CFM) fabricated in-house (tip length 50-100 μ m) and a Millar
132 voltammeter (Julian Millar, Barts and the London School of Medicine and Dentistry). In brief, a triangular
133 voltage waveform (range -700 mV to +1300 mV vs. Ag/AgCl) was applied at 800 V/s at a scan frequency of 8
134 Hz. Electrodes were switched out of circuit between scans. Electrodes were calibrated using 1-2 μ M DA in

135 each experimental medium. Calibration solutions were prepared immediately prior to calibration from a 2.5
136 mM stock solution in 0.1 M HClO₄ stored at 4°C. Signals were attributable to DA by the potentials for peak
137 oxidation and reduction currents (oxidation peak: +500-600 mV, reduction peak: ~-200 mV).

138 *2.4 Electrical stimulation*

139 DA release was evoked by a local bipolar concentric Pt/Ir electrode (25 μm diameter; FHC Inc. ME, USA)
140 placed approximately 100 μm from the CFM. Stimulus pulses (200 μs duration) were given at 0.6 mA
141 (perimaximal in control conditions). Electrical stimulations were repeated at 2.5 minute intervals, which
142 allow stable release to be sustained over several hours. Each stimulus type was repeated in triplicate in a
143 random order. When directly comparing DA release evoked by light versus electrical stimuli, stimuli at 25 Hz
144 were used to allow for ChR2 re-activation. When exploring changes in frequency sensitivity of DA release,
145 electrical stimulations of single pulses (1p) and 4 pulses at 100 Hz were used because the ratio of DA
146 released by 4p/100Hz versus 1p (4p:1p) is very sensitive to nAChR activity (Rice and Cragg 2004). When
147 nAChRs are active, 4p:1p is ~1, indicating a large degree of short-term depression, whereas when nAChRs
148 are blocked or desensitized, the 4p:1p can be ~4.

149 *2.5 Optical stimulation*

150 Light stimulation of ChR2-expressing ChIs and brainstem afferents in striatum was via a 470 nm LED
151 (OptoLED, Cairn Research), which illuminated the full-field of view (2.2 mm diameter, 10x water-immersion
152 objective). TTL-driven light pulses (2 ms duration, ~6.5 mW, Thor labs optical power meter) were applied
153 singly or in trains (4-10 pulses, 10-25 Hz). In some experiments, light activation of ChIs that was subthreshold
154 for evoking DA release was desired, for comparison with brainstem activation. This was achieved by
155 stimulating and recording in areas of sparse ChI transfection, i.e. posterior and lateral CPu. Electrical and
156 optical stimulations at a given site were alternated.

157 2.6 *Drugs*

158 Dihydro- β -erythroidine (DH β E) was purchased from Ascent scientific. All other reagents were purchased
159 from Sigma Aldrich. Stock solutions were made to 1000x final concentrations in H₂O and stored at -20 °C.
160 Drugs were diluted to their required concentrations in aCSF immediately prior to use.

161 2.7 *Immunocytochemistry and Site marking*

162 Images of ChR2-eYFP expression were captured after fixation. Slices were fixed (PFA 4% formaldehyde)
163 for at least 2 days, washed in PBS, and re-sectioned to 40 μ m. Sections were mounted on gelled slides with
164 Vectashield (Vector labs) and ChR2-eYFP fluorescence was imaged using an Olympus BX41 microscope with
165 Q-Click cooled monochrome CCD camera (Olympus medical).

166 ChR2-eYFP fluorescence in ChIs was readily visible in 300 μ m acute living brain slices in the recording
167 chamber under water immersion optics using (non-pulsing) activation of eYFP using OptoLED (505 nm),
168 whereas ChR2-eYFP-expressing fibers from PPN/LDT were not. We therefore marked striatal recording sites
169 with FluoSpheres, to determine post-hoc whether they were within an area of ChR2-expressing cholinergic
170 brainstem innervation. Recording sites were located in central to medial striatum consistent with the
171 organization of cholinergic inputs to striatum from PPN/LDT, and were labelled by replacing the CFM with a
172 micropipette and injecting 0.5-1.0 μ l of 1 μ m-diameter red FluoSpheres (Invitrogen) after recordings. Slices
173 were fixed (PFA 4% formaldehyde) for at least 2 days, washed in PBS, and re-sectioned to 40 μ m. Sections
174 were mounted on gelled slides with Vectashield (Vector labs) and imaged using an Olympus BX41
175 microscope with Q-Click cooled monochrome CCD camera (Olympus medical). Monochrome images of
176 striatal ChR2-eYFP expression and FluoSpheres were each captured and pseudo-colored using Q-capture
177 Pro7 and optimized using histogram equalization. Only recordings that were confirmed *post-hoc* to be in
178 striatal areas within a region of ChR2-eYFP-expressing neuropil (see example in Figure 2A) were included for
179 analysis.

180 To confirm that striatal neurons transduced by AAV2 injected in rat striatum were cholinergic, striatal
181 sections were incubated in a blocking solution consisting of 10% normal donkey serum (NDS) in PBS

182 containing 1% Triton X-100 for 1 h minimum. Sections were incubated with previously validate antibodies
 183 against GFP (1:1,000, raised in rabbit, Invitrogen, A21311) and an antibody against ChAT (raised in goat;
 184 1:500 dilution in 1% NDS, 0.03% Triton X-100 in PBS, Millipore AB144P) followed by several washes in PBS
 185 and incubation in an Alexa488-conjugated donkey anti-rabbit antibody (1:1,000 dilution, Jackson
 186 Immunoresearch) or CY5-conjugated donkey anti-goat antibody (1:1,000, Jackson Immunoresearch).

187 2.8 Statistics

188 Data are expressed as mean \pm SEM and N=number of rats, n =number of recording sites. Data at each
 189 site was averaged from at least 3 repeat recordings for each stimulus, and where appropriate was
 190 normalized to 1p release in control conditions. Population means were compared using two-way ANOVA
 191 with repeated measures and Sidak's multiple comparison t-test as appropriate.

192

193 Statistics Analysis Table

Analysis	Data structure	Type of test	Power
a	Normal	2-way ANOVA with Sidak posttest	Interaction: $F_{1,11}=8.5$, $p=0.014$; post-hoc test: 1p vs 4p DH β E, $p<0.05$
b	Normal	2-way ANOVA	Interaction: $F_{1,6}=17.1$, $p=0.006$; post-hoc test: 1p vs 4p, $p<0.05$
c	Normal	2-way ANOVA (repeated measures)	effect of light: $F_{1,4}=0.19$, $p=0.68$; pre-flash x pulse number interaction, $F_{1,4}=0.02$, $p=0.88$
d	Normal	2-way ANOVA	effect of region: $F_{1,18}=8.7$, $p=0.004$; post-test, with vs without pre-pulse: ChIs, $p<0.01$
e	Normal	2-way ANOVA	effect of light: $F_{1,12}=0.2$, $p=0.67$

194

195

196 3. Results

197 3.1 Striatal ACh from rat cholinergic interneurons (ChIs) drives dopamine release

198 To obtain striatal expression of ChR2-eYFP in either ChIs, or afferents from PPN/LDT, we injected
 199 anterograde-specific AAV2-packaged constructs into either the striatum or PPN/LDT respectively, of ChAT-
 200 Cre rats. Striatal injections resulted in detectable ChR2-eYFP expression in striatum and an absence of

201 retrograde transduction of ChR2-eYFP expression in PPN/LDT cholinergic neurons in brainstem, whereas
202 PPN/LDT injections resulted in ChR2-eYFP expression in PPN/LDT and in neuropil in striatum (**Fig 1A**), as
203 shown previously following striatal vs PPN/LDT injections of AAV2-EF1a-DIO-YFP in ChAT-Cre rats (Dautan et
204 al., 2014). ChR2-eYFP expression was confirmed as originating from neurons immunopositive for ChAT in
205 striatum (**Fig 1B**), as has been confirmed previously for expression in PPN/LDT neurons following brainstem
206 injections (Dautan et al., 2016).

207 We first sought to test whether targeted activation of striatal ChIs are able to directly drive DA release.
208 To confirm recording site viability, we initially explored DA release in response to electrical stimuli (single
209 pulses, 1p, or trains of 4 pulses, 4p at 25 Hz); evoked striatal DA release in rat did not vary with stimulation
210 protocol in drug-free control conditions (**Fig 1C,D**), consistent with previous observations in mice and guinea-
211 pig (Exley et al., 2012; Rice and Cragg, 2004; Zhang et al., 2009). DA release was strongly regulated by
212 nAChRs: When nAChRs were inhibited by antagonist DH β E (1 μ M), peak extracellular DA concentration
213 ($[DA]_o$) evoked by 1p was reduced and by 4p (25 Hz) was slightly facilitated (**Fig. 1C,D**) consistent with
214 previous findings (Rice and Cragg, 2004; Zhang and Sulzer, 2004; Zhang et al., 2009). Thus, inhibition of
215 nAChRs promoted the sensitivity of DA release to axonal activity (**Fig. 1D**; 2-way ANOVA drug x pulse number
216 interaction $F_{1,11}=8.5$, $p=0.014$ (*analysis a*); post-hoc test: 1p vs 4p DH β E, $p<0.05$). In the same recording sites,
217 in the absence of DH β E, targeted activation of ChR2-expressing ChIs using blue light pulses (1p or 4p, 25 Hz)
218 also evoked DA release, and was insensitive to pulse number (**Fig. 1E-G**), as shown previously in mice using
219 AAV5-packaged ChR2 (Threlfell et al., 2012). Light-activated DA release was abolished in the presence of
220 DH β E (1 μ M), showing the dependence on nAChRs. Since ChIs but not brainstem neurons express ChR2 in
221 these animals (**Fig. 1A**), these data show that that targeted activation of ChIs alone can reproduce in rats the
222 previously documented effects in mice of activating all striatal ACh systems on driving DA release (**Fig. 1E,F**;
223 $n=4$ slices from 3 rats). Evoked $[DA]_o$ ranged from 0.2-1.2 μ M for single electrical pulses and from 0.13-1.7
224 μ M for single light pulses.

225

226 3.2 Striatal ACh from brainstem afferents does not drive DA release

227 To explore whether striatal ACh afferents from PPN/LDT can drive DA release in response to these brief
228 stimulation, when activation of either ChIs alone (see Fig. 1) or all striatal ACh networks strongly drive DA
229 release (Cachope et al., 2012; Threlfell et al., 2012), we injected an AAV2 containing ChR2-eYFP constructs
230 into the right PPN/LDT of ChAT-cre rats (**Fig. 2A**). This protocol leads to ChR2-eYFP expression in ~70% of
231 PPN cholinergic neurons (Dautan et al., 2016). In contrast to the high density of ChR2-eYFP-expressing
232 striatal fibers seen after striatal injections, striatal ChR2-eYFP expression after PPN/LDT injections were not
233 visible by fluorescence imaging during recordings in live slices. Expression of ChR2 was corroborated only
234 after recording, following injection of red FluoSpheres to mark recording sites using published protocol
235 (Brimblecombe and Cragg, 2015), followed by fixation, to confirm whether recordings were in an area of
236 innervation by ChR2-expressing brainstem afferents (**Fig. 2A**).

237 In striatal sites with confirmed ChR2-eYFP-expressing brainstem fibres, brief light pulses did not
238 evoke detectable levels of $[DA]_o$ even with trains of 10 pulses (10 Hz) (**Fig. 2B,C**). By contrast, electrical
239 stimulation at the same recording sites reliably evoked DA release proving site viability (**Fig. 2B,C**).
240 Furthermore, light-activation of the opposite hemisphere where ChIs were transfected with ChR2-eYFP also
241 reliably evoked DA release, even with single pulses (**Fig. 2B,C**). To test if activation of cholinergic brainstem
242 afferents was driving DA release below our DA detection threshold, we applied an inhibitor of DA uptake,
243 cocaine (5 μ M), to enhance any evoked DA transients. In the presence of cocaine, $[DA]_o$ evoked by electrical
244 stimuli (single pulses) were large and prolonged, but by contrast, light activation of brainstem afferents did
245 not evoke detectable $[DA]_o$ (**Fig. 2D**). These observations suggest that activation of cholinergic brainstem
246 afferents alone does not generate a sufficient ACh source with these protocols in slices, to explain how
247 striatal DA release is locally driven by striatal ACh.

248 3.3 Brainstem ACh afferents do not modulate electrically evoked DA release

249 We tested the possibility that brainstem afferents might nonetheless be able to modulate presynaptic
250 excitability of DA axons but in a manner that is below the threshold for directly driving DA release. We tested

251 whether we could expose a role for brainstem ACh in the modulation of DA release evoked by other stimuli.
252 We established a stimulus protocol in which DA release was driven by local electrical stimulation with or
253 without a prior light pulse train in Chr2-expressing striatum. We hypothesized that if a prior light stimulation
254 caused ACh release to reach nAChRs on DA axons, then it might modulate nAChR activity and/or promote
255 desensitization, and consequently change the frequency sensitivity of electrically evoked DA release that is
256 critically determined by nAChRs (Cragg, 2006). We used a light pulse train (10p/10 Hz) that commenced 0.5 s
257 prior to electrical stimulation, to detect any effects of light stimulation alone, as well as subsequent effects
258 on combined electrical stimulation.

259 We first established the effects of combined light and electrical stimulation on striatal DA when
260 Chr2 was expressed by ChIs. We selected striatal regions where the density of Chr2-eYFP-expressing fibers
261 from ChIs was sparse, in order to be more comparable to the innervation by brainstem afferents. In regions
262 sparsely innervated by Chr2-expressing ChIs, electrical stimuli alone readily evoked DA release, but trains of
263 light pulses (10p/10 Hz) did not drive $[DA]_o$ to a detectable level (see **Fig. 3A**). A pre-stimulation of ChIs with
264 light pulses that commenced 0.5 s prior to an electrical stimulus did not evoke detectable $[DA]_o$ but
265 nonetheless modified $[DA]_o$ evoked by electrical stimulation: there was a reduction in $[DA]_o$ evoked by a
266 single electrical pulse and a tendency towards a facilitation of $[DA]_o$ evoked by a burst of electrical pulses
267 (4p/100 Hz) (compared to electrical stimulus alone) (**Fig. 3A,B**; 2-way repeated measures ANOVA: light
268 condition x pulse number interaction: $F_{1,6}=17.1$, $p=0.006$, *statistical analysis b*). There was a resulting
269 increase in the ratio of $[DA]_o$ evoked electrically by 4p versus 1p (**Fig. 3A,B**; post-hoc test, 1p vs 4p with light:
270 $p<0.05$). This modulation of evoked $[DA]_o$ is consistent with reduced activation of nAChRs (Rice and Cragg,
271 2004; Zhang and Sulzer, 2004) at the time of electrical stimulation, confirming that light activation of ChIs
272 that was sub-threshold for directly driving DA release was nonetheless able to modulate nAChRs and DA
273 release.

274 We then tested the effect of prior light stimulation of cholinergic brainstem afferents on subsequent
275 electrically evoked DA release. Light activation of brainstem afferents in striatum did not drive detectable

276 [DA]_o (as in Fig. 2) and furthermore, did not modulate [DA]_o evoked by electrical stimulation given 0.5 s later
277 (**Fig. 3C,D**; 2-way repeated measures ANOVA, effect of light: $F_{1,4}=0.19$, $p=0.68$; pre-flash x pulse number
278 interaction, $F_{1,4}=0.02$, $p=0.88$; *statistical analysis c*). The ratio of [DA]_o evoked electrically by 4p versus 1p was
279 not enhanced by light pre-stimulation of brainstem afferents (**Fig. 3E**, 2-way ANOVA, effect of region:
280 $F_{1,18}=8.7$, $p=0.004$; post-test, with vs without pre-pulse: ChIs, $p<0.01$; *statistical analysis d*).

281 Finally, in the event that subtle effects of prior ACh action at nAChRs were masked by the stronger
282 subsequent electrical stimuli, we tested whether we could expose an effect of a light pre-stimulation for a
283 lower electrical stimulation current. A lower electrical current evoked [DA]_o that were ~two-thirds of those
284 previously, but nonetheless, pre-stimulation of ChR2-expressing brainstem afferents with light pulse trains
285 did not modify [DA]_o further (**Fig. 3F**, 2-way ANOVA: effect of light: $F_{1,12}=0.2$, $p=0.67$; *statistical analysis e*).

286

287 4. Discussion

288 We show here, using specific targeting of ChR2 to either striatal ChIs or brainstem cholinergic neurons
289 of PPN/LDT, that the powerful effects of striatal ACh and nAChRs on DA release reported previously *ex vivo*
290 can be reproduced by targeted activation of ChIs. Striatal ChIs and nAChRs can directly drive DA release, and
291 also modulate DA release driven by activity generated in DA neurons, shown here in rats, as reported
292 previously in mice using non-specific ACh activation (Cachope et al., 2012; Rice and Cragg, 2004; Threlfell et
293 al., 2012; Zhang and Sulzer, 2004). By contrast, while PPN/LDT nuclei can modulate somatodendritic DA
294 neuron activity (Dautan et al., 2016), we could not find any evidence that similar stimulation protocols could
295 recruit PPN/LDT afferents in striatum to regulate DA release from axons.

296 4.1 Two cholinergic sources for regulation of striatal DA

297 Acetylcholine is well known to modulate DA transmission through two major cholinergic pathways that
298 have previously been assumed to be distinct. Firstly, roles of the cholinergic brainstem for modulating DA
299 neuron activity and consequent DA release have previously been established. Cholinergic neurons of the
300 brainstem make synaptic contacts with midbrain DA neurons (Beninato and Spencer, 1988; Bolam et al.,

301 1991) and direct activation of midbrain ACh receptors or PPN/LDT cholinergic axons modulates the discharge
302 properties of DA neurons and consequently, the downstream release of DA in the striatum (Blaha and Winn,
303 1993; Dautan et al., 2016). These studies indicate that cholinergic PPN/LDT neurons are able to modulate DA
304 release via inputs to midbrain DA neurons. Secondly, a role for striatal acetylcholine systems, nAChRs and
305 nicotine in modulating DA axonal release directly has become well documented, and striatal ACh has been
306 shown to bypass midbrain DA neurons and directly drive DA release (Cachope et al., 2012; Cragg, 2006; Rice
307 and Cragg, 2004; Threlfell et al., 2012; Zhang and Sulzer, 2004). The neurons responsible for local striatal
308 modulation were assumed to be only the intrinsic interneurons, the ChIs. However, the identification of
309 cholinergic afferents in striatum arising from the PPN/LDT (Dautan et al., 2014), suggested that brainstem
310 inputs might be partly responsible for local striatal modulation of DA by contributing as an additional source
311 of striatal ACh. However, we were unable to obtain any evidence here for either ACh release or DA
312 modulation by presynaptic nAChRs following PPN/LDT stimulation.

313 *4.2 Cholinergic interneurons but not brainstem afferents account for rapid regulation of striatal DA by*
314 *nAChRs*

315 Our experiments explored whether protocols that have been used previously to activate striatal ACh
316 systems and that drive and powerfully modulate striatal DA via nAChRs, primarily involve ChIs or brainstem
317 afferents. Our data indicate that whereas ACh from ChIs could account for previously documented effects of
318 nAChRs on striatal DA, we could not show the same was true for brainstem afferents. Single light flashes in
319 ChIs are sufficient to drive DA release directly, but by contrast, single flashes or even more sustained
320 stimulation of brainstem afferents did not allow us to detect any DA. We were unable to find any further
321 signs of modulation of nAChRs on DA axons in a protocol designed to explore whether activation of
322 brainstem afferents is capable of modulating DA release evoked by other stimuli. As a positive control, we
323 showed that pre-activation of sparsely labelled ChIs, that in isolation was unable to drive DA release, was
324 nonetheless able to modulate electrically evoked DA release, and significantly increase the 4p:1p ratio. This
325 increase in 4p:1p ratio is consistent with a decrease in activation of nAChRs on DA axons at the point of
326 electrical stimulation. This decrease in nAChR activity could result from initial ACh release leading to a

327 depression in ACh re-release by the subsequent electrical pulse, or to some nAChR desensitization, to which
328 nAChRs are particularly susceptible (Quick and Lester, 2002; Rice and Cragg, 2004; Zhou et al., 2001). By
329 contrast, pre-stimulation of brainstem afferents with light had no measurable effect on subsequent
330 electrically-evoked $[DA]_o$ or on 4p:1p ratio.

331 These data suggest that any ACh released by activation of brainstem afferents alone is unable to reach
332 sufficient levels to modulate nAChRs on DA axons. The more readily detectable role for ChIs in gating striatal
333 DA, and also for cortical or thalamic glutamate inputs to ChIs (Kosillo et al., 2016) than for brainstem inputs,
334 is in keeping with the relative visibility of striatal YFP expression noted in 300 μ m-thick slices under the
335 recording microscope. This conclusion is also consistent with the finding that deletion of brainstem
336 cholinergic neurons does not affect electrically evoked dopamine release in striatal slices (Patel et al., 2012).
337 We cannot exclude the possibility that ACh might not be released from PPN/LDT terminals in striatum in *ex*
338 *vivo* slices. This caveat does not detract from the principal conclusion that striatal ChIs are entirely sufficient
339 to account for current observations of the modulation of DA by striatal ACh. Our findings do not necessarily
340 preclude brainstem afferents from locally regulating DA release during other conditions e.g. *in vivo*, when
341 they might modulate the dynamic activity *in vivo* of networks of striatal neurons or interneurons (Dautan et
342 al., 2018) which might in turn subsequently regulate DA release.

343 4.3 Summary and Conclusions

344 In summary, we show that ChIs readily drive DA release in rat, as shown previously in mouse, and that
345 striatal modulation of DA transmission by nAChRs and nicotine can readily be reproduced by targeted
346 activation of ChIs but not brainstem afferents. Brainstem afferents were not sufficient to drive or modulate
347 striatal DA release under the experimental paradigms used here as previously, in which ChI function
348 dominates.

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434

435 FIGURE LEGENDS

436

437 **Figure. 1: Light activation of rat striatal cholinergic interneurons evokes striatal dopamine release.**

438 (A) ChR2-eYFP detected in striatum (*left*) and PPN/LDT (*right*) after AAV2 injection to PPN/LDT (*lower*), and
 439 detected in striatum only after injection to striatum (*upper*), fixed tissue. (B) GFP-immunopositive soma after
 440 striatal injection were co-immunopositive for ChAT. (C,E) Mean profiles of $[DA]_o \pm SEM$ vs time evoked by 1
 441 or 4 pulses (25 Hz) of electrical (C) or light (E) stimulation, in control drug-free conditions or in the presence
 442 of DH β E (1 μ M). Data are normalised to 1p peak $[DA]_o$ in control conditions. Control conditions (*black lines*),
 443 DH β E (*red lines*). (D,F) Mean peak $[DA]_o$ normalised to control 1p for electrical (D) and light-evoked DA
 444 release (F) in control (*black*) and in the presence of DH β E (*red*). N=3 rats, n=4 sites. Two-way ANOVA with
 445 Sidak posttest comparisons of control vs DH β E: *p<0.05, ***p<0.001.

446

447 **Figure. 2: Light activation of striatal cholinergic brainstem afferents with brief stimuli does not reveal**

448 **dopamine release.** (A) *Left*, Cartoon indicating PPN/LDT injections sites and *right*, recording site labelled
 449 with red FluoSpheres in an area of cholinergic brainstem innervation indicated by ChR2-eYFP fluorescence.
 450 (B) Example profiles of $[DA]_o$ (μ M) vs time evoked by either light activation of ChIs (*Ch1 ChR2*, *blue dashed*,
 451 *1p*), electrical stimulation of striatum (*black solid line*, *1p*) or light activation of brainstem cholinergic
 452 afferents (*brainstem ChR2*, *blue solid line*, *10p 10Hz*). *Inset*, Corresponding voltammograms for DA following
 453 each activation type for site indicated in panel A, at time pointed indicated on profiles by gray circles. (C)
 454 Peak evoked $[DA]_o$ (μ M) for each recording site and stimulation methods, with mean \pm SEM indicated.
 455 Arrows indicate data points and sites shown in panel B. (D) Mean profiles of current detected at DA
 456 oxidation potential (\pm SEM) vs time evoked by striatal electrical stimulation (1p) (*black*) or light stimulation of
 457 ChR2-expressing cholinergic brainstem afferents (10p 10Hz) (*blue*) in the presence of cocaine (5 μ M), (n=10
 458 observations from 3 sites).

459

460 **Figure. 3: Light activation of striatal cholinergic interneurons but not brainstem afferents readily**
461 **modulates dopamine release. (A,C)** Mean profiles of $[DA]_o \pm SEM$ vs time evoked by 1 or 4 pulses (100 Hz) of
462 electrical (E) stimulation alone (*left*), or with stimulation with light (10p/10 Hz beginning 0.5 s prior to
463 electrical) (*right*) to stimulate ChR2 expressed in either ChIs (A) or brainstem afferents (C). Data are
464 normalised to 1p control (without light). **(B,D)** Summary data showing mean peak $[DA]_o \pm SEM$ evoked by the
465 electrical stimulation normalised to control 1p, for ChR2-expressing ChIs (B) or brainstem afferents (D) with
466 and without light activation (*blue vs black*). Two-way ANOVA with repeated measures with Sidak post-test
467 comparisons of 1p vs 4p: $**p < 0.01$, N.S. $p > 0.05$. **(E)** Ratio of $[DA]_o$ evoked by 4 vs 1 electrical pulses (100 Hz)
468 with and without light stimulation (*blue versus black*) of either ChIs or striatal brainstem afferents. Light pre-
469 stimulation of ChIs but not brainstem afferents significantly potentiated 4p:1p ratio of electrically evoked DA
470 release (2-way ANOVA; Sidak post-test for with vs without light: ChI: $t_{18} = 4.1$, $**p < 0.01$; brainstem: $t_{18} = 0.58$,
471 $p > 0.05$). **(F)** Mean peak 1p $[DA]_o \pm SEM$, evoked by 0.7 mA and 0.3 mA electrical stimuli, with and without
472 light pre-stimulation of brainstem afferents. Two-way ANOVA; Sidak post-test with vs without light: 0.7 mA:
473 $t_{12} = 0.29$, $p > 0.05$; 0.3 mA: $t_{12} = 1.2$, $p > 0.05$. Data are in μM , $n = 4$ rats, $n = 6$ sites.

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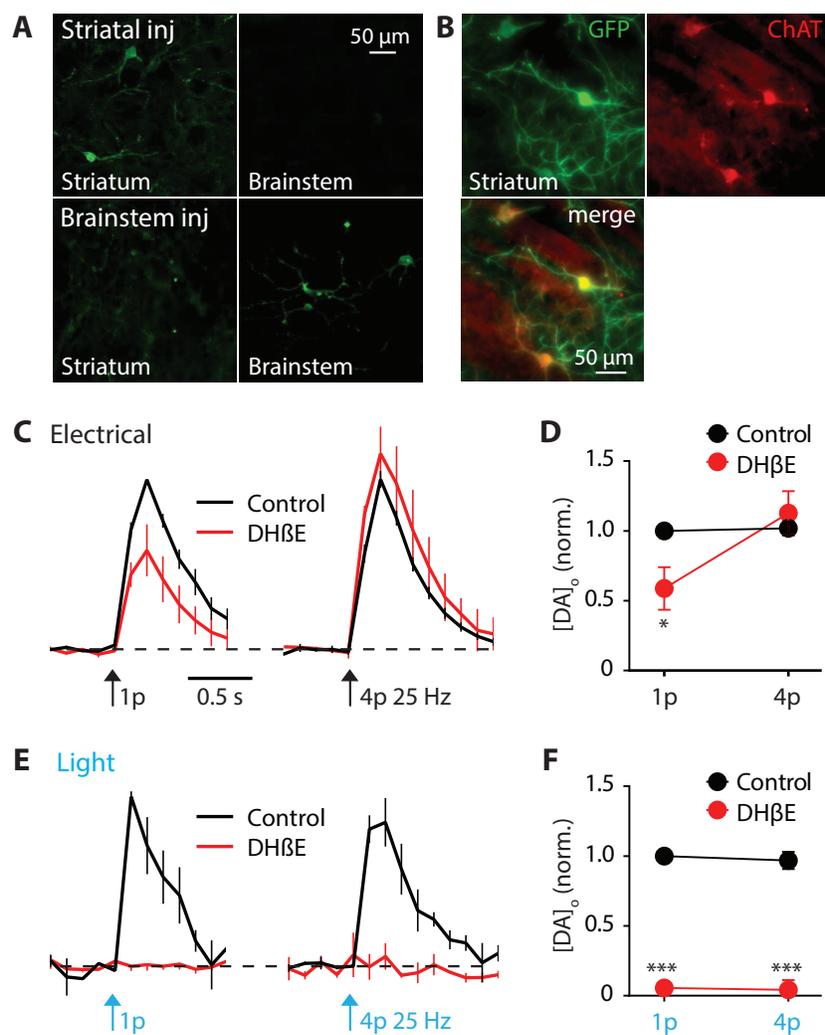


Figure 1

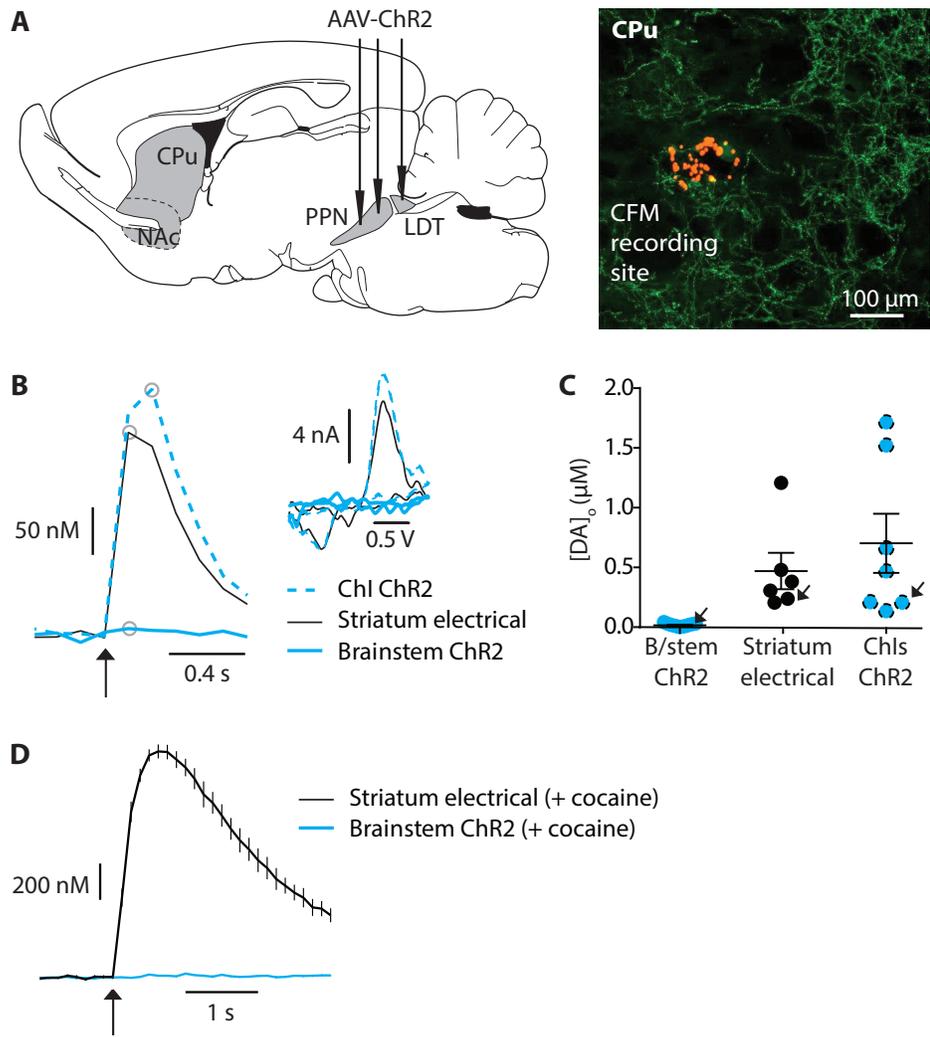


Figure 2

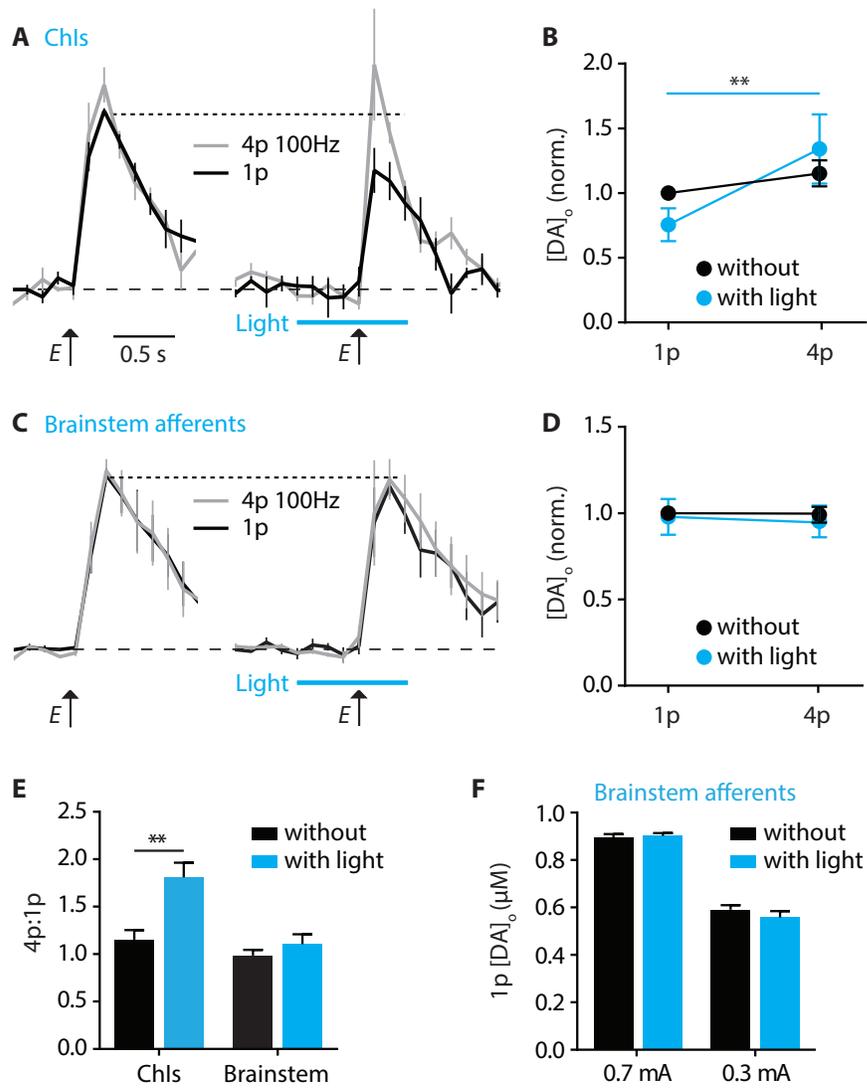


Figure 3