



## **THERAPEUTIC POTENTIAL OF ROSMARINIC ACID IN MYOCARDIAL INFARCTION AND POST-MYOCARDIAL INFARCTION DEPRESSION: THE ROLE OF TUMOR NECROSIS FACTOR- $\alpha$**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Myocardial infarction patients are more prone to develop depression, which further increases the adverse cardiac outcome. The current pharmacotherapeutic strategy of myocardial infarction improves cardiovascular outcomes without any effects on depression. On the other hand, antidepressant drugs in myocardial infarction patients have shown minimal improvement in depressive symptoms while some of them are worsening the cardiac outcome. A clear understanding of the underlying mechanism of interaction between myocardial infarction and post-myocardial infarction depression remains obscure. However, the pro-inflammatory cytokine particularly, tumor necrosis factor- $\alpha$  has been suggested as a common mechanism of interaction between myocardial infarction and depression. Tumor necrosis factor- $\alpha$  produced during myocardial infarction causes perturbation of blood-brain barrier and interrupts the normal brain functioning leading to depression. Phytochemicals such as rosmarinic acid have shown marked efficacy against various disorders such as heart failure, psoriasis, cancer, and ankylosing spondylitis via inhibition of tumor necrosis factor- $\alpha$  activity. We hypothesize that rosmarinic acid could inhibit the tumor necrosis factor- $\alpha$  in the myocardium as well as inhibit the intrusion of same into the brain through blood brain barrier. We emphasize the therapeutic potential of rosmarinic acid to treat the patients suffering from both conditions of myocardial infarction and post- myocardial infarction depression.

**KEY WORDS:** Myocardial infarction, post-myocardial infarction depression, rosmarinic acid, tumor necrosis factor- $\alpha$ , phytochemicals.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Myocardial infarction (MI) is the irreversible injury of myocardium due to prolonged ischemia and hypoxia (Thygesen et al., 2012; Kumar et al., 2016). MI is a leading cause of morbidity and mortality in

both developed and developing countries (Thygesen et al., 2012). In recent years, clinicians and basic researchers become more interested in understanding the interactive relationship between MI and depression (Smallheer et al., 2017). There is a bidirectional relationship between these



two disorders; MI Patients have a high risk of developing depression while depressive patients have a high risk of experiencing a cardiovascular event (Liu et al., 2013; Reppermund and Tsang, 2016). A recent meta-analysis has reported 1.6- to 2.7-fold increase in the risk of worsening cardiac outcomes in post-MI depressive patients (Meijer et al., 2013). At the moment, a clear understanding of the underlying mechanism of interaction between MI and post-MI depression remains obscure. However, the inflammatory pathway has been suggested as a common pathway of interaction (Liu et al., 2013; Halaris, 2016). Necrosis of myocardium following ischemia triggers an intense inflammatory response, which plays a vital role in the pathogenesis and progression of myocardial infarction (Marchant et al., 2012; Frangogiannis, 2014). In response to myocardial damage, the release of endogenous molecules called 'alarmins' further activates the downstream pro-inflammatory pathways (Frangogiannis, 2008, 2014). The pro-inflammatory cytokines, particularly tumor necrosis factor (TNF)- $\alpha$ , interleukin-1 $\beta$ , and interleukin-6 released by leukocytes, fibroblasts, and endothelial cells have been suggested as key inflammatory mediators involved in the pathophysiology of MI (Frangogiannis et al., 1998; Dewald et al., 2004). The infiltrations of the peripheral immune signal into the brain may interfere with the brain activity while the reverse transfer of immune signal from the brain to the periphery is rare (Liu et al., 2013). Earlier studies have reported that inflammatory mediators produced during MI causes perturbation of blood-brain barrier (BBB) and interrupt the normal brain function (Abbott, 2000; Li and Patel, 2003; Müller and Schwarz, 2007).

An over-activated immune system has been observed in both MI and depressed patients

(Bodi et al., 2008; Müller et al., 2011) with significantly high plasma levels of TNF- $\alpha$  in MI patients (Lissoni et al., 1992; Francis et al., 2003). The elevated levels of TNF- $\alpha$  enhance the permeability of BBB via mechanisms such as nitric oxide pathway, cyclooxygenase (COX) pathway, increased leukocyte migration to endothelium and disruption of the endothelial cells architecture (Henry and Duling, 2000; Bove et al., 2001; Liu et al., 2013). In this connection, several in-vitro and in-vivo studies have demonstrated the effects of TNF- $\alpha$  on the BBB permeability (de Vries et al., 1996; Mark and Miller, 1999; Dickstein et al., 2000; Mayhan, 2002). The primarily affected neuroanatomical region in the brain is parts of bulbus olfactorius, somatosensory cortex, parietal and entorhinal cortex, hypothalamus, substantia nigra, cerebellum, spinal trigeminal nucleus, and the periambiguous area (TerHorst et al., 1996; Ter Horst et al., 1997). More specifically, the paraventricular nucleus (PVN) of the hypothalamus has gained much attention in cardiovascular research because it contributes to the sympathetic nervous system activity in both normal and pathological state (Li and Patel, 2003). The peripheral immune activation during MI has been reported to increase the inflammatory cytokine levels and neuronal activity in the PVN (Felder et al., 2003; Guggilam et al., 2007; Leenen, 2007). More recently, it has been reported that activated microglia in the PVN increases the production of cytokines, COX-2, and PGE-2 (Kang et al., 2006; Rana et al., 2010; Yu et al., 2010).

Pharmacological, mechanical, and combined reperfusion techniques form the current treatment strategy for MI, and antidepressants, cognitive behavioral therapy, and physical activity forms the treatment strategy for post-MI depression



(Wang et al., 2011; Ibáñez et al., 2015). The current antidepressant drugs have minimal or no effect on the cardiac outcome while some of them worsening the cardiac outcomes (Akhondzadeh et al., 2003; Marano et al., 2011; Waring, 2012). There is no evidence of treatment strategy that improves cardiac outcome as well as depressive symptoms in MI patients. However, targeting inflammation may improve both cardiac outcomes as well as depressive symptoms in MI patients.

In recent times, natural phytochemicals have gained attention in the field of

cardiovascular and neurological research due to their extraordinary mechanisms of action (Shukla et al., 2010; Davinelli et al., 2016). Natural polyphenols such as rosmarinic acid have been demonstrated significant anti-inflammatory activity through several mechanisms includes inhibition of activation of nuclear factor-kappa B (NF- $\kappa$ B), overexpression of pro-inflammatory cytokines, cyclooxygenase-2, and inducible nitric oxide synthase (Veres, 2012; Fazel Nabavi et al., 2015).

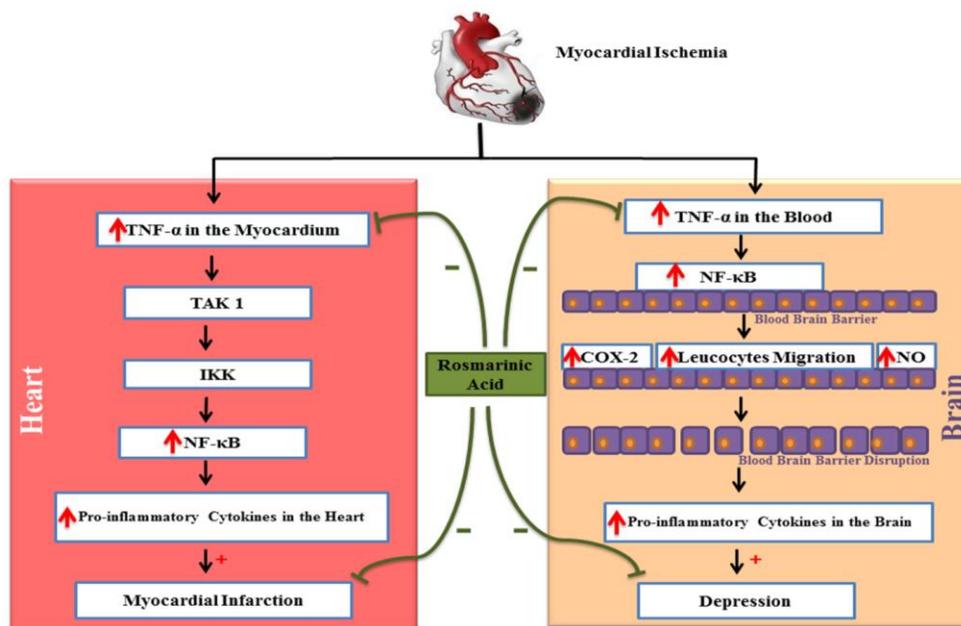


Figure 1: Rosmarinic acid in MI and post-MI depression—a hypothesis. Myocardial ischemia causes an increase in TNF- $\alpha$  production at the ischemic area leading to activation of TAK1 and IKK. The activated IKK further leads to activation of transcription factor NF- $\kappa$ B. NF- $\kappa$ B increases the synthesis of pro-inflammatory cytokines and results in the pathogenesis and progression of MI. On the other hand, the elevated levels of TNF- $\alpha$  in the systemic circulation leads to BBB disruption through NF- $\kappa$ B mediated increase in COX-2, leucocyte migration, and NO release from the endothelial cells of BBB. The disruption of BBB increases the pro-inflammatory cytokines levels in the brain and cause depression. It is hypothesized that rosmarinic acid may inhibit the activity of TNF- $\alpha$  in the heart and the brain to mitigate MI as well as post-MI depression. TAK1, Transforming growth factor- $\alpha$ -activated kinase 1; IKK, I kappa B kinase; TNF- $\alpha$ , Tumor necrosis factor-alpha; COX-2, Cyclooxygenase-2; NO, Nitric oxide; BBB, Blood-brain barrier.



## HYPOTHESIS

We hypothesize that rosmarinic acid (RA) could mitigate MI and post-MI depression by inhibiting the TNF- $\alpha$  activity in the myocardium and inhibiting the intrusion of it into the brain. The consideration of TNF- $\alpha$  as a target is supported by findings of various preclinical and clinical studies pertaining to diseases such as heart-failure, psoriasis, ankylosing spondylitis, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and breast cancer (Grippio et al., 2003; Tying et al., 2006; Ertenli et al., 2012; Kappelmann et al., 2016; Hoseth et al., 2017; Ji et al., 2017). The schematic representation of our hypothesis is given in Figure 1.

## TNF- $\alpha$ INHIBITORY ACTIVITY OF ROSMARINIC ACID

Rosmarinic acid ( $\alpha$ -o-caffeoyl-3,4-dihydroxy phenyl lactic acid) is polyphenolic compound commonly found in *Rosmarinus officinalis*, *Salvia officinalis*, and *Perilla frutescens*. RA has been extensively investigated due to its putative anti-inflammatory activity in cancer research. Although pre-clinical and clinical studies have shown its potential against different types of cancers, the possibility that it could as well be useful for prevention and cure of cardiovascular disorders particularly myocardial infarction remain unanswered (Ferreira et al., 2013; González-Vallinas et al., 2015). Earlier laboratory pharmacokinetic studies demonstrated good bioavailability and pharmacokinetic of RA (Nakazawa and Ohsawa, 1998; Baba et al., 2004; Konishi and Kobayashi, 2005). The clinical study of RA in the management of knee osteoarthritis pain symptoms has shown promising results (Connelly et al., 2014). The optimal pharmacokinetic property combined with its anti-

inflammatory activity may facilitate its interaction with multiple protein targets and make RA a multifaceted therapeutic drug candidate. RA has shown TNF- $\alpha$  inhibitory activity in various preclinical studies. Osakabe and colleagues investigated the anti-inflammatory activity of RA in lipopolysaccharide-induced liver injury by measuring the m-RNA level of TNF- $\alpha$  via RT-PCR. RA significantly modulate the mRNA expression of TNF- $\alpha$  (Osakabe et al., 2002). RA has been reported to inhibit TNF- $\alpha$  induced NF- $\kappa$ B activation and reactive oxygen species formation in human dermal fibroblasts (Moon et al., 2010). Kim and colleagues proposed that RA could block TNF- $\alpha$ -dependent NF- $\kappa$ B activation through inhibition of I $\kappa$ B $\alpha$  phosphorylation (Moon et al., 2010). RA has been shown to decrease the mRNA expressions of TNF- $\alpha$  in the nasal mucosa tissue and spleen of ovalbumin-sensitized mice and showed marked anti-inflammatory activity against allergic inflammatory reactions. It was further encouraged to use in allergic rhinitis and allergic rhinoconjunctivitis (Oh et al., 2011).

Rosmarinic acid could offer two major advantages, firstly; it could inhibit the inflammatory phase of MI resulting in reduced activation/accumulation of pro-inflammatory cytokines in the myocardium as well as in the systemic circulation. Due to the strong TNF- $\alpha$  modulating property of RA, it could inhibit the downstream TNF- $\alpha$  signaling pathway that activates the other mediators of inflammation such as NF- $\kappa$ B, IL-1B, and IL-6. Secondly, RA could directly inhibit the TNF- $\alpha$  mediated BBB permeability or inhibit TNF- $\alpha$  activity in the PVN (Song et al., 2016).



## CONCLUSION

Rosmarinic acid has a promising potential to inhibit TNF- $\alpha$  activity in the myocardium as well as in the BBB, and it may further prevent intrusion of TNF- $\alpha$  into the brain. This hypothesis could help researchers to explore the potential of RA in the treatment of MI and post-MI depression, which is highly relevant from patients as well as a society perspective.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Authors of the manuscript declare no conflict of interest.

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