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## **Noribogaine, but not 18-MC, Exhibits Similar Actions as Ibogaine on GDNF Expression and Ethanol Self-Administration**

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## Abstract

Ibogaine is a naturally occurring alkaloid that has been reported to decrease various adverse phenotypes associated with exposure to drugs of abuse and alcohol in human and rodent models (Maciulaitis et al., 2008). Unfortunately, ibogaine cannot be used as a medication to treat addiction because of severe side effects (Maciulaitis et al., 2008). Previously, we reported that the desirable actions of ibogaine to reduce self-administration of, and relapse to, alcohol consumption are mediated via the upregulation of the expression of the glial cell line-derived neurotrophic factor (GDNF) in the midbrain ventral tegmental area (VTA), and the consequent activation of the GDNF pathway (He et al., 2005). The ibogaine metabolite noribogaine, and a synthetic derivative of ibogaine, 18-Methoxycoronaridine (18-MC), possess a similar anti-addictive profile as ibogaine in rodent models, but without some of its adverse side effects (Glick et al., 2000; Maciulaitis et al., 2008). Here, we determined whether noribogaine and/or 18-MC, like ibogaine, increase *GDNF* expression, and whether their site of action to reduce alcohol consumption is the VTA. We used SH-SY5Y cells as a cell culture model and found that noribogaine, like ibogaine, but not 18-MC, induces a robust increase in *GDNF* mRNA levels. Next, we tested the effect of intra-VTA infusion of noribogaine and 18-MC on rat operant alcohol self-administration and found that noribogaine, but not 18-MC, in the VTA decreases responding for ethanol. Together, our results suggest that noribogaine and 18-MC have different mechanisms and sites of action.

**Key words:** Ethanol self-administration, GDNF, ibogaine, 18-Methoxycoronaridine, noribogaine.

## Introduction

Alcohol and drug addiction are chronic relapsing diseases characterized by compulsive drug use, and are major societal issues. However, available medications to treat drug addiction in general and alcoholism in particular are very limited. Additionally, the two leading FDA-approved medications to treat alcoholism, Naltrexone and Acamprosate, have limited efficacy and success rates (Garbutt, 2009; Johnson, 2008). One drug that initially showed great promise as a possible treatment for multiple types of addiction is ibogaine (Maciulaitis et al., 2008). Ibogaine is a naturally occurring indole alkaloid claimed to reverse addiction to opiates, stimulants, alcohol, and nicotine (Alper et al., 2008; Mash et al., 1998; Popik et al., 1995; Vastag, 2002). Ibogaine is extracted from the root bark of the West African shrub *Tabernanthe iboga* and is used by indigenous people in low doses to keep hunters awake and motionless, and in higher doses for religious rituals because of its psychostimulant and hallucinogenic properties (Alper et al., 2008; Maciulaitis et al., 2008). The initial discovery that ibogaine eliminates signs and symptoms of opioid withdrawal and diminishes craving for heroin was made in the 1960s by a group of heroin addicts (Maciulaitis et al., 2008; Mash et al., 1998). Since that time, several human anecdotal reports and studies have shown that ibogaine possesses many attractive properties as an anti-addiction agent. First, the compound crosses the blood brain barrier and can be given to addicts orally (Mash et al., 1998). Second, a single dose of ibogaine is claimed to abolish drug craving for up to six months, and repeated ibogaine treatment (a series of four oral administrations) was reported to be effective in blocking craving and relapse for up to three years in cocaine and opiate

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addicts (Alper et al., 2000; Mash et al., 1998; Sheppard, 1994). Since compliance is a significant problem in medication development to treat addiction, the fact that ibogaine has very long lasting effects (months to years) is very desirable.

Studies in animal models recapitulate human observations. Ibogaine reduces self-administration and withdrawal symptoms for alcohol and various drugs of abuse in mice, rats and monkeys (Glick et al., 2000). For example, single and repeated intraperitoneal (i.p.) injections of a moderate dose of ibogaine (40 mg/kg) can reduce self-administration of cocaine or morphine in rats and cocaine in mice for several days (Cappendijk and Dzoljic, 1993; Glick et al., 1994; Sershen et al., 1994). Ibogaine decreases heroin self-administration and naloxone/naltrexone-precipitated withdrawal in morphine-dependent rats (Cappendijk et al., 1994; Glick et al., 1992; but see Sharpe and Jaffe, 1990). Finally, ibogaine reduces ethanol intake in several strains of alcohol-preferring rats in a dose-dependent manner, using concentrations ranging from 10 to 60 mg/kg, with no changes in blood alcohol concentration or food intake (Rezvani et al., 1995). We replicated and extended the findings of Rezvani and colleagues (1995) on different ethanol-drinking behaviors. We found that an acute injection of ibogaine (40 mg/kg, i.p.) in male Long-Evans rats 3 hrs before the test session significantly reduced ethanol intake, but not the concurrent water intake or sucrose intake, using a 2-bottle preference procedure, as well as operant ethanol self-administration (He et al., 2005). We were also interested in testing whether ibogaine would have efficacy in a model of relapse in which rats are allowed to self-administer alcohol in operant chambers following 3 weeks of extinction training. Ibogaine blocked the excessive intake produced by such forced abstinence period (He et al., 2005), suggesting a potent action of ibogaine to prevent relapse. In summary, human

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anecdotal reports, as well as several preclinical studies in rodents, suggest that ibogaine is a long-lasting and selective anti-addiction medication for alcohol, opioids, psychostimulants, and nicotine.

Unfortunately, despite its attractive properties, ibogaine is not used in the US to treat addiction because of severe side effects, which include hallucination, bradycardia, whole-body tremors and ataxia (Alper et al., 2008; Glick et al., 2000; Maas and Strubelt, 2006; Maciulaitis et al., 2008; Popik et al., 1995). In addition, while a moderate dose of ibogaine (40 mg/kg) that is effective to reduce self-administration of several drugs of abuse is not neurotoxic in rodents, (He et al., 2005; Molinari et al., 1996) cerebellar Purkinje cell death has been reported in rats after administration of a higher concentration (100 mg/kg, i.p.) (O'Hearn and Molliver, 1993, 1997). Moreover, although ibogaine is not addictive, the FDA classified the drug in the schedule I category of narcotics because of its stimulant and hallucinogenic properties.

In an attempt to separate the desirable anti-addictive properties of the drug from the undesirable side effects, we set out to identify the molecular mechanism mediating ibogaine's effects on voluntary ethanol consumption. We found that systemic administration of ibogaine induced a long-lasting increase in the expression of the glial-derived neurotrophic factor (GDNF) in the dopaminergic ventral tegmental area (VTA) of rodents and that the effect of ibogaine to reduce ethanol self-administration is localized in the VTA (He et al., 2005). Importantly, when the GDNF pathway was inhibited in the VTA, ibogaine was significantly less effective in reducing ethanol self-administration (He et al., 2005). More recently, we observed that upregulation of tyrosine hydroxylase levels resulting from long-term exposure of ethanol in a dopaminergic-like cell line is

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blocked by ibogaine in a mechanism that requires GDNF (He and Ron, 2008). Finally, similarly to ibogaine, GDNF administered into the VTA resulted in a long-lasting inhibition of ethanol-seeking and -drinking behaviors in models of moderate and excessive drinking of ethanol, as well as in a model of relapse (Carnicella et al., 2009b; Carnicella et al., 2008; Carnicella and Ron, 2009; He et al., 2005). Together, our results suggest that the upregulation of the GDNF pathway in the VTA mediates, at least in part, the desirable actions of ibogaine to reduce voluntary ethanol consumption and relapse.

Ibogaine is metabolized by cytochrom P4502D6 into a major metabolite noribogaine, (12-hydroxyibogamine) (Obach et al., 1998). Interestingly, while ibogaine levels in the plasma rapidly decline, noribogaine levels remain high for at least 24 hrs after oral administration of ibogaine in humans (Mash et al., 1998; Mash et al., 2000; Mash et al., 1995). Similarly, it has been shown in rats that peak blood levels of noribogaine were reported to exceed those of ibogaine, and a small, but significant portion of the administered noribogaine was still detected in the bloodstream 24 hrs after an acute i.p. administration (Baumann et al., 2001). Behavioral studies show that noribogaine acts as an active metabolite (Baumann et al., 2001) and possesses a similar anti-addictive profile as ibogaine (Glick et al., 1996b). For example, systemic administration of noribogaine induces a long-lasting decrease of morphine and cocaine self-administration (Glick et al., 1996b). Importantly, noribogaine does not produce tremors and ataxia (Baumann et al., 2001; Glick et al., 1996b), suggesting that it is not, or less, neurotoxic than its parent compound. Moreover, noribogaine was recently found to be more than two times less toxic than its parent compound in mice (Kubiliene et al., 2008).

18-MC is a synthetic derivative of ibogaine (Glick et al., 1996a). 18-MC shares ibogaine's desirable properties but, interestingly, the derivative lacks some of the adverse effects of ibogaine (Glick et al., 2000). Like ibogaine, 18-MC administration results in a long-lasting decrease in ethanol, morphine, cocaine, methamphetamine and nicotine self-administration, and attenuation of opioid withdrawal symptoms (reviewed in Glick et al., 2000). However, unlike ibogaine, 18-MC does not induce bradycardia, whole body tremor, and cerebellar toxicity in rats, even at high doses (Glick et al., 2000). Moreover, 18-MC is probably not hallucinogenic as it does not affect serotonin levels (Glick et al., 2000).

Because of similarities in structure and anti-addictive actions of ibogaine, noribogaine, and 18-MC, we hypothesized that like ibogaine, the ibogaine derivatives upregulate *GDNF* expression and that their mechanism of action to reduce ethanol self-administration is localized in the VTA. Therefore, we set out to determine whether noribogaine and 18-MC increase *GDNF* expression in SH-SY5Y cells and whether the ibogaine derivatives affect operant ethanol self-administration in rats when infused into the VTA.

## **Methods**

### *Reagents*

Noribogaine hydrochloride was a generous gift from the Addiction Research Institute (Austin, Texas), and 18-MC hydrochloride was obtained from Albany Molecular Research, Inc. (Albany, NY). Ibogaine was purchased from Sigma (St. Louis, MO). Growth medium Dulbecco's modified Eagle's medium (DMEM) and Trizol reagent were purchased from Invitrogen (Carlsbad, CA). The Reverse Transcription System kit was purchased from Promega (Madison, WI).

### *Animals*

Male Long-Evans rats (280-300 g at the beginning at the experiment) obtained from Harlan (Indianapolis, IN) were used. Rats were housed at a 12-hour light/dark cycle, with lights on 7:00 a.m. and food and water available *ad libitum*. All animal procedures in this report were approved by the Gallo Center Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee and were conducted in agreement with the Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals, National Research Council, 1996.

### *Cell culture and drug treatment*

SH-SY5Y human neuroblastoma cells were cultured in the growth medium DMEM containing 10% fetal bovine serum (FBS) plus 1x MEM non-essential amino acid solution. Cells were incubated in a low-serum medium containing 1% FBS for 2 days before experiments. Cells were then treated for 3 hrs with different concentrations of

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ibogaine (5, 10 or 50  $\mu\text{M}$ ), noribogaine (5, 10 or 50  $\mu\text{M}$ ) or 18-MC (10, 20, 50 or 100  $\mu\text{M}$ ) dissolved in the medium. **This time point was chosen since we previously observed that 3 hrs incubation of SH-SY5Y cells with ibogaine or cabergoline was sufficient time to upregulate GDNF pathway (Carnicella et al., 2009b; He et al., 2005).**

#### *Reverse Transcription - Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR)*

Total RNAs were isolated using Trizol reagent and reversely transcribed using a Reverse Transcription System kit at 42°C for 30 min. *GDNF* was analyzed by PCR with temperature cycling parameters consisting of initial denaturation at 94°C for 2 min followed by 35 cycles of denaturation at 94°C for 30 s, annealing at 52°C for 30 s, extension at 72°C for 2 min, and a final incubation at 72°C for 7 min. PCR for *actin*, an internal control, was run with the same temperature cycling parameters for 30 cycles. The primers used in RT-PCR are as follows: human *GDNF*, upstream 5'-TGC CAG AGG ATT ATC CTG ATC AGT TCG ATG-3' and downstream 5'-TTG TCG TAC GTT GTC TCA GCT GCA TCG CAA-3'; human *actin*, upstream 5'-TCA TGA AGT GTG ACG TTG ACA TC-3' and downstream 5'-AGA AGC ATT TGC GGT GGA CGA TG-3'. PCR products were separated on 1.8% agarose gels in Tris/acetic acid/EDTA buffer with 0.25  $\mu\text{g/ml}$  ethidium bromide, photographed by Eagle Eye II (Stratagen, La Jolla, CA) and quantified by NIH Image 1.61.

*Operant ethanol self-administration after a history of high voluntary ethanol consumption*

High levels of voluntary ethanol consumption were obtained in an intermittent access two-bottle choice drinking paradigm to 20% ethanol as previously described (Carnicella et al., 2009b). Briefly, animals were given 24-h concurrent access to one bottle of 20% (v/v) ethanol in tap water and one bottle of water on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, with 24- or 48-h ethanol deprivation periods in between the ethanol-drinking sessions. After achieving a stable baseline of ethanol consumption of ~ 6 g/kg/24 hrs and preference for the 20% ethanol solution over water (see Figure 2A-C), rats were trained to self-administer a 20% ethanol solution in operant self-administration chambers. The chambers contained two levers: an active lever, for which presses result in delivery of 0.1 ml of the ethanol solution, and an inactive lever, for which responses are counted but no programmed events occur. After 2 nights in the chambers to allow acquisition of a lever-press response for ethanol under a fixed ratio 1 (FR1), operant sessions were conducted 5 days per week, with the schedule requirement increased to FR2 and the length of session shortened from 60 to 30 min over the first two weeks. Because the level of presses on the inactive lever was extremely low after acquisition of the self-administration procedure (< 10 presses), and the activity on this lever was not affected by any of the experimental treatments, this measure was excluded from the figures and the analysis for better clarity. After 1 month of training, surgery to implant cannulae was conducted.

#### *Surgery and intra-VTA infusions*

Rats were anesthetized continuously with isoflurane (Baxter Health Care Corporation, Deerfield, IL). Bilateral guide cannulae (C235G-1.5, 26 ga, Plastics One, Roanoke, VA) were aimed dorsal to the VTA (5.6 mm posterior to bregma, 0.75 mm

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mediolateral, 8.0 mm ventral to the skull surface), according to Paxinos and Watson (2007). The coordinates were chosen according to previous studies (Carnicella et al., 2008; He et al., 2005). After 3 to 5 days of recovery, rats returned to self-administration training and intra-VTA infusions began when operant responding returned to a stable baseline. Noribogaine and 18-MC were dissolved in PBS containing 2% DMSO. Three hours before the beginning of the session, 0.8  $\mu$ l of noribogaine (1, 10, 100  $\mu$ M; equivalent to 3, 30, 300 ng/ $\mu$ l), 18-MC (1, 10, 100  $\mu$ M; equivalent to 3.7, 37, 370 ng/ $\mu$ l) or vehicle were infused over 2 min to gently-restrained rats via injection cannula extending 0.5 mm beyond the guide cannula tip. The time point of infusion and concentration were chosen according to He et al. (2005), in which we found that intra-VTA infusion of ibogaine 3 hrs before the beginning of the session decreased ethanol self-administration. The experiment was performed using a within-subject, Latin Square Design, with an interval of at least one week between two infusions, allowing lever responding for ethanol to return to baseline (e.g., at least 3 sessions with similar operant performance as the pre-infusion period) between treatments. This repeated procedure of infusions does not produce significant physical damage in the VTA (Carnicella et al., 2008) and does not affect VTA function. Indeed, baseline operant performance stayed the same throughout the experiment without any adverse effects in response to repeated infusion of the vehicle. Moreover, the efficacy of the agents infused into the VTA to reduce operant ethanol self-administration remained similar throughout the experiment. It should be noted that responding for ethanol in the vehicle group decreased somewhat over the 4 days of self-administration. This effect is due to the fact that rats have access to ethanol five days a week. Therefore, a small deprivation effect is detected at the

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beginning of the week (after two days of ethanol withdrawal) that disappears over the self-administration session. Importantly, we also observe this effect without manipulations, indicating that it is independent of the intra-brain region infusion."

### *Histology*

Locations of cannulae were verified in 60- $\mu$ m coronal sections of paraformaldehyde-fixed tissue stained with thionine. Only data from subjects with cannulae located in the region of interest were included in the analysis (see Figure 2D).

### *Statistical analysis*

Data were analyzed using a one-way or two-way ANOVA with repeated measures, followed by Student-Newman-Keuls test or the method of contrasts (Keppel, 1991) when indicated.

## Results

### Noribogaine, but not 18-MC, is a potent inducer of *GDNF* expression

First, we determined whether exposure of the dopaminergic-like SH-SY5Y cell line to noribogaine or 18-MC results in an increase in the expression of *GDNF*. We, therefore, treated cells for 3 hrs with different concentrations of noribogaine or 18-MC and compared the level of *GDNF* expression to those obtained upon incubation of cells to ibogaine. As shown in Figure 1A and B, noribogaine induced a dose-dependent increase in *GDNF* expression similar to the one observed upon exposure of cells to ibogaine ( $F(3, 12) = 14.64, p < 0.001$  and  $F(3, 20) = 10.39, p < 0.001$ , for ibogaine and noribogaine, respectively). In contrast, incubation of SH-SY5Y cells with 18-MC produced a very small, albeit significant, increase in *GDNF* expression, even at high concentrations (Figure 1C,  $F(4, 34) = 4.02, p < 0.01$ ). Noribogaine and 18-MC were also tested at other time points (0.5 to 6 hrs). Noribogaine increased *GDNF* expression at 1 hr and 6 hrs, however no significant effects were observed when cells were treated with 18-MC (data not shown), indicating that the absence of effect of 18-MC on *GDNF* expression is not due to an issue of the time window of action. These results, therefore, suggest that the ibogaine metabolite, noribogaine, but not its synthetic derivative, 18-MC, is a potent inducer of *GDNF* expression.

### **Intra-VTA infusion of noribogaine, but not 18-MC, reduces operant ethanol self-administration in rats**

Next, we tested whether infusion of noribogaine or 18-MC into the VTA, the site of action of both ibogaine and GDNF (Carnicella et al., 2009b; Carnicella et al., 2008; He et al., 2005), decreases operant ethanol self-administration in rats with a history of high levels of ethanol consumption. Specifically, intermittent access to a 20% ethanol solution in a two-bottle choice drinking paradigm led to an escalation of ethanol consumption (Figure 2A), a progressive decrease in the drinking of the water solution (Figure 2B), and consequently to an increase in preference for the 20% ethanol solution over water (Figure 2C). Rats were then trained to self-administer a 20% ethanol solution in operant self-administration chambers and noribogaine, 18-MC or vehicle was infused into the VTA (Figure 2D) after acquisition of a stable baseline of responding. As shown in Figure 3A and B, noribogaine, but not 18-MC, significantly reduced operant responding for ethanol 3 hrs after the intra-VTA infusion ( $F(3, 36) = 6.72, p < 0.001$  and  $F(3, 36) = 1.23, p = 0.31$ , for noribogaine and 18-MC, respectively), leading to a substantial decrease in ethanol intake only for the rats that received noribogaine ( $F(3, 36) = 7.66, p < 0.001$  and  $F(3, 36) = 1.85, p = 0.16$ , for noribogaine and 18-MC, respectively; Figure 3C and D).

To ensure that the absence of behavioral effects in response to intra-VTA administration of 18-MC was not due to the use of too low of a dose, the dose of 10  $\mu\text{g}/\mu\text{l}$  of 18-MC, which has been shown to efficiently reduce morphine and methamphetamine self-administration when infused into the medial habenula or the interpeduncular nucleus (Glick et al., 2006; Glick et al., 2008), was also tested in the VTA and did not affect operant ethanol self-administration (data not shown).

Interestingly, as shown in Figure 4A and C, noribogaine at a concentration of 10  $\mu$ M produced a decrease in operant ethanol self-administration that was long-lasting and persisted for more than 48 hrs (Treatment,  $F(1, 36) = 10.63, p < 0.01$ , Session,  $F(3, 36) = 2.46, p = 0.08$ , Treatment x Session interaction,  $F(3, 36) = 3.26, p < 0.05$  and Treatment,  $F(1, 36) = 11.26, p < 0.01$ , Session,  $F(3, 36) = 2.18, p = 0.11$ , Treatment x Session interaction,  $F(3, 36) = 3.13, p < 0.05$ , for ethanol deliveries and ethanol intake, respectively). Similar results were obtained with the 100  $\mu$ M concentration of noribogaine (data not shown). In contrast, and consistent with the absence of effect 3 hrs post-infusion, no effect of 18-MC on level of response and intake was observed at any of the test sessions (Figure 4B and D; Treatment,  $F(1, 36) = 0.07, p = 0.80$ , Session,  $F(3, 36) = 2.67, p = 0.06$ , Treatment x Session interaction,  $F(3, 36) = 2.26, p = 0.10$  and Treatment,  $F(1, 36) = 0.01, p = 0.92$ , Session,  $F(3, 36) = 2.32, p = 0.09$ , Treatment x Session interaction,  $F(3, 36) = 1.87, p = 0.15$ , for ethanol deliveries and ethanol intake, respectively). Taken together, these data suggest that the VTA is an important site of action of noribogaine, but not 18-MC, to reduce operant ethanol self-administration.

## Discussion

Here we show that noribogaine, like ibogaine, but not 18-MC, potently increases *GDNF* expression in a dopaminergic-like cell culture model. In addition, we found that administration of noribogaine, but not 18-MC, into the VTA results in a significant and long-lasting decrease in operant self-administration of ethanol.

Different factors can contribute to a decrease in operant performance, including potential suppressant effects of the pharmacological agent, such as sickness, sedation or locomotor deficits. It is, however, unlikely that such factors contribute to the decrease in operant behavior induced by noribogaine as systemic administration of noribogaine does not induce tremor or ataxia (Baumann et al., 2001; Glick et al., 1996b), and does not alter locomotor activity in rats (Baumann et al., 2001). While intra-VTA infusion of noribogaine, and not systemic administration was used in the present study, the present data suggest that noribogaine in the VTA reduces the motivation to self-administer ethanol.

Our results suggest that the ibogaine metabolite noribogaine exhibits similar activities as ibogaine in both increasing the level of *GDNF* and reducing ethanol operant self-administration after infusion of the drug into the VTA, the site of action of both ibogaine (He et al., 2005) and *GDNF* (Carnicella et al., 2008; Carnicella and Ron, 2009). Interestingly, noribogaine is as potent as ibogaine in increasing *GDNF* expression in SH-SY5Y cells and in reducing operant ethanol self-administration (He et al., 2005). Also, like ibogaine, the decrease in ethanol self-administration induced by noribogaine is long-lasting, and although in this study we performed a 72-hr (4 sessions) time course for

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noribogaine and previously we tested only a 48-hr (3 sessions) time course for ibogaine (He et al., 2005), the results for both drugs are likely to be similar.

Ibogaine is metabolized to noribogaine (Obach et al., 1998) and the levels of noribogaine were reported to remain high for a prolonged period of time following oral administration of ibogaine in humans (Mash et al., 1998; Mash et al., 2000; Mash et al., 1995). In rats, however, in which metabolism of drugs in the liver and in the brain is generally much faster (Smith, 1991; Woodland et al., 2008), only a small fraction of the noribogaine injected systemically is detected 24 hrs after the administration (Baumann et al., 2001). Therefore, it seems unlikely that the decrease in operant ethanol self-administration observed 24 hrs or more after the infusion results from a persistent level of noribogaine in the brain. However, this possibility cannot be excluded. We previously showed that ibogaine blocks or reverses biochemical and behavioral adaptations obtained in response to exposure of SH-SY5Y cells and rodents to ethanol via GDNF (He et al., 2005; He and Ron, 2008). We also obtained evidence to suggest that the long-lasting increase in *GDNF* expression induced by ibogaine is due to the induction of a positive autoregulatory loop in which GDNF increases its own expression (He and Ron, 2006). As GDNF in the VTA has been shown to be a potent inhibitor of ethanol-drinking and -seeking behaviors (Carnicella et al., 2009b; Carnicella et al., 2008), these data strongly suggest that the long-term action of noribogaine on operant ethanol self-administration, as with ibogaine, is mediated by GDNF via the activation of the same positive feedback loop.

In contrast, we did not observe a significant increase in *GDNF* expression upon treatment of cells with the synthetic derivative of ibogaine, 18-MC. In line with these

results, infusion of 18-MC into the VTA did not lead to a reduction of operant self-administration of ethanol, even at high concentrations. Interestingly, systemic administration of 18-MC in selectively bred alcohol-preferring rats was found to dose-dependently decrease ethanol intake and preference in a two-bottle choice paradigm (Rezvani et al., 1997). These results thus suggest that the site of action of 18-MC is not the VTA, and that this synthetic derivative of ibogaine does not mediate its actions on ethanol consumption via the upregulation of the GDNF pathway. 18-MC has been reported to act as an antagonist of nicotinic  $\alpha3\beta4$  receptors (Glick et al., 2002b; Maisonneuve and Glick, 2003). Indeed, low dose combinations of 18-MC with other pharmacological agents that antagonize the nicotinic  $\alpha3\beta4$  acetylcholine receptors (mecamylamine, dextromethorphan or burpropion), decrease morphine, methamphetamine, and nicotine self-administration at doses that were ineffective when administered alone (Glick et al., 2002a; Glick et al., 2002b). Moreover, 18-MC reduces morphine and methamphetamine self-administration after infusion into the medial habenula or interpeduncular nucleus (Glick et al., 2006; Glick et al., 2008), two diencephalon structures with a high level of nicotinic  $\alpha3\beta4$  receptors (Perry et al., 2002; Quick et al., 1999) that are known to influence the activity of the mesocorticolimbic system (e.g., Jhou et al., 2009; Nishikawa et al., 1986). In contrast, and in line with the present data, 18-MC is not effective in decreasing morphine and methamphetamine self-administration when infused into the VTA (Glick et al., 2006; Glick et al., 2008), in which the expression of the nicotinic  $\alpha3\beta4$  is low (Klink et al., 2001; Perry et al., 2002). Therefore, while the two ibogaine congeners noribogaine and 18-MC reduce drug self-administration when administered systemically, our data suggest that their site and

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mechanism of action are different. Like 18-MC, ibogaine is a potent antagonist of the nicotinic  $\alpha 3\beta 4$  receptors (Glick et al., 2002b). However, ibogaine also has a plethora of mechanisms of action in the brain, and it is proposed that this variety of effects accounts for its anti-addictive properties (Glick and Maisonneuve, 1998; Sweetnam et al., 1995). It is, therefore, likely that both the effects of ibogaine on *GDNF* expression in the VTA, as well as its antagonist activity at the nicotinic  $\alpha 3\beta 4$  receptors, are likely to contribute significantly to its anti-addictive activities.

As described in the introduction, ibogaine's side effects preclude its use as a medication. Noribogaine, as suggested by the present study and others (e.g., Glick et al., 1996b), shares the same desirable long-lasting actions and anti-addictive mechanisms as ibogaine. Importantly, however, noribogaine is safer than its parent compound and, for example, has no tremorigenic effects (Baumann et al., 2001; Glick et al., 1996b). As such, noribogaine may be considered to have a greater therapeutic profile than ibogaine. The present data also suggest that the effects of noribogaine on *GDNF* expression greatly contribute to its potential anti-addictive profile. We recently showed that another molecule, cabergoline, reduces ethanol consumption and relapse in rodent preclinical models by the upregulation of the *GDNF* pathway in the VTA (Carnicella et al., 2009a). Together, these results put forward the use of *GDNF* inducers as a valuable strategy to combat alcohol use and abuse disorders.

In summary, the present data strongly suggest that activation of the *GDNF* pathway in the VTA is a mechanism of action of noribogaine, but not 18-MC, to reduce ethanol **taking**. Taken with other studies, it emphasizes an important role of the *GDNF* pathway within the VTA to modulate ethanol-drinking behaviors. Understanding how

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ibogaine derivatives decrease drug intake and delineating the different signaling events mediating the anti-addictive properties of ibogaine derivatives may lead to the development of a new generation of drugs to treat addiction.

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### **Authors' contribution**

SC and DR designed research. SC, DYH and QVY performed research. SC, DYH and DR assisted with data analysis and interpretation of findings. SC and DR wrote the manuscript and SDG provided material consultation and discussion. All authors critically reviewed content and approved final version for publication.

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## Figure legends

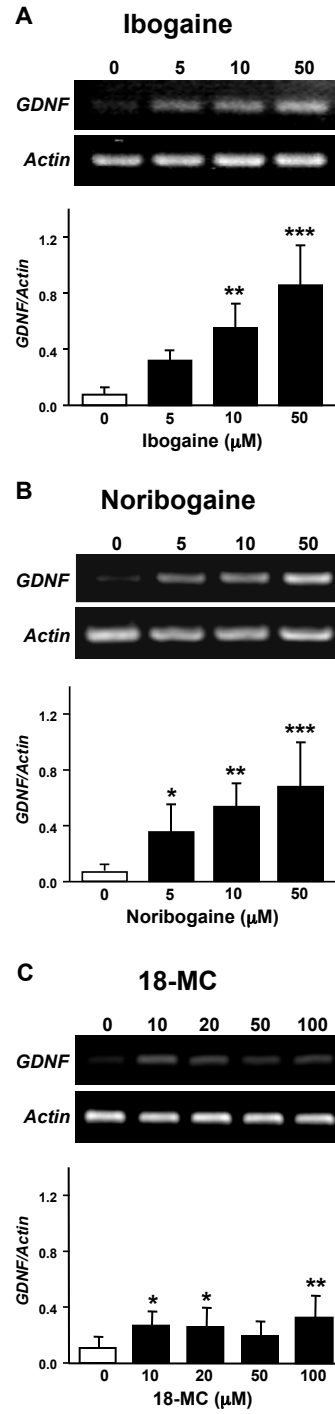
**Figure 1. Ibogaine and noribogaine, but not 18-MC, dose-dependently increase GDNF expression in the dopaminergic-like SH-SY5Y cell line.** SH-SY5Y cells were treated for 3 hrs with ibogaine (5, 10 or 50  $\mu\text{M}$ ; **A**), noribogaine (5, 10 or 50  $\mu\text{M}$ ; **B**) or 18-MC (10, 20, 50 or 100  $\mu\text{M}$ ; **C**), and *GDNF* expression was analyzed by RT-PCR. Data are expressed as mean  $\pm$  SD of the *GDNF/Actin* ratios.  $n = 6-8$ .  $*p < 0.05$ ,  $**p < 0.01$ ,  $***p < 0.001$  compared with control.

**Figure 2. Escalation of ethanol intake and preference in an intermittent access two-bottle choice paradigm and representation of the cannulae placement.** **A-C**, Mean  $\pm$  standard error of the mean (SEM) of ethanol (**A**), water (**B**) intake and ethanol preference (**C**) during acquisition of voluntary consumption of a 20% ethanol solution. **D**, Schematic representation of the cannulae placement on coronal section (Paxinos and Watson, 2007). The location of the injector tips is represented by *gray circles*. Numbers on the left side indicate the distance posterior to bregma in millimeters.  $n = 13$ .

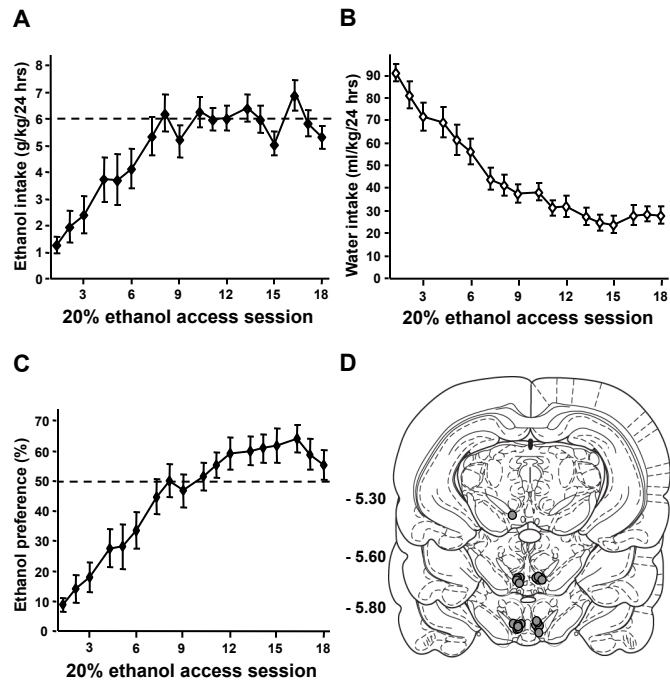
**Figure 3. Intra-VTA infusion of noribogaine, but not 18-MC, decreases operant ethanol self-administration in rats.** Rats were infused into the VTA with noribogaine (1, 10 or 100  $\mu\text{M}$ ), 18-MC (1, 10 or 100  $\mu\text{M}$ ) or vehicle 3 hrs before the beginning of the test session. **A&B**, Mean  $\pm$  SEM of the number of ethanol deliveries for noribogaine (**A**) and 18-MC (**B**). **C&D**, Mean  $\pm$  SEM of the ethanol intake for noribogaine (**C**) and 18-MC (**D**).  $n = 13$ .  $**p < 0.01$ ,  $***p < 0.001$ .

**Figure 4. Intra-VTA infusion of noribogaine, but not 18-MC, induces a long-lasting decrease in operant ethanol self-administration in rats.** Noribogaine or 18-MC (10  $\mu$ M) was infused into the VTA and operant ethanol self-administration was monitored over 4 consecutive sessions. The same subjects as in Figure 2 were tested 24 hrs (session 2), 48 hrs (session 3) and 72 hrs (session 4) after the intra-VTA infusion of the drugs. Session 1 recapitulates the results obtained 3 hrs after the infusion and represented in Figure 2. **A&B**, Mean  $\pm$  SEM of the number of ethanol deliveries for noribogaine (**A**) and 18-MC (**B**). **C&D**, Mean  $\pm$  SEM of the ethanol intake for noribogaine (**C**) and 18-MC (**D**).  $n = 13$ . \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

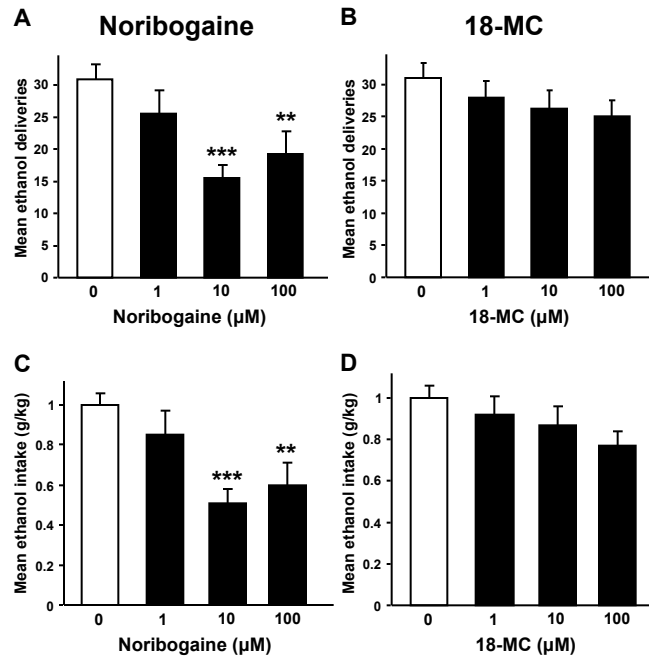
Carnicella et al., Figure 1



Carnicella et al., Figure 2



Carnicella et al., Figure 3



Carnicella et al., Figure 4

