

RAGE as a Potential Therapeutic Target for Alzheimer's disease

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Abstract:

Alzheimer's disease (AD) is a chronic neurodegenerative disease which accounts for 60–70% cases of dementia. Worldwide, around 50 million people are affected by dementia and every year nearly 10 million new cases are being reported. Major cause of AD is abnormal accumulation of amyloid beta in the brain cells which in turn forms neurofibrillary tangles that leads to failure of synaptic transmission and neuronal degeneration. Deposition of amyloid beta is governed by various factors in which Receptor for advanced glycation end products (RAGE) plays a critical role in pathogenesis of AD. RAGE is a key pattern recognition receptor of the innate immune response and mediates diverse physiological and pathological effects through cellular signaling pathways leading to inflammatory reactions. In this context, the potential role of RAGE in cognitive impairment and as therapeutic target for AD is an interesting topic to review. In this essence, the contents emphasis on RAGE and its isoforms in human, pattern recognition of RAGE for diverse ligands, role of RAGE in AD through RAGE and amyloid beta interaction, involvement of RAGE activated signaling pathways in neuro-inflammation, role of sRAGE in Amyloid beta clearance, sRAGE as therapeutics for AD and development of RAGE inhibitors. This chapter overviews RAGE as potential therapeutic targets for Alzheimer's disease.

Keywords: Dementia, Alzheimer's disease, Cognitive impairment, RAGE, Amyloid Beta, Neurodegeneration, Drug development

INTRODUCTION

Dementia is a root for progressive cognitive decline and is caused by various disease conditions such as Alzheimer's disease (AD), Huntington's disease and multiple sclerosis etc. Dementia patients are facing vulnerable conditions in terms of physical and mental health which presents a serious challenge to the healthcare systems and requires early diagnosis and therapy. The incidence of dementia is mostly observed in aging populations over 65 years old. Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause for AD (50-75%). The pattern of symptoms and biomarkers helps to identify Alzheimer's disease. AD generates short-term memory decline, manifestation and repetitive questioning state in patients. Dementia affects essential functions which are memory function, executive ability, language ability, visuospatial ability, and personality and behavior conditions. The association of dementia with pathophysiological conditions observed in normal aging complicates the early identification and leads to overt cognitive decline which give rise to functional impairment. The biomarkers accustomed to AD are extracellular accumulated amyloid beta and intracellular tangles of hyperphosphorylated tau and affect synaptic function that leads to neuronal signal loss. Hippocampal atrophy in the medial temporal lobe also causes early symptoms in AD. The Receptor for Advanced Glycation Endproducts (RAGE) is a multi-ligand pattern recognition receptor that plays an important role in AD pathology. During aging oxidative stress increases in brain cells which lead to the formation of AGEs (Advanced glycation end-products) around the brain cells. This AGE in turn activates

RAGE which leads to influx of A β from the blood to brain and causes subsequent inflammatory reactions. Amyloid peptides also bind to RAGE which is further eliciting an inflammatory response through the NF- κ B (Nuclear factor kappa B) pathways. Therefore, RAGE plays a major role in AD pathology [1,2,3].

FUNCTIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF RAGE IN ADD

RAGE is a multi-ligand receptor which belongs to the Immunoglobulin superfamily having a molecular weight of 35kDa and RAGE gene is located in chromosome 6. The full-length RAGE consists of V domain with 23-116 amino acid residues, C1 domain with 124-221 amino acid residues, C2 domain with 227-317 amino acid residues, transmembrane region with 343-363 amino acid residues and the cytoplasmic tail domain with 363-404 amino acid residues [4,5,6,7]. The V and C2 domains are composed of 8 strands linked through 6 loops forming 2 β sheets attached by disulfide bonds respectively whereas the C2 domain folds as C-type immunoglobulin domain. The transmembrane domain contains the "GxxxG" motif which is essential for homodimerization of receptor and signal transduction [8,9]. The cytoplasmic tail has 3 units such as membrane proximal domain (17 amino acids), central domain (17 amino acids) and unstructured C terminus [10]. These structural units are essential for mediating the interaction between RAGE and effector molecules. RAGE binds with a diverse range of ligands relevant to distinct pathological conditions such as AD, cardiovascular disease and cancer. Binding of RAGE ligands mediates cellular signal

transduction pathways namely MAPK (mitogen-activated protein kinase), NF- κ B etc. RAGE expression is exhibited in various locations such as cerebral endothelial cells, astrocytes, neurons of the hippocampus, entorhinal cortex, and superior frontal gyrus. The escalation level of RAGE at the Blood Brain Barrier (BBB) leads to influx of A β into the brain. At the same time, in neurons it increases the activity of the A β producing β -secretase enzyme (BACE1), which in turn induces A β accumulation, tau hyperphosphorylation and neuroinflammation. Accumulation of A β_{1-40} and A β_{1-42} resulting in RAGE-mediated apoptosis in neurons [11,12,13]. Multiple isoforms of RAGE generated as a result of alternative splice variants of RAGE gene and proteolytic cleavage of f-RAGE. These isoforms exhibit responsibility for a variety of pathophysiological processes depending on the interaction of ligands. Eventually, all the isoforms exhibit similar affinity towards RAGE ligands. In order to understand the RAGE mediated signaling pathways, it is essential to understand the interaction and function of isoforms. Majorly, three isoforms of RAGE represented as a key player in mediating signaling pathways which are full-length RAGE (fRAGE), soluble RAGE (sRAGE) and Dominant Negative RAGE (DNRAGE). Aside from these three predominant types of RAGE, other forms of RAGE are also reported in the human brain which is RAGEB (intracellular modified RAGE), sRAGEB (C domain modified sRAGE), DNRAGEB (C domain modified DNRAGE) and NRAGE (N truncated RAGE). Elucidating the role of these isoforms helps to understand the functional perspective of signaling pathways in neuronal disorders (figure 1) [2,14,15,16].

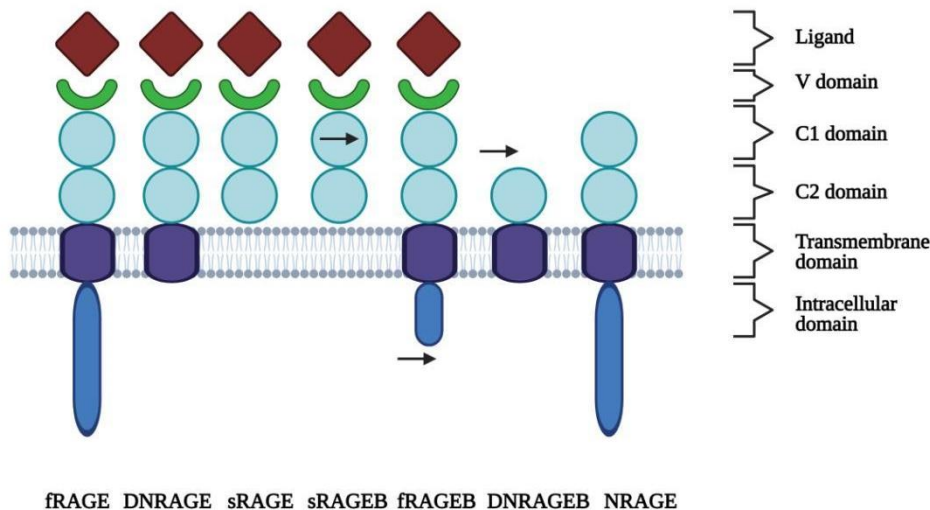


Figure 1: Structure and Isoforms of RAGE. Arrow mark indicates modifications in the domain (Created with BioRender.com)

Full-length RAGE (fRAGE)

Full-length RAGE is a direct mediator of pathophysiological pathways such as chemotaxis, apoptosis, proliferation and

inflammation. fRAGE consists of V domain, C1 and C2 domain, transmembrane domain followed by intracellular cytoplasmic tail domain. The intracellular cytoplasmic domain is essential for activating various signaling pathways such as NF- κ B, MAPK etc [17,18,19,20]. Presence of fRAGE induces more accelerated and sustained signaling pathways than the other forms of RAGE. Since, DNRAGE and sRAGE are involved in decaying the binding of ligands towards fRAGE presumably involved in suppressing the effect of fRAGE mediating signaling. Therefore, sRAGE and DNRAGE gained an important role in study of inhibitors in various chronic neuronal diseases. Additionally, interaction of ligands with RAGE generates reactive oxidative species (ROS) which regulate the intracellular signaling pathways [21,22]. RAGE-ligand interactions had shown cell specific effects. Therefore, the signal transduction pathway activation is solely dependent on the specific cell type.

Soluble RAGE (sRAGE)

sRAGE consists of V domain, C1 and C2 domain similar to fRAGE but lacks transmembrane and cytoplasmic tail domain leading to release of sRAGE into the extracellular space. And also, there is a subtype of sRAGE that exists which are esRAGE and cRAGE. The sRAGE is generated from the pre-mRNA by alternative splicing is known as endogenous secretory RAGE (esRAGE) and the one which formed from the cleavage of extracellular domain of RAGE is known as cleaved RAGE (cRAGE) [2,14]. The sRAGE is a key player in decaying fRAGE mediated signaling pathways because sRAGE binds to the RAGE ligands prior to the fRAGE [1,23]. When sRAGE binds with early monomeric or soluble ligands, it further prevents the formation of insoluble complexes. Therefore, sRAGE amends the formation of insoluble aggregates of ligands and thereby prevents the efficacious activation of fRAGE signaling pathway [2,24,25,26].

Dominant Negative RAGE (DNRAGE)

DNRAGE has a similar V type and C type domain as fRAGE but lacks an intracellular cytoplasmic tail domain. DNRAGE competes with fRAGE for binding with ligands to block the fRAGE mediating signal transduction due to lack of intracellular cytoplasmic tail domain. DNRAGE interaction with ligands prevents the initial binding of fRAGE with ligands. At the same time, accumulation of ligands on the surface of the cells further activates influx of more ligands which in turn causes aggregation of ligands and oxidative stress that promotes fRAGE activation [25,27].

Structural feature of RAGE for diverse ligands

RAGE interacted with a diverse variety of ligands with different size and symmetry. The rationale behind the multi-ligand recognition property of RAGE elucidated by negatively charged VC1 domain and ligand-driven multimodal dimerization [4,5]. Since RAGE interacted with acidic ligands and oligomerization had provided high stability between RAGE and ligand interaction. The basic (positive charge) nature of the V domain is provided by the presence of highly conserved Arginine and Lysine residues. At the same time, the C2 domain composed of large negative charge mediates the efficient

binding of ligands on VC1 domain by repelling the negatively charged ligands towards VC1 domain. Therefore, the conserved basic cavity exhibited by the RAGE receptor is essential for recognizing multi diverse ligands [4,5,8,35].

ROLE OF RAGE LIGANDS IN AD

Studies have been reported that RAGE is a multi-ligand receptor which binds with variety of ligands mainly advanced glycation end products (AGE), A β , HMGB1 (High mobility group box), S100 proteins (S100A12, S100B, S100A7, S100A8/A9 complex), Mac-1 (Macrophage-1 antigen) and Phosphatidylserine [28,29,30].

AGE are the forms of modified proteins that are subjected to glycation and progressively involved in various modifications that in turn result in formation of insoluble cross links. Various types of AGE is reported such as Carboxymethyl-lysine (CML), Carboxyethyl-lysine (CEL), Pentosidine, glyoxal-lysine dimer (GOLD) and methylglyoxal-lysine dimer (MOLD). The rate of formation of AGE is altered by various environmental factors. Accumulation of AGE in intracellular and extracellular space recruits various neuronal related disorders. During aging, oxidative stress is elevated in brain cells which lead to the formation of AGE. This AGE in turn activates RAGE which mediates influx of A β from the blood to the brain and causes subsequent inflammatory reactions. RAGE-A β interactions induce NF- κ B inflammatory response through signaling pathways [31,32,33,34].

AGEs are mostly located in pyramidal neurons. It is evident that AGEs concentration had increased in pyramidal neurons of the AD patients. As AD progress, the elevated level of AGE positive neurons leads to hyperphosphorylation of tau protein which finally causes neurofibrillary tangles (NFTs) and senile plaques [38,39]. AGEs-RAGE interaction leads to dephosphorylation of the Nuclear factor activated T-cells (NFAT-1) elevated a BACE1 expression. NFAT-1 is a crucial controller of BACE1 expression which in turn regulates the APP processing [40,41]. Regulation of detoxifying mechanisms such as Glyoxalase 1 (GLO1) detoxifying pre-AGEs methylglyoxal (MG) is prominent activity to mitigate the AD pathogenesis. But essential enzyme cofactor glutathione depletion in AD patients down regulates the GLO1-AGE detoxifying system, thus mediating the elevated production AGEs [42,43,44,45].

RAGE AND AMYLOID PATHOLOGY

Amyloid Beta (A β) is a crucial player in mediating pathogenesis of AD. A β is toxic to neuronal cells which has the ability to generate reactive oxygen species and causes accumulation of lipid peroxides and hydrogen peroxides. It is a potent inducer of the transcription factor NF- κ B in primary neurons and astrocytes. Chemotactic nature of A β causes migration of microglia which leads to an increased accumulation of microglial cells surrounding the amyloid plaques. Both the monomeric and complex forms of A β interact

with sRAGE. Finally, A β interaction potentiates the secretion of the cytokines Interleukin (IL)-6, IL-8 and IL-1 β -activated human astrocytoma cells and leads to neuronal damage [4,5,32].

Failure in the RAGE receptor function tends to imbalance the production and clearance of A β peptides inside the brain. RAGE is a key player in generating neurotoxicity. RAGE interaction with A β oligomers activates proinflammatory responses, ROS activation which causes amyloid pathological change followed by neuronal cell death (figure 2) [36,37].

RAGE is a critical player in AD as follows; i) RAGE increase the formation of A β and neurofibrillary tubes (tau hyperphosphorylation). ii) Activates microglia and astrocytes into inflammatory states which tend to develop cellular stress. iii) Enhanced neurodegeneration leads to cognitive impairment. iv) This process continues as a cyclic process and leads to progression of AD [46,47,48,49,50,51,52].

RAGE and A β clearance

RAGE is a transporter responsible for mediating influx of A β inside the brain whereas efflux of A β is controlled by LRP-1 and P-glycoprotein transporters. It has been demonstrated that AD affected brain samples had shown elevated expression of RAGE receptors and decreased level of LRP1 receptors [37]. Up-regulation of RAGE and downregulation of LRP1 receptors leads to re-entry of circulating A β peptides into the brain. Further activation of β and γ secretases in turn leads to A β generation [36]. It is evident that A β accumulation distorts the BBB junction via Ca²⁺/calcineurin pathway [53,54,55]. Abundant RAGE-A β interaction drives the RAGE-

DIAPH1 signaling pathway which is a prominent mediator for activating inflammation and cellular dysfunction [42,56].

Role of oxidative stress in AD

Interaction of RAGE-AGEs tends to elevate through levels of ROS which affects various antioxidant defense systems such as superoxide dismutase, catalase and glutathione related enzymes and also activates protein kinase C [57]. The presence of metal ions along with the AGEs initiates the generation of ROS that affects the cellular processes. Peptidyl radicals and nitroxyl radicals are sources for oxidative stress [58,59].

RAGE: Signaling pathways in AD pathology

Neuronal inflammation is a major reason for enhanced generation of A β and hyperphosphorylation of tau protein. Interaction of RAGE and A β induces various cellular signaling pathways [60]. RAGE-A β mediates the activation of CaMKK β -AMPK (Ca²⁺/calmodulin dependent protein kinase kinase-beta- AMP-activated protein kinase) signaling pathway which causes chronic neuroinflammation, oxidative stress and tau hyperphosphorylation[51,61]as represented in figure 2. Phosphorylation of ERK1/2 (extracellular signal regulated kinase 1/2) enhances binding of A β and increased levels of tau kinases [62,63,64]. RAGE mediated GSK-3 (Glycogen synthase kinase 3) signaling pathway induces the hyperphosphorylation of tau protein [11,45,65]. RAGE mediated NF- κ B signaling pathway induces the release of cytokines which leads to oxidative stress and inflammation[66,67,68].

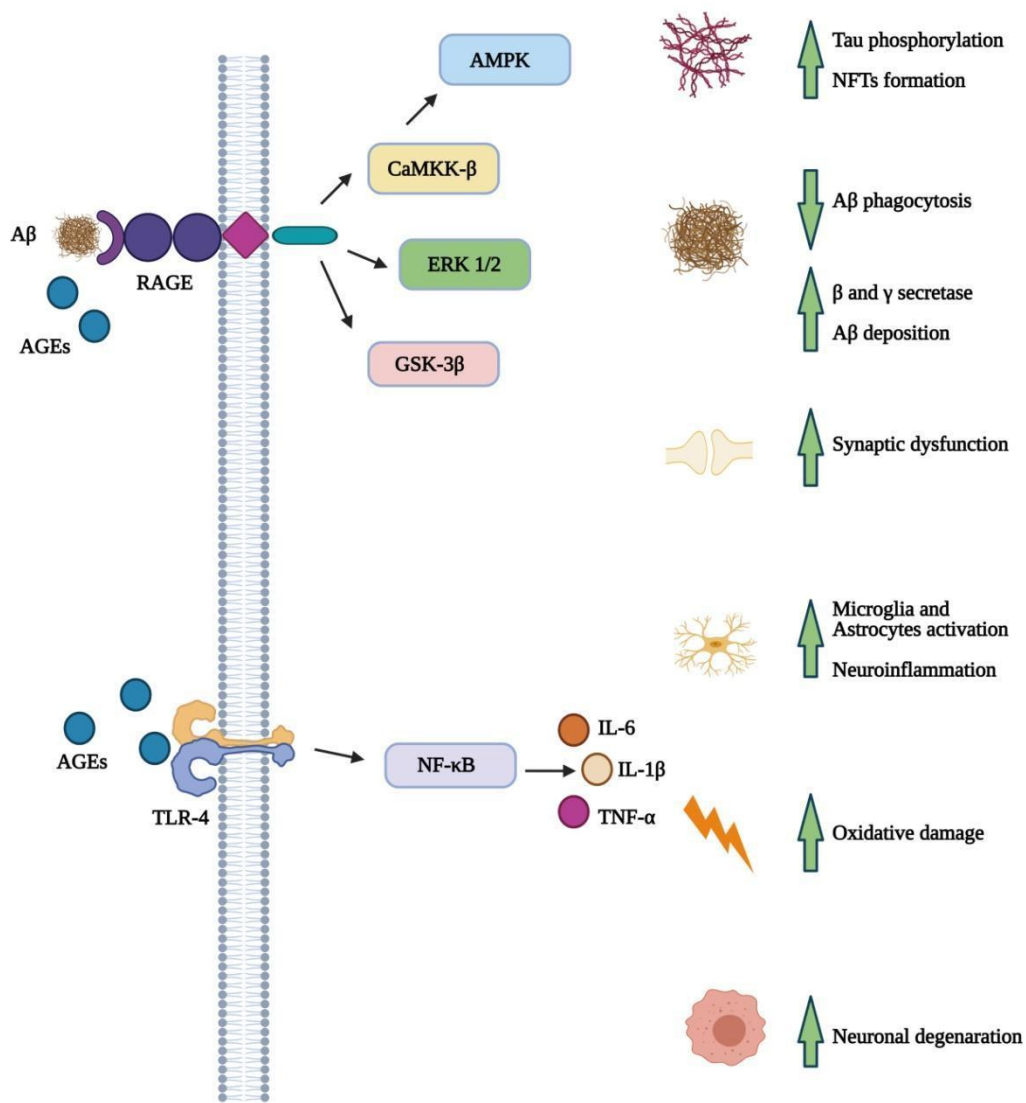


Figure 2: Pathological process in AD mediated by RAGE-A β interaction (Created with BioRender.com).

Interaction between sRAGE and A β

sRAGE had an inhibitory effect on fRAGE signaling pathways. Elevated aggregation of A β leads to formation of highly cross linked complex structures. It is evident that fRAGE mostly binds with highly cross-linked structures than the monomeric A β . Therefore, when sRAGE binds with the earliest stage of A β prior to the membrane bound RAGE, prevents the fRAGE activation and RAGE ligand generation [24] which is represented in figure 3. Studies also reported that administration

of sRAGE into the circulatory system increases peripheral nerve regeneration, prevents the A β crossing from blood and reduces the binding of AGEs to the endothelial cell surface [73,74,75]. Additionally, most of the sRAGE is generated by ADAM10 (A disintegrin and metalloproteinase 10) sheddase and polymorphism in ADAM10 might be responsible for lower concentration of sRAGE which leads to the progression of AD [76,77,78,79,80].

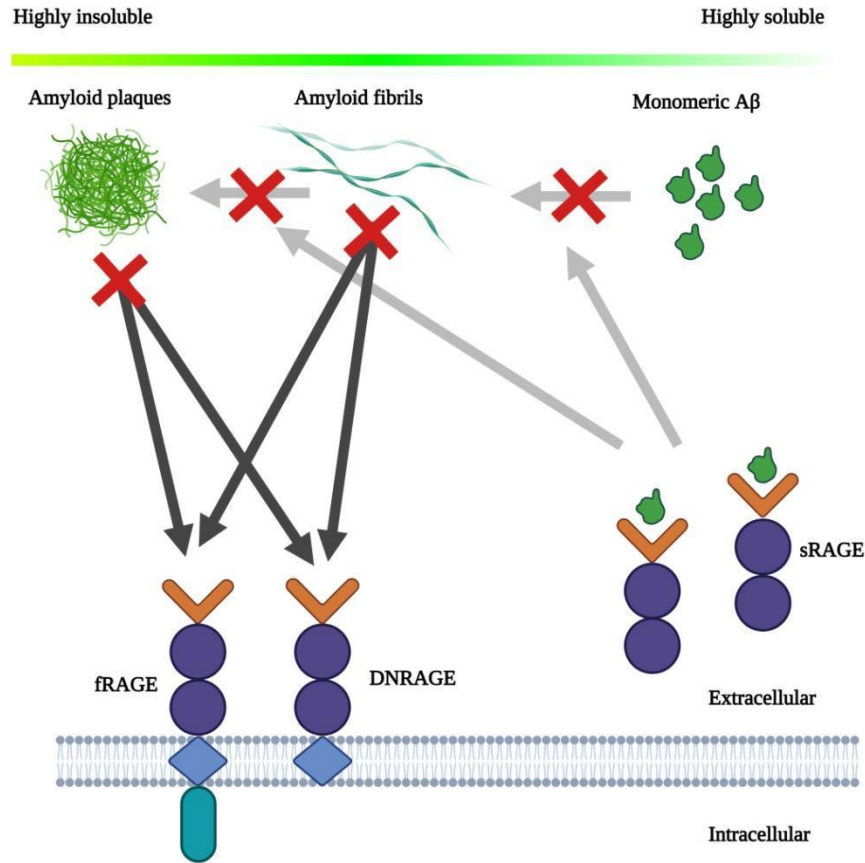


Figure 3: sRAGE as therapeutics for Aβ clearance in AD. Binding of sRAGE with monomeric Aβ prevents the formation of complex Aβ structures thereby preventing fRAGE interaction and proinflammatory signaling pathways. (Created with BioRender.com)

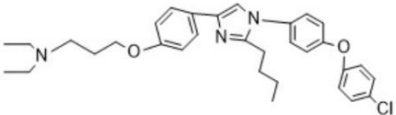
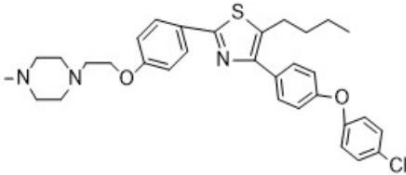
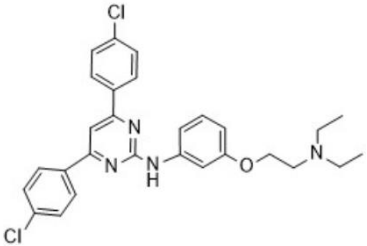
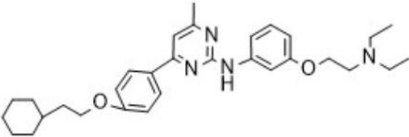
DEVELOPMENT OF RAGE INHIBITORS

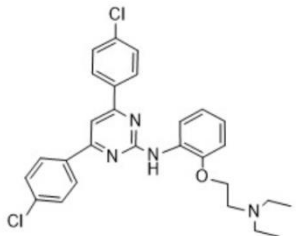
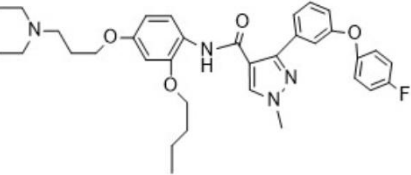
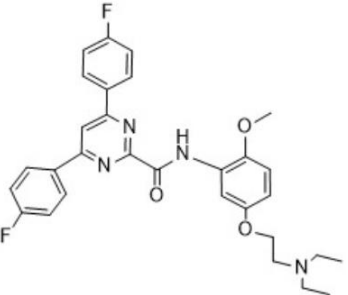
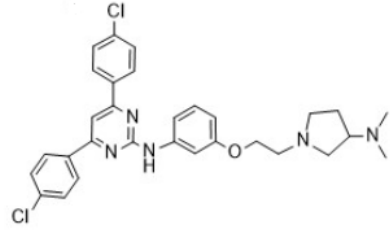
Existing knowledge on the mechanism of RAGE-Aβ interaction in AD pathology paves way for development of RAGE antagonists for AD treatment. Various strategies have been developed for blocking the RAGE-Aβ interaction such as synthetic RAGE analogs and RAGE antibodies to decay the RAGE mediated inflammatory response [81]. Studies had proven that administration of anti-RAGE antibodies hampered the inflammatory signaling pathways leading to reduction in the cytokine expression and interruption in the RAGE up-regulation. Anti-RAGE antibodies also prevent the Aβ mediated monocyte infiltration which induce pro-inflammatory responses and cause neurotoxicity in AD. Even though anti-RAGE antibodies seem to be beneficial, its permeability through blood brain barrier is still implausible [82, 83]. Hence,

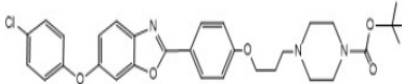
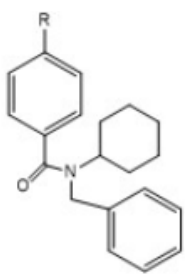
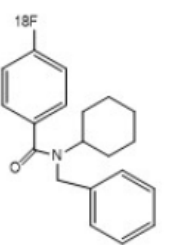
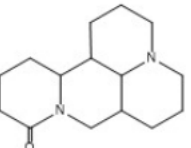
the development of synthetic RAGE inhibitors gained attractiveness.

In the recent years, various synthetic RAGE inhibitors are developed in rapid pace such as 2-aminopyrimidine series of inhibitors, pyrazole-5-carboximide series of inhibitors, 6-phenoxy-2-phenylbenzoxazole series of inhibitors, FPS-ZM1, [¹⁸F] RAGER and Matrine. The details of synthetic RAGE inhibitors are given in table 1.

Table 1: Development of Synthetic inhibitors for RAGE

Inhibitor classification	Inhibitor	Inhibitor name	Inhibitor structure	RAGE inhibitory activity	Model system and method used for RAGE-drug interaction	Therapeutic Effects	References
2-aminopyrimidines analog series	1	PF-04494700 or TTP488 (3-[4-[2-butyl-1-[4-(4-chlorophenoxy)phenyl]imidazol-4yl]phenoxy]-N,N-diethylpropan-1-amine)		$K_d = 500$ nM	Phase III clinical trial Participants with mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease Fluorescent polarization with sRAGE Mouse model of systemic amyloidosis	Inhibition of RAGE-A β interaction Reduction of inflammatory markers Cognitive function improvement	84,85,86,87
	2	2,4-phenyl-substituted thiazole derivatives of 2 aminopyrimidines		$IC_{50} = 1.21$ μ M	Structure-Activity relationship study (SAR)	Inhibition of A β influx through BBB Downregulation of NF- κ B Blocking RAGE-A β interaction	88
	3	4,6-Bis(4-chlorophenyl)-N-(3-(2-(diethylamino)ethoxy)phenyl)pyrimidin-2-amine		$K_d = 102$ μ M $IC_{50} = 16.4$ μ M	Acute model study- mice model Surface plasmon Resonance (SPR) using human RAGE	Inhibition of A β BBB entry Downregulation of NF- κ B activation Improvement of cognitive function Inhibition of A β accumulation	89,90
	4	4-(4-(2-Cyclohexylethoxy)phenyl)-N-(3-(2-(diethylamino)ethoxy)-phenyl)-6-methylpyrimidin-2-amine		Percent inhibition = 49.6 ± 4.4	Acute animal model study- mice model	Inhibition of A β -RAGE binding Blocking of A β entry into BBB Downregulation of NF- κ B of activation	89

	5	4,6-Bis(4-chlorophenyl)-N-(2-(2-(diethylamino)ethoxy) phenyl)-pyrimidin-2-amine		$IC_{50} = 4.6 \mu M$	Acute animal model study- mice model SPR using human RAGE	Inhibition of $A\beta$ accumulation Inhibition of $A\beta$ entry into BBB Downregulation of NF- κB activation	89
Pyrazole-5-carboximide analog series	6	N-(2-butoxy-4-(3-(diethylamino)propoxy) phenyl)-3-(4-(4-fluorophenoxy) phenyl)-1-methyl-1H-pyrazole-5-carboxamide)		$K_d = 43.4 \mu M$ $IC_{50} = 1.9 \mu M$	SAR study mice model study SPR analysis	Inhibition of $A\beta$ -RAGE binding Inhibition of $A\beta$ entry into BBB	89,90
	7	N-(2-(2-(Diethylamino)ethoxy)-5-methoxyphenyl)-4,6-bis(4-fluorophenyl)pyrimidine-2-carboxamide)		-	ELISA on human RAGE- $A\beta_{1-42}$	Inhibition of $A\beta$ -RAGE binding Improved hydrophilicity and reduced cytotoxicity	90
	8	4,6-Bis(4-chlorophenyl)-N-(3-(2-(3(dimethylamino)pyrrolidin-1-yl)ethoxy) phenyl)pyrimidin-2-amine)		-	Molecular docking study ELISA on human RAGE- $A\beta_{1-42}$	Inhibition of $A\beta$ -RAGE binding Improved analog binding efficiency	92

6-phenoxy-2-phenylbenzoxazole analog series	9	4-(3-{4-[6-(4-Chlorophenoxy)-benzoxazol-2-yl]-phenoxy}-propyl)-piperazine-1-carboxylic acid tert-butyl ester)		40% inhibition at 4 μ M	AD mice model study Fluorescence resonance energy transfer (FRET) assay	Blocks A β transport across the BBB Reduction of amyloid deposition Analogues are protective against cytotoxicity	93
	10	FPS-ZM1 (N-Benzyl-N-cyclohexyl-4-chlorobenzamide)		K _i for A β ₁₋₄₀ = 25 nM	Rat model study ELISA on human RAGE- A β ₁₋₄₂ RAGE- A β ₁₋₄₀	Up-regulated antioxidant defense system Down-regulated AGE-mediated pro-inflammatory cytokines Reduced A β ₁₋₄₀ and A β ₁₋₄₂ production and oxidative stress Improved cognitive function	94,95
	11	[¹⁸ F] RAGER		K _d = 15 nM	Molecular docking study Autoradiography	Inhibition of A β -RAGE binding	96
	12	Matrine		K _d = 24 mM	AD mice model study ELISA on human RAGE- A β ₁₋₄₂	Inhibits the A β ₄₂ -induced cytotoxicity Inhibition of aggregation of A β ₄₂ Suppressed the A β /RAGE signaling pathway, proinflammatory cytokines and plaque formation Improved cognitive function	97

2-aminopyrimidines series of inhibitors are derived from one of the RAGE ligand called argpyrimidine-1 which is served as a template for the design of inhibitor. This argpyrimidine 1 has two essential moieties which are pyrimidine moiety and amino acid moiety (two parts – linker part and terminal polar part). The modification in these two moieties gave rise to a new class of aminopyrimidines of the RAGE antagonists (Inhibitor 1-5). These classes of inhibitors had pharmacophore composed of two aromatic groups, a pyrimidine central core and alkyl chain having protonable nitrogen [84-89]. Pyrazole-5-carboximide series of inhibitors are designed by introduction of electronegative substituent and modification of ethoxy moiety (Inhibitor 6-8) [90-92]. 6-phenoxy-2-phenylbenzoxazole series of inhibitors have three parts such as 6-phenoxy region, 2-phenyl benzoxazole core and amino alkoxy region. In the 6-phenoxy-2-phenylbenzoxazole class of inhibitors compounds with a (4-(alkoxycarbonyl) piperazin-1-yl) alkyloxy side chain had shown significant inhibition towards the RAGE–A β interactions [93]. [¹⁸F] RAGER is a first small molecule radiotracer which accumulates in areas of RAGE expression [96]. Matrine (Mat) is derived from *Sophora flavescens* Ait, a chinese herb medicine used to treat dementia. Matrine could inhibit A β 42-induced cytotoxicity by preventing the A β 42 aggregation and reducing the A β -RAGE signaling pathway [97]. Even though various RAGE inhibitor synthetic small molecules are under trial, it could not interact with larger surface areas of the protein interface to block the protein-protein interactions. Thereupon, peptides as an inhibitor gained essential attractiveness in therapeutics due to its advantages over small molecule antagonists [98].

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE ASPECTS

RAGE-amyloid interactions plays a major role in pathophysiology of AD through neuroinflammation and amyloid mediated pathogenesis. Blocking this interaction by synthetic small molecule inhibitors, anti-RAGE antibodies and peptides antagonists are novel therapeutic strategy for AD. However as on date there are no RAGE inhibitors approved for clinical use mainly due to the limited bioavailability and permeability of the drug candidates through BBB. Future research on developing drug therapeutics with good bioavailability, permeability, maximum safety and efficacy is warranted.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None declare

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