Adenosine A2a Receptors Improve Hypoxic Pulmonary Arterial Hypertension Via Mitochondrial ATP-sensitive Potassium Channels

Type
Research paper

Keywords
proliferation, apoptosis, pulmonary vascular remodeling, A2a receptor, mitochondrial ATP-sensitive potassium channels

Abstract
Introduction
This study is aimed to explore the effects of Adenosine A2a receptors (A2aR) on hypoxia-induced pulmonary hypertension (HPH) via mitochondrial ATP-sensitive potassium channels (MitoKATP) in vivo and in vitro.

Material and methods
Using wild-type (WT) and A2aR-deficient (A2aR-/-) mice; hypoxic pulmonary artery smooth muscle cells (PASMCs) were induced by a 24-hours hypoxia exposure. Mice and PASMCs were treated with the A2aR agonist CGS21680, MitoKATP blocker 5-hydroxydecanoic acid sodium salt (5HD), or MitoKATP agonist diazoxide. Mitochondrial morphology was observed by electron microscopy. The mitochondrial membrane potential (ΔΨm); invasive hemodynamic parameters; right ventricular (RV) hypertrophy index; pulmonary arterial remodeling index; proliferative and apoptotic indexes; protein expression levels of A2aR, Bax, Bcl-2, and Caspase-9; and release of cytochrome C from the mitochondria to the cytoplasm were measured.

Results
In vitro, hypoxia induced the opening of MitoKATP. The up-regulation of A2aR reduced the opening of MitoKATP, and the blocking of MitoKATP or activating A2aR promoted mitochondria-dependent apoptosis of PASMCs. In vivo, compared with WT mice, A2aR-/- mice displayed increased RV systolic pressure, RV hypertrophy index, and pulmonary arterial remodeling index. The expression levels of Bax, cytochrome C, and Caspase-9 were higher and Bcl-2 expression was lower in A2aR-/- mice than in WT mice. CGS21680 could reverse hypoxia-induced hemodynamic changes, RV hypertrophy, and pulmonary arterial remodeling as well as abnormal proliferation and apoptosis resistance in WT mice with pulmonary hypertension (PH).

Conclusions
A2aR induced the mitochondrial-dependent apoptosis pathway and inhibited PASMC proliferation by blocking MitoKATP, thereby inhibiting pulmonary vascular structural remodeling and reducing PH.
Adenosine $A_2a$ Receptors Improve Hypoxic Pulmonary Arterial Hypertension Via Mitochondrial ATP-sensitive Potassium Channels

**Running Title**: The mechanism of A$2a$R improving HPH

**Keywords**: pulmonary vascular remodeling; $A_2a$ receptor; mitochondrial ATP-sensitive potassium channels; apoptosis; proliferation
Abstract

**Aim:** This study is aimed to explore the effects of Adenosine A₂a receptors (A₂aR) on hypoxia-induced pulmonary hypertension (HPH) via mitochondrial ATP-sensitive potassium channels (MitoK<sub>ATP</sub>) *in vivo* and *in vitro*.

**Main Methods:** Using wild-type (WT) and A₂aR-deficient (A₂aR<sup>−/−</sup>) mice; hypoxic pulmonary artery smooth muscle cells (PASMCs) were induced by a 24-hours hypoxia exposure. Mice and PASMCs were treated with the A₂aR agonist CGS21680, MitoK<sub>ATP</sub> blocker 5-hydroxydecanoic acid sodium salt (5HD), or MitoK<sub>ATP</sub> agonist diazoxide. Mitochondrial morphology was observed by electron microscopy. The mitochondrial membrane potential (∆ψm); invasive hemodynamic parameters; right ventricular (RV) hypertrophy index; pulmonary arterial remodeling index; proliferative and apoptotic indexes; protein expression levels of A₂aR, Bax, Bcl-2, and Caspase-9; and release of cytochrome C from the mitochondria to the cytoplasm were measured.

**Key findings:** *In vitro*, hypoxia induced the opening of MitoK<sub>ATP</sub>. The up-regulation of A₂aR reduced the opening of MitoK<sub>ATP</sub>, and the blocking of MitoK<sub>ATP</sub> or activating A₂aR promoted mitochondria-dependent apoptosis of PASMCs. *In vivo*, compared with WT mice, A₂aR<sup>−/−</sup> mice displayed increased RV systolic pressure, RV hypertrophy index, and pulmonary arterial remodeling index. The expression levels of Bax, cytochrome C, and Caspase-9 were higher and Bcl-2 expression was lower in A₂aR<sup>−/−</sup> mice than in WT mice. CGS21680 could reverse hypoxia-induced hemodynamic changes, RV hypertrophy, and pulmonary arterial remodeling as well as abnormal proliferation and apoptosis resistance in WT mice with pulmonary hypertension (PH).

**Significance:** A₂aR induced the mitochondrial-dependent apoptosis pathway and inhibited PASMC proliferation by blocking MitoK<sub>ATP</sub>, thereby inhibiting pulmonary vascular structural remodeling and reducing PH.

Introduction

Pulmonary hypertension (PH) is a potentially fatal disease characterized by excessive pulmonary...
vasoconstriction, vascular remodeling and pulmonary arteriole occlusion. These pathological symptoms cause a continuous increase in pulmonary artery pressure, which aggravates the right ventricular (RV) afterload, leading to RV failure and even death [1]. The median survival rate of patients treated with traditional methods is only 2.8 years, and the 1-, 3-, and 5-year survival rates are 68%, 48%, and 34%, respectively; therefore, the prognosis remains very poor [2,3,4].

Multiple cell and molecular signaling pathways are involved in the pathological process of pulmonary vascular remodeling [5,6]. At present, the complex pathogenesis of PH is not fully understood; however, an increasing number of studies have confirmed that pulmonary vascular remodeling plays an important role in the development of PH [7-10].

Adenosine is an endogenous mediator that is often used as a cytoprotective modulator for stress responses and has strong vasodilator and anti-inflammatory effects. Adenosine signaling has an important regulatory role in various physiological and pathological conditions via the four subtypes of G protein-coupled receptors (A1, A2a, A2b, and A3), which are expressed in the lung [11]. Adenosine A2a receptor (A2aR) is a highly expressed receptor with complex functions [12]. Adenosine activates A2aR to cause vasodilation, thereby reducing systemic circulation and pulmonary circulation pressure [13]. Xu [14] found that A2aR-deficient (A2aR−/−) mice exhibit pulmonary arterial pressure elevation, pulmonary vascular remodeling, and excessive proliferation of pulmonary artery smooth muscle cells (PASMCs) compared with wild-type (WT) mice. Moreover, our previous study showed that activation of A2aR could relieve hypoxia-induced pulmonary hypertension [15]. However, the specific mechanism remains to be elucidated.

ATP-sensitive potassium channels (KATP) are ionic channels that influence the excitability and
metabolism of cells and thereby affect function [16]. The mitochondrial apoptotic pathway is an important signal transduction pathway in apoptosis. Mitochondrial membrane potential is associated with the integrity of mitochondrial function; the mitochondrial ATP-sensitive potassium channel (MitoK\textsubscript{ATP}), a K\textsubscript{ATP} channel in the mitochondrial membrane of PASMCs, is closely associated with the maintenance of mitochondrial membrane potential [17]. Hu [18] found that hypoxia can activate the activity of MitoK\textsubscript{ATP} in PASMCs, promoting their opening and partial depolarization of the mitochondrial membrane potential (Δψm), subsequent inhibition of the release of cytochrome C (Cyt C), and ultimately promoting proliferation and inhibition of apoptosis in smooth muscle cells. The opening of MitoK\textsubscript{ATP} channel can promote hypoxia-induced proliferation of human PASMCs [19]. These findings suggest that MitoK\textsubscript{ATP} is associated with the development of PH.

Additionally, adenosine can stimulate the activity of K\textsubscript{ATP} and calcium-activated potassium channels by activating the A\textsubscript{2a} receptor, thereby expanding the coronary vessels [20]. We speculated that A\textsubscript{2a}R could also affect pulmonary circulation via MitoK\textsubscript{ATP}, ultimately reducing pulmonary vascular remodeling and preventing PH. To evaluate this hypothesis, the effects of A\textsubscript{2a}R on HPH via MitoK\textsubscript{ATP} were determined in vivo and in vitro.

**Materials and methods**

**Reagents**

The A\textsubscript{2a}R agonist CGS21680, MitoK\textsubscript{ATP} blocker 5-hydroxydecanoic acid sodium salt (5HD), and MitoK\textsubscript{ATP} agonist diazoxide were obtained from Sigma-Aldrich (St. Louis, MO, USA). Dulbecco’s modified Eagle medium (high glucose), streptomycin, penicillin G, and fetal bovine serum were
obtained from Gibco BRL (Gaithersburg, MD, USA). Rabbit antibodies against Bax, Caspase-9, proliferating cell nuclear antigen (PCNA), and A2aR were purchased from Abcam (Cambridge, UK). Rabbit antibodies against Bcl-2, Cyt C, COX IV, and GAPDH were purchased from Cell Signaling Technology (Beverly, MA, USA). Goat anti-rabbit IgG conjugated to horseradish peroxidase was provided by Beyotime (Haimen, China). SuperSignal® West Femto Maximum Sensitivity Substrate, a BCA Protein Assay Kit, and a Mitochondria Isolation Kit for Tissue were purchased from Thermo Fisher (Madison, WI, USA). A DAB Kit and Polink-2 Plus Polymer HRP Detection System were purchased from ZSGB Biotech (Beijing, China). The in situ Cell Death Detection Kit was purchased from Roche (Indianapolis, IN, USA).

Animal models
Fifty 12- to 14-week-old male BALB/c mice weighing approximately 20–25 g were purchased from Slac Experimental Animal Technology (Shanghai, CHN), and forty 12- to 14-week-old, male A2aR-/- mice weighing approximately 20–25 g were purchased from Jackson Laboratory (Bar Harbor, ME, USA). All animals were fed in a specific pathogen-free animal laboratory, and the laboratory and experimental protocols were reviewed and approved by Wenzhou Medical University Animal Experiment Center. In the laboratory, the mice were maintained under a 12-hour day-night cycle at 20–24 °C and were allowed free access to sufficient food and water.

Fifty WT mice were randomly divided into the following five groups (10 mice per group): a WT normal control group (N, saline-treated), a WT hypoxia group (H, saline-treated), a WT hypoxia plus 5HD group (H5HD, 10 mg/kg), a WT hypoxia plus diazoxide group (HDia, 7 mg/kg), and a WT hypoxia plus CGS21680 group (HCGS, 0.2 mg/kg). Forty A2aR-/- mice were randomly
divided into the following four groups (10 mice per group): an A$_2$A$^{-/}$ normoxia group (K, saline-treated), A$_2$A$^{-/}$ hypoxia group (HK, saline-treated), A$_2$A$^{-/}$ hypoxia plus 5HD group (HK5HD, 10 mg/kg), and A$_2$A$^{-/}$ hypoxia plus diazoxide group (HKDia, 7 mg/kg). Control mice in groups N and K were exposed to room air while the hypoxia groups were exposed to 9%–11% O$_2$. HPH mouse models were established over a 4-week period by placing mice in the hypoxia groups in a closed chamber (8 hours per day) and by monitoring and automatically controlling the O$_2$ concentration using a detector as previously described [15].

**Cell culture and treatment**

PASMCs were cultured in Dulbecco’s modified Eagle medium supplemented with 100-μg/mL streptomycin, 100-IU/mL penicillin, and 10% fetal bovine serum. After reaching 80% confluence, cells were treated with 0.25% trypsin-EDTA for further passaging. PASMCs were used at fifth passage. The cultured cells were confirmed to be PASMCs by immunofluorescence. For further in vitro study, PASMCs were divided into the following groups: a normoxia group (N), a hypoxia group (H), a hypoxia plus 5HD group (H5HD, 500 μmol/L), a hypoxia plus diazoxide group (HDia, 100 μmol/L), a hypoxia plus A$_2$A-R-knockdown group (HK), and a hypoxia plus CGS21680 group (HCGS, 2 μmol/L). The A$_2$A-R gene knockdown depended on transfection of effective small interfering RNA (siRNA) synthesized by Genechem (Shanghai, China). Cells were transfected with siRNAs according to the manufacturer’s protocol, and the validity of knockdown was confirmed. The normoxia group was cultured in a normal incubator (37 °C, 21% O$_2$, 5% CO$_2$, and 74% N$_2$) for 24 h, whereas the hypoxia groups were kept in a hypoxia incubator (37 °C, 5% O$_2$, 5% CO$_2$, and 90% N$_2$) for 24 h.
Measurements of hemodynamic parameters and RV hypertrophy

At the end of the hypoxia exposure period, the RV systolic pressure (RVSP) and the mean carotid arterial pressure (mCAP) were measured using the method described by Huang et al. [15]. The mice were anesthetized with 20% urethane (1 mL/100 g) and supine fixed, and the right external jugular vein and left carotid artery were separated. Two home-made polyethylene catheters (outer diameter: 0.9 mm, inner diameter: 0.5 mm) connected to pressure transducers and prefilled with heparin were inserted into the RV and left carotid artery, and RVSP and mCAP were measured and analyzed using a PowerLab 8/35 Multi-channel Biological Signal Recording System (AD Instruments, Colorado Springs, Australia). After sacrificing mice by exsanguination, their hearts were removed and divided into the RV, left ventricle (LV), and septum (S), and each section was weighed. The weight ratios RV/(LV+S) and RV/body weight (BW) were calculated as indexes of RV hypertrophy. Additionally, a portion of the lung tissue was homogenized to detect the expression of A2aR in each group by western blotting.

Measurement of pulmonary arterial remodeling

The lung tissue was dissected and cut into several parts. The upper lobe of the right lung was promptly fixed in 4% paraformaldehyde, conventionally dehydrated, paraffin-embedded, serially sectioned at a thickness of 4 μm, and then stained with hematoxylin–eosin (HE). After HE staining, the structural remodeling of the pulmonary arteries was observed by microscopy. Pulmonary arteries (external diameters, 25-100 μm) were randomly selected and analyzed using Image-Pro Plus 6.0 (Media Cybernetics, Rockville, MD, USA). The ratios (expressed as percentages) of the pulmonary artery wall area to the total area (WA/TA%) and the wall thickness to the total
thickness (WT/TT%) were calculated to evaluate pulmonary arterial remodeling as previously described [15].

**Ultrastructural examination of pulmonary arteries**

Tissue samples of approximately $1 \times 1 \times 3$ mm$^3$ were taken from the left lung near the hilum. The tissues were fixed with 2.5% glutaraldehyde and 1% osmic acid, stained with 1% uranium acetate, dehydrated with acetone, and embedded in epoxy resin. Subsequently, the fixed tissues were sectioned (semithin and ultrathin sections), and the ultrathin sections were examined using an H-7500 transmission electron microscope (Hitachi, Tokyo, Japan).

**Detection of mitochondrial membrane potential**

Rhodamine-123 can cross the mitochondrial membrane in living cells, and its fluorescence intensity is linearly correlated with $\Delta \psi_m$. PASMCs were incubated with rhodamine-123 (10 mg/L) for 30 min at 37 °C. The fluorescence intensity was detected by laser confocal microscopy (Olympus FV1000, Tokyo, Japan) and analyzed using Image-Pro Plus 6.0. The optical densities of the respective images were measured and expressed as the corrected average optical density.

**Detection of proliferation**

PCNA is usually expressed in the DNA synthesis phase of the cell cycle. To detect PCNA expression levels, 10-μm-thick paraffin sections of lung tissues were dehydrated with ethanol, heat induced for antigen retrieval, blocked with normal goat serum, and incubated with anti-PCNA antibody (1:100) overnight at 4 °C. Subsequently, the sections were incubated with goat anti-rabbit IgG conjugated to horseradish peroxidase (1:100). Diaminobenzidine was used as the chromogen, and hematoxylin was used for counterstaining. The sections were then observed under...
a microscope (ICC50W0859, Leica, Germany), and the percentages of positive cells were assessed in five randomly selected pulmonary arteries (external diameters of 100 μm).

Detection of apoptosis

The terminal deoxyribonucleotide transferase mediated dUTP nick-labeling (TUNEL) assay (using the *in situ* Cell Death Detection Kit, POD) was used to detect apoptosis. After tissue sections were dewaxed and rehydrated with xylene and ethanol, they were treated with a 3% hydrogen peroxide solution to block endogenous peroxidase. After cell drilling with Triton-X100, every tissue section was incubated with the TUNEL reaction mixture and transforming agent POD.

Western blotting analyses

Lung tissues were homogenized in cold RIPA lysis buffer using an automatic homogenizer (FastPrep-24 5G, MP Biomedicals, Irvine, CA, USA), then lysed using an ultrasonic disruptor. The supernatants were collected after the homogenates were centrifuged (12,000 rpm, 4 ℃) for 30 min. PASMCs were lysed with cold RIPA lysis buffer containing phenylmethylsulfonyl fluoride. The supernatants were collected after the lysates were centrifuged (12,000 rpm, 4 ℃) for 30 min. Protein concentrations were determined using a Pierce BCA Protein Assay Kit (Thermo Fisher, Waltham, MA, USA). Equal amounts of proteins were separated by SDS-PAGE; transferred to PVDF membranes (Millipore, Burlington, MA, USA); blocked with 5% skim milk; and incubated with specific primary antibodies against A2aR (1:1,000), Bax (1:1,000), Bcl-2 (1:1,000), Caspase-9 (1:1,000), β-tubulin (1:1,000), and GAPDH (1:1,000) overnight at 4℃ before being incubated with goat anti-rabbit IgG conjugated to horseradish peroxidase (1:10,000). To detect Cyt
C release, mitochondrial and cytosol pellets were isolated using a Mitochondria Isolation Kit for Tissue and immunoblotted with antibodies against Cyt C (1:1,000), with COX IV serving as the mitochondrial marker and GAPDH as the cytosolic marker. After the pellets were triple washed with phosphate-buffered saline, the immunoreactive bands were visualized using SuperSignal chemiluminescence substrates (Thermo Fisher) and were analyzed using Image Lab 5.1 (Bio-Rad Laboratories, Hercules, CA, USA).

**Statistical analysis**

All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS 20.0 (IBM, Somers, NY, USA). All results are expressed as mean ± standard deviation (SD) and were tested for normality. Comparisons between two groups were performed using Student’s t-tests, and comparisons among multiple groups were performed using one-way analysis of variance with the LSD test (equal variances assumed). A p-value of < 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

**Results**

*A2aR reversed the hypoxia-induced opening of MitoKATP in PASMCs*

To assess whether *A2aR* reverses the hypoxia-induced opening of MitoKATP in PASMCs, we first established an *A2aR*-down-regulated PASMC model by siRNA and examined the knockdown efficiency of siRNA by western blotting. As shown in Fig. 1a, siRNA-*A2aR2* significantly reduced the expression of *A2aR* protein in PASMCs by 40% (p < 0.05). Then, we used the fluorescence intensity of Rhodamine 123 to indicate the opening level of MitoKATP in PASMCs of different groups. As shown in Fig. 1b and c, compared with that in the N group, the rhodamine-123 fluorescence intensity in the H group was significantly higher (p < 0.01), which indicated that
hypoxia promoted the opening of MitoK$_{\text{ATP}}$ in PASMCs. Interestingly, the rhodamine-123 fluorescence intensity ratio was significantly decreased post CGS21680 treatment ($p < 0.05$). In contrast, when the A$_{2a}$R gene was knocked down, the fluorescence intensity ratio was further enhanced in the HK group ($p < 0.01$). Ultimately, these results indicate that A$_{2a}$R reversed the hypoxia-induced opening of MitoK$_{\text{ATP}}$ in PASMCs.

A$_{2a}$R alleviated hypoxia-induced hemodynamic changes by blocking MitoK$_{\text{ATP}}$

To determine the protective effects of A$_{2a}$R in HPH, A$_{2a}$R protein expression in lung homogenates was first examined by western blotting. In vivo, as shown in Fig. 2a, A$_{2a}$R was not expressed in the A$_{2a}$R$^{-/-}$ groups. A$_{2a}$R expression increased in hypoxia-exposed WT mice than that in normoxic mice ($p < 0.05$). Moreover, CGS21680 treatment significantly enhanced A$_{2a}$R expression compared with hypoxia treatment ($p < 0.05$). Then, RVSP in each group was recorded to reflect the pulmonary arterial pressure after 4 weeks of treatment. As shown in Fig. 2b and d, RVSP was significantly higher in groups exposed to hypoxia (groups H and HK) than in groups exposed to normoxia (groups N and K) ($p < 0.01$), and RVSP in the HK group was higher than in the H group ($p < 0.05$). The hypoxia-induced increase in RVSP was inhibited by CGS21680 treatment ($p < 0.05$). These results indicate that the hypoxia-induced increase in RVSP is alleviated by an increase A$_{2a}$R and exacerbated by its decrease. The hypoxia-induced increase in RVSP was reduced by treatment with 5HD ($p < 0.05$), but it was further increased by treatment with diazoxide in both WT and A$_{2a}$R$^{-/-}$ groups ($p < 0.05$). Accordingly, hypoxia-induced increases in RVSP are alleviated by blocking MitoK$_{\text{ATP}}$ and exacerbated by promoting its opening. Furthermore, RVSP in the HK5HD group was significantly higher than in the H5HD group ($p < 0.01$), and it was higher in the HKDia group than that in the HDia group ($p < 0.05$). Combined
with previous research that found that $A_{2a}$R could reverse the hypoxia-induced opening of MitoK$_{\text{ATP}}$ in PASMCs, these results indicate that $A_{2a}$R alleviated hypoxia-induced hemodynamic changes partially by blocking MitoK$_{\text{ATP}}$. However, as shown in Fig. 2c and e, there were no significant differences in mCAP among these nine groups.

$A_{2a}$R alleviated hypoxia-induced RV hypertrophy and pulmonary arterial remodeling by blocking MitoK$_{\text{ATP}}$.

To evaluate the degree of RV hypertrophy, we measured the RV/(LV+S) and RV/BW ratios of mice after hypoxia exposure (4 weeks, 8 hours per day). As shown in Fig. 3a and b, both these ratios were significantly higher in WT and $A_{2a}$R$^{-/-}$ mice exposed to hypoxia than in those exposed to normoxia (p < 0.01). Treatment with CGS21680 reduced the RV/(LV+S) (p < 0.05) and RV/BW ratios (p < 0.05); the ratios in the HK group were higher than those in the H group (p < 0.05). These results demonstrate that hypoxia-induced RV hypertrophy was alleviated by an increase in $A_{2a}$R and exacerbated by its decrease. Repeated administration of 5HD also reduced the RV/(LV+S) (p < 0.05) and RV/BW ratios (p < 0.05) in WT mice while repeated administration of diazoxide led to the opposite effects (p < 0.05). These results show that hypoxia-induced RV hypertrophy is alleviated by blocking MitoK$_{\text{ATP}}$ and aggravated by promoting its opening. Furthermore, the RV/(LV+S) (p < 0.05) and RV/BW (p < 0.01) ratios were significantly higher in the HK5HD group than in the H5HD group, and they were also higher in the HKDia group than in the HDia group (p < 0.05). These results indicate that $A_{2a}$R alleviated hypoxia-induced RV hypertrophy partly by blocking the opening of MitoK$_{\text{ATP}}$.

To investigate pulmonary arterial remodeling, we estimated the pulmonary artery wall area...
relative to the total area (WA/TA%) and the wall thickness relative to total thickness (WT/TT%).

by HE staining. As shown in Fig. 3c-e, exposure to hypoxia for 4 weeks caused a significant
increase in the wall area and thickness of the pulmonary artery in WT and A2aR−/− mice compared
with normoxia exposure (p < 0.01). As expected, CGS21680 exerted the strongest inhibitory effect
and dramatically decreased WA/TA and WT/TT ratios (p < 0.05). These results indicate that an
increase in A2aR alleviates hypoxia-induced pulmonary arterial remodeling. Moreover, the
hypoxia-induced increase in WA/TA and WT/TT ratios was aggravated by diazoxide (p < 0.05),
which was reversed by treatment with 5HD in both WT and A2aR−/− groups. These findings suggest
that hypoxia-induced pulmonary arterial remodeling is alleviated by blocking the opening of
MitoK\textsubscript{ATP} and aggravated by promotion of its opening. Additionally, WA/TA and WT/TT
percentages were higher in the HK5HD (p < 0.05) and HKDia (p < 0.05) groups than in the H5HD
and HDia groups. These results demonstrate that A2aR alleviates hypoxia-induced pulmonary
arterial remodeling partially through blocking the opening of MitoK\textsubscript{ATP}.

\textit{A2aR alleviated hypoxia-induced excessive proliferation in PASMCs by blocking MitoK\textsubscript{ATP}}

To evaluate the proliferation of PASMCs \textit{in vivo}, proliferating cell nuclear antigen (PCNA)
expression was measured by immunohistochemistry. As shown in Fig. 4a and c, PCNA expression
was significantly higher in the hypoxia groups than in the control groups (p < 0.01). CGS21680
treatment significantly decreased the expression of PCNA in the HCGS group compared with that
in the H group (p < 0.01). Meanwhile, the expression of PCNA in the HK group was higher than
in the H group (p < 0.05). The groups treated with 5HD had observably reduced percentages of
positive cells compared with that in the hypoxia groups (p < 0.01). In contrast, repeated
administration of diazoxide further increased the percentage of PCNA-positive cells (p < 0.05).
These results suggest hypoxia-induced excessive proliferation of PASMCs is alleviated by blocking MitoK\textsubscript{ATP} and promoting the opening. Additionally, the percentage of PCNA-positive cells was significantly higher in the HK5HD group than in the H5HD group (p < 0.01), and it was also higher in the HKDia group than in the HDia group (p < 0.05).

**A\textsubscript{2a}R decreased hypoxia-induced apoptosis resistance in PASMCs by blocking MitoK\textsubscript{ATP}**

We further investigated the effects of A\textsubscript{2a}R on cell apoptosis. *In vivo*, as shown in Fig. 4b and d, the percentage of apoptotic cells was significantly lower in the hypoxia groups than in the control groups (p < 0.01). However, the decreased apoptosis index was significantly increased by treatment with CGS21680 (p < 0.01). Treatment with 5HD reversed chronic hypoxia-induced apoptosis resistance and increased the apoptosis index in the WT (p < 0.01) groups. However, diazoxide treatment further decreased the percentage of apoptotic cells (p < 0.05). Additionally, the percentage of apoptotic cells in the K5HD group was significantly lower than in the 5HD group (p < 0.01), and the apoptosis index was lower in the KDia group than in the Dia group (p < 0.05).

Furthermore, we evaluated the expression level of apoptosis-related proteins, including Bax and Bcl-2, and calculated the ratio of Bax to Bcl-2 expression. As shown in Fig. 5a, Bax expression was significantly down-regulated in the lung tissue homogenate of the hypoxia groups compared with that in the control groups (p < 0.01). However, treatment with CGS21680 reversed this effect (p < 0.05) (Fig. 5a). Additionally, the expression of Bax in the HK group was lower than in the H group (p < 0.05) (Fig. 5b). These results indicate that an increase in A\textsubscript{2a}R up-regulates the expression of Bax. As shown in Fig. 5b, decreases in Bax expression induced by hypoxia were
reversed by treatment with 5HD in the WT group (p < 0.05). Compared with expression levels in
the hypoxia groups, diazoxide further down-regulated the expression of Bax (p < 0.05) (Fig. 5c).
According to these results, the expression of Bax is up-regulated by blocking MitoK\textsubscript{ATP} and
down-regulated by promoting its opening. As shown in Fig. 5b, the effects of 5HD up-regulation
of Bax was reversed in the A\textsubscript{2a}R\textsuperscript{−/−} group, and the expression of Bax in the HK5HD group was
lower than in the H5HD group (p < 0.05).

The expression levels of Bcl-2 were opposite to those of Bax in each group (Fig. 5d-f). We also
computed the ratio of Bax to Bcl-2 expression and found that the ratio was the same as Bax. As
shown in Fig. 5g, the ratio was significantly down-regulated in the hypoxia groups compared with
that in the control groups (p < 0.01) and treatment with CGS21680 reversed this effect (p < 0.01).
Additionally, the ratio in the HK group was lower than in the H group (p < 0.05) (Fig. 5h-i). As
shown in Fig. 5h, decreases in the ratio of Bax to Bcl-2 expression induced by hypoxia were
reversed by treatment with 5HD in the WT group (p < 0.01), and the effects of 5HD were reversed
in the A\textsubscript{2a}R\textsuperscript{−/−} group, and the ratio in the HK5HD group was lower than that in the H5HD group (p
< 0.01). Compared with expression levels in the hypoxia groups, diazoxide further down-regulated
the ratio (p < 0.01) (Fig. 5i).

\textit{A\textsubscript{2a}R modulated cell apoptosis via the mitochondrial-dependent apoptosis pathway}

To investigate whether A\textsubscript{2a}R modulates cell apoptosis via the mitochondrial-dependent apoptosis
pathway, electron microscopy was used to observe the ultrastructure of mitochondria. \textit{In vivo}, as
shown in Fig. 6a, in the N and K groups, the mitochondrial bilayer membrane structure was
complete, and the cristae of the mitochondria were compact. Compared with the N and K groups,
abnormal mitochondria membrane swelling was observed in the H and HK groups (i.e., the structure of mitochondrial cristae was disordered, vacuoles appeared in few mitochondria, and some were broken). However, after treatment with CGS21680, the mitochondrial cristae became dense, the membrane was intact, and the structure tended to be normal. The destructive effects of hypoxia were reversed with 5HD treatment but aggravated by diazoxide treatment. The mitochondrial damage was more severe in the HK5HD and HKDia groups than in the H5HD and HDia groups. In groups HK5HD and HKDia, mitochondrial swelling was obvious, most of the cristae were broken and appeared blurry, and some mitochondria exhibited pyknosis.

To further clarify the relationship between A2aR and MitoKATP in the mitochondrial-dependent apoptotic pathway, the expression levels of Cyt C and Caspase-9 were detected by western blotting. As shown in Fig. 6b and d, the release of Cyt C from the mitochondria to the cytoplasm was significantly inhibited in the hypoxia groups compared with that in the normoxia groups (p < 0.01), which was reversed after treatment with CGS21680 (P<0.01). Meanwhile, inhibition of the pathway was reversed by treatment with 5HD in both the WT and A2aR−/− groups (p < 0.01) (Fig. 6f-g). Additionally, the mice treated with diazoxide exhibited (HDia) further reductions in the release of Cyt C from the mitochondria to the cytoplasm than those exposed to hypoxia(H) (p < 0.05) (Fig. 6h-j). These results suggest that the mitochondrial-dependent apoptotic pathway is activated by blocking MitoKATP and inhibited by promoting its opening. In addition, the effects of 5HD up-regulation of the release of Cyt C from the mitochondria to the cytoplasm was reversed in A2aR−/− mice, and there was a significant difference in the release of Cyt C from the mitochondria to the cytoplasm between the H5HD and HK5HD groups (p < 0.05) (Fig. 6f-g); a similarly significant difference between the HDia and HKDia groups was observed (p < 0.05) (Fig. 6h-j).
Thus, these results indicate that A2aR activates the mitochondrial-dependent apoptotic pathway partially by blocking the opening of MitoK\textsubscript{ATP}.

As shown in Fig. 6k, the expression of Caspase-9 was decreased in the lung tissues of hypoxia-exposed mice (p < 0.01), which was ameliorated by CGS21680 treatment (p < 0.05). Repeated administration of 5HD reversed chronic hypoxia-induced down-regulation of Caspase-9 expression (p < 0.01) (Fig. 6l), and the expression of Caspase-9 was lower in the HK5HD group than in the H5HD group (p < 0.05), indicating that A2aR activates the mitochondrial-dependent apoptotic pathway by blocking MitoK\textsubscript{ATP}. The decrease in Caspase-9 expression induced by hypoxia was further inhibited by diazoxide treatment (p < 0.01) (Fig. 6m).

Discussion

In this study, we verified that A2aR and MitoK\textsubscript{ATP} both play an important role in the treatment of hypoxic pulmonary arterial hypertension, and that A2aR can improve HPH via mitochondrial ATP-sensitive potassium channels.

The vasoconstriction and pulmonary vascular remodeling is the primary pathophysiological features of PH\cite{21}. Humbert et al. found that excessive vasoconstriction is associated with the abnormal expression of potassium channels and dysfunction of endothelial cells\cite{22}. In addition, the primary factor contributing to pulmonary vascular remodeling is the imbalance between proliferation and apoptosis\cite{23}. The purpose of this study was to explore whether MitoK\textsubscript{ATP} is involved in the mechanism underlying improvement of PH and whether it mediates the function of A2aR in regulating PASMC apoptosis.

Adenosine is an endogenous purine nucleoside that regulates a series of physiological and
pathological processes by binding to adenosine receptors [24]. Recently, the relationship between adenosine and PH has been a focus of research. In other types of PH models, A2aR has been confirmed to play an important role in the pathogenesis of PH. Alencar et al. reported that an A2aR agonist can reverse pulmonary vascular remodeling and endothelial dysfunction in rats with monocrotaline-induced PH [25]. Shang et al. established the A2aR knockout mice model and found that A2aR−/− mice are more likely to exhibit the pathological features of PH [14, 26]. Like previous studies, A2aR showed the same effects in an HPH animal model. Consistent with the results of this study, these studies all indicate that A2aR plays an important role in the treatment of HPH.

An imbalance between PASMC proliferation and apoptosis is a primary cause of pulmonary vascular remodeling. It has been found that, in HPH, some drugs can regulate cell apoptosis through A2aR [27]. Youle et al. reported that members of the Bcl-2 protein family play important roles in regulating apoptosis: Bax promotes the opening of the mitochondrial permeability transition pore to induce apoptosis and Bcl-2 inhibits its opening and prevents apoptosis [28]. In this study, we found that the Bax/Bcl-2 ratio in the lung homogenates with CGS21680 treatment was significantly increased than that of the hypoxia group, objectively proving that the increase in A2aR expression promotes PASMC apoptosis in the treatment of HPH. Although the Bax/Bcl-2 ratio was significantly decreased in A2aR−/− mice, a certain level was still maintained. These findings indicate that A2aR partially influences PASMC apoptosis induced by hypoxia.

Dromparis et al. have reported that the mitochondrial-dependent apoptotic pathway plays an important role in the occurrence and development of HPH [29]; our study also supports this view. MitoKATP is an important determinant of the mitochondrial membrane potential, which is sensitive to hypoxia. According to a previous study, hypoxia or diazoxide can lead to the depolarization of
the mitochondrial membrane in PASMCs, thereby ultimately reducing apoptosis in these cells. The results of this study support this conclusion [18]. Moreover, we found that 5HD ameliorates the effects of hypoxia. The RVSP and RV/(LV+S), RV/BW, WA/TA, and WT/TT ratios in hypoxia-exposed mice were significantly reduced by repeated 5HD treatment, and the ultrastructure of mitochondria in the 5HD group was also relatively intact. Compared with the hypoxia control group, the percentage of PCNA-positive cells in 5HD-treated mice was significantly lower, and the apoptotic index of PASMCs was significantly higher. These findings firmly prove that hypoxia-induced excessive proliferation and apoptosis resistance of PASMCs were inhibited by blocking MitoKATP exacerbated by promoting its opening, which contributes to alleviation of HPH.

Our previous study found that A2aR could alleviate HPH via mitochondrial-dependent apoptotic pathway [27], we further explored whether there is an interaction between A2aR and MitoKATP. In our study, the ability of 5HD to improve pathological changes of HPH was significantly inhibited in A2aR−/− mice than that in WT mice. The RVSP, RV/(LV+S), RV/BW, WA/TA, and WT/TT values in the A2aR−/− group treated with 5HD were significantly higher than those in the WT group. Coincidentally, the initial components of the mitochondrial-dependent apoptotic pathway are apoptosis-regulating proteins of the Bcl-2 protein family. Within this family, Bax is a pro-apoptotic protein and Bcl-2 is an anti-apoptotic protein, and down-regulation of Bax/Bcl-2 in the mitochondrial apoptotic pathway inhibits the release of Cyt C and Caspase-9. Bax promotes the release of mitochondrial Cyt C into the cytoplasm and then activates Caspase-9 to produce a cascade reaction [28]. To explore whether A2aR-induced blocking of MitoKATP could activate the mitochondrial-dependent apoptotic pathway, we detected the expression of Bax, Bcl-2, Cyt C, and
Caspase 9. We found that deletion of A2aR diminished the positive effect of the MitoK$_{ATP}$ blocker on the mitochondrial apoptotic pathway. This indicates that A2aR up-regulates the expression of Bax partially by blocking MitoK$_{ATP}$ and that A2aR thus prevents HPH via blocking MitoK$_{ATP}$.

Endogenous nitric oxide (NO) has been reported to promote mitoK$_{ATP}$ channel opening [30], and its inhibitor can block the cardioprotective effect induced by mitoK$_{ATP}$ channel inhibitor diazoxide [31]. A recent study found that A2a receptor agonist could suppress the expression of NO synthase protein, thus inhibited the release of NO [32]. In conclusion, A2aR may block the MitoK$_{ATP}$ channels by decreasing the expression of NO. But the certain mechanisms between the A2aR and MitoK$_{ATP}$ channel remains to be further verified.

In this study, we established a hypoxic animal model and verified that A2aR and MitoK$_{ATP}$ both play an important role in the treatment of HPH, and we demonstrated an interaction between the two. A2aR can activate the mitochondrial-dependent apoptotic pathway and inhibit PASMC proliferation partially by blocking the opening of MitoK$_{ATP}$, thereby alleviating pulmonary vascular structural remodeling and attenuating HPH. The specific mechanism between A2aR and MitoK$_{ATP}$ needs to be further investigated.

Conclusions

This study showed that an increase in A2aR and blocking of MitoK$_{ATP}$ alleviate HPH. Furthermore, A2aR induced the mitochondrial-dependent apoptosis pathway and inhibited PASMC proliferation by blocking MitoK$_{ATP}$, thereby alleviating pulmonary vascular structural remodeling and reducing HPH. This study further elucidated the pathogenesis of HPH and explored the mechanism of action of A2aR.
Acknowledgments

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Abbreviations

PH: pulmonary hypertension; HPH: hypoxia-induced pulmonary hypertension; A2aR: A2a receptors; MitoKATP: mitochondrial ATP-sensitive potassium channels; WT: wild-type; A2aR\textsuperscript{-/-}: A2aR-deficient; Dia: diazoxide; 5HD: 5-hydroxydecanoic acid sodium salt; PASMCs: pulmonary artery smooth muscle cells; PCNA: proliferating cell nuclear antigen; Δψm: mitochondrial membrane potential; HE: hematoxylineosin; RVSP: right ventricular systolic pressure; mCAP: mean carotid arterial pressure; RV: right ventricle; LV: left ventricle; S, septum; BW: body weight; WA: wall area; TA: total area; WT: wall thickness; TT: total thickness; NO, nitric oxide.

Compliance with ethics guidelines

All institutional and national guidelines for the care and use of laboratory animals were followed. All experimental protocols conformed to the Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals, which was published by the US National Institutes of Health, and were approved by the Animal Ethics Committee of Wenzhou Medical University.

Competing interests

The authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

Availability of data and material

All relevant data and materials are stored in the Key Laboratory of Heart and Lung of Wenzhou
Medical University and can be obtained from the first author and corresponding author.
References


Figure Legends

Fig. 1 A2aR reversed hypoxia-induced opening of MitoKATP in PASMCs

A2aR protein expression levels in PASMCs transfected with siCTRL and siA2aR under normoxic (Nor) and hypoxic (5% O2) conditions for 48 h (a). Using the fluorescence intensity of Rhodamine 123 to indicate the opening level of MitoKATP in PASMCs of different groups (b). Representative micrographs of rhodamine-123 fluorescence intensity in PASMCs (c). Data are presented as the mean ± standard deviation (SD). # p < 0.05, ## p < 0.01 vs normoxic group; * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01 vs hypoxic group; + p < 0.05, ++ p < 0.01 between A2aR−/− and WT mice groups. A2aR: A2a receptors; MitoKATP: mitochondrial ATP-sensitive potassium channels; PASMCs, pulmonary artery smooth muscle cells.

Fig. 2 A2aR alleviated hypoxia-induced hemodynamic changes via MitoKATP

Effects of CGS21680 (+CGS, 0.2 mg/kg/day), 5HD (+5HD, 10 mg/kg/day), and Dia (+Dia, 7 mg/kg/day) on A2aR protein expression levels in lung homogenates of mice exposed to hypoxic conditions (10% O2) or ambient oxygen levels (21% O2) for 4 weeks were examined by western blotting (a; n = 3). Effects of CGS21680 (+CGS, 0.2 mg/kg/day), 5HD (+5HD, 10 mg/kg/day), and Dia (+Dia, 7 mg/kg/day) on RVSP (b; n = 6) and mCAP (c; n = 6) in WT and A2aR−/− mice. Representative pictures of RVSP waves (red) in the WT and A2aR−/− groups (d). Representative pictures of mCAP waves (blue) in the WT and A2aR−/− groups (e). Data are presented as the mean ± standard deviation (SD). # p < 0.05, ## p < 0.01 vs normoxic group; * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01 vs hypoxic group; + p < 0.05, ++ p < 0.01 between A2aR−/− and WT mice groups. A2aR: A2a receptors; MitoKATP: mitochondrial ATP-sensitive potassium channels; 5HD, 5-hydroxydecanoic acid sodium
Fig. 3 $\alpha_2$R alleviated hypoxia-induced RV hypertrophy and pulmonary arterial remodeling via MitoK$_{\text{ATP}}$

Effects of CGS21680 (+CGS, 0.2 mg/kg/day), 5HD (+5HD, 10 mg/kg/day), and Dia (+Dia, 7 mg/kg/day) on the RV/(LV + S) (a; n = 10), RV/BW (b; n = 10), WT/TT(%) (d; n = 10), and WA/TA(%) (e; n = 10) ratios in WT and $\alpha_2$R$^{-/-}$ mice. Representative photomicrographs showing hypoxia-induced remodeling in the pulmonary arteries of the WT and $\alpha_2$R$^{-/-}$ groups exposed to hypoxia (10% O$_2$) or ambient oxygen levels (21% O$_2$) for 4 weeks (c, ×400), the white arrow indicates the pulmonary artery. Data are presented as the mean ± standard deviation (SD). # $p <$ 0.05, ## $p <$ 0.01 vs normoxic group; * $p <$ 0.05, ** $p <$ 0.01 vs hypoxic group; + $p <$ 0.05, ++ $p <$ 0.01 between $\alpha_2$R$^{-/-}$ and WT mice groups. $\alpha_2$R: $\alpha_2$ receptors; MitoK$_{\text{ATP}}$: mitochondrial ATP-sensitive potassium channels; 5HD, 5-hydroxydecanoic acid sodium salt; Dia, diazoxide; RV, right ventricle; LV, left ventricle; S, septum; BW, body weight; WT, wall thickness; TT, total thickness; WA, wall area; TA, total area; WT, wild-type.

Fig. 4 $\alpha_2$R alleviated hypoxia-induced excessive proliferation and apoptosis resistance in PASMCs via MitoK$_{\text{ATP}}$

Representative photomicrographs of PCNA (brown) expression in the pulmonary arteries of WT and $\alpha_2$R$^{-/-}$ groups (a, ×400), the black arrow indicates the PCNA in the pulmonary arteries. Representative photomicrographs of apoptotic cells (brown) in the pulmonary arteries of WT and $\alpha_2$R$^{-/-}$ groups (b, ×400), the black arrow indicates the apoptotic cells in the pulmonary arteries. PCNA expression levels in PASMCs were examined by immunohistochemistry, and apoptosis
levels of PASMCs were examined by TUNEL assay. Effects of CGS21680 (+CGS, 0.2 mg/kg/day), 5HD (+5HD, 10 mg/kg/day), and Dia (+Dia, 7 mg /kg/day) on PCNA expression in PASMCs (c; n = 5), and the apoptosis of PASMCs (d; n = 5) in WT and A2aR−/− mice. Data are presented as the mean ± standard deviation (SD). # p < 0.05, ## p < 0.01 vs normoxic group; * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01 vs hypoxic group; + p < 0.05, ++ p < 0.01 between A2aR−/− and WT mice groups.

A2aR: A2a receptors; MitoKATP: mitochondrial ATPsensitive potassium channels; PCNA, proliferating cell nuclear antigen; WT, wild-type; PASMCs, pulmonary artery smooth muscle cells; 5HD, 5-hydroxydecanoic acid sodium salt; Dia, diazoxide.

Fig. 5 A2aR alleviated hypoxia-induced apoptosis resistance in PASMCs via MitoKATP

Bax and Bcl-2 expression levels in lung homogenates were examined by western blotting. Effects of CGS21680 (+CGS, 0.2 mg/kg/day) on Bax and Bcl-2 expression in lung homogenates of WT mice (a, d; n = 3). Effects of 5HD (+5HD, 10 mg/kg/day) on Bax and Bcl-2 expression in lung homogenates of WT and A2aR−/− mice (b, e; n = 3). Effects of Dia (+Dia, 7 mg/kg/day) on Bax and Bcl-2 expression in lung homogenates of WT and A2aR−/− mice (c, f; n = 3). Protein expression ratios of Bax to Bcl-2 were also calculated (g, h, and i; n = 3). Data are presented as the mean ± standard deviation (SD). # p < 0.05, ## p < 0.01 vs normoxic group; * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01 vs hypoxic group; + p < 0.05, ++ p < 0.01 between A2aR−/− and WT mice groups. A2aR: A2a receptors; MitoKATP: mitochondrial ATPsensitive potassium channels; WT, wild-type; 5HD, 5-hydroxydecanoic acid sodium salt; Dia, diazoxide.

Fig. 6 A2aR modulated cell apoptosis via the mitochondrial-dependent apoptosis pathway
Effects of CGS21680 (+CGS, 0.2 mg/kg/day), 5HD (+5HD, 10 mg/kg/day), and Dia (+Dia, 7 mg/kg/day) on PH at the ultrastructure level. Ultrathin sections of lung tissues from WT and 
$A_2aR^+-$ mice were observed by a Hitachi H-7500 transmission electron microscopy (a, $\times$20000), the white arrow indicates the mitochondria. The expression levels of cytochrome C in mitochondrial and cytosol pellets and Caspase-9 in lung tissue were examined by western blotting with antibodies against cytochrome C with COX IV as a mitochondria marker and GAPDH as the internal control. Effects of CGS21680 (+CGS, 0.2 mg/kg/day) on cytochrome C in mitochondrial and cytosol pellets and Caspase-9 expression in lung homogenate of WT mice (b, c, k; $n = 3$).

Effects of 5HD (+5HD, 10 mg/kg/day) on cytochrome C in mitochondrial and cytosol pellets and Caspase-9 expression in lung homogenate of WT mice (e, f, l; $n = 3$). Effects of Dia (+Dia, 7 mg/kg/day) on cytochrome C in mitochondrial and cytosol pellets and Caspase-9 expression in lung homogenate of WT mice (h, i, m; $n = 3$). Protein expression ratios of cytochrome C in mitochondrial and cytosol pellets were also calculated (d, g, j; $n = 3$). Data are presented as the mean ± standard deviation (SD). # $p < 0.05$, ## $p < 0.01$ vs normoxic group; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ vs hypoxic group; + $p < 0.05$, ++ $p < 0.01$ between $A_2aR^+-$ and WT mice groups. $A_2aR$: $A_2a$ receptors; 5HD, 5-hydroxydecanoic acid sodium salt; Dia, diazoxide; PH, pulmonary hypertension; WT, wild-type.

Fig. 7 $A_2aR$ attenuated HPH via MitoK\textsubscript{ATP}

$A_2aR$ attenuated HPH by modulating the mitochondrial-dependent apoptosis pathway via MitoK\textsubscript{ATP}. HPH, hypoxia-induced pulmonary hypertension.
Fig. 1 A2aR reversed hypoxia-induced opening of MitoKATP in PASMCs
A2aR protein expression levels in PASMCs transfected with siCTRL and siA2aR under normoxic (Nor) and hypoxic (5% O2) conditions for 48 h (a). Using the fluorescence intensity of Rhodamine 123 to indicate the opening level of MitoKATP in PASMCs of different groups (b). Representative micrographs of rhodamine-123 fluorescence intensity in PASMCs (c). Data are presented as the mean ± standard deviation (SD). # p < 0.05, ## p < 0.01 vs normoxic group; * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01 vs hypoxic group; + p < 0.05, ++ p < 0.01 between A2aR−/− and WT mice groups. A2aR: A2a receptors; MitoKATP: mitochondrial ATP-sensitive potassium channels; PASMCs, pulmonary artery smooth muscle cells.
Fig. 2 A2aR alleviated hypoxia-induced hemodynamic changes via MitoKATP
Effects of CGS21680 (+CGS, 0.2 mg/kg/day), 5HD (+5HD, 10 mg/kg/day), and Dia (+Dia, 7 mg/kg/day) on A2aR protein expression levels in lung homogenates of mice exposed to hypoxic conditions (10% O2) or ambient oxygen levels (21% O2) for 4 weeks were examined by western blotting (a; n = 3). Effects of CGS21680 (+CGS, 0.2 mg/kg/day), 5HD (+5HD, 10 mg/kg/day), and Dia (+Dia, 7 mg/kg/day) on RVSP (b; n = 6) and mCAP (c; n = 6) in WT and A2aR-/ mice. Representative pictures of RVSP waves (red) in the WT and A2aR-/ groups (d). Representative pictures of mCAP waves (blue) in the WT and A2aR-/ groups (e). Data are presented as the mean ± standard deviation (SD). # p < 0.05, ## p < 0.01 vs normoxic group; * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01 vs hypoxic group; + p < 0.05, ++ p < 0.01 between A2aR-/ and WT mice groups. A2aR: A2a receptors; MitoKATP: mitochondrial ATP-sensitive potassium channels; 5HD, 5-hydroxydecanoic acid sodium salt; Dia, diazoxide; RVSP, right ventricular systolic pressure; mCAP, mCAP; WT, wild-type.
Fig. 3 A2aR alleviated hypoxia-induced RV hypertrophy and pulmonary arterial remodeling via MitoKATP

Effects of CGS21680 (+CGS, 0.2 mg/kg/day), 5HD (+5HD, 10 mg/kg/day), and Dia (+Dia, 7 mg/kg/day) on the RV/(LV + S) (a; n = 10), RV/BW (b; n = 10), WT/TT(%) (d; n = 10), and WA/TA(%) (e; n = 10) ratios in WT and A2aR-/- mice. Representative photomicrographs showing hypoxia-induced remodeling in the pulmonary arteries of the WT and A2aR-/- groups exposed to hypoxia (10% O2) or ambient oxygen levels (21% O2) for 4 weeks (c, ×400), the white arrow indicates the pulmonary artery. Data are presented as the mean ± standard deviation (SD). # p < 0.05, ## p < 0.01 vs normoxic group; * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01 vs hypoxic group; + p < 0.05, ++ p < 0.01 between A2aR-/- and WT mice groups. A2aR: A2a receptors; MitoKATP: mitochondrial ATP-sensitive potassium channels; 5HD, 5-hydroxydecanoic acid sodium salt; Dia, diazoxide; RV, right ventricle; LV, left ventricle; S, septum; BW, body weight; WT, wall thickness; TT, total thickness; WA, wall area; TA, total area; WT, wild-type.
Fig. 4 A2aR alleviated hypoxia-induced excessive proliferation and apoptosis resistance in PASMCs via MitoKATP

Representative photomicrographs of PCNA (brown) expression in the pulmonary arteries of WT and A2aR-/- groups (a, ×400), the black arrow indicates the PCNA in the pulmonary arteries. Representative photomicrographs of apoptotic cells (brown) in the pulmonary arteries of WT and A2aR-/- groups (b, ×400), the black arrow indicates the apoptotic cells in the pulmonary arteries. PCNA expression levels in PASMCs were examined by immunohistochemistry, and apoptosis levels of PASMCs were examined by TUNEL assay. Effects of CGS21680 (+CGS, 0.2 mg/kg/day), 5HD (+5HD, 10 mg/kg/day), and Dia (+Dia, 7 mg/kg/day) on PCNA expression in PASMCs (c; n = 5), and the apoptosis of PASMCs (d; n = 5) in WT and A2aR-/- mice. Data are presented as the mean ± standard deviation (SD). # p < 0.05, ## p < 0.01 vs normoxic group; * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01 vs hypoxic group; + p < 0.05, ++ p < 0.01 between A2aR-/- and WT mice groups. A2aR: A2a receptors; MitoKATP: mitochondrial ATPsensitive potassium channels; PCNA, proliferating cell nuclear antigen; WT, wild-type; PASMCs, pulmonary artery smooth muscle cells; 5HD, 5-hydroxydecanoic...
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vs normoxic group; * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01 vs hypoxic group; + p < 0.05, ++ p < 0.01
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Fig. 7 A2aR attenuated HPH via MitoKATP
A2aR attenuated HPH by modulating the mitochondrial-dependent apoptosis pathway via MitoKATP. HPH, hypoxia-induced pulmonary hypertension.