Isoflurane, but not Halothane, Induces Protection of Human Myocardium via Adenosine A₁ Receptors and Adenosine Triphosphate–sensitive Potassium Channels

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Background: Volatile anesthetics produce differing degrees of myocardial protection in animal models of ischemia. The purpose of the current investigation was to determine the influence of isoflurane and halothane on myocardial protection in a human model of simulated ischemia and the role of adenosine A₁ receptors and adenosine triphosphate–sensitive potassium (K_{ATP}) channels in the anesthetic pathway.

Methods: Human atrial trabecular muscles were superfused with oxygenated Krebs-Henseleit buffer and stimulated at 1 Hz, with recording of maximum contractile force. Fifteen minutes before a 30-min anoxic insult, muscles were pretreated for 5 min with either anoxia, the A₁ agonist N⁶-cyclohexyladenosine, 1% halothane or 1.2% isoflurane. These treatments were also performed in the presence of either the K_{ATP} channel antagonist glibenclamide or the A₁ receptor antagonist 8-cyclopentyl-1,3-dipropylxanthine (DPCPX). Anesthetic effects were also determined on K_{ATP} currents in isolated whole cell voltage-clamped human atrial myocytes.

Results: Recovery of force (recorded 60 min after anoxia) in isoflurane-pretreated muscles was reduced from 76.6 ± 7.5% of baseline to 43.7 ± 7.1% by pretreatment with glibenclamide, and to 52.5 ± 6.2% by pretreatment with DPCPX. Halothane treatment provided no cardioprotection and seemed to inhibit protection by anoxic preconditioning. Halothane decreased whole cell K_{ATP} currents in atrial myocytes, whereas isoflurane had no effects.

Conclusions: This study demonstrates the cardioprotective effects of isoflurane in contrast to the effects of halothane. Furthermore, A₁ receptors and K_{ATP} channels seem to mediate the beneficial effects of anoxia and isoflurane in human myocardium. (Key words: Isolated muscles; myocardial protection; volatile anesthetics.)

THE intraoperative and perioperative period is a time during which ischemia may be induced in patients by stress¹,² and also by certain anesthetics.³–⁵ The detrimental consequences of myocardial ischemia have been shown to be reduced by pretreatment with transient ischemia, the phenomenon termed “ischemic preconditioning” (IPC).⁶ Studies of the mechanism of IPC suggests that protein kinase C (PKC) activity may be enhanced by IPC⁷ and, in turn, may activate the adenosine triphosphate–sensitive potassium channel (K_{ATP}).⁸,⁹ Although the sarcolemmal K_{ATP} channel may contribute, recent studies have suggested that the relevant K_{ATP} channel actually resides in the mitochondria.¹⁰,¹¹ Cardioprotective benefits of K_{ATP} channel openers have been observed both in vivo¹² and in vitro, whereas K_{ATP} channel antagonists such as glibenclamide (glyburide) and 5-hydroxydecanoate preclude the preconditioning effectiveness of ischemia.¹³,¹⁴

Like IPC, volatile anesthetics have also been shown to provide protection for ischemic myocardium, both experimentally¹⁵,¹⁶ and more recently in a clinical study.¹⁷ One possible common site of action between volatile anesthetics and IPC may be the K_{ATP} channel of cardiac myocytes, because the ability of volatile anesthetics to alter channel activity has been demonstrated in experiments on isolated myocytes.¹⁸ Furthermore, glibenclamide inhibits cardioprotection by isoflurane in a canine model of ischemia.¹⁶ The protection afforded by isoflurane is similarly inhibited by antagonists of adenosine receptors,¹⁹ suggesting that adenosine receptor activation may also be involved in the pathway linking...
isoflurane to cardioprotection. The purpose of the current investigation was to determine any interaction between volatile anesthetics and preconditioning in a human model of simulated myocardial ischemia using anoxia (anoxic preconditioning).

Materials and Methods

Tissue Acquisition and Dissection

Human right atrial appendages were acquired from patients undergoing coronary artery bypass grafting surgery before bypass in accordance with guidelines of the University Human Investigation Committee. Patients taking oral hypoglycemics were excluded from the study. Appendages were transported from the operating room to the laboratory in oxygenated solution containing 130 mM NaCl, 5 mM Na₂SO₄, 6 mM KCl, 5 mM MgCl₂, 2 mM NaH₂PO₄, 20 mM glucose, and 5 mM HEPES, and were oxygenated for a further 30 min. Trabeculae were carefully dissected from the appendages and, using 2-mm circular spring clips, were vertically suspended from a force transducer (Model 400; Cambridge Technology, Watertown, MA) in an organ bath maintained at 32°C. This lower temperature is used to prevent automaticity and facilitate pacing. The bath was filled with a Krebs-Henseleit buffer consisting of 118.5 mM NaCl, 4.8 mM KCl, 24.8 mM NaHCO₃, 1.2 mM KH₂PO₄, 1.44 mM MgSO₄, 2.5 mM CaCl₂, 10 mM glucose, and 10 mM pyruvate, pH 7.4, and bubbled constantly with 95% O₂-5% CO₂. Muscles were equilibrated for 10 min before being field stimulated to contract at 0.1 Hz (Grass Stimulator, model S88; Grass Instruments, Watertown, MA) for another 20 min. Muscles were then stretched to the minimum length to produce maximum isometric contractions (Lₘₐₓ) and stimulated at 1 Hz until a steady force of contraction was maintained for at least 20 min. The resting tension on muscle and stimulation voltage remained constant for the duration of the experiment. The buffer was changed every 15 min before and during the experiments. Muscles that failed to generate 1 mN of force were not used in the experiments.

Experimental Protocol

After stabilization of contractile performance, muscles were subjected to a 5-min treatment interval (fig. 1). During this treatment interval, muscles were alternatively pretreated with 100 nM N⁰-cyclohexyladenosine (CHA; fig. 1C), an adenosine A₁ agonist, or with anoxic preconditioning (APc) by bubbling the organ bath with 95% N₂-5% CO₂ instead of 95% O₂-5% CO₂ (fig. 1B) to simulate ischemia. These pretreatments were also re-
peated in the presence of 0.3 μM glibenclamide, a K<sub>ATP</sub> channel antagonist, or 10 nm (with APc) or 100 nm (with CHA) 8-cyclopentyl-1,3-dipropylxanthine (DPCPX), an A<sub>1</sub> antagonist, to determine the role of K<sub>ATP</sub> channels and A<sub>1</sub> receptors, respectively. These concentrations of drugs were similar to those used in previous in vitro studies. DPCPX and glibenclamide treatments were also administered alone as controls.

In anesthetic treatment groups, 1% halothane or 1.2% isoflurane was delivered to the organ chamber for 5 min either in 95% O<sub>2</sub>-5% CO<sub>2</sub> (fig. 1C) to determine the effect of prior exposure to anesthetic alone, or in 95% N<sub>2</sub>-5% CO<sub>2</sub> (fig. 1B) to determine interaction of anesthetics with preconditioning anoxia. The specific carrier gas was passed through a calibrated anesthetic vaporizer to produce the stated vapor concentration. The vapor concentrations used resulted in aqueous concentrations of 0.23 mM halothane and 0.26 mM isoflurane, which approximates the aqueous concentration at 37°C achieved by 1 minimum alveolar concentration of halothane (0.75%) or isoflurane (1.3%). Anesthetic treatments were also performed in the presence of 0.3 μM glibenclamide and 10 nm DPCPX (fig. 1C). Muscles that received no treatment during this initial 5-min interval (fig. 1A). At the end of the treatment (time 5 min) and after a washout, a 15-min interval followed during which no treatments were administered. Next, muscles in all groups (except control) were made anoxic by replacing 95% O<sub>2</sub>-5% CO<sub>2</sub> with 95% N<sub>2</sub>-5% CO<sub>2</sub> to determine interaction of anesthetics with preconditioning anoxia. The specific carrier gas was passed through a calibrated anesthetic vaporizer to produce the stated vapor concentration. The vapor concentrations used resulted in aqueous concentrations of 0.23 mM halothane and 0.26 mM isoflurane, which approximates the aqueous concentration at 37°C achieved by 1 minimum alveolar concentration of halothane (0.75%) or isoflurane (1.3%). Anesthetic treatments were also performed in the presence of 0.3 μM glibenclamide and 10 nm DPCPX (fig. 1C). Muscles that served as time control or those subjected only to the subsequent anoxic insult alone (nonconditioned) received no treatment during this initial 5-min interval (fig. 1A). At the end of the treatment (time 5 min) and after a washout, a 15-min interval followed during which no treatments were administered. Next, muscles in all groups (except control) were made anoxic by replacing 95% O<sub>2</sub>-5% CO<sub>2</sub> with 95% N<sub>2</sub>-5% CO<sub>2</sub> in the buffer for 30 min, followed by a 60-min oxygenated recovery period.

The trabeculae that were used in these experiments were 4-5 mm in length with a 1-mm<sup>2</sup> cross-sectional area. The average weight of trabeculae (n = 132) used was 3.11 ± 2.8 mg. Pretreatment force generated in muscles ranged from 1 to 17 mN and averaged 7.35 ± 8.8 mN (table 1). Actual baseline values for developed force did not differ significantly among treatment groups. Some experiments were excluded from the study because of insufficient recovery after treatment. Nine studies were excluded from the Apc group, two from the glibenclamide in the presence of DPCPX group, and one from the glibenclamide control group.

**Atrial Myocyte Isolation**

Atrial myocytes were isolated from right atrial appendages using a procedure based on that of Nánási et al. Trabeculae minced into 1-mm<sup>3</sup> pieces were allowed to equilibrate for 40 min in a low Ca<sup>2+</sup> buffer containing 130 mM NaCl, 3 mM CaCl<sub>2</sub>, 5 mM Na<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>, 6 mM KCl, 5 mM MgCl<sub>2</sub>, 2 mM NaH<sub>2</sub>PO<sub>4</sub>, 5 mM HEPES, and 20 mM glucose adjusted to pH 7.3 with NaOH. The tissue was then digested for 25-30 min with 1 mg/ml collagenase (Type I; Sigma, St. Louis, MO) and 0.15 mg/ml pronase (Type XIV; Sigma). Initial digestion was followed by a 1-2-min wash in calcium-free solution with 0.25 mg/ml aprotonin (Sigma) adjusted to pH 7.4 with NaOH. A second enzyme solution containing 1 mg/ml albumin, 5 mg/ml Na<sub>2</sub>ATP, 0.5 mg/ml creatine, 0.5 mg/ml pyruvate, and 0.5 mg/ml β-hydroxybutyrate with 2 mg/ml collagenase and 0.1 mg/ml elastase (Type III; Sigma) was superfused for 3-12 min. The tissue fragments were gently triturated and filtered through a 250-μm nylon mesh. The myocytes were stored at 4°C in medium (20 mM KCl, 10 mM glucose, 70 mM glutamate, 10 mM β-hydroxybutyrate, 10 mM taurine, 10 mM EGTA, and 1% albumin) for 1 h before recordings were made. Throughout the isolation procedure, all solutions were gassed with 100% O<sub>2</sub> and maintained at 37°C.

**Whole Cell Voltage Clamp**

The myocyte suspension was placed in a chamber mounted on an inverted microscope and allowed to settle to the bottom. Quiescent rod-shaped myocytes with clear striations were whole cell voltage clamped at room temperature (22-25°C) in external solution consisting of 140 mM NaCl, 5 mM KCl, 1 mM MgCl<sub>2</sub>, 1 mM CaCl<sub>2</sub>, and 10 mM HEPES, pH 7.4. Microelectrodes were
pulled (Model PB-7; Narishige Instruments, Tokyo, Japan) from glass pipettes and polished with a microforge (CPM2; ALA Scientific, New York, NY). Pipette resistances were typically 3-4 MΩ. Pipette internal solution consisted of 140 mM KCl, 5 mM EGTA, 5 mM HEPES, 10 mM KOH, 1 mM MgCl₂, 0.1 mM Na₂ATP, and 0.1 mM NaADP. Currents were evoked by 10-ms voltage steps from -100 to 30 mV from a holding potential of -80 mV. Halothane or isoflurane was bubbled into the extracellular solution via air and superfused over the cells in the absence or presence of 50 μM 2,4-dinitrophenol (DNP) to enhance K_ATP currents. Halothane administered at vapor concentrations of 0.5%, 1.0%, 1.5%, 2.0%, and 2.5% resulted in aqueous concentrations in the cell chamber of 0.23, 0.51, 0.68, 1.0, and 1.1 mM, respectively. Isoflurane administered at 1.0%, 2.0%, and 3.0% resulted in aqueous concentrations of 0.47, 0.96, and 1.25 mM, respectively. Currents were recorded with pCLAMP 5.0 (Axon Instruments, Foster City, CA) and analyzed using PCS analysis software developed in our laboratory.

**Chemicals**

Glibenclamide (Sigma) was made as a stock solution in 1:1:1 ethanol, polyethyl glycol, and 1 N sodium hydroxide. DPCPX (RBI, Natick, MA) was made as a stock solution in 95% ethyl alcohol, and CHA (RBI) was made as a stock solution in distilled water.

**Statistical Analysis**

All data are expressed as mean ± SD percent of the percent pretreatment (time 0 min) force, except as specified in table 1. Anesthetic and preconditioning treatment groups were compared between groups using a one-way analysis of variance and Student-Neuman-Keuls post hoc analysis. P < 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

**Results**

**Effects of Preconditioning with Anoxia on Human Myocardial Contractility**

All data are expressed in the text as a percent of the force of contraction at the initiation (time 0 min) of the experimental protocol. The time course of the changes in force of contraction for APc and anesthetic experiments is shown in figure 2. Contractile force of untreated trabeculae showed a modest decrease during the 110 min of these experiments (fig. 2A) to 82.3 ± 5.0% of

Fig. 2. Time course of effects of pretreatments and anoxia on contractile force in isolated human atrial trabeculae. Mean (± SD) percent of pretreatment (time 0) from the end of the treatment period (time 5 min) until the conclusion of the experiment. The treatment interval (anoxia and/or drug) is indicated by a banded bar, and the filled black bar denotes the interval of anoxia. (A) Effects of 0.3 μM glibenclamide (Glib) and 10 nM 8-cyclopentyl-1,3-dipropylxanthine (DPCPX) on anoxic preconditioning (APc). The time control is indicated by a solid line. (B and C) Preconditioning of muscles with 1.2% isoflurane (Isof) and 1% halothane (Hal). Values for the nonpreconditioned (dotted line) and APc (dashed line) groups are also shown for comparison.

the time-0 value. Untreated muscles made anoxic for 30 min and reoxygenated for 60 min contracted with a force of only 30.4 ± 8.3% of pretreatment at the conclusion of the experiment. Pretreatment of the muscles with a single 5-min anoxic interval reduced contractile
force to less than 25% of pretreatment control but resulted in postanoxic recovery of contractile force to 71.6 ± 5.5% of pretreatment (time 0 min) after 60 min of reperfusion ($P < 0.05$ vs. recovery of nonpreconditioned muscles). This protocol was used throughout the remainder of the experiments to determine the relative effects of combining treatments with APc.

Anesthetic Effects on Anoxia and APc

The effects of the volatile anesthetics on contractile force were evaluated at the end of the 5-min treatment interval (fig. 3) and again 60 min postanoxia (110 min; fig. 4) in both untreated and pretreated muscles. When administered in the absence of oxygen, neither anesthetic altered the anoxia-induced decrease in contractile force over the 5-min treatment interval. In the presence of oxygen, 1.2% isoflurane produced no significant change in contractile force. In contrast, delivery of 1% halothane via oxygen decreased force of contraction to 48.3 ± 13.6% pretreatment after 5 min. The postanoxic recovery of muscles in these treatment groups also differed. Muscles pretreated with 1.2% isoflurane alone recovered 76.6 ± 7.5% pretreatment control force post-
Role of Adenosine A1 Receptors and KATP Channels
Pretreatment with the A1 receptor agonist CHA resulted in improved postanoxic recovery (110 min) similar to Apc (74.6 ± 8.4%). Postanoxic recovery in Apc and CHA-pretreated muscles was similarly inhibited by DPCPX to 39.5 ± 9.6% and 36.9 ± 8.6% of pretreatment control, respectively. These findings corroborate previous studies that suggested a role of A1 receptors in physiologic preconditioning.22 When given concurrently with isoflurane pretreatment, 10 nM DPCPX inhibited the postanoxic recovery to 52.5 ± 6.2% of pretreatment control, comparable to that seen in Apc muscles. Pretreatment with 0.3 μM glibenclamide to block activation of KATP channels also inhibited postanoxic recovery in CHA and Apc-pretreated muscles (fig. 4), as has been previously demonstrated. This dose of glibenclamide also produced a decrease of postanoxic recovery of force in 1.2% isoflurane-pretreated muscles (P < 0.05; figs. 2 and 4). Recovery of halothane-treated muscles was not significantly altered by the inclusion of glibenclamide. Pretreatment with these antagonists alone (glibenclamide, DPCPX; figs. 2 and 4) did not alter the postischemic recovery of contractile force as compared with nonpreconditioned muscles.

Anesthetic Effects on KATP Current in Isolated Myocytes
Whole cell currents ranged from −198.5 ± 44.5 to 487.5 ± 81.1 pA at voltages from −100 to 30 mV. To determine if either volatile anesthetic was directly activating or inhibiting KATP channel currents, anesthetics were applied to myocytes in the absence of channel activators or in the presence of DNP. In the absence of DNP-enhanced current, the baseline K+ conductance was not enhanced by either halothane or isoflurane (n = 6, data not shown). Application of 50 μM DNP augmented whole cell outward currents by 65.4 ± 23.6% (n = 11), with negligible effect on inward current. DNP-induced currents recorded at voltages from −100 to 30 mV ranged from −400 to 1,500 pA. Halothane (1%) decreased inward and outward currents stimulated by DNP at −100 and 30 mV by 29.8 ± 4.5% and 31.9 ± 6.3%, respectively. The results from a representative experiment are shown in figure 5. Increasing concentrations of halothane produced slightly greater decreases in outward current but no further reduction of inward current (table 2). Halothane maximally reduced inward current at a concentration of 1%, whereas 2.5% halothane produced the greatest reduction of outward current observed in these experiments. Isoflurane failed to produce any significant changes in either inward or outward KATP current (IKATP) when administered in concentrations as high as 3% (table 2). These currents were susceptible to 50–65% inhibition by glibenclamide (data not shown). The high degree of variability observed in the isoflurane-treated groups is insignificant and probably resultant of variations in the whole cell current. This variability was not apparent in halothane-treated cells because of the substantial and consistent effect of halothane treatment.
Table 2. Current in Isolated Human Atrial Myocytes following Treatment with Anesthetics

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<tr>
<th>V command</th>
<th>Halothane</th>
<th>Isoflurane</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.5% (n = 4)</td>
<td>1.0% (n = 7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>−100 mV</td>
<td>−8.8 ± 20%</td>
<td>−29.8 ± 11.8%*</td>
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<tr>
<td>30 mV</td>
<td>−18.3 ± 23.7%</td>
<td>−31.9 ± 16.7%*</td>
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Data expressed as mean ± SD of the percent of pretreatment control. Group size indicated in parentheses.

* Denotes $P < 0.05$ compared with pretreatment control.

Discussion

The objectives of this study were to verify studies suggesting protective roles of adenosine receptors and cardiac $K_{ATP}$ channels using this human model of preconditioning, and to determine if volatile anesthetics could pharmacologically imitate or modulate the physiologic effects of APc. These findings support previous reports suggesting that preconditioning in human myocardium involves adenosine receptor activation and $K_{ATP}$ channel activation$^{14,23}$ as well as providing evidence toward a mechanism for anesthetic effects in ischemic myocardium.

The anesthetics studied were isoflurane, which represents the most widely used volatile anesthetic despite prior concerns regarding its potential for causing ischemia.$^{3-5}$ and halothane, a historically widely applied anesthetic with somewhat greater ability to depress myocardial contractility.$^{24,25}$ At clinically relevant concentrations, isoflurane protected the human myocardium in this model against a protracted 30-min anoxia to a similar extent as did hypoxic preconditioning. This effect of isoflurane seems to be mediated through $A_1$ receptors and the $K_{ATP}$ channel, as the $A_1$ antagonist DPCPX and the $K_{ATP}$ channel antagonist glibenclamide, respectively, inhibit it. Halothane, at clinically relevant concentrations, provided no benefit to anoxic myocardium and seemed to inhibit the cardioprotection provided by hypoxic preconditioning. In isolated myocytes, halothane inhibited induced $K_{ATP}$ currents, but isoflurane produced no effect.

A human model of simulated ischemia was used to examine the interactions between anesthetics and preconditioning, which have been somewhat characterized in several other species,$^{15,16}$ but it remained to be determined whether the effects persisted in the human model. Although experiments performed in a human model have the benefit of more relevant clinical extrapolations, there are a few limitations. For example, the human model possesses a high degree of variability because of possible drug interactions and disease states. Therefore, appendages were not used if obtained from patients currently on an oral hypoglycemic regimen in an attempt to preclude from the study samples with $K_{ATP}$ channels altered by prior pharmacologic interventions. Another consideration was the use of volatile anesthetic in the surgical procedure during which the atrial specimen is removed, because this study attempted to demonstrate anesthetic-specific effects on myocardial protection. Because of its widespread use as a supplementary anesthetic during cardiac surgery at our institution, patients were frequently exposed to isoflurane (0.5-1.0%), which could theoretically precondition the sample. However, studies were initiated at least 90 min (and anoxic insult performed 110-140 min) after removal of the atrium, times that extend beyond the early window of preconditioning.$^{9}$ Furthermore, comparison is made with control experiments that were performed in parallel. Nevertheless, our experimental results may be superimposed on some small residual effects. The contribution of endothelial function to a model of protection must also be examined, because myocardial protection mediated by IPC has recently been shown to include not only the myocytes themselves, but also to extend to endothelium.$^{26}$ Obviously, protection of the endothelium may be critical to preventing subsequent alterations in perfusion due to disruptions in endothelial regulation of vascular tone. However, anesthetic effects in this model of superfused muscle segments is unlikely involve a major contribution from endothelium. Another issue that must be considered is the temperature at which each experiment was performed. Temperatures below physiologic 37°C have been found to decrease channel responsiveness to potassium channel openers,$^{27,28}$ which suggests an alteration in channel activity. This effect could theoretically alter the anesthetic responses in isolated muscles contracting at 32°C and patch-
clamped myocytes at 22–25°C. No studies to date specifically address temperature effects on $K_{\text{ATP}}$ channel function. Conducting these experiments at the stated temperatures allows comparison with other studies that have typically been performed at these somewhat subphysiologic temperatures.

Finally, inherent to models of preconditioning is a variability in the methods used to simulate ischemia. In our experiments, ischemia was simulated by anoxia, which was achieved by substitution of nitrogen for oxygen. Although many studies use a duration of anoxia up to 90 min, 30 min has been used in other human models.\(^3\) This anoxic period conceivably may result in a reversible cardiodepression without cell death ("myocardial stunning"), which has been found by some to be reversible cardiodepression without cell death ("myocardial stunning"), which has been found by some to be reversible. The reason for this discrepancy could be explained by the fact that the current study uses restoration of contractile function, not cell viability, as the measure of postischemic recovery. Nonetheless, because this study focuses on contractile performance, a hypoxic insult sufficient to prevent functioning is adequate for the determination of cardioprotection.

The possible involvement of adenosine $A_1$ receptors and $K_{\text{ATP}}$ channels as mediators of physiologic preconditioning has been suggested by studies in several animal models, including human ones.\(^{14,21,34}\) It has been suggested that adenosine receptors may be activated by preconditioning and, in turn, activate $K_{\text{ATP}}$ channels, possibly through an intermediate such as PKC. Evidence in support of this theory include: (1) adenosine-stimulated preconditioning of human atrial trabeculae can be partially blocked by glibenclamide\(^25\); (2) IPC of rabbit myocardium enhances translocation of PKC isoforms $\eta$ and $\epsilon$; (3) preconditioning of human atrial trabeculae with a $K_{\text{ATP}}$ channel opener is inhibited by a PKC antagonist\(^14\); and (4) $K_{\text{ATP}}$ currents evoked in rabbit myocytes by metabolic inhibition are increased in the combined presence of PKC activation and adenosine.\(^32\) The current study confirms that adenosine receptors and $K_{\text{ATP}}$ channels may sequentially mediate physiologic preconditioning as well as pharmacologic protection provided by anesthetics. Several possible mechanisms by which $K_{\text{ATP}}$ channel activation results in cardioprotection against an ischemic insult have been proposed, including a shortening of action potential duration. However, this has been refuted by findings demonstrating protection by potassium channel openers in the absence of action potential effects,\(^33\) suggesting that activation of sarcolemmal $K_{\text{ATP}}$ channels may not mediate cardioprotection. Recent studies have described a $K_{\text{ATP}}$ channel on the inner membrane of the mitochondria, which is selectively activated by diazoxide and inhibited by 5-hydroxydecanate.\(^34\) Studies using these agents in isolated rat and rabbit hearts suggest mitochondrial $K_{\text{ATP}}$ channels can mediate physiologic preconditioning.\(^35,36\) Our results do not provide any information that would distinguish between a sarcolemmal and mitochondrial effect.

The current study confirms findings in animal models demonstrating a cardioprotective effect of isoflurane anesthesia that is also mediated through adenosine receptors and $K_{\text{ATP}}$ channels.\(^{16,19}\) In a porcine model, coronary vasodilation induced by isoflurane can be inhibited by $K_{\text{ATP}}$ channel inhibition with glibenclamide.\(^37\) Previous investigators have suggested that this vasodilation by isoflurane may induce coronary "steal" and thereby induce ischemic changes.\(^3-5\) However, subsequent studies suggest if coronary perfusion pressure is adequately maintained there is no evidence of such steal.\(^38\) This study now documents that in human myocardium, isoflurane can play a direct protective role, as has also been demonstrated in animal models.\(^{16,39,40}\) It is also noteworthy that the protective effect of isoflurane persists beyond its withdrawal for at least 15 min, similar to the "memory" effects previously reported experimentally\(^41\) and clinically.\(^42\)

To determine whether isoflurane exerts a direct effect on $K_{\text{ATP}}$ channels, we applied isoflurane to voltage-clamped human atrial myocytes. In doses as high as 3% (roughly 3 minimum alveolar concentration), glibenclamide-sensitive $K_{\text{ATP}}$ currents were not affected, either positively or negatively, by isoflurane. These findings suggest that isoflurane does not have a direct effect on channel activation. Because the activator used here, DNP, activates $K_{\text{ATP}}$ currents by decreasing intracellular ATP as well as through a direct channel effect,\(^42\) it is possible that protective activity of isoflurane is exerted at a regulatory site on the channel that is circumvented by the direct action of DNP. For example, in rabbit ventricular myocytes, isoflurane has been shown to decrease channel sensitivity to ATP.\(^18\) Another possibility is that the site of protective action of isoflurane is an upstream intermediate, such as an adenosine receptor. The latter theory is supported by the demonstrated inhibition of isoflurane effects by 10 nm DPCPX. A similar study by Krersten et al.\(^40\) found that 0.8 mg/kg of DPCPX in dogs partially inhibits the cardioprotective activity of
isoflurane. If this dose produced the maximal effect of $A_1$ antagonism, as suggested by the investigators, $A_1$ receptors may be only one mediator of the isoflurane effect on ischemic recovery, and partial mediation by $A_3$ receptors remains a possibility.

The finding that halothane pretreatment diminishes the protective effects of Apc contradicts previous studies that have demonstrated a cardioprotection by halothane.\[^{15}\] The discrepancy may be a result of the difference in experimental species and illustrates the rationale for conducting these experiments in a human model. This study also supports the hypothesis of a possible interaction of halothane with $K_{ATP}$ channels by two observations: (1) halothane blunts the cardioprotection provided by Apc in isolated muscles, which is strongly evidenced to be mediated through $K_{ATP}$ channels; and (2) $K_{ATP}$ currents in voltage-clamped isolated human atrial myocytes were blocked by approximately 30% in the presence of halothane. These observations strongly suggest that halothane affects Apc through the inhibition of $I_{KATP}$, although it would require that its effects extend beyond its immediate period of application. Because inhibition of $K_{ATP}$ current by halothane was not as extensive as that seen with glibenclamide, this less-than-complete inhibition may explain why 1% halothane caused only a partial interference with Apc.

In conclusion, our findings demonstrate that the adenosine receptor activation of the $K_{ATP}$ channel, which mediates Ipc in human atrium, contributes to the cardioprotective effects of the volatile anesthetic isoflurane. Such a protective effect, which can be elicited even when isoflurane is briefly applied clinically in cardioplegic solution,\[^{17}\] could contribute to the relatively low incidence of myocardial ischemia observed intraoperatively. Disappearance of protection in the immediate postoperative period might be anticipated as the preconditioning effect declines.\[^{42}\] Furthermore, we show this property is not present among all volatile anesthetics because halothane did not protect and even seemed to attenuate protection by Apc.

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