Down-regulation of protocadherin-α A isoforms in mice changes contextual fear conditioning and spatial working memory

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Keywords: 5-hydroxytryptamine, behavior, hippocampus, memory formation

Abstract
Diverse protocadherins (Pcdhs), which are encoded as a large cluster (composed of α, β and γ clusters) in the genome, are localized to axons and synapses. The Pcdhs have been proposed to contribute to the generation of sophisticated neural networks and to regulate brain function. To address the molecular roles of Pcdhs in regulating individual behavior, here we generated knockdown mice of Pcdh-α proteins and examined their behavioral abnormalities. There are two alternative splicing variants of the Pcdh-α constant region. Pcdh-α A and B isoforms, with different cytoplasmic tails. Pcdh-α A Bneo/ΔBneo mice, in which the Pcdh-α B splicing variant was absent and the Pcdh-α A isoforms were down-regulated to approximately 20% of the wild-type level, exhibited enhanced contextual fear conditioning and disparities in an eight-arm radial maze. Similar abnormalities were found in Pcdh-α A Bneo/ΔBneo mice, which lacked 57 amino acids of the Pcdh-α A cytoplasmic tail. These learning abnormalities were, however, not seen in Pcdh-α A Bneo/ΔB mice [in which the neomycin-resistance (neo) gene cassette was removed from the Pcdh-α A Bneo/ΔBneo alleles], in which the expression level of the Pcdh-α A isoforms was recovered, although the Pcdh-α B isoforms were still completely missing in the brain. In addition, the amount of 5-hydroxytryptamine increased in the hippocampus of the hypomorphic Pcdh-α A mutant mice but not in recovery Pcdh-α A Bneo/ΔBneo mice. These results suggested that the level of Pcdh-α A isoforms in the brain has an important role in regulating learning and memory functions and the amount of 5-hydroxytryptamine in the hippocampus.

Introduction
During the development of the nervous system, cell recognition molecules are involved in organizing neuronal networks by regulating neural migration, fasciculation, synaptogenesis and intracellular signaling (Dodd & Jessell, 1988; Edelman & Crossin, 1991; Fields & Itoh, 1996).

The protocadherin (Pcdh)-α family was originally identified as cadherin-related neuronal receptors (CNRs) (Kohmura et al., 1998). The Pcdh-α cluster is followed by the Pcdh-β and Pcdh-γ clusters, which are arranged in tandem on human chromosome 5 and mouse chromosome 18. The mouse Pcdh-α gene cluster is composed of 14 variable exons and a set of three constant-region exons (Sugino et al., 2000; Wu & Maniatis, 2000). Mature Pcdh-α mRNAs are generated from one of these variable exons, encoding alternative extracellular and transmembrane regions, and a set of constant-region exons, which encode short cytoplasmic domains. For the Pcdh-α third constant exon, two kinds of alternative splicing variants, Pcdh-α A and B isoforms, are produced (Sugino et al., 2000). Diverse Pcdh proteins appear to be exclusively expressed in the brain, especially in the olfactory bulb, hippocampus and cerebellum. Pcdh proteins, and complexes that include them, are localized to axons and partially to synapses during neuronal development (Kohmura et al., 1998; Phillips et al., 2003; Morishita et al., 2004). Several dozen Pcdh-α and Pcdh-γ mRNAs are differentially expressed in single Purkinje cells with monoallelic chromosome regulation (Esumi et al., 2005; Kaneko et al., 2006). This molecular diversity

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Received 17 August 2007, revised 7 July 2008, accepted 27 July 2008

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of the Pcdhs has led to the speculation that these proteins might underlie the precise formation of the neuronal network (Serafini, 1999; Shapiro & Colman, 1999; Yagi & Takeichi, 2000; Hamada & Yagi, 2001; Yagi, 2008).

Pcdh-γ null mice die soon after birth because of a dramatic degeneration of spinal interneurons in the late embryonic stages (Wang et al., 2002; Weiner et al., 2005). Moreover, synaptic density in the intermediate zone of the spinal cord is dramatically decreased. Further investigation has been performed in mutants lacking both Pcdh-γ proteins and the proapoptotic protein BAX (a member of proapoptotic Bel-2 family). In these mice, a decrease in synapses, despite the minimal apoptosis and neurodegeneration, was still observed and the activity of the synapses that did form was reduced. These results indicated that Pcdh-γ proteins are essential for the synaptic development of at least some neurons. We recently demonstrated that Pcdh-α mutants lacking the common cytoplasmic tail showed abnormal axonal sorting of olfactory sensory neurons into glomeruli (Hasegawa et al., 2008). However, roles for Pcdh proteins in regulating brain functions that affect behavior have not yet been identified.

In the present study, we generated mutant mice with extensively decreased Pcdh-α proteins, to investigate the physiological role of these proteins in vivo. These mutant mice showed enhanced fear-conditioning learning and a moderate disparity from normal in the eight-arm radial maze test. These abnormalities were reversed by the expression of normal levels of Pcdh-α isoforms. In addition, these hypomorphic Pcdh-α A mutations led to up-regulated levels of 5-hydroxytryptamine (5-HT) in the hippocampus.

Materials and methods

Production of Pcdh-α isoform-specific gene-converted mice

To generate the Pcdh-α ΔNeo allele, we constructed a targeting vector to insert a termination codon in-frame followed by a loxp site at the first codon of the constant fourth exon, which encodes a subtype-specific region of the Pcdh-α B isoform. To generate the Pcdh-α ΔAneo allele, we constructed a targeting vector to insert a termination codon just after the A and B common coding region in the constant third exon. The 5' homology arms were NolI/SalI-digested 3.0-kb fragments generated by polymerase chain reaction (PCR) with two primers for the Pcdh-α B allele; CP3-F (5'-ATAAGATGCCGCGCCTGACAATGTGGGAGAT-3') and CNR-B-R (5'-ACGGCTCGACTCATTCGAAACAAGGCCGAGATG-3') for the Pcdh-α A allele; and CP3-F and CNR-A-R (5'-ACGGCTCGACTCATTCGAAACAAGGCCGAGATG-3') for the Pcdh-α ΔNeo allele. These homology arms as the ΔAneo specific region were used for immunoprecipitation. Anti-n-synaptophysin (Sigma), anti-n-glutamate acid decarboxylase 67 (Chemicon) and anti-postsynaptic density 95 (Affinity Bioreagents, USA) were purchased.

Plasmids and transfection

Plasmid DNA was prepared as previously described (Murata et al., 2004). Briefly, full-length mouse Pcdh-α4-A or Pcdh-α4-B was tagged with a c-myc epitope and then cloned into a pcDNA3.1 expression vector (Myc-CNR/Pcdh-α4-A or Myc-CNR/Pcdh-α4-B). HEK293T cells were maintained in Dulbecco’s Modified Eagle medium supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum. Plasmid DNA was transfected into HEK293T cells using LipofectAMINE 2000 (Invitrogen).

Reverse transcription-PCR

Total RNA from the mouse brain was extracted with TRIzol Reagent (Invitrogen) and cDNA was synthesized after priming with 40 pmol per reaction with oligo-dT primers in a total volume of 20 μL, using 15 U of Superscript III (Invitrogen) in accordance with the manufacturer’s protocol. To detect spliced transcripts in wild-type and mutant mice, the mouse pair North-F (5'-GCCAGCCCAACCTCTGACT-3') and mh1-R (5'-GCCAGCCCAACCTCTGACT-3') were used. To define each transcript, Southern blot analysis using an internal probe for the products was performed after reverse transcription-PCR.

Immunoblotting and immunoprecipitation

Mice were deeply anesthetized with diethyl ether. The harvested brains were immediately frozen and tissues were homogenized in 20 mM Tris–HCl, pH 6.8, 4% sodium dodecyl sulfate, 4% mercaptoethanol, 20% glycerol, 0.02% bromophenol blue. The lysates were spun at 20 000 g for 20 min and the supernatant was used for immunoblot analysis. For immunoprecipi-
tation, tissues were homogenized in radioimmunoprotein assay buffer (10 mM Tris–HCl, pH 7.5, 150 mM NaCl, 5 mM EDTA, 1% Triton X-100, 1% sodium deoxycholate, 0.1% sodium dodecyl sulfate) with protease inhibitors (5 μg/mL aprotinin, 3 μg/mL leupeptin, 3 μg/mL pepstatin A, 1 mM phenylmethylsulfonyl fluoride) and incubated at 4°C for 10 min. The lysates were spun at 9100 g at 4°C for 20 min and the supernatants were preclared with protein G-Sepharose beads (Amersham, Bioscience) at 4°C for 1 h. Protein G-Sepharose beads were added and the samples were incubated at 4°C for more than 2 h. The beads were washed extensively with RIPA buffer and phosphate-buffered saline, and the proteins were dissociated from them by boiling the beads in sample buffer. The proteins were subjected to sodium dodecyl sulfate-polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis followed by western blot analysis (Murata et al., 2004).

Animal and behavioral experiments

All tests were performed with male mice that were 10 weeks old at the start of testing. The mice were housed four per cage in a room with a 12 h light/dark cycle and ad libitum access to food and water. Experimental procedures were in accordance with Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals in Science Council of Japan and were approved by the Animal Experiment Committee of Osaka University and Kyoto University.

Motor function tests

Motor function tests were conducted as described previously (Miyakawa et al., 2001). The rotarod test was performed using an accelerating rotarod (UGO Basile Accelerating Rotarod). The time that each mouse was able to stay on the rod was measured. In the wire hang test, each animal was placed on the lid of a wire cage and then inverted gently so that the mouse gripped the wire. The latency to fall was recorded with a 60 s cutoff time.

Open field test

Locomotor activity was measured by the open field test. Mice were placed in the center of an open field apparatus (27.4 × 27.4 × 20 cm; MED Associates, Alben, VT, USA). Data were collected for 2 h and the total distance and time spent in the center were recorded.

Light/dark transition test

Light/dark transition tests were conducted in a two-chamber apparatus as described previously (Miyakawa et al., 2001). One chamber was irradiated brightly, whereas the other chamber was dark. Mice were placed into the light side and allowed to move freely between the two chambers for 10 min. The total number of transitions and total time in the light chamber were recorded.

Home-cage activity

During the home-cage activity test, each subject was housed individually in a cage (31 × 21 × 13 cm) in a room with a 12 h light/dark cycle and ad libitum access to food and water. Mice were observed for 3 days and the total distance traveled during the night and day was recorded.

Elevated plus maze

The elevated plus maze formed two open arms (25 × 5 cm) and two enclosed arms that had 15-cm-high transparent walls. The two sets of arms were placed diagonally and the apparatus was elevated to 50 cm above the floor. To prevent mice from falling from the apparatus, 3-mm-high Plexiglas ledges were attached to the open arms. The mice were placed in the central square (5 × 5 cm) facing one of the closed arms. The test was conducted for 10 min and the time spent in the open arms was recorded.

Porsolt forced swim test

The Porsolt forced swim test was conducted as described previously (Miyakawa et al., 2001). Briefly, mice were placed into a cylinder filled with super hypochlorous water and their behavior was recorded for 10 min. Data acquisition was performed automatically and the time of immobility was recorded.

Pain test

The mice were placed on a 55°C hot plate and the latency to paw lick or foot shake was recorded.

Contextual and cued fear conditioning

On the training day, each mouse was placed into a conditioning chamber (10.5 × 10.5 × 10.5 cm; O’Hara & Co., Tokyo, Japan) and
allowed to explore freely for 2 min. A tone (75 dB) was sounded as the conditioned stimulus for 30 s followed by a 2 s mild foot-shock (0.35 mA) as the unconditioned stimulus. One or two more tone-shock pairs were given at 2 min intervals and the animal was returned to its home cage 30 s after the last pair. At 24 h after the conditioning session, the mice were placed back into the conditioning chamber for 5 min and their freezing behavior was measured in context. At 1 h after context testing, the mice were placed into a different, white Plexiglas chamber for 3 min and then the tone was turned on for 3 min. Freezing during the first and subsequent 3 min intervals was recorded.

Morris water maze

A hidden-platform version of the Morris water maze test was conducted as described previously (Miyakawa et al., 2001). A plastic circular pool (40 cm high × 95 cm in diameter) was filled to a depth of 30 cm with water at 21 ± 1°C made opaque with non-toxic white paint. Each mouse was placed in one of four starting locations facing the pool wall and swam until finding a platform 1 cm below the water’s surface or for a maximum of 60 s. Four trials per day were conducted for 9 days. Latency to reach the platform, the distance traveled to reach the platform, the average swim speed and the percentage of time spent at the perimeter of the pool were recorded. On the 10th day, the platform was removed and a probe test was conducted. The percentage of time spent in each quadrant, the number of platform crossings, the average swim speed and the percentage of time spent at the perimeter of the pool were recorded.

Eight-arm radial maze test

The eight-arm radial maze test was conducted as described previously (Miyakawa et al., 2001). Briefly, mice were deprived of food and maintained at 80–85% of their initial body weight. After a pretraining session, maze acquisition trials were performed for 15 consecutive days. For each trial, the choice of arms, latency to obtain all of the pellets, the distance traveled, the number of different arms chosen within the first eight choices and the number of working memory and omission errors were scored.

Image analysis

All of the data analyses for the behavioral studies were performed on a Macintosh computer, using Image OF, Image WM and Image FZ (O’Hara & Co.). Applications were based on the public domain NIH IMAGE program (developed at the U.S. National Institute of Mental Health and available on the Internet at http://rsb.info.nih.gov/nih-image/) and modified by T.M. (available through O’Hara & Co.).

Measurement of monoamines by high performance liquid chromatography

The monoamines and their metabolites were measured using high performance liquid chromatography with electrochemical detection. Mice were killed by decapitation at 10 weeks old and the brain regions were rapidly dissected out and frozen at −80°C until assay. Each sample of frozen brain tissue was homogenized by ultrasonic irradiation in 250 μL of 0.2 M perchloric acid containing isoproterenol as an internal standard. The homogenates were placed on ice for 30 min and spun at 20 000 g for 15 min at 4°C. The supernatants were filtered through a syringe filter unit (DISMIC-3; Advantec, Japan), their pH was adjusted to 3.0 by adding 1 M sodium acetate and then they were injected into a high performance liquid chromatography system equipped with an ODS column (Eicom SC3-ODS; 3 × 100 mm; Eicom, Japan) and an electrochemical detector (EDC-100; Eicom) with the potential set at +750 mV. The mobile phase was 0.1 M citric acid and 0.1 M sodium acetate, pH 3.5, containing sodium-1-octansulfonate (190 mg/L), EDTA-2Na (5 mg/L) and 17% methanol. The flow rate was set at 0.25 mL/min. The protein content was measured using Bradford protein assay solution (Bio-Rad, Richmond, CA, USA) after the precipitates had been solubilized with 0.1 M NaOH.

Statistical analysis

Statistical analyses were conducted using StatView (SAS Institute, Cary, NC, USA). Data were analysed by Student’s t-test (two-tailed, unpaired), two-way ANOVA or two-way repeated measures ANOVA. Values in tables and graphs are expressed as the mean ± SEM.

Results

Generation of Pcdh-α isoform-specific gene-converted mice

To examine the roles of Pcdh-α proteins in vivo, we generated Pcdh-α isoform-specific gene-converted mice. Mice bearing ΔBneo and ΔB alleles were produced to assess the roles of Pcdh-α B-type transcripts. In the ΔBneo allele, no amino acids (aa) were changed in the Pcdh-α A isoforms but the Pcdh-α B isoforms were not expected to be expressed (Fig. 1A–C). A sequence shown in Supporting information, Fig. S1). In the ΔBneo allele, a neo gene was inserted into the fourth constant exon, which encodes the specific Pcdh-α B region (Fig. 1C). The gene conversion was confirmed by PCR and Southern blot analyses (Fig. 1D and G). To evaluate the expression of Pcdh-α proteins in Pcdh-αΔBneo and Pcdh-αΔB isoforms, we performed western blot analysis using a monoclonal antibody (anti-1F4) against Pcdh-α B proteins that specifically detected the Pcdh-α B isoform (specificity shown in Fig. 1E using HEK293T transfectants) and anti-CNR/Pcdh-α, which mainly recognized the Pcdh-α A isoforms (specificity shown in Fig. 1F using HEK293T transfectants). Using the anti-1F4 antibody, we could not detect any Pcdh-α B proteins in the brain extracts of Pcdh-αΔBneo mice, even in immunoprecipitates obtained with an anti-CNRN antibody that recognizes Pcdh-α4 proteins (Fig. 1E). At the same time, the amount of Pcdh-α A isoforms proteins decreased greatly, to approximately 20% of the wild-type level, in Pcdh-αΔBneo/ΔBneo mutants and to 60% in Pcdh-αΔBΔBneo mice (Fig. 1F). We confirmed by reverse transcription-PCR that the Pcdh-α B mRNAs were abolished in Pcdh-αΔBneo/ΔBneo mice but Pcdh-α A mRNAs were not (Fig. 1H). In the ΔBneo allele, the coding sequences for the Pcdh-α A isoform proteins should not have been changed; therefore, it was possible that this down-regulation of the Pcdh-α A isoform was caused by the inserted neo gene cassette in the ΔBneo-targeted allele.

To examine this possibility, we produced a ΔB allele by removing the neo gene cassette from the ΔBneo allele. A loxP site was located on both sides of the neo gene cassette; therefore, we could easily remove it from the ΔBneo allele using Cre recombinase. By crossing the Pcdh-αΔBneo/ΔBneo mice with CAG-Cre mice, we obtained mutants (Pcdh-αΔBneo/ΔBneo) containing the ΔB allele (Fig. 1C). PCR analysis of the genomic DNA using primers against both sides of the neo gene in the ΔBneo allele confirmed that the neo gene was correctly removed at the loxP sites in the Pcdh-αΔBneo and Pcdh-αΔBneo/ΔBneo mice (Fig. 1G).
The Pcdh-\(\alpha\) B mRNAs and proteins were also completely abolished in the Pcdh-\(\alpha^{Bneo/AB}\) mouse (Fig. 1H and I); however, the Pcdh-\(\alpha\) A isoforms recovered to a level similar to those of wild-type mice when the neo gene cassette was removed (Fig. 1J). Thus, we obtained two different Pcdh-\(\alpha\) mutant strains, i.e. Pcdh-\(\alpha^{Bneo/AB}\) mutants, which had about 20% of the wild-type level of Pcdh-\(\alpha\) A isoforms and lacked the Pcdh-\(\alpha\) B isoforms, and Pcdh-\(\alpha^{AB/\alpha\beta}\) mutants, which lacked the Pcdh-\(\alpha\) B isoforms but had the normal protein level of the Pcdh-\(\alpha\) A isoforms. Using mice bearing these hypomorphic Pcdh-\(\alpha\) mutations, we addressed the roles of Pcdh-\(\alpha\) proteins in regulating brain function.

### Phenotypes of the Pcdh-\(\alpha^{Bneo/AB}\) mutant

The Pcdh-\(\alpha^{Bneo/AB}\) mice exhibited no perinatal lethality, were healthy and fertile, and were found at the expected Mendelian frequency at the time of weaning. We observed no visible abnormalities in the Pcdh-\(\alpha^{Bneo/AB}\) mice during development or adulthood. The brains of Pcdh-\(\alpha^{Bneo/AB}\) mice were similar in size and shape to those of wild-type mice. No obvious impairments were detected in the organization of the neocortex, hippocampus or cerebellar cortex by Nissl staining of brain sections (Fig. S2). We also did not detect any apparent differences in the levels of synaptic proteins, such as synaptophysin, synaptotagmin, growth-associated protein 43, glutamic acid decarboxylase 67 or postsynaptic density 95, in the hippocampus of the mutant vs. wild-type mice (Fig. S2).

### Emotional behavior of the Pcdh-\(\alpha^{Bneo/AB}\) mice

We next analysed the function of Pcdh-\(\alpha\) in the behavior of these mutant mice. All of the behavioral experiments were performed with male mice that were 10 weeks old at the beginning of the behavior tests. The Pcdh-\(\alpha^{Bneo/AB}\) mice had no significant defects in their physical characteristics, such as in their body weight, whiskers and fur. No disparities were observed for the mutant mice in the wire hanging test or in the rotarod test for motor coordination. As shown in Table 1, their responses in the light/dark transition test and their home-cage activity scores were similar to wild-type. However, the scores of time spent in the center area in the open field test showed a tendency of the Pcdh-\(\alpha^{Bneo/AB}\) mice to exhibit anxious or fearful phenotypes (\(P = 0.11\)), as did their results for the stay time in the open arms in the elevated plus maze test (\(P = 0.13\)). However, the difference from wild-type mice was not significant. In contrast, the Pcdh-\(\alpha^{AB/\alpha\beta}\) mice, which were Pcdh-\(\alpha\) B isoform-specific mutants, appeared normal in the open field and elevated plus maze tests. The Pcdh-\(\alpha^{Bneo/AB}\) mice also showed a tendency to different behavior than wild-type mice in the Porsolt forced swim test, which is used to evaluate depression (\(P = 0.05\)), and in the hot-plate test for pain sensitivity (\(P = 0.07\)) but the differences were not significant.

### Enhanced freezing of Pcdh-\(\alpha^{Bneo/AB}\) mice in the contextual fear-conditioning test

The cognitive functions of Pcdh-\(\alpha^{Bneo/AB}\) mice and their siblings were analysed in a contextual and cued fear-conditioning test. During the conditioning period, the animals were twice presented with a paired tone and foot-shock, as training. During this period, the Pcdh-\(\alpha^{Bneo/AB}\) mice showed no difference from wild-type in their freezing response (genotype effect, \(F_{1,31} = 0.002, P = 0.967\)) (Fig. 2A). When the contextual and cued tests were performed at 24 h after training, the Pcdh-\(\alpha^{Bneo/AB}\) mice showed a significant enhancement of freezing in the contextual test relative to wild-type mice (genotype effect, \(F_{1,31} = 5.48, P = 0.0258\)) (Fig. 2B). However, Pcdh-\(\alpha^{Bneo/AB}\) mice and their wild-type littermates displayed similar levels of freezing during the cued testing (genotype effect, \(F_{1,31} = 1.987, P = 0.169\)) (Fig. 2C). To avoid possible effects of the test sequence in the test battery, we performed the contextual and cued fear-conditioning tests using another group of mice that had experienced no other behavioral tests. After the littermates had received the paired tone and foot-shock twice, the Pcdh-\(\alpha^{Bneo/AB}\) mice again showed greater freezing than wild-type mice in the contextual test but not in the cued test. These results indicated that the Pcdh-\(\alpha^{Bneo/AB}\) mutants exhibited enhanced contextual learning.

Next, to confirm whether the abnormalities in the fear-conditioning test shown by the Pcdh-\(\alpha^{Bneo/AB}\) mice were caused by the decrease in Pcdh-\(\alpha\) A or the loss of Pcdh-\(\alpha\) B isoform proteins, we conducted the fear-conditioning test using the Pcdh-\(\alpha^{AB/\alpha\beta}\) mice, which lacked the Pcdh-\(\alpha\) B proteins but had normal levels of Pcdh-\(\alpha\) A proteins. Pcdh-\(\alpha^{AB/\alpha\beta}\) mice and their wild-type littermates were presented twice with a paired tone and foot-shock in the conditioning phase. After 24 h, contextual and cued tests were conducted. Interestingly, the Pcdh-\(\alpha^{AB/\alpha\beta}\) mice showed no significant difference in their freezing behavior in the contextual test compared with their wild-type littermates (genotype effect, \(F_{1,31} = 0.054, P = 0.818\)) (Fig. 2E). Also, no differences were observed in the training (genotype effect, \(F_{1,31} = 1.511, P = 0.228\)) and cued tests (genotype effect, \(F_{1,31} = 0.27, P = 0.870\)) (Fig. 2D and F). These findings indicated that the enhanced freezing in the altered contextual fear-conditioning test displayed by the Pcdh-\(\alpha^{Bneo/AB}\) mice was due to the down-regulation of Pcdh-\(\alpha\) A isoform proteins.

### Table 1. Sensory and motor abilities in Pcdh-\(\alpha\) gene-mutated mice

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>+/+</th>
<th>Mutants</th>
<th>(P)-value</th>
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<tr>
<td>Motor tests</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wire hang (latency to fall) (s)</td>
<td>52.3 ± 3.0</td>
<td>52.0 ± 3.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rotarod (latency to fall) (s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>59.8 ± 6.4</td>
<td>55.5 ± 6.4</td>
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<td>Day 2</td>
<td>87.0 ± 7.2</td>
<td>89.1 ± 7.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open field</td>
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<tr>
<td>Center time (s)</td>
<td>11.7 ± 2.5</td>
<td>6.9 ± 1.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distance (cm)</td>
<td>7388 ± 562</td>
<td>6772 ± 653</td>
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<tr>
<td>Light/ dark transition test</td>
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<tr>
<td>No. transitions</td>
<td>24.0 ± 1.5</td>
<td>23.6 ± 2.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total time in light (s)</td>
<td>172.2 ± 11.4</td>
<td>160.8 ± 11.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Home-cage activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distance night (cm)</td>
<td>1003 ± 180</td>
<td>824 ± 177</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distance day (cm)</td>
<td>204 ± 21</td>
<td>174 ± 17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elevated plus maze</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time on open arms (%)</td>
<td>14.8 ± 4.5</td>
<td>7.4 ± 1.6</td>
<td>0.13</td>
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<td>Porsolt forced swim</td>
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<tr>
<td>Immobility (%) 1–4 min</td>
<td>29.3 ± 3.5</td>
<td>38.3 ± 2.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Immobility (%) 1–10 min</td>
<td>42.2 ± 4.3</td>
<td>46.1 ± 3.2</td>
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<td>Pain test</td>
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<td>Hot plate (latency) (s)</td>
<td>11.5 ± 1.1</td>
<td>9.2 ± 0.6</td>
<td>0.07</td>
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<td>Pcdh-(\alpha^{AB/\alpha\beta}) mice (+/+; n = 15–17; (\alpha\beta/\alpha\beta), m = 15–16)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open field</td>
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<tr>
<td>Center time (s)</td>
<td>23.6 ± 2.8</td>
<td>24.3 ± 2.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distance (cm)</td>
<td>3028 ± 154</td>
<td>2983 ± 98</td>
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<td>Elevated plus maze</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time on open arms (%)</td>
<td>7.1 ± 1.7</td>
<td>6.6 ± 1.2</td>
<td>0.81</td>
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Data represent the mean ± SEM.

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*European Journal of Neuroscience, 28*, 1362–1376
Enhanced freezing during the contextual test conducted at 24 h after conditioning (Pcdh-\(\alpha\)D\(\text{Bneo}/\text{A}\)Bneo mice) showed enhanced freezing during the contextual test conducted at 24 h after conditioning (\(P < 0.03\)). (C) A tone was sounded for 30 s (bars) followed by a 2 s foot-shock (arrows). (D) Pcdh-\(\alpha\)D\(\text{Bneo}/\text{A}\)Bneo mice showed freezing during the conditioning phase (\(\pm +/\pm\) and Pcdh-\(\alpha\)D\(\text{Bneo}/\text{A}\)Bneo mice). There was no significant difference between wild-type (\(+/\pm\)) and Pcdh-\(\alpha\)D\(\text{Bneo}/\text{A}\)Bneo mice. (E) Percentage of freezing during context testing. No significant difference was observed between the wild-type (\(+/\pm\)) and Pcdh-\(\alpha\)D\(\text{Bneo}/\text{A}\)Bneo mice. (F) Freezing during the tone-cued testing in wild-type (\(+\)) and Pcdh-\(\alpha\)D\(\text{Bneo}/\text{A}\)Bneo mice. There was no significant difference between genotypes. Data are given as the mean ± SEM (Pcdh-\(\alpha\)D\(\text{Bneo}/\text{A}\)Bneo, \(n = 16\); Pcdh-\(\alpha\)D\(\text{B}/\text{A}\)B mice, \(n = 16\); wild-type, \(n = 17\) respectively).

**Pcdh-\(\alpha\)D\(\text{Bneo}/\text{A}\)Bneo behavior in the Morris water maze**

To examine the spatial learning defects of the Pcdh-\(\alpha\)D\(\text{Bneo}/\text{A}\)Bneo mice, we subjected them and their wild-type littermates to the Morris water maze (hidden platform version). The mice were subjected to four trials per day for nine consecutive days in the training phase and the probe test was performed at 1 day after the training. In this test, the Pcdh-\(\alpha\)D\(\text{Bneo}/\text{A}\)Bneo mice generally showed no significant cognitive impairment. The escape latency, which was the time that they took to reach the platform, was similar between genotypes during training (genotype effect, \(F_{1,29} = 0.174, P = 0.679\)) (Fig. 3A). The mutant also showed no abnormality in swimming speed or the time spent at the perimeter of the pool (Fig. 3B and C) (\(P < 0.05\)).

During the probe test, in which the learning platform was removed, the Pcdh-\(\alpha\)D\(\text{Bneo}/\text{A}\)Bneo mice spent more time in the training quadrant than in the other quadrants, similar to their wild-type littermates (Fig. 3D). Both genotypes also spent significantly more time in the training quadrant than in the other quadrants in the probe test conducted after reversal training at 1 week after the original training (Fig. 3F). Thus, the Pcdh-\(\alpha\)D\(\text{Bneo}/\text{A}\)Bneo mice showed no abnormalities in Morris water maze learning.

**Disparities between Pcdh-\(\alpha\)D\(\text{Bneo}/\text{A}\)Bneo and wild-type mice in the eight-arm radial maze test**

The Pcdh-\(\alpha\)D\(\text{Bneo}/\text{A}\)Bneo mice and their wild-type littermates were analysed using the eight-arm radial maze test to examine their spatial working memory. In this task, the number of working memory errors made by mice revisiting arms that had been visited previously, which is generally interpreted as a measure of working memory performance, was determined (Olton & Papas, 1979; Olton et al., 1979). The number of working memory errors made by the Pcdh-\(\alpha\)D\(\text{Bneo}/\text{A}\)Bneo mice was significantly lower than that made by wild-type mice during the first six trials (genotype effect, \(F_{1,23} = 5.015, P = 0.035\); interaction between trials and genotype, \(F_{5,115} = 0.043, P = 0.999\)). No significant genotype effect on working memory errors during the delay period (30 s in the 15th trial and 2 min in the 16th–18th trials) was observed (genotype effect, \(F_{1,23} = 2.789, P = 0.109\)) (Fig. 4A). The amount of total food intake during a trial was significantly lower for the Pcdh-\(\alpha\)D\(\text{Bneo}/\text{A}\)Bneo mice than for wild-type mice during the first six trials (genotype effect, \(F_{1,23} = 4.547, P = 0.044\); interaction between trials and genotype, \(F_{5,115} = 0.837, P = 0.526\) and the delay period (15th–18th trials) (genotype effect, \(F_{1,23} = 4.347, P = 0.048\); interaction between trials and genotype, \(F_{1,69} = 0.486, P = 0.693\)) (Fig. 4B). However, the number of different arms chosen within the first eight choices was not significantly different (\(P > 0.05\)) (Fig. 4C). There were no significant differences in the distance traveled (Fig. 4D) or in the latency to take all of the pellets during the trials, including the delay period (data not shown). In addition, there was no significant genotype effect on the number of omission error trials (genotype effect, \(F_{1,23} = 0.713, P = 0.407\); interaction between trials and genotype, \(F_{17,391} = 0.648, P = 0.853\)) (Fig. 4E), suggesting that the increased number of revisiting errors displayed during the trials without delay was unlikely to be caused by a reduced motivation to take the pellets. Thus, the Pcdh-\(\alpha\)D\(\text{Bneo}/\text{A}\)Bneo mice showed a decreased number of working memory errors in the eight-arm radial maze. Consistent with the locomotor activity measured in several tests, such as the open field test, light/dark transition and home-cage activity (Table 1), there was...
no difference in the distance traveled. Taken together, these findings suggest that the reduction in Pcdh-α protein level in these mutants was associated with abnormal memory formation.

We also performed the eight-arm radial maze test with Pcdh-α^{AB}/ΔB mice and their wild-type littermates. There were no significant differences between the genotypes in the number of working memory errors, the amount of total food eaten, the number of different arms chosen within the first eight choices, the distance traveled or the number of omission error trials (P > 0.05) (Fig. S3). These results indicated that the down-regulation of the Pcdh-α A isoform proteins also caused disparities in spatial working memory.

**Generation of a mouse bearing another hypomorphic mutation of the Pcdh-α A isoforms**

To confirm the roles of Pcdh-α A isoform proteins in regulating brain function, we generated another hypomorphic Pcdh-α A isoform gene-converted mouse. By conventional gene targeting, we obtained heterozygous and homozygous mutant mice bearing the ΔAneo allele and the gene conversion was confirmed by Southern blot analysis (Fig. 5C). In the ΔAneo allele, the Pcdh-α A isoform proteins were truncated at the 57 aa cytoplasmic tail. Also, a neo gene was inserted into the third constant exon (Fig. 5A and B) (aa sequence shown in Fig. S1). We performed Western blot analysis to examine the expression of Pcdh-α proteins in the Pcdh-α^{Aneo}/ΔAneo mutant brains. Because of the 56 aa cytoplasmic tail deletion, we could not use the anti-CNR/Pcdh-α antibody, which recognizes the Pcdh-α cytoplasmic region. We therefore used the 4E11 antibody, which recognizes the EC1 region, to detect immunoprecipitates obtained with anti-CNRN (which recognizes the N-terminal region of Pcdh-α4 proteins) and anti-CNR-A (which recognizes Pcdh-α A isoform proteins). In immunoprecipitates obtained with anti-CNRN, we found truncated Pcdh-α proteins (Fig. 5D). In addition, full-length Pcdh-α A isoform proteins were not found in the Pcdh-α^{Aneo}/ΔAneo mutants by immunoprecipitation or western blotting with the anti-CNR-A antibody (Fig. 5D). Thus, we confirmed that the Pcdh-α A isoform proteins were truncated in Pcdh-α^{Aneo}/ΔAneo mice.

In the behavioral experiments, the Pcdh-α^{Aneo}/ΔAneo mutants showed abnormalities in contextual learning and working memory. These abnormal phenotypes were due to the down-regulated Pcdh-α A isoforms because the defects in contextual learning were not found in the Pcdh-α^{AB}/ΔB mice, which are Pcdh-α B isoform-specific mutants; therefore, we performed learning and memory tests for the Pcdh-α^{Aneo}/ΔAneo mice bearing the other Pcdh-α A hypomorphic mutation.

In the fear-conditioning test, the Pcdh-α^{Aneo}/ΔAneo mice were presented with three pairs of tone and foot-shock, as training. More Pcdh-α^{Aneo}/ΔAneo mice displayed freezing behavior during the first 2 min (P = 0.018) in the contextual test but not in the training and cued tests (Fig. 6A–C). Pcdh-α^{Aneo}/ΔAneo mice and their wild-type littermates were also presented with three pairs of tone and foot-shock, as training (Fig. 6D). In the contextual test conducted at 24 h after training, significantly more Pcdh-α^{Aneo}/ΔAneo mice showed freezing behavior during the second and third minutes (P = 0.032) (Fig. 6E); however, no significant differences from wild-type were observed in the training and cued tests (Fig. 6D and F). These phenotypes were similar to those of the Pcdh-α^{Aneo}/ΔAneo mice, strongly suggesting that the enhanced freezing in the contextual fear-conditioning test was due to the low levels of Pcdh-α A isoform proteins.

In the eight-arm radial maze test, the number of working memory errors made by the Pcdh-α^{Aneo}/ΔAneo mice was significantly lower during the first five trials than that of wild-type mice (genotype effect, F_{1,35} = 4.609, P = 0.039; interaction between trials and genotype, F_{4,140} = 0.661, P = 0.662). However, no significant genotype effect on working memory errors during the delay period was observed (genotype effect, F_{1,30} = 0.007, P = 0.932) (Fig. 7A). The amount of total food taken by the Pcdh-α^{Aneo}/ΔAneo mice showed a greater...
decrease than by wild-type mice during the first five trials but the difference was not significant ($P = 0.075$) (Fig. 7B). The number of different arms chosen within the first eight choices was not significantly different (Fig. 7C). There were also no significant differences in the distance traveled (Fig. 7D), omission errors (Fig. 7E) and latency to take all of the pellets during the trials, including the delay period (data not shown). Thus, Pcdh-$\alpha$DAneo/DAneo mice showed abnormalities in working memory in the eight-arm radial maze that were similar to those of the Pcdh-$\alpha$DBneo/DBneo mice. These results indicated that reduced Pcdh-$\alpha$ A isoforms induced abnormal working memory formation. Taken together, these findings indicate that Pcdh-$\alpha$ A isoforms in the brain play important roles in regulating the learning and memory abilities of mice.

Analysis of monoamine levels in mice bearing Pcdh-$\alpha$ hypomorphic mutations

Neurochemical analyses were performed to examine the effect of the down-regulation of Pcdh-$\alpha$ proteins on monoaminergic neurotransmission in Pcdh-$\alpha$DBneo/DBneo mice. In the frontal cortex of Pcdh-$\alpha$DBneo/DBneo mice, no obvious differences were found in the levels of noradrenalin, 5-hydroxyindoleacetic acid (5-HIAA) (serotonergic metabolites), 5-HT, dopamine, 3,4-dihydroxyphenylacetic acid (dopamine metabolites) or homovanillic acid (dopamine metabolites) (Fig. 8B). In the hippocampus, however, the 5-HT level was significantly increased in these mice ($P < 0.001$), although the noradrenalin and 5-HIAA levels were not different

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**Fig. 4.** Eight-arm radial maze test of wild-type (+/+) and Pcdh-$\alpha$DBneo/DBneo mice. Mice were subjected to 14 trials and four delay trials (30 s for the 15th trial and 120 s for the 16th–18th trials). In the delay trials, the mice were confined to the center platform for the delay time after taking the fourth pellet. (A) Number of working memory errors. A significant genotype effect was observed during the first to sixth days ($P < 0.05$). (B) Amount of total food intake. A significant genotype effect was observed during the first six trials ($P < 0.05$) and delay trials (15th–18th trials) ($P < 0.05$). (C) Number of different arms chosen within the first eight choices. No significant genotype effects were observed ($P > 0.05$). (D) Total distance traveled during the trials. There were no significant differences between genotypes. (E) Number of omission errors. Data are presented as the mean ± SEM (Pcdh-$\alpha$DBneo/DBneo mice, $n = 15$; wild-type, $n = 9$).
from wild-type (Fig. 8A). Furthermore, no significant increase in 5-HT levels was found in the hippocampus or frontal cortex of the Pcdh-α/D mice (Fig. 8C and D). In the Pcdh-α/Aneo/D mice, however, the level of 5-HT in the hippocampus was significantly higher than in wild-type mice (P < 0.001) (Fig. 8E and F). These results suggested that the 5-HT level in the

Fig. 5. Generation of Pcdh-αAneo/Aneo mice, another Pcdh-α A mutant. (A) Genomic organization of the wild-type Pcdh-α genome, the targeting vector, and the ΔAneo targeted allele. A floxed neo gene was inserted at the beginning of the Pcdh-α A-type-specific region. Restriction enzyme sites around the locus in each allele are shown (E, EcoRI; S, SalI; X, XhoI; Sp, Spel). Probes for Southern blot analysis and primers for genomic PCR (arrows) are indicated. Neo, neomycin-resistance transferase; DT-A, diphtheria toxin A fragment. (B) Protein structure of Pcdh-α A and the truncated ΔA proteins. Pcdh-α A isoforms lacked the 57-aa cytoplasmic tail and had an additional Glu-Ser-Thr (EST) (Fig. S1). EC1-6, extracellular cadherin domains 1–6; TM, transmembrane domain; CPN, short cytoplasmic domain; K-rich, lysine-rich region. (C) Southern blot analysis of the mutated Pcdh-α third constant exon locus in the constant region. DNA from the tails of wild-type (+/+), heterozygous (+/Aneo) and homozygous (ΔAneo/ΔAneo) mice was digested with EcoRI. Blotted DNA was hybridized with a 5′ probe, against a 5′ flanking region of the Pcdh-α third constant exon. (D) Protein expression in wild-type (+/+), and Pcdh-αAneo/Aneo (−/−) mice. Immunoprecipitates (IP) obtained using an anti-CNRN antibody or anti-CNR-A antibody from the brain extracts of each mouse were immunoblotted with the anti-4E11 or anti-CNR-A antibody, respectively.
Discussion

In this study, we report abnormal phenotypes in Pcdh-α gene-converted mice, specifically enhanced fear-related learning, disparities in working memory and an enhanced 5-HT level in the hippocampus. These abnormalities were found in both Pcdh-α Aneo mice, carrying a hypomorphic Pcdh-α A allele that expressed Pcdh-α A proteins at about 20% of the wild-type levels, and Pcdh-α Aneo mice, in which the Pcdh-α A proteins were truncated. However, Pcdh-α A proteins were normal but the Pcdh-α B isoforms were absent, did not exhibit these learning abnormalities or the increased hippocampal 5-HT level. These results suggest that the Pcdh-α A isofroms might play important roles in the hippocampus. Moreover, it is known that working memory in the radial maze task and spatial learning in the Morris water maze task are largely dependent on hippocampal function. Here we also found abnormalities in the working memory of the mice producing little to no Pcdh-α A, which could have been derived from hippocampal defects. However, Pcdh-α Aneo mice showed no spatial learning deficit in the Morris water maze task, which is also dependent on hippocampal function. It is possible that the enhanced learning ability may be hardly detectable in the Morris water maze task compared with the radial maze task and the fear-conditioning test. Indeed, a previous study showed that mice mutant in Telencephalin, a cell-adhesion molecule exclusively distributed in the telencephalon of the mammalian brain, showed enhanced performance in the radial maze task but not in the Morris water maze task (Nakamura et al., 2001).

The level of 5-HT was enhanced in the hippocampus of mice bearing the Pcdh-α A hypomorphic mutations, whereas noradrenalin was not changed. We also found that Pcdh-γ mRNAs were extensively expressed in the raphe nuclei, where 5-HT neurons are concentrated (S.K., S.H., S.E. and T.K., unpublished data). The mechanism by which Pcdh-α A proteins might increase the 5-HT level in the hippocampus remains to be determined. It is possible that Pcdh-α A proteins are involved in generating serotonergic projections from the raphe nuclei to the hippocampus. The level of 5-HT in the hippocampus was significantly elevated in both the Pcdh-α Aneo mice and Pcdh-α Aneo Bneo mice, whereas an enhanced 5-HIAA level was detectable only in the Pcdh-α Aneo Bneo mutants. It is possible that the 5-HT turnover ratio (5-HIAA/5-HT) is different between the Pcdh-α Aneo Bneo and Pcdh-α Aneo Bneo mutants. The serotonergic pathway is involved in many physiological functions in the brain, including learning and memory formation in the hippocampus (Buhot et al., 2003). Our present results suggest that the 5-HT level in the hippocampus might be one of the causes of the learning abnormalities in these mice.

A previous study showed that Pcdh-γ null mice die soon after birth because of increased neuronal cell death and decreased synapse formation (Wang et al., 2002). Deletion of the Pcdh-γ locus in mice induces neuronal degeneration in various areas of the brain and spinal cord; therefore, the roles of Pcdh-γ molecules in regulating brain function in vivo have not been examined. Here, mice carrying...
either of two Pcdh-\(\alpha\) hypomorphic alleles, encoding down-regulated or truncated Pcdh-\(\alpha\) proteins, respectively, were observed to develop normally. Therefore, the surviving mutant mice could be analysed for behavioral and molecular differences from wild-type. Pcdh-\(\alpha\) isoforms and full-length Pcdh-\(\gamma\) proteins can form a protein complex on the membrane surface and also partially colocalize in the molecular layers of the hippocampus where synapses are enriched (Murata et al., 2004). Therefore, diverse Pcdh molecules, including Pcdh-\(\gamma\), which forms a protein complex with and regulates the membrane translocation of Pcdh-\(\alpha\) proteins, may play important roles in generating synapses and in learning and memory formation in the brain.

The Pcdh-\(\alpha\) proteins can bind to integrins via their conserved RGD(Arg-Gly-Asp) motif, which is located in the first cadherin

![Fig. 7. Radial maze test of wild-type (+/+).](image-url)

(A) The number of working memory errors made by the Pcdh-\(\alpha\)\(\Delta\)Aneo\(\Delta\)Aneo mice was significantly lower during the first five trials (\(P < 0.05\)). (B) The amount of total food intake tended to decrease in the Pcdh-\(\alpha\)\(\Delta\)Aneo\(\Delta\)Aneo mice during the first five trials but not significantly. (C) The number of different arms chosen within the first eight choices was not significantly different. (D) Total distance during the trials. There was no significant difference between wild-type (+/+ and Pcdh-\(\alpha\)\(\Delta\)Aneo\(\Delta\)Aneo mice. (E) The number of omission errors was not different. Data are given as the mean ± SEM (Pcdh-\(\alpha\)\(\Delta\)Aneo\(\Delta\)Aneo mice, \(n = 18\); wild-type, \(n = 19\)).
Integrins play important roles in regulating synaptic plasticity in the CA1 synapse of the hippocampus (Huang et al., 2006; Kramar et al., 2006). It is possible that interactions between Pcdh-α proteins and integrins regulate synaptic plasticity in the hippocampus. It was also previously reported that the specific cytoplasmic tails of Pcdh-α A and Pcdh-α B associate with neurofilament M and fascin, respectively (Triana-Baltzer & Blank, 2006). Neurofilament M may therefore associate with Pcdh-α A isoforms, playing a structural and scaffolding role in neurons. Moreover, because neurofilament M appears to form a protein complex with N-methyl-d-aspartate receptors, which play crucial roles in regulating synaptic plasticity and learning and memory in the hippocampus, and with dopamine receptors (Ehlers et al., 1998; Kim et al., 2002), it is possible that Pcdh-α A isoforms specifically regulate synaptic plasticity in the hippocampus together with neurofilaments and N-methyl-d-aspartate receptors. However, further analysis will be required to assess the role of Pcdh-α A proteins in the regulation of activities in the brain.
In the human Pcdh gene cluster, many single-nucleotide polymorphisms, several haplotypes and deletion alleles have been detected (Kirov et al., 2003; Noonan et al., 2003; Miki et al., 2005). Here we showed that hypomorphic alleles for Pcdh-α proteins induced abnormalities in learning and memory formation in mice. Human germline polymorphisms in Pcdh family genes might provide genetic variations in brain functions and neurological disorders. In fact, a recent report demonstrated a striking increase in homozygosity of a minor allele of the human Pcdh-α cluster locus in patients with bipolar disorder pathogenesis (Pedrosa et al., 2008).

In this study we report for the first time that Pcdh-α gene-converted mice showed behavioral abnormalities in fear-related contextual learning and working memory. Moreover, the cause of these disparities depended on Pcdh-α isoforms. It will be important to elucidate the molecular functions of diverse Pcdh molecules, including splicing variants and Pcdh-β and -γ, in regulating synapse function and generating functional neural networks in the brain.

Supporting information

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article.

Fig. S1. Comparison of the amino acid sequences of Pcdh-α A, ΔA, and B.

Fig. S2. Nissl staining of coronal sections and the expression level of synaptic proteins of the brain from wild-type (A, B, C, D) and Pcdh-α<sup>Bneo/A</sup> mice (A, F, G, H).

Fig. S3. Eight-arm radial maze test of wild-type (+/+) and Pcdh-α<sup>M/A</sup> mice. Please note: Wiley-Blackwell are not responsible for the content or functionality of any supporting materials supplied by the authors. Any queries (other than missing material) should be directed to the corresponding author for the article.

Acknowledgements

We thank the members of the KOKORO Biology Laboratory for assistance and discussions, and C. Sanbo, N. Yamauchi, H. Masuda and E. Naruto for technical assistance. We also thank T. Manabe for critical reading and discussion. We are grateful to J. Miyazaki (Osaka University, Japan) for the CAG-Cre transgenic mice. This work was supported in part by a grant from CREST, Japan Science and Technology Agency (T. Yagi), a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research on Priority Areas - Advanced Brain Science Project from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan (S. Hamada), and the BIRD Program of the Japan Science and Technology Agency (T.M.), a grant from the Japan Foundation for Neuroscience and Mental Health (S. Hamada). Integrative Brain Research (SHIEN)-from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (T. Yagi, T.M.).

Abbreviations

5-HIAA, 5-hydroxyindolacetic acid; 5-HT, 5-hydroxytryptamine; serotonin; aa, amino acid; CNR, cadherin-related neuronal receptor; DT-A, diphtheria Toxin A fragment gene; EDTA, ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid; neo, neomycin resistance; ODS, octadecylsilica; Pcdh, protocadherin; PCR, polymerase chain reaction; RIPA, radioimmunoprotein assay.

References


