

Cardiovascular Hormone Systems

Edited by
Michael Bader



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Contents

	Preface	XVII
	List of Contributors	XIX
	Part One Steroid Hormones	
1	Glucocorticoids and Mineralocorticoids	3
	<i>Eilidh Craigie, John J. Mullins, and Matthew A. Bailey</i>	
1.1	Synthesis of the Corticosteroids	3
1.2	Regulation of Corticosteroid Synthesis	7
1.2.1	Aldosterone	7
1.2.2	Glucocorticoids	9
1.3	Corticosteroid Receptors and Control of Ligand Access	11
1.3.1	Steroid Receptors	11
1.3.2	Control of Ligand Access	12
1.3.2.1	11 β HSD1	13
1.3.2.2	11 β HSD2	14
1.4	Cardiovascular Effects of Aldosterone	16
1.4.1	Aldosterone and the Heart	16
1.4.2	Vasculature	19
1.5	Cardiovascular Effects of Glucocorticoids	21
1.5.1	Transgenic Models	23
1.5.2	Lessons from Human Disease	24
1.5.2.1	Cushing's Syndrome	24
1.5.2.2	The Metabolic Syndrome and Tissue-Specific Regulation of Glucocorticoids	25
1.5.2.3	Glucocorticoid Resistance Syndrome	25
1.5.2.4	GR Polymorphisms	26
1.5.3	Endothelial Dysfunction, Vascular Tone and Atherosclerosis	26
	References	27

2	Sex Steroid Hormones	39
	<i>Vera Regitz-Zagrosek, Eva Becher, Sebastian Brokat, Shokoufeh Mahmoodzadeh, and Carola Schubert</i>	
2.1	Sex Differences in Cardiovascular Physiology and Disease and Effect of Hormone Therapy	39
2.2	Sex Steroids: Estradiol, Estrone, Testosterone and Progesterone	40
2.2.1	Synthesis and Endocrine Physiology	40
2.2.2	Age-Dependent Blood Levels of Sex Hormones in Females and Males	40
2.2.3	Levels of Estradiol and Testosterone in Rodents	41
2.3	Sex Hormone Receptors: Structure and Function	41
2.3.1	Hormone Response Element	42
2.3.2	Molecular Mechanisms of Nuclear Receptor Activation	42
2.3.2.1	Ligand-Dependent Transcription	42
2.3.2.2	Ligand-Independent Genomic Pathway: Cross-Talk Between SHRs and Other Signal Transduction Pathways	42
2.3.2.3	Nongenomic Pathway	44
2.3.3	Role of Coregulators in Transcriptional Regulation by SHRs	44
2.3.4	Role of Proteasomal Degradation Pathway in SHR-Mediated Gene Transcription	44
2.3.5	Receptor Activity and Availability in the Cardiovascular System	45
2.3.6	Localization of SHRs in the Heart and Vessels of Rodent and Men	45
2.4	Receptor-Independent Effects of Sex Steroids	47
2.5	Sex Hormone Effects on Cardiovascular Cells and Organs	47
2.5.1	Sex Hormone Effects on Different Cardiovascular Cell Types	47
2.5.1.1	Cardiomyocytes	47
2.5.1.2	Fibroblasts	48
2.5.1.3	Endothelial Cells	48
2.5.1.4	Vascular Smooth Muscle Cells	48
2.5.1.5	Platelets	48
2.5.2	Sex Hormone Effects on the Heart	49
2.5.2.1	Effects of Exercise	49
2.5.2.2	Pressure Overload	50
2.5.2.3	Hypertension	50
2.5.2.4	Volume Overload	50
2.5.2.5	Myocardial Infarction	51
2.5.3	Sex Hormone Effects on Atherosclerosis, Plaque Formation and Rupture	51
2.5.4	Sex Hormone Effects on Systemic and Circulating Mediators of the Cardiovascular System	52
2.5.4.1	Lipid Levels	52
2.5.4.2	Glucose and Insulin	53
2.5.4.3	Blood Pressure	53
2.5.4.4	Coagulatory Activity	53
	References	54

Part Two Peptide Hormones

- 3 Angiotensins 67**
*Robson Augusto Souza Dos Santos, Anderson José Ferreira,
 and Ana Cristina Simões e Silva*
- 3.1 Introduction 67
- 3.2 RAS: The Classical and Updated View 67
- 3.3 New Aspects of Classical RAS Enzymes 68
- 3.3.1 Renin/Prorenin Receptor 68
- 3.3.2 Signaling Through ACE 68
- 3.4 Ang II 69
- 3.4.1 Ang II and the Cardiovascular System 72
- 3.4.2 Ang II and the Endocrine System 73
- 3.4.3 Ang II and the Renal System 74
- 3.5 Ang-(1-7) 77
- 3.5.1 Ang-(1-7) and the Heart 77
- 3.5.2 Ang-(1-7) and Blood Vessels 81
- 3.5.3 Ang-(1-7) and the Kidney 83
- 3.6 Ang III [Ang-(2-8)] 85
- 3.7 Ang IV/AT₄ Receptor Axis 85
- 3.8 Des-Asp¹-Ang I [Ang-(2-10)] 86
- 3.9 Other Angiotensin Peptides 87
- References 87
- 4 Kinins 101**
*Suzana Macedo de Oliveira, Kely de Picoli Souza, Michael Bader,
 and João Bosco Pesquero*
- 4.1 Introduction 101
- 4.2 Kininogens: Precursors of Kinins 103
- 4.3 Kinin-Forming Systems 104
- 4.4 Kininases 104
- 4.5 Kinin Receptors 106
- 4.6 Physiological and Pathological Cardiovascular Roles of Kinins 107
- 4.7 Kinins in Blood Pressure Control and Hypertension 109
- 4.8 Kinins in the Heart 110
- 4.9 Renal Effects of Kinins 112
- References 115
- 5 Natriuretic Peptides 125**
Paula M. Bryan and Lincoln R. Potter
- 5.1 History 125
- 5.2 Natriuretic Peptides: Structure, Processing and Expression 126
- 5.3 Natriuretic Peptide Receptors 126
- 5.3.1 NPR-A 128
- 5.3.2 NPR-B 130

- 5.3.3 NPR-C 131
- 5.4 Physiological Effects of the Natriuretic Peptide System 132
 - 5.4.1 Effects on Blood Pressure 132
 - 5.4.2 Effects of ANP/NPR-A on Intravascular Volume and Endothelium Permeability 133
 - 5.4.3 Effects of ANP and BNP on Cardiac Hypertrophy and Fibrosis 133
 - 5.4.4 Effects of ANP and CNP on Vascular Relaxation and Remodeling 133
 - 5.4.5 Effects of ANP on Natriuresis and Diuresis 134
 - 5.4.6 Natriuretic Peptides and Renal Function 134
- 5.5 Natriuretic Peptides as Diagnostic Indicators of Heart Failure 135
- 5.6 NPRs and Heart Failure 135
- 5.7 Therapeutic Applications and Future Directions 136
- References 136

6 Endothelins 143

Gian Paolo Rossi and Teresa M. Seccia

- 6.1 Endothelin System 143
- 6.2 ET and Cardiovascular Disease 145
- 6.3 Assessment of the ET System in Disease States 146
- 6.4 ET in PAH 148
- 6.5 ET in Systemic Arterial Hypertension 149
 - 6.5.1 Animal Studies 149
 - 6.5.2 Human Studies 151
 - 6.5.3 ET-1 in Renal Disease 152
 - 6.5.3.1 Blood Pressure, Proteinuria and ERAs 154
 - 6.6 ERAs in Human Renal Diseases 154
 - 6.7 ET and Heart Failure 155
 - 6.8 Role of ET in Heart Failure 156
 - 6.8.1 ET-1 Plasma Levels in Heart Failure 156
 - 6.8.2 ERAs in Heart Failure 157
 - 6.8.3 Selective or Nonselective ERAs in Heart Failure? 158
 - 6.9 Long-Term Effects of ERAs in Heart Failure 159
 - 6.10 Conclusions 160
 - References 161

7 Adrenomedullin 169

István Szokodi and Heikki Ruskoaho

- 7.1 Molecular Aspects of AM 169
 - 7.1.1 Structure and Synthesis of AM 169
 - 7.1.2 Distribution and Sites of AM Production 170
 - 7.1.3 Regulators of AM Gene Expression 170
 - 7.1.4 AM Receptors 171
- 7.2 Functional Role of AM in the Heart 172
 - 7.2.1 AM and Myocardial Contractility 172
 - 7.2.1.1 Effect of AM on Cardiac Contractility 172

7.2.1.2	Signaling Mechanisms	172
7.2.2	AM and Coronary Blood Flow	173
7.2.2.1	Effect of AM on Coronary Vascular Tone	173
7.2.2.2	Signaling Mechanisms	175
7.2.3	AM in Myocardial Ischemia	176
7.2.3.1	AM Production in Myocardial Ischemia	176
7.2.3.2	Myocardial Cytoprotection by AM	177
7.2.3.3	Signaling Mechanisms	178
7.2.4	AM and Angiogenesis	179
7.2.4.1	Angiogenic Effect of AM	179
7.2.4.2	Signaling Mechanisms	180
7.2.5	AM in Heart Failure	180
7.2.5.1	Cardiac AM Production in Heart Failure	180
7.2.5.2	Acute Hemodynamic Effects of AM in Heart Failure	181
7.2.5.3	Chronic Effects of AM on Heart Failure Progression	182
	References	184

8 Apelin and Vasopressin 193

Xavier Iturrioz, Annabelle Reaux-Le Goazigo, Françoise Moos, and Catherine Llorens-Cortes

8.1	Discovery of Apelin	193
8.2	Structure and Processing of the Apelin Precursor	194
8.3	Apelin Receptor Signaling and Internalization	195
8.4	Distribution of Apelin and Its Receptor within the Adult Rat Brain	196
8.4.1	Topographical Distribution of Apelin	196
8.4.2	Distribution of Apelin Receptor mRNA Expression	197
8.5	Apelin: Physiological Actions within the Brain and Anterior Pituitary Gland	197
8.5.1	Involvement of Vasopressin and Apelin in the Maintenance of Water Balance	197
8.5.1.1	Vasopressinergic System	197
8.5.1.2	Apelinergic System	199
8.5.2	Apelin, like Vasopressin, is involved in Regulating the Hypothalamic–Adrenal–Pituitary Axis	202
8.6	Peripheral Cardiovascular Actions	203
8.7	Conclusions and Pathophysiological Implications	204
	References	205

Part Three Amines

- 9 Serotonin 211**
Michael Bader
- 9.1 Introduction 211
- 9.2 Components of the Serotonin System 213
- 9.2.1 Enzymes 213
- 9.2.1.1 Tryptophan Hydroxylases 213
- 9.2.1.2 Aromatic Amino Acid Decarboxylase 215
- 9.2.1.3 Monoamine Oxidases 216
- 9.2.2 Transporters 216
- 9.2.2.1 Serotonin Transporter 216
- 9.2.2.2 Vesicular Monoamine Transporters 217
- 9.2.3 5-HT Receptors 217
- 9.2.3.1 5-HT₁ Family 217
- 9.2.3.2 5-HT₂ Family 218
- 9.2.3.3 5-HT₃ Family 218
- 9.2.3.4 5-HT₄ Family 218
- 9.2.3.5 5-HT₅ Family 219
- 9.2.3.6 5-HT₆ Family 219
- 9.2.3.7 5-HT₇ Family 219
- 9.3 Cardiovascular Actions 219
- 9.3.1 Platelets 219
- 9.3.2 Vessels 221
- 9.3.3 Heart 222
- 9.3.4 Brain 223
- 9.4 Conclusions 225
- References 225
- 10 Adrenaline and Noradrenaline 233**
Nadine Beetz and Lutz Hein
- 10.1 Introduction 233
- 10.2 Biosynthesis and Degradation of Noradrenaline and Adrenaline 234
- 10.2.1 Biosynthesis 234
- 10.2.1.1 Tyrosine Hydroxylase (TH) 235
- 10.2.1.2 Aromatic L-Amino Acid Decarboxylase (AADC) 235
- 10.2.1.3 Dopamine β -Hydroxylase (DBH) 236
- 10.2.1.4 Phenylethanolamine *N*-Methyltransferase (PNMT) 237
- 10.2.2 Metabolism 238
- 10.2.2.1 Noradrenaline Transporter (NET) 239
- 10.2.2.2 Organic Cation Transporter 3 (OCT3) 240
- 10.2.2.3 Catechol O-Methyltransferase (COMT) 240
- 10.2.2.4 Monoamine Oxidase A (MAO-A) 240
- 10.2.2.5 Vesicular Monoamine Transporter 2 (VMAT2) 241

10.3	Adrenergic Receptors	241
10.3.1	α_1 -Adrenoceptors	242
10.3.1.1	Mouse Models	242
10.3.1.2	Human Genetics and Function	242
10.3.2	α_2 -Adrenoceptors	243
10.3.2.1	Mouse Models	243
10.3.2.2	Human Genetics and Function	243
10.3.3	β -Adrenoceptors	244
10.3.3.1	Mouse Models	244
10.3.3.2	Human Genetics and Function	244
10.4	Conclusions	244
	References	245
11	Dopamine	251
	<i>Pedro Gomes and Patr�io Soares-da-Silva</i>	
11.1	Introduction	251
11.2	Dopamine Synthesis	251
11.2.1	L-DOPA Uptake and Decarboxylation	251
11.2.2	Amino Acid Transporters	252
11.2.3	Mechanisms Regulating Dopamine Availability	254
11.3	Dopamine Receptors	255
11.3.1	Classification	255
11.3.2	Tissue Distribution	257
11.4	Signaling Machinery and Effectors Downstream Dopamine Receptor Activation	257
11.4.1	Ion Transporters and Channels	257
11.4.2	G-Proteins	258
11.4.3	Adenylyl Cyclase/Protein Kinase A	259
11.4.4	Phospholipase C/Protein Kinase C	259
11.4.5	Other Pathways	260
11.5	Peripheral Effects of Dopamine	261
11.5.1	Renal Function	261
11.5.1.1	Renal Blood Flow	261
11.5.1.2	Glomerular Filtration Rate	261
11.5.1.3	Tubular Effect	262
11.5.2	Gastrointestinal Effect	263
11.6	Dopamine and Pathophysiology	263
11.6.1	Hypertension	263
11.6.2	Renal Failure	265
11.6.3	Heart Failure	266
11.6.4	Diabetes Mellitus	266
11.6.5	Aging	267
11.7	Clinical Applications of Dopamine	268
11.7.1	Heart Failure	268
11.7.2	Renal Failure	269

- 11.7.3 Surgery and Transplantation 271
- 11.7.4 Sepsis and Inflammation 274
- References 275

12 Histamine 295

Izabela Rozenberg, Felix C. Tanner, and Thomas F. Lüscher

- 12.1 Introduction 295
- 12.2 Biochemistry 296
 - 12.2.1 Synthesis 296
 - 12.2.2 Degradation 296
- 12.3 Receptors 297
- 12.4 Vasomotion 298
 - 12.4.1 EDRF 298
 - 12.4.1.1 Signaling Role of Ca²⁺ 300
 - 12.4.1.2 Activation of eNOS 300
 - 12.4.1.3 Transcriptional Regulation of eNOS 300
 - 12.4.2 EDCF 300
- 12.5 Thrombosis 301
 - 12.5.1 Tissue Factor Expression 301
 - 12.5.2 Weibel–Palade Bodies 303
 - 12.5.3 Platelet Aggregation 304
- 12.6 Inflammation 304
 - 12.6.1 Vascular Permeability 305
 - 12.6.2 Adhesion Molecule Expression 305
 - 12.6.3 Leukocyte Accumulation 306
 - 12.6.4 Regulation of T_h1/T_h2 Balance 306
 - 12.6.5 Macrophage Activation 307
 - 12.6.6 Obesity 307
- 12.7 Atherosclerosis 307
- 12.8 Autoimmune Diseases and Allergy 308
 - 12.8.1 Autoimmune Diseases 308
 - 12.8.2 Allergy 308
 - 12.8.2.1 Immediate Response 309
 - 12.8.2.2 Long-Term Response 309
- 12.9 Conclusions 310
- References 310

13 Prostaglandins and Leukotrienes 315

Katharina Lötzer and Andreas J. R. Habenicht

- 13.1 AA Metabolism by the COX and 5-LO Pathways 315
- 13.2 PGs in Cardiovascular Physiology and Pathophysiology 317
 - 13.2.1 Diversity of Prostanoid Effects in the Cardiovascular System 317
 - 13.2.2 PGs and Atherosclerosis 317
 - 13.2.3 COX-2 Inhibition and Cardiovascular Risk in Humans 319

13.3	LTs in Cardiovascular Physiology and Pathophysiology	320
13.3.1	Activities of LTs in the Cardiovascular System	320
13.3.2	5-LO Atherosclerosis Hypothesis	321
13.3.3	5-LO Pathway in Mouse Models of Atherosclerosis	322
13.3.4	Population Genetic Studies Indicate a Role of the 5-LO Pathway in Cardiovascular Disease	323
	References	324
14	Cytochrome P450-Dependent Eicosanoids	333
	<i>Wolf-Hagen Schunck and Cosima Schmidt</i>	
14.1	Introduction	333
14.2	Prospects of the Research Field	333
14.3	How CYP Enzymes Became Established Members of the AA Cascade	335
14.4	Structure and Function of CYP Enzymes and Their Role in AA Metabolism	336
14.4.1	Unique Spectral and Catalytic Features of CYP Enzymes	336
14.4.2	CYP Systems and Their Reaction Cycle in the ER	337
14.4.2.1	Membrane Integration and Substrate Access	337
14.4.2.2	Electron Transfer and Activation of Molecular Oxygen	337
14.4.2.3	Product Formation and Specificity	337
14.4.3	Reaction Types and Primary Products of CYP-Dependent AA Metabolism	339
14.4.4	AA Metabolizing CYP Isoforms and Their Orthologs Among Rodents and Human	340
14.4.4.1	CYP Superfamily	340
14.4.4.2	Identity of AA-Metabolizing CYP Isoforms	340
14.4.4.3	Problem of Overlapping Substrate Specificities	341
14.4.4.4	Problem of Orthologous Genes	341
14.5	Physiological and Pathophysiological Context of CYP-Dependent Eicosanoid Formation and Action	341
14.5.1	Extracellular Signal-Induced AA Release	341
14.5.2	Second Messenger Function	342
14.5.3	Cellular Context and the Multiplicity of Signaling	342
14.5.4	Physiological Context	342
14.5.5	Role of I/R	342
14.6	Systemic and Tissue-Specific Metabolic Factors Modulating CYP-Dependent Eicosanoid Formation	343
14.6.1	Essential Fatty Acids Compete as Precursors for Oxygenated Metabolites	343
14.6.1.1	ω -6 Fatty Acids	343
14.6.1.2	ω -3 Fatty Acids	343
14.6.1.3	Health Benefits from ω -3 Fatty Acids	345
14.6.1.4	ω -3 Fatty Acids Are the Precursors of Novel CYP-Dependent Eicosanoids	345

- 14.6.2 Role of Nitric Oxide 345
- 14.6.3 Carbon Monoxide and Heme Oxygenase 346
- 14.6.4 CYP Enzymes as Targets, Sources and Utilizers of Reactive Oxygen Species 346
 - 14.6.4.1 Reactive Oxygen Species Affect CYP Activities 346
 - 14.6.4.2 Reactive Oxygen Species Production by CYP Enzymes 346
 - 14.6.4.3 CYP Enzymes Can Use Reactive Oxygen Species and Hydroperoxides for Substrate Oxygenation 346
- 14.7 Biological Activities of EETs and 20-HETE 347
 - 14.7.1 Regulation of Vascular Tone 347
 - 14.7.2 Regulation of Renal Tubular Function 347
 - 14.7.3 Cardiac Function 350
 - 14.7.4 General Cell- and Organ-Protective Properties of EETs 351
 - 14.7.5 Biological Activities of Eicosanoids Originating from CYP-Dependent *n*-3 PUFA Oxygenation 351
- 14.8 Secondary Product Formation and the Metabolic Fate of CYP-Dependent Eicosanoids 352
- 14.9 CYP-Dependent AA Metabolism in Animal Models of Hypertension and End-Organ Damage 353
 - 14.9.1 Prohypertensive and Proinflammatory Role of Vascular 20-HETE 355
 - 14.9.1.1 Androgen-Induced Hypertension 355
 - 14.9.1.2 Cyclosporin A-Induced Hypertension 355
 - 14.9.2 Antihypertensive Role of EETs in Salt-Sensitive Hypertension 355
 - 14.9.3 Antihypertensive Role of EETs in Pregnancy 356
 - 14.9.3.1 Renal and Vascular Alterations during Pregnancy 356
 - 14.9.3.2 Role of EETs in Placenta, Decidua and Trophoblasts 357
 - 14.9.4 20-HETE Deficiency and Salt-Sensitive Hypertension 357
 - 14.9.5 Role of EETs, HEETs and PPAR α in Inflammatory Renal Damage 357
- 14.10 Structure and Cardiovascular Functions of the Soluble Epoxide Hydrolase 358
 - 14.10.1 Enzymatic Activities 358
 - 14.10.2 sEH – A Novel Target for the Treatment of Cardiovascular Disease? 359
- 14.11 General Conclusions on Cause–Effect Relationships Associating Alterations in CYP-Dependent Eicosanoid Production and Cardiovascular Disease 359
 - 14.11.1 Any Alteration in CYP-Dependent AA Metabolism May Contribute to Cardiovascular Disease 359
 - 14.11.2 EET and 20-HETE Availability – A Bottleneck of Various Signaling Pathways? 360
 - 14.11.3 Is There a Primary Role of CYP-Dependent Eicosanoids and of CYP Gene Polymorphism in the Development of Cardiovascular Disease? 360

14.11.4	What Is the Cause for Alterations in the Production and Effects of CYP-Dependent Eicosanoids in Disease States?	361
	References	362
15	Nucleotides and the Purinergic System	373
	<i>Vera Jankowski and Joachim Jankowski</i>	
15.1	Introduction	373
15.2	Mononucleoside Polyphosphates	373
15.3	Dinucleoside Polyphosphates	375
15.4	Purinoceptor System	380
15.5	Metabolism of Nucleotides	383
15.6	Therapeutic Aspects of the Purinergic System	383
	References	384
16	Nitric Oxide	395
	<i>Valérie B. Schini-Kerth and Paul M. Vanhoutte</i>	
16.1	Regulation of the Endothelial Formation of NO	396
16.1.1	Hemodynamic Forces	396
16.1.2	Blood- and Platelet-Derived Factors	398
16.1.3	Local and Circulating Hormones, Growth Factors, and Neurotransmitters	399
16.1.4	Polyphenols	400
16.2	Vasoprotective Effects of NO	400
16.2.1	Regulation of Vascular Tone and Structure	400
16.2.2	Regulation of Coagulant and Thrombotic Responses	402
16.2.3	Regulation of Atherogenic Responses	402
16.3	Conclusions	403
	References	403
17	Acetylcholine	407
	<i>Maria Cláudia Irigoyen, Catarina S. Porto, Pedro Paulo Soares, Fernanda Consolin-Colombo, and Antônio Cláudio Nóbrega</i>	
17.1	Muscarinic Acetylcholine Receptor: Subtypes and Intracellular Signaling	407
17.1.1	Muscarinic Receptors in the Heart	409
17.2	Physiological Effects of ACh on the Heart	410
17.2.1	Reflex Control of Heart Rate by the Autonomic Nervous System	411
17.3	Parasympathetic Dysfunction: Clinical Impact on the Cardiovascular System	414
17.4	ACh and Vascular Function	417
	References	418
	Index	425

Preface

Cardiovascular diseases have the highest morbidity and mortality world-wide. They comprise disorders like hypertension, myocardial infarction, cardiac and renal failure as well as stroke. Since the cardiovascular system is regulated by hormones and autacoids, which either are circulating or locally released in vascular tissues from endothelial cells and neurons, these hormones are of major pathophysiological importance for cardiovascular diseases.

The chemical nature of these hormones is quite diverse. There are steroids, such as the estrogens, androgens, mineralocorticoids and glucocorticoids; peptides, such as angiotensins, kinins, endothelins, vasopressin, apelin, natriuretic peptides, calcitonin gene-related peptide and adrenomedullin; biogenic amines synthesized from amino acids, such as serotonin, dopamine, norepinephrine, epinephrine and histamine; arachidonic acid products, such as prostaglandins, leukotrienes and cytochrome P450 metabolites; esters, such as acetylcholine; as well as nucleotides and even gases such as nitric oxide. The receptors with which they interact are markedly different. While the majority of the factors act on members of the huge family of G-protein-coupled receptors with seven-transmembrane domains, steroids bind to nuclear receptors, natriuretic peptides activate membrane-bound guanylate cyclases and nitric oxide acts on soluble guanylate cyclases. In addition, the direct activation of ion channels has been described for serotonin (5-HT₃ receptors), some steroids (nongenomic actions), acetylcholine (nicotinic receptor) and nucleotides (P_{2X} receptors).

The kinetics with which the hormone systems interfere with cardiovascular regulation also vary drastically. Steroid hormones induce their effects mainly on the transcriptional level. They start to be effective from hours up to days. Peptide hormones are released within minutes and are effective for hours. Autacoids such as the cytochrome P450 products, prostaglandins and nitric oxide are released in seconds, and their effects last for minutes. This allows a high flexibility of the organism to react to cardiovascular challenges at different time scales.

Furthermore, these hormone systems enable intensive networking between the cardiovascular tissues. The major player is the brain, which regulates all other organs in the cardiovascular system using the sympathetic and parasympathetic nerves with noradrenaline and acetylcholine as transmitters, respectively. Furthermore, it releases vasopressin targeting the kidney, and factors influencing steroid

hormone generation in the adrenal gland and the gonads. The heart can signal to the rest of the cardiovascular system via the natriuretic peptides (atrial natriuretic peptide and brain natriuretic peptide). The kidney employs the renin–angiotensin system for the same purpose.

Due to the complexity of the cardiovascular system and its regulation, the study of cardiovascular hormones has been mainly limited to whole-organism models. As a consequence, transgenic technology employing the targeted alteration of the genome of a rat or mouse had a major impact on the study of these systems, and the description of such relevant animal models is a major focus of this book.

With the help of such models it was discovered that some of the hormones are already essential for the normal development of the cardiovascular system. For example, animals deficient for endothelins show drastic developmental defects in heart and vessels, and die shortly after birth. Also, most animals deficient for dopamine, norepinephrine and adrenal steroids are not viable for more than a few days. Mice lacking angiotensin exhibit abnormalities in kidney morphology; nevertheless, some of them reach adulthood.

The majority of common drugs for cardiovascular diseases interfere with the generation or signaling of the factors described in this book. For example, the renin–angiotensin system is the target of three classes of drugs: angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitors, angiotensin AT₁ receptor antagonists and recently also newly developed renin inhibitors. Norepinephrine and its β -receptor are inhibited by β -blockers. However, these drugs not only affect a single hormone system but also interfere with other systems summarized in this book. For example, angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitors stabilize bradykinin and β -blockers inhibit renin release. Thus, the sole view on one hormone system is not sufficient to understand the actions of these classical cardiovascular drugs. Therefore, this book was designed to give a comprehensive overview about cardiovascular hormones, their metabolism, physiological actions and therapeutic value. Each hormone system is described separately by one of the leaders in the field of research about this system.

I am very grateful to all of the coauthors of *Cardiovascular Hormone Systems* whose excellent contributions created a very valuable and comprehensive source of information for clinical and basic scientists interested in cardiovascular regulation, endocrinology and pharmacology.

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Part One Steroid Hormones

1

Glucocorticoids and Mineralocorticoids

Eilidh Craigie, John J. Mullins, and Matthew A. Bailey

Glucocorticoids and mineralocorticoids are members of the corticosteroid hormone family, synthesized in the adrenal gland from the precursor sterol cholesterol via the intermediate pregnenolone (Figure 1.1). The principal glucocorticoid in humans is cortisol (in rodents corticosterone) and the principal mineralocorticoid is aldosterone. Sharing a common synthesis pathway, cortisol and aldosterone are structurally similar (Figure 1.1), and exhibit a degree of cross-receptor affinity and function. Nevertheless, small differences in structure permit important differences in physiological function. Aldosterone classically acts via the mineralocorticoid receptor (MR) to promote sodium transport in the kidney and gut, thereby regulating long-term electrolyte homeostasis and blood pressure control. Cortisol, by comparison, exhibits a wide range of metabolic and stress-related response effects.

1.1

Synthesis of the Corticosteroids

Steroid synthesis occurs principally in the adrenal gland but also occurs in the steroidogenic cells of the testes, ovary, placenta and brain. The intramitochondrial delivery of cholesterol is the rate-limiting step for steroid synthesis and is mediated by steroidogenic acute regulatory protein (StAR) [1]). Defects in cholesterol transport associated with mutations in StAR [2] cause the autosomal recessive disorder of lipoid congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH; Online Mendelian Inheritance in Man (OMIM) #201710). This rare condition presents with large adrenal glands containing high levels of cholesterol. Lipoid CAH is lethal within a few days without hormone replacement therapy. Over 30 mutations in StAR have been reported to cause lipoid CAH, all of which result in varying degrees of defective cholesterol transport (for review, see [3]). Mice null for StAR, generated by homologous recombination, emphasize the key role of this protein. Homozygous null pups fail to thrive and die within a week of birth: corticosterone and aldosterone levels are very low despite elevated ACTH (adrenal corticotropic hormone) and CRH (corticotropin-releasing hormone) [4]. Lipoid CAH can also arise from

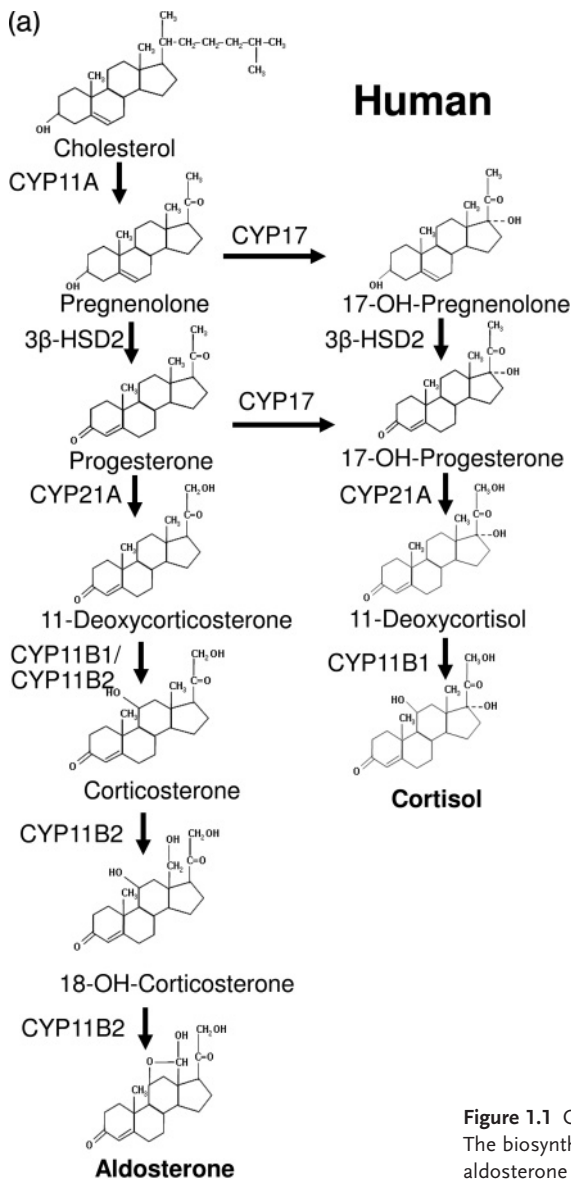


Figure 1.1 Corticosteroid biosynthesis. The biosynthesis pathways of cortisol and aldosterone in (a) humans and (b) rodents.

mutations in P450scc [5], an enzyme that cleaves cholesterol to produce pregnenolone—the common precursor for both cortisol and aldosterone synthesis (Figure 1.1). Indeed the biosynthetic pathways of both share a number of intermediates and enzymes (Figure 1.1), becoming fully exclusive only at 11-deoxycortisol (DOC; cortisol pathway) and 11-deoxycorticosterone (aldosterone pathway). In rodents, exclusivity occurs at 11-deoxycorticosterone (Figure 1.1b).

The final step in cortisol synthesis, the conversion of DOC to cortisol, is catalyzed by 11β-hydroxylase (CYP11B1 gene), while the final three stages of aldoste-