

## Hepatic PPARalpha is critical in the metabolic adaptation to sepsis

Réjane Paumelle, Joël Haas, Nathalie Hennuyer, Eric Baugé, Yann Deleye, Dieter Mesotten, Lies Langouche, Jonathan Vanhoutte, Céline Cudejko, Kristiaan Wouters, et al.

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1 **Hepatic PPAR $\alpha$  is critical in the metabolic adaptation to sepsis**

2 Réjane PAUMELLE<sup>1\*</sup>, Joel HAAS<sup>1\*</sup>, Nathalie HENNUYER<sup>1\*</sup>, Eric BAUGE<sup>1\*</sup>, Yann  
3 DELEYE<sup>1</sup>, Dieter MESOTTEN<sup>6</sup>, Lies LANGOUCHE<sup>6</sup>, Jonathan VANHOUTTE<sup>1</sup>,  
4 Céline CUDEJKO<sup>1</sup>, Kristiaan WOUTERS<sup>2</sup>, Sarah Anissa HANNOU<sup>1</sup>, Vanessa  
5 LEGRY<sup>1</sup>, Steve LANCEL<sup>1</sup>, Fanny LALLOYER<sup>1</sup>, Arnaud POLIZZI<sup>4</sup>, Sarra SMATI<sup>4</sup>,  
6 Pierre GOURDY<sup>3</sup>, Emmanuelle VALLEZ<sup>1</sup>, Emmanuel BOUCHAERT<sup>1</sup>, Bruno  
7 DERUDAS<sup>1</sup>, Hélène DEHONDT<sup>1</sup>, Céline GHEERAERT<sup>1</sup>, Sébastien FLEURY<sup>1</sup>, Anne  
8 TAILLEUX<sup>1</sup>, Alexandra MONTAGNER<sup>3,4</sup>, Walter WAHLI<sup>4,5</sup>, Greet VAN DEN  
9 BERGHE<sup>6</sup>, Hervé GUILLOU<sup>4</sup>, David DOMBROWICZ<sup>1+</sup> and Bart STAELS<sup>1+</sup>.

10

11 \* Co-first authors; + co-senior authors

12 1 Univ. Lille, Inserm, CHU Lille, Institut Pasteur de Lille, U1011 - EGID, F-59000  
13 Lille, France

14 2 Maastricht University, Dept. of Internal Medicine, Maastricht, The Netherlands.

15 3 Institut National de La Santé et de La Recherche Médicale (INSERM), UMR1048,  
16 Institute of Metabolic and Cardiovascular Diseases, Toulouse, France.

17 4 Institut National de La Recherche Agronomique (INRA), UMR1331 ToxAlim,  
18 Toulouse, France.

19 5 Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine, Nanyang Technological University Singapore,  
20 Clinical Sciences Building, 11 Mandalay Road, Singapore 308232; Center for  
21 Integrative Genomics, Université de Lausanne, Le Génopode, CH-1015 Lausanne,  
22 Switzerland.

1 6 Laboratory of Critical Care Medicine, Dept Cellular and Molecular Medicine, KU  
2 Leuven, University Hospitals Leuven, Herestraat 49 Bus 503, B-3000 Leuven,  
3 Belgium

4  
5 *Correspondence:* Bart Staels. Inserm U1011, Institut Pasteur de Lille, 1 rue du  
6 Professeur Calmette, BP 245, Lille 59019, France, Tel: +33 3 20 87 73 88, Fax: +33  
7 3 20 87 73 60, E-mail: [bart.staels@pasteur-lille.fr](mailto:bart.staels@pasteur-lille.fr)

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19

20 *Running title:* PPAR $\alpha$  controls the hepatic metabolic response to sepsis

21

## 1 **Abstract**

2 *Background and aims:* Although the role of inflammation to combat infection is  
3 known, the contribution of metabolic changes in response to sepsis is poorly  
4 understood. Sepsis induces the release of lipid mediators, many of which activate  
5 nuclear receptors such as the peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor (PPAR) $\alpha$ ,  
6 which controls both lipid metabolism and inflammation. However, the role of hepatic  
7 PPAR $\alpha$  in the response to sepsis is unknown.

8 *Methods:* Sepsis was induced by intraperitoneal injection of *Escherichia coli* in  
9 different models of cell-specific *Ppar* $\alpha$ -deficiency and their controls. The systemic  
10 and hepatic metabolic response was analysed using biochemical, transcriptomic and  
11 functional assays. PPAR $\alpha$  expression was analysed in livers from elective surgery  
12 and critically ill patients and correlated with hepatic gene expression and blood  
13 parameters

14 *Results:* Both whole body and non-hematopoietic *Ppar* $\alpha$ -deficiency in mice  
15 decreased survival upon bacterial infection. Livers of septic *Ppar* $\alpha$ -deficient mice  
16 displayed an impaired metabolic shift from glucose to lipid utilization resulting in  
17 more severe hypoglycemia, impaired induction of hyperketonemia and increased  
18 steatosis due to lower expression of genes involved in fatty acid catabolism and  
19 ketogenesis. Hepatocyte-specific deletion of PPAR $\alpha$  impaired the metabolic  
20 response to sepsis and was sufficient to decrease survival upon bacterial infection.  
21 Hepatic *PPARA* expression was lower in critically ill patients and correlated positively  
22 with expression of lipid metabolism genes, but not with systemic inflammatory  
23 markers.

1 *Conclusion:* Metabolic control by PPAR $\alpha$  in hepatocytes plays a key role in the host  
2 defense to infection.

3

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5

6 *Lay summary:* As the main cause of death of critically ill patients, sepsis remains a  
7 major health issue lacking efficacious therapies. While *current* clinical literature  
8 suggests an important role for inflammation, metabolic aspects of sepsis have been  
9 mostly overlooked. Here, we show that mice with an impaired metabolic response,  
10 due to deficiency of the nuclear receptor PPAR $\alpha$  in the liver, exhibit enhanced  
11 mortality upon bacterial infection despite a similar inflammatory response,  
12 suggesting that metabolic interventions may be a viable strategy for improving sepsis  
13 outcomes.

14

15

16

17 **Highlights:**

- 18 - Sepsis activates hepatic PPAR $\alpha$
- 19 - PPAR $\alpha$  plays a protective role in sepsis
- 20 - *Ppar* $\alpha$ -deficiency impairs FA utilization in the liver during sepsis
- 21 - Hepatocyte *Ppar* $\alpha$ -deficiency worsens the outcome of bacterial infection
- 22 - PPAR $\alpha$  activity is lower in livers of non-surviving critically ill patients

23

24

## 1 **Introduction**

2 Sepsis, the systemic inflammatory response to poorly controlled infection, causes  
3 significant morbidity/mortality [1]. Sepsis is often complicated by multiple organ  
4 failure, requiring intensive care. Recently, mortality in sepsis has decreased largely  
5 due to improved supportive strategies for critically ill patients, such as mechanical  
6 ventilation, renal replacement therapy and antibiotics. While current therapeutic  
7 strategies targeting the inflammatory response have been disappointing [1,2],  
8 metabolic interventions, such as intensive insulin therapy [3] and controlled caloric  
9 deficit through delayed administration of parenteral nutrition [4], have shown some  
10 promise, suggesting that appropriate adaptation of energy metabolism contributes to  
11 proper defense against pathogens [5].

12 The early pro-inflammatory response to infection requires glycolysis and non-insulin-  
13 mediated glucose uptake to rapidly meet the high energy demand of innate immune  
14 cells [6]. In this phase, hepatic gluconeogenesis increases to maintain plasma  
15 glucose concentrations [7]. As sepsis sets in, plasma free fatty acid (FFA) and  
16 glycerol levels rise due to enhanced adipose tissue (AT) lipolysis [7]. In response,  
17 organs such as the liver, muscle and heart, shift from glucose to FA utilization [8]  
18 and enhance mitochondrial activity [9].

19 PPAR $\alpha$  is a nuclear receptor activated by fatty acids and derivatives regulating both  
20 metabolism and inflammation [10]. PPAR $\alpha$  is highly expressed in metabolic tissues,  
21 such as liver, heart, kidney and muscle, the vasculature (endothelial cells, smooth  
22 muscle cells) as well as in the immune system (monocytes/macrophages,  
23 neutrophils, etc.) [11]. During fed-to-fasted transition, hepatic PPAR $\alpha$  expression  
24 increases [12] and is activated by the influx of AT-released FFA, orchestrating a shift

1 from glucose to FA utilization driving ketone body and glucose production by the liver  
2 [12,13].  
3 PPAR $\alpha$  also exerts anti-inflammatory activities by inhibiting NF $\kappa$ B and AP1 signaling  
4 [10]. Consequently, *Ppar* $\alpha$ -deficient mice display a prolonged inflammatory response  
5 upon sterile inflammation [14]. Conversely, upon polymicrobial infection, *Ppar* $\alpha$ -  
6 deficient mice display decreased survival associated with a reduced pro-  
7 inflammatory immune response [15], through mechanisms involving non-  
8 hematopoietic PPAR $\alpha$  [16]. Although cardiac PPAR $\alpha$  contributes to sepsis survival  
9 by increasing cardiac performance and FA oxidation [17], the specific contribution of  
10 PPAR $\alpha$  in the liver has not yet been addressed.

11



## 1 **Materials and methods**

### 2 **Mice**

3 Whole body *Ppara* knockout (KO) and wild type (WT) littermate C57BL/6J mice (gift  
4 of F.Gonzalez [18]) were bred at the Institut Pasteur de Lille (IPL) transgenic rodent  
5 facility (SPF status). Hepatocyte-specific *Ppara*-deficient (*Ppara fl/fl*, Albumin-Cre<sup>+</sup>,  
6 *Ppara*<sup>hepKO</sup>) and corresponding littermate controls (*Ppara fl/fl*, Albumin-Cre<sup>-</sup>) mice  
7 were generated and bred at INRA's rodent facility (conventional health status,  
8 Toxalim, Toulouse, France), as described [19]. In survival experiments comparing  
9 *Ppara*<sup>hepKO</sup> to whole body *Ppara* KO mice, all mice were bred at the INRA transgenic  
10 rodent facility. Infection experiments were conducted on female (8-12 weeks) mice  
11 fed a standard rodent diet (Safe 04 U8220G10R) at IPL facility. All animals were  
12 housed under temperature-controlled (at 22-24°C), 12-hour light/dark cycle  
13 conditions. Experimental procedures were approved by the Nord Pas-de-Calais  
14 Ethics committee (CEEA 75, APAFIS#7738-2015121713177853 v9).

15

### 16 **Bacterial cultures and infection**

17 DH5α *E.coli* were grown in LB Broth at 37°C to an OD<sub>600</sub> of 0.6, equivalent to 4-  
18 5x10<sup>8</sup> CFU/mL, collected by centrifugation, washed once with sterile PBS, and  
19 resuspended in cold PBS at 4-7x10<sup>8</sup> CFU/mL. Concentration and viability were  
20 confirmed by plaque assay colony counting. Mice (10-15 mice/group) were injected  
21 intraperitoneally (i.p.) with 4-7x10<sup>8</sup> CFU/mouse in 1 mL PBS and survival rates were  
22 monitored every 6hrs for a week. For biochemical characterization, mice were killed  
23 by cervical dislocation 16hrs post infection and serum and livers collected.

24

## 1 **Human study**

2 Post-mortem liver biopsies were taken from ICU-patients (n=46), enrolled in a  
3 randomized controlled trial [3]. All deaths occurred after multidisciplinary decision to  
4 restrict therapy when further treatment was judged to be futile. During this trial, for  
5 postmortem tissue sampling for academic purposes, each patient or his/her legal  
6 representative consented upon admission, via a hospital-wide information and  
7 consent procedure that required active opting-out when not consenting. Opting-out  
8 remained possible until time of death. This strategy was approved by the Institutional  
9 Ethical Review Board. Liver samples were harvested within minutes after death.  
10 Control liver biopsies from 20 demographically matched patients (written informed  
11 consent obtained prior to the procedure) undergoing an elective restorative rectal  
12 resection were obtained. All protocol and consent forms were approved by the  
13 Institutional Ethical Review Board of the KU Leuven (ML1094, ML2707). Baseline  
14 and outcome variables are indicated in Supplementary Table 1. Liver biopsies were  
15 taken from liver segment IVb, snap-frozen in liquid nitrogen, and stored at -80°C until  
16 analysis (see Supplementary Material & Methods (Suppl.M&M)).

17

## 18 **Biochemical analysis**

19 Plasma aspartate aminotransferase (AST) and alanine aminotransferase (ALT)  
20 (Biolabo), free fatty acids (FFA) (Diasys),  $\beta$ -hydroxybutyrate (ketone bodies) (Thermo  
21 Fisher) were determined by colorimetric assays. Plasma Tnfa, Kc and IL-6 protein  
22 levels were measured by ELISA (R&D Systems) and MPO activity as described [20].  
23 Cytokine levels were quantified in serum of critically ill patients collected on the day  
24 of biopsy (last day alive in the ICU) [21].

1

## 2 **Liver transcriptomic analysis**

3 RNA extraction and analysis are detailed in Suppl.M&M. RNA microarray analysis  
4 was performed using Mouse Gene 2.0ST arrays. Array data processing was  
5 performed using Bioconductor in the R-environment (r-project.org). Gene expression  
6 was calculated after normalizing signal using robust multichip averaging (RMA) in  
7 the *oligo* package [22]. Differential gene expression between groups (*Pparα* WT  
8 uninfected, *Pparα* WT infected, *Pparα* KO uninfected and *Pparα* KO infected) was  
9 assessed using *limma* package [23] with a threshold of 5% false discovery rate  
10 (FDR). Differentially expressed genes were clustered using the *hopach* package [24]  
11 with the cosine distance metric. Gene Ontology (GO) terms enrichment of selected  
12 clusters was performed using the *clusterProfiler* package [25,26]. For KEGG  
13 pathway analysis, data were analyzed using Partek software.

14

## 15 **Mitochondrial respiration**

16 Liver samples (125mg) were minced and dounce homogenized by 8-10 strokes in  
17 ice-cold MIR05 respiratory buffer (20mM HEPES, 10mM KH<sub>2</sub>PO<sub>4</sub>, 110mM sucrose,  
18 20mM taurine, 60mM K-lactobionate, 0.5mM EGTA, 3mM MgCl<sub>2</sub>·6H<sub>2</sub>O, 1g/L BSA  
19 (fatty acid free)). Liver homogenates (50μl) were introduced into O2K oxygraph  
20 chambers (Oroboros Instruments, Innsbruck, Austria) to assess oxygen consumption  
21 in presence of pyruvate (5mM) and malate (2mM) (state 2 respiration), followed by  
22 ADP (0.5mM) (state 3 respiration). To measure β-oxidation, octanoylcarnitine (25μM)  
23 and malate (2mM) were added, followed by ADP (0.5mM). The respiratory control

1 ratio (RCR) was calculated as the state 3:state 2 ratio. Finally, cytochrome c (10 $\mu$ M)  
2 was added to measure mitochondrial integrity.

3

#### 4 **Histological analysis**

5 Frozen liver samples were embedded in Frozen Section Medium (NEG-50, Richard-  
6 Allan Scientific), stained with anti-Moma2 (ab33451, abcam) or anti-Ly6G (1A8, BD  
7 Pharmingen) antibodies and counterstained with hematoxylin. Ly6G and Moma2  
8 staining areas were determined by color detection using a Nikon Eclipse Ti  
9 microscope and a color video camera coupled to the NIS Elements software (Nikon).

10

11 **Hepatic triglyceride measurement:** see Suppl.M&M.

12

#### 13 **Statistical analysis**

14 Groups were compared using the Log-rank (Mantel-Cox) Test (survival test), 2-way  
15 ANOVA, 2-tailed non-paired t-tests or nonparametric Wilcoxon tests (mouse and  
16 human studies) and expressed as means  $\pm$  SEM using the GraphPad Prism  
17 software. Significance of correlations between parameters was assessed by  
18 calculation of the Pearson (r) correlation coefficient using GraphPad Prism software.

19

## 1 **Results**

2 *Whole body and non-hematopoietic Ppar $\alpha$ -deficiency aggravate mortality upon*  
3 *bacterial infection.*

4 To evaluate the role of *Ppar $\alpha$*  in sepsis, whole body *Ppar $\alpha$* -deficient (KO) and wild  
5 type (WT) mice were inoculated with Gram-negative *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*). Three  
6 days after infection, mortality was 0% in *Ppar $\alpha$*  WT compared to 75% in *Ppar $\alpha$*  KO  
7 mice (Fig.1A). As PPAR $\alpha$  is expressed in immune cells and exerts anti-inflammatory  
8 actions, we assessed whether restoration of PPAR $\alpha$  in the hematopoietic  
9 compartment conferred protection to infection. Chimeric mice were generated by  
10 transplanting lethally irradiated whole body *Ppar $\alpha$*  KO and *Ppar $\alpha$*  WT mice with  
11 *Ppar $\alpha$*  WT bone marrow (WTbm->KO and WTbm->WT, respectively, see  
12 Suppl.M&M). Surprisingly, *Ppar $\alpha$* -deficiency in non-hematopoietic cells was still  
13 associated with increased mortality in response to infection (20% *Ppar $\alpha$*  WTbm->WT  
14 compared to 70% *Ppar $\alpha$*  WTbm->KO mortality 3 days after infection; Suppl.Fig.1A),  
15 revealing a protective role for non-hematopoietic PPAR $\alpha$  in response to sepsis.

16

17 *Whole body Ppar $\alpha$ -deficiency results in impaired metabolic and inflammatory*  
18 *responses to bacterial sepsis.*

19 To understand the mechanisms of increased mortality of *Ppar $\alpha$*  KO mice in response  
20 to sepsis, the systemic metabolic and inflammatory response to bacterial infection  
21 was characterized. Plasma FFA levels significantly increased during sepsis to a  
22 similar extent in *Ppar $\alpha$*  WT and KO mice at 16hrs post-infection (Fig.1B), when  
23 maximal changes in metabolic parameters are observed (Suppl.Fig.2). Plasma AST

1 and ALT levels were similar in *Pparα* WT and KO mice, suggesting comparable  
2 tissue damage (Fig.1C,D). Conversely, plasma ketone body levels increased  
3 strongly upon infection in WT, but not in *Pparα* KO mice (Fig.1E). In addition,  
4 infection-induced hypoglycemia was more pronounced in *Pparα* KO mice,  
5 suggesting defective glucose homeostasis (Fig.1F). Interestingly, infected chimeric  
6 *Pparα* WTbm->KO mice also displayed lower plasma ketone body levels and more  
7 pronounced hypoglycemia compared to WTbm->WT controls (Suppl.Fig.1B,C).  
8 These results demonstrate that the metabolic response to sepsis depends on  
9 PPAR $\alpha$  expression in non-hematopoietic derived cells. In line with previous  
10 observations [15], *Pparα*-deficiency resulted in decreased, rather than increased,  
11 inflammatory responses as illustrated by lower plasma tumor necrosis factor alpha  
12 (Tnfa) and chemokine Kc/Cxcl1 levels 6hrs after infection (Fig.1G,H). Since hepatic  
13 PPAR $\alpha$  contributes to systemic inflammation [27], histological analysis of livers from  
14 infected *Pparα* WT and KO mice was performed. Surprisingly, whole body *Pparα*-  
15 deficiency did not affect infection-induced neutrophil or monocyte/macrophage  
16 recruitment in livers as assessed by Ly6G and Moma2 stainings (Suppl.Fig.3).  
17 Plasma myeloperoxidase activity (Fig.1I) and bacterial dissemination into peritoneum  
18 and blood (Fig.1J) were also unaffected by whole body *Pparα*-deficiency.

19

20 *Whole body Pparα-deficiency modulates the hepatic metabolic and inflammatory*  
21 *gene expression responses to bacterial sepsis.*

22 To identify molecular pathways regulated by PPAR $\alpha$  in response to sepsis,  
23 microarray analysis was performed on livers from whole body *Pparα* WT and KO

1 mice 16hrs post-infection and from uninfected controls. In addition to inflammation-  
2 related pathways, the Gene Ontology (GO) term “Oxidation-Reduction Process,” was  
3 altered by infection in *Pparα* WT mice, suggesting altered mitochondrial function  
4 (Fig.2A). Unbiased clustering analysis of genes affected by sepsis in either whole  
5 body *Pparα* WT or KO mice revealed 3 gene clusters (Fig.2B,C and Suppl.Fig.4).  
6 While cluster 1 (black) and cluster 3 (purple) contained genes whose response to  
7 infection (induced or suppressed, respectively) was largely maintained in whole body  
8 *Pparα* KO mice, genes in cluster 2 (green) were either unresponsive or responded in  
9 the opposite direction in *Pparα* KO mice despite strong regulation in *Pparα* WT mice  
10 upon infection. Cluster 1 was enriched in genes associated with inflammatory  
11 response and ROS metabolism, and cluster 3 was enriched in genes involved in  
12 cellular glucuronidation and response to xenobiotics (Suppl.Fig.4). Interestingly,  
13 Cluster 2 contained many genes related to FA metabolism and circadian rhythm,  
14 many of which are *bona fide* PPAR $\alpha$  targets. Indeed, carnitine palmitoyl transferase  
15 (*Cpt*)1a, acyl-Coenzyme A oxidase (*Acox*)1 and pyruvate dehydrogenase kinase  
16 (*Pdk*)4, were induced by sepsis in *Pparα* WT mice, but either reduced or unchanged  
17 by infection in *Pparα* KO mice (Fig.2D). Together, these results demonstrate that the  
18 most profound transcriptional differences between whole body *Pparα* WT and KO  
19 mice in response to sepsis are related to regulation of PPAR $\alpha$ 's metabolic targets,  
20 rather than to effects on inflammation or other pathways.

21

22 *Whole body Pparα-deficiency impairs the hepatic metabolic shift from glucose to lipid*  
23 *utilization during bacterial sepsis.*

1 To further characterize the metabolic contribution of PPAR $\alpha$  upon sepsis, glucose  
2 and lipid metabolism gene expression was measured in livers of infected *Ppar $\alpha$*  WT  
3 and KO mice (Supp.Fig.5). Sepsis increased expression of genes involved in  
4 gluconeogenesis, such as phosphoenolpyruvate carboxykinase (*Pck1*) and fructose-  
5 1,6-biphosphatase (*Fbp1*), although the magnitude of response was lower in *Ppar $\alpha$*   
6 KO mice (*Ppar $\alpha$*  WT vs KO: *Pck1*: 3.00vs1.67; *Fbp1*: 2.81vs1.44-fold induction)  
7 (Supp.Fig.5A). However, sepsis raised expression of *Pdk4*, which inhibits the final  
8 step of glycolysis, >100-fold in a PPAR $\alpha$ -dependent manner (Supp.Fig.5B).  
9 Similarly, sepsis strongly increased (>12-fold) hepatic adipose triglyceride lipase  
10 (*Atgl/Pnpla2*) expression in *Ppar $\alpha$*  WT mice only (Supp.Fig.5C). Moreover, sepsis  
11 increased several PPAR $\alpha$  target genes involved in hepatic lipid metabolism such as  
12 FA uptake (e.g. *Fatp1*, *Cd36*), FA activation (e.g. *Acs1*), peroxisomal FA  $\beta$ -oxidation  
13 (*Acox1*) and mitochondrial FA transport and  $\beta$ -oxidation (e.g. *Cpt1a*, *Lcad*)  
14 (Supp.Fig.5D). Interestingly, except for *Cpt1a*, sepsis-mediated induction of these  
15 genes was PPAR $\alpha$ -dependent. Moreover, expression of 3-hydroxy-3-methylglutaryl-  
16 Coenzyme A synthase (*Hmgcs2*), the rate-limiting enzyme for  $\beta$ -hydroxybutyrate  
17 production, was lower in *Ppar $\alpha$* -deficient mice (Supp.Fig.5E). Furthermore, infected  
18 chimeric *Ppar $\alpha$*  WTbm->KO mice, expressing *Ppar $\alpha$*  only in hematopoietic cells, also  
19 displayed lower hepatic expression of *Pdk4*, *Cd36*, *Acox1*, *Lcad*, *Hmgcs2* and *Atgl*  
20 compared to WTbm->WT mice (Supp.Fig.5F,G), demonstrating that the metabolic  
21 transcriptional response to sepsis in liver depends on non-hematopoietic PPAR $\alpha$ .  
22 Functional analysis of liver mitochondria also suggested impaired FA utilization in  
23 whole body *Ppar $\alpha$*  KO mice. Unaltered citrate synthase activity indicated that *Ppar $\alpha$* -



1 deficiency did not impact mitochondrial quantity (Supp.Fig.5H). Uninfected whole  
2 body *Ppara* KO livers displayed lower RCR values upon incubation with pyruvate  
3 and malate (PYR) and, to a lesser extent, with octanoylcarnitine and malate (OCTA)  
4 compared to uninfected *Ppara* WT (Fig.2E). However, bacterial infection shifted the  
5 respiration rate from pyruvate/malate to octanoylcarnitine/malate in *Ppara* WT,  
6 whereas this shift was less apparent in *Ppara* KO livers (Fig.2E). Together, these  
7 data indicate that sepsis shifts the transcriptional and metabolic program from  
8 glucose to lipid utilization and this is impaired in whole body *Ppara* KO livers.

9

10 *Hepatocyte-specific PPAR $\alpha$  expression is required for proper metabolic response*  
11 *and survival upon bacterial infection.*

12 Because the results of both transcriptomic and metabolic analysis suggested that  
13 hepatic PPAR $\alpha$  is activated upon sepsis, we postulated that hepatic PPAR $\alpha$  may be  
14 critical to the organism's response to infection. Therefore, hepatocyte-specific  
15 *Ppara*<sup>hepKO</sup> were subjected to bacterial infection and their response compared to  
16 *Ppara*<sup>hepWT</sup> and whole body *Ppara* KO mice. Similar to whole body *Ppara* KO mice,  
17 *Ppara*<sup>hepKO</sup> showed increased mortality compared to *Ppara*<sup>hepWT</sup> mice (Fig.1A&3A).  
18 Infected *Ppara*<sup>hepKO</sup> mice also displayed lower ketone body levels compared to  
19 *Ppara*<sup>hepWT</sup>, despite similar levels of plasma FFA, ALT and AST (Fig.3B-D and  
20 Supp.Fig.6). Liver triglyceride (TG) content increased more markedly upon bacterial  
21 infection in *Ppara*<sup>hepKO</sup> vs *Ppara*<sup>hepWT</sup> mice (3.1 vs 2.2-fold, Fig.3F), suggesting  
22 defective hepatic lipid utilization. Surprisingly, infected *Ppara*<sup>hepKO</sup> mice displayed no  
23 significant differences in glycaemia (Fig.3E), nor plasma levels of inflammatory

1 cytokines (*Tnfa*, *Kc* and *IL-6*) at both 5hrs and 16hrs post-infection (Fig.3G,H &  
2 Supp.Fig.7) compared to *Ppara*<sup>hepWT</sup>. In addition, bacterial dissemination in  
3 peritoneum and blood did not differ between *Ppara*<sup>hepWT</sup> and *Ppara*<sup>hepKO</sup> mice  
4 (Fig.3I). These data suggest that the increased mortality observed in whole body  
5 *Ppara* KO is unlikely caused by the different glycemic and systemic inflammatory  
6 responses.

7 Similar to whole body *Ppara* KO mice, *Ppara*<sup>hepKO</sup> mice displayed major defects in  
8 sepsis-modulated regulation of several genes involved in hepatic glucose (i.e. *Pdk4*,  
9 Fig.4A) and lipid metabolism (e.g. *Cd36*, *Acox1*, *Vlca*d and *Lca*d, Fig.4B), as well as  
10 *Ppara* itself (Fig.4C). Interestingly, the induction of hepatic *Atgl* and *Cpt1a*  
11 expression upon sepsis was independent of hepatocyte PPAR $\alpha$  (Fig.4B).  
12 Conversely, hepatic *Hmgcs2* expression was virtually undetectable upon sepsis in  
13 *Ppara*<sup>hepKO</sup> mice (Fig.4B). Bacterial infection increased *Atgl*, but not *Hmgcs2* or  
14 *Dgat1* expression at the protein level (Supp.Fig.8). Moreover, *Hmgcs2* protein levels  
15 were lower in *Ppara*<sup>hepKO</sup> mice both in uninfected and infected conditions. Whereas  
16 *Atgl* protein induction appeared less pronounced upon sepsis in *Ppara*<sup>hepKO</sup> mice,  
17 *Dgat1* protein expression only increased in *Ppara*<sup>hepKO</sup> mice, both consistent with  
18 increased hepatic TG content. Together, these data indicate that hepatocyte-specific  
19 PPAR $\alpha$ -deficiency profoundly affects the hepatic metabolic response to infection.

20

21 *Ppara*-deficiency regulates the inflammatory response, but does not promote innate  
22 immune cell recruitment or inhibit autophagy in the liver upon bacterial sepsis.

1 To determine the contribution of non-hematopoietic PPAR $\alpha$  to systemic inflammation  
2 in sepsis, expression of inflammatory genes was measured in livers and spleens  
3 from whole body *Ppar $\alpha$*  KO, chimeric *Ppar $\alpha$*  WTbm->KO mice and their respective  
4 controls. The induction of *Tnfa*, *Mcp1*, *Il6* and *Ifng* upon sepsis was markedly  
5 attenuated in livers (Fig.5A), and, to a lesser extent, in spleens (Suppl.Fig.9) of  
6 whole body *Ppar $\alpha$*  KO mice compared to controls. Likewise, induction of the vascular  
7 inflammation markers *Vcam1* and *Icam1* (Fig.5B) and the mitochondrial anti-oxidant  
8 enzyme *Sod2* (Fig.5C) was lower in livers of whole body *Ppar $\alpha$*  KO mice than in their  
9 WT counterparts. By contrast, the hepatic and vascular inflammatory and anti-  
10 oxidant responses (Fig.5D&E), as well as MPO activity (Fig.5F) and immune cell  
11 recruitment (Suppl.Fig.10) were similar in chimeric *Ppar $\alpha$*  WTbm->KO and WTbm-  
12 >WT mice, despite differing survival outcomes (Fig.1A, Supp.Fig.1A). Interestingly, in  
13 *Ppar $\alpha$* <sup>hepKO</sup> mice, the induction of inflammatory genes (Fig.6A) upon sepsis was  
14 either higher (*Tnfa*) or unchanged (*Mcp1*, *Il6*), whereas neutrophil and  
15 monocyte/macrophage recruitment was again similar (Ly6G and Moma2 stainings,  
16 Fig.6C-E) upon infection. Altogether, these data indicate that the attenuated  
17 inflammatory response observed in livers of whole body *Ppar $\alpha$*  KO mice depends on  
18 hematopoietic, but not hepatic *Ppar $\alpha$*  expression.

19 Because autophagy may play a protective role during sepsis [28] and PPAR $\alpha$   
20 mediates fasting-induced autophagy [29], markers of autophagy were assessed in  
21 whole body and hepatocyte-specific *Ppar $\alpha$* -deficient mice. Whereas sepsis increased  
22 expression of certain autophagy genes, their regulation was not different in whole  
23 body *Ppar $\alpha$*  KO mice (Supp.Fig.11A). Moreover, hepatocyte-specific *Ppar $\alpha$* -  
24 deficiency (Supp.Fig.11B-C) rather resulted in more pronounced induction of *Ulk1*,

1 *Atg5*, *Bnip3* and *Becn1* gene expression and Lc3b-II/I protein ratio, suggestive of a  
2 compensatory induction of autophagy to combat the deleterious response to sepsis  
3 in *Ppara*<sup>hepKO</sup> mice. Altogether, these data indicate that hepatocyte PPAR $\alpha$   
4 expression contributes to protection against sepsis by controlling the systemic  
5 metabolic response.

6

7 *PPAR $\alpha$  expression and activity is lower in livers of critically ill patients.*

8 To determine whether hepatic PPAR $\alpha$  expression is altered in critically ill human,  
9 livers from non-surviving critically ill patients and healthy controls were analysed for  
10 PPAR $\alpha$  and target gene expression (Fig.7A). Interestingly, *PPARA* expression was  
11 lower in livers of critically ill patients. Moreover, expression of genes involved in TG  
12 lipolysis (*ATGL*), glucose oxidation (*PDK4*), FA uptake and  $\beta$ -oxidation (*CD36*,  
13 *LCAD*) and ketogenesis (*HMGCS2*) were also lower and correlated with *PPARA*  
14 expression (Fig.7A,B). Surprisingly, *PPARA* mRNA levels did not correlate with  
15 serum cytokine levels in these patients (Fig.7B), suggesting a critical role for hepatic  
16 PPAR $\alpha$  in the metabolic, but not in the inflammatory response to sepsis in critically ill  
17 human patients.

18

19

## 1 **Discussion**

2 Our results demonstrate that PPAR $\alpha$  protects against sepsis primarily by controlling  
3 the metabolic response in the hepatocyte, by shifting its energy utilization from  
4 glucose to FA and by increasing ketogenesis.

5 The host defense toward bacterial infection is a complex response involving  
6 resistance (to limit microbial burden) and tolerance (to limit tissue injury and organ  
7 dysfunction) mechanisms. These processes require metabolic reprogramming in  
8 immune and non-immune cells [30]. Resistance is characterized by a balance  
9 between local activation of pro-inflammatory pathways to restrain and eliminate  
10 invading pathogens and anti-inflammatory pathways required to prevent exaggerated  
11 systemic inflammation [31,32]. Our data show that whole body *Ppar $\alpha$* -deficiency  
12 attenuates organ and systemic inflammatory responses upon infection. This  
13 contrasts with previous observations in models of sterile chronic and acute  
14 inflammation in which *Ppar $\alpha$* -deficiency results in exacerbated inflammatory  
15 responses to endotoxemia in vascular, splenic and liver cells [33]. Accordingly,  
16 whole body *Ppar $\alpha$* -deficiency also resulted in a decreased pro-inflammatory  
17 response and survival in a cecal ligation sepsis model [15].

18 Interestingly, our data and others' indicate that non-hematopoietic PPAR $\alpha$  action is  
19 an important determinant of survival. Studies by *Standage et al.* suggest that heart  
20 PPAR $\alpha$  expression contributes to survival during sepsis by increasing cardiac  
21 performance and FA oxidation [16,17]. In the present study, we demonstrate that  
22 PPAR $\alpha$  expression and activation in hepatocytes, but not immune cells, contributes  
23 to protection against sepsis by promoting an appropriate metabolic response, hence  
24 improving survival. Sepsis activates hepatic PPAR $\alpha$ , which results in activation of FA

1 metabolism and ketogenesis-related target genes, and elevates plasma ketone body  
2 levels. Indeed, *Ppara*<sup>hepKO</sup> mice displayed higher hepatic TG accumulation, reduced  
3 plasma ketonemia, and lower hepatic expression of FA metabolism and ketogenesis  
4 genes. Decreased ketogenesis in septic *Ppara*-deficient mice was unlikely due to  
5 defective AT lipolysis, since plasma FFA levels were unaffected by whole body nor  
6 hepatocyte-specific *Ppara*-deficiency.

7 Defective FA oxidation and ketogenesis in septic *Ppara*-deficient mice may indirectly  
8 contribute to the aggravation of hypoglycaemia and mortality. Mouse models  
9 displaying FA oxidation defects are often hypoglycemic upon LPS administration,  
10 e.g. *Mcad*-deficient mice [34,35] and *Tbp2*-deficient mice [36]. Moreover, several  
11 lines of evidence indicate that PPAR $\alpha$  plays an important role in glucose  
12 homeostasis [37]. Under septic conditions, the hypoglycemia in whole body *Ppara*-  
13 deficient mice may involve increased hepatic glucose utilization. Indeed, *Ppara*-  
14 deficiency impairs the induction of *Pdk4* gene expression upon sepsis, whereas the  
15 expression of gluconeogenic genes was not affected. Still, assessment of  
16 mitochondrial respiration in *Ppara*-deficient livers suggests that infection does not  
17 increase pyruvate oxidation. Thus, the hypoglycemia might also result from  
18 increased peripheral glucose uptake by metabolic organs, such as the heart, muscle  
19 and brain, to compensate for both the inability to catabolize FA [38,39] and reduced  
20 ketone body availability. In line, septic *Ppara*<sup>hepKO</sup> mice display less pronounced  
21 hypoglycaemia than whole body *Ppara*-deficient mice. However, it has been shown  
22 that decreased FA oxidation and ketogenesis as a result of *Ppara* or *Fgf21*-  
23 deficiency can lead to an inability to maintain tissue tolerance to bacterial sepsis  
24 leading to neuronal dysfunction and death [40]. Moreover, ketone body therapy

1 protects against lipotoxicity and acute liver failure in *Ppara* $\alpha$ -deficient mice [41].  
2 Altogether, these and our data suggest that the increased mortality during sepsis  
3 may be caused by a deficiency in beneficial energetic substrates produced by FA  
4 oxidation in hepatocytes, such as ketone bodies, to maintain tissue protection.  
5 Interestingly, in livers of non-surviving critically ill patients, *PPARA* mRNA levels are  
6 lower and correlate with the lower expression of genes involved in lipid and glucose  
7 metabolism, but not with plasma markers of inflammation. These data corroborate  
8 findings from a clinical metabolomic study showing that lactate, pyruvate, acetyl-  
9 carnitine and several citric acid cycle metabolites, were higher in sepsis non-  
10 survivors compared to survivors, suggesting that a profound defect in FA  $\beta$ -oxidation,  
11 possibly as a result of mitochondrial dysfunction, is associated with the incidence of  
12 death in critical ill patients [42,43].  
13 In conclusion, we have shown that *Ppara* $\alpha$ -deficiency in hepatocytes during sepsis is  
14 deleterious as it impairs the adaptive metabolic shift from glucose to FA utilization.  
15 While most current approaches to treat sepsis aim to harness the inflammatory  
16 response, our results might pave the way for strategies based on adaptive energy  
17 homeostasis.

18

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22

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24

## 1 **Figure Legends**

2 **Figure 1: Whole body *Ppara*-deficiency enhances mortality upon bacterial**  
3 **sepsis and impairs the metabolic and inflammatory response to bacterial**  
4 **infection.** *Ppara* WT and KO mice were injected (ip) with vehicle (PBS) (-) or *E.coli*  
5 ( $4 \times 10^8$  living bacteria) (Inf) (+). (A). Survival was followed for 8 days after injection  
6 (n=8-10 mice/group). Plasma was collected 6 (G,H) or 16hrs (B-F, I-J) after injection  
7 and (B) free fatty acids (FFA), (C) aspartate aminotransferase (AST), (D) alanine  
8 aminotransferase (ALT), (E) ketone bodies, (F) blood glucose, (G) Tnfa, (H)  
9 Kc/Cxcl1 concentrations and myeloperoxidase (MPO) activity (I) were measured as  
10 described in methods. (J) Bacterial levels in peritoneal fluid and blood were  
11 measured by retro-culture (n=3 mice/group). Statistical differences are indicated  
12 (Survival test: *Log-rank (Mantel-Cox) Test*: \*\*  $p < 0.01$ . 2-way ANOVA: \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  
13  $p < 0.01$  and \*  $p < 0.05$  for effect of infection; §§§  $p < 0.001$ ; §§  $p < 0.01$ ; §  $p < 0.05$  for  
14 genotype effect; ns: non-significant)

15

16 **Figure 2: Whole body *Ppara*-deficiency modulates hepatic metabolic and**  
17 **inflammatory transcriptional responses to infection.** Livers from *Ppara* WT and  
18 KO mice injected (ip) with vehicle (PBS) (Control) or *E.coli* ( $4 \times 10^8$  live bacteria)  
19 (Infected) were collected after 16hrs and transcriptomic analysis was performed (n=6  
20 mice/group). (A) Top enriched GO terms for genes differentially expressed  
21 comparing infection vs control in *Ppara* WT mice. (B) Hierarchical clustering and (C)  
22 dot plot of genes affected by infection in *Ppara* WT or KO mice. (D) Selected genes  
23 from the "fatty acid oxidation pathway" GO term of Cluster 2. (E) Mitochondrial  
24 respiration measured with (pyruvate/malate (PYR) or octanoylcarnitine/malate

1 (OCTA) as described in methods (n=7-8 mice/group). Statistical differences are  
2 indicated (2way ANOVA: \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01 and \* p<0.05 for effect of infection;  
3 §§§ p<0.001; §§ p<0.01; § p<0.05 for genotype effect; ns: non-significant).

4  
5 **Figure 3: Hepatocyte-specific *Ppara*-deficiency results in metabolic  
6 perturbations and aggravates mortality during bacterial infection. (A)**

7 *Ppara*<sup>hepWT</sup>, *Ppara*<sup>hepKO</sup>, and *Ppara* KO mice were injected (ip) with *E.coli* (7x10<sup>8</sup>  
8 live bacteria). Survival was followed for 8 days after bacterial infection (n=12-18 mice  
9 /group). Plasma was collected 5 (G,H) or 16hrs (B-E) 16hrs after bacterial infection  
10 and (B) free fatty acids (FFA), (C) alanine amino transferase (ALT), (D) ketone  
11 bodies, (E) blood glucose, (G) Tnfa and (H) Kc/Cxcl1 concentrations were measured  
12 as described in methods. Livers, peritoneal fluid and blood were collected 16hrs after  
13 injection and (F) TG content and (I) bacterial levels were determined as described in  
14 methods (n=7-8 mice/group). Statistical differences are indicated (Survival test: *Log-*  
15 *rank (Mantel-Cox) Test*. \* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.001 compare to survival of PPAR $\alpha$ <sup>hepWT</sup>;  
16 2-way ANOVA: §§§ p<0.001; §§ p<0.01; § p<0.05 for genotype effect; ns: non-  
17 significant).

18  
19 **Figure 4: Hepatocyte-specific *Ppara*-deficiency impairs the response of lipid**

20 **metabolism genes to bacterial infection.** *Ppara*<sup>hepWT</sup>, *Ppara*<sup>hepKO</sup> mice were  
21 injected (ip) with vehicle (PBS) (-) or with *E.coli* (6x10<sup>8</sup> live bacteria) (inf) (+). Livers  
22 were collected 16hrs after infection and hepatic mRNA expression of (A) *Pdk4*, (B)  
23 genes involved in lipid metabolism and (C) *Ppara* was measured. Statistical  
24 differences are indicated (2way ANOVA: \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01 and \* p<0.05 for

1 effect of infection; §§§ p<0.001; §§ p<0.01; § p<0.05 for effect of genotype; ns: non-  
2 significant).

3

4 **Figure 5: The sepsis-induced inflammatory response occurs through**  
5 **hematopoietic PPAR $\alpha$ .** Whole body *Ppar $\alpha$*  WT and KO mice (A-C) or chimeric  
6 *Ppar $\alpha$*  WTbm->WT and WTbm->KO mice (D-F) were injected (ip) with vehicle (PBS)  
7 (-) or *E.coli* ( $4 \times 10^8$  live bacteria) (Inf) (+). Livers were collected 16hrs after infection  
8 and mRNA expression of genes involved in inflammation (A, D), endothelial  
9 activation (B, E), and oxidative stress (C, E), was analyzed using RT-Q-PCR.  
10 Plasma myeloperoxidase (MPO) activity (F) was measured as described in methods  
11 (n=8 mice/group). Statistical differences are indicated (2way ANOVA: \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\*  
12 p<0.01 and \* p<0.05 for effect of infection; §§§ p<0.001; §§ p<0.01; § p<0.05 for  
13 genotype effect; ns: non-significant).

14

15 **Figure 6: Hepatocyte-specific *Ppar $\alpha$* -deficiency modulates the inflammatory**  
16 **response in the liver without affecting innate immune cell recruitment upon**  
17 **bacterial infection.** *Ppar $\alpha$* <sup>hepWT</sup>, *Ppar $\alpha$* <sup>hepKO</sup> mice were injected (ip) with vehicle  
18 (PBS) (-) or *E.coli* ( $6 \times 10^8$  live bacteria) (inf) (+). Livers were collected 16hrs after  
19 infection and mRNA expression of genes involved in (A) inflammation, (B)  
20 endothelial activation and oxidative stress (B) was analysed using RT-Q-PCR. Liver  
21 sections stained for Ly6G (E, top panel) and Moma2 (E, bottom panel) and  
22 quantified (C, D) respectively using NIS Element software (n=7-8 mice/group) (Bar =  
23 100 $\mu$ m). Statistical differences are indicated (2way ANOVA: \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01



1 and \*  $p < 0.05$  for effect of infection; §§§  $p < 0.001$ ; §§  $p < 0.01$ ; §  $p < 0.05$  for genotype  
2 effect; ns: non-significant).

3 **Figure 7: PPAR $\alpha$  gene expression in liver biopsies of critically ill patients**  
4 **correlates with decreased expression of FA utilization genes.** (A) Liver biopsies  
5 from elective surgery (n=20) and critically ill patients (n=46) were collected and  
6 mRNA was analysed using RT-Q-PCR. Statistical differences are indicated  
7 (Wilcoxon test: \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; compared to healthy). Serum cytokines were  
8 quantified as described in methods. (B) Correlations of hepatic *PPARA* mRNA  
9 expression with metabolic gene expression or serum cytokine levels from critically ill  
10 patients were calculated. Statistical differences are indicated (Pearson (r): \*\*\*  
11  $p < 0.001$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ).