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PhD

Abstract: Cognitive dysfunction and neuroinflammation are typical in Alzheimer's disease (AD), but are also associated with normal aging, albeit less severely. Insulin resistance in the brain has been demonstrated in AD patients and is thought to be involved in AD pathophysiology. Using 15-18 month-old APP/PS1 mice, this study measured peripheral and central insulin signaling and sensitivity, inflammatory markers in brain and plasma and oxidative stress and synapse density in the brain. Novel object recognition, Morris water maze and reversal water maze tasks were performed to assess cognitive function in aged APP/PS1 mice and wild type littermates. Glucose tolerance and insulin sensitivity were similar in APP/PS1 mice and wild type controls, however IRS-1 pSer616 was increased in cortex and dentate gyrus of APP/PS1 mice. Recognition and spatial memory was impaired in both APP/PS1 and wild type mice, however learning impairments were apparent in APP/PS1 mice. Expression of GLP-1 receptor, ERK2, IKK β , mTOR, PKC θ , NF- κ B1 and TLR4 was similar between aged APP/PS1 mice and age-matched wild types. Compared to age-matched wild type mice, IFN γ and IL-4 were increased in brains of APP/PS1 mice. These results suggest that normal aging may be associated with enhanced neuroinflammation, oxidative stress, and cognitive decline, however distinctions are apparent in the brain of APP/PS1 mice in terms of inflammation and insulin signaling and in certain cognitive domains. Demarcation of pathological events that distinguish AD from normal aging will allow for improvements in diagnostic tools and the development of more effective therapeutics.

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17th March 2018

Dear Professor Pariante,

On behalf of the authors, we are grateful for the thorough evaluation of our manuscript and the additional comments raised by the Reviewers and Editors. These have been very helpful and constructive. We have further revised our manuscript according to the points raised and we believe it has been strengthened as a result. Please see our responses to Reviewer's comments in a point-by-point fashion below.

We very much hope that you will consider our revised manuscript acceptable for publication in *Brain, Behavior and Immunity*.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Paul Denver

Inflammation, insulin signaling and cognitive function in aged APP/PS1 mice. (BBI-D-17-00762)

Highlights

- Peripheral insulin sensitivity and glucose tolerance in aged APP/PS1 mice is comparable to wild-type.
- Recognition and spatial memory is impaired in aged wild-type and APP/PS1 mice.
- Spatial learning is impaired in aged APP/PS1 mice, compared to age-matched controls.
- IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ and astrocytes are elevated in brains of aged APP/PS1 mice compared to controls
- IFN γ , IL-1 β and IL-4 are elevated in brains of APP/PS1 mice compared to age-matched controls

Inflammation, insulin signaling and cognitive function in aged APP/PS1 mice. (BBI-D-17-00762R1)

Reviewer #2

The explanations offered by the authors are adequate.

Thank you to the reviewer for acknowledging our previous response to reviewers' comments as adequate.

Reviewer #3

While the reviewers generally recognize the new and interesting contributions to knowledge provided by this paper several specific deficiencies are identified. In response the authors have added sections to the paper with additional references to address these deficiencies. In particular reviewers have indicated that young cohorts of wild type and transgenic mice should have been included in the study. The authors acknowledge this but cite previously published work to provide support for their speculative assertions that synaptophysin staining may be generally reduced in brains of aged wild type mice in their experiments.

Where it was possible to do so the authors have responded well to comments made by the reviewers by including additional data, figures, text and citations. This includes additional details of data analysis in the statistics section and the addition of Figure 7. The authors acknowledge that their future studies should include the younger age cohorts, more discrete studies including regional brain areas and examining changes in microglia.

As with most large studies that employ multiple sensitive techniques it will always be possible to identify interesting additions that might have been included if time and funds were available however the reality is that these are often limited.

Thank you to the reviewer for their comments and for their appreciation for the limitations that were acknowledged in our previous response to reviewers' comments and in the manuscript itself. As noted by this reviewer, we added data, analysis, text and citations that we hope helps support our conclusions.

Reviewer #4

In the revision, the authors have addressed several of the issues raised with the initial reviews. However, one major issue that remains is the absence of young cohort of WT and APP/PS1 mice. This absence is very significant and, apparently, can not be addressed by the authors.

Because there is some value in the aged WT vs APP/PS1 comparison, the entire manuscript should be completely restructured, streamlined, and focused solely on this comparison. The extremely limited data of young WT mice is a distraction, not an addition to the aged mice data. Data interpretation and discussion should also be limited to the contributions of the APP/PS1 genotype to differences between the aged WT and APP/PS1 animals.

Thank you to the reviewer for these helpful comments. The authors agree that our limited young data distracts from the aged data and detracts from the overall story of the manuscript, however, we feel that this young data is nevertheless of value here. We suggest that removing the young data from the

main figures and condensing it into one supplementary figure may adequately address these concerns, while allowing the young data to be included in the article as supportive to the aged data, rather than as part of the main narrative. To this end, we removed the young data from figures 5 and 6, we added one supplementary figure consisting of 4 panels and made adjustments to the text in the following sections of the manuscript to reflect these changes:

- Abstract
- Results; 3.1.4 Peripheral insulin sensitivity and glucose tolerance and inflammatory and insulin signaling gene expression in brains of aged APP/PS1 mice
- Results; 3.1.5 Cytokine levels in brains of aged APP/PS1 mice
- Discussion

The authors feel that these changes have improved the manuscript and reiterate our thanks to the reviewer for their insight. However, should the reviewer and/or the editor feel that our response was inadequate and would prefer if the young data was removed entirely, then we would be happy to oblige and remove it.

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Inflammation, insulin signaling and cognitive function in aged APP/PS1 mice

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Abstract: 243 words

Main text: 4,491 words

Figures: 7

Supplementary Figures: 1

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9 **Abstract**

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11 Cognitive dysfunction and neuroinflammation are typical in Alzheimer's disease (AD), but
12 are also associated with normal aging, albeit less severely. Insulin resistance in the brain has
13 been demonstrated in AD patients and is thought to be involved in AD pathophysiology.
14 Using 15-18 month-old APP/PS1 mice, this study measured peripheral and central insulin
15 signaling and sensitivity, inflammatory markers in brain and plasma and oxidative stress and
16 synapse density in the brain. Novel object recognition, Morris water maze and reversal water
17 maze tasks were performed to assess cognitive function in aged APP/PS1 mice and wild type
18 littermates. Glucose tolerance and insulin sensitivity were similar in APP/PS1 mice and wild
19 type controls, however IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ was increased in cortex and dentate gyrus of APP/PS1
20 mice. Recognition and spatial memory was impaired in both APP/PS1 and wild type mice,
21 however learning impairments were apparent in APP/PS1 mice. Expression of GLP-1
22 receptor, ERK2, IKK β , mTOR, PKC θ , NF- κ B1 and TLR4 was similar between aged
23 APP/PS1 mice and age-matched wild types. Compared to age-matched wild type mice, IFN γ
24 and IL-4 were increased in brains of APP/PS1 mice. These results suggest that normal aging
25 may be associated with enhanced neuroinflammation, oxidative stress, and cognitive decline,
26 however distinctions are apparent in the brain of APP/PS1 mice in terms of inflammation and
27 insulin signaling and in certain cognitive domains. Demarcation of pathological events that
28 distinguish AD from normal aging will allow for improvements in diagnostic tools and the
29 development of more effective therapeutics.
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Keywords: Alzheimer's disease; aging; neuroinflammation; insulin signalling; cognitive function; learning; memory; insulin sensitivity; cytokines

Abbreviations: **A β** Amyloid- β **AD** Alzheimer's disease **ERK2** extracellular signal-regulated kinase 2 **IKK β** Inhibitor of NF- κ B kinase β **IRS-1** **pSer⁶¹⁶** Insulin receptor substrate-1 phosphorylated at serine residue 616 **MAPK** mitogen-activated protein kinase **mTOR** mechanistic target of rapamycin **MWM** Morris water maze **ORT** Novel object recognition task **PKC** Protein kinase C **RI** Recognition index **RWM** Reversal water maze **TLR4** Toll-like receptor 4

1 Introduction

As healthcare improves around the world, life expectancy continues to rise (1). Accordingly, the past 25 years have seen a dramatic increase in disorders associated with aging, including neurological diseases such as Alzheimer's disease (AD) (1), for which advancing age is the principal risk factor (2).

Many clinical and neuropathological features of AD parallel the normal progression of aging, making differentiation between normal brain aging and early-stage AD difficult. Generally, it can be said that healthy aging is associated with moderate decline in some cognitive abilities, whilst AD is characterized by severe deterioration of the same cognitive domains, with additional progressive decline of further cognitive functions, such that the patient's daily life is adversely affected to a severe degree (3). In AD, amyloid- β (A β) accumulates into progressively larger fibrils, which become deposited as insoluble plaques in the brain parenchyma (4). Accumulating evidence suggests that the presence of A β fibrils and plaques is not uncommon in the brains of non-demented, cognitively healthy older people (5, 6). Several studies have also shown that A β deposition does not correlate with

1 cognitive impairment in elderly cohorts (6), highlighting the variability of age-related
2 cognitive decline and suggesting that A β *per se* does not directly influence cognitive
3 function.
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7 Profound inflammation is evident in AD brain (7), primarily mediated by microglia
8 and astrocytes (8, 9). Activated microglia and astrocytes phagocytose A β oligomers and
9 fibrils, degrade A β plaques and reduce amyloid burden (10, 11). However, sustained
10 microglial activation and unresolved inflammation in the brain is harmful to neurons and
11 synapses and promotes chronic dysregulation of glial cells and subsequent deterioration of
12 brain structure and function (12, 13). Inflammation in the brain increases with age (14) and
13 several studies have shown elevated levels of inflammatory cytokines in the brains of aged
14 rodents (15, 16). In the context of AD, primed microglia respond more readily to A β ,
15 producing increased levels of cytokines that exert direct toxic effects on neurons and at
16 synapses (17).
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32 Insulin resistance has been demonstrated in postmortem brain tissue from AD patients
33 and those with mild cognitive impairment, in the absence of diabetes and irrespective of
34 ApoE- ϵ 4 status (18). Furthermore, IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ was identified as a putative biomarker of
35 brain insulin resistance in AD and was found to correlate positively with A β oligomer levels
36 and negatively with cognitive function (18). Additionally, Bomfim *et al.* (19) demonstrated
37 increased levels of IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ in the hippocampus of 13 month-old APP/PS1 mice. Other
38 studies have also demonstrated impaired neuronal insulin signaling in AD brain and in
39 response to A β oligomer challenge (20, 21).
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52 This study sought to determine differences in learning and memory, oxidative stress,
53 glucose tolerance, central and peripheral insulin sensitivity between 15-18 month old wild
54 type and age-matched APP/PS1 mice. Using novel object recognition and Morris water maze
55 tasks, cognitive function was measured in aged wild type and APP/PS1 mice. Systemic
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1 insulin sensitivity and glucose tolerance were compared between groups. Brain levels of A β ,
2 GFAP, 8-oxoguanine, IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ and synaptophysin were measured by
3 immunohistochemistry. Additionally inflammatory and insulin signalling associated genes,
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5 GLP-1R, IKK β , ERK2, mTOR, NF- κ B1, PKC θ , and TLR4 and inflammatory cytokines
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7 (IFN γ , IL-10, IL-1 β , IL-12p70, IL-2, IL-4, IL-5, IL-6 and KC/GRO (CXCL1)) were assessed
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9 in brain tissue from aged APP/PS1 and wild type mice to delineate pathological changes from
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11 those associated with ‘normal’ aging.
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17 **2 Materials and Methods**

18 *2.1.1 Animals*

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20 Male APP_{swe}/PS1 Δ e9 (APP/PS1) mice with a C57Bl/6J background were bred with wild type
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22 C57Bl/6J females at the Biomedical and Behavioural Research Unit at Ulster University in
23
24 Coleraine. Offspring were ear punched and positivity for the APP_{swe}/PS1 Δ e9 transgene, or
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26 lack thereof was confirmed by polymerase chain reaction, using primers specific for the APP
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28 sequence of the APP/PS1 construct (Forward “GAATTCCGACATGACTCAGG”, Reverse:
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30 “GTTCTGCTGCATCTTGGACA”). Offspring males heterozygous for the APP_{swe}/PS1 Δ e9
31
32 transgenic construct were then age-matched with wild type littermates, not expressing the
33
34 transgene, which were used as controls. Both groups of mice were caged individually and
35
36 allowed access to food and water *ad libitum*. Animals were maintained on a 12:12 light-dark
37
38 cycle (lights on at 08:00, lights off at 20:00), within a temperature-controlled room (T:
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40 21.5°C \pm 1°C). All tests were performed during the light cycle. All experiments were
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42 designed, analyzed and reported in accordance with ARRIVE guidelines. Experiments were
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44 licensed according to UK Home Office regulations (UK Animals Scientific Procedures Act
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46 1986) and associated guidelines (EU Directive 2010/63/EU). C57Bl/6 mice were derived
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48 from a colony maintained in the Biomedical and Behavioural Research Unit at Ulster
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50 University in Coleraine.
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2.1.2 Glucose tolerance and insulin sensitivity tests

After an overnight fasting period, APP/PS1 mice and age-matched wild types received an i.p. injection of glucose (18 mmol/kg bw) in 0.9% NaCl or insulin (0.25 μ M/g). Blood glucose was measured at 0, 15, 30 and 60 minutes following glucose or insulin injection using a hand-held Ascencia Contour blood glucose meter (Bayer Health Care).

2.1.3 Behavioural Assessment

Mice were assessed in the ORT, as described previously (22). Briefly, mice were subjected to a 10 minute acquisition period, with two identical objects, followed by a 3 hour retention period and a 10 minute test phase, which involved replacing one of the objects with a novel object. A recognition index (RI) was calculated for each object, defined as amount of time spent exploring object A or B over the total time spent exploring both objects x 100 (t_A or $t_B / (t_A + t_B) \times 100$).

Following ORT, mice were assessed in the Morris water maze (MWM) (22). The acquisition training phase consisted of 4 x 90 second trials per day, for 4 consecutive days, followed by a probe trial on the fifth day. The day after the probe trial, mice were subjected to reversal water maze (RWM), wherein the escape platform was moved from the southwest to northwest quadrant. There were 4 trials per day, for 4 consecutive days, followed by a reversal probe trial on day 5.

2.1.4 Immunohistochemistry

Following sacrifice, animals were perfused with PBS and brains excised. One hemisphere was fixed in 4% paraformaldehyde and the other was frozen in liquid nitrogen. Hemi-brains for histology were then transferred to 30% sucrose and 40 μ m coronal sections were cut

1 using a cryostat (Leica Microsystems). One section in every 6 was collected sequentially and
2 stored at -20°C. Staining was performed for A β , GFAP, 8-oxoguanine, IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ and
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4 synaptophysin. All sections were incubated in H₂O₂ and permeabilized using Triton X. For 8-
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6 oxoguanine, sections were incubated at 37°C for 30 minutes with 2 M hydrochloric acid,
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8 followed by 0.1 M borax (Sigma Aldrich) for 10 minutes. Blocking with 1.5%-10% normal
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10 serum was performed prior to incubation with anti-A β (1:200; Invitrogen; 71-5800) anti-
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12 GFAP (1:250; Merck Millipore; MAB3402), anti-8-oxoguanine (1:250; Merck Millipore;
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14 MAB3560), anti-IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ (1:200; Invitrogen; 44-550G) or anti-synaptophysin (1:200;
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16 Abcam; ab7837) antibodies overnight at 4°C. Sections were then incubated with secondary
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18 antibodies and visualized using Vectastain Elite and SG substrate (Vector Laboratories).
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20 Percentage area stained in each image was quantified using a multi threshold plug-in within
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22 Image J (NIH, Bethesda, USA) in a blinded manner.
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37 *2.1.5 Quantitative polymerase chain reaction (qPCR)*

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39 RNA was extracted from brain tissue using RNeasy Lipid Tissue Mini Kit (Qiagen)
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41 according to manufacturer's instructions. For cDNA synthesis, transcriptor First Strand
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43 cDNA synthesis kit (Roche Diagnostics) was used using 500 ng of RNA per sample. Real-
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45 time PCR reactions were composed of; 5 μ l of PCR MasterMix (Roche Diagnostics), 1 μ l (10
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47 pM/ μ l) gene-specific probes, 3 μ l of RNase free water and 1 μ l (25ng) of template cDNA.
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49 Gene-specific probes (Roche Diagnostics) were as follows: GLP-1R (*Glp1r*), IKK β (*Ikkkb*),
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51 ERK2 (*Mapk1*), mTOR (*Mtor*), NF- κ B1 (*Nfkb1*), PKC θ (*Prkcq*) and TLR4 (*Tlr4*).
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57 Quantitative PCR was performed on Lightcycler 480 system (Roche Diagnostics), and
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quantified on accompanying software package (Roche, Lightcycler 480 software, v1.5). Gene expression changes were calculated using Delta Delta CT mathematical model (23).

2.1.6 Meso Scale Discovery multi-array

Whole hemi-brains were homogenized under liquid nitrogen, followed by addition of 10 ml/g of lysis buffer (1 mM EDTA in PBS supplemented with protease inhibitor cocktail). Samples were centrifuged at 14,000 G for 20 min at 4°C and supernatant was removed and added to Meso Scale Discovery (MSD[®]) plate. Bradford protein assay was performed to measure protein content and data were normalized to the total amount of protein present in each sample. Levels of IFN γ , IL1 β , IL-2, IL-4, IL-5, IL-6, IL-10, IL-12p70, TNF- α and KC/GRO (CXCL1) were quantified in brain and plasma using MSD[®] Multi-spot Assay Pro-inflammatory panel 1 kit (Rockville, MD, USA) according to manufacturer's instructions.

2.1.7 Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using Graphpad Prism (v6.0h). Differences were deemed to be significant if $p \leq 0.05$. Data are expressed as means \pm SEM. Tests included one-way or two-way ANOVA and unpaired Student's t tests. Data heterogeneity was tested and, where variance was significant, appropriate non-parametric tests were used. Corrections for multiple comparisons were performed using appropriate *post-hoc* tests. Linear relationships between two variables were measured by Pearson's correlation analysis.

3 Results

3.1.1 Spatial learning is impaired in aged APP/PS1 mice

During the acquisition phase of the MWM, escape latency significantly decreased over time ($p < 0.0001$), as expected, and was also significantly greater overall in APP/PS1 mice (Fig.

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1A; $p=0.0264$). However, *post-hoc* analysis indicated that average escape latency was not significantly different between aged wild type and APP/PS1 mice on any of the training days (Fig. 1A). In the probe trial, time spent in each quadrant by wild type mice was not significantly different (Fig. 1D). Similarly, APP/PS1 mice spent a similar amount of time swimming in all 4 quadrants in the probe trial and although significant variation in the time spent in each quadrant was detected ($p=0.0174$), *post-hoc* analysis showed that time spent in the target quadrant by APP/PS1 mice was not significantly different from any other quadrant (Fig. 1G). In the acquisition phase of the RWM, escape latency decreased over time (Fig. 1B; $p=0.0009$) and was also significantly affected by genotype (Fig. 1B; $p=0.0020$). *Post-hoc* analysis revealed that average escape latency was significantly greater in APP/PS1 mice, compared to wild types on days 2 ($p<0.05$), 3 ($p<0.01$) and 4 ($p<0.05$; Fig. 1B).

In the reversal probe trial, time spent in each of the quadrants by wild types (Fig. 1E) or APP/PS1 (Fig. 1H) mice did not differ significantly

3.1.2 Recognition memory is impaired in aged APP/PS1 and wild type mice

In the acquisition phase of the ORT, recognition indices for the identical objects were not significantly different in 15-18 month old APP/PS1 or wild type mice (Fig. 1C). In the test phase, recognition index for the novel object was not significantly different from the familiar in the aged APP/PS1 mice or the age-matched control group (Fig. 1F).

3.1.3 Immunohistochemistry

3.1.3.1 $A\beta$ deposition is ubiquitous in brains of aged APP/PS1 mice

1 Representative micrographs from wild type mice show that A β immunopositivity was almost
2 completely absent from the cortex (0.0054% \pm 0.0012) and dentate gyrus (0.0178 \pm 0.0136)
3 (Fig. 2A and B). However, widespread A β deposition was apparent in the cerebral cortex and
4 dentate gyrus of APP/PS1 mice (Fig. 2E and F). Quantification confirmed that A β
5 immunopositivity was significantly higher in the cortex (Fig. 2D; p <0.0001) and dentate
6 gyrus (Fig. 2H; p <0.0001) of APP/PS1 mice compared to wild type controls.
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17 *3.1.3.2 IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ is elevated in brains of aged APP/PS1 mice*

18 Representative micrographs illustrate increased levels of IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ in the cerebral cortex
19 (Fig. 2M) and dentate gyrus (Fig. 2N) of APP/PS1 mice, compared to age-matched wild
20 types (Fig. 2I and J). Although distribution of IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ staining was similar between
21 groups in both brain regions, staining intensity was greater in APP/PS1 mice (Fig. 2O)
22 compared to wild types (Fig. 2K). As such, quantification showed that IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ was
23 significantly greater in the cortex (Fig. 2L; p =0.0303) and dentate gyrus (Fig. 2P; p =0.0429)
24 of aged APP/PS1 mice compared to wild type controls. Pearson's correlation analysis
25 identified negative correlations between recognition index for the novel object in ORT and
26 IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ immunopositivity in the cortex (Fig. 7A) dentate gyrus (Fig. 7B) of wild type
27 and APP/PS1 mice. Although the negative correlation between cortical IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ staining
28 and ORT recognition index in APP/PS1 approached significance (Fig. 7A; r =-0.7744,
29 p =0.0706) the negative trends between IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ staining and ORT recognition index
30 remained insignificant in both brain regions of both genotypes.
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54 *3.1.3.3 Oxidative stress is comparable in brains of aged APP/PS1 and wild type mice*

55 Representative micrographs shown in Fig. 3A-C and E-G illustrate the similarity in oxidative
56 stress levels between the brains of aged APP/PS1 mice and wild type controls. Quantitative
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1 analysis demonstrated that 8-oxoguanine immunopositivity was not significantly different in
2 the cortex (Fig. 3D) or the dentate gyrus (Fig. 3H) of APP/PS1 mice compared to age-
3 matched wild type controls.
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7 8 9 10 *3.1.3.4 Astrocytes are elevated in brains of aged APP/PS1 mice*

11 Representative micrographs illustrate increased levels of GFAP-positive astrocytes in the
12 cerebral cortex (Fig. 3I and J) and dentate gyrus (Fig. 3M and N) of aged APP/PS1 mice
13 compared to wild type controls. Quantitative analysis revealed a significant increase in GFAP
14 immunopositivity in the cortex (Fig. 3L; $p=0.0010$) and dentate gyrus (Fig. 3P; $p=0.0007$),
15 compared to age-matched wild type mice.
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24 25 26 27 *3.1.3.5 Synaptophysin is reduced in the polymorphic layer of the dentate gyrus of aged* 28 *APP/PS1 mice*

29 Representative images illustrate reduced synaptophysin in the hippocampal polymorphic
30 layer of 15-18 month old APP/PS1 mice (Fig. 4D) compared to wild types (Fig. 4A;
31 $p=0.0338$). Synaptophysin staining was similar in all other layers of the hippocampus
32 between wild type and APP/PS1 mice and was not significantly different in the granule cell
33 (Fig. 4D), molecular layer (Fig. 4D), strata radiatum (Fig. 4E), pyramidale (Fig. 4E) or oriens
34 (Fig. 4E) of APP/PS1 mice, compared to wild type controls (Fig. 4A and B). Furthermore,
35 synaptophysin optical density did not differ significantly in the inner or outer (Fig. 4F)
36 cortical layers of APP/PS1 mice, compared to age-matched wild types (Fig. 4C).
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Quantification confirmed that synaptophysin staining was reduced in the polymorphic layer
of APP/PS1 mice, but was comparable with wild types in all other layers of the hippocampus
and cortex (Fig. 4G).

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3.1.4 Peripheral insulin sensitivity and glucose tolerance and inflammatory and insulin signaling gene expression in brains of aged APP/PS1 mice

Expression of GLP-1R, IKK β , ERK2, mTOR, NF- κ B1, PKC θ and TLR4 was comparable in brains of aged APP/PS1 and wild type mice and genotype did not have a significant effect on gene expression (Fig. 5A). Additional analysis comparing aged APP/PS1 mice with younger C57Bl/6 mice (17-22 weeks old) identified a significant effect of genotype on gene expression (Supplementary Fig. 1A; $p < 0.0001$) and *post-hoc* analysis showed that expression of IKK β ($p < 0.01$), ERK2 ($p < 0.05$) and mTOR ($p < 0.01$) was significantly down-regulated and TLR4 ($p < 0.05$) was up-regulated in brains of aged APP/PS1 mice, compared to young C57Bl/6 controls. As illustrated in Fig. 5C, in response to an insulin sensitivity test, a significant decrease in blood glucose over time was detected ($p < 0.0001$), however genotype had no significant effect on blood glucose levels. Similarly, glucose tolerance was comparable in both groups and although time significantly affected blood glucose levels ($p < 0.0001$), genotype was not associated with a change in peripheral glucose tolerance (Fig. 5D).

3.1.5 Cytokine levels in brains of aged APP/PS1 mice

Brain levels of IFN γ (Fig. 6A; $p = 0.0046$) and IL-4 (Fig. 6F; $p = 0.0013$) were significantly elevated in brains of 15-18 month-old APP/PS1 mice compared to age-matched wild type mice (Fig. 6A). A trend towards elevated IL-1 β was detected in the brains of APP/PS1 mice compared to age-matched wild types, however this failed to reach significance (Fig. 6C; $p = 0.0965$). Additional analysis indicated that IL-1 β was significantly elevated in the brains of 15-18 month-old wild type ($p < 0.01$) and APP/PS1 ($p < 0.0001$) mice, compared to young wild types (Supplementary Fig. 1B). A significant increase in IL-4 (Supplementary Fig. 1C; $p < 0.001$) and IFN γ (Supplementary Fig. 1D; $p < 0.01$) was also detected in the brains of aged

1 APP/PS1 mice, compared to young wild type mice. In addition, Pearson's correlation
2 analysis identified a significant negative correlation between levels of IFN γ and novel object
3 recognition index in APP/PS1 mice (Fig. 7C; $r=-0.8362$, $p=0.0381$), suggesting that higher
4 levels of IFN γ in the brain were associated with worse ORT performance in APP/PS1 mice.
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6 No significant correlations were identified between IFN γ and IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ immunopositivity
7 in the cortex or dentate gyrus (Fig. 7D and E).
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10 **4. Discussion**

11 This study showed that peripheral glucose tolerance and insulin sensitivity were comparable
12 between aged APP/PS1 and wild type mice, conflicting with a number of other studies (24,
13 25). It has been suggested that 5/6 hours fasting is optimal for glucose and insulin tolerance
14 tests, as this was sufficient for normalization of glucose levels and phosphorylation of insulin
15 signaling proteins (26, 27). The current study performed glucose tolerance and insulin
16 sensitivity tests following an overnight fasting period, so it is possible that results presented
17 here reflect an exaggerated suppression of basal glucose levels in mice as a result of
18 prolonged fasting. This suggestion is supported by Jimenez-Palomares *et al.* (28) who also
19 found that glucose tolerance and insulin sensitivity were not significantly different in 8
20 month-old APP/PS1 mice, compared to wild types following overnight fasting periods.
21 Future studies should avoid overnight fasting prior to glucose and insulin tolerance tests in
22 order to achieve optimal normalization of metabolic parameters and to avert potentially
23 dangerous hypoglycemic effects of insulin. Other reports suggest that insulin insensitivity
24 and glucose intolerance also exists in aged animals (29-31), including C57Bl/6 mice (32-34);
25 a possible explanation for the similarity between APP/PS1 mice and controls in the present
26 study. To better understand the impact of central insulin resistance on global insulin
27 utilisation in the APP/PS1 model, future studies should assess the impact of hypothalamic
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1 insulin administration alone and in combination with insulin sensitising drugs, such as
2 metformin, in hyperinsulinemic euglycemic clamp models.
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5 Recognition memory was impaired in APP/PS1 mice here, consistent with several
6 other studies (35-37). However, since wild type controls also exhibited impaired recognition
7 memory, the deficits may be related to advanced age, rather than the APP/PS1 genotype; a
8 suggestion supported by other studies reporting recognition memory deficits in aged C57Bl/6
9 mice (38, 39). Another study found several indications of cognitive dysfunction in 18-20
10 month-old C57Bl/6 mice, including impaired novel location memory, but not object
11 recognition memory (40). Spatial learning was impaired in aged APP/PS1 mice, in agreement
12 with other studies (41, 42). Spatial memory recall was impaired in APP/PS1 mice and wild
13 type mice, similar to Barreto *et al.* (43), who showed that spatial learning and memory were
14 impaired in 18 month-old C57Bl/6 mice. Other reports have highlighted age-related decline
15 in learning and memory in C57Bl/6 mice (44, 45) consistent with the findings of the present
16 study, providing further evidence that there exists age-related deterioration of cognitive
17 function in C57Bl/6 mice. Learning in the reversal water maze task was impaired in aged
18 APP/PS1 mice, compared to controls, while both APP/PS1 mice and wild types failed to
19 recognize the reversal target quadrant. Some (46), but not others (47) have shown that
20 reversal learning and memory are impaired in APP/PS1 mice. Results presented here, suggest
21 that reversal learning is a cognitive domain that is especially vulnerable to the effects of AD
22 pathology in aged mice.
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48 Amyloid- β (A β) deposits were detected throughout the brains of 15-18 month-old
49 APP/PS1 mice, while A β was undetectable in wild type controls. APP/PS1 mice develop
50 plaque deposition by 6 months of age, which progressively worsens, leading to abundant and
51 widespread A β plaque pathology by the age of 14 months (48, 49). The finding that A β
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1 deposition was significant in APP/PS1 brains and absent from wild types suggests that the
2 spatial memory deficits in both groups were not directly related to A β burden.
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5 Oxidative stress levels were similar between APP/PS1 and wild type mice in the
6 cortex and dentate gyrus. This was unexpected given previous reports showing elevated
7 oxidative damage in brains of aged APP/PS1 mice (50-52). However, since aging is
8 associated with accumulation of oxidative stress in the brain (53, 54), results presented here
9 may reflect age-related accumulation of oxidative DNA damage in both APP/PS1 and wild
10 type mice.
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19 IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ was increased in brains of APP/PS1 mice, as has also been observed in
20 AD patients (18, 19, 55) and in experimental models (55, 56). The findings of the present
21 study corroborate those of Talbot *et al.* (18) that demonstrated elevated IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ in the
22 hippocampus of APP/PS1 mice. IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ has been shown to robustly correlate with
23 cognitive impairment and brain insulin resistance associated with AD (18) and is likely
24 related to the cognitive impairment in APP/PS1 mice here. It is interesting to note that the
25 increased brain insulin resistance in aged APP/PS1 mice was apparent in the absence of any
26 significant indications of peripheral insulin insensitivity or glucose intolerance.
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39 Astrocytes were increased in the cortex and dentate gyrus of APP/PS1 mice,
40 consistent with previous reports (50, 57). Neuroinflammation and glial cell proliferation,
41 recruitment and activation is a commonly associated with AD pathology (13). The fact that
42 A β deposition remained substantial in the brains of APP/PS1 mice suggests that clearance of
43 A β was minimal, providing support for the proposal that astrocyte function is defective in
44 AD (58). Expression of inflammatory and insulin signaling genes was similar in brains of
45 aged APP/PS1 mice and age-matched wild type controls. It has been shown previously that
46 expression of TLR4 is up-regulated in brains of APP/PS1 and wild type mice in an age-
47 related manner (59) and the present report provides further evidence that TLR4 expression in
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1 brain is increased with normal aging, to levels comparable with APP/PS1 mice. Th1 cytokine
2 IFN γ was elevated in brains of APP/PS1 mice compared to wild types, in agreement with
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4 another study that showed age-related enhancement of IFN γ in brains of AD mice from 3 to
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6 19 months of age (60). It has also been shown that IFN γ has opposing functions in AD brain,
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8 whereby overexpression of IFN γ in the hippocampus augments neuroinflammation and
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10 worsens A β burden, but abrogates tau pathology and enhances synaptic markers and
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12 neurogenesis (61). Further experimentation should determine whether the increased IFN γ in
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14 brains of APP/PS1 mice here represents a component of pathogenic neuroinflammation or an
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16 up-regulation of protective processes. A significant negative correlation was identified here
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18 between IFN γ levels and novel object recognition memory in APP/PS1 mice, in line with a
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20 recent study demonstrating improved hippocampal synaptic plasticity and cognitive
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22 performance in mice deficient for IFN γ (62), suggesting that increased IFN γ in the brain may
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24 impair cognitive function in aged APP/PS1 mice. The increase in IFN γ is mirrored by a
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26 comparable increase in anti-inflammatory IL-4 in brains of APP/PS1 mice, which likely
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28 reflects an attempt to suppress the Th1 response. Interestingly IFN γ has also been implicated
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30 in attenuation of insulin signaling (63) and may be similarly associated with the brain insulin
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32 resistance in the present study. Although we failed to detect significant correlations between
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34 brain levels of IFN γ and IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶, this potential mechanism certainly warrants further
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36 exploration.
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47 Previous studies have detected increased IL-1 β in the brains of APP/PS1 mice (64,
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49 65). The present report, however, detected a non-significant trend towards an increase in IL-
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51 1 β in the brains of APP/PS1 mice, possibly due to a parallel, age-related elevation of IL-1 β in
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53 wild-type mice. This suggests that IL-1 β is involved with neuroinflammation that
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55 accompanies normal aging, while IFN γ and IL-4 are not part of the normal process of aging,
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1 but are components of the neuroinflammatory processes associated with AD, since these were
2 elevated in aged APP/PS1 mice, compared to both young and old wild types.
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5 Expression of mTOR and ERK2 was comparable in brains of aged APP/PS1 mice,
6 compared to wild types. Extracellular signal-regulated kinase 2 (ERK2) signaling facilitates
7 learning and memory (68, 69), suggesting that impaired cognitive function in aged mice may
8 be due, in part to reduced expression of ERK2 in the brain. Dineley *et al.* (70) showed that
9 A β reduces ERK2 activity and that ERK2 expression is down-regulated in brains of 20
10 month-old AD mice. Similarly, dysregulation of signaling downstream of mTOR has been
11 demonstrated in post-mortem brain tissue from AD patients (71). Signaling through mTOR
12 contributes to synaptic plasticity, learning and memory (72, 73). It has also been shown that
13 insulin promotes neurogenesis, dendrite and synapse formation by signaling through IRS-
14 mediated activation of mTOR (74, 75). Amyloid- β (A β) perturbs mTOR signaling in neurons
15 (76) and mTOR inhibition impairs hippocampal LTP in an AD mouse model (77). Our results
16 suggest that expression of insulin signaling components is comparable in aged APP/PS1 and
17 wild-type mice. Disruption of insulin signaling in the brain may be involved in the
18 pathophysiology of AD and may contribute to cognitive impairments associated with aging, a
19 proposition that should be further probed in future studies.
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41 Synaptophysin staining was reduced in the polymorphic layer of the dentate gyrus of
42 APP/PS1 mice. Several previous studies have shown that synapse density is decreased in the
43 brains of APP/PS1 mice (78-80). These studies did not consider the discrete cellular layers of
44 the hippocampus and may have overlooked subtle variation in synapse density between
45 subregions (78-80). However, one report showed that synaptophysin levels in the
46 hippocampus of 7 and 17 month-old APP/PS1 mice were similar to age-matched wild types
47 (81), which more closely aligns with the findings of the present study. It has also been shown
48 in Tg2576 mice, that synaptophysin levels were no different from controls at 3, 9, 14 and 19
49 months of age.
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1 months of age (82), while Xu *et al.* (45) reported age-related decline in hippocampal synaptic
2 spine density in C57Bl/6 mice. Results of the present report reflect a similar pattern, with
3 synapse density being comparable to wild types in 15-18 month-old APP/PS1 mice. Since
4 synapse density in the polymorphic layer was reduced in aged transgenic mice, it is
5 reasonable to suggest that this subregion was selectively susceptible to synaptotoxicity
6 associated with AD neuropathology.
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14 A limitation of the present study is the absence of young cohorts of wild type and
15 APP/PS1 mice. Based on evidence from the literature, it is likely that peripheral insulin
16 sensitivity, cognitive function and synapse density were influenced by aging. Future studies
17 should include groups of young wild type and transgenic mice in order to more robustly
18 characterize the differences between AD pathology and changes associated with normal
19 aging, throughout the lifecourse. Another limitation of the present report is that cytokines and
20 mRNA were measured in whole hemi-brains, while analysis of immunohistochemistry was
21 performed on brain sections allowing for quantification within discrete brain regions. This
22 means that comparing the results of our biochemical assays with our immunohistochemical
23 data is difficult. Future studies will analyse mRNA and associated proteins and activation
24 states in discrete brain regions to allow for more accurate demarcation of differences between
25 APP/PS1 mice and wild types with regard to insulin signaling dysregulation and
26 inflammation the brain.
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46 Nevertheless, this study has demonstrated memory deficits and neuroinflammation in
47 aged APP/PS1 and wild type mice. Astrocyte accumulation, IL-1 β and IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ levels
48 were increased in the brain of APP/PS1 mice in the absence of systemic insulin insensitivity
49 or glucose intolerance. Pharmacological agents targeting impaired insulin signaling and
50 inflammation in the brain may prove efficacious in treating AD, a suggestion requiring
51 further investigation.
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24 **Declaration / Conflict of Interest**
25

26 All authors declare that there is no duality of interest associated with their contribution to this
27 manuscript.
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34 **Author Contribution Statement**
35

36 PMcC conceived the study, participated in the analysis and interpretation of data, drafted the
37 manuscript and revised it critically for intellectual content. PD participated in data
38 generation, analysis and interpretation and drafted the manuscript and revised it critically for
39 intellectual content. AE participated in data generation and analysis. All authors approved the
40 final version of the manuscript. PD is the guarantor of this work and, as such, had full access
41 to all the data in the study and takes responsibility for the integrity of the data and the
42 accuracy of the data analysis.
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36 **Figure Legends**

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38 **Figure 1. Learning and memory in aged APP/PS1 and wild type mice.** The acquisition
39 training phase of the Morris water maze (MWM) involved four training sessions per day
40 over four consecutive days, followed by a probe trial on the fifth day, 24 hours following the
41 final training session. Escape latency during the training phase is shown (A), as is the
42 proportion of time spent in each quadrant during the probe trial by 15-18 month-old wild
43 type (solid line with circles; D) and APP/PS1 (dotted line with squares; G) mice. Reversal
44 water maze acquisition training began 24 hours following the MWM probe trial and
45 consisted of four consecutive days with four training sessions per day, followed by a reversal
46 probe trial on the fifth day. Illustrated are training phase escape latency (B) and time spent in
47 each quadrant during the reversal probe trial by wild type (E) and APP/PS1 (H) mice. For
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1 the novel object recognition task, recognition index, a measure of the percentage of time
2 spent exploring either object, is illustrated in the acquisition phase (C) during exposure to
3 two identical objects, and the test phase (F), in the presence of one familiar (black bars) and
4 one novel (white bars) object. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ APP/PS1 vs. wild type; two-way repeated
5 measures ANOVA with Bonferroni's *post-hoc* test (A, B), ordinary one-way ANOVA with
6 Dunnett's *post-hoc* test (D, E, G, H), multiple *t* tests with Holm-Šidák's *post-hoc* test (C, F).
7 Data represent mean \pm SEM for 13-15 mice per group.
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19 **Figure 2. A β deposition and IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ in the cerebral cortex and dentate gyrus of**
20 **aged APP/PS1 and wild type mice.** Representative images (10x magnification) are shown
21 that depict A β staining in the cerebral cortex (A) and dentate gyrus (B) of 15-18 month old
22 wild type mice and the cerebral cortex (E) and dentate gyrus (F) of age-matched APP/PS1
23 mice. Also shown is an exemplary magnified image (20x magnification) of A β staining in
24 brains of wild type (C) and APP/PS1 (G) mice. Quantification of A β immunopositivity in
25 the cortex (D) and dentate gyrus (H) of 15-18 month old APP/PS1 and wild type mice is also
26 shown. Representative images (20x magnification) are also shown that depict IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶
27 staining in the cerebral cortex (I) and dentate gyrus (J) of 15-18 month old wild type mice
28 and the cerebral cortex (M) and dentate gyrus (N) of age-matched APP/PS1 mice. Also
29 shown are exemplary magnified images (40x magnification) from wild type (K) and
30 APP/PS1 (O) mice. Quantification of IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ immunopositivity in cortex (L) and
31 dentate gyrus (P) of 15-18 month old APP/PS1 and wild type mice is also illustrated.
32 * $p < 0.05$, **** $p < 0.0001$, Student's *t* test. Data represent mean \pm SEM for 6 per group.
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57 **Figure 3. Oxidative stress and astrocytes in the cerebral cortex and dentate gyrus of**
58 **aged APP/PS1 and wild type mice.** Representative images (20x magnification) are shown
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1 that depict the 8-oxoguanine staining in cerebral cortex (A) and dentate gyrus (B) of 15-18
2 month old wild type mice and cerebral cortex (E) and dentate gyrus (F) of age-matched
3 APP/PS1 mice. Also shown are exemplary magnified images (40x magnification) from wild
4 type (C) and APP/PS1 (G) mice. Quantification of 8-oxoguanine immunopositivity in cortex
5 (D) and dentate gyrus (H) of 15-18 month old APP/PS1 and wild type mice is also
6 illustrated. Representative images (20x magnification) are also shown that depict GFAP
7 staining in the cerebral cortex (I) and dentate gyrus (J) of 15-18 month-old wild type mice
8 and the cerebral cortex (M) and dentate gyrus (N) of age-matched APP/PS1 mice. Also
9 shown are exemplary magnified images (100x magnification) from wild type (K) and
10 APP/PS1 (O) mice. Quantification of GFAP immunopositivity in cortex (L) and dentate
11 gyrus (P) of 15-18 month old APP/PS1 and wild type mice is also shown. *** $p < 0.001$;
12 Student's *t* test. Data represent mean \pm SEM for 6 per group.
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31 **Figure 4. Synapse density is decreased in the polymorphic layer of the dentate gyrus in**
32 **APP/PS1 mice.** Illustrated are representative images depicting synaptophysin staining of
33 brain sections from 15-18 month-old wild type (A, B, C) and APP/PS1 (D, E, F) mice. A
34 and D show the polymorphic layer (PL), granule cell layer (GCL) and molecular layer (ML)
35 of the dentate gyrus. C and D show the stratum radiatum (SR), stratum pyramidale (SP) and
36 stratum oriens (SO) of the hippocampus, while B and E show the inner (IC) and outer (OC)
37 cerebral cortex. Also illustrated is quantification of synaptophysin optical density values for
38 the polymorphic layer, granule cell layer and molecular layer of the dentate gyrus and the
39 stratum radiatum, stratum pyramidale and stratum oriens of the hippocampus, inner and outer
40 cortex of 15-18 month-old APP/PS1 and wild type mice (G). * $p < 0.05$; Student's *t* tests. Data
41 represent mean \pm SEM for 6 per group.
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Figure 5. Peripheral insulin sensitivity, glucose tolerance and expression of inflammatory and insulin signaling genes in brains of aged APP/PS1 mice. Illustrated is quantification of the expression of genes associated with inflammatory pathways and insulin signaling in brains of 15-18 month-old APP/PS1 mice (black bars), compared with age-matched wild type controls (white bars) (A). Also shown are blood glucose levels following insulin injection (B) and following glucose injection (C). Wild type (solid line with circles) and APP/PS1 mice (dotted line with squares) aged 15-18 months were administered insulin or glucose via i.p. injection and blood glucose levels were measured at 15, 30 and 60 minutes post-injection. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$; ordinary two-way ANOVA with Holm-Šidák's *post-hoc* test (A) or 13-15 per group, two-way repeated measures ANOVA with Holm-Šidák's *post-hoc* test (B, C). Data represent mean \pm SEM for 5 per group.

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Figure 6. Cytokine levels in the brains of aged APP/PS1 and wild type mice. MSD multiplex analysis of 8 cytokines was performed on supernatant extracted from brain tissue. Protein levels of IFN γ (A), IL-10 (B), IL-1 β (C), IL-12p70 (D), IL-2 (E), IL-4 (F), IL-5 (E), IL-6 (G) and KC/GRO (CXCL1) (H) were measured and compared between 15-18 month-old APP/PS1 mice (black bars) and age-matched wild types (white bars).** $p < 0.01$; Student's *t* tests. Data represent mean \pm SEM for 6 per group..

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Figure 7. Correlations between IFN γ , IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ and novel object recognition memory in aged APP/PS1 and wild type mice. Pearson's correlation analysis was performed between IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ immunopositivity and novel object recognition index (A, B), between IFN γ and novel object recognition index (C) and between IFN γ and IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ immunopositivity (D, E) in wild type (open circles and dotted best fit line) and APP/PS1 (black squares and solid best fit line) mice. Lines of best fit, *r* and *p* values were

1 also added to the graphs. Each data point represents an *XY* pair for a total of 6 *XY* pairs per
2 genotype on each graph. Significance of correlation was determined using two-tailed *t* tests.
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7 **Supplementary Figure 1. Cytokines and gene expression in brains of young wild type**
8 **mice.** Quantification of expression of inflammatory and insulin signaling genes in the brains
9 of young wild type mice (17-22 weeks old) is shown (black bars), compared to aged wild
10 types (white bars) and APP/PS1 mice (dark grey bars) (A). Also illustrated are brain levels of
11 IFN γ (B), IL-1 β (C) and IL-4 (D) in young wild type mice, compared with aged wild types
12 and APP/PS1 mice. **p*<0.05, ***p*<0.01, ****p*<0.001, *****p*<0.0001; ordinary one-way
13 ANOVA with Holm-Šídák's *post-hoc* test (A) and Student's *t* test (B-D). Data represent
14 mean \pm SEM for 5 (A) or 6 (B-D) per group.
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Figure 1

Denver et al. Inflammation, insulin signaling and cognitive function in aged APP/PS1 mice

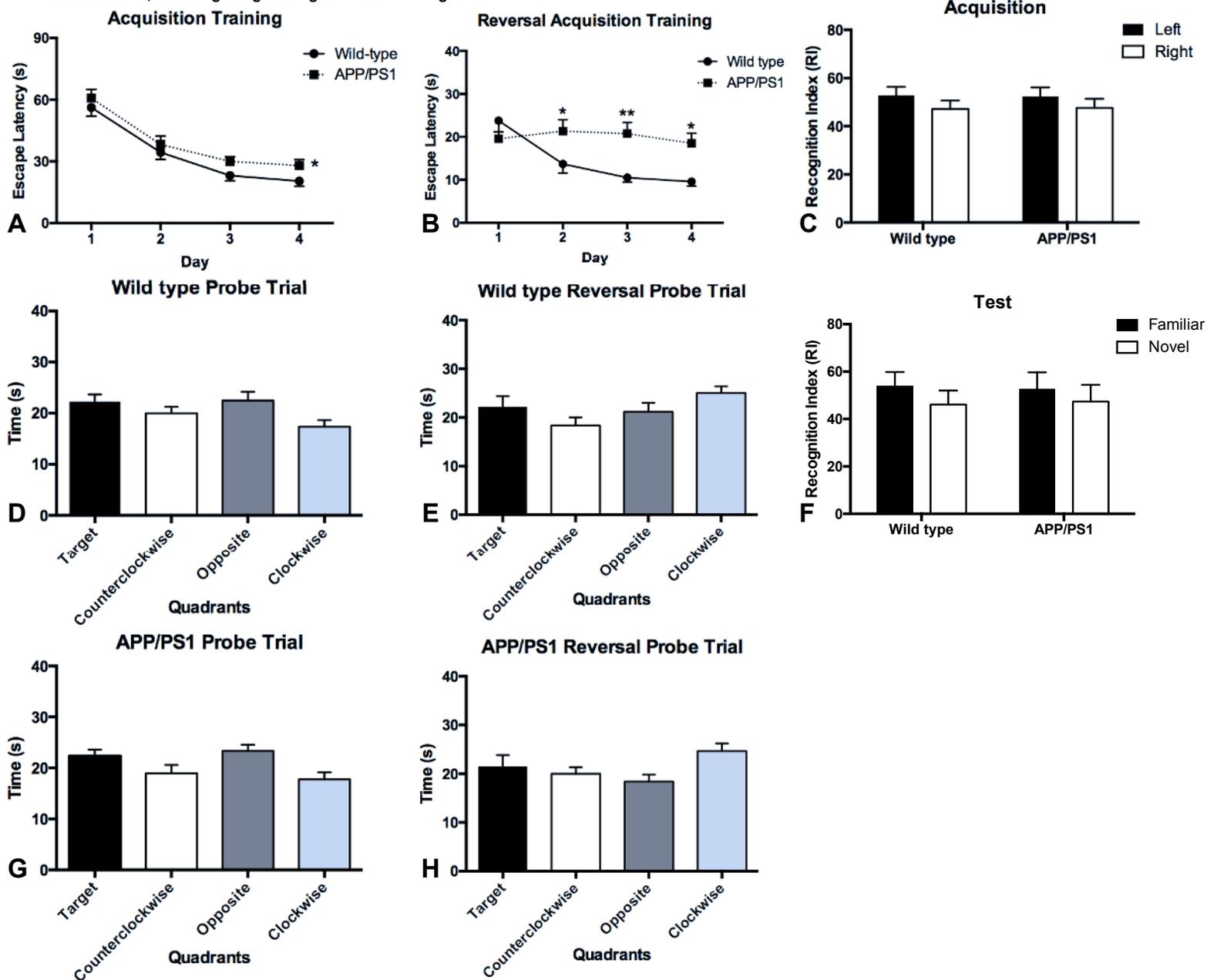


Figure 2
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Denver et al. Inflammation, insulin signaling and cognitive function in aged APP/PS1 mice

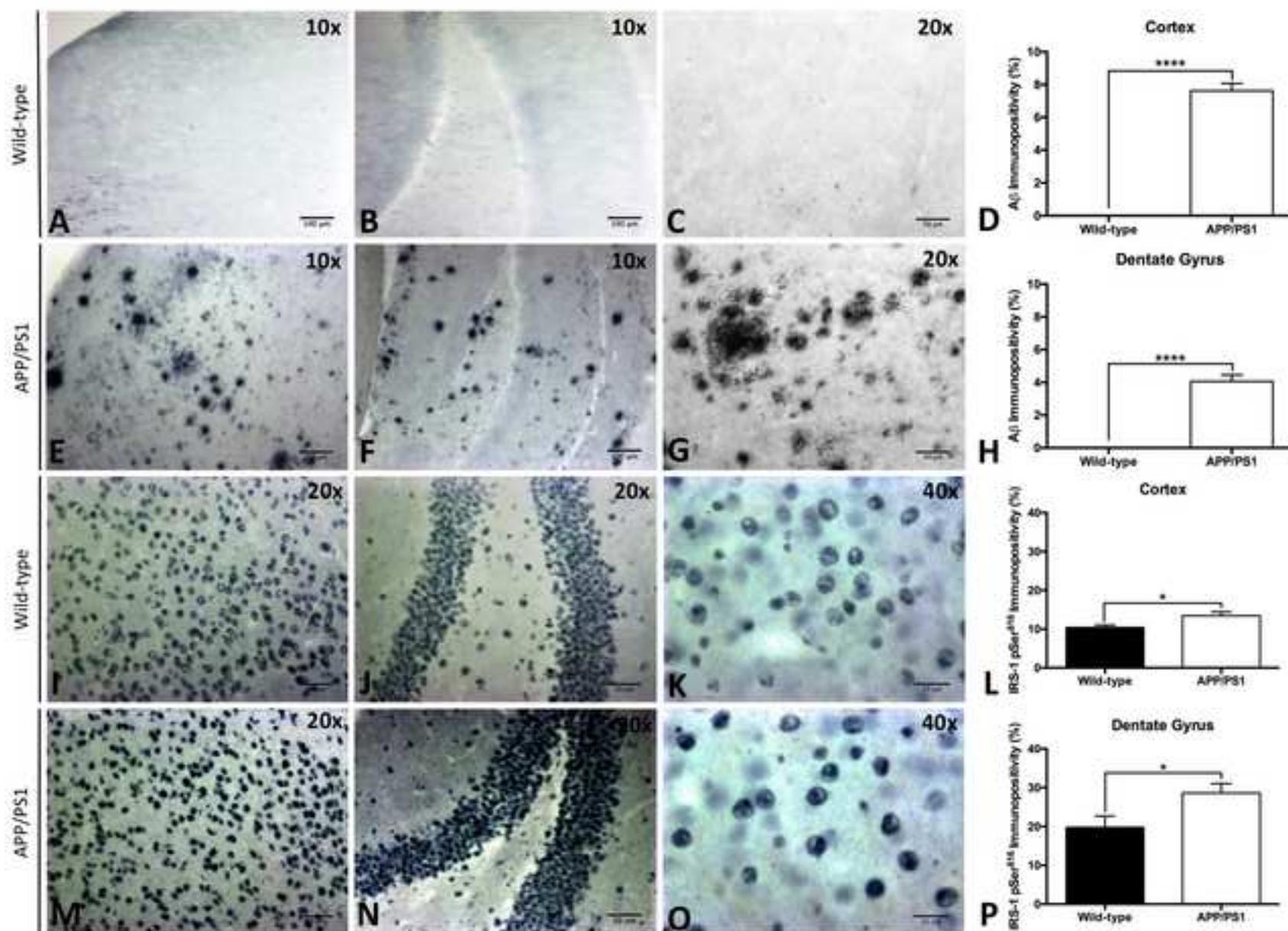


Figure 3
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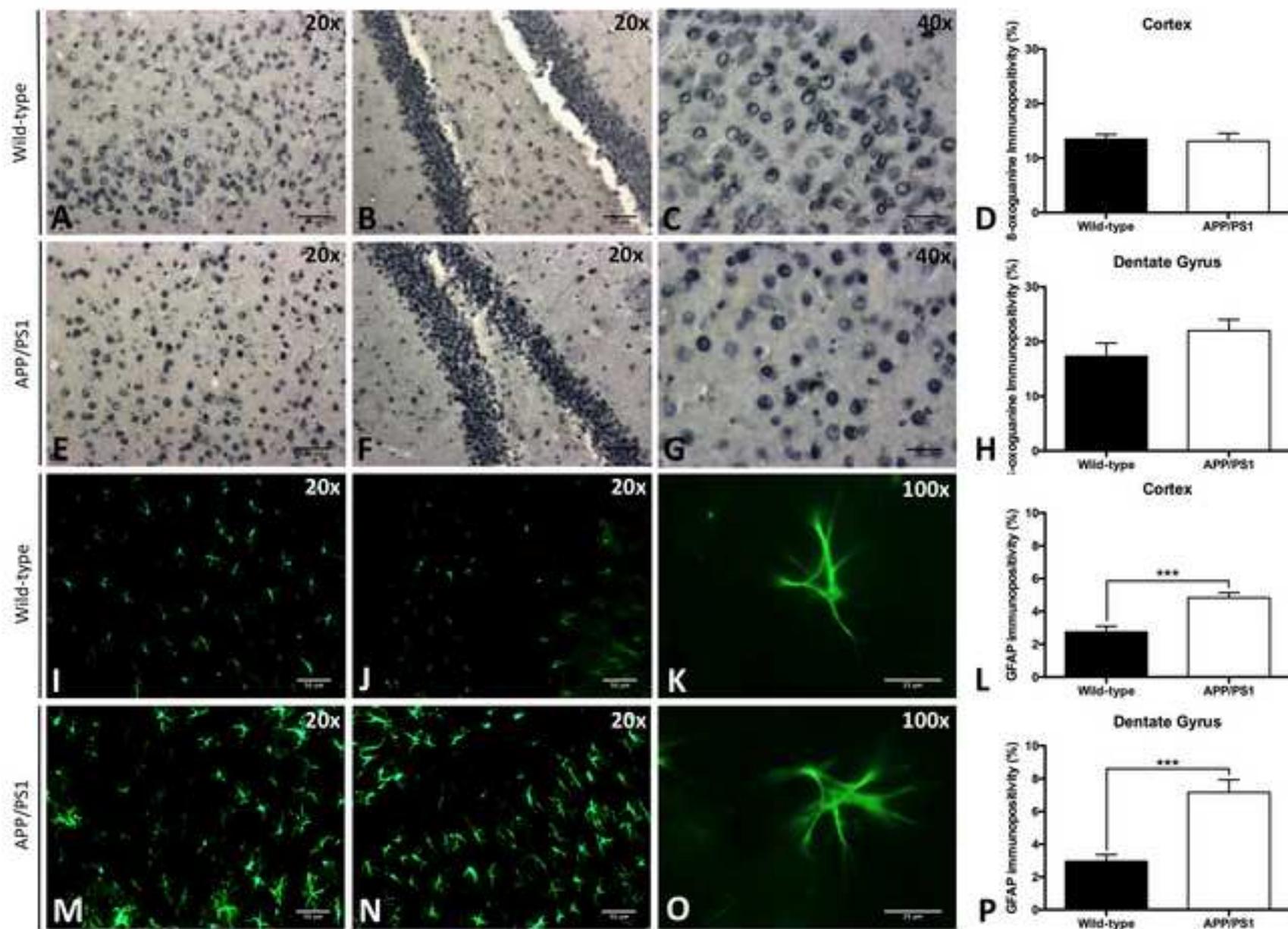
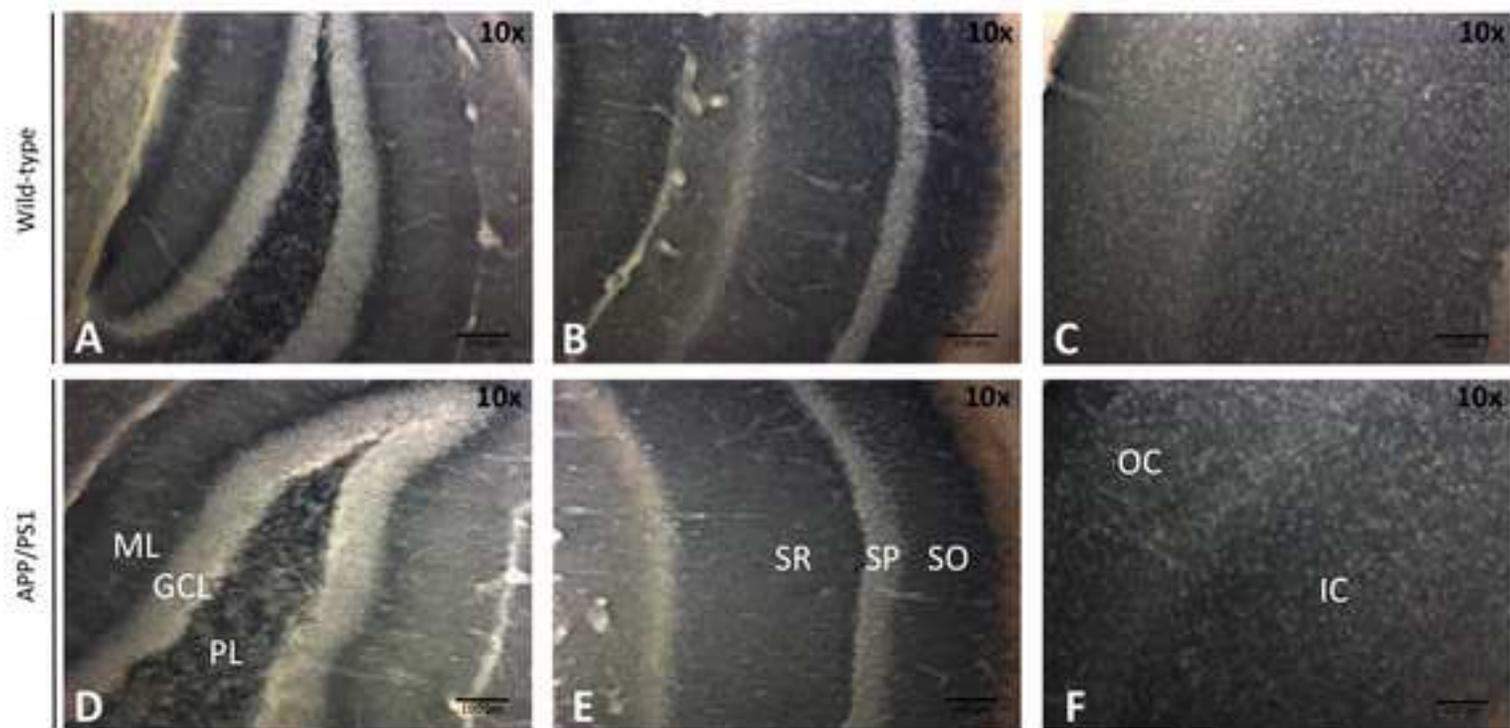


Figure 4
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Synaptophysin

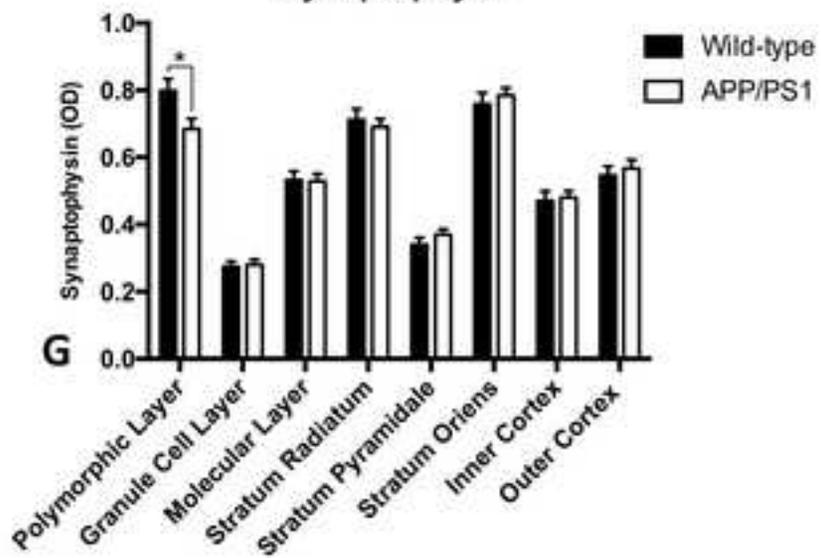


Figure 5 (revised)

Denver et al. Inflammation, insulin signaling and cognitive function in aged APP/PS1 mice

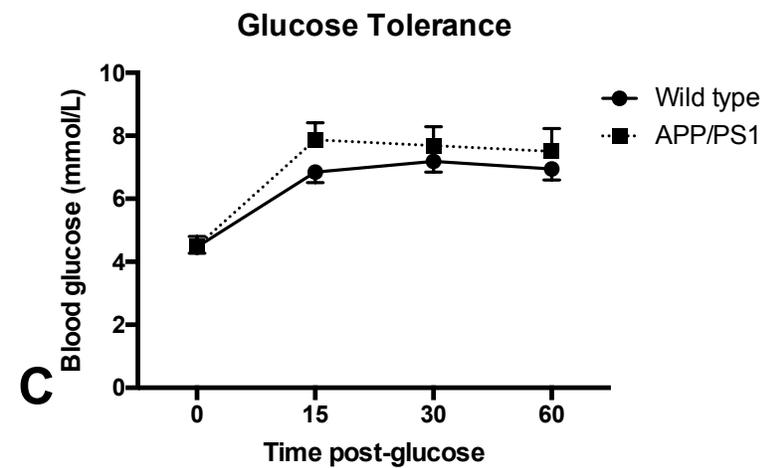
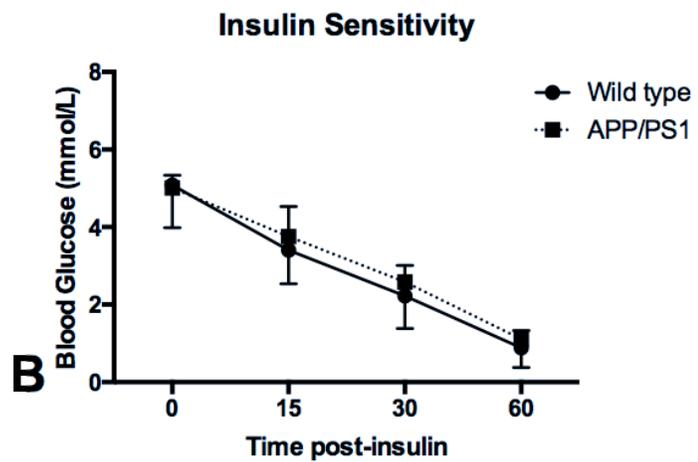
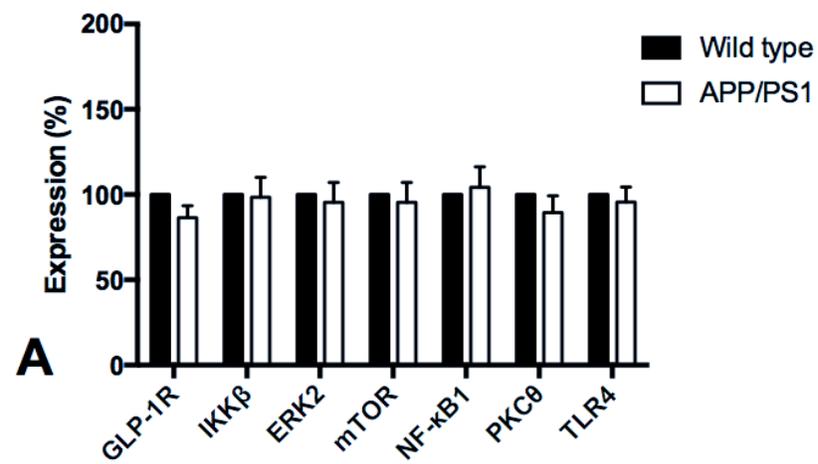
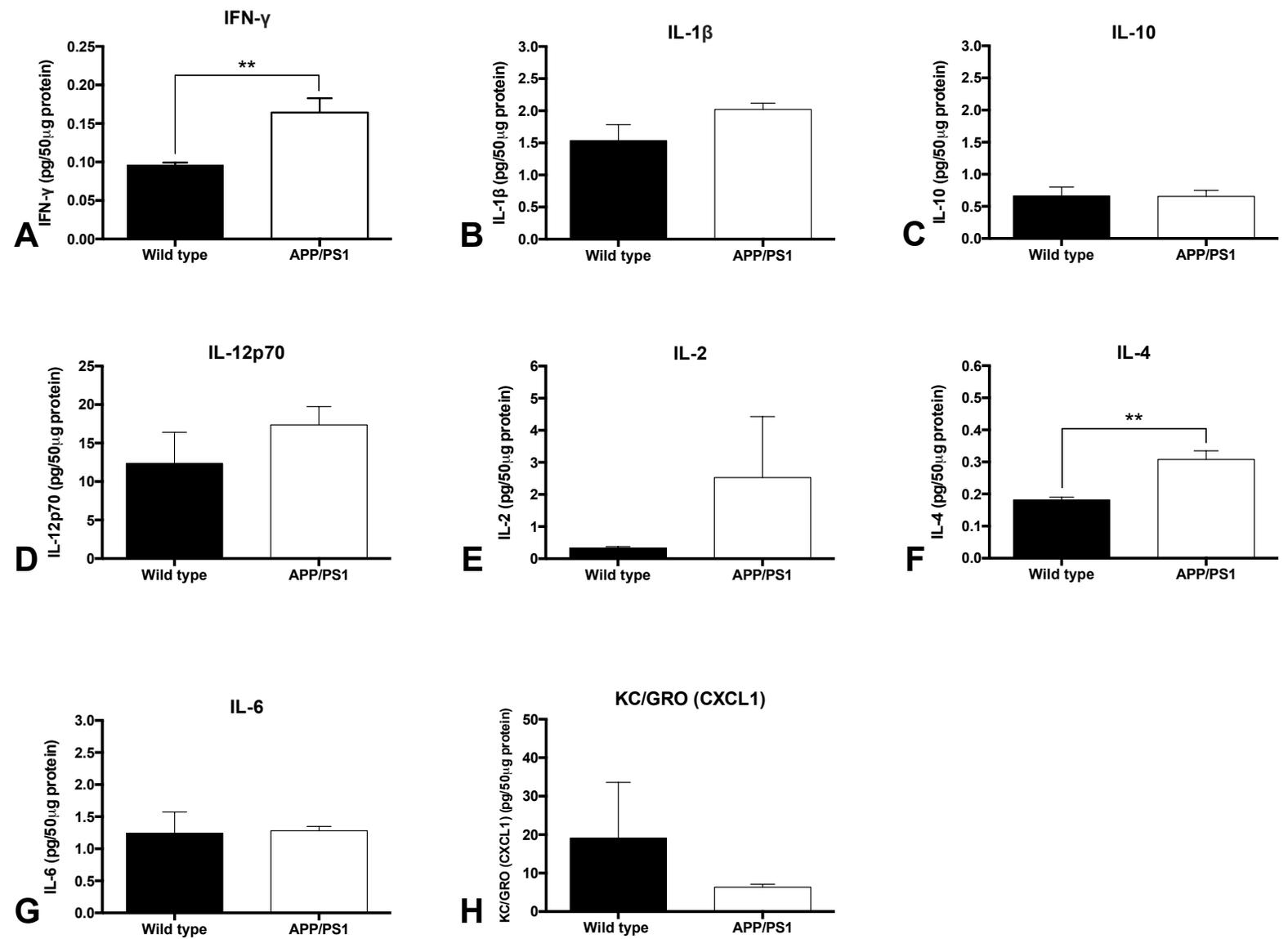
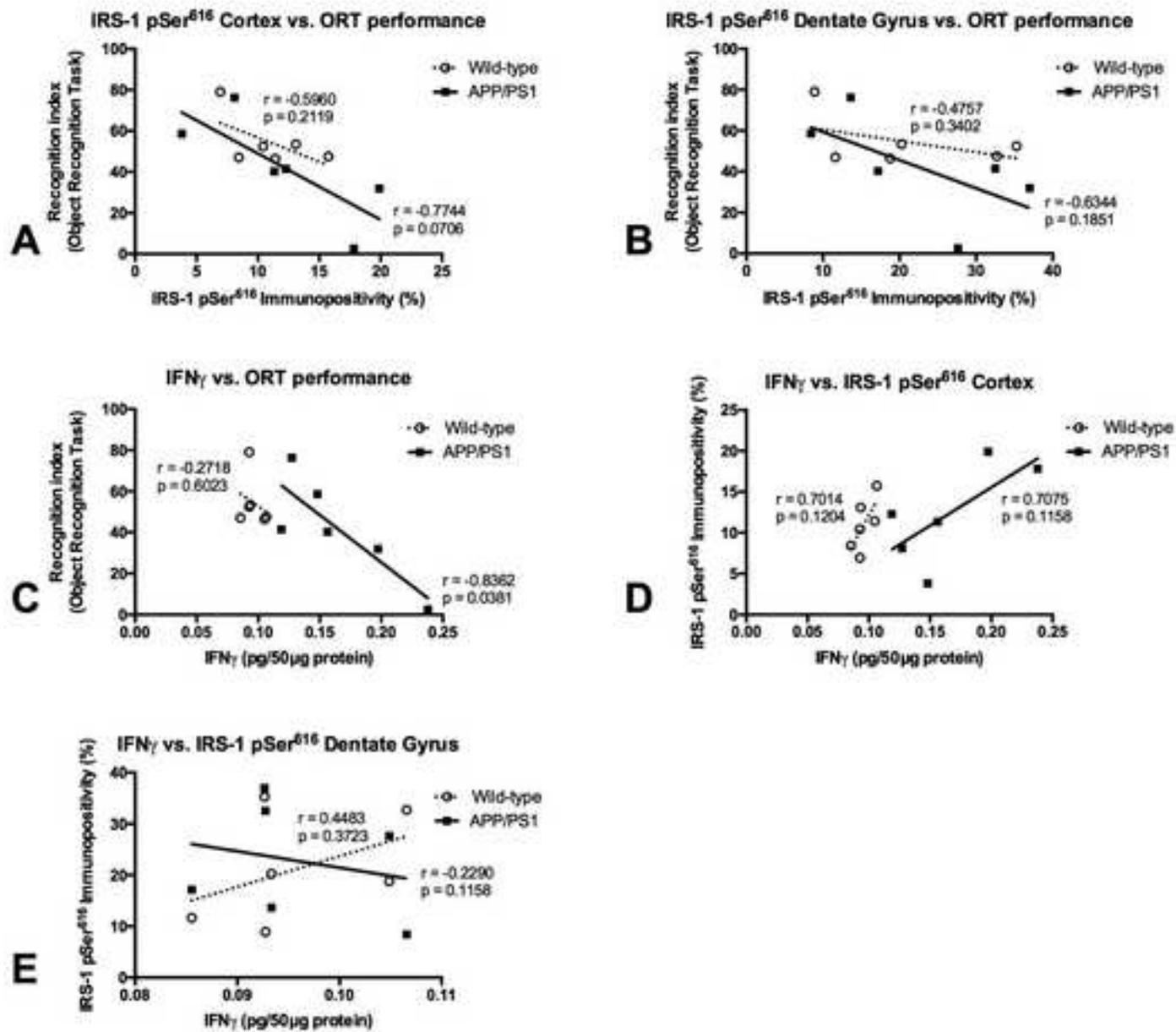


Figure 6 (revised)

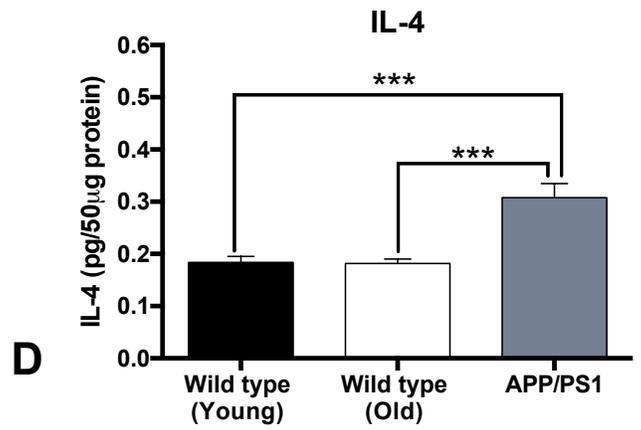
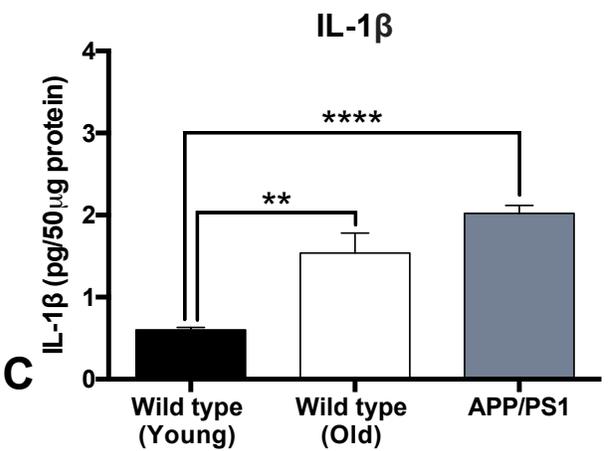
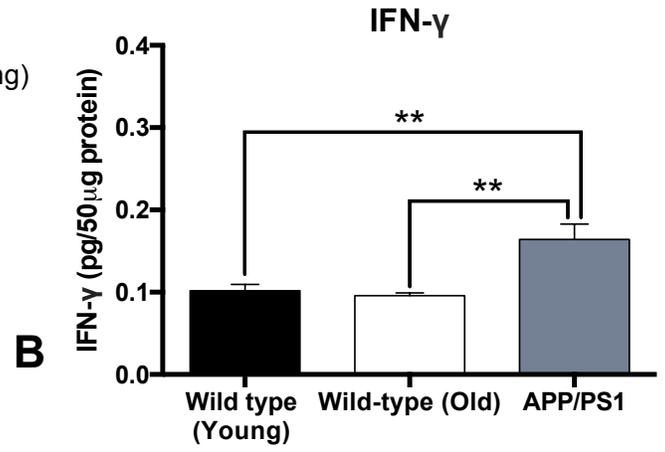
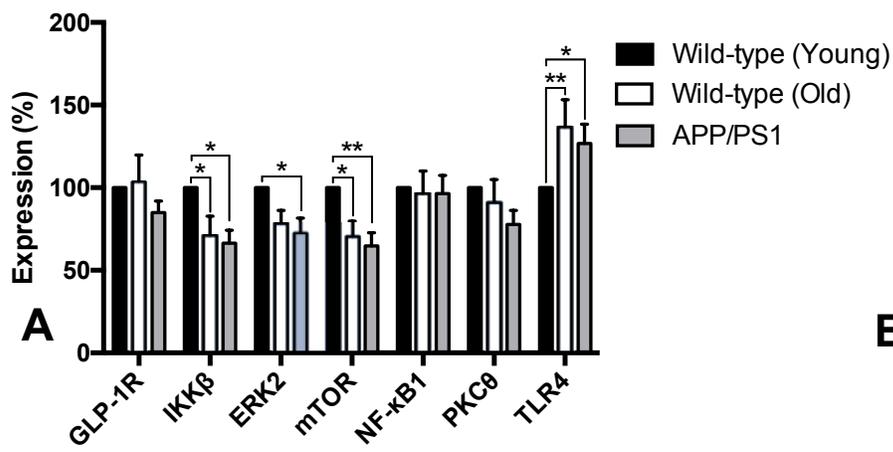
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9 Paul Denver^{a,1}, Andrew English^b and Paula L McClean^b
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9 **Abstract**

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11 Cognitive dysfunction and neuroinflammation are typical in Alzheimer's disease (AD), but
12 are also associated with normal aging, albeit less severely. Insulin resistance in the brain has
13 been demonstrated in AD patients and is thought to be involved in AD pathophysiology.
14 Using 15-18 month-old APP/PS1 mice, this study measured peripheral and central insulin
15 signaling and sensitivity, inflammatory markers in brain and plasma and oxidative stress and
16 synapse density in the brain. Novel object recognition, Morris water maze and reversal water
17 maze tasks were performed to assess cognitive function in aged APP/PS1 mice and wild type
18 littermates. Glucose tolerance and insulin sensitivity were similar in APP/PS1 mice and wild
19 type controls, however IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ was increased in cortex and dentate gyrus of APP/PS1
20 mice. Recognition and spatial memory was impaired in both APP/PS1 and wild type mice,
21 however learning impairments were apparent in APP/PS1 mice. Expression of GLP-1
22 receptor, ERK2, IKK β , mTOR, PKC θ , NF- κ B1 and TLR4 was similar between aged
23 APP/PS1 mice and age-matched wild types, ~~however, compared to young wild types (7-9~~
24 ~~month-old), IKK β , mTOR and ERK2 were decreased in brains of APP/PS1 mice, while~~
25 ~~TLR4 expression was increased.~~ Compared to age-matched ~~and younger~~ wild type mice,
26 IFN γ and IL-4 were increased in brains of APP/PS1 mice, ~~whereas IL-1 β was increased in~~
27 ~~the brains of aged wild type and APP/PS1 mice, compared to young controls.~~ These results
28 suggest that normal aging may be associated with enhanced neuroinflammation, oxidative
29 stress, and cognitive decline, however distinctions are apparent in the brain of APP/PS1 mice
30 in terms of inflammation and insulin signaling and in certain cognitive domains. Demarcation
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2 of pathological events that distinguish AD from normal aging will allow for improvements in
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4 diagnostic tools and the development of more effective therapeutics.
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8 **Keywords: Alzheimer's disease; aging; neuroinflammation; insulin signaling; cognitive**
9 **function; learning; memory; insulin sensitivity; cytokines**
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13 **Abbreviations: A β** Amyloid- β **AD** Alzheimer's disease **ERK2** extracellular signal-regulated
14 kinase 2 **IKK β** Inhibitor of NF- κ B kinase β **IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶** Insulin receptor substrate-1
15 phosphorylated at serine residue 616 **MAPK** mitogen-activated protein kinase **mTOR**
16 mechanistic target of rapamycin **MWM** Morris water maze **ORT** Novel object recognition
17 task **PKC** Protein kinase C **RI** Recognition index **RWM** Reversal water maze **TLR4** Toll-
18 like receptor 4
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29 **1 Introduction**

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31 As healthcare improves around the world, life expectancy continues to rise (1). Accordingly,
32 the past 25 years have seen a dramatic increase in disorders associated with aging, including
33 neurological diseases such as Alzheimer's disease (AD) (1), for which advancing age is the
34 principal risk factor (2).
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40 Many clinical and neuropathological features of AD parallel the normal progression
41 of aging, making differentiation between normal brain aging and early-stage AD difficult.
42 Generally, it can be said that healthy aging is associated with moderate decline in some
43 cognitive abilities, whilst AD is characterized by severe deterioration of the same cognitive
44 domains, with additional progressive decline of further cognitive functions, such that the
45 patient's daily life is adversely affected to a severe degree (3). In AD, amyloid- β (A β)
46 accumulates into progressively larger fibrils, which become deposited as insoluble plaques in
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2 the brain parenchyma (4). Accumulating evidence suggests that the presence of A β fibrils
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4 and plaques is not uncommon in the brains of non-demented, cognitively healthy older
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6 people (5, 6). Several studies have also shown that A β deposition does not correlate with
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8 cognitive impairment in elderly cohorts (6), highlighting the variability of age-related
9
10 cognitive decline and suggesting that A β *per se* does not directly influence cognitive
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12 function.
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15 Profound inflammation is evident in AD brain (7), primarily mediated by microglia
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17 and astrocytes (8, 9). Activated microglia and astrocytes phagocytose A β oligomers and
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19 fibrils, degrade A β plaques and reduce amyloid burden (10, 11). However, sustained
20
21 microglial activation and unresolved inflammation in the brain is harmful to neurons and
22
23 synapses and promotes chronic dysregulation of glial cells and subsequent deterioration of
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25 brain structure and function (12, 13). Inflammation in the brain increases with age (14) and
26
27 several studies have shown elevated levels of inflammatory cytokines in the brains of aged
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29 rodents (15, 16). In the context of AD, primed microglia respond more readily to A β ,
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31 producing increased levels of cytokines that exert direct toxic effects on neurons and at
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33 synapses (17).
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37 Insulin resistance has been demonstrated in postmortem brain tissue from AD patients
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39 and those with mild cognitive impairment, in the absence of diabetes and irrespective of
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41 ApoE- ϵ 4 status (18). Furthermore, IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ was identified as a putative biomarker of
42
43 brain insulin resistance in AD and was found to correlate positively with A β oligomer levels
44
45 and negatively with cognitive function (18). Additionally, Bomfim *et al.* (19) demonstrated
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47 increased levels of IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ in the hippocampus of 13 month-old APP/PS1 mice. Other
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49 studies have also demonstrated impaired neuronal insulin signaling in AD brain and in
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51 response to A β oligomer challenge (20, 21).
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2 This study sought to determine differences in learning and memory, oxidative stress,
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4 glucose tolerance, central and peripheral insulin sensitivity between 15-18 month old wild
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6 type and age-matched APP/PS1 mice. Using novel object recognition and Morris water maze
7
8 tasks, cognitive function was measured in aged wild type and APP/PS1 mice. Systemic
9
10 insulin sensitivity and glucose tolerance were compared between groups. Brain levels of A β ,
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12 GFAP, 8-oxoguanine, IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ and synaptophysin were measured by
13
14 immunohistochemistry. Additionally inflammatory and insulin signaling associated genes,
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16 GLP-1R, IKK β , ERK2, mTOR, NF- κ B1, PKC θ , and TLR4 and inflammatory cytokines
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18 (IFN γ , IL-10, IL-1 β , IL-12p70, IL-2, IL-4, IL-5, IL-6 and KC/GRO (CXCL1)) were assessed
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20 in brain tissue from aged APP/PS1 and wild type mice to delineate pathological changes from
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22 those associated with ‘normal’ aging.
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36 **2 Materials and Methods**

37 *2.1.1 Animals*

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39 Male APP_{swe}/PS1 Δ e9 (APP/PS1) mice with a C57Bl/6J background were bred with wild type
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41 C57Bl/6J females at the Biomedical and Behavioural Research Unit at Ulster University in
42
43 Coleraine. Offspring were ear punched and positivity for the APP_{swe}/PS1 Δ e9 transgene, or
44
45 lack thereof was confirmed by polymerase chain reaction, using primers specific for the APP
46
47 sequence of the APP/PS1 construct (Forward “GAATTCGACATGACTCAGG”, Reverse:
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49 “GTTCTGCTGCATCTTGGACA”). Offspring males heterozygous for the APP_{swe}/PS1 Δ e9
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51 transgenic construct were then age-matched with wild type littermates, not expressing the
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2 transgene, which were used as controls. Both groups of mice were caged individually and
3
4 allowed access to food and water *ad libitum*. Animals were maintained on a 12:12 light-dark
5
6 cycle (lights on at 08:00, lights off at 20:00), within a temperature-controlled room (T:
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8 21.5°C ± 1°C). All tests were performed during the light cycle. All experiments were
9
10 designed, analyzed and reported in accordance with ARRIVE guidelines. Experiments were
11
12 licensed according to UK Home Office regulations (UK Animals Scientific Procedures Act
13
14 1986) and associated guidelines (EU Directive 2010/63/EU). C57Bl/6 mice were derived
15
16 from a colony maintained in the Biomedical and Behavioural Research Unit at Ulster
17
18 University in Coleraine.

21 22 23 *2.1.2 Glucose tolerance and insulin sensitivity tests*

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25 After an overnight fasting period, APP/PS1 mice and age-matched wild types received an i.p.
26
27 injection of glucose (18 mmol/kg bw) in 0.9% NaCl or insulin (0.25 µM/g). Blood glucose
28
29 was measured at 0, 15, 30 and 60 minutes following glucose or insulin injection using a
30
31 hand-held Ascencia Contour blood glucose meter (Bayer Health Care).

32 33 34 35 *2.1.3 Behavioural Assessment*

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37 Mice were assessed in the ORT, as described previously (22). Briefly, mice were subjected to
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39 a 10 minute acquisition period, with two identical objects, followed by a 3 hour retention
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41 period and a 10 minute test phase, which involved replacing one of the objects with a novel
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43 object. A recognition index (RI) was calculated for each object, defined as amount of time
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45 spent exploring object A or B over the total time spent exploring both objects x 100 (t_A or
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47 $t_B / (t_A + t_B) \times 100$).

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50 Following ORT, mice were assessed in the Morris water maze (MWM) (22). The
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52 acquisition training phase consisted of 4 x 90 second trials per day, for 4 consecutive days,
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1 followed by a probe trial on the fifth day. The day after the probe trial, mice were subjected
2 to reversal water maze (RWM), wherein the escape platform was moved from the southwest
3 to reversal water maze (RWM), wherein the escape platform was moved from the southwest
4 to reversal water maze (RWM), wherein the escape platform was moved from the southwest
5 to reversal water maze (RWM), wherein the escape platform was moved from the southwest
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9 to reversal water maze (RWM), wherein the escape platform was moved from the southwest
10 to reversal water maze (RWM), wherein the escape platform was moved from the southwest

11 12 *2.1.4 Immunohistochemistry*

13 Following sacrifice, animals were perfused with PBS and brains excised. One hemisphere
14 was fixed in 4% paraformaldehyde and the other was frozen in liquid nitrogen. Hemi-brains
15 was fixed in 4% paraformaldehyde and the other was frozen in liquid nitrogen. Hemi-brains
16 for histology were then transferred to 30% sucrose and 40 µm coronal sections were cut
17 using a cryostat (Leica Microsystems). One section in every 6 was collected sequentially and
18 stored at -20°C. Staining was performed for Aβ, GFAP, 8-oxoguanine, IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ and
19 synaptophysin. All sections were incubated in H₂O₂ and permeabilized using Triton X. For 8-
20 oxoguanine, sections were incubated at 37°C for 30 minutes with 2 M hydrochloric acid,
21 followed by 0.1 M borax (Sigma Aldrich) for 10 minutes. Blocking with 1.5%-10% normal
22 serum was performed prior to incubation with anti-Aβ (1:200; Invitrogen; 71-5800) anti-
23 GFAP (1:250; Merck Millipore; MAB3402), anti-8-oxoguanine (1:250; Merck Millipore;
24 MAB3560), anti-IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ (1:200; Invitrogen; 44-550G) or anti-synaptophysin (1:200;
25 Abcam; ab7837) antibodies overnight at 4°C. Sections were then incubated with secondary
26 antibodies and visualized using Vectastain Elite and SG substrate (Vector Laboratories).
27 Percentage area stained in each image was quantified using a multi threshold plug-in within
28 Image J (NIH, Bethesda, USA) in a blinded manner.
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50 *2.1.5 Quantitative polymerase chain reaction (qPCR)*

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2 RNA was extracted from brain tissue using RNeasy Lipid Tissue Mini Kit (Qiagen)
3 according to manufacturer's instructions. For cDNA synthesis, transcriptor First Strand
4 cDNA synthesis kit (Roche Diagnostics) was used using 500 ng of RNA per sample. Real-
5 time PCR reactions were composed of; 5 µl of PCR MasterMix (Roche Diagnostics), 1 µl (10
6 pM/µl) gene-specific probes, 3 µl of RNase free water and 1 µl (25ng) of template cDNA.
7
8 Gene-specific probes (Roche Diagnostics) were as follows: GLP-1R (*Glp1r*), IKKβ (*Ikkbb*),
9
10 ERK2 (*Mapk1*), mTOR (*Mtor*), NF-κB1 (*Nfkb1*), PKCθ (*Prkcq*) and TLR4 (*Tlr4*).
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12 Quantitative PCR was performed on Lightcycler 480 system (Roche Diagnostics), and
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14 quantified on accompanying software package (Roche, Lightcycler 480 software, v1.5). Gene
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16 expression changes were calculated using Delta Delta CT mathematical model (23).
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25 *2.1.6 Meso Scale Discovery multi-array*

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27 Whole hemi-brains were homogenized under liquid nitrogen, followed by addition of 10 ml/g
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29 of lysis buffer (1 mM EDTA in PBS supplemented with protease inhibitor cocktail). Samples
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31 were centrifuged at 14,000 G for 20 min at 4°C and supernatant was removed and added to
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33 Meso Scale Discovery (MSD[®]) plate. Bradford protein assay was performed to measure
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35 protein content and data were normalized to the total amount of protein present in each
36
37 sample. Levels of IFNγ, IL1β, IL-2, IL-4, IL-5, IL-6, IL-10, IL-12p70, TNF-α and KC/GRO
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39 (CXCL1) were quantified in brain and plasma using MSD[®] Multi-spot Assay Pro-
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41 inflammatory panel 1 kit (Rockville, MD, USA) according to manufacturer's instructions.
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46 *2.1.7 Statistical Analysis*

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48 Data were analyzed using Graphpad Prism (v6.0h). Differences were deemed to be
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50 significant if $p \leq 0.05$. Data are expressed as means ± SEM. Tests included one-way or two-
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52 way ANOVA and unpaired Student's *t* tests. Data heterogeneity was tested and, where
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2 variance was significant, appropriate non-parametric tests were used. Corrections for multiple
3 comparisons were performed using appropriate *post-hoc* tests. Linear relationships between
4 two variables were measured by Pearson's correlation analysis.
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10 **3 Results**

11 *3.1.1 Spatial learning is impaired in aged APP/PS1 mice*

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13 During the acquisition phase of the MWM, escape latency significantly decreased over time
14 ($p < 0.0001$), as expected, and was also significantly greater overall in APP/PS1 mice (Fig.
15 1A; $p = 0.0264$). However, *post-hoc* analysis indicated that average escape latency was not
16 significantly different between aged wild type and APP/PS1 mice on any of the training days
17 (Fig. 1A). In the probe trial, time spent in each quadrant by wild type mice was not
18 significantly different (Fig. 1D). Similarly, APP/PS1 mice spent a similar amount of time
19 swimming in all 4 quadrants in the probe trial and although significant variation in the time
20 spent in each quadrant was detected ($p = 0.0174$), *post-hoc* analysis showed that time spent in
21 the target quadrant by APP/PS1 mice was not significantly different from any other quadrant
22 (Fig. 1G). In the acquisition phase of the RWM, escape latency decreased over time (Fig. 1B;
23 $p = 0.0009$) and was also significantly affected by genotype (Fig. 1B; $p = 0.0020$). *Post-hoc*
24 analysis revealed that average escape latency was significantly greater in APP/PS1 mice,
25 compared to wild types on days 2 ($p < 0.05$), 3 ($p < 0.01$) and 4 ($p < 0.05$; Fig. 1B).
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42 In the reversal probe trial, time spent in each of the quadrants by wild types (Fig. 1E)
43 or APP/PS1 (Fig. 1H) mice did not differ significantly
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48 *3.1.2 Recognition memory is impaired in aged APP/PS1 and wild type mice*

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50 In the acquisition phase of the ORT, recognition indices for the identical objects were not
51 significantly different in 15-18 month old APP/PS1 or wild type mice (Fig. 1C). In the test
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2 phase, recognition index for the novel object was not significantly different from the familiar
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4 in the aged APP/PS1 mice or the age-matched control group (Fig. 1F).
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10 11 12 *3.1.3 Immunohistochemistry*

13 *3.1.3.1 A β deposition is ubiquitous in brains of aged APP/PS1 mice*

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15 Representative micrographs from wild type mice show that A β immunopositivity was almost
16
17 completely absent from the cortex ($0.0054\% \pm 0.0012$) and dentate gyrus (0.0178 ± 0.0136)
18
19 (Fig. 2A and B). However, widespread A β deposition was apparent in the cerebral cortex and
20
21 dentate gyrus of APP/PS1 mice (Fig. 2E and F). Quantification confirmed that A β
22
23 immunopositivity was significantly higher in the cortex (Fig. 2D; $p < 0.0001$) and dentate
24
25 gyrus (Fig. 2H; $p < 0.0001$) of APP/PS1 mice compared to wild type controls.
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31 *3.1.3.2 IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ is elevated in brains of aged APP/PS1 mice*

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33 Representative micrographs illustrate increased levels of IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ in the cerebral cortex
34
35 (Fig. 2M) and dentate gyrus (Fig. 2N) of APP/PS1 mice, compared to age-matched wild
36
37 types (Fig. 2I and J). Although distribution of IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ staining was similar between
38
39 groups in both brain regions, staining intensity was greater in APP/PS1 mice (Fig. 2O)
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41 compared to wild types (Fig. 2K). As such, quantification showed that IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ was
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43 significantly greater in the cortex (Fig. 2L; $p = 0.0303$) and dentate gyrus (Fig. 2P; $p = 0.0429$)
44
45 of aged APP/PS1 mice compared to wild type controls. Pearson's correlation analysis
46
47 identified negative correlations between recognition index for the novel object in ORT and
48
49 IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ immunopositivity in the cortex (Fig. 7A) dentate gyrus (Fig. 7B) of wild type
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51 and APP/PS1 mice. Although the negative correlation between cortical IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ staining
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2 and ORT recognition index in APP/PS1 approached significance (Fig. 7A; $r=-0.7744$,
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4 $p=0.0706$) the negative trends between IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ staining and ORT recognition index
5
6 remained insignificant in both brain regions of both genotypes.
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10 *3.1.3.3 Oxidative stress is comparable in brains of aged APP/PS1 and wild type mice*

11
12 Representative micrographs shown in Fig. 3A-C and E-G illustrate the similarity in oxidative
13
14 stress levels between the brains of aged APP/PS1 mice and wild type controls. Quantitative
15
16 analysis demonstrated that 8-oxoguanine immunopositivity was not significantly different in
17
18 the cortex (Fig. 3D) or the dentate gyrus (Fig. 3H) of APP/PS1 mice compared to age-
19
20 matched wild type controls.
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25 *3.1.3.4 Astrocytes are elevated in brains of aged APP/PS1 mice*

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27 Representative micrographs illustrate increased levels of GFAP-positive astrocytes in the
28
29 cerebral cortex (Fig. 3I and J) and dentate gyrus (Fig. 3M and N) of aged APP/PS1 mice
30
31 compared to wild type controls. Quantitative analysis revealed a significant increase in GFAP
32
33 immunopositivity in the cortex (Fig. 3L; $p=0.0010$) and dentate gyrus (Fig. 3P; $p=0.0007$),
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35 compared to age-matched wild type mice.
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40 *3.1.3.5 Synaptophysin is reduced in the polymorphic layer of the dentate gyrus of aged* 41 *APP/PS1 mice*

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43 Representative images illustrate reduced synaptophysin in the hippocampal polymorphic
44
45 layer of 15-18 month old APP/PS1 mice (Fig. 4D) compared to wild types (Fig. 4A;
46
47 $p=0.0338$). Synaptophysin staining was similar in all other layers of the hippocampus
48
49 between wild type and APP/PS1 mice and was not significantly different in the granule cell
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51 (Fig. 4D), molecular layer (Fig. 4D), strata radiatum (Fig. 4E), pyramidale (Fig. 4E) or oriens
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2 (Fig. 4E) of APP/PS1 mice, compared to wild type controls (Fig. 4A and B). Furthermore,
3
4 synaptophysin optical density did not differ significantly in the inner or outer (Fig. 4F)
5
6 cortical layers of APP/PS1 mice, compared to age-matched wild types (Fig. 4C).
7
8 Quantification confirmed that synaptophysin staining was reduced in the polymorphic layer
9
10 of APP/PS1 mice, but was comparable with wild types in all other layers of the hippocampus
11
12 and cortex (Fig. 4G).
13

14 15 16 *3.1.4 Peripheral insulin sensitivity and glucose tolerance and inflammatory and insulin* 17 18 *signaling gene expression in brains of aged APP/PS1 mice*

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20 Expression of GLP-1R, IKK β , ERK2, mTOR, NF- κ B1, PKC θ and TLR4 was comparable in
21
22 brains of aged APP/PS1 and wild type mice and genotype did not have a significant effect on
23
24 gene expression (Fig. 5A). Additional analysis comparing aged APP/PS1 mice with younger
25
26 C57Bl/6 mice (17-22 weeks old) identified a significant effect of genotype on gene
27
28 expression ([Supplementary Fig. 1A](#); ~~Fig. 5B~~; $p < 0.0001$) and *post-hoc* analysis showed that
29
30 expression of IKK β ($p < 0.01$), ERK2 ($p < 0.05$) and mTOR ($p < 0.01$) was significantly down-
31
32 regulated and TLR4 ($p < 0.05$) was up-regulated in brains of aged APP/PS1 mice, compared to
33
34 young C57Bl/6 controls. As illustrated in Fig. 5C, in response to an insulin sensitivity test, a
35
36 significant decrease in blood glucose over time was detected ($p < 0.0001$), however genotype
37
38 had no significant effect on blood glucose levels. Similarly, glucose tolerance was
39
40 comparable in both groups and although time significantly affected blood glucose levels
41
42 ($p < 0.0001$), genotype was not associated with a change in peripheral glucose tolerance (Fig.
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44 5D).
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50 *3.1.5 Cytokine levels in brains of aged APP/PS1 mice*

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2 Brain levels of IFN γ ($p=0.0015$ Fig. 6A; $p=0.0046$), IL-1 β ($p<0.0001$) and IL-4 ($p=0.0002$ Fig.
3 ~~6F; $p=0.0013$~~) were significantly impacted by genotype (Fig. 6A, C and F). ~~Post hoc analysis~~
4 ~~revealed that IFN γ was significantly elevated~~ in brains of 15-18 month-old APP/PS1 mice
5 compared to age-matched ($p<0.01$) and young ($p<0.01$) wild type mice (Fig. 6A). A trend
6 towards elevated IL-1 β was comparable detected in the brains of APP/PS1 mice and
7 compared to age-matched wild types, however a significant increase in IL-1 β protein was
8 detected in the brains of APP/PS1 mice, compared to 17-22 week old wild type mice
9 this
10 failed to reach significance (Fig. 6C; $p=0.0965001$). ~~Furthermore~~Additional analysis
11 indicated that, IL-1 β was significantly elevated in the brains of 15-18 month-old wild type
12 ($p<0.01$) and APP/PS1 ($p<0.0001$) mice, compared to young wild types (Supplementary Fig.
13 1B) (Fig. 6C; $p<0.01$). A significant increase in IL-4 (Supplementary Fig. 1C; $p<0.001$) and
14 IFN γ (Supplementary Fig. 1D; $p<0.01$) was also detected in the brains of aged APP/PS1
15 mice, compared to ~~age-matched ($p<0.001$) and young ($p<0.001$)~~ wild type mice (~~Fig. 6F~~). In
16 addition, Pearson's correlation analysis identified a significant negative correlation between
17 levels of IFN γ and novel object recognition index in APP/PS1 mice (Fig. 7C; $r=-0.8362$,
18 $p=0.0381$), suggesting that higher levels of IFN γ in the brain were associated with worse
19 ORT performance in APP/PS1 mice. No significant correlations were identified between
20 IFN γ and IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ immunopositivity in the cortex or dentate gyrus (Fig. 7D and E).

4. Discussion

21
22 This study showed that peripheral glucose tolerance and insulin sensitivity were comparable
23 between aged APP/PS1 and wild type mice, conflicting with a number of other studies (24,
24 25). It has been suggested that 5/6 hours fasting is optimal for glucose and insulin tolerance
25 tests, as this was sufficient for normalization of glucose levels and phosphorylation of insulin
26 signaling proteins (26, 27). The current study performed glucose tolerance and insulin
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2 sensitivity tests following an overnight fasting period, so it is possible that results presented
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4 here reflect an exaggerated suppression of basal glucose levels in mice as a result of
5
6 prolonged fasting. This suggestion is supported by Jimenez-Palomares *et al.* (28) who also
7
8 found that glucose tolerance and insulin sensitivity were not significantly different in 8
9
10 month-old APP/PS1 mice, compared to wild types following overnight fasting periods.
11
12 Future studies should avoid overnight fasting prior to glucose and insulin tolerance tests in
13
14 order to achieve optimal normalization of metabolic parameters and to avert potentially
15
16 dangerous hypoglycemic effects of insulin. Other reports suggest that insulin insensitivity
17
18 and glucose intolerance also exists in aged animals (29-31), including C57Bl/6 mice (32-34);
19
20 a possible explanation for the similarity between APP/PS1 mice and controls in the present
21
22 study. To better understand the impact of central insulin resistance on global insulin
23
24 utilisation in the APP/PS1 model, future studies should assess the impact of hypothalamic
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26 insulin administration alone and in combination with insulin sensitising drugs, such as
27
28 metformin, in hyperinsulinemic euglycemic clamp models.
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31 Recognition memory was impaired in APP/PS1 mice here, consistent with several
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33 other studies (35-37). However, since wild type controls also exhibited impaired recognition
34
35 memory, the deficits may be related to advanced age, rather than the APP/PS1 genotype; a
36
37 suggestion supported by other studies reporting recognition memory deficits in aged C57Bl/6
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39 mice (38, 39). Another study found several indications of cognitive dysfunction in 18-20
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41 month-old C57Bl/6 mice, including impaired novel location memory, but not object
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43 recognition memory (40). Spatial learning was impaired in aged APP/PS1 mice, in agreement
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45 with other studies (41, 42). Spatial memory recall was impaired in APP/PS1 mice and wild
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47 type mice, similar to Barreto *et al.* (43), who showed that spatial learning and memory were
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49 impaired in 18 month-old C57Bl/6 mice. Other reports have highlighted age-related decline
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51 in learning and memory in C57Bl/6 mice (44, 45) consistent with the findings of the present
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2 study, providing further evidence that there exists age-related deterioration of cognitive
3 function in C57Bl/6 mice. Learning in the reversal water maze task was impaired in aged
4 APP/PS1 mice, compared to controls, while both APP/PS1 mice and wild types failed to
5 recognize the reversal target quadrant. Some (46), but not others (47) have shown that
6 reversal learning and memory are impaired in APP/PS1 mice. Results presented here, suggest
7 that reversal learning is a cognitive domain that is especially vulnerable to the effects of AD
8 pathology in aged mice.
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Amyloid- β ($A\beta$) deposits were detected throughout the brains of 15-18 month-old APP/PS1 mice, while $A\beta$ was undetectable in wild type controls. APP/PS1 mice develop plaque deposition by 6 months of age, which progressively worsens, leading to abundant and widespread $A\beta$ plaque pathology by the age of 14 months (48, 49). The finding that $A\beta$ deposition was significant in APP/PS1 brains and absent from wild types suggests that the spatial memory deficits in both groups were not directly related to $A\beta$ burden.

Oxidative stress levels were similar between APP/PS1 and wild type mice in the cortex and dentate gyrus. This was unexpected given previous reports showing elevated oxidative damage in brains of aged APP/PS1 mice (50-52). However, since aging is associated with accumulation of oxidative stress in the brain (53, 54), results presented here may reflect age-related accumulation of oxidative DNA damage in both APP/PS1 and wild type mice.

IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ was increased in brains of APP/PS1 mice, as has also been observed in AD patients (18, 19, 55) and in experimental models (55, 56). The findings of the present study corroborate those of Talbot *et al.* (18) that demonstrated elevated IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ in the hippocampus of APP/PS1 mice. IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ has been shown to robustly correlate with cognitive impairment and brain insulin resistance associated with AD (18) and is likely related to the cognitive impairment in APP/PS1 mice here. It is interesting to note that the

1
2 increased brain insulin resistance in aged APP/PS1 mice was apparent in the absence of any
3 significant indications of peripheral insulin insensitivity or glucose intolerance.
4

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6 Astrocytes were increased in the cortex and dentate gyrus of APP/PS1 mice,
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8 consistent with previous reports (50, 57). Neuroinflammation and glial cell proliferation,
9
10 recruitment and activation is a commonly associated with AD pathology (13). The fact that
11
12 A β deposition remained substantial in the brains of APP/PS1 mice suggests that clearance of
13
14 A β was minimal, providing support for the proposal that astrocyte function is defective in
15
16 AD (58). ~~E~~Although expression of ~~several~~ inflammatory and insulin signaling genes was
17
18 similar in brains of aged APP/PS1 mice and age-matched wild type controls, ~~comparison~~
19
20 ~~with younger control mice showed that IKK β , ERK2 and mTOR were reduced, while TLR4~~
21
22 ~~was increased in brains of APP/PS1 mice compared to young wild types.~~ It has been shown
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24 previously that expression of TLR4 is up-regulated in brains of APP/PS1 and wild type mice
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26 in an age-related manner (59) and the present report provides further evidence that TLR4
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28 expression in brain is increased with normal aging, to levels comparable with APP/PS1 mice.
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30 Th1 cytokine IFN γ was elevated in brains of APP/PS1 mice compared to ~~young and old~~ wild
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32 types, in agreement with another study that showed age-related enhancement of IFN γ in
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34 brains of AD mice from 3 to 19 months of age (60). It has also been shown that IFN γ has
35
36 opposing functions in AD brain, whereby overexpression of IFN γ in the hippocampus
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38 augments neuroinflammation and worsens A β burden, but abrogates tau pathology and
39
40 enhances synaptic markers and neurogenesis (61). Further experimentation should determine
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42 whether the increased IFN γ in brains of APP/PS1 mice here represents a component of
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44 pathogenic neuroinflammation or an up-regulation of protective processes. A significant
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46 negative correlation was identified here between IFN γ levels and novel object recognition
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48 memory in APP/PS1 mice, in line with a recent study demonstrating improved hippocampal
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50 synaptic plasticity and cognitive performance in mice deficient for IFN γ (62), suggesting that
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1
2 increased IFN γ in the brain may impair cognitive function in aged APP/PS1 mice. The
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4 increase in IFN γ is mirrored by a comparable increase in anti-inflammatory IL-4 in brains of
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6 APP/PS1 mice, which likely reflects an attempt to suppress the Th1 response. Interestingly
7
8 IFN γ has also been implicated in attenuation of insulin signaling (63) and may be similarly
9
10 associated with the brain insulin resistance in the present study. Although we failed to detect
11
12 significant correlations between brain levels of IFN γ and IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶, this potential
13
14 mechanism certainly warrants further exploration.
15

16
17 Previous studies have detected increased IL-1 β in the brains of APP/PS1 mice (64,
18
19 ~~65) in agreement with the present report. The present report, however, detected a non-~~
20
21 ~~significant trend towards an increase in IL-1 β in the brains of APP/PS1 mice, possibly due to~~
22
23 ~~a parallel, age-related elevation of IL-1 β in wild-type mice. It has been demonstrated that A β~~
24
25 ~~stimulates IL-1 β production and secretion via NLRP3-dependent cleavage of pro-IL-1 β by~~
26
27 ~~caspase 1 (66, 67). It is also interesting to note that IL-1 β is the only one of all cytokines~~
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29 ~~measured that was increased in both aged APP/PS1 and wild-type mice, compared to young~~
30
31 ~~wild types.~~ This suggests that IL-1 β is involved with neuroinflammation that accompanies
32
33 normal aging, while IFN γ and IL-4 are not part of the normal process of aging, but are
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35 components of the neuroinflammatory processes associated with AD, since these were
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37 elevated in aged APP/PS1 mice, compared to both young and old wild types.
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41 Expression of mTOR and ERK2 was ~~reduced-comparable~~ in brains of aged APP/PS1
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43 mice, compared to ~~young~~-wild types. Extracellular signal-regulated kinase 2 (ERK2)
44
45 signaling facilitates learning and memory (68, 69), suggesting that impaired cognitive
46
47 function in aged mice may be due, in part to reduced expression of ERK2 in the brain.
48
49 Dineley *et al.* (70) showed that A β reduces ERK2 activity and that ERK2 expression is
50
51 down-regulated in brains of 20 month-old AD mice, ~~similar to results presented here.~~
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53 Similarly, dysregulation of signaling downstream of mTOR has been demonstrated in post-
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1 mortem brain tissue from AD patients (71), ~~consistent with the reduced mTOR expression in~~
2 ~~APP/PS1 brain shown here~~. Signaling through mTOR contributes to synaptic plasticity,
3
4 learning and memory (72, 73). It has also been shown that insulin promotes neurogenesis,
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6 dendrite and synapse formation by signaling through IRS-mediated activation of mTOR (74,
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8 75). Amyloid- β ($A\beta$) perturbs mTOR signaling in neurons (76) and mTOR inhibition impairs
9
10 hippocampal LTP in an AD mouse model (77). Our results suggest that expression of insulin
11
12 signaling components is comparable in aged APP/PS1 and wild-type mice. Disruption of
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14 insulin signaling in the brain may be involved in the pathophysiology of AD and may
15
16 contribute to cognitive impairments associated with aging, a proposition that should be
17
18 further probed in future studies.
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23 Synaptophysin staining was reduced in the polymorphic layer of the dentate gyrus of
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25 APP/PS1 mice. Several previous studies have shown that synapse density is decreased in the
26
27 brains of APP/PS1 mice (78-80). These studies did not consider the discrete cellular layers of
28
29 the hippocampus and may have overlooked subtle variation in synapse density between
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31 subregions (78-80). However, one report showed that synaptophysin levels in the
32
33 hippocampus of 7 and 17 month-old APP/PS1 mice were similar to age-matched wild types
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35 (81), which more closely aligns with the findings of the present study. It has also been shown
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37 in Tg2576 mice, that synaptophysin levels were no different from controls at 3, 9, 14 and 19
38
39 months of age (82), while Xu *et al.* (45) reported age-related decline in hippocampal synaptic
40
41 spine density in C57Bl/6 mice. Results of the present report reflect a similar pattern, with
42
43 synapse density being comparable to wild types in 15-18 month-old APP/PS1 mice. Since
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45 synapse density in the polymorphic layer was reduced in aged transgenic mice, it is
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47 reasonable to suggest that this subregion was selectively susceptible to synaptotoxicity
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49 associated with AD neuropathology.
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2 A limitation of the present study is the absence of young cohorts of wild type and
3 APP/PS1 mice. Based on evidence from the literature, it is likely that peripheral insulin
4 sensitivity, cognitive function and synapse density were influenced by aging. Future studies
5 should include groups of young wild type and transgenic mice in order to more robustly
6 characterize the differences between AD pathology and changes associated with normal
7 aging, throughout the lifecourse. Another limitation of the present report is that cytokines and
8 mRNA were measured in whole hemi-brains, while analysis of immunohistochemistry was
9 performed on brain sections allowing for quantification within discrete brain regions. This
10 means that comparing the results of our biochemical assays with our immunohistochemical
11 data is difficult. Future studies will analyse mRNA and associated proteins and activation
12 states in discrete brain regions to allow for more accurate demarcation of differences between
13 APP/PS1 mice and wild types with regard to insulin signaling dysregulation and
14 inflammation the brain.
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29 Nevertheless, this study has demonstrated memory deficits and neuroinflammation in
30 aged APP/PS1 and wild type mice. Astrocyte accumulation, IL-1 β and IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ levels
31 were increased in the brain of APP/PS1 mice in the absence of systemic insulin insensitivity
32 or glucose intolerance. Pharmacological agents targeting impaired insulin signaling and
33 inflammation in the brain may prove efficacious in treating AD, a suggestion requiring
34 further investigation.
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Declaration / Conflict of Interest

All authors declare that there is no duality of interest associated with their contribution to this manuscript.

Author Contribution Statement

PMcC conceived the study, participated in the analysis and interpretation of data, drafted the manuscript and revised it critically for intellectual content. PD participated in data generation, analysis and interpretation and drafted the manuscript and revised it critically for intellectual content. AE participated in data generation and analysis. All authors approved the final version of the manuscript. PD is the guarantor of this work and, as such, had full access to all the data in the study and takes responsibility for the integrity of the data and the accuracy of the data analysis.

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13 **Figure Legends**

14
15 **Figure 1. Learning and memory in aged APP/PS1 and wild type mice.** The acquisition

16
17 training phase of the Morris water maze (MWM) involved four training sessions per day

18
19 over four consecutive days, followed by a probe trial on the fifth day, 24 hours following the

20
21 final training session. Escape latency during the training phase is shown (A), as is the

22
23 proportion of time spent in each quadrant during the probe trial by 15-18 month-old wild

24
25 type (solid line with circles; D) and APP/PS1 (dotted line with squares; G) mice. Reversal

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27 water maze acquisition training began 24 hours following the MWM probe trial and

28
29 consisted of four consecutive days with four training sessions per day, followed by a reversal

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31 probe trial on the fifth day. Illustrated are training phase escape latency (B) and time spent in

32
33 each quadrant during the reversal probe trial by wild type (E) and APP/PS1 (H) mice. For

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35 the novel object recognition task, recognition index, a measure of the percentage of time

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37 spent exploring either object, is illustrated in the acquisition phase (C) during exposure to

38
39 two identical objects, and the test phase (F), in the presence of one familiar (black bars) and

40
41 one novel (white bars) object. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ APP/PS1 vs. wild type; ~~Data represent~~

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43 ~~mean \pm SEM for 13-15 mice per group,~~ two-way repeated measures ANOVA with

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45 Bonferroni's *post-hoc* test (A, B), ordinary one-way ANOVA with Dunnett's *post-hoc* test

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47 (D, E, G, H), multiple *t* tests with Holm-Šidák's *post-hoc* test (C, F). Data represent mean \pm

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49 SEM for 13-15 mice per group.
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4 **Figure 2. A β deposition and IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ in the cerebral cortex and dentate gyrus of**
5 **aged APP/PS1 and wild type mice.** Representative images (10x magnification) are shown
6 that depict A β staining in the cerebral cortex (A) and dentate gyrus (B) of 15-18 month old
7 wild type mice and the cerebral cortex (E) and dentate gyrus (F) of age-matched APP/PS1
8 mice. Also shown is an exemplary magnified image (20x magnification) of A β staining in
9 brains of wild type (C) and APP/PS1 (G) mice. Quantification of A β immunopositivity in
10 the cortex (D) and dentate gyrus (H) of 15-18 month old APP/PS1 and wild type mice is also
11 shown. Representative images (20x magnification) are also shown that depict IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶
12 staining in the cerebral cortex (I) and dentate gyrus (J) of 15-18 month old wild type mice
13 and the cerebral cortex (M) and dentate gyrus (N) of age-matched APP/PS1 mice. Also
14 shown are exemplary magnified images (40x magnification) from wild type (K) and
15 APP/PS1 (O) mice. Quantification of IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ immunopositivity in cortex (L) and
16 dentate gyrus (P) of 15-18 month old APP/PS1 and wild type mice is also illustrated.
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* p <0.05, **** p <0.0001, Student's t test. Data represent mean \pm SEM for 6 per group.

Figure 3. Oxidative stress and astrocytes in the cerebral cortex and dentate gyrus of
aged APP/PS1 and wild type mice. Representative images (20x magnification) are shown
that depict the 8-oxoguanine staining in cerebral cortex (A) and dentate gyrus (B) of 15-18
month old wild type mice and cerebral cortex (E) and dentate gyrus (F) of age-matched
APP/PS1 mice. Also shown are exemplary magnified images (40x magnification) from wild
type (C) and APP/PS1 (G) mice. Quantification of 8-oxoguanine immunopositivity in cortex
(D) and dentate gyrus (H) of 15-18 month old APP/PS1 and wild type mice is also
illustrated. Representative images (20x magnification) are also shown that depict GFAP
staining in the cerebral cortex (I) and dentate gyrus (J) of 15-18 month-old wild type mice

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2 and the cerebral cortex (M) and dentate gyrus (N) of age-matched APP/PS1 mice. Also
3 shown are exemplary magnified images (100x magnification) from wild type (K) and
4 APP/PS1 (O) mice. Quantification of GFAP immunopositivity in cortex (L) and dentate
5 gyrus (P) of 15-18 month old APP/PS1 and wild type mice is also shown. *** $p < 0.001$.
6 Student's *t* test. Data represent mean \pm SEM for 6 per group.
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14 **Figure 4. Synapse density is decreased in the polymorphic layer of the dentate gyrus in**
15 **APP/PS1 mice.** Illustrated are representative images depicting synaptophysin staining of
16 brain sections from 15-18 month-old wild type (A, B, C) and APP/PS1 (D, E, F) mice. A
17 and D show the polymorphic layer (PL), granule cell layer (GCL) and molecular layer (ML)
18 of the dentate gyrus. C and D show the stratum radiatum (SR), stratum pyramidale (SP) and
19 stratum oriens (SO) of the hippocampus, while B and E show the inner (IC) and outer (OC)
20 cerebral cortex. Also illustrated is quantification of synaptophysin optical density values for
21 the polymorphic layer, granule cell layer and molecular layer of the dentate gyrus and the
22 stratum radiatum, stratum pyramidale and stratum oriens of the hippocampus, inner and outer
23 cortex of 15-18 month-old APP/PS1 and wild type mice (G). * $p < 0.05$. Student's *t* tests.
24 Data represent mean \pm SEM for 6 per group.
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40 **Figure 5. Peripheral insulin sensitivity, glucose tolerance and expression of**
41 **inflammatory and insulin signaling genes in brains of aged APP/PS1 mice.** Illustrated is
42 quantification of the expression of genes associated with inflammatory pathways and insulin
43 signaling in brains of 15-18 month-old APP/PS1 mice (black bars), compared with age-
44 matched wild type controls (white bars) (A). ~~Also shown is quantification of expression of~~
45 ~~the same genes in aged APP/PS1 and wild type mice, compared with 17-22 week old wild~~
46 ~~types (dark grey bars) (B).~~ Also shown are blood glucose levels following insulin injection
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2 | (**BE**) and following glucose injection (**CD**). Wild type (solid line with circles) and APP/PS1
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4 mice (dotted line with squares) aged 15-18 months were administered insulin or glucose via
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6 i.p. injection and blood glucose levels were measured at 15, 30 and 60 minutes post-injection.
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8 | * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$. ~~Data represent mean \pm SEM for 5 per group, p , ordinary two-way~~
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10 ANOVA with Holm-Šidák's *post-hoc* test (**A**, **B**) or 13-15 per group, two-way repeated
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12 measures ANOVA with Holm-Šidák's *post-hoc* test (**BE**, **CD**). Data represent mean \pm SEM
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14 for 5 per group.
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19 **Figure 6. Cytokine levels in the brains of aged APP/PS1 and wild type mice.** MSD

20 multiplex analysis of 8 cytokines was performed on supernatant extracted from brain tissue.

21 Protein levels of IFN γ (**A**), IL-10 (**B**), IL-1 β (**C**), IL-12p70 (**D**), IL-2 (**E**), IL-4 (**F**), IL-5 (**E**),

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23 IL-6 (**G**) and KC/GRO (CXCL1) (**H**) were measured and compared between 15-18 month-

24
25 old APP/PS1 mice (black bars) and, age-matched wild types (white bars) and younger mice,

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27 aged 17-22 weeks (dark grey bars). ** $p < 0.01$; Student's t tests. *** $p < 0.001$,

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29 *** $p < 0.0001$. Data represent mean \pm SEM for 6 per group, ordinary one-way ANOVA

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31 with Holm-Šidák's *post-hoc* test.
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38 **Figure 7. Correlations between IFN γ , IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ and novel object recognition**

39 memory in aged APP/PS1 and wild type mice. Pearson's correlation analysis was

40 performed between IRS-1 pSer⁶¹⁶ immunopositivity and novel object recognition index (**A**,

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42 **B**), between IFN γ and novel object recognition index (**C**) and between IFN γ and IRS-1

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44 pSer⁶¹⁶ immunopositivity (**D**, **E**) in wild type (open circles and dotted best fit line) and

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46 APP/PS1 (black squares and solid best fit line) mice. Lines of best fit, r and p values were

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48 also added to the graphs. Each data point represents an XY pair for a total of 6 XY pairs per

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50 genotype on each graph. Significance of correlation was determined using two-tailed t tests.
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Supplementary Figure 1. Cytokines and gene expression in brains of young wild type mice. Quantification of expression of inflammatory and insulin signaling genes in the brains of young wild type mice (17-22 weeks old) is shown (black bars), compared to aged wild types (white bars) and APP/PS1 mice (dark grey bars) (A). Also illustrated are brain levels of IFN γ (B), IL-1 β (C) and IL-4 (D) in young wild type mice, compared with aged wild types and APP/PS1 mice. * p <0.05, ** p <0.01, *** p <0.001, **** p <0.0001; ordinary one-way ANOVA with Holm-Šidák's *post-hoc* test (A) and Student's *t* test (B-D). Data represent mean \pm SEM for 5 (A) or 6 (B-D) per group.

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