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1 **Metabolic reprogramming: an innate cellular defense mechanism**  
2 **against intracellular bacteria?**

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34 **Abstract**

35 The limited metabolic resources of a cell represent an intriguing “conflict of interest” during  
36 host-pathogen interactions, as the battle for nutrients might determine the outcome of an  
37 infection. To adapt their metabolic needs, innate immune cells such as monocytes,  
38 macrophages or dendritic cells reprogram their metabolism upon activation by microbial  
39 compounds. In turn, infection by intracellular bacteria provokes metabolic alterations of the  
40 host cell that benefit the pathogen. Here we discuss the state-of-the-art knowledge on  
41 metabolic reprogramming of host cells upon activation or infection with intracellular bacteria.  
42 The study of the host- and pathogen-driven metabolic alterations that seem to co-exist during  
43 infection is an emerging field that will define the metabolic pathways that might be targeted  
44 to combat infection.

## 46 **Introduction**

47 Cellular metabolism comprises the controlled biochemical processes that occur within a cell  
48 to maintain life. It is generally divided in, anabolic processes (the build-up of  
49 macromolecules) and catabolic processes (the breakdown of macromolecules). To maintain  
50 constant cellular conditions in response to changes in the environment (homeostasis) a cell  
51 regulates its specific needs by the fine-tuning of these metabolic pathways.

52 During host-pathogen interactions, host and pathogen fight for the nutrients needed for  
53 cellular catabolism, as resources are generally limited [1,2]. Obtaining energy and ready-to-  
54 use basic molecules is key to build up new cellular components, to grow and reproduce, or to  
55 respond to environmental changes. Thus the result of this metabolic clash is key for the  
56 outcome of host-pathogen interactions and the infection process.

57 Cellular metabolism is one of the most complex and intricate cellular systems. To simplify,  
58 two main catabolic programs work to obtain energy, “glycolysis” and “oxidative  
59 phosphorylation” (OXPHOS) (Figure 1A). During glycolysis that is performed in the cytosol,  
60 cells convert glucose into pyruvate by anaerobic glycolysis and then pyruvate is fermented to  
61 lactate. Thereby 2 ATP molecules are generated per molecule of glucose. During OXPHOS  
62 the pyruvate generated by anaerobic glycolysis is routed to mitochondria where it is oxidized  
63 to CO<sub>2</sub> via the tricarboxylic acid (TCA) cycle. The released energy (stored as NADH) is used  
64 by the electron transport chain (ETC) to pump protons across the membrane. This generates  
65 an electrochemical gradient used to synthesize ATP by the mitochondrial F<sub>1</sub>-F<sub>0</sub>-ATPase.  
66 Under the OXPHOS program, the cell produces 36 ATPs per molecule of glucose [3].

67 Interestingly, many proliferating cells (such as embryonic stem cells, cancer cells or  
68 activated T-cells) prefer the glycolytic program although this metabolic pathway is less  
69 efficient for ATP production as compared to OXPHOS. In contrast, tumour cells convert most  
70 of the absorbed glucose to lactate even under oxygen-rich conditions, a program that was  
71 termed “aerobic glycolysis” or the “Warburg effect” (Figure 1B) [4]. Thus elevated glucose  
72 uptake and lactate secretion are metabolic hallmarks of solid tumours [5,6]. Although the  
73 question why cancer cells prefer a “less efficient” metabolic pathway to grow is still a matter  
74 of debate, it seems that aerobic glycolysis coupled to fermentation is a fast process, easy to  
75 regulate, that fulfils all metabolic requirements of a proliferating cell. The Warburg program  
76 maximizes biosynthetic pathways by redirecting cytosolic glycolysis and the mitochondrial  
77 TCA cycle to the biosynthesis of nucleotides, amino acids and lipids (Figure 1B). The fast  
78 withdrawal of pyruvate and TCA intermediates in the mitochondria, which are normally

79 dedicated to the OXPHOS program and their redirection to biosynthetic pathways, explains  
80 the reduction of oxygen consumption after the switch to the Warburg metabolism. Thus  
81 Warburg metabolism seems to be induced to reprogram cellular metabolism towards  
82 macromolecular synthesis.

83 Reprogramming to Warburg-like metabolism has been observed during activation of diverse  
84 immune cells and, interestingly, also during infection of human cells by intracellular bacterial  
85 pathogens such as *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* [7-11], *Legionella pneumophila* [12], *Brucella*  
86 *abortus* [13], *Chlamydia trachomatis* [14,15] or *C. pneumoniae* [16]. Although the Warburg  
87 program in proliferating T-cells and cancer cells can be seen as program necessary for  
88 proliferation, the induction of the Warburg program in infected cells raises intriguing  
89 questions. Why non-proliferating immune cells, such as monocytes, dendritic cells (DCs) or  
90 macrophages, switch to a Warburg-like metabolism during infection? What is the impact of  
91 such metabolic changes on the pathogen that obtains its nutrients only from the infected host  
92 cell? Is metabolic reprogramming beneficial or detrimental for intracellular bacteria? Are  
93 these metabolic alterations driven by the host cell itself in response to bacteria, as a defence  
94 mechanism, or are they induced by the pathogen for its own benefit?

95

### 96 **Non-proliferating immune cells reprogram metabolic pathways upon stimulation with** 97 **microbial compounds**

98 Monocytes, DCs and macrophages are differentiated, non-proliferative, innate immune cells  
99 that, once activated by microbial stimuli, orchestrate the activation of other immune cells  
100 through the secretion of immuno-regulatory cytokines, but they also increase glycolytic fluxes  
101 and modulate their metabolism.

102 In DCs, glucose uptake is increased and accompanied by lactate production shortly after  
103 their activation by microbial compounds that engage Toll-like receptors (TLRs) such as  
104 bacterial lipopolysaccharide (LPS). After TLR stimulation, a signalling cascade involving  
105 TBK1, IKK $\alpha$  and Akt promotes the association of the glycolytic enzyme hexokinase-2 (HK2)  
106 with mitochondria increasing its enzymatic activity and therefore the glycolytic flux, however,  
107 cellular ATP is still provided by OXPHOS [17]. At these early time points, glycolysis  
108 supplies DCs with citrate, which fuels the synthesis of fatty acids that are required by  
109 activated DCs to increase the size of the endoplasmic reticulum (ER) and the Golgi apparatus  
110 [17]. Thus, the fast and early metabolic switch of DCs to a glycolytic program due to the  
111 stimulation with microbial compounds is linked to fatty acid synthesis and the adoption of the

112 secretory state. At 24 h of DC activation by LPS, iNOS-derived NO inhibits cellular  
113 OXPHOS, which almost disappears and DCs rely exclusively on glycolysis, a Warburg-like  
114 metabolic program is installed [18].

115 In murine bone-marrow-derived macrophages (BMDMs), metabolic reprogramming to a  
116 glycolytic Warburg-like program is necessary for transcription of the pro-inflammatory  
117 cytokine IL1 $\beta$ . Upon LPS stimulation, BMDMs show a broken TCA cycle and intermediates,  
118 such as succinate or citrate, accumulate [19]. Furthermore, LPS induces the up-regulation of  
119 pyruvate kinase M2 (PKM2) dimer and tetramer levels. In its enzymatically inactive form  
120 (dimers), increased PKM2 induces succinate accumulation [20]. PKM2 dimers also migrate to  
121 the nucleus where they induce PKM2-mediated transcription of IL1 $\beta$ . In its enzymatically  
122 active form (tetramers), LPS-induction of PKM2 also increases the rate of glycolytic fluxes,  
123 as the reaction catalysed by PKM2 is the rate-limiting step of glycolysis. Accumulated  
124 succinate stabilizes HIF1 $\alpha$ , which can now translocate to the nucleus and, together with  
125 PKM2 dimers, drive IL1 $\beta$  gene expression. Succinate in mitochondria is oxidized by  
126 succinate dehydrogenase and leads to the reverse flow of the ETC, which produces  
127 mitochondrial reactive oxygen species (mROS) that also induce HIF1 $\alpha$ -mediated IL1 $\beta$  mRNA  
128 expression [21]. Accumulation of citrate is due to the LPS-induced expression of the  
129 mitochondrial citrate carrier, which diverts citrate from the mitochondrial TCA cycle to the  
130 cytoplasm. Cytoplasmic citrate is then used to generate NO, ROS and prostaglandins by  
131 BMDMs, as well as to produce the antimicrobial metabolite itaconate [22-24].

132 Taken together, exposure of murine macrophages to bacterial LPS reprograms their  
133 metabolism from OXPHOS to glycolysis, rewiring TCA intermediates such as citrate and  
134 succinate to biosynthetic pathways. As itaconate has direct antimicrobial properties against a  
135 wide range of intracellular bacteria, such as *M. tuberculosis*, *Salmonella enterica* or  
136 *L. pneumophila* [25], the redirection of citrate for the synthesis of itaconate represents a  
137 prominent example of how metabolic reprogramming of activated macrophages becomes a  
138 defence mechanism against infection by intracellular bacteria. In addition to its antibacterial  
139 properties, itaconate has also immunoregulatory functions during infection due to its  
140 inhibitory actions on the production of mROS and certain cytokines and chemokines as  
141 shown for BMDMs infected with *S. enterica* serovar Typhimurium [26], and for mice  
142 infected with *M. tuberculosis* [27].

143 Recently it was shown that human monocytes isolated from blood also shift to a Warburg-  
144 like metabolism when stimulated with LPS, but not upon stimulation with the TLR2 ligand

145 Pam3Cys (P3C) or whole-pathogen lysates. Indeed, in P3C stimulated monocytes, increased  
146 glycolysis was accompanied by increased OXPHOS, which was required for retention of their  
147 phagocytic capacity and cytokine production [28]. Elevated succinate, itaconate and citrate  
148 levels were only observed in LPS-stimulated monocytes, but not in P3C-stimulated  
149 monocytes. Interestingly, exposure of human monocytes to *M. tuberculosis* whole cell lysates  
150 did not affect OXPHOS, in contrast to infection of monocytes with living *M. tuberculosis* or  
151 after exposure to LPS as OXPHOS reduction was observed [9,28]. Moreover, exposure of  
152 monocytes to *Escherichia coli* or *Staphylococcus aureus* whole-cell lysates leads to increased  
153 OXPHOS [28], suggesting that heterogeneous metabolic responses may be elicited depending  
154 on the specific pathogen and TLR activation pattern involved.

155 These results indicate that metabolic reprogramming of innate immune cells upon  
156 stimulation with microbial components rewires cellular metabolism to biosynthetic pathways  
157 that drive growth of cell size and production and secretion of cytokines and antimicrobial  
158 compounds. It is critical to clarify whether these metabolic alterations are stimuli-specific  
159 (LPS vs. P3C), cell-type specific (macrophages vs. monocytes vs. DCs), host-species specific  
160 (mouse vs. human) and/or bacterial-species specific (*S. aureus* vs. *M. tuberculosis*).

161

## 162 **Intracellular bacteria reprogram the host metabolism to a Warburg-like metabolism**

163 *M. tuberculosis* [7-11], *L. pneumophila* [12], *B. abortus* [13], *C. trachomatis* [14,15],  
164 *C. pneumoniae* [16] or *Listeria monocytogenes* [29,30], were reported to modulate the  
165 metabolism of their host cells to a Warburg-like metabolism [31]. Yet only few studies  
166 addressed the metabolism of primary cells during infection thus one must be careful with the  
167 interpretation of metabolic changes as most cancer cell lines have an enhanced Warburg  
168 metabolism due to their tumour origin [31]. This has been demonstrated for *L. monocytogenes*,  
169 as high induction of glucose uptake and glycolysis was only observed in primary BMDMs,  
170 and not in the murine macrophage-like cells line J774A.1. However, intracellular bacteria  
171 replicated to five fold higher numbers within the cancer cell line than in primary cells,  
172 suggesting that the Warburg metabolism exhibited by cell lines might promote bacterial  
173 replication [29].

174 The changes to a Warburg-like metabolism induced by many intracellular bacteria come in  
175 different styles (Figure 3). *Chlamydia trachomatis* infection of primary human umbilical vein  
176 endothelial cells leads to a specific Warburg-like program. Cellular glucose uptake and the  
177 phosphate pentose pathway (PPP), a nucleotide biosynthetic pathway derived from the

178 glycolytic flux are increased [15] (Figure 3A, *Chl*). The infection-dependent upregulation of  
179 the PPP supplies the pathogen with nucleotides for intracellular replication, which serve as  
180 nutrients together with amino acids, and lipids that *C. trachomatis* needs to sequester from the  
181 host cell [32]. Thus, the induction of this Warburg-like program during infection seems to  
182 benefit the pathogen.

183 *L. pneumophila* induces a Warburg-like metabolism characterized by the upregulation of  
184 glycolysis and reduction of OXPHOS dependent on the injection of the bacterial effector  
185 MitF in the host cell that induces reduction of OXPHOS through fragmentation of  
186 mitochondrial networks [12]. This metabolic reprogramming of infected cells to a Warburg-  
187 like program appears essential for bacterial growth and might be related to the need of amino  
188 acids, the main source of energy for growing *L. pneumophila* [3,33], which can be  
189 synthesized from redirected glycolytic and/or TCA intermediates (Figure 3B, *Lp*).

190 *M. tuberculosis* infection induces a Warburg-like program when infecting human primary  
191 macrophages, that is characterized by decreased OXPHOS and upregulation of glucose uptake  
192 and glycolysis coupled with the redirection of glycolytic intermediates to the synthesis of  
193 large lipid bodies that accumulate in the macrophage (Figure 3C, *Mtb*). These lipid bodies,  
194 together with the lactate produced by glycolysis, serve as nutrients for intracellular growth of  
195 the pathogen [34-36], suggesting that the biosynthetic role of the Warburg-like program  
196 benefits the intracellular replication of *M. tuberculosis*.

197 Although it is not clear yet whether *Salmonella enterica*, induces a Warburg-like  
198 metabolism in the host cells or not, it has been reported that *S. enterica* modulates the  
199 metabolism of the cell it infects. During *in vivo* infection of mice with *S. enterica* serovar  
200 *typhimurium* OXPHOS is completely shut-off [37], while glycolysis might be induced [38].  
201 However, the most prominent metabolic alteration induced by *S. typhimurium* seems the  
202 piracy of glucose by the pathogen. In mouse BMDMs *Salmonella* disrupts glycolytic fluxes to  
203 reroute glucose from host macrophages to its vacuole (Figure 3A, *St*) and thereby this  
204 pathogen reduces host glucose availability [39,40]. Interestingly, inhibition of glycolytic  
205 fluxes creates a unique metabolic defect that activates the NLRP3 inflammasome [40].  
206

## 207 **Intracellular bacteria modulate autophagy, a catabolic program and a cellular defense** 208 **system**

209 Another important metabolic response to infection is the cellular process known as  
210 autophagy, a self-degradative process that is key for balancing sources of energy in response

211 to nutrient stress and to remove intracellular pathogens in response to infection [41-43].  
212 Interestingly, autophagy also regulates cytokine production and secretion in immune cells  
213 upon microbial stimulation [44,45].

214 Host-driven and pathogen-driven alterations of autophagy occur during infection with  
215 intracellular bacteria. As host-induced autophagy degrades invading pathogens, evasion of  
216 autophagy is key for pathogens such as *M. tuberculosis*, *S. typhimurium* or *L. pneumophila*  
217 that inhibit autophagy initiation upstream of autophagosome formation, or *Shigella flexneri*  
218 that evades autophagy recognition by masking the bacterial surface [46-49]. Interestingly,  
219 *L. pneumophila* encodes two secreted effectors, RavZ and LpSPL that inhibit autophagosome  
220 formation at two different stages [47,50]. Other intracellular bacteria such as *Anaplasma*  
221 *phagocytophilum*, *Yersinia pseudotuberculosis*, *Coxiella burnetii* and *Francisella tularensis*  
222 hijack autophagosomes during infection to redirect the by-products of the autophagic  
223 degradation of cellular components to their vacuoles for their own nutritional use, which  
224 finally promotes bacterial replication [51]. For instance, *A. phagocytophilum* secretes the  
225 effector Ats-1 to induce autophagosome formation to obtain nutrients contained in them [52],  
226 showing that pathogens may activate autophagy also for their benefit.

227 Taken together, these results suggest that modulation of autophagy during bacterial  
228 infection is host- as well as pathogen-driven and leads to alterations of the metabolism and the  
229 immune defences of the infected cell.

230

### 231 **Concluding remarks**

232 Some metabolic host responses, such as activation of the HIF1 $\alpha$  axis, commonly occur in  
233 macrophages and other cell types upon bacterial infection [53]. However, pathogen specific  
234 reprogramming of the cellular metabolism [28] and metabolic alterations triggered by  
235 bacterial effectors [12], which seem beneficial for the pathogen, also exist. A recurrent debate  
236 is whether the observed metabolic changes in infected cells are host-driven in response to  
237 bacterial invasion, or driven by the pathogen to benefit its intracellular survival and  
238 replication. As some metabolic alterations such as autophagy modulation or induction of  
239 Warburg-like programs, seem dependent on bacterial effectors and beneficial for the pathogen,  
240 both processes seem to happen in parallel and thus the observed metabolic phenotypes during  
241 infection are a mixture of host-driven and pathogen-driven metabolic reprogramming,  
242 reflecting the battle for resources in an infected cell.

243 Furthermore, some pathogen-mediated metabolic alterations during infection seem to trigger  
244 host immune responses. An example is the NLRP3 inflammasome activation following the  
245 inhibition of glycolytic fluxes at the level of GAPDH by *S. enterica* [40], or the binding of  
246 bacterial sugars to the glycolytic enzyme HK2, a member of the sugar kinase family that  
247 binds glucose and surprisingly triggers NLRP3 inflammasome activation when binding  
248 bacterial peptidoglycan-derived N-acetylglucosamine [54].

249 Although many puzzling enigmas remain to be clarified, a novel aspect may emerge from  
250 the “immune surveillance hypothesis” [55]. While this hypothesis defends that pathogen-  
251 mediated disruption of host physiology leads to immune activation, we think that an  
252 additional novel aspect should be added: specific checkpoints might exist along cellular  
253 metabolic pathways that, when altered, trigger immune responses such as inflammasome  
254 activation. We thus suggest the term “*Danger-Associated Metabolic Modifications*”  
255 (DAMMs) for alterations in the metabolism of host cells that trigger defence responses.  
256 OXPHOS dysfunction, altered glycolytic fluxes or piracy of metabolic intermediates induced  
257 by intracellular bacteria might be DAMMs linking pathogen-driven and host-driven metabolic  
258 reprogramming. Future work should shed light on these exciting and complex host-pathogen  
259 interactions.

260

261 **Declarations of interest:** none.

262

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266

267

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- 449

450 **Figure legends**

451

452 **Figure 1. General cellular metabolism (A) and the metabolic Warburg program (B).**

453 Large arrows and pathway names in bold represent increased metabolic fluxes. Anabolic  
454 pathways appear in violet. Blue electron transport chain (ETC): active optimal OXPHOS;  
455 pink ETC: reduced OXPHOS.

456

457 **Figure 2. Metabolic reprogramming of innate immune cells upon exposure to TLR4 or**

458 **TLR2 ligands. (A)** In DCs, TLR4 engagement by LPS increases glycolysis through the  
459 activation of a TBK1-Akt-HK2 signalling axis. Glycolysis supplies DCs with citrate, which  
460 fuels the synthesis of fatty acids that are required by activated DCs to increase their secretory  
461 capacities. **(B)** In BMDM, LPS induces dimer and tetramer levels of PKM2. Increased PKM2  
462 dimers lead to succinate accumulation and dimers also migrate to the nucleus, where they  
463 induce IL1 $\beta$  transcription. LPS-induction of PKM2 tetramers increases the rate of glycolysis.  
464 A broken TCA cycle leads to OXPHOS reduction and succinate and citrate accumulation.  
465 Accumulated succinate stabilizes HIF1 $\alpha$  that can be translocated to the nucleus and drive  
466 IL1 $\beta$  gene expression. In mitochondria, succinate oxidation leads to mROS production and  
467 subsequent HIF1 $\alpha$ -mediated IL1 $\beta$  mRNA expression. Accumulated citrate is used to generate  
468 NO, ROS and prostaglandins by BMDMs, as well as to produce the antimicrobial metabolite  
469 itaconate. **(C)** Human monocytes shift to a Warburg-like metabolism when stimulated with  
470 LPS, but not upon stimulation with the TLR2 ligand P3C. In P3C-stimulated monocytes,  
471 increased glycolysis is accompanied by increased OXPHOS. Elevated succinate, itaconate  
472 and citrate levels were observed in LPS-stimulated but not in P3C-stimulated monocytes.

473

474 **Figure 3. Metabolic reprogramming of host cells infected by intracellular bacteria. (A)**

475 *Salmonella enterica* serovar Typhimurium (*St*) diverts glucose to the bacterial vacuole, while  
476 *Chlamydia spp.* (*Chl*) induce the Pentose Phosphate Pathway (PPP) to produce nucleotides for  
477 bacterial replication. **(B)** *Legionella pneumophila* (*Lp*) induces glycolysis, reduces OXPHOS,  
478 and might take advantage of this metabolism to acquire amino acids from the host cell. **(C)**  
479 *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* (*Mtb*) induces glycolysis, reduces OXPHOS, and increase fatty  
480 acids synthesis to use lipid bodies and glycolytic-generated lactate as nutrients for its own  
481 growth.

482





