

# Photomodulation of G Protein-Coupled Adenosine Receptors by a Novel Light-Switchable Ligand

María Isabel Bahamonde,<sup>†</sup> Jaume Taura,<sup>‡</sup> Silvia Paoletta,<sup>§</sup> Andrei A. Gakh,<sup>§</sup> Saibal Chakraborty,<sup>§</sup> Jordi Hernando,<sup>¶</sup> Víctor Fernández-Dueñas,<sup>‡</sup> Kenneth A. Jacobson,<sup>\*,§</sup> Pau Gorostiza,<sup>\*,†,¶,||</sup> and Francisco Ciruela<sup>\*,‡</sup>

<sup>†</sup>Institute for Bioengineering of Catalonia (IBEC), 08028 Barcelona, Spain

<sup>‡</sup>Unitat de Farmacologia, Departament Patologia i Terapèutica Experimental, Facultat de Medicina, IDIBELL, Universitat de Barcelona, L'Hospitalet de Llobregat, 08907 Barcelona, Spain

<sup>§</sup>Molecular Recognition Section, Laboratory of Bioorganic Chemistry, National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland 20892, United States

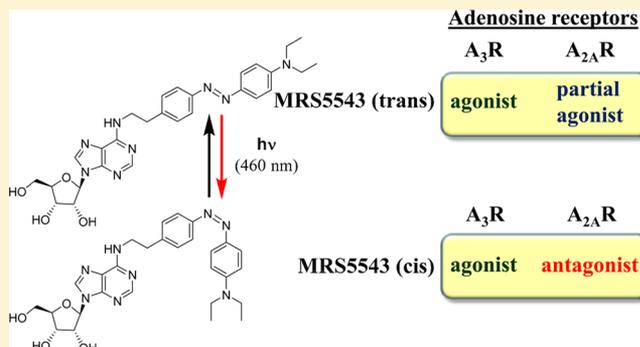
<sup>¶</sup>Departament de Química, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Cerdanyola del Vallès, 08193 Barcelona, Spain

<sup>||</sup>Institució Catalana de Recerca i Estudis Avançats (ICREA), 08010 Barcelona, Spain

<sup>||</sup>Centro de Investigación Biomédica en Red en Bioingeniería, Biomateriales y Nanomedicina (CIBER-BBN), 50118 Zaragoza, Spain

## Supporting Information

**ABSTRACT:** The adenosinergic system operates through G protein-coupled adenosine receptors, which have become promising therapeutic targets for a wide range of pathological conditions. However, the ubiquity of adenosine receptors and the eventual lack of selectivity of adenosine-based drugs have frequently diminished their therapeutic potential. Accordingly, here we aimed to develop a new generation of light-switchable adenosine receptor ligands that change their intrinsic activity upon irradiation, thus allowing the spatiotemporal control of receptor functioning (i.e., receptor activation/inactivation dependent on location and timing). Therefore, we synthesized an orthosteric, photoisomerizable, and nonselective adenosine receptor agonist, nucleoside derivative MRS5543 containing an aryl diazo linkage on the N<sup>6</sup> substituent, which in the dark (relaxed isomer) behaved as a full adenosine A<sub>3</sub> receptor (A<sub>3</sub>R) and partial adenosine A<sub>2A</sub> receptor (A<sub>2A</sub>R) agonist. Conversely, upon photoisomerization with blue light (460 nm), it remained a full A<sub>3</sub>R agonist but became an A<sub>2A</sub>R antagonist. Interestingly, molecular modeling suggested that structural differences encountered within the third extracellular loop of each receptor could modulate the intrinsic, receptor subtype-dependent, activity. Overall, the development of adenosine receptor ligands with photoswitchable activity expands the pharmacological toolbox in support of research and possibly opens new pharmacotherapeutic opportunities.



## INTRODUCTION

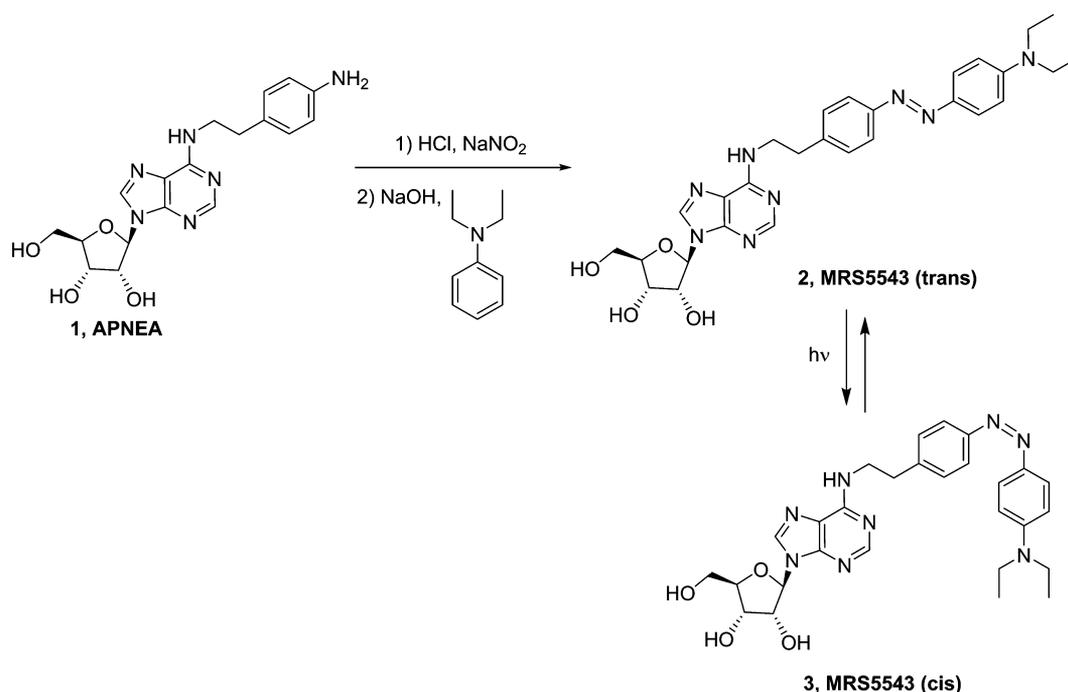
Adenosine, a well-known neuromodulator,<sup>1</sup> exerts its physiological effects through four subtypes (A<sub>1</sub>, A<sub>2A</sub>, A<sub>2B</sub>, and A<sub>3</sub>) of G protein-coupled receptors (GPCRs).<sup>2</sup> Agonists and antagonists of adenosine receptors have an enormous therapeutic potential for both peripheral and central diseases, including cerebral and cardiac ischemic diseases, sleep disorders, immune and inflammatory disorders, Parkinson's disease, epilepsy, and cancer.<sup>3</sup> However, although medicinal chemistry for adenosine receptors has been widely developed in recent decades, several adenosine receptor ligands that entered clinical trials have elicited undesirable side effects precluding their further development. Thus, the *in vivo* lack of drug selectivity may lead to the inability of controlling receptor activity in time and space. Interestingly, these kinds of drawbacks can be addressed

by means of photoisomerization, which for instance was used as the basis to achieve temporal and local activation of biologically active substances or their release from liposomes.<sup>4,5</sup> Similarly, aryl diazo derivatives were designed to interconvert between *cis* and *trans* forms upon irradiation with UV-A light in order to produce differential effects on ion channels, such as potassium channels.<sup>4,5</sup> Azobenzene-based photoswitches have also been used to control metabotropic glutamate receptors at their orthosteric<sup>6</sup> and allosteric<sup>7</sup> sites. Overall, controlling drug activity with light offers the possibility of enhancing pharmacological selectivity with spatiotemporal patterns of

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**Figure 1.** Synthesis of MRS5543, **2**. The photocommutable nucleoside MRS5543 was synthesized in two steps using the nonselective adenosine receptor agonist APNEA **1**, an arylamine that could be readily diazotized without the use of protecting groups.

illumination, thus enabling localized drug effects and the application of dosing patterns.<sup>8</sup>

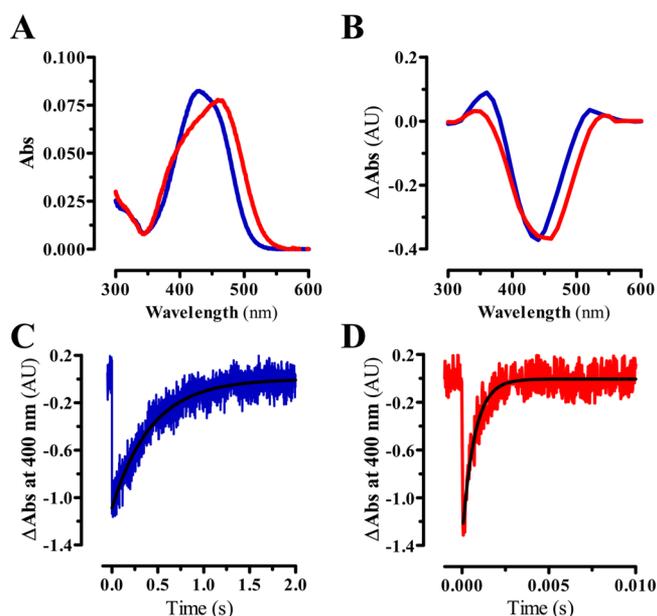
We now describe a photoswitchable aryl diazo derivative of a potent but nonselective adenosine receptor agonist *N*<sup>6</sup>-2-(4-aminophenyl)ethyladenosine (APNEA **1**), termed MRS5543 **2** (Figure 1), which functions as a photochromic adenosine receptor ligand showing differential pharmacodynamics. The design approach was based on the observation that the N<sup>6</sup> region of adenosine agonists can accommodate diverse substitutions without losing the ability to bind to the receptors, while marked effects on the pharmacological profile, either subtype selectivity or efficacy at a given subtype, are observed following relatively subtle structural changes of the N<sup>6</sup> substituent.<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, X-ray crystallographic analysis of agonist- and antagonist-bound states of the A<sub>2A</sub>R indicated a conformational reorganization of the second and third extracellular loops (ELs) in an agonist-bound, active-like state.<sup>8</sup> Hydrophobic N<sup>6</sup> substituents of adenosine receptor agonists interact largely with these regions of the receptor. Thus, we hypothesized that the introduction of a *trans*–*cis* photoisomerizable azobenzene group fused with a sterically bulky and extended N<sup>6</sup> chain would have characteristic effects on the agonist profile. Furthermore, in view of potential physiological applications, the photochromic group of MRS5543 was designed to present a red-shifted absorption spectrum with respect to regular, violet-excitable azobenzene and a short-lived *cis* state in aqueous medium that could rapidly back-isomerize to the initial *trans* isomer in the absence of illumination.<sup>10</sup> Overall, here we aimed to demonstrate that photoinduced differential pharmacological responses of this compound could be attained using visible light and a single irradiation source.<sup>11</sup>

## RESULTS

**MRS5543 Synthesis and Photochemical Characterization.** The aryl diazo derivative MRS5543 was prepared from

commercially available APNEA and purified to homogeneity using a modification of previously reported methods.<sup>12</sup> In brief, the aryl amine of APNEA was diazotized and the resulting diazonium salt coupled to *p*-(diethylamino)-benzene (Figure 1). Subsequently, we undertook the photochemical characterization of MRS5543 in solution. First, the steady-state absorption spectra of this compound in DMSO and HBSS were measured (Figure 2A). They present similar maxima at  $\lambda = 430$  (DMSO) and 460 nm (HBSS) arising from the well-known  $\pi \rightarrow \pi^*$  transition of its *trans*-azobenzene moiety, which is bathochromically shifted with respect to violet-excitable, regular azobenzenes owing to the diethylamino substituent introduced.<sup>13</sup> As such, *trans*  $\rightarrow$  *cis* photoisomerization of MRS5543 should take place under irradiation with blue-green visible light. However, no azobenzene photoisomerization was observed by steady-state UV–vis absorption spectroscopy upon illumination at  $\lambda_{\text{exc}} = 420$ –460 nm in DMSO and HBSS. This was ascribed to the short lifetime expected for the photo-induced *cis* state of the compound due to the azobenzene diethylamino substituent,<sup>11,13</sup> which would therefore lead to fast, spontaneous *cis*  $\rightarrow$  *trans* back-isomerization in the dark.

Transient absorption measurements were conducted to dissect this process. As shown in Figure 2, pulsed excitation of MRS5543 at  $\lambda_{\text{exc}} = 460$  nm in DMSO and HBSS resulted in an immediate loss of *trans* state absorption at  $\lambda = 440$  nm, thus indicating the formation of the *cis* isomer of the switchable molecule. Because of the lower extinction coefficient of this species within the 380–500 nm region with respect to the *trans* state,<sup>11,13</sup> the transient absorption spectra at  $t = 0$  shows a large negative bleaching signal that mirror-images the steady-state absorption spectra of *trans*-MRS5543 (Figure 2B). Once produced, the *cis* isomer of the compound rapidly returned to the *trans* state via thermal back-isomerization, which allowed the initial absorption at  $\lambda = 440$  nm to be recovered in the second (in DMSO) and subsecond (in HBSS) time scales, as shown in Figure 2C,D. Thermal *cis* state lifetimes were

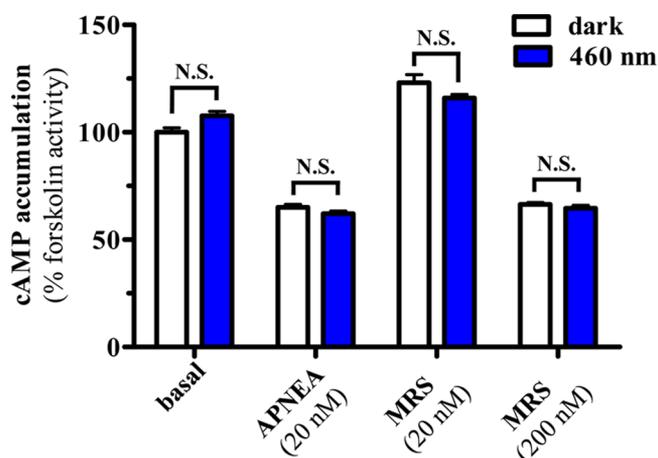


**Figure 2.** Photochemical characterization of MRS5543. (A) Steady-state absorption spectra of *trans*-MRS5543 (5  $\mu$ M) in DMSO (blue) and HBSS (red). (B) Transient absorption spectrum at  $t = 0$  of *trans*-MRS5543 (10  $\mu$ M) upon pulsed excitation at  $\lambda_{\text{exc}} = 460$  nm and 25  $^{\circ}$ C (DMSO: blue; HBSS: red). (C,D) Variation of the absorption at  $\lambda = 440$  nm of *trans-cis* mixtures of MRS5543 prepared by irradiation of the initial *trans* state (10  $\mu$ M) with a single ns laser pulse ( $t = 0$ ) at  $\lambda_{\text{exc}} = 460$  nm and 25  $^{\circ}$ C (C: DMSO; D: HBSS). Solid thick lines correspond to monoexponential fitting of the experimental data.

determined from monoexponential fits of the experimental absorption recovery curves ( $\tau = 430$  and 0.70 ms in DMSO and HBSS, respectively) and they were in agreement with those reported for similar azobenzene systems in polar media.<sup>11,14</sup> Such short lifetimes should enable photodriving the system with a single irradiation source, since the photoinduced *cis* molecules should immediately relax back to their *trans* state when switching off the illumination.

**Light-Mediated Modulation of MRS5543 Intrinsic Activity.** Once the capability of MRS5543 to photoisomerize was demonstrated, we aimed to assess the ability of both *cis* and *trans* isomers to modulate adenosine receptor functioning. Since we used APNEA (a nonselective adenosine receptor agonist initially used to characterize the  $A_3R$ <sup>15</sup>) as the chemical template for the synthesis of MRS5543, it was necessary to evaluate its intrinsic activity at this  $G_{\text{ai/o}}$  coupled adenosine receptor subtype.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, we assessed  $A_3R$ -mediated inhibition of adenylyl cyclase activity upon MRS5543 challenge both in the dark (i.e., *trans* isomer) and during *cis* photoconverting conditions (i.e., continuous 460 nm irradiation). Both isomers of MRS5543 were equally able to inhibit forskolin-induced cAMP accumulation to the same extent as APNEA (Figure 3). Indeed, *cis* and *trans* MRS5543 showed similar potency ( $EC_{50}$ ) and efficacy ( $E_{\text{max}}$ ) values in modulating adenylyl cyclase activity in cells expressing  $A_3R$  (Table 1), thus suggesting that MRS5543 photoisomerization did not alter its  $A_3R$  agonist efficacy.

Next, we aimed to study the intrinsic activity of MRS5543 at a different APNEA-sensitive adenosine receptor, the  $A_{2A}R$ . Thus, under the same experimental conditions MRS5543 dose-dependently induced cAMP accumulation in dark conditions ( $EC_{50} = 150 \pm 50$  nM) (Table 1), indicating a partial agonist



**Figure 3.** Effect of MRS5543 in  $A_3R$ -mediated cAMP accumulation. HEK293 cells were transiently transfected with the human  $A_3R$  and the forskolin-stimulated cAMP production was measured in the absence (basal) or presence of APNEA (20 nM), MRS5543 (20 nM), or MRS5543 (200 nM) both in dark conditions (white column) and upon irradiation at 460 nm (purple column). Data (means  $\pm$  SEM of triplicates) are given as percentage of the forskolin stimulated cells in basal and dark conditions. No significant differences were found when dark vs 460 nm conditions were compared within each treatment (two-way ANOVA with a Bonferroni posthoc test). N.S., not significant. Similar results were obtained in three independent experiments.

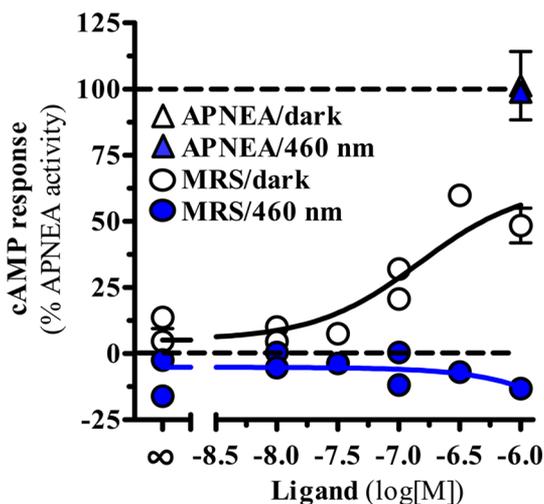
behavior when compared to APNEA-mediated full activation of the  $A_{2A}R$  (Figure 4, Table 1). Unexpectedly, when  $A_{2A}R$ -expressing cells were continuously irradiated at 460 nm (i.e., *cis* photoconverting conditions), MRS5543 was unable to trigger activation of the  $A_{2A}R$  (Figure 4) (Table 1). Hence, these results demonstrated that while the *trans* isomer partially activated the  $A_{2A}R$ , the *cis* isomer was inactive.

Subsequently, we aimed to elucidate the lack of intrinsic activity of the *cis* MRS5543 isomer. Thus, the potential neutral competitive antagonist activity of this molecule was evaluated. To this end, the ability to compete with a prototypical, orthosteric  $A_{2A}R$  full agonist, 2-[*p*-(2-carboxyethyl)phenylethylamino]-5'-*N*-ethylcarboxamidoadenosine (CGS21680), was assessed. Interestingly, when  $A_{2A}R$  expressing cells were challenged with CGS21680, cAMP accumulation was observed under both dark and irradiating conditions (Figure 5). This  $A_{2A}R$  agonist intrinsic activity was blocked by 4-[2-[7-amino-2-(2-furyl)-1,2,4-triazolo[1,5-*a*][1,3,5]triazin-5-yl-amino]ethyl]phenol (ZM241385), a selective  $A_{2A}R$  antagonist (Figure 5). On the other hand, incubation of cells with CGS21680 plus MRS5543 in the dark (i.e., *trans* MRS5543, partial agonist) prompted a partial  $A_{2A}R$  activation, while under *cis* photoconverting conditions MRS5543 was able to completely block CGS21680-mediated cAMP accumulation. These results suggested that the *trans* MRS5543 (i.e., partial agonist) would in fact act as a limited competitive  $A_{2A}R$  antagonist in the presence of a full agonist (i.e., CGS21680), thus reducing the potency of CGS21680 with a concomitant net decrease in the activation of the  $A_{2A}R$ , and importantly confirming that the *cis*-isomer behaved purely as a competitive antagonist (Figure 5). Overall, we concluded that both MRS5543 isomers showed agonist activity at the  $A_3R$  while the *cis* and *trans* isomers of MRS5543 showed antagonist and partial agonist activity at the  $A_{2A}R$ , respectively.

**Table 1.** Half-Maximal-Effective Concentration ( $EC_{50}$ ) Values and Maximum Responses ( $E_{max}$ ) of APNEA and MRS5543 Modulating Adenylyl Cyclase Activity in Transfected HEK293 Cells Expressing the Indicated Adenosine Receptor<sup>b</sup>

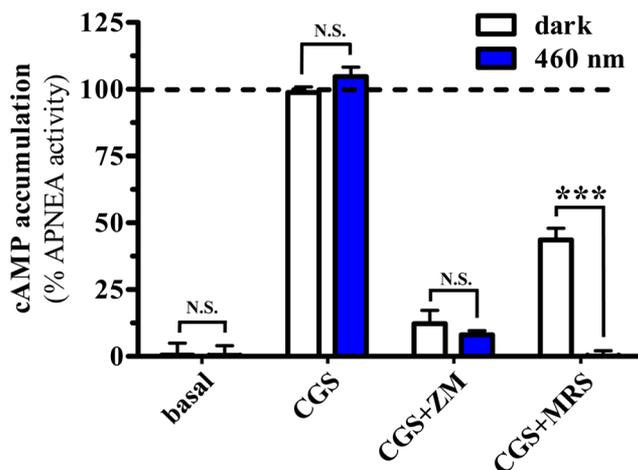
		Adenosine Receptor			
		$A_3R$		$A_{2A}R$	
Ligand	APNEA	$EC_{50}$ (nM) 20±2.5	$EC_{50}$ (nM) 17±5.4	$EC_{50}$ (nM) 34±17	$EC_{50}$ (nM) 23±13
	MRS5543	$E_{max}$ 100±9.1	$E_{max}$ (% dark) 108±9	$E_{max}$ 100±10.4	$E_{max}$ (% dark) 84±11.7
		$EC_{50}$ (nM) 119±11.8	$EC_{50}$ (nM) 118±13.6	$EC_{50}$ (nM) 150±50	$EC_{50}$ (nM) N.D.
		$E_{max}$ (% APNEA) 100±3.5	$E_{max}$ (% APNEA) 90±7.6	$E_{max}$ (% APNEA) 64±8 <sup>a</sup>	$E_{max}$ (% APNEA) N.D.
		<b>dark</b>	<b>460 nm</b>	<b>dark</b>	<b>460 nm</b>

<sup>b</sup>The maximal efficacy ( $E_{max}$ ) of MRS5543 in modulating adenylyl cyclase activity through the  $A_3R$  and  $A_{2A}R$  is compared to that observed for APNEA. Also, for each compound (i.e., APNEA and MRS5543) the impact of 460 nm irradiation into the  $EC_{50}$  and  $E_{max}$  was analyzed. N.D. non determinable. <sup>a</sup> $P < 0.05$  vs APNEA.



**Figure 4.** MRS5543-dependent photomodulation of  $A_{2A}R$ -mediated cAMP accumulation. HEK293 cells were transiently transfected with the human  $A_{2A}R$  and the cAMP production was measured in the absence or presence of increasing concentrations of MRS5543 both in dark conditions (white circles) and upon irradiation at 460 nm (purple circles). APNEA (1  $\mu M$ ) was used as a positive control of  $A_{2A}R$ -mediated cAMP accumulation. Data (means  $\pm$  SEM of triplicates) are given as fold over the basal activity. Similar results were obtained in three independent experiments.

**Molecular Modeling of MRS5543 Docking at Human  $A_3R$  and  $A_{2A}R$ .** The putative binding conformations of MRS5543 *cis* and *trans* isomers in complex with  $A_3R$  and  $A_{2A}R$  were evaluated through molecular modeling studies. In particular, a recently reported agonist-bound human  $A_{2A}R$  crystallographic structure (PDB ID: 3QAK)<sup>17</sup> and a homology model of the human  $A_3R$ ,<sup>18</sup> built using this  $A_{2A}R$  structure as a template, were used to perform docking simulations of both isomers. The multiply substituted agonist ligand present in this  $A_{2A}R$  crystal structure (6-(2,2-diphenylethylamino)-9-



**Figure 5.** MRS5543 *cis* isomer blocks  $A_{2A}R$ -mediated cAMP accumulation. HEK293 cells were transiently transfected with the human  $A_{2A}R$  and the cAMP production was measured upon stimulation with the  $A_{2A}R$  agonist CGS21680 (500 nM) alone or in the presence of ZM241385 (1  $\mu M$ ) or MRS5543 (3  $\mu M$ ) both in dark conditions (white columns) and upon irradiation at 460 nm (purple columns). Data (means  $\pm$  SEM of triplicates) are given as percentage of the CGS stimulated cells in dark conditions. The asterisks denote data significantly different when dark vs 460 nm was compared. \*\*\* $P < 0.001$ , two-way ANOVA with a Bonferroni posthoc test. N.S., not significant. Similar results were obtained in three independent experiments.

((2*R*,3*R*,4*S*,5*S*)-5-(ethylcarbamoyl)-3,4-dihydroxytetrahydrofuran-2-yl)-*N*-(2-(3-(1-(pyridin-2-yl)piperidin-4-yl)ureido)ethyl)-9*H*-purine-2-carboxamide, UK-432097) contained a bulky  $N^6$  substituent, which displaced EL3 to open the binding site and to allow recognition of other  $N^6$  substituted nucleosides.

The docking poses of each MRS5543 isomer inside the  $A_3R$  and  $A_{2A}R$  binding sites (Figure 6) preserved most of the main receptor–ligand interactions of ribose and adenine moieties



important region of adenosine receptors. On the other hand, we used an X-ray structure of the  $A_{2A}$  receptor and a well-validated homology model of the closely related  $A_3$  receptor to predict differential interactions of *cis* and *trans* isomers. By basing the design of MRS5543 on APNEA, it was possible to achieve high affinity of the diazo derivative at both  $A_{2A}$  and  $A_3$  receptors.

Evidence is increasing that plasticity of the ELs may have implications for the activation of GPCRs. Interestingly, here we characterized the effects of distinct *cis* and *trans* isomers of this nucleoside on the adenylyl cyclase system. However, the effects on other effector systems that may be coupled to these adenosine receptor subtypes are unknown and would not necessarily follow the same characteristic patterns we revealed. For instance, it is known that APNEA exerts  $A_{2A}$ R-dependent effects in rat cortical synaptosomes through N-type calcium channels.<sup>26</sup> However, it is not known whether isomers of MRS5543 would exert differential effects in that model. Also, we did not evaluate the effects at the  $A_1$  or  $A_{2B}$  receptors; APNEA binds with moderate affinity to the  $A_1$  but not to  $A_{2B}$  receptors.<sup>27,28</sup> Therefore, although we were able to provide detailed information on  $A_3$ R and  $A_{2A}$ R activity, it is necessary to be aware that more work is still needed to elucidate a detailed understanding of the recognition of *cis* and *trans* stereoisomers of MRS5543 at adenosine receptor subtypes in both activated and basal states.

In conclusion, we presented here the first photochromic adenosine-based compound, a visible (less harmful) light-switchable, azobenzene-containing adenosine receptor ligand whose intrinsic activity is light-moldable. The design strategy for this compound was facilitated and results interpreted with the aid of a recently determined X-ray structure of an adenosine receptor. With the surge of new X-ray structures reported for GPCRs,<sup>36</sup> it seems reasonable that similar approaches could be used for many other receptors (GPCRs), which are indeed the mechanistic framework for many of the pharmaceuticals on the market. Accordingly, our application of ligand photomodulation to this important class of signaling proteins, demonstrating the feasibility of modulating metabotropic receptors by small molecules using light, could serve as a model for a much broader application of this kind of approach. We envision its application both in pharmacological tool compounds and potentially in therapeutic agents toward the goal of achieving a site- and time-specific action.

## ■ EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES

**Synthesis of MRS5543.** All reagents and solvents were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich (St. Louis, MO, USA).  $^1\text{H}$  NMR spectra were obtained with a Bruker 400 spectrometer (Bruker Corp., Billerica, MA, USA), and chemical shifts are expressed in  $\delta$  values (ppm) with tetramethylsilane ( $\delta$  0.00). Analytical TLC was performed using glass sheets precoated with silica gel F254 (0.2 mm) from Sigma-Aldrich. The purity of final nucleoside derivative was shown to be >95% (detection at 254 nm) using a Hewlett–Packard 1100 HPLC equipped with a Zorbax SB-Aq 5  $\mu\text{m}$  analytical column (50  $\times$  4.6 mm; Agilent Technologies Inc., Palo Alto, CA, USA). Mobile phase: linear gradient solvent system, 5 mM TBAP (tetrabutylammonium dihydrogen phosphate)– $\text{CH}_3\text{CN}$  from 80:20 to 0:100 in 13 min; the flow rate was 0.5 mL/min. Peaks were detected by UV absorption with a diode array detector at 230, 254, and 280 nm.

$N^6$ -2-(4-{(E)-[4-(Diethylamino)phenyl]diazonyl}phenyl)-ethyladenosine (MRS5543, 2) was synthesized as follows

(Figure 1). APNEA (10 mg, 25.8  $\mu\text{mol}$ , 1) was dissolved in hydrochloric acid solution (20% of 12 M hydrochloric acid in water; 200  $\mu\text{L}$ ) and the solution cooled to 0  $^\circ\text{C}$  using an ice bath with vigorous stirring. A solution of sodium nitrite (2.0 mg; 28  $\mu\text{mol}$ ) in water (10  $\mu\text{L}$ ) was then added and the solution stirred at 0  $^\circ\text{C}$  for 20 min to allow formation of the diazonium salt to occur (Figure 1, step 1). During this time, *N,N*-diethylaniline (5.0  $\mu\text{L}$ ; 33  $\mu\text{mol}$ ) (Figure 1) dissolved in methanol (5  $\mu\text{L}$ ) and sodium hydroxide (10% soln. in water; 200  $\mu\text{L}$ ) (Figure 1, step 2) was cooled to 0  $^\circ\text{C}$ . This solution was then added dropwise to the preformed, cooled diazonium salt solution in the dark, and the solution was adjusted to neutrality. The solution was extracted with ethyl acetate (10 mL); the organic layer was separated, washed with saturated aqueous sodium bicarbonate solution (2  $\times$  10 mL) and brine (1  $\times$  10 mL), dried ( $\text{MgSO}_4$ ), and then concentrated under reduced pressure to give a yellowish brown solid. This solid was purified by semipreparative silica gel plate chromatography (5:1 dichloromethane: methanol). Evaporation of the solvents provided the title compound as a homogeneous yellow solid (7 mg, 50%).  $\delta_{\text{H}}$  ( $\text{CD}_3\text{CN}$ ): 8.26 (1H, bs), 7.97 (1H, bs), 7.79 (2H, d,  $J$  = 9.24 Hz), 7.73 (2H, d,  $J$  = 8.4 Hz), 7.42 (2H, d,  $J$  = 8.04 Hz), 6.82 (2H, d,  $J$  = 9.28 Hz), 5.8 (1H, d,  $J$  = 6.88 Hz), 4.82–4.79 (1H, m), 4.32–4.31 (1H, m), 4.16 (1H, m), 3.9 (2H, bm), 3.83–3.79 (1H, m), 3.69–3.64 (1H, m), 3.49 (4H, q), 3.07 (2H, t), 1.21 (6H, t). HRMS: (MH $^+$ ) found 547.2781;  $\text{C}_{28}\text{H}_{35}\text{O}_4\text{N}_8$  requires 547.2759.

**Photochemical Characterization of MRS5543.** Steady-state absorption measurements were registered in a UV–vis HP 8453 spectrophotometer (Agilent Technologies, Inc., Colorado Springs, CO, USA). Transient absorption measurements were performed by means of a LKII laser flash photolysis spectrometer (Applied Photophysics, Surrey, UK) equipped with a Xe lamp, a monochromator, and a photomultiplier (PMT) tube (Hamamatsu Photonics, Hamamatsu, Japan). The 20 ns pulsed laser beam arising from an Rainbow OPO (Quantel, Les Ulis, France) pumped by a Nd:YAG Brilliant laser (Quantel) was used to excite the solutions of interest at 460 nm and 1 mJ/p. The signal from the PMT tube was collected in a 500 MHz oscilloscope (Agilent Technologies, Inc.) and transferred to an Accorn PCRisk station. In this way the decay kinetics of photogenerated transient species at selected wavelengths could be measured and subsequently analyzed by means of nonlinear least-squares exponential fittings.

**Plasmid Constructs.** The use of the  $A_{2A}$ R<sup>Rluc</sup> was previously described,<sup>29</sup> and the  $A_3$ R<sup>Rluc</sup> construct was obtained using standard molecular biology techniques and the cDNA encoding the human  $A_3$ R gene as a template.<sup>30</sup> Briefly, the human  $A_3$ R sequence was amplified using the sense oligonucleotide primer FA3XhoI (5'-CGGCTCGAGATGCCCAACAACAGCACTGCTC-3') and the antisense primer RA3BamHI (5'-GCGGGATCCCGCTCAGAATTCCTC-TCAATGCTTGTGTCC-3'). The fragment was then subcloned in-frame into the XhoI/BamHI sites of the pRluc-N1 (Packard Bioscience, Madrid, Spain), resulting in the  $A_3$ R with *Renilla* luciferase at its C-terminus ( $A_3$ R<sup>Rluc</sup>). All constructs were verified by nucleotide sequencing.

**Cell Culture and Transfection.** Human embryonic kidney (HEK-293T) cells were grown in Dulbecco's modified Eagle's medium (DMEM) (Sigma-Aldrich) supplemented with 1 mM sodium pyruvate, 2 mM L-glutamine, 100  $\mu\text{g}/\text{mL}$  streptomycin, 100 U/mL penicillin, and 5% (v/v) fetal bovine serum at 37  $^\circ\text{C}$

and in an atmosphere of 5% CO<sub>2</sub>. Cells were transiently transfected with TransFectin Lipid Reagent (Bio-Rad Laboratories, Hercules, CA, USA).

**MTT Viability Assay.** The impact of MRS5543 treatment and 460 nm irradiation on cell viability was examined by MTT assay. In brief, HEK-293T cells were grown in 96-well plates for 24 h. Cells were treated during 2 h with increasing concentrations of MRS5543 with and without irradiation at 460 nm by using a custom-made 9 × 4 light-emitting diode (LED) matrix (12 × 9 cm) (FCTecnicos, Barcelona, Spain) installed in the culture hood at height of 2 cm above the cells. Subsequently, the cells were washed and incubated for 2 h in the dark at 37 °C with 3-(4,5-dimethylthiazol-2-yl)-2,5-diphenyltetrazolium bromide (MTT) (Sigma-Aldrich). Following the lysis of the cells the cell viability was determined by measuring the absorbance at 560 nm. Interestingly, the MRS5543 treatment (ranging from 10 nM to 3.3 μM) did not affect the cell viability in either dark or upon 460 nm irradiation conditions (Supporting Information Figure 1).

**cAMP Assay.** We used a dual luciferase reporter assay to indirectly detect variations of cAMP levels in transiently transfected HEK-293T cells. Accordingly, cells were seeded at a density of 1 × 10<sup>6</sup> cells/well in 6-well dishes, and co-transfected with 2 μg of the plasmid encoding the cAMP response element–firefly luciferase fusion protein (pGL4-CRE-luc2p; Promega, Madison, WI, USA) plus 2 μg of plasmid encoding either A<sub>2A</sub>R<sup>Rluc</sup> or A<sub>3</sub>R<sup>Rluc</sup>, approximately 36 h after transfection and then treatment with the indicated ligand during 2 h in the presence of 50 μM zardaverine and with and without irradiation at 460 nm. Cells were then harvested, washed twice with PBS, and the firefly luciferase luminescence (FLU) determined using the Bright-Glo luciferase assay system (Promega) following the manufacturer's indications. The *Renilla* luciferase luminescence (RLU) was determined by incubating the cells with 5 μM of benzyl-coelenterazine (NanoLight Technology, Pinetop, AZ, USA).<sup>31</sup> Both firefly and *Renilla* luminescence was measured in a POLARstar Optima plate reader (BMG Labtechnologies, Ortenberg, Germany) using a 30 nm bandwidth 535 nm filter setting. The firefly luciferase activity was normalized against *Renilla* luciferase values (i.e., FLU/RLU) for each data point.

**Statistics.** The number of samples (*n*) in each experimental condition is indicated in the figure legends. The statistical analysis was performed by two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) followed by Bonferroni posthoc test. Statistical significance was set as *P* < 0.05.

**Molecular Modeling.** The adenosine derivatives (prepared for docking using the build panel and the LigPrep panel implemented in the Schrödinger suite)<sup>32</sup> were docked in an agonist-bound structure of the human A<sub>2A</sub>R (PDB code 3QAK)<sup>17</sup> and in a model of the closely related human A<sub>3</sub>R. More precisely, a model of the hA<sub>2A</sub>R was built, using the homology modeling tool implemented in the MOE suite,<sup>33</sup> to fill the portion of EL2 that is missing in the crystal (from Gly142 to Leu167). Coordinates for these residues were taken from another agonist-bound hA<sub>2A</sub>R crystal structure (PDB code 2YDV).<sup>19</sup> The human A<sub>3</sub>R homology model was built using MOE suite,<sup>33</sup> as previously reported,<sup>18,34</sup> based on the human A<sub>2A</sub>R structure<sup>17</sup> as a template.

Glide<sup>35</sup> module of the Schrödinger suite was used for the docking in the rigid binding site using the SP (standard precision) procedure. A Glide Grid was centered within key conserved residues of the binding pocket, i.e., Phe (EL2), Asn

(6.55), Trp (6.48), and His (7.43). The Glide Grid was built using an inner box (ligand diameter midpoint box) of 6 Å × 6 Å × 14 Å and an outer box that extended 20 Å in each direction from the inner one. The top scoring docking poses for each ligand were subjected to visual inspection and analysis of protein–ligand interactions to select the proposed binding conformations.

## ■ ASSOCIATED CONTENT

### 📄 Supporting Information

Additional figure. This material is available free of charge via the Internet at <http://pubs.acs.org>.

## ■ AUTHOR INFORMATION

### Corresponding Authors

\*E-mail: kennethj@helix.nih.gov.

\*E-mail: pau@icrea.cat.

\*E-mail: fciruela@ub.edu.

### Author Contributions

María Isabel Bahamonde, Jaume Taura, and Silvia Paoletta contributed equally.

### Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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