UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL

# IMPACT DE L'EPIGALLOCATECHINE-3-GALLATE SUR LA RÉGULATION PARACRINE DES MÉCANISMES DE DIFFÉRENCIATION ET DE TRANSFORMATION ONCOGÈNIQUE DES CELLULES SOUCHES PRÉADIPOCYTAIRES

# THÈSE PRÉSENTÉE COMME EXIGENCE PARTIELLE DU DOCTORAT EN BIOCHIMIE

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OCTOBRE 2023

UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL

# IMPACT OF EPIGALLOCATECHIN-3-GALLATE ON THE PARACRINE REGULATION AND PREADIPOCYTES STEM CELLS MECHANISMS OF DIFFERENTIATION AND ONCOGENIC TRANSFORMATION

THESIS SUBMITTED AS PARTIAL REQUIREMENT OF THE DOCTORATE IN BIOCHEMISTRY

> BY NARJARA GONZALEZ SUAREZ

> > OCTOBER 2023

## UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL Service des bibliothèques

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## DEDICATION

To my dear family.

The one who raised me with love and support: my mom, grandparents, and aunt Pucha. They taught me to be resilient and to trust myself above all else.

To my dear husband and son. You give me all the motivation to continue and sort out each obstacle.

This work is for you and thanks to you.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work is the closure of a journey that I stared in January 2019, and that involved the contribution of several people that I would like to acknowledge and thank.

First, I would like to start by thanking my supervisor Dr. Borhane Annabi for accepting me in his lab. I really appreciated your support and guidance all these years, but above all, thank you very much for believing in me and help in overcoming each obstacle.

I would like to continue to thank Dr. Denis Flipo and Dr. Grégoire Bonnamour for their contribution with the microscopy experiments. You were always kind and willing to help me and I will never forget that.

I recognize the support of our collaborator Prof. Luc Boudreau, which helped us to boost the part of the project associated with the EV and who was always very optimistic and motivated. Also, to my colleague and collaborator Dr. Yuniel Fernández-Marero for giving me his time and making big data analysis possible in our project.

I would also like to extent my acknowledgements to all UQAM professors that despite my lack of French, were very supportive in and outside the classroom. Especially to Prof. Dr. Claire Bénard, my most sincere thanks for your trust in me, encouragement and advice.

I would like to recognize the scholarships I received from CERMO-FC and from the FRQNT, which validated the pertinence of my research project and definitively made this journey easier.

Thank you so much to the members of the Committee of my Doctoral Exam: Prof. Isabelle Plante, Prof. Diana Alison Averill, and twice for Prof. Mircea A. Mateescu, that was also part of my evaluation committed in the Projet de Thèse. I am extremely grateful for accepting to revise my PhD thesis, the contribution of your suggestions improved the quality of my work.

My most sincere thanks to all the past and present members of Dr. Annabi's lab at UQAM: Marbelis Francisco Fernandez and Tiziana Dao, you welcomed me into the lab and taught me not only the techniques but also helped me with the cells or the experiments on those days when I couldn't come or had to rush out because my son was adapting his immune system to the cold temperatures. To, the girls that arrived almost at the end but again were more than colleagues: Layal El Cheikh-Hussein, Marie-Eve Roy, Celia Kassouri, Sahily Rodriguez Torres and Sima Torabidastgerdooei, Carolane Veilleux; and especially Souad Djediai for your

friendship and support beyond the lab. Also, to my colleagues at the lab: Cyndia, Jean Christophe, Naoufal, Isabelle, Mary-Cruz, Damiil and Bogdan, it has been a pleasure to share this time with you guys.

Many thanks to all my friends for making me feel like home in those short but great lunches to recharge batteries: Alexis, Anna Caridis, Yarelys, Mariela y Ana.

Finally, I would like to thank my family. My grandparents, my aunt Puchita, my dad Paul, my brother and my mom because they have believed in my abilities and decisions throughout my life, which have strengthened my confidence enough to allow me to accept this and rest of the challenges that lie ahead. To my dear motherin-law, Mama, you had my back just when I needed it most, thank you very much.

My infinitive love to my husband and son.

Ale, this work is as much mine as yours, without your support I would never have gotten to this point and certainly not so fast. I believe that together we can accomplish everything we want to.

To my son Arian because your laugh and the way you look at me are my greatest drivers.

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### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

- ADM: Adrenomedullin
- AKT: Protein kinase B
- ALDH1: Aldehyde dehydrogenase 1
- ALIX: Programmed cell death 6-interacting protein
- AML: Acute myeloid leukemia
- AMP: Adenosine monophosphate
- AMPK: 5' adenosine monophosphate-activated protein kinase

AP-1: Activator protein 1

aP2: Adipocyte protein 2

ATP: Adenosine trisphosphate

Bad: BCL2 associated agonist of cell death

BAI: Body adiposity index

BAT: Brown adipose tissue

Bax: Bcl-2 associated X-protein

BC: Breast cancer

Bcl-2: B-cell lymphoma-2 protein

Bcl-XL: B-cell lymphoma-extra large protein

BCSCs: Breast cancer stem cells

BIP: Binding immunoglobulin protein

BMI: Body mass index

BRAF: B-Raf proto-oncogene, serine/threonine kinase

BRCA1/2: Breast and ovarian cancer susceptibility protein 1 and 2

C/EBPA: CCAAT/enhancer binding proteins alpha

C/EBPB: CCAAT/enhancer binding proteins beta

C/EBPD: CCAAT/enhancer binding proteins delta

CAA: Cancer-associated adipocytes

- CAF: Cancer-associated fibroblasts
- cAMP: Cyclic adenosine monophosphate
- CCL2: C-C motif chemokine ligand 2
- CCL5/RANTES: C-C motif chemokine ligand 5
- CDK2: Cyclin-dependent kinase 2
- CDK4: Cyclin-dependent kinase 4
- CDK6: Cyclin-dependent kinase 6
- CDKN1A: Cyclin dependent kinase inhibitor 1A
- CDKN2A/B: Cyclin dependent kinase inhibitor 2A/2B
- cGMP: Cyclic guanosine monophosphate
- CM: Conditioned media
- COX2/PTGS: Cyclooxygenase 2 / prostaglandin-endoperoxide synthase 2
- CREB: Cyclic AMP response binding element
- CSC: Cancer stem cells
- CTLA-4: Lymphocyte-associated protein 4
- CXCL-11: C-X-C motif chemokine ligand 11
- CXCL-12: C-X-C motif chemokine ligand 12
- CXCL-12: C-X-C motif chemokine ligand 12
- CXCL-8/IL-8: C-X-C motif chemokine ligand 8/ Interleukin 8
- CXCR4: C-X-C chemokine receptor 4
- DAPI: 4′,6-diamidino-2-phenylindole
- DCIS: Ductal carcinoma in situ
- DEX: Dexamethasone
- DNA: Deoxyribonucleic acid
- DNMT1: DNA methyltransferase 1
- ECM: Extracellular matrix
- EGCG: Epigallocatechin-3-gallate
- EGF: Epidermal growth factor

EGFR: Epidermal growth factor receptor

EMT: Epithelial-to-mesenchymal transition

ER: Estrogen receptor

ERBB2/HER2: Epidermal growth factor receptor 2

ERK1/2 or MAPK: Mitogen-activated protein kinase 1/2

ESCRT: Endosomal sorting complex required for transport

EV: Extracellular vesicles

FABP4: Fatty acid binding protein

FAS: Fatty acid synthase

FasL: Fas ligand

FFA: Free fatty acids

FLOT1: Flotillin

FN: Fibronectin

GAPDH: Glyceraldehyde-3-phosphate dehydrogenase

GATA2/ 3: GATA binding proteins 2 and 3

GIP: Gastric inhibitory polypeptide

GLP-1: Glucagon-like peptide-1

GLUT1: Glucose transporter 1

GLUT4: Glucose transporter 4

GSH: Glutathione

GSK-3β: Glycogen synthase kinase-3 beta

GSTP1: Glutathione s-transferase P1

hADMSC: Human adipose-derived mesenchymal stem cells

HDAC: Histone deacetylase

HGF: Hepatocyte growth factor

Hh: Hedgehog

HIF-1A: Hypoxia-inducible factor-1 alpha

HSP70: Heat shock proteins 70

HSP90: Heat shock proteins 90

IDO: Indoleamine 2,3-dioxygenase

IGF-1: Insulin-like growth factor 1

IGF-1R: Insulin-like growth factor1 receptor

IGFPB1: IGF binding protein 1

IGFPB3: IGF binding protein 3

IKBA/B/E: Nuclear factor of the kappa light polypeptide gene enhancer in B-cells

inhibitor-alpha/beta/epsilon

IL-6/10/12/17: Interleukin 6, 10, 12 and 17

IL-1B: Interleukin beta

ILV: Intraluminal vesicles

iNOS: Inducible nitric oxide synthase

ISEV: International Society for Extracellular Vesicles

JAK: Janus kinases

JNK: c-Jun N-terminal kinase

KLF3: Kruppel-like transcription factors 3

KLF4: Kruppel-like transcription factors 4

KLF5: Kruppel-like transcription factors 5

KRAS: Kirsten rat sarcoma viral oncogene homolog

67LR: 67kDa Laminin receptor

LDH-A: Lactate dehydrogenase

lncRNAs: Long non-coding RNAs

LOX: Lipoxygenase

LPL: Lipoprotein lipase

MCP-1: Monocyte chemoattractant protein-1

MDSC: Myeloided-derived suppressor cells

MET: Proto-oncogene receptor tyrosine kinase

miRNA: Micro RNAs

- MMP 2/9/11: Metalloproteinase 2, 9, and 11
- MS: Metabolic syndrome
- MSC: Mesenchymal stem cells
- mTOR: Mammalian Target of Rapamycin
- MVB: Multivesicular bodies
- MYC: Proto-oncogene, BHLH transcription factor
- NDRG1: *N*-myelocytomatosis viral related oncogene (myc) downstream regulated
- NF-KB: Nuclear factor kappa B
- NK: Natural killer
- NKG2D: Killer cell lectin like receptor K 1
- p38MAPK: p38 mitogen-activated protein kinases
- PAI1: Plasminogen activator inhibitor 1
- PD-1: Programmed cell death protein-1
- PD-L1: Programmed cells death ligand 1
- PECAM: Platelet and endothelial cell adhesion molecule
- PI3K: Phosphatidylinositol-3-kinase
- PIK3CA: Phosphatidylinositol-4,5-bisphosphate 3-kinase catalytic subunit alpha
- PIK3CD: Phosphatidylinositol-4,5-bisphosphate 3-kinase catalytic subunit delta
- PIPs: Phosphatidylinositol phospholipids
- PKA: Protein kinase A
- PKC: Protein kinase C
- PP2A: Protein phosphatase 2A
- PPARG: Peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor ganma
- PR: Progesterone receptor
- PTEN: Phosphatase and TENsin homolog deleted on chromosome 10
- RB1: Retinoblastoma 1
- RNA: Ribonucleic acid
- ROS: Reactive oxygen species

SASP: Senescence-associated secretory phenotype

SGLT-2: Sodium-glucose co-transporter-2

SNARE: Soluble N-ethylmaleimide-sensitive factor-attachment protein (SNAP)

receptor

SOD: Superoxide dismutase

SREBP1: Sterol regulatory element-binding protein 1

STAT3/5: Signal transducers and activators of transcription 3 and 5

TAM: Tumor-associated macrophages

TGFBR1: TGFB receptor 1

TGFB: Transforming growth factors beta

TILs: Tumor-infiltrating lymphocytes

TLR4: Toll-like receptor 4

TME: Tumor microenvironment

TNBC: Triple-negative breast cancer

TNFA: Tumor necrosis factor alpha

TP53: Tumor protein p53

Tregs: Regulatory T cells

UCP1/2: Uncoupling protein 1 and 2

VEGF: Vascular endothelial growth factor

VM: Vasculogenic mimicry

VPS4: Vacuolar protein sorting homolog A

WAT: White adipose tissue

WHO: World Health Organization

Wnt: Wingless-type MMTV integration site family members

WNT3A: Wnt family member 3A

WNT5: Wnt ligand 5

α-SMA: Alpha-smooth muscle actin

β-gal: Senescence-associated β-galactosidase

# RÉSUMÉ

L'émergence et le développement du cancer est un phénomène multifactoriel. Des données récemment recueillies ont mis en évidence le rôle pro-tumoral de l'obésité en entretenant un état d'inflammation chronique de bas grade. Dans ce contexte, le sécrétome du tissu adipeux pourrait donc jouer un rôle régulateur paracrine crucial dans la promotion et la progression du cancer du sein. Cependant, les mécanismes moléculaires impliqués demeurent peu documentés. D'autre part, des études épidémiologiques suggèrent que la consommation d'aliments riches en polyphénols réduit l'incidence de certains cancers liés à l'obésité. L'épigallocatéchine-3-gallate (EGCG) est le composé principal du thé vert et, dans un modèle murin, il a été démontré qu'il réduit l'expression des marqueurs adipocytaires, leur prolifération et l'accumulation de lipides. Il reste à déterminer si les polyphénols dérivés de l'alimentation peuvent modifier le profil du sécrétome des adipocytes. Compte tenu de ces faits, ce project doctoral visait à identifier les mécanismes moléculaires impliqués dans la régulation paracrine adipocytaire du phénotype invasif des cellules cancéreuses du sein et l'efficacité d'une intervention dérivée de l'alimentation pouvant modifier ce phénomène. Pour modéliser l'interaction entre le tissu adipeux et les cellules cancéreuses du sein, nous avons utilisé des cellules souches mésenchymateuses dérivées d'adipocytes humains (h-ADMSC), qui peuvent se différencier en adipocytes matures et soutenir l'expansion du tissu adipeux. Quant à la lignée cellulaire tumorale, nous avons utilisé les cellules MDA-MB-231, un modèle de cancer du sein triple négatif, un sous-type très agressif. Premièrement, nous avons constaté que le sécrétome des adipocytes matures augmentait la capacité de migration des cellules MDA-MB-231 ainsi que leur potentiel à former de nouveaux vaisseaux sanguins (mimétisme vasculogénique). Fait intéressant, cet effet est en corrélation avec l'induction de la voie de signalisation STAT3, et l'EGCG l'a effectivement réduit. De plus, le polyphénol a inhibé la différenciation des h-ADMSC en adipocytes en réduisant l'expression de biomarqueurs adipogéniques clés. Deuxièmement, nous avons démontré que le sécrétome du TNBC pouvait attirer les h-ADMSC vers le microenvironnement tumoral et remodeler les pré-adipocytes pour acquérir un phénotype de type adipocyte associé au cancer (CAA), via la régulation positive de l'expression de cytokines telles que CCL2, CCL5, IL-1B et IL-6 et des immunomodulateurs COX2, HIF-1, VEGF et PD-L1. Nous avons également découvert que l'EGCG inhibait l'induction de ces gènes et la réponse chimiotactique induite. Enfin, nous nous sommes concentrés sur les vésicules extracellulaires (VE) au sein du sécrétome du TNBC et leur capacité à induire un phénotype pro-inflammatoire dans les h-ADMSC. Les VE ont induit l'expression des marqueurs CAA au sein du h-ADMSC. En revanche, les VE obtenus à partir de MDA-MB-231 traitées à l'EGCG (EGCG-EV) ont réduit l'expression de CCL2, CCL20 et IL-1Btout en augmentant les niveaux de CXCL8 et IL-6. De plus, les EGCG-EV ont spécifiquement réduit l'activation des voies de signalisation AKT et GSK-3β dans h-ADMSC, les sauvant de la sénescence induite par la déprivation de sérum. Dans

l'ensemble, nous avons démontré que l'EGCG prévient l'apparition d'un environnement obésogène qui favorise le développement de TNBC, en réduisant la modulation pro-inflammatoire du profil des sécrétomes des adipocytes et des cellules tumorales et en modulant le profil tumoral en contenu génétique des VE.

MOTS-CLÉS: Adipogenèse, adipocytes associés au cancer, obésité, épigallocatéchine-3-gallate, cellules cancéreuses du sein triple négatif, vésicules extracellulaires, inflammation.

### ABSTRACT

The emergence and development of cancer is a multifactorial phenomenon. Recently collected data has pointed out the pro-tumoral role of obesity by sustaining a low-grade chronic inflammation state. In this context, the adipose tissue secretome could play a crucial paracrine regulatory role in the promotion and progression of breast cancer. However, little is known about the molecular mechanisms involved. On the other hand, epidemiological studies suggest that consuming a polyphenol-rich food reduces the incidence of some obesity-related cancers. Epigallocatechin-3-gallate (EGCG), the main compound in green tea, has reduced adipocytes markers' expression, proliferation, and lipid accumulation in a murine model. Whether diet-derived polyphenols can consequently alter the adipocyte secretome profile remains to be addressed. Considering these facts, this doctoral project aimed to identify the molecular mechanisms involved in the adipocyte paracrine regulation of cancer cells' invasive phenotype and how efficient diet-derived intervention may alter such a phenomenon. To model the interaction between adipose tissue and breast cancer cells, we used human adipocyte-derived mesenchymal stem cells (h-ADMSC), which can differentiate into mature adipocytes and sustain the expansion of the adipose tissue. As tumor cell line model, we used MDA-MB-231, a highly aggressive subtype model of triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC). *Firstly*, we found that the secretome of mature adipocytes increased the migratory capacity of the MDA-MB-231 cells as well as their potential to form new blood vessels (vasculogenic mimicry). Interestingly, this effect correlates with the induction of the STAT3 oncogenic signaling pathway and was effectively reduced by EGCG. In addition, the polyphenol inhibited the differentiation of h-ADMSCs into adipocytes by reducing the expression of key adipogenic biomarkers. *Secondly*, we demonstrated that the secretome of the TNBC could attract the h-ADMSC to the tumor microenvironment and reshape the pre-adipocytes to acquire a cancer-associated adipocyte (CAA)-like phenotype by upregulating the expression of cytokines like CCL2, CCL5, IL-1, and IL-6 and immunomodulators COX2, HIF-1, VEGF and PD-L1. Additionally, we found that EGCG inhibited the induction of these genes and the induced chemotactic response. *Finally*, we focused on the extracellular vesicles (EV) within the secretome of the TNBC and their capacity to modulate the h-ADMSC phenotype. Interestingly, while EV induced the expression of the CAA markers within the h-ADMSC, the vesicles obtained from the EGCG-treated MDA-MB231 cells (EGCG-EV) reduced the expression of *CCL2*, *CCL20* and *IL-1B*while increasing *CXCL8* and *IL-6* levels. In addition, EGCG-EV specifically reduced the activation of AKT and GSK-3β signaling pathways in h-ADMSC, rescuing them from serum starvation-induced senescence. Overall, we demonstrated that EGCG prevents the onset of an obesogenic environment that favours TNBC development by acting at different nodes: preventing the expansion of the adipose tissue, reducing the proinflammatory modulation of both adipocyte and tumor cells secretome profile and modulating the tumor-derived EV' genetic content.

KEYWORDS: Adipogenesis, cancer-associated adipocytes, obesity, epigallocatechin-3-gallate, triple-negative breast cancer cells, extracellular vesicles, inflammation.

### CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Cancer in the context of obesity

### 1.1.1 Obesity: a modern pandemic

Obesity is a condition that has increased worldwide, both for adults and children regardless of the country's income level (Avgerinos *et al.*, 2019). It is defined as an individual with a body mass index (BMI) equal to or greater than 30, calculated according to the weight and height (weight [kg]/ height [m²]) of the person (Pischon et Nimptsch, 2016). Fat deposition can lead to a chronic condition that increases the risk of other comorbidities. For instance, abdominal obesity is associated with diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer (Hu *et al.*, 2017). Hence, an alternative method has been established to include measuring the body fat percentage called the body adiposity index (BAI) (Bergman, 2012), although difficult to standardize.

Several factors can trigger this condition in adulthood, from social factors, lifestyles, and nutritional habits to genetics (Safaei *et al.*, 2021). As for the latter, factors include the brain-gut axis, gut microbiome, neuroendocrine conditions, and viruses (Kadouh et Acosta, 2017). With the increase in obesity, the incidence of other comorbidities like diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and several cancer types, has also increased (Andolfi et Fisichella, 2018; Avgerinos *et al.*, 2019). As a result, a high percentage of global deaths has been attributed to obesity as a risk factor. The figure below shows the increases in the percentage of obesity-related deaths worldwide within a ten-years laps (Figure 1. 1).





It has been recognized that obesity is a multifactorial disease that links low-grade inflammation with metabolic, mitochondrial, and adipose tissue dysfunction (Kawai et al., 2021; Perez et al., 2016). Obesity manifests as the expansion of the white adipose tissue (WAT) localized near the visceral organs and under the skin. This expansion is often characterized by an increase in the size (hypertrophy) and number (hyperplasia) of adipocytes, followed by disruption of the hormonal and secretory profile (Zatterale *et al.*, 2019). Losing weight through changes in diet and lifestyle are the primary interventions against obesity, but diet adherence in the long term is a challenge. Sometimes surgical intervention and pharmacotherapy are required (Williams *et al.*, 2020).

1.1.2 The adipose tissue as a secretory gland

Besides WAT, the adipose tissue can be mainly classified as brown (BAT) or beige (Correa et al., 2019). BAT is associated with thermogenesis (Shin *et al.*, 2006), and is characterized by the expression of the uncoupling protein 1 (UCP1) gene and mitochondria enrichment (Wankhade *et al.*, 2016). It is predominant in newborns but decreases in adulthood, where it localizes in the neck and interscapular region (Wankhade *et al.*, 2016). Also, a pro-tumoral role ascribed to BAT has been associated with cancer-induced cachexia (Vaitkus et Celi, 2017).

The expansion of the WAT is a characteristic of obesity (Correa *et al.*, 2019). This tissue is involved in energy storage and regulates the metabolisms throughout the secretion of cytokines and chemokines, referred to as adipokines (Perez *et al.*, 2016). It is divided into subcutaneous and visceral fat, where the subcutaneous is associated with hormonal secretion and a beneficial role (Ma *et al.*, 2015), while the visceral fat is associated with metabolic syndrome (MS) and complications (Mathieu *et al.*, 2010). MS is a group of conditions including high blood pressure, sugar levels, triglycerides, and cholesterol; that foster the risk of severe health problems like diabetes, stroke and heart disease (Mathieu *et al.*, 2010). Interestingly, the adipose tissue has a high plasticity for responding to metabolic demands. During exercise-mediated weight loss, the subcutaneous WAT undergoes a browning or beige process, adopting a brown-like phenotype (Stanford *et al.*, 2015). Hence, beige adipocytes are characterized as an intermediary between BAT and WAT, with mitochondria and brown fat-associated genes (UCP-1) but with more multilocular lipid droplets than BAT (Correa *et al.*, 2019). On the other hand, a group of researchers have reported the existence of pink adipocytes in mice, restricted to the breast and originating from subcutaneous WAT during pregnancy and lactation (Cinti, 2018; Giordano *et al.*, 2014). However, its existence in humans remains unclear.

The adipocytes are the main cellular component of the breast, followed by preadipocytes, adipose-derived stem cells, endothelial and immune cells (Esteve Rafols, 2014). Significantly, the adipokine pattern depends on whether the fat depot's origin is subcutaneous or visceral (Dommel et Bluher, 2021). Several adipokines like adiponectin, tumor necrosis factor alpha (TNFA) and leptin are secreted in the adipose tissue and intervene in their paracrine regulation mechanisms (Correa *et al.*, 2019). Leptin is one of the critical adipokines involved in regulating nutritional status, inducing anorexic effects, and regulating lipogenesis in the liver (Cohen *et al.*, 2002).

In tumor cells, leptin activates the phosphatidylinositol-3-kinase (PI3K) signaling pathway promoting cell proliferation and migration (Correa *et al.*, 2019). Adiponectin, in contrast, protects against insulin resistance, fatty acid oxidation in the liver and obesity-associated metabolic stress (Yamauchi *et al.*, 2002; Yamauchi *et al.*, 2001). The ratio of circulating levels of adiponectin (low) versus leptin (high) has been used as an indicator of adipose tissue dysfunction, cardiometabolic alterations and insulin resistance (Fruhbeck *et al.*, 2018). Hence, it has been proposed as a predictor for MS (Fruhbeck *et al.*, 2019).

The adipose secretion of the pro-inflammatory cytokines TNFA, and interleukin 6 (IL-6), as well as the monocyte chemoattractant protein-1 (MCP-1), also known as C-C motif chemokine ligand 2 (CCL2), links obesity to inflammation (Hotamisligil, 2006; Hotamisligil *et al.*, 1993). Among the cytokines, TNF-A directly inhibits the insulin signaling pathway (Hotamisligil *et al.*, 1994). It is mainly secreted by the resident macrophages within the adipose tissue and is responsible for sustained metabolic inflammation (Park *et al.*, 2010a). IL-6, in addition to its well-known proinflammatory role (Tanaka *et al.*, 2014), is involved in the regulation of glucose metabolism and adipose tissue dysfunction (Lehrskov et Christensen, 2019). This cytokine can be secreted by a broad range of cell subtypes, triggering in the target cells several pathways such as PI3K, mitogen-activated protein kinase (MAPK), adenosine monophosphate (AMP)-activated protein kinase (AMPK) and Janus kinases (JAK) signal transducers and activators of transcription (STAT3) (Kamimura *et al.*, 2003; Yang *et al.*, 2003). Induced IL-6 levels cause translocation of the glucose transporter 4 (GLUT4) to the membrane, augmenting glucose uptake and fatty acid oxidation (Lehrskov et Christensen, 2019). A high level of this cytokine in serum has been linked to insulin resistance in obese patients, which is a characteristic of MS (Vozarova *et al.*, 2001). Blocking the IL-6 receptors showed a beneficial effect on MS (Castaneda *et al.*, 2019).

Other identified adipokines are resistin, the retinol transport protein (Rbp4), secreted frizzled-related protein 5 (Sfrp5) and FABP4, also known as a lipid-activated

adipocytokine (aP2) (Cao, 2014). The latter controls glucose metabolism and lipid regulation in the liver (Cao et al., 2013), and it is implicated in metabolic inflammation (Cao, 2014).

#### 1.1.3 A molecular insight into adipogenesis

Adipogenesis is a process that involves several rounds of cell differentiation. First, adipose-derived mesenchymal stem cells (ADMSC) are committed and become preadipocytes, followed by mitotic clonal expansion to finally acquire a fully mature adipocyte phenotype. (Tang et Lane, 2012). This process involves a network of transcriptional factors regulating adipocytes' morphological, metabolic, and secretory changes (Lefterova et Lazar, 2009). At early stages of differentiation, there is an increase in the expression of markers such as the CCAAT/enhancer binding proteins beta and delta (C/EBPB and C/EBPD) (Farmer, 2006), the Kruppel-like transcription factors 4, 5 (KLF4 and KLF5) (Birsoy *et al.*, 2008; Oishi *et al.*, 2005), the early betacell factor 1 (EBF1) (Rosen *et al.*, 2009) and the cyclic AMP response binding element (CREB) (Reusch *et al.*, 2000). Apart from KLF4, the rest of the markers have demonstrated *in vitro* to directly induce the expression of the main transcriptional factors of adipogenesis, the peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor gamma (PPARG) and the CCAAT/enhancer binding proteins alpha (C/EBPA) (Rosen *et al.*, 2009). These are the master regulators of the adipocyte's terminal differentiation markers. C/EBPA controls the induction of phosphoenol pyruvate carboxykinase (PEPCK), fatty acid binding protein (aP2/FABP4), glucose transporter 4 (GLUT4) and stearoyl CoA desaturase-1 (SCD1) (Moseti *et al.*, 2016); while PPARG regulates lipoprotein lipase (LPL), acyl-CoA synthase (ACS), as well as aP2/FABP4 (Rosen *et al.*, 1999; Wahli, 2002). Hence, cooperation between both transcriptional factors is required to maintain the terminal differentiation state (Sarjeant et Stephens, 2012). The sterol regulatory element-binding protein 1 (SREBP1) is another transcriptional factor of adipogenesis involved in cholesterol homeostasis and the expression of fatty acid synthase (FAS) and LPL (Kim et Spiegelman, 1996). On the other hand, KLF3 (Sue *et al.*, 2008), KLF7 (Cho *et al.*, 2007), GATA binding proteins 2 and 3 (GATA2 and 3) (Sarjeant et Stephens, 2012; Tong *et al.*, 2005), and the interferon regulatory factors 3 and 4 (IRF-3/4) (Eguchi *et al.*, 2008), are transcriptional suppressors of adipocyte differentiation. The different stages and transcriptional regulators of adipogenesis are summarized in the following figure (

Figure 1. *2*).



Figure 1. 2. Transcriptional regulators of adipogenesis

Created in BioRender with information from (Eguchi *et al.*, 2008; Lefterova et Lazar, 2009). AMPK (adenosine monophosphate-activated protein kinase); cAMP (cyclic adenosine monophosphate); CEBP-A/B/D (CCAAT/enhancer binding proteins alpha, beta and delta); DEX (dexamethasone); FABP4 (fatty acid binding protein); FAS (fatty acid synthase); GATA (GATA-binding factor) GLUT4 (glucose transporter 4); Hh (Hedgehog); IGF-1 (insulin-like growth factor 1); IRF (interferon regulatory factors); KLF (Kruppel-like transcription factors); LPL (lipoprotein lipase); PPARG (peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor gamma); SREBP1 (sterol regulatory element-binding protein 1); TGF-B (transforming growth factor); Wnt (Wingless-type MMTV integration site family members).

In addition, the signaling pathways of transforming growth factor beta (TGFB), the Wingless-type MMTV integration site family members (Wnt), Hedgehog (Hh) and AMPK negatively regulate adipogenesis (Habinowski and Witters, 2001). AMPK is a kinase involved in regulating lipid and glucose homeostasis, mitochondrial biogenesis, and redox equilibrium (Ceddia, 2013; Xu *et al.*, 2012). Hence, AMPK can be activated in response to various stimuli from exercise, cold, nutrient deprivation and adipokines (IL-6, adiponectin, and leptin) (Daval et al., 2006; Katwan et al., 2019).

During *in vitro* studies, TGF-B1 inhibited pre-adipocyte differentiation, repressing the expression of C/EBPA, C/EBPB and PPARG (Margoni *et al.*, 2012; Moseti *et al.*, 2016). Besides, activating the canonical Wnt/β-catenin pathway leads to the differentiation of ADMSC into myocytes or osteocytes rather than adipocytes (Li *et al.*, 2007). The Wnt ligand 5 (WNT5)-mediated activation of the non-canonical pathways has been reported to promote adipogenesis by inhibiting the Wnt/β-catenin and blocking the PPARG downregulation (van Tienen *et al.*, 2009).

The natural inducers of this biological process include hormones (insulin) (Klemm *et al.*, 2001), growth factors like the insulin-like growth factor 1 (IGF-1) (Lefterova et Lazar, 2009), and adrenergic factors such as cyclic adenosine monophosphate (cAMP) and epinephrine (Tang and Lane, 2012). *In vitro*, adipogenesis can be induced with a corticosteroid such as dexamethasone (DEX) and isobutyl methylxanthine, a nonspecific inhibitor of the cAMP and cyclic guanosine monophosphate (cGMP) phosphodiesterase (Farmer, 2006). Also, during adipogenesis cells undergo a morphological change and become spherical, which causes the remodeling of the extracellular matrix (ECM) and the loss of actin expression (Lazar, 2018).

### 1.1.4 Mechanisms linking obesity with cancer etiopathogenesis

The increased ectopic fat accumulation within tissues happens during obesity and it is associated with the incidence of adipocyte hypertrophy, insulin resistance and cancer (Pischon and Nimptsch, 2016). Several mechanisms have been proposed to explain how this environment contributes to cancer progression (Avgerinos *et al.*,

2019). Among these are i) chronic low-grade inflammation levels, ii) aberrations in the IGF-1 signaling axis linked to hyperinsulinemia and insulin resistance, iii) oxidative stress, iv) alteration of sex hormone production and pathways, v) adipose tissue dysfunction, and vi) stresses within the microenvironment (Avgerinos et al., 2019). Due to their relevance in breast cancer (BC), low-grade inflammation and adipose pathophysiology will be addressed more extensively in the following sections.

IGF-1 and IGF-II are growth factors ubiquitously secreted within the organism where they mediate cell growth and survival (Moschos et Mantzoros, 2002). Insulin binds to its cell surface receptors (IGF-IR and IGF-IIR) and activates the PI3K/ protein kinase B (AKT) pathways releasing anti-apoptotic molecules like the B-cell lymphoma-2 protein (Bcl-2) (Zha and Lackner, 2010). It also promotes glucose metabolism through the inhibition of glycogen synthase kinase-3 beta (GSK-3β) (Zha and Lackner, 2010). These growth factors and their receptors are overexpressed in many tumors including colon, breast, and prostate (Nguyen et al., 2022; Vigneri et al., 2016), and have been associated with drug resistance (Denduluri et al., 2015). Since insulin regulates glucose, protein and lipid metabolism (Magkos et al., 2010), it is also linked to oxidative stress (Hurrle et Hsu, 2017).

A disturbance in the redox equilibrium might cause the accumulation of reactive oxygen species (ROS) and the emergence of an oxidative stress state, which in turn causes DNA and mitochondrial damage (Sabharwal and Schumacker, 2014). Nevertheless, high levels of ROS have dual tumor-promoting and suppressing functions (Azmanova and Pitto-Barry, 2022). ROS, like superoxide and hydroxyl ions, fuel genomic instability and enhance mutational rates, in favour of cancer development, (Liou and Storz, 2010; Sabharwal and Schumacker, 2014). Also, ROS activate transcription factors involved in carcinogenesis, such as hypoxia-inducible factor-1 alpha (HIF-1A), nuclear factor kappa B (NF-KB), activator protein 1 (AP-1) and tumor protein p53 (TP53), promoting angiogenesis and metastasis (Marinho *et al*., 2014). However, above a certain threshold, very high ROS levels induce apoptosis via extrinsic or intrinsic pathways (Azmanova et Pitto-Barry, 2022).

The adipose tissue conversion of androgens (like testosterone) to estrogen is mediated by the aromatase enzyme, which has a high activity in obese individuals and is responsible for their high estrogen levels (Crosbie et al., 2010). As a consequence, obese postmenopausal women with high circulating estrogen levels (mainly estradiol) have an increased risk of developing BC (Key *et al.*, 2003) and endometrial cancer (Shaw et al., 2016). In premenopausal women, estrogen levels vary according to the menstrual cycle, which limits determining its association with BC risk. In this population, testosterone concentrations were found to be positively associated with BC risk (Zeleniuch-Jacquotte *et al.*, 2012), and to have a positive correlation with BMI (Harvie *et al.*, 2011). Nevertheless, it is unclear whether obesity causes increased androgen levels or whether women with hyperandrogenemia syndrome (polycystic ovary syndrome) are more likely to be obese (Moulana *et al.*, 2011).

Lastly, obesity alters cell signaling and the tumor microenvironment (TME) (Avgerinos *et al.*, 2019). It activates endothelial cells, forming the tumor-associated vasculature (Kwaifa et al., 2020) and triggers the epithelial-to-mesenchymal transition (EMT) program (Gilbert and Slingerland, 2013). This is a program in which epithelial cells acquire a more mesenchymal phenotype and lose their tissue attachment, allowing cells to invade and metastasize (Hursting and Dunlap, 2012). EMT can be triggered in the tumor cells by cytokines often present within the inflammatory adipose tissue like IL-6, IL-8, CCL5 (RANTES) and CCL2 (Gilbert and Slingerland, 2013; Kwaifa *et al*., 2020). Also, high circulating levels of free fatty acids (FFA) are often detected in obese people and linked with ROS-mediated oxidation of proteins (Iyengar *et al*., 2016). This causes endoplasmic reticulum stress and contributes to an inflammatory state (Iyengar et al., 2016). Besides, mesenchymal stem adipose-derived progenitors from the WAT can migrate to the TME (Zhang *et al.*, 2010), and differentiate into cancer-associated fibroblasts (CAF) (Bertolini *et al*., 2015). CAF are abundant in the TME and contribute to the malignancy development by suppressing the functions of immune cells, and by secreting factors responsible for the ECM remodelling (Hu *et al.*, 2022b).

1.1.5 Low-grade inflammation increases the risk of cancer

The WAT expansion during obesity causes a remodelling of the tissue characterized by high infiltration of immune cells, and an inflammatory state with some level of fibrosis. In this context, several factors can trigger the state of chronic inflammation like hypoxia, dysregulation of FFA homeostasis, mechanical stress associated with tissue expansion, cell death (Zatterale *et al.*, 2019), and infiltration of immune cells, mainly macrophages (Weisberg *et al*., 2003). In fact, pro-inflammatory macrophages are found near dead adipocytes forming crown-like structures, associated with local inflammation (Haase *et al.*, 2014).

Adipokines are implicated in the inflammatory response and the regulation of tumor cell metabolism, establishing a link between this process and increased cancer risk (Avgerinos *et al.*, 2019). For instance, the secretion of TNFA from the tissueresident macrophages occurs in response to the release of FFA from the adipocytes, and a positive loop between both molecules is established (Nguyen *et al.*, 2005). Then, TNFA induces the production of pro-inflammatory cytokines by the adipocytes such as IL-6 and CCL2, stimulating the NF-KB pathway (Dommel and Bluher, 2021; Tanaka *et al.*, 2014). The relevance of TNFA and IL-6 in raising the risk of tumor development was confirmed in a study in mice, where chronic liver inflammation sustained the activation of the STAT3 pathway, enhancing hepatocellular carcinoma incidence and proliferation rate (Park *et al.*, 2010a).

Due to its role during chronic inflammation by acting as an attractant for macrophages and monocytes, MCP-1/CCL2 has been associated with malignancy of different cancer types like breast (Chen *et al.*, 2022), prostate (Hao *et al.*, 2020) and glioma (Qian *et al.*, 2022). Among the mechanisms proposed was its capacity to trigger macrophage polarization to the regulatory M2 phenotype (McClellan *et al.*, 2012), induce cell proliferation, promote migration, stemness and chemoresistance (Chen *et al.*, 2022; Hao *et al.*, 2020; Qian *et al.*, 2022).

The researchers found that obese mice fed with a high-fat diet had high levels of FABP4, which caused an upregulation of the STAT3/IL-6 axis leading to the overexpression of the DNA methyltransferase 1 (DNMT1) and the abrogation of the tumor suppressor gene p15INK4B, which encodes for the cyclin dependent kinase inhibitor 2B (CDKN2B) (Yan *et al*., 2017). In another report, obesity was linked to acute myeloid leukemia (AML) aggressiveness, because adipokines induced and sustained tumoral cell proliferation (Cao, 2014). In general, a dysfunction in the adipose tissue provides the energy and the inflammatory state required to increase the risk of developing a malignancy like cancer.

1.1.6 Evidence of the obesity pro-tumoral role in breast cancer

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), in 2020, BC was the most prevalent cancer in women, with 7.8 million diagnosed in the last five years (WHO, 2021). Many factors influence the development of this disease, from the genetic background, like mutations in the breast and ovarian cancer susceptibility protein (BRCA1/2), to the hormonal state (Avgerinos *et al.*, 2019). Estrogen and progesterone levels regulate the growth and development of the mammary gland (milk ducts and lobules) (Alferez *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, an imbalance in their levels is also involved in the development of BC (Satpathi *et al.*, 2023).

Epidemiological studies relating obesity to BC risk have yielded contrasting results regarding the women's hormonal status (Avgerinos *et al.*, 2019; Lauby-Secretan *et al.*, 2016). For instance, in postmenopausal women, BC risk has a positive association with increasing BMI, waist circumference and body weight gain (Renehan *et al.*, 2008). In premenopausal women, a high BMI reduces the incidence of BC, but no clear association has been found regarding waist circumference and weight gain (Renehan *et al.*, 2008). This double effect of obesity has been partially explained through its impact on endogenous sources of estrogen. Premenopausal obese women might have greater anovulation periods, lowering the circulating levels of estrogen and

progesterone increasing the clearance rate of both hormones by the liver (Key and Pike, 1988). Opposite, in postmenopausal women, obesity increases the level of estrogen in circulation by increasing androgen precursor availability which can be converted into estrogen in peripheral tissue, especially by the aromatase enzyme present in the peripheral adipose tissue. Also, a reduction in the sex-hormone-binding globulin (SHBG) levels has been observed during obesity, and this protein binds to estradiol reducing its availability (Siiteri, 1987). In fact, in postmenopausal women, obesity has been suggested to increase the risk of hormone-receptor-positive BC, associated with high levels of estrogen (Key *et al.*, 2003; Li *et al.*, 2019a; Zeng *et al.*, 2020). In addition, the BMI has a different impact on the BC risk depending on the molecular subtype (Yang *et al.*, 2007).

There are approximately 18 histological types of BC, and the most common have epithelial origin like the infiltrating duct carcinoma no special type (IDC-NST, 70- 80%) and the invasive lobular carcinomas (ILC, 10%), (Lokuhetty *et al.*, 2019; Van Baelen *et al.*, 2023). To complement the histology, BC are also classified molecularly and according to their immunophenotype (Weigelt *et al.*, 2010). The immunophenotyping considers the expression levels of the hormonal receptors for estrogen (ER+) and progesterone (PR+), and the human epidermal growth factor receptor 2 (ERBB2/HER2+) (Weigelt *et al.*, 2008; Weigelt et Reis-Filho, 2009). Based on a microarray dataset analysis, five molecular subtypes have been described: luminal A, luminal B, HER2, basal-like and triple negative (TNBC) (Anders and Carey, 2008; Hu *et al.*, 2006; Perou *et al.*, 2000). This adds complexity to our understanding of obesity as a risk factor for different BC subtypes. For instance, during a populationbased study (Poland), in premenopausal women increasing BMI had a protective effect for luminal A, but not for basal-like tumors (Yang *et al.*, 2007). Interestingly, obesity increased the risk of TNBC development and recurrence in premenopausal women, but in postmenopausal was not clearly established (Picon-Ruiz *et al.*, 2017; Sun *et al.*, 2017). Table 1. 1 summarizes the different classifications of BC, their prevalence, and stage definitions according to the TNM systems (Barzaman *et al.*, 2020; Lachapelle
and Foulkes, 2011; Orrantia-Borunda *et al.*, 2022). This staging system describes anatomically the primary tumor site and size (T), the involvement of lymph node (N) and the presence of metastasis (M) (Stages of breast cancer | Canadian Cancer Society).







CK (cytokeratins), EGFR (epidermal growth factor receptor 1), ER (estrogen receptor), PR (progesterone receptor), HER2 (epidermal growth factor receptor 2/ ERBB2), DCIS (ductal carcinoma in situ) and TNBC (triple-negative breast cancer). Source: Stages of breast cancer | Canadian Cancer Society.

Finding an effective therapy against TNBC is an open field in cancer research, where a subgroup of patients showed benefits with a combination of chemotherapy and antiimmune checkpoint blockage (Schmid *et al*., 2018; Wang *et al.*, 2019b). In this regard, obesity has been related to immune response dysregulation (Naik *et al*., 2019), affecting the efficacy of immunotherapies through a direct effect on several immune elements (Wang *et al.*, 2019d). For instance, obese individuals showed an exhausted T-cell phenotype related to the low-chronic inflammation state (Wang *et al.*, 2019c) and a reduction of the T-cell progenitor pool (Dooley and Liston, 2012) in the thymus by promoting the differentiation of thymic fibroblast into adipocytes (Dixit, 2010). Nevertheless, studies have reported that the blockage of the immune checkpoint interaction of programmed death 1 receptor with its ligand (PD-1/PD-L1) in TNBC obese patients, reverses the T cell exhaustion (Vonderheide *et al*., 2017; Yeong *et al.*, 2017). There are biases in determining obesity based on anthropomorphic measures of BMI and waist-to-hip ratio, such as not taking into account factors of race and ethnicity, which also impact what researchers have defined as "metabolically healthy" individuals (Dietze *et al*., 2018). Therefore, the direct impact of obesity on TNBC risk is not conclusive and varies among studies.

The presence of the adipose tissue within the mammary gland is extensive. Hence, it is an important component of the TME, and the contribution of adipokines in the oncogenesis and development of BC has been reported. FABP4, for example, regulates the traffic of FFA, and during obesity, its circulating levels are increased (Hao *et al.*, 2018b). It has been described that circulating FABP4 can trigger a stem-like phenotype within the tumor cells by interacting with cell membrane phosphatidylinositol phospholipids (PIPs), causing the activation of NF-KB which in turn promotes the autocrine production of IL-6 and the stimulation of the axis IL-6/STAT3/aldehyde dehydrogenase 1 (ALDH1) (Ginestier *et al.*, 2007; Zeng *et al.*, 2020). In addition, IL-6 secretion is sustained by the tumor-associated macrophages (TAM), where FABP4 induces its secretion via NF-KB activation (Hao *et al.*, 2018a).

In BC, CCL2 has also been reported to induce proliferation (Soria *et al.*, 2008) and bone metastasis, and it is a predictor of the advanced state of the disease (Hao *et al.*, 2020). Interestingly TAM-derived CCL2 was shown to increase the resistance to Tamoxifen, an ER modulator, by activating the PI3K/AKT/mechanistic target of Rapamycin (mTOR) pathway (Li *et al.*, 2020a). The relevance of CCL2 circulating level was later correlated with disease outcome because patients with endocrineresistance cancer and high levels of CCL2 had shorter progression-free survival (Li *et al.*, 2020a).

Another vital aspect of BC pathology is the crown-like structures the macrophages form surrounding dead/dying adipocytes. This has been considered a histological marker of local inflammation and is under consideration for its value as a marker for unfavourable prognosis (Maliniak et al., 2021). Mechanistically, the dying adipocytes, release FFA that can be used as an energy source for the highly metabolically active tumoral cells (Nieman *et al*., 2013).

# 1.2 Cancer as a multi-factorial disease

### 1.2.1 The hallmarks of cancer

Cancer is a highly complex disease that requires the whole organism's participation in its development. The tumor does not only consist of malignant cells, but bears other cell types present within the TME (Hanahan and Weinberg, 2011). Hanahan and Weinberg described the regulatory mechanisms that cancer must bypass to develop as a disease, becoming a reference for all researchers in the field (Hanahan and Weinberg, 2011). In general, all cancers have a high rate of proliferation with resistance to cell death and adjusted energy metabolism due to genomic instability, which allows a high mutation rate and enables replicative immortality. Sustained inflammation conditions genomic instability and protects the tumors from immune elimination. Angiogenesis is another hallmark of cancer, although aberrant vessel

forms are often found within the malignancy, they are effective in providing nutrient supply (Hanahan and Weinberg, 2011). Finally, tumors can invade distant tissues and create metastasis (Hanahan and Weinberg, 2011), adding complexity to the disease.

Besides these well-established hallmarks, four emerging characteristics have been recently added, which help to better understand cancer as a disease that evolves. These new traits are unlocking phenotypic plasticity, non-mutational reprogramming, polymorphic microbiomes and senescent cells (Hanahan, 2022). Unlocking phenotypic plasticity refers to the disruption of the normal process of cellular differentiation, which allows cells to escape from terminal differentiated states and become more parenterallike (dedifferentiation), or when progenitor cells keep a partially differentiated state (blocked differentiation or trans-differentiation) (Hanahan, 2022; Yuan *et al.*, 2019). As an advantage, cells are more flexible in responding and adapting to the tissue's environment.

In the beginning, all aberrant phenotypes were described as mutation associated. However, evidence from the tumor's genetic screen have highlighted the contribution of epigenetic regulation to the malignant phenotype (Baylin and Jones, 2016), named non-mutational reprogramming. For example, tumor microenvironment conditions like hypoxia and nutrient deprivation, can trigger epigenetic modifications, and act as a selective force for clonal expansion (Hanahan, 2022). This is one of the mechanisms that contribute to explaining the origin of intratumor heterogeneity (Lu *et al.*, 2020).

Senescent cells are non-proliferative, with metabolic and morphological changes that include a secretory profile called senescence-associated secretory phenotype (SASP) (Gorgoulis *et al.*, 2019). A protective role has been described for this mechanism against malignant progression (He and Sharpless, 2017), although other studies support the contrary (Faget *et al.*, 2019; Lee and Schmitt, 2019; Ruhland *et al.*, 2016b). Molecules within the SASP of senescent tumor cells have a paracrine regulatory function in the TME, triggering apoptosis, immune evasion and inducing other pro-tumoral effects (Hanahan, 2022; Hwang *et al.*, 2020; Ruhland *et al.*, 2016b). Besides, senescence is not irreversible, and cells can reassume proliferation once

favourable conditions are set, allowing malignant cells to enter and exit dormancy (De Blander *et al.*, 2021). Indeed, a senescence phenotype has been reported for cells from the TME such as cancer-associated fibroblasts (CAF) (Wang *et al.*, 2020a) and tumor endothelial cells (Hwang *et al.*, 2020; Wang *et al.*, 2020b), with great implication in tumor development.

#### 1.2.2 Breast cancer and its tumor microenvironment

Breast cancers are highly heterogeneous in terms of clinical manifestations, and therapy response. Biologically, they are grouped according to their histological origin (Ellis *et al.*, 1992) and degree of differentiation (Elston and Ellis, 1991) as mentioned before (Table 1. 1). Tumors develop from the normal tissue and conserve some of their original characteristics, which are used for their classification. Normal breast tissue is mainly composed of epithelial and non-epithelial cells with a heterogeneous profile. Two luminal and two basal phenotypes have been described for the epithelial (Keller *et al.*, 2010). The luminal progenitor epithelial cells are characterized by the surface expression of the epithelial cell adhesion molecule (EpCAM), and the lack of CD49f+ (alpha-6 integrin) (Shipitsin *et al.*, 2007), while mature luminal epithelial express an EpCAM<sup>+</sup>/CD49f<sup>+</sup> phenotype (Keller *et al.*, 2010; Shipitsin *et al.*, 2007). They are both positive for cytokeratin 8 and 18 (CK-8 and CK-18) (Dairkee *et al.*, 1988) and the expression of CD24, a surface marker for genes involved in hormone responses. On the other hand, the basal cells express CK-5/5/14 (Raouf *et al.*, 2008; Shipitsin *et al.*, 2007), and have two phenotypes, one has  $EpCAM^{+/lo}/CD24$ <sup>-</sup>/CD49f<sup>+</sup> cells and the other is EpCAM  $\sqrt{CD24}$ /CD49f<sup>+</sup> cells (mesenchymal) (Keller *et al.*, 2010). Then, luminal-derived tumors are associated with the expression of hormonal receptors (like the estrogen receptor, ER) and HER2 (Sorlie *et al.*, 2001), however immunohistochemical studies in BC biopsies reported the expression of luminal markers in all the different molecular subtypes (Park *et al.*, 2010b).

In addition to the intrinsic characteristics of tumors, the different components of the TME (Figure 1. 3) are essential in the development and clinical response of malignancies. In this section, we will focus on studies describing their contribution to BC progression, metastatic capacity, and drug resistance.



Figure 1. 3. Main components of the TME in BC*.*

Created in BioRender. ADMSC (adipo-derived mesenchymal stem cell); CAA (cancerassociated adipocytes); CAF (cancer-associated fibroblasts); ECM (extracellular matrix); MDSC (myeloid-derived suppressor cells); TAMs (tumor-associated macrophages); TILs (tumor-infiltrating lymphocytes).

One of the components altered within the TME is the ECM, which in the obese adipose tissue is rich in fibrillar collagen and myofibroblast-secreted fibronectin (Quail and Dannenberg, 2019). These myofibroblasts have been described as preadipocytes recruited by the tumor into the TME through chemokines like C-X-C motif chemokine ligand 11 (CXCL11) (Zhang et al., 2016), and differentiated to this phenotype, contributing to tumoral angiogenesis (Correa *et al.*, 2019). Besides, during obesity, the accumulation of collagen fibres causes the ECM to be tighter, inducing the formation of integrin clusters, and promoting tumor proliferation and invasiveness (Gehler *et al.*, 2013; Mittal *et al.*, 2018).

Different immune cells infiltrate the TME with pro-tumoral roles. One of the best described cells are macrophages, which become tumor-associated macrophages (TAM) responsible for the crown-like structures previously mentioned. There are two populations of macrophages with opposite functions: the M1 (inhibitors) and the M2 (tumor-promoter). The latter has been demonstrated to support BC metastasis by inducing the EMT in malignant cells (Yang *et al.*, 2016) and degrading the ECM (Mittal *et al.*, 2018), favouring invasion and metastasis. On the other hand, tumorinfiltrating regulatory T cells (Tregs) are often associated with tumor malignancy. They have high expression of programmed cell death protein-1 (PD-1) (Taylor *et al.*, 2017), an inhibitory immuno-checkpoint protein that abrogates T effector cell-mediated cytotoxicity, helping tumors evade the anti-tumor immune response (Taylor *et al.*, 2017). The role of neutrophils in tumor promotion has been recently described; not only they suppress the T-cells and natural killer (NK) function (Spiegel *et al.*, 2016), but also produce DNA extracellular traps that contribute to cancer progression by preventing effector cells from reaching the cancer cells (Park *et al.*, 2016). Another critical component of the tumor-infiltrating immune cells are the myeloid-derived suppressor cells (MDSC), primarily associated with immune evasion and pro-tumoral role (Bergenfelz *et al.*, 2015). Their blood circulation levels are associated with recurrence and metastasis, reducing patients' overall survival (Diaz-Montero *et al.*, 2009). Within the TME, they are called tumor infiltrating MDSC (tiMDSC) and secrete indoleamine 2,3-dioxygenase (IDO), an inhibitory molecule of T cell activation (Yu *et al.*, 2014). The localization and predominance of the tumor infiltrating immune cells have been studied and characterized, creating an immune score that can predict the patient's clinical evolution and recurrence rate (Curigliano et Perez, 2014).

Encompassing the BC TME are non-inflammatory cells with an equally important role in cancer development, such as breast cancer stem cells (BCSCs), endothelial cells, CAFs and adipocytes. The BCSCs are a small subset of the tumor cells, although they are responsible for tumor heterogenicity (Cabrera *et al.*, 2015), recurrence (Li *et al.*, 2008), and chemoresistance. Their plasticity allows them to resist different stressful stimuli and proliferate. Critical pathways have been associated with the biological properties of BCSC, like JAK/STAT (Wang *et al.*, 2018b) in the self-renewal potential; while Wnt/β-catenin, hedgehog and Notch are related to resistance and metastasis (Cochrane *et al.*, 2015; Pires *et al.*, 2016). Recently, a new phenotype of BCSC has been described as energetic-CSC, characterized by a high mitochondrial mass, oxidative metabolism, and increased proliferation rate (Fiorillo *et al.*, 2018). These cells have a hybrid phenotype with the expression of markers for senescence (cyclindependent kinase inhibitor 1A, CDKN1A expression), and stemness such as the brainenriched myelin-associated protein 1 (BCAS1), and ALDH (Fard *et al.*, 2017; Sotgia *et al.*, 2019).

Endothelial cells are essential in tumoral angiogenesis because they form the neovasculature, providing nutrients to solid tumors. Besides this notable contribution to tumor progression, a new study showed that senescent endothelial cells promoted BC aggressiveness, mediated by the secretion of specific cytokines (Hwang *et al.*, 2020; Wang *et al.*, 2020a). For instance, the chemokine CXCL11 present within the SASP of endothelial cells, increased the migration and spheroid formation capacity of the TNBC cell line MDA-MB-231, both *in vitro* and *in vivo* (Hwang et al., 2020). This pro-tumorigenic effect of CXCL11 was associated with the activation of AKT-ERK pathways, through its binding with the CXCR3 receptor expressed in the MDA-MB-231 (Hwang *et al.*, 2020). In another study, a tyrosine kinase inhibitor (sunitinib) induced senescence in endothelial cells (Wang *et al.*, 2020b). The SASP was enriched in pro-inflammatory cytokines, serving as a chemoattractant for tumor cells, macrophages, and neutrophils (Wang *et al.*, 2020b). These findings emphasize the

importance of the mechanisms by which senescence is induced because it affects the composition of the SASPs and their pro-tumoral role.

The pro-tumoral role of the CAF has been well characterized due to their abundance within the stroma of the TME. This population derives from bone marrowderived mesenchymal stem cells and resident fibroblasts (Mittal *et al.*, 2018). Also, it has been described that epithelial carcinoma undergoing EMT can differentiate into CAF (Hanahan et Weinberg, 2011; Soda *et al.*, 2011; Zhou *et al.*, 2014) which in turn secrete growth factors and cytokines that promote proliferation (Mittal *et al.*, 2018), angiogenesis, and metastasis (Orimo *et al.*, 2005). Also, it has been reported that CAF promote therapy resistance (Amornsupak *et al.*, 2014; Shekhar *et al.*, 2007), protecting cells from drug-mediated apoptosis (Martinez-Outschoorn *et al.*, 2011). Besides, human fibroblasts that became senescent *in vitro* by replicative exhaustion could induce proliferation in epithelial cells with different grades of malignancy (Krtolica *et al.*, 2001), establishing senescence as a mechanism linking aging with the increased cancer risk.

As previously mentioned, TNBC is the most aggressive form of BC with a high metastatic potential in the lung, bones and brain (Anders and Carey, 2008; Deepak *et al.*, 2020); and high mortality associated with the lack of effective therapy. To explain its aggressiveness, it is important to highlight that in comparison with the other subtypes, TNBC has twelve times more BRCA1 mutational rate (Haffty *et al.*, 2006), and overexpression of the epidermal growth factor receptor 1 (EGFR) and TP53 among others (Rakha *et al.*, 2007; Wu *et al.*, 2021). In fact, according to its molecular profiling, six subtypes of TNBC have been well described: basal like-1 and 2 (BL1 and BL2), immunomodulatory (IM), mesenchymal (M), mesenchymal stem-like (MSL), luminal androgen receptor (LAR) (Lehmann *et al.*, 2011).

The BL1 subtype is characterized by the BRCA1 and BRCA2 mutations, which abrogate their role as tumor suppressor genes by inhibiting their capacity to regulate DNA repair, genome stability and cell cycle control (Yoshida and Miki, 2004). In the BL1 subtype, the most frequent deletions are found in the genes related to DNA repair: phosphatase and TENsin homolog (PTEN) deleted on chromosome 10, retinoblastoma 1 (RB1) and TP53 among others (Yin *et al.*, 2020). This subtype is also characterized by a high amplification of several molecules associated with intracellular signal transducing pathways like the proto-oncogene BHLH transcription factor (MYC), phosphatidylinositol-4,5-bisphosphate 3-kinase catalytic subunit alpha (PIK3CA), AKT2, Kirsten rat sarcoma viral oncogene homolog (KRAS) and CDKN2A/B (Yin *et al.*, 2020). On the other hand, BL2 is associated with genetic abnormalities in glycolysis, glucogenesis and growth factors signaling pathways like Wnt/β-catenin, proto-oncogene receptor tyrosine kinase (MET), epidermal growth factor receptor (EGFR) and IGF-1R (Yin *et al.*, 2020).

The IM is the TNBC-subtype with the better prognosis since it has been associated with increased chemotherapy sensitivity (Yin *et al.*, 2020), especially targeting the immune checkpoints PD1, programmed cells death ligand 1 (PD-L1) and cytotoxic Tlymphocyte associated protein 4 (CTLA-4) (O'Meara *et al.*, 2020). This subtype has enriched expression of genes associated with cytokine-cytokine receptor interaction responses like interleukins 12 and 17 (IL-12 and IL-17) and the NF-KB pathway (Yin *et al.*, 2020). In the M subtype, there is an increased expression of genes associated with cell migration (PTEN, TP53 and PIK3CA), epithelial cells-like physical characteristics, and interaction with the ECM (Gibson *et al.*, 2005; Lehmann et Pietenpol, 2014). Compared with M, MSL has higher levels of stemness and angiogenesis-associated genes (Yin *et al.*, 2020).

Pathways related to cell differentiation, like Wnt and TGFB (Deepak *et al.*, 2020; Yin *et al.*, 2020), are involved in the metabolism of androgen, estrogen, and steroid synthesis (Yin *et al.*, 2020). Unlike the other subtypes, LAR has high activation in hormone-related signaling, associated with the increase in the expression of the androgen receptor (AR) and its downstream mediators (Liu *et al.*, 2016). Besides high AR expression, it has mutations in genes such as PIK3CA (55%), AKT (13%) and cadherin 1 (CDH1, 13%) (Bareche *et al.*, 2018; Lehmann and Pietenpol, 2014). In a recent study, after standard chemotherapy, patients with the LAR subtype had the

poorest probability of 5-years overall survival compared with the other subtypes (Hartung *et al.*, 2021). All these differences have a direct influence on tumor sensitivities and are taken into consideration for therapy selection. For instance, BL1 is sensitive to the unspecific cell cycle inhibitory drug cisplatin (Lehmann et Pietenpol, 2014), BL2 to mTOR and growth factor inhibitors (Lehmann et Pietenpol, 2014), while M and MSL to PI3K, mTOR and the non-receptor protein-tyrosine kinase Src pathways inhibitors (Abramson *et al.*, 2015; Yin *et al.*, 2020). LAR is also sensitive to PI3K pathway inhibitors and androgen receptor antagonists (Burstein *et al.*, 2015).

The presence of hypoxia is a general characteristic in many solid tumors and within the TME of TNBC. Most importantly, hypoxia promotes fibrosis of the tissues and regulates the interaction between cells and the ECM (Petrova *et al*., 2018). It augments the expression of metalloproteinases (MMP9), increasing invasiveness (Choi et al., 2011). Low oxygen levels induced the expression of HIF-1A in the CAF (Chiavarina et al., 2010), secreting not only enzymes that remodel the ECM (Cirri et Chiarugi, 2011) but also TGFB, vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF), hepatocyte growth factor (HGF) and C-X-C motif chemokine ligand 12 (CXCL12), increasing their availability for the tumor cells in the ECM (Petrova *et al*., 2018).

#### 1.2.3 The role of cancer-associated adipocytes in tumor progression

The contribution of adipocytes to tumoral development has remained unknown for many years despite being among the main components of TME in the breast. Human histological sections of breast biopsies have shown the presence of adipocytes and dedifferentiated adipocytes in the periphery of the tumor invasive front, referred to as cancer-associated adipocytes (CAA) (Dirat *et al.*, 2011). CAA have different morphology, with a fibroblast shape and expressed markers like the fibroblast activation protein (FAP), alpha-smooth muscle actin  $(\alpha$ -SMA) and chondroitin sulphate proteoglycan (Bochet *et al.*, 2013). They are smaller, with dispersed droplet accumulation and loss of terminal differentiation markers like FABP4, resistin and C/EBPA (Dirat *et al.*, 2011; Fujisaki *et al.*, 2015; Gonzalez Suarez *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, CAA express the BAT-associated protein UCP1 (Wang *et al.*, 2014), which makes them resemble an intermediary phenotype. Also, they have a high proliferation rate (Fujisaki *et al.*, 2015) and an increased expression of proinflammatory cytokines such as IL-6, IL-1β, TNFA and CCL2, as well as metalloproteinase-2, -9 and -11 (MMP-2, -9, -11) (Dirat *et al.*, 2011; Fujisaki *et al.*, 2015; Rybinska *et al.*, 2021). A higher level of IL-6 expression was correlated with larger tumors and lymph node participation (Dirat *et al.*, 2011). This cytokine is critical in linking obesity with cancer progression because resistance to anti-VEGF therapies in obese BC patients correlates with its high levels in circulation (Incio *et al.*, 2018). CAA demonstrated a capacity to improve human BC cells' migration and metastatic ability *in vitro* and *in vivo* (Dirat *et al.*, 2011; Fujisaki *et al.*, 2015).

The emergence of CAA has been proposed as a process of dedifferentiation of mature adipocytes in response to tumor-secreted factors (Dirat *et al.*, 2011; Fujisaki *et al.*, 2015). More interestingly, the dedifferentiation of adipocytes to fibroblasts has been described in BC and related to the fibrotic environment near the tumor (Bochet *et al.*, 2013). The expression of CCL5 and IGF-1 within the adipocytes increases the invasiveness of the MDA-MB-231 TNBC cell line *in vitro* (D'Esposito *et al.*, 2016). A result later confirmed in a clinical setting where the CCL5 detection in the peritumoral adipose tissues of patients with TNBC showed a negative correlation with overall survival (D'Esposito *et al.*, 2016). The co-culture of TNBC with adipocytes triggered the activation of the Src signaling pathway, resulting in the autocrine production of pro-inflammatory cytokine, and raising the metastatic potential (Picon-Ruiz *et al.*, 2016). Src activation also triggered the upregulation of the tumorigenic driving pathways SRY-Box Transcription Factor 2 (SOX2), c-MYC, and Nanog (Picon-Ruiz *et al.*, 2016).

Several stimuli can lead to the development of CAA. The activation of the Wnt/βcatenin pathway is required for the differentiation of CAA in response to the tumorsecreted TNFA (Gustafson et Smith, 2010). Mechanistically, β-catenin inhibits the activity of the adipogenic master regulator PPARG (Liu *et al.*, 2006), favoring the loss of terminal differentiation markers and the transition to a dedifferentiated state. Additionally, the WNT3A-mediated activation of Wnt is also required to initiate an immature phenotype (Rybinska *et al.*, 2021). Hepatocellular carcinoma-derived exosomes induced a CAA-like phenotype in human adipose-derived mesenchymal stem cells by activating mitogen-activated protein kinase 1/2 (ERK1/2 or MAPK), AKT, NF-KB, GSK-3β, and the signal transducers and activators of transcription-5 alpha (STAT5α) pathways (Wang *et al.*, 2018a). Soluble factors like the mammosphere-secreted adrenomedullin caused the conversion of white adipocytes into a brown-like phenotype, by inducing UCP1 and activating MAPK pathways (Pare *et al.*, 2020). Numerous molecular mechanisms unveil how cancer cells and adipocyte crosstalk regulates such a phenotype. Figure 1. *4* is a representation of the pathways and markers reported to describe the CAA induction and phenotype.



Figure 1. 4.**Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference.**

Created in Biorender with information from (Dirat *et al.*, 2011; Fujisaki *et al.*, 2015; Pare *et al.*, 2020; Rybinska *et al.*, 2021; Wang *et al.*, 2018a). p38MAPK (p38 mitogen-

activated protein kinases); UCP1 (uncoupling protein 1); AKT (or protein kinase B, PKB); ERK1/2 (extracellular signal-regulated kinase 1/2); GSK-3β (glycogen synthase kinase-3 beta); PPARG (peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor gamma); NF-κβ (AP-1factor kappa light chain enhancer of activated B cells); STAT5a (signal transducer and activator of transcription 5A); TNF $\alpha$  (tumor necrosis factor alpha); CCL2/5 (C-C Motif chemokine ligand 2/5); FFA (free fatty acid); MMP-2/9/11 (metalloproteinase 2/9/11); WNT3A (Wnt family member 3A); FAP (fibroblast activation protein alpha); α-SMA (smooth muscle alpha-actin); FABP4/aP2 (fatty acidbinding protein 4/adipocyte binding protein 2); C/EBPA (CCAAT/enhancer-binding protein alpha).

CAA are delipidated and consequently released FFA, which in turn is transferred to the BC tumor cells, directly or by extracellular vesicles (Clement *et al.*, 2020), There, FFA induces cell growth and epigenetic changes that drive metabolic adaptation, and contribute to the acquisition of an aggressive phenotype (Attane and Muller, 2020; Rybinska *et al.*, 2021). Besides, CAA can regulate ECM remodelling through the overexpression of collagen VI and MMP11, contributing to fibrosis, angiogenesis, and tumor growth (Iyengar *et al.*, 2005; Wei *et al.*, 2019). The broad pro-inflammatory secretory profile of CAA contributes to the recruitment of immunomodulatory cells like MDSC, neutrophils and TAMs to the TME (Rybinska *et al.*, 2021), which in turn reinforces the pro-tumoral conditions.

# 1.3 Targeting pro-tumoral processes with diet-derived polyphenols

Diet-derived polyphenols are gaining more attention in the clinical scenario because of evidence highlighting their protective role through strong antioxidant properties (Khan *et al.*, 2021), making them suitable not only in prevention but also in combination with therapies (Lee *et al.*, 2021). These compounds can be found in fruits, vegetables, cereals and beverages like tea and wine (Arts and Hollman, 2005). Commonly, these include catechins, anthocyanidins, flavonoids, stilbenes, phenolic acids, lignans, tannins and flavonoids (Rudrapal *et al.*, 2022). Figure 1. *5* shows the

classification of polyphenols and the chemical structures of some of the most studied compounds in each sub-group.



Adapted from (Mao *et al*., 2018; Zhou *et al*., 2016). Figure 1. 5. Classification and chemical structure of natural polyphenols

Polyphenols are a class of organic compounds that have at least one aromatic ring with several hydroxyl groups within their chemical structure (Tsao, 2010). This allows them to act as scavengers for ROS and prevent cellular damage (Zhang, 2016). ROS induce several pathways with a pro-survival role, such as ERK, PI3K and NF- $\kappa$ B, or that are linked to apoptosis like c-Jun N-terminal kinase (JNK), TP53 and MAPK (p38) (Finkel et Holbrook, 2000). ROS can be generated by external (irradiation, drugs and toxins) or internal (hypoxia, mitochondrial activity and inflammatory cell responses) signals, and trigger oxidative stress causing modifications in all macromolecules (Rudrapal *et al.*, 2022) leading to cell death (Aguiar *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, ROS dysregulation has been linked to several pathologies (Law *et al.*, 2017). Antioxidant enzymes like catalase (CAT), superoxide dismutase (SOD) and reduced glutathione (GSH) are essential for maintaining homeostasis (Mao *et al.*, 2018). Besides, sustaining ROS production at a low level can lead to genetic instability and pro-inflammatory cytokine release, increasing the risk for cancer development (Khansari *et al.*, 2009), and linking oxidative stress to cancer progression.

## 1.3.1 Diet-derived polyphenols with anti-tumoral roles

The anti-cancer properties of dietary polyphenols are correlated with the regulation of ROS and linked to their antioxidant impact. Nutraceuticals have been demonstrated to impact cell proliferation and inflammation (Maiuolo *et al.*, 2021). However, their rapid metabolic transformation, short half-life, low water solubility, absorption and biodistribution, limit their biological effects. In this sense, strategies to bypass these limitations have included chemical modifications (Bulotta *et al.*, 2013) and nanoencapsulation (Vinayak and Maurya, 2019). Still, no robust clinical validations have been performed so far. In the following section, we will describe the molecular mechanisms of some of these natural compounds.

Quercetin belongs to the flavonoids group, a subclass of flavonols. It is present in a wide variety of fruits and vegetables, with a high concentration in onions (Neveu *et al.*, 2010). It has antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects. Besides, quercetin negatively impacts the cell cycle, and proliferation, inducing apoptosis in models of the prostate (Ward *et al.*, 2018), ovarian (Catanzaro *et al.*, 2015), TNBC (Choi *et al.*, 2008) and melanoma (Kim *et al.*, 2019) cancers. The general mechanism of action triggers the inhibition of cyclins (D1, A and B) and cyclin-dependent kinase 2 (CDK2), causing DNA damage at physiological concentrations. Additionally, it triggers apoptosis-mediated cell death by the mitochondrial associated pathway, causing an increase in pro-apoptotic (caspases 3, 8 and 9, Bax and Bad) mediators and a decrease in some anti-apoptotic ones (Bcl-XL and Bcl-2). Necroptosis is another cell death pathway induced by this compound, which increased the expression of receptorinteracting serine/threonine-protein kinase 1 and 3 (RIPK1 and RIPK3) in a model of BC (Khorsandi *et al.*, 2017). Quercetin also hampers the activation of the pro-survival pathways AKT and NF-KB (Ward *et al.*, 2018) while increasing the activation of the

stress-activated pathways JNK-p38, leading to cell apoptosis (Kim *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, quercetin regulates mitochondrial function and glucose metabolism (Lang et Racker, 1974). In several studies performed in colon and BC, the compound inhibited the activity of lactate dehydrogenase (LDH-A), monocarboxylate transporter (MCT), pyruvate kinase isoenzyme M2 (PKM2) and GLUT1, contributing to the inhibition of glycolysis, a critical metabolic pathway for tumor promotion (Aslan *et al.*, 2016; Jia *et al.*, 2018; Reyes-Farias et Carrasco-Pozo, 2019).

Curcumin is the principal polyphenol of the ginger family plant Curcuma Longa. It has an anti-proliferative and anti-inflammatory effect. The latter is supported by inhibiting NF-kB in BC and leukemia (Farghadani and Naidu, 2021). Similar to quercetin, curcumin causes cell cycle arrest and apoptosis in different cancer cell models. It regulates genes like *TP53*, *P21*, *P27* and caspases (3, 8, 9), and downregulates the AKT and STAT3 pathways (Farghadani et Naidu, 2021; He *et al.*, 2019). It has a protective effect. Curcumin's anti-inflammatory effect is mediated by its ability to decrease the expression of the enzymes cyclooxygenase 2 (COX2), lipoxygenase (LOX) and inducible nitric oxide synthase (iNOS), while blocking the TNFA signaling pathway (Maiuolo *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, curcumin exerted epigenetic regulation by modulating the expression of **s**mall (21-23 nucleotides), single-stranded, non-coding RNA (microRNAs) that regulate gene expression. It was demonstrated that in MCF-7, a cellular model of a human hormone-sensitive mammary tumor, the polyphenol induced the expression of the tumor suppressor cluster of microRNAs (miRNA)-15a/16 (Qin *et al.*, 2014).

Resveratrol is a polyphenol present in the peel of grapes (berries and peanuts), with a potential regulatory role in the expression of miRNAs. In BC cells, it has demonstrated a capacity to decrease the expression of DNA methyltransferase (DNMT) 3b in tumors but not in normal tissue, increasing the expression of tumor suppressors miRNAs- 129, 204, and 489 (Qin *et al.*, 2014). In rectal cancer, resveratrol shows a pro-apoptotic and anti-survival effect, inducing the expression of caspase 3,

TP53 and stabilizing PTEN, especially in models expressing wild type TP53 (Almatroodi *et al.*, 2022; Chen *et al.*, 2018). As an inducer of apoptosis, resveratrol reduces Bcl2 expression and activation levels of AKT (She *et al.*, 2001), which is responsible for the mitochondrial translocation of Bax, and interrupting mitochondrial transmembrane potential (Mahyar-Roemer *et al.*, 2002). In several cancer models, resveratrol demonstrated diminished angiogenesis by reducing the production of HIF-1A and VEGF (Kimura et Okuda, 2001). Also, it induces STAT3 and PI3K/AKTmediated cell proliferation and invasion (Almatroodi *et al.*, 2022).

Green tea is rich in catechins among which epigallocatechin-3-gallate (EGCG) is the most abundant, with anti-proliferative, anti-angiogenic, and anti-metastatic capacity (Shankar *et al.*, 2008). These antitumoral effects have been demonstrated in different cancer cell models and through several mechanisms of action (Rady, 2018). In a study with pancreatic tumor cells and a xenograft tumor model, EGCG induced cancer cell apoptosis, inhibited tumoral cell proliferation, angiogenesis, and metastasis (Shankar *et al.*, 2008). The polyphenol diminished the ERK pathway signaling in the tumor while increasing P38 and JNK activation (Shankar *et al.*, 2008). Also, EGCG induced epigenetic modifications by inhibiting histone deacetylase (HDAC) activity, which increases the kinase inhibitor protein's expression (RKIP). As a result, genes associated with the EMT program were reduced, such as *SNAIL1*, and the activity of MMP2 and MMP9 (Kim et Kim, 2013). In a gastric cancer model, besides reducing the tumor burden, the catechin suppressed the expression of VEGF and inhibited the STAT3 activation (Zhu *et al.*, 2007). Its inhibitory effect on VEGF secretion and proangiogenic capacity was confirmed in both *in vitro* and *in vivo* in a human non-small cell lung cancer cell model, where it also downregulated the induction of HIF-1A (Li *et al.*, 2013). Also, in a human adrenal cancer cell model, the catechins affected mitochondrial membrane potential, increasing the influx of  $Ca^{2+}$  and causing cell growth arrest and apoptosis. Among the proteins involved in these effects, EGCG triggered the expression of regulatory proteins involved in the mitochondrial apoptotic pathway, such as Bad, Bax, cytochrome c, apoptosis protease-activating factor-1

(Apaf-1), and FAS/CD95, as well as the effectors caspases 3, 7, 8, and 9 (Rady, 2018). EGCG also downregulated anti-apoptotic mediators like Bcl-2, Bcl-XL, and heat shock proteins 70 and 90 (HSP70 and HSP90) (Wu *et al.*, 2009). EGCG arrests the cell cycle in cellular models of pancreatic (Shankar *et al.*, 2007), lung (Ma *et al.*, 2014), prostate (Gupta *et al.*, 2000), cervical (Sharma *et al.*, 2012) and colorectal cancers (Zhang *et al.*, 2012). It inhibits the signaling axis EGFR/cyclin D1 (Ma *et al.*, 2014) and regulates the expression of proliferation master regulators CDK4/6, P21 and P27 (Rady, 2018). In general, EGCG inhibits a plethora of signaling pathways like AKT, ERK, Src, c-Met, STAT3 and NF-KB, associated with several biological processes involved in cancer development (Chen *et al.*, 2011; Gonzalez Suarez *et al.*, 2022; Koh *et al.*, 2011; Sen et Chatterjee, 2011; Shi *et al.*, 2015; Zhou *et al.*, 2012; Zhu *et al.*, 2011).

Importantly, EGCG discriminates normal cells from cancer epithelial cells and only triggers apoptosis in malignant epithelial cells. This effect was described for prostate (Tang *et al.*, 2010), BC (Mineva *et al.*, 2013), colon (Toden *et al.*, 2016) and neuroblastoma (Nishimura *et al.*, 2012) cancer cell models, sharing some common mechanisms with other polyphenols like the downregulation of anti-apoptotic proteins Bcl-2, and the activation of the pro-apoptotic caspases -3 and -7, and the pro-invasive Vimentin, SLUG and SNAIL1 (Tang *et al.*, 2010). The catechin also increased the chemo-sensitivity of cancer stem cells (CSC) and downregulated stem cell markers (OCT4 and Nanog), key pathways (Notch1) and negative regulatory microRNAs linked to stem cell self-renewal (miRNAs, miR-34a, miR-145, and miR-200c), as well as molecules associated with chemoresistance (BMI-1, SUZ12 and EZ2) (Toden *et al.*, 2016).



Figure 1. 6. Polyphenols target several hallmarks of cancer. Adapted from (Hanahan, 2022). EGCG (epigallocatechin-3-gallate).

Overall, polyphenols target several pathways involved in carcinogenesis establishment and development (Figure 1. *6*). Hence, recent approaches have been designed to combine their potential to influence the entire TME to improve the effectiveness of other therapeutic agents like immune checkpoint inhibitors (Lee *et al.*, 2021). In this regard, most of the studies for EGCG and quercetin have been inhibiting the PD-1/PD-L1 axis, while resveratrol and curcumin affected the expression of CTLA-4 (Lee *et al.*, 2021). However, more studies are required to unveil these compounds' best combinatory strategy and delivery format. Nevertheless, EGCG affects protein expression by several mechanisms, including disrupting lipid rafts, receptor signalization and epigenetic modulation, and regulating miRNA expression. In a study with highly aggressive melanoma, the polyphenol inhibited tumor proliferation by activating its 67kDa laminin receptor (67LR). Consequently, the 67LR-mediated activation of cAMP/protein kinase A (PKA)/protein phosphatase 2A

(PP2A) led to the upregulation of let-7b (Yamada *et al.*, 2016). This miRNA inhibits the expression of tumor progression-associated genes like the high mobility group (HMGA2), involved in other cancer types (Liu *et al.*, 2014).

### 1.3.2 Anti-inflammatory effect of EGCG

 $NF-\kappa B$  acts as a master regulator of genes involved in cellular processes such as differentiation, response to oxidative stress, survival, inflammation, angiogenesis and metastasis, establishing a link between inflammation and cancer (Gupta et al., 2010; (Gupta *et al.*, 2018). The modulation of the NF- $\kappa$ B transcription factor expression represents the primary mechanism described by nutraceuticals with anti-inflammatory effects (Gupta et al., 2018). When cells are not activated, NF-KB proteins remain associated with inhibitory molecules called nuclear factor of kappa light polypeptide gene enhancer in B-cells inhibitor-alpha/beta/epsilon (IKBA/B/E) in the cytoplasm (Hayden et Ghosh, 2004). Once cells are activated, the IKK complex phosphorylates the I<sub>K</sub>B, inducing their degradation, and releasing NF- $\kappa$ B. Then, NF- $\kappa$ B is translocated to the nucleus to exert its transcriptional role (Hayden et Ghosh, 2004). Besides IKK intervention, protein kinases such as GSK-3β, PI3K, AKT and p38 MAPK, can directly phosphorylate and activate NF- $\kappa$ B (Gupta *et al.*, 2010).

EGCG affects downstream signaling cascades upon cell surface receptors' activation and it is the only catechin with a known receptor, the 67LR. Upon activation, 67LR leads to apoptosis and inhibition of the TLR4/MAPK-mediated inflammation (Xu *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, EGCG inhibited the activation of NF-kB in several malignancy models by blocking the IKK-mediated phosphorylation of IKBA (Nomura *et al.*, 2000) and the activity of MAPK (Afaq *et al.*, 2003). The latter pathways mainly encompass the inhibition of the growth factor and mitogen stimulator ERK1/2, and the pro-inflammatory, cell differentiation, and pro-apoptotic inducers JNK/p38. The effect of EGCG on the MAPK family-mediated process has been documented (Mokra *et al.*,

2022). For example, in mice, EGCG downregulated ROS and MAPK mediated activation of the inflammasome NLR family pyrin domain-containing protein 3 (NLRP3) (Liu *et al.*, 2021), a multimeric intracellular protein complex that mediates the inflammatory response. In human cancer cells, EGCG has been demonstrated to inhibit pro-inflammatory mediators such as  $COX-2$ , IL-8, IL-1 $\beta$ , and iNOS, as well as the STAT1/3 inflammatory responders TNFA and IL-6 (Mokra *et al.*, 2022), highlighting its potent anti-inflammatory properties.

### 1.3.3 Anti-obesogenic effect of EGCG

EGCG downregulates significant genes involved in adipogenesis, such as the C/EBPA, PPARG, FAS, and FABP4 (Gonzalez Suarez *et al*., 2021; Lee *et al*., 2013). EGCG negatively impacts adipocyte differentiation and lipid accumulation (Gonzalez Suarez *et al*., 2021), as well as their proliferation by inducing cell cycle arrest and apoptosis (Carrasco-Pozo *et al*., 2019; Chan *et al.*, 2011). Studies have linked these results with its capacity to activate the Wnt/β pathway and GSK-3β (Lee *et al.*, 2013), and to downregulate ERK1/2 and CDK2 pathways (Carrasco-Pozo *et al.*, 2019; Hung *et al.*, 2005).

EGCG also inhibits the insulin-mediated activation of the PI3K/AKT signaling pathway (Kim and Sakamoto, 2012), a potent inducer of adipogenesis, while triggering AMPK, C/EBPA and the PPARG suppressor (Hwang *et al.*, 2005). Consequently, there is a reduction in lipid accumulation, adipocyte expansion, and the expression of other adipogenic markers like SREBP-1c (Furuyashiki *et al.*, 2004; Kim *et al.*, 2010; Wu *et al.*, 2017b). Interestingly, the polyphenols also exert anti-obesogenic roles by stimulating energy expenditure. This was observed in an adipocyte murine model both *in vitro* and *in vivo*, where EGCG increased the expression of UCP-2, a crucial protein in mitochondrial membrane transport and thermogenesis (Klaus *et al.*, 2005; Lee et Kim, 2009).

EGCG affects different mechanisms involved in obesity progression and associated comorbidities. Early studies demonstrated that it modulates lipid metabolism by increasing lipid oxidation and lipolysis (Lee et al., 2009), and reducing lipogenic enzyme activity (Carrasco-Pozo *et al.*, 2019; Yeh *et al.*, 2003). Later, it was described that besides interfering with lipid metabolisms, EGCG could also induce lipid droplet degradation (lipophagy) (Kim *et al.*, 2017a). Mechanistically, EGCG reduces intracellular ATP levels via AMPK activation, which serves as an internal stimulus for autophagy and promotes the recognition of lipid droplets by the RAS oncogene family member 7 (RAB7), a pivotal event to trigger lipophagy (Kim *et al.*, 2017a).

## 1.4 Extracellular vesicle-mediated regulation of carcinogenesis

Extracellular vesicles (EV) are microparticles delimited by a lipid bilayer and secreted by almost all types of cells, participating in cell-to-cell communication (Thery *et al.*, 2018). They transfer nucleic acids (ADN, mRNA and miRNA), proteins and lipids to distant cells. Therefore, EV are involved in the paracrine regulation of several biological processes (Tkach and Thery, 2016). EV is a global term referring to a heterogeneous population of vesicles with different origins, sizes, and biochemical properties, including oncosomes, ectosomes, microvesicles, exosomes and apoptotic bodies (Zheng *et al.*, 2019).

### 1.4.1 Classification of extracellular vesicles

The lack of consensus about the markers of each EV' specific subsets make their classification difficult. In this regard, the International Society for Extracellular Vesicles (ISEV) guided the minimal characterization each researcher must perform during their studies. In general, EV must be characterized according to their physical characteristics (size and density), biochemical composition and the description of cell origin and culture conditions. In terms of size, vesicles < 200nm are considered small (exosomes, exomeres), whereas  $EV > 200$ nm are considered medium (microvesicles) to large (apoptotic bodies) (Thery *et al.*, 2018).

The biochemical composition refers to the vesicles' lipid and protein structure, reflecting their origin. Most EV emerge from the plasma membrane, except for the exosomes (Zhang *et al.*, 2019b). They are released from the membrane after the fusion of endosomal multivesicular bodies (MVB). Hence, some proteins are expected to be enriched in each EV subsets. In general, at least three positive markers (transmembrane/lipid-bound and cytosolic) must be detected to confirm the presence of a lipid bi-layer with closed membrane vesicles within the isolation fraction. In cases where a pure vesicle population is required, the absence of at least one negative marker (lipoproteins and serum-derived proteins) must be demonstrated (Thery *et al.*, 2018). Table 1. *2* provided examples of proteins found in different EV populations and considered as positive or negative markers.

Table 1. 2. Proposal of different proteins enriched within the EV. Adapted from MISEV2018 (Raposo and Stoorvogel, 2013; Thery *et al*., 2018).



EV (extracellular vesicles), HSP70/90 (heat shock porteins 70/90), NK (natural killer), MSC (mesenchymal stem cells), PECAM (platelet and endothelial cell adhesion molecule), EPCAM (epithelial cell adhesion molecule), ERBB2/HER2 (epithelial growth factor receptor 2), Alix (programmed cell death 6-interacting protein), FLOT1/2 (Flotillin), CAV (Caveolin), ESCRT (endosomal sorting complex required for transport), GAPDH (glyceraldehyde-3-phosphate dehydrogenase), APOA1/2 and APOB (apolipoproteins), ALB (albumin), BIP (binding immunoglobulin protein), CANX (calnexin), ACTN1/4 (actin 1/4), SNARE (soluble N-ethylmaleimide-sensitive-factor attachment protein receptor), VEGFA (vascular epidermal growth factor alpha), EGF (epidermal growth factor), ILs (interleukins) and FN (fibronectin).

Another critical aspect for vesicle characterization is the description of cell origin, culture conditions such as the number of passages, seeding density/confluence, oxygen level, culture system (static or in bioreactor), and if there was a specific surface coating (Thery *et al.*, 2018).

### 1.4.2 Biogenesis of the different extracellular vesicles

Exosomes is a term for vesicles with a sucrose gradient density of  $1.13$ - $1.19$  g/mL and a size ranging from 30-150nm in diameter (Zhang *et al.*, 2019b). They originate from late endosomes, also called the MVB (Raposo et Stoorvogel, 2013), which suffered an inward budding of the membranes forming the intraluminal vesicles (ILV). The MVB can later be fused with lysosomes and degraded, or transported and fused with the extracellular membrane to release ILV as exosomes (Zhang *et al.*, 2019b). Studies have revealed the existence of MVB sub-populations according to the cell type. For instance, in B cells, the MVB with high cholesterol levels are those that fuse with the plasmatic membranes and are released as exosomes (Mobius *et al.*, 2002). In other models, the fusion of the MVB with the plasma membrane is stimulated by the ligandreceptor interaction such as the EGF-mediated activation of the epidermal growth factor receptor (EGF-EGFR) (White *et al.*, 2006), and (Chen *et al.*, 2016; Tauro *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, the TP53 signaling pathway has been linked to regulating exosome biogenesis and secretion (Yu *et al.*, 2006).

In the secretion of exosomes, several proteins are involved, starting with the endosomal sorting complex required for transport (ESCRT), which encompasses four members (0-III) and participates in the MVB formation, protein sorting and vesicle budding (Henne *et al.*, 2013; Hurley, 2015). ESCRT-0 serves as a clathrin adaptor, associated with the clathrin-coated domains within the endosomal membrane, where it encounters ESCRT-I. Then cooperatively, ESCRT-I and II sequester ubiquitinated proteins (ex., tetraspanins) to the endosomal membranes, followed by the interaction of the other complex members. ESCRT-III is responsible for ILV cleavage, a process that requires the energy provided by the ATPase vacuolar protein sorting 4 homolog A (VPS4) (Henne *et al.*, 2013). Also, the programmed cell death 6-interacting protein (ALIX) binds to ESCRT-III, functioning as an alternative branch to coupling other molecules such as Synthenin, which mediates the recruitment of the Syndecan, often present in exosomes (Hurley, 2015). Hence, ALIX participates in the exosomal sorting cargo and its releasing mechanisms (summarized in Figure 1. *7*). This mechanism is shared among other small vesicles and involves the action of the GTPase ADPribosylation factor 6 (ARF6) and phospholipase D2 (Ghossoub *et al.*, 2014). Besides, other GTPases participate in the intracellular trafficking of MVB and small vesicles, such as Rab27a/b, Rab11a, Rab35 and SNAREs (Mathieu *et al.*, 2019).



Figure 1. 7. Overview of the ESCRT complexes involved in exosomes budding from the MVB.

Adapted from (Hurley, 2015). ESCRT (endosomal sorting complex required for transport); ALIX (programmed cell death 6-interacting protein); VPS4 (vacuolar protein sorting 4); MVB (multivesicular bodies).

Besides sphingomyelin and ceramides, exosomes are enriched in cholesterol (Raposo and Stoorvogel, 2013). There is also an ESCRT-independent mechanism for the exosome's biogenesis based on raft microdomains causing lateral segregation of sphingomyelinases (SMAse)-enriched microdomains (Castro *et al.*, 2014). This enzyme mediates sphingomyelin hydrolysis generating ceramide, which promotes the budding of the membranes and highlights the role of lipids in this process (Castro et al., 2014). In addition, there is evidence of CD63 participation in the latest mechanism (Edgar *et al.*, 2014).

Since their cargo is intracellular components, exosome biogenesis has been suggested to maintain homeostasis by eliminating intracellular waste (Hessvik and Llorente, 2018). However, only a small portion of the cellular content can be eliminated by exosomes (Hessvik and Llorente, 2018). Meanwhile, they have proven to be key mediators in the paracrine regulation of several biological and cancer-promoting processes (Zhang *et al.*, 2019b; Zheng *et al.*, 2019).

Conversely, microvesicles are a highly heterogeneous population with a size between 100-1000nm and a sucrose gradient density of 1.25-1.30 g/mL (Zhang *et al.*, 2019b). They emerge as a direct outward budding of the plasma membrane in a process that requires the rearrangement of the cytoskeleton and cytosolic  $Ca^{2+}$  mobilization (Taylor and Bebawy, 2019). The  $Ca^{2+}$  release from the endoplasmatic reticulum to the cytosol involves the participation of channels like transient receptor potential (TRP), inositol triphosphate receptors (IP3R) and ryanodine receptors (RYR). Next,  $Ca^{2+}$ mediates the suppression of aminophospholipid translocase (flippase), resulting in a random distribution of phospholipids. Ultimately, this changes the membrane– cytoskeletal anchorage, forming membrane blebs, a structure resolved by the ESCRT machinery (Zheng *et al.*, 2019). Besides, an ADP-ribosylation factor 6 (ARF6) mediated mechanism for microvesicle release has been reported, where activated phospholipase D caused phospholipids redistribution and ended with the necessary activation of myosin light chain kinase (MLCK). Other shared molecules with exosome biogenesis have been found in this subpopulation, like the ESCRT-I subunit TSG101

and VPS4 (Abels and Breakefield, 2016). They are loaded with proteins, lipids, and all types of nucleic acids, originating from parental cells. There has yet to be a definitive consensus about surface markers to identify this subpopulation, although ARF6 and VCAMP3 have been proposed (Muralidharan-Chari *et al.*, 2009).

Apoptotic bodies originate from apoptotic cells and are characterized by phosphatidylserine and cellular organelles. They have a size of 1–5 μm and a sucrose gradient density from 1.18 to 1.28 g/mL (Thery *et al.*, 2001). Among other characteristics, the oxidation state of surface molecules favours the binding of complement proteins (C3b), mediating recognition and clearance by macrophage (Takizawa *et al.*, 1996). Besides C3b and Annexin V, DNA and histones have been used as specific markers for this population (Zhang *et al.*, 2019b).

#### 1.4.3 Extracellular vesicles in cancer progression

Tumor cells release exosomes and EV, which can trigger phenotypic changes in other cell types present within the tumor microenvironment or at distant places (Hu *et al.*, 2022a). These vesicles are often named oncosomes, or in most studies referred to as exosomes. Studies with EV require a thorough characterization of the vesicle preparation, mainly to discriminate a pure population of exosomes from that of small EV. There is currently a lack of consensus on this point in most papers. Therefore, we will use the term EV in the following sections, to encompass the reports that use both exosomes and EV. In general, EV can fuse with the plasma membrane of the target cells or be internalized through receptor-mediated endocytosis. Then, vesicles can trigger a signalization cascade mediated by receptor activation or the direct release of their molecular content within the cytosol (Raposo and Stoorvogel, 2013). Therefore, EV use several mechanisms to exert their paracrine regulation with a pro-tumoral effect.

For instance, EV originating from tumors can shut down the immune response within the TME, assisting cancer immune evasion. Immune suppressors are among the proteins detected within tumor-derived EV and are responsible for prompt apoptosis in T and NK cells. Ovarian carcinoma-derived EV, induced FasL–mediated apoptosis of T (CD8+) cells (Taylor *et al.*, 2003). Another inhibitory molecule, PD-1, was found expressed at the surface of BC-released exosomes (Yang *et al.*, 2018). In addition, EV isolated from patients with mesothelioma were TGFB1-loaded and specifically downregulated the expression of killer cell lectin-like receptor K 1 (NKG2D) in the surface of NK cells and T cells (Clayton *et al.*, 2008). The diminishment of this activator receptor provoked the impairment of lymphocyte functionalities (Clayton *et al.*, 2008). More recently, T cell functionality was also abrogated by an immunosuppressive subset of  $\gamma$ δT1 cells (CD73+) induced by BC-derived exosomes loaded with the long non-coding RNAs (lncRNAs, SNHG16). Importantly, this regulatory γδT1-subtype within the tumor-infiltrating lymphocytes (TILs) has been associated with poor prognosis in BC patients (Ni *et al.*, 2020).

Tumor-derived EV also mediate the acquisition of pro-tumoral phenotype in different cellular components of the TME. For example, macrophage polarization was induced by BC-derived EV toward a regulatory/immunosuppressive M2 phenotype, characterized by the secretion of the immunoregulatory enzyme Arginase-I and the anti-inflammatory cytokines IL-10 and TGFB (Ahmed et Ismail, 2020). In the murine model, bone marrow-derived macrophages secreted IL-6 due to activating the STAT3 signaling pathway mediated by the BC-EV-derived glycoprotein 130 (gp130) (Ham *et al.*, 2018). The role of the gp130/STAT3 pathway in macrophage polarization was previously documented. This glycoprotein is enriched in exosomes and is stabilized by the tetraspanin CD9 (Shi *et al.*, 2017). During another *in vitro* experiment using human BC-derived EV, macrophage cell lines were activated through toll-like receptor 2 (TLR2)/NF-KB signaling pathway and promoted the secretion of pro-inflammatory molecules such as IL-6, TNFA and CCL2 (Chow *et al.*, 2014).

Tumor-derived EV can also modify adipocytes. It was shown that adipocytes treated with hepatocellular carcinoma-derived EV, were later transferred to tumorbearing mice, and stimulated tumor growth, macrophage recruitment and angiogenesis (Wang *et al.*, 2018a). The molecular mechanism by which EV triggered this tumorpromoting capacity in the adipocytes required the activation of the AKT, STAT5A, ERK1/2, NF-KB and GSK-3β pathways, which in turn induced the secretion of the pro-inflammatory cytokines IL-6, IL-8, and CCL2 (Wang *et al.*, 2018a). Furthermore, BC-derived exosomes transferred miRNA-155, mediating metabolic reprogramming of adipocytes and their dedifferentiation into beige/brown. This caused PPARG downregulation, increasing UCP1 levels and augmenting lipolysis (Wu *et al.*, 2018).

Besides activating several pathways within the target cells, EV can also transfer oncoproteins, promoting metastasis and conditioning the pre-metastatic niche. The latter is mediated by tumor-educated bone marrow-derived cells (Kaplan *et al.*, 2005). Patients with advanced Stage IV melanoma were reported to have circulating exosomes with a specific signature, encompassing the tyrosinase-related protein-2 (TYRP2) and the MET oncoprotein. In an *in vitro* study, the researchers showed that bone marrowderived cells treated with exosomes-enriched MET had high expression of the oncoprotein and enhanced cell mobilization. More importantly, the MET-exosomal transferring seems to mediate the metastatic capacity of bone marrow-derived cells (Peinado *et al.*, 2012).

On the other hand, the EV derived from cells within the TME influence the tumor cells, promoting cancer development. For instance, adipocytes-derived EV induced mitochondrial activity and migration by transferring lipids (lysophosphatidylcholine, sphingomyelin and cholesterol), proteins and substrates involved in fatty acid oxidation to melanoma cancer cells (Clement *et al.*, 2020; Lazar *et al.*, 2016). Additionally, EV can efficiently transfer all types of RNAs to a host cell including lncRNAs and miRNA, regulating the expression of genes involved in diverse biological processes (Statello *et al.*, 2021). It has been documented that TAMs-secreted EV promoted BC progression through several mechanisms, including cancer aerobic glycolysis and tumor invasion (Chen *et al.*, 2019; Yang *et al.*, 2011). TAMs release-EV loaded with HISLA, a HIF-1A-stabilizing lncRNA. This molecule participates in glucose metabolism, increasing

the occurrence of aerobic glycolysis within the tumoral cells and contributing to chemoresistance in patients with BC (Chen *et al.*, 2019). Besides, IL-4 positive TAMsderived EV promoted the invasiveness of BC cell lines by transferring miR-223 to the cancer cells, which ultimately caused β-catenin nuclear accumulation (Yang *et al.*, 2011).

BC cells acquired a more aggressive phenotype after going through the EMT transition caused by CAF-derived exosomes carrying the Wnt10b protein and activating the canonical Wnt pathway (Chen *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, in samples from human ovarian cancer, CAF-EV were enriched in the TGFB1 cytokine, enhancing migration and metastasis in a BC cell line panel (Li *et al.*, 2017). On the other hand, exosomes isolated from *in vitro* differentiated adipocytes also promoted a BC cell line proliferation and migration capacity. In this case, the exosomes effect was mediated by activating the Hippo signaling pathway within the cancer cell line, inducing proliferation, and conferring resistance to apoptosis (Wang *et al.*, 2019a).

Studies have revealed that transferring oncogenic proteins and RNA by the EV mediates drug resistance. This interchange can happen between resistant and sensitive cells or non-tumorigenic cells (Ozawa *et al.*, 2018). In BC, it has been reported that miR-100, miR-221/222 and miR-30a are among the chemoresistance-mediated RNAs transferred by EV (Pan *et al.*, 2020; Wei *et al.*, 2014). In addition, some exosomederived miRNAs such as miR-155 (Santos *et al.*, 2018), miRNA-9-5p, miRNA-195- 5p, and miRNA-203a-3p (Shen *et al.*, 2019), have been demonstrated to induce resistance by triggering the acquisition of cancer stem cell phenotypes. Recently, studies have documented the involvement of lncRNA in the exosome-mediated transfer of resistance in several cancer models (Wang *et al.*, 2021a). The protein content within the tumor-derived EV has also been documented to mediate drug resistance. For example, a transmembrane glycoprotein (P-gp) responsible for drug substrate efflux was observed to be exosome-transferred from resistant to sensitive BC cell lines, supporting cell survival by keeping drugs at a sublethal concentration (Lv *et al.*, 2014). In another study, the researchers found an increase in the glutathione S-transferase P1

(GSTP1)- containing EV in the serum of BC patients with progressive disease, after an anthracycline/taxane-based neoadjuvant chemotherapy treatment. Concluding that the presence of this detoxifying metabolic enzyme within the EV was associated with chemoresistance (Yang *et al.*, 2017). Remarkably, therapeutic-induced senescent cells are associated with the formation of stem cell niches during metastases. These cells have been shown to secrete more EV than non-senescent cells containing a high expression of P-gp and other critical proteins involved in ATP depletion and proliferation, among others (Kavanagh *et al.*, 2017). Collectively, EV serve as messengers for a tumor cell to transform their surroundings into a suitable environment for their progression, with a broad spectrum of mechanisms of action.

### 1.4.4 Low oxygen levels impact the extracellular vesicle cargo

Hypoxia is present within extended areas of adipose tissue as well as in the tumor mass. Hence, cells undergo metabolic rearrangement to survive a low oxygen tension environment, affecting the material released in the EV (Kucharzewska *et al.*, 2013). Increased levels of HIF (both intracellular and within the secreted vesicles), is one of the first responses to hypoxic conditions. This family of three isoforms (HIF-1A/2A/4A) regulates tissue remodelling, glucose metabolism, proliferation, and angiogenesis (Finger et Giaccia, 2010). It has been reported that during hypoxia, HIF-1A is stabilized and activates the overexpression of c-Met protein (Pennacchietti *et al.*, 2003), Wnt/beta-catenin signaling (Jiang *et al.*, 2007), and the secretion of VEGF, angiopoietin 2 (Ang-2), and platelet-derived growth factor (PDGF) (Finger et Giaccia, 2010; Ruan *et al.*, 2009). Hypoxic tumors have a more aggressive phenotype since these factors promote cell proliferation, EMT-mediated invasion and angiogenesis.

In BC models, hypoxia-induced HIF-1A-mediated release of EV with high expression of miR-210 (King *et al.*, 2012). The latter is a HIF-1A inducible miRNA linked to neovascularization (Jung *et al.*, 2017) and DNA repair regulation (Fasanaro *et al.*, 2008). Also, lncRNA SNHG1 is enriched in hypoxic BC-derived EV, which

promotes tumor angiogenesis by activating the proliferation and migration of human umbilical vein endothelial cells (HUVECs), and by extending the proliferative phenotype in BC through the miR-216b-5p/JAK2 axis (Dai *et al.*, 2022). Remarkably, BC-derived EV mediates T-cell suppression via delivering TGFB during hypoxic culture conditions (Rong *et al.*, 2016).

EV's capacity to promote aggressiveness has been extensively associated with hypoxic conditions (Jiang *et al.*, 2022), and the research on this topic has been extended to various tumor localizations. EV isolated from hypoxic prostate cancer cells compared with controls, were shown to be loaded with MMP-2 and MMP-9 proteins, as well as cytokines like TGFB2, TNF-1A and IL-6 (Ramteke *et al.*, 2015). Likewise, patients with glioblastoma multiforme showed enrichment of other hypoxia-regulated factors at the protein and mRNA levels, such as IL-8, adrenomedullin (ADM), lysyl oxidase (LOX), caveolin 1, plasminogen activator inhibitor 1 (PAI1), *N*myelocytomatosis viral related oncogene (myc) downstream regulated 1 (NDRG1) and IGF binding protein 1 and 3(IGFPB1/3), all involved in proliferation, angiogenesis and migration (Kucharzewska *et al.*, 2013). In the *in vitro* setting, most of the hypoxiaupregulated proteins within the EV mirrored the content of their donor cells, and cytokines like IL-1Bwere not detected in the vesicles, suggesting specific sorting mechanisms of the EVs' load (Kucharzewska *et al.*, 2013). Intriguingly, the study did not detect HIF-1A within the EV. Nevertheless, in a nasopharyngeal carcinoma model, the presence of transcriptionally active HIF-1A was detected in the EV, and upon delivery, changed the expression of the EMT-associated markers E and N cadherins in the targeted cells (Aga *et al.*, 2014).

Other cells present within the hypoxic TME can contribute to the progression of the disease. Hypoxic MSC secreted EV packaged with miR-21-5p. This miRNA promotes cancer cell survival by inhibiting the expression of the anti-apoptotic PTEN and programmed cell death 4 (*PDCD4*) protein and increasing tumor chemoresistance by polarizing macrophages toward the M2 phenotype (Ren *et al.*, 2019).This. EV
released by hypoxic human breast CAF were loaded with the autophagy-associated G protein-coupled receptor 64 (GPR64) protein. Upon incubation with BC cell lines, this mediator activated the non-canonical NF-KB pathway, upregulating the expression of MMP-9 and IL-8 and augmenting their invasive capacity (Xi *et al.*, 2021). In contrast, EV released by NK cell culture under low oxygen levels proved to be more cytotoxic due to the high expression of granzyme B, perforin and FasL (Jiang *et al.*, 2021).

#### 1.4.5 Impact of EGCG on the extracellular vesicles' cargo and paracrine regulation

The direct effect of EGCG on cell metabolisms, signaling pathways and gene expression has been extensively studied (Romano and Martel, 2021). However, few studies have documented how the polyphenol might affect what cells secret within their microvesicles and, consequently, their paracrine regulation. In this direction, the focus has been on the modulation of the miRNAs sorting also referred to as exomiR (Table 1. *3*) and regulates gene expression through mRNA binding (Saliminejad *et al.*, 2019). When the 4T1 murine BC cells were treated with EGCG, both cells and secreted vesicles showed an upregulation of miR-16, among others. Nevertheless, the miR-16 transferred by the EV inhibited *in vivo* tumor growth by preventing TAM infiltration and M2 polarization via NF-KB pathway suppression (Jang *et al.*, 2013). This miRNA is often downregulated in human breast cancer cells (Thu *et al.*, 2021), where it acts as a tumor suppressor by targeting genes involved in the cell cycle and apoptosis (Liu *et al.*, 2008). This shows how BC can promote macrophage infiltration and polarization towards the TAM phenotype, which is related to a worse clinical outcome for the patient.

Studies associated with other pathologies have demonstrated the potential of the polyphenol to affect cell-cell communication via EV delivery. For instance, the antifibrotic effect of EGCG in a pulmonary fibrosis model was mediated by augmenting the expression levels of miR‑6757‑3p within the EV secreted from endothelial cells (Murata *et al.*, 2023). This miRNA has been proposed to target TGFB receptor 1 (TGF- BR1) and to downregulate fibrosis-related genes such as fibronectin  $\alpha$ -SMA (Murata, M. 2023). In an ischemia model, vesicles derived from EGCG-treated cardiomyocytes were enriched in miR30a, which reduced the autophagy and apoptotic levels, once transferred to cells during a myocardial infarction (Zhang *et al.*, 2020). Accordingly, the EGCG's potential capacity to ameliorate the damage during coronary artery embolization was mediated by the induction of miR30a (Zhang *et al.*, 2020). Table 1. 3 summarizes the mRNAs modified in the EV upon EGCG treatment of the cells.

Another mechanism, by which EGCG improves myocardial recovery after an infarction, was linked to its action over procoagulant platelets. The EV released by these pro-coagulant platelets are enriched in phosphatidylserine, which upon fusing other platelets, propagate this phenotype and contribute to coagulation and thrombosis. Then, EGCG didn't affect phosphatidylserine serine exposure but rather reduced the number of released EV from pro-coagulant platelets (Millington-Burgess and Harper, 2021). Similar results were obtained during proteomic profiling of EV secreted by intestinal-like cells, in which EGCG reduced both the number and size of the vesicles. Additionally, the EGCG altered the repertoire of enriched proteins within the EV, toward proteins involved in maintaining skin homeostasis, instead of those involved in cell proliferation and immune response, as observed in the control cells (Yano *et al.*, 2022).

Whether the effect of EGCG over EV sorting is specific or is a consequence of the overall modification in cell activation status and gene expression remains an open question. Many factors influence the outcome of what cells are secreted, and it is model-dependent. Some research supports the observation that vesicles reflect the content of their parental cells, while others do not. Interestingly, a study performed in macrophages demonstrated that EGCG could be internalized into cytoplasmic vesicles, triggering an oxidative reaction and causing the selective aggregation and degradation of HMGB1 (Li *et al.*, 2011a), suggesting that some proteins can be targeted intracellularly by the catechin affecting their release as well.

miRNA	<b>Status</b>	Model	Reference
let-7, miR-16, miR-18b, miR-20a, miR-25, miR-92, miR-93, miR- $221$ , and miR-320	Up (EV and Cells)	BC-Macrophage (Murine)	(Jang $et$ al., 2013)
miR-10a, miR-18a, miR-19a, miR- 26b, miR-29b, miR-34b, miR-98, miR-129, miR-181d	Down (EV and Cells)		
miR-6757-3p, miR-1298-5p, miR-3666, miR-4501, miR-6866-3p, miR-562, miR-8055, miR-4690-3p, miR-657, miR-610, miR-4737, miR-509-3-5p, miR-628-3p, miR-550b-2-5p, miR-494-5p, miR-4470, miR-3612, miR-1233-3p, miR-4290, miR-5584-3p, miR-6728-3p, miR-4529-5p 2.02 0.001	Up (EV)	Pulmonary Fibrosis	(Murata <i>et al.</i> , 2023)
miR-449b-5p, miR-4710, miR-6801-3p, miR-6827-5p.	Down (EV)		
miR <sub>30</sub> a	UP (EV and Cells)	Acute myocardial infarction	(Zhang et al., 2020)

Table 1. 3. Reported miRNAs (miR) modulated by EGCG in the EV.

miR: micro RNA, EV: extracelular vesicles, BC: breast cancer

#### RESEARCH PROBLEMATIC, HYPOTHESIS AND OBJECTIVES

Obesity is a condition with a high incidence worldwide. A chronic low inflammation grade is one of the principal characteristics that conditions the development of several comorbidities such as heart disease and cancer (Himbert *et al.*, 2017). The adipose tissue has been acknowledged as an endocrine organ essential in regulating insulin sensitivity and immunological responses (Gregoire, 2001). The presence of hypoxia in extended areas of the adipose tissue promotes and sustains inflammation by recruiting macrophages, which contribute to a pro-angiogenic environment (Nieman *et al.*, 2013). During obesity, the adipocytes' hypertrophy causes a dysfunctional secretory profile toward an inflammatory phenotype. CCL2/MCP-1, TNFA, IL-6, IL-8, PAI-1 and leptin are among the cytokines responsible for triggering the infiltration of lymphocytes, stromal cells and macrophages, altering the tissue microenvironment (Nieman *et al.*, 2013). Hence, the obesogenic condition appears to favor the emergence and development of cancers including breast and endometrial, especially in postmenopausal women (Bjune *et al.*, 2022).

How cancer cells reshape adipocytes is not fully understood. The presence of adipocytes and tumor-reshaped adipocytes (CAA) within the invasive front of breast cancer biopsies has been reported (Duong *et al*., 2017; Nieman *et al*., 2013). Cancer cells can activate lipolysis in the adipocytes by secretion of lipolytic signals like catecholamines, proinflammatory cytokines and adrenomedullin. Then, released FFA can be delivered into the cancer cells by adipose-derived EV, promoting tumor proliferation and migration (Attane and Muller, 2020). Notably, the BC tumor microenvironment is rich in adipose tissue, thereby, it is an excellent model for understanding the molecular intermediates involved in the crosstalk between cancer cells and adipocytes.

Epidemiological studies suggest that consuming a polyphenol-rich diet reduces the incidence of some obesity-related cancers. EGCG, the main catechin in green tea, targets signaling pathways associated with cell survival, proliferation, differentiation,

migration, angiogenesis, hormone activities, detoxification enzymes and immune responses (Bae *et al.*, 2019; Zhou *et al.*, 2016). Besides, EGCG reduces adipocyte markers' expression (PPARG and C/EBPA), proliferation and lipid accumulation (Gonzalez Suarez *et al.*, 2021; Lin *et al.*, 2005). Whether this diet-derived polyphenol can alter the adipocyte secretome profile remains to be addressed.

Considering these facts, we aim to identify the molecular mechanisms involved in the adipocyte paracrine regulation of cancer cells' invasive phenotype and how efficient diet-derived intervention may alter such a phenomenon. To model the interaction between adipose tissue and breast cancer cells, human adipocyte-derived mesenchymal stem cells (h-ADMSC) were used and differentiated into mature adipocytes. As for the tumor cell line, we used MDA-MB-231, a highly aggressive subtype model of TNBC. This is a hard-to-treat subtype because of a lack of recognized targets for molecular-oriented therapy, where little therapeutic progress has been made during the past decades. Thus, new approaches and strategies need to be addressed to prevent the onset of TNBC.

Hypothesis: EGCG alters adipocyte differentiation and signaling pathways involved in the crosstalk between adipocytes and tumor cells.

Objectives:

- 1) To evaluate the inhibitory capacity of EGCG on adipose-derived mesenchymal stem cell differentiation into adipocytes and the impact on the secretome profile and paracrine regulation of the TNBC invasive phenotype.
- 2) To characterize the acquisition of a CAA-like phenotype in h-ADMSC and chemotaxis in response to the TNBC-derived secretome.
- 3) To evaluate the chemopreventive impact of EGCG intervention against acquiring a CAA-like phenotype in the h-ADMSC.
- 4) To characterize how EGCG alters the TNBC derived-EV cargo and their paracrine regulation over the h-ADMSC.

## CHAPTER II

#### ARTICLE 1

# EGCG INHIBITS ADIPOSE-DERIVED MESENCHYMAL STEM CELLS DIFFERENTIATION INTO ADIPOCYTES AND PREVENTS A STAT3-MEDIATED PARACRINE ONCOGENIC CONTROL OF TRIPLE-NEGATIVE BREAST CANCER CELL INVASIVE PHENOTYPE

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Manuscript published in Molecules **2021**, 26, 1506. https://doi.org/10.3390/molecules26061506.

## Authors contributions:

*Narjara Gonzalez Suarez* and *Borhane Annabi*: Designed the experiments of this study and wrote the manuscript.

*Narjara Gonzalez Suarez, Sahily Rodriguez Torres, Amira Ouanouki* and *Layal El Cheikh-Hussein*: Conducted the experiments, data analysis, and critical discussions of the results.

*Borhane Annabi*: Provided the financial support.

All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

#### 2.1 Résumé

Les personnes obèses ont un risque accru de développer un cancer du sein triple négatif (TNBC), en partie associé à l'état d'inflammation chronique. De plus, les données épidémiologiques indiquent qu'une consommation accrue de fruits et légumes riches en polyphénols joue un rôle clé dans la réduction de l'incidence de certains types de cancer. Ici, nous avons testé si l'épigallocatéchine-3-gallate (EGCG) dérivée du thé vert pouvait inhiber la différenciation des cellules souches mésenchymateuses adipocytaire en adipocytes, et comment cela impactait le profil du sécrétome et la régulation paracrine du phénotype invasif TNBC. Dans cette étude, les cellules souches mésenchymateuses ont été différenciées en adipocytes, et le milieu conditionné (CM) des préadipocytes et des adipocytes matures a été récolté pour des études de migration et de vasculogenèse. La migration en temps réel des cellules de la lignée MDA-MB-231 dérivée d'un TNBC humain a été réalisée à l'aide du système exCELLigence. Des micropuces d'ADN et la RT-qPCR ont été utilisées pour évaluer les niveaux d'expression géniques. L'immunobuvardage a été utilisé pour évaluer l'expression des protéines et leur statut de phosphorylation. Le mimétisme vasculogénique (VM) *in vitro* a été évalué sur Matrigel. Nos résultats montrent que l'EGCG inhibe l'induction de biomarqueurs adipogéniques clés, notamment la lipoprotéine lipase, l'adiponectine, la leptine, la synthase d'acide gras FABP4. Une augmentation de la chimiotaxie des cellules MDA-MB-231 et du VM ont été observés en réponse au sécrétome des adipocytes matures. Ceci est corrélé à l'augmentation de l'état de phosphorylation de STAT3. Ce phénotype invasif a été inhibé par l'EGCG, les inhibiteurs de JAK/STAT Tofacitinib et AG490, ainsi que par répression génique de STAT3. En conclusion, les catéchines alimentaires pourraient prévenir l'apparition d'un environnement obésogène qui favorise le développement de TNBC en partie à cause de l'inhibition de l'adipogenèse et la modulation du profil du sécrétome des adipocytes.

#### 2.2 Abstract

Obese subjects have an increased risk of developing triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC), in part associated with the chronic low-grade inflammation state. On the other hand, epidemiological data indicates that increased consumption of polyphenol-rich fruits and vegetables plays a key role in reducing incidence of some cancer types. Here, we tested whether green tea-derived epigallocatechin-3-gallate (EGCG) could alter adipose-derived mesenchymal stem cell differentiation into adipocytes, and how this impacts the secretome profile and paracrine regulation of the TNBC invasive phenotype. Here, cell differentiation was performed and conditioned media (CM) from preadipocytes and mature adipocytes harvested. Human TNBC-derived MDA-MB-231 real-time cell migration was performed using the exCELLigence system. Differential gene arrays and RT-qPCR were used to assess gene expression levels. Western blotting was used to assess protein expression and phosphorylation status levels. *In vitro* vasculogenic mimicry (VM) was assessed with Matrigel. EGCG was found to inhibit the induction of key adipogenic biomarkers, including lipoprotein lipase, adiponectin, leptin, fatty acid synthase, and fatty acid binding protein 4. Increased TNBC-derived MDA-MB-231 cell chemotaxis and vasculogenic mimicry were observed in response to mature adipocytes' secretome, and this was correlated with increased STAT3 phosphorylation status. This invasive phenotype was prevented by EGCG, the JAK/STAT inhibitors Tofacitinib and AG490, as well as upon STAT3 gene silencing. In conclusion, dietary catechin-mediated interventions could, in part through the inhibition of adipogenesis and modulation of adipocytes' secretome profile, prevent the onset of an obesogenic environment that favors TNBC development.

#### 2.3 Introduction

Adipogenesis, as defined by the formation of adipocytes from stem cells (Dagpo *et al.*, 2020), and the adipose tissue itself have drawn much attention at the onset of chronic inflammation in metabolic diseases, such as type 2 diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular diseases, and in several types of cancer (Heyn *et al.*, 2020; Himbert *et al.*, 2017). Among the processes involved in the setting of these diseases, the adipose tissue secretome has been inferred to play a crucial paracrine regulatory role in brain cancer (Onzi *et al.*, 2019), prostate cancer (Sacca *et al.*, 2019), bladder cancer (Maj *et al.*, 2018), breast cancer (Chu *et al.*, 2019), and colon cancer (Riondino *et al.*, 2014). Molecular links between central obesity and breast cancer have also been inferred to trigger oncogenic signaling pathways, including NF-KB, JAK, STAT3, and AKT (Zimta *et al.*, 2019).

The adipose tissue functions as an endocrine organ that, in obese people, produces a high level of tumor-promoting hormones such as leptin and estrogen, and a low level of the tumor suppressor hormone, adiponectin (Jasinski-Bergner et Kielstein, 2019). In particular, adipose tissues from tumor-bearing breasts have shown a distinct molecular signature and physiological status from those of tumor-free breasts (Miran *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, several adipose tissue-derived miRNAs were associated with adipocyte differentiation and identified with essential roles in obesity-associated inflammation, insulin resistance, and tumor microenvironment (Heyn *et al.*, 2020). The efficacy of currently approved drug therapies and understanding of drug mechanisms against obesity remain open for debate (Williams *et al.*, 2020), diet-derived phytochemicals have emerged as potential candidates to combat obesity via adipose non-shivering thermogenesis (Li *et al.*, 2019b), or targeting of the adipose tissue inflammation (Li *et al.*, 2020b; Sudhakaran and Doseff, 2020).

Epidemiological data indicate that increased consumption of fruits and vegetables plays a key role in reducing the incidence of some cancers (Fund., 2007). These foods contain a significant number of polyphenols, which are potential agents that reduce obesity in part through reducing the amount of adipose tissue by stimulating lipolysis (Andersen *et al.*, 2010). It has been reported that in pre-adipocyte murine models of differentiation, epigallocatechin-3-gallate (EGCG), which is the main compound in green tea, reduced adipocyte proliferation, lipid accumulation and expression of peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor gamma (PPARG) and CCAAT/enhancerbinding protein alpha (C/EBPA) in mature adipocytes (Lin *et al.*, 2005). Whether dietmediated polyphenols can consequently alter the secretome profile of adipocytes, and how secretome-mediated paracrine regulation of cancer cells' invasive phenotype occurs, remains to be better addressed.

Therefore, the present study aims at exploring the molecular mechanisms involved in the adipocyte paracrine regulation of cancer cells' invasive characteristics, and how efficient diet-derived intervention may prevent such regulation. It was found that the secretome of differentiated adipocytes specifically triggered migration in several TNBC-derived cells, but not the migration of the ovarian or colon cancer cells tested. Chronic exposure of adipose-derived mesenchymal stem cells (ADMSC) to EGCG during their differentiation into mature adipocytes effectively altered adipogenesis and the secretome profile of differentiated adipocytes as TNBC-derived cell chemotaxis and vasculogenic mimicry were inhibited. Finally, adipocyte secretome-mediated paracrine regulation of TNBC-derived cells' invasive phenotype required STAT3 oncogenic signaling, and EGCG was able to acutely inhibit STAT3 phosphorylation.

#### 2.4 Materials and methods

#### 2.4.1 Materials

Sodium dodecylsulfate (SDS), epigallocatechin-3-gallate (EGCG), Tofacitinib, AG490, and bovine serum albumin (BSA) were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich Canada (Oakville, ON). Electrophoresis reagents were purchased from Bio-Rad (Mississauga, ON, Canada). The enhanced chemiluminescence (ECL) reagents were from Amersham Pharmacia Biotech (Baie d'Urfé, QC, Canada). Micro bicinchoninic acid protein assay reagents were purchased from Pierce (Rockford, IL, USA). The polyclonal antibodies against Fibronectin, Tubulin, AKT, phosphorylated AKT, STAT3 and phosphorylated STAT3 were obtained from Cell Signaling Technology Inc. (Danvers, MA, USA). Horseradish peroxidase-conjugated donkey anti-rabbit and anti-mouse IgG secondary antibodies were obtained from Jackson ImmunoResearch Laboratories (West Grove, PA, USA).

#### 2.4.2 Cell Culture

Human serous carcinoma-derived ES-2 ovarian cancer cells, HT-29 colon adenocarcinoma, and triple-negative breast cancer cell lines, including MDA-MB-231, MDA-MB-468, MDA-MB-157, BT-20 and HCC-70, were all purchased from the American Type Culture Collection (ATCC). BT-20, ES-2 and HT-29 cells were grown as monolayers in McCoy's 5a Modified Medium (Wisent, 317-010-CL) containing 10% fetal bovine serum (Life Technologies, 12483-020), 100 U/mL penicillin and 100 mg/mL streptomycin (Wisent, 450-202-EL). MDA-MB-231, MDA-MB-157 and MDA-MB-468 breast cancer cell lines were grown in DMEM Medium (Wisent, 319- 005-CL) supplemented with 10% of fetal bovine serum, while HCC-70 cells were cultured in RPMI (Wisent, 350-007-CL). All cells were cultured at 37 °C under a humidified  $95\% - 5\%$  ( $v/v$ ) mixture of air and CO<sub>2</sub>.

#### 2.4.3 Adipose-Derived Mesenchymal Stem Cell Differentiation

Adipose-derived mesenchymal stem cells (ADMSC; ATCC, PCS-500-011) were grown using the Mesenchymal Stem Cell Basal Medium (ATCC, PCS-500-030), and supplemented with Mesenchymal Stem Cell Growth Kit for adipocyte differentiation-Low Serum (ATCC, PCS-500-040). When cells reached 70–80% confluency, they were seeded at a density of  $18,000$  cells/cm<sup>2</sup> and differentiated into mature adipocytes with Adipocyte Differentiation Toolkit (ATCC, PCS-500-050) following the manufacturer's instructions. Briefly, cells were incubated at  $37^{\circ}$ C with  $5\%$  CO<sub>2</sub> for 48 h before initiating adipocyte differentiation. Then, the media was removed, and cell monolayers rinsed with room temperature PBS (ATCC, 302200). Next, 2 mL (for 6 well plates) of pre-warmed (37°C) adipocyte differentiation/initiation medium was added to each well to initiate adipocyte differentiation. After a 48-h incubation, half the volume of media was removed, and the previous steps repeated for another 48 h. Later, the maintenance phase was initiated by carefully removing 2 mL of media from each well (leaving 1 mL) and replacing it with 2 mL of pre-warmed adipocyte differentiation/maintenance medium in each well. The latter step was repeated every 3–4 days for another 11 days until adipocytes reached full maturity  $(\sim]12-15$  days). Conditioned media (CM) was collected at different time points.

#### 2.4.4 Oil Red O Staining

In order to assess adipocyte maturation status and to visualize the lipid droplet formation, medium was removed, and cells were incubated with 10% formalin at room temperature for 5 min, then fresh formalin was added, and cells were stored at 4°C in the dark, for up to 2 days. The wells were next washed with 60% isopropanol and left to dry. Oil Red O (0.5 g/100 isopropanol stock solution; Sigma-Aldrich) was added and left for 10 min. Wells were finally washed with water four times and pictures taken.

2.4.5 Total RNA Isolation, cDNA Synthesis and Real-Time Quantitative PCR

Total RNA was extracted from cell monolayers using TriZol reagent (Life Technologies, Gaithersburg, MD, USA). For cDNA synthesis, two μg of total RNA were reverse-transcribed using a high capacity cDNA reverse transcription kit (Applied Biosystems, Foster City, CA, USA). cDNA was stored at -80°C prior to PCR. Gene expression was quantified by real-time quantitative PCR using iQ SYBR Green Supermix (Bio-Rad, Hercules, CA, USA). DNA amplification was carried out using an Icycler iQ5 (Bio-Rad, Hercules, CA, USA) and product detection was performed by measuring binding of the fluorescent dye SYBR Green I to double-stranded DNA.

#### 2.4.6. Human Adipogenesis and Inflammation PCR Arrays

The Human Adipogenesis  $RT^2$  Profiler PCR Array (PAHS-049Z) and the Human Cancer Inflammation & Immunity Crosstalk  $RT^2$  Profiler<sup>TM</sup> PCR Array (PAHS-181Z) were used according to the manufacturer's protocol (QIAGEN). The detailed list of the key genes assessed can be found on the manufacturer's website (https://geneglobe.qiagen.com/us/product-groups/rt2-profiler-pcr-arrays) (accessed on 13 February 2021). Using real-time quantitative PCR, we reliably analyzed expression of a focused panel of genes related to adipogenesis and PPARG targets, or to inflammatory cytokines/receptors. Relative gene expressions were calculated using the  $2^{-\Delta\Delta C}$ <sub>T</sub> method, in which C<sub>T</sub> indicates the fractional cycle number where the fluorescent signal reaches detection threshold. The "delta–delta" method uses the normalized  $\Delta C_T$ value of each sample, calculated using a total of five endogenous control genes (*B2M*, *HPRT1*, *RPL13A*, *GAPDH,* and *ACTB*). Fold change values are then presented as average fold change =  $2$ (average  $\Delta \Delta C_T$ ) for genes in differentiated adipocytes relative to pre-adipocytes. Detectable PCR products were obtained and defined as requiring <35 cycles. The resulting raw data were then analyzed using the PCR Array Data Analysis Template (http://www.sabiosciences.com/pcrarraydataanalysis.php) (accessed on 1

February 2021). This integrated web-based software package automatically performs all  $\Delta\Delta C_T$ -based fold-change calculations from the uploaded raw threshold cycle data.

#### 2.4.7 Western Blotting

TNBC-derived MDA-MB-231 cells were lysed in a buffer containing 1 mM each of NaF and Na3VO4, and proteins (30 μg) were separated by SDS-polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis (PAGE). After electrophoresis, proteins were electro-transferred to polyvinylidene difluoride membranes, which were then blocked for 1 h at room temperature with 5% nonfat dry milk in Tris-buffered saline (150 mM NaCl, 20 mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.5) containing 0.3% Tween-20 (TBST; Bioshop, TWN510-500). Membranes were further washed in TBST and incubated with the appropriate primary antibodies (1/1000 dilution) in TBST containing 3% BSA and 0.1% sodium azide (Sigma-Aldrich), followed by a 1 h incubation with horseradish peroxidase-conjugated donkey anti-rabbit or anti-mouse IgG at 1/2500 dilutions in TBST containing 5% nonfat dry milk. Immunoreactive material was visualized by ECL.

#### 2.4.8 Chemotactic Cell Migration Assay

Cell migration assays were carried out using the Real-Time Cell Analyzer (RTCA) Dual-Plate (DP) Instrument of the xCELLigence system (Roche Diagnostics). Adherent cell monolayers were trypsinized and seeded (30,000 cells/well) onto CIM-Plates 16 (Roche Diagnostics). These migration plates are similar to conventional Transwells (8 μm pore size) but have gold electrode arrays on the bottom side of the membrane to provide real-time measurement of cell migration. Prior to cell seeding, the underside of the wells from the upper chamber were coated with 25 μL of 0.15% gelatin in PBS and incubated for 1 h at 37°C. Chemotaxis was monitored for 8 h using as chemoattractant either media conditioned from serum-starved ADMSC (Preadipo-CM) or from mature adipocytes (Adipo-CM), in the presence or not of EGCG,

Tofacitinib, or AG490. The impedance values were measured by the RTCA DP Instrument software and were expressed in arbitrary units as Normalized Cell Migration Index. Each experiment was performed three times in duplicate.

#### 2.4.9 Wound-Healing Assay

MDA-MB-231 cells were seeded into 6-well tissue culture dishes and grown to nearly confluent cell monolayers. Then, a linear wound was generated in the monolayer with a sterile 200 μL pipette tip creating a cell-free area (Francisco Fernandez *et al.*, 2019). Cultures were gently washed with the growth medium to remove loose cells. The cells were then treated with either Preadipo-CM or Adipo-CM. Immediately after the scratch and at 2, 4, and 8 h, at least four images of the scraped area were captured using phase contrast microscopy and analyzed using NIH ImageJ software (Suarez-Arnedo *et al.*, 2020). Two independent experiments were performed, using three wells for each stimulating condition. The same scratched area was selected for the measurements at each time of the study.

#### 2.4.10 *In Vitro* Vasculogenic Mimicry Assay

*In vitro* vasculogenic mimicry (VM) of human TNBC-derived MDA-MB-231 cells were assessed by Matrigel tube formation as previously described (Sicard *et al.*, 2021). In brief, each well of a 96-well plate was pre-coated with 50 μL of Matrigel. After gel solidification, MDA-MB-231 cell suspension in culture media (5  $\times$  10<sup>4</sup>) cells/200 μL) was seeded into the wells. Either serum-deprived basal media (unstimulated condition), or stimulation with Preadipo-CM or Adipo-CM (stimulated conditions) were performed. Acute additions of EGCG, Tofacitinib, or AG490 (all at 30 μM) were done in the presence of Adipo-CM to the cell culture and incubated at 37°C in a CO2 incubator. Pictures were taken overtime using a digital camera attached to a phase-contrast inverted microscope. Images were then placed in bins and subjected to the "Skeletonize" function of ImageJ software. The corresponding loop area, loop perimeter, branching, and tube elongation parameters were measured using the 2D/3D skeleton PlugIn (Arganda-Carreras *et al.*, 2010) for the NIH ImageJ software (Abramoff, 2004).

#### 2.4.11 Statistical Data Analysis

Unless otherwise stated, data and error bars were expressed as means  $\pm$  SEM of three or more independent experiments. Statistical analysis of data was performed by Kruskal–Wallis with DunnTukey's post-test to establish differences among groups or Mann–Whitney for two groups' comparison. Probability values of less than 0.05 were considered significant and an asterisk identifies such significance in the figures. GraphPad Prism 7 software (San Diego, CA, USA) was used for all analyses.

#### 2.5 Results

2.5.1 Phenotypical and transcriptional assessment of adipose-derived mesenchymal stem cell differentiation and inhibition of adipogenesis by green tea-derived EGCG

The differentiation of human adipose-derived mesenchymal stem cells (ADMSC) into mature adipocytes was first performed according to the manufacturer's instructions. Lipid droplet generation was effectively observed as early as day 6 in mature adipocytes as confirmed by increases in size shape due to lipid vesicles accumulation and by Oil Red O staining (Figure 2. 1A). Interestingly, such differentiation processes were abrogated by the presence of the diet-derived epigallocatechin-3-gallate (EGCG), a flavonoid believed to prevent the obesityassociated mortality (Carrasco-Pozo *et al.*, 2019; Lee *et al.*, 2019; Rufino *et al.*, 2021), as both cell size and Oil Red O staining levels were reduced (Figure 2. 1A). When total RNA was extracted from each condition and RT-qPCR was performed to assess gene expression levels, classical adipogenesis-associated genes were induced, including the transcription factors PPARG and C/EBPA, which promote expression of genes that confer the characteristics of mature adipocytes (Lee *et al.*, 2019). Among those genes are insulin receptors, fatty acid synthase, lipoprotein lipase, adiponectin, leptin, acetyl-CoA carboxylase beta, and fatty acid binding protein 4 (FABP4, Figure 2. 1B) (Rosen *et al.*, 2000), the latter being a new player connecting obesity with breast cancer development (Zeng *et al.*, 2020). Interestingly, EGCG inhibited the induction of these genes by 40–80%, suggesting that the resulting mature adipocytes may additionally exhibit an altered secretome profile (Figure 2. 1C). Finally, differential gene expression of inflammatory biomarkers was assessed comparing genes preferentially expressed in ADMSC (Figure 2. 1D, left) versus genes preferentially expressed in adipocytes (Figure 2. 1D, right). Whereas this does not preclude their overall expression, data confirm that the composition of the respective pro-inflammatory secretome characterizes each of the undifferentiated vs. differentiated adipocyte states.





Figure 2. 1. Transcriptional validation of ADMSC differentiation into adipocytes and green tea-derived EGCG inhibition of adipogenesis.

(**A**) ADMSC were differentiated into mature adipocytes in the presence or not of 10 μM EGCG as described in the Methods section. Oil Red O staining was performed at different stages of differentiation to confirm mature adipocyte status through lipid droplets formation, typically observed between day 6 and day 12. (**B**) Total RNA was extracted from ADMSC, adipocytes, as well as ADMSC differentiated in the presence or not of EGCG. RT-qPCR was performed using a  $RT^2$ -Profiler gene array to assess adipogenesis gene expression levels. Ratios of adipocytes gene expression on ADMSC gene expression were performed and expressed in a logarithmic scale. (**C**) Ratios of adipocytes differentiated in the presence of EGCG on ADMSC were performed, and EGCG inhibitory potential calculated. (**D**) Total RNA was extracted from ADMSC and from adipocytes. RT-qPCR was performed using a  $RT^2$ -Profiler gene array to assess inflammatory-associated gene expression levels. Ratios of adipocytes/ADMSC gene expression (right), and ADMSC/adipocytes (left) gene expression were performed and expressed in a logarithmic scale. Gene arrays data reflect one representative experiment out of two.

2.5.2 Adipocyte Secretome, But Not that of Adipose-Derived Mesenchymal Stem Cells, Triggers Increased TNBC-Derived Cell Migration

Secretome from ADMSC and from adipocyte cell cultures was defined as the conditioned media (CM) collected from each of the respective cell lines, and chemoattractant capacity was assessed on human TNBC-derived MDA-MB-231 cells, ES-2 ovarian cancer cells, and HT-29 colorectal cancer cells. Adipocyte secretome (Adipo-CM; Figure 2. *2* closed circles) was found to trigger a higher chemotactic response in TNBC cells than in any of the two other cancer cell line models tested when compared to ADMSC secretome (Preadipo-CM; Figure 2. *2*, open circles). To further document the evidence of increased chemotaxis observed in MDA-MB-231 cells, a wound-healing assay was performed (Figure 2. 3A) and was found to corroborate the increased invasiveness phenotype as cells recovered the wounded area faster in response to Adipo-CM (Figure 2. 3B). Finally, chemotaxis screening of four other human TNBC-derived cell lines was performed with MDA-MB-468, MDA-MB-157, BT-20, and HCC-70 cells in response to either Preadipo-CM or Adipo-CM. All but HCC-70 cells were found to be more responsive to Adipo-CM than to Preadipo-CM (Figure 2. 3C). This suggests that the mature adipocyte secretome exerts oncogenic paracrine regulation of TNBC cells, increasing their invasiveness.



Figure 2. 2. Adipocyte secretome, but not that of ADMSC, triggers increased TNBCderived cell migration.

Real-time cell migration was performed using the xCELLigence System-RTCA as described in the Methods section in response to ADMSC conditioned media (Preadipo-CM, open circles) or adipocytes' conditioned media (Adipo-CM, closed circles). Cells assessed were human TNBC-derived MDA-MB-231, ES-2 ovarian carcinoma, and HT-29 colorectal adenocarcinoma.



Figure 2. 3. Chemotaxis response of different TNBC-derived cell lines to adipocyte secretome.

(**A**) A wound-healing assay was performed with MDA-MB-231 cells in response to conditioned media isolated from ADMSC (Preadipo-CM) and from adipocyte conditioned media (Adipo-CM), and pictures were taken of the recovered area as described in the Methods section. (**B**) The extent of the recovered area was calculated from a representative experiment. (**C**) Chemotaxis screening of four other human TNBC-derived cell lines was performed with MDA-MB-468, MDA-MB-157, BT-20, and HCC-70 cells in response to either Preadipo-CM (white bars) or Adipo-CM (black bars). Two independent cell migration assays were performed and measured in triplicate.

# 2.5.3 EGCG Inhibits Both the Acute Response and the Paracrine Regulation of TNBC Cell Chemotaxis Response to Mature Adipocyte Secretome

The capacity of EGCG to regulate the chemotaxis response triggered by the adipocyte secretome was next assessed. Two conditions were tested: first adding the catechin molecule into the Adipo-CM (acute treatment) and second using a CM from ADMSC differentiated in the presence of 10 μM EGCG (paracrine regulation). Whereas little inhibition was found when MDA-MB-231 cells were exposed to Preadipo-CM in the presence of increasing EGCG concentrations (Figure 2. 4A), and a dose-dependent inhibition of chemotaxis was observed in response to Adipo-CM and, when treated at 15 μM EGCG, reached migration levels equivalent to the basal Preadipo-CM response (Figure 2. 4B). When MDA-MB-231 chemotaxis response was assessed with CM isolated from mature adipocytes and from ADMSC differentiated in the presence of EGCG, it was also found to be reduced (Figure 2. 4C). In light of the previously reported involvement of the Fibronectin/STAT3 signaling axis in epithelialmesenchymal transition (EMT), a process that increases invasion and metastasis of breast cancer cells (Balanis *et al.*, 2013), cell lysates of the above conditions were isolated. Immunoblotting was performed and Adipo-CM was found to trigger Fibronectin expression, a condition which was abrogated by EGCG (Figure 2. 4D). Altogether, these data suggest that specific signaling pathway inhibition may account for the acute EGCG inhibition of chemotaxis. More importantly, EGCG is able to prevent the paracrine regulation of TNBC cell chemotaxis response by altering the adipocyte secretome profile and, ultimately, the acquisition of an EMT-related invasive phenotype.





MDA-MB-231 cell migration was assessed as described in the Methods section in the presence of increasing concentrations of EGCG and in response to (**A**) conditioned media isolated from ADMSC (Preadipo-CM), or (**B**) conditioned media isolated from differentiated adipocytes (Adipo-CM). (**C**) Chemotaxis response to conditioned media harvested from adipocytes that were differentiated from ADMSC in untreated (white bar), vehicle-treated (ethanol, grey bars), or differentiated in the presence of 15  $\mu$ M EGCG (black bars). (**D**) MDA-MB-231 cells were treated for 24 h in basal media (Control), Preadipo-CM, Adipo-CM, or Adipo-CM in the presence of 30 μM EGCG. Fibronectin and Tubulin protein expression were then assessed by immunoblotting using the respective cell lysates. Two independent cell migration assays were performed and measured in triplicate.

2.5.4 STAT3 Is Involved in the Paracrine Chemotaxis Response to Adipocyte Secretome

Stress-induced signaling through signal transducer and activator of transcription 3 (STAT3) is, among other transducing pathways, involved in the initiation, progression, metastasis, and immune evasion of TNBC (Balanis et Carlin, 2017). More recently, STAT3 is further considered as a potential therapeutic target (Bharadwaj *et al.*, 2020; Qin *et al.*, 2019; Wu *et al.*, 2017a). Whether STAT3 is involved in the paracrine response to mature adipocyte secretome was next assessed. MDA-MB-231 cells were exposed to Preadipo-CM or to Adipo-CM for 24 h and STAT3 phosphorylation status assessed by Western blotting. STAT3 phosphorylation was induced in response to Preadipo-CM, whereas phosphorylation was higher in response to Adipo-CM (Figure 2. 5A, upper panels). Interestingly, phosphorylation of the serine/threonine-specific protein kinase AKT, which plays a key role in multiple cellular processes such as cell proliferation, transcription, and cell migration (Jabbarzadeh Kaboli *et al.*, 2020; Lyons, 2019), was only induced in response to Adipo-CM (Figure 2. 5A, lower panels). However, EGCG was able to inhibit STAT3 but not AKT phosphorylation. In addition to EGCG, Tofacitinib and AG490, two pharmacological inhibitors of STAT3 phosphorylation (Hosseini *et al.*, 2020; Jing et Tweardy, 2005), also inhibited Adipo-CM-induced STAT3 phosphorylation (Figure 2. 5B) as well as the MDA-MB-231 chemotactic cell response (Figure 2. 5C). Finally, transient siRNA-mediated gene silencing of STAT3 was performed in MDA-MB-231 cells in order to reduce the STAT3 protein content (Figure 2. 5D, insert). Then, siScrambled or siSTAT3 cells were challenged to migrate in response to Adipo-CM as a chemoattractant. Similarly, to STAT3 pharmacological inhibition, transient silencing of STAT3 was found to reduce the MDA-MB-231 chemotaxis response to the adipocyte secretome (Figure 2. 5D).



Figure 2. 5. Figure 2.5: STAT3 involvement in the paracrine chemotaxis response to adipocyte secretome.

(**A**) MDA-MB-231 cells were treated for 24 h in the presence of basal media (Control), ADMSC conditioned media (Preadipo-CM), adipocyte conditioned media (Adipo-CM), or Adipo-CM in the presence of 30 μM EGCG. STAT3 and AKT phosphorylation status was then assessed by immunoblotting using the respective cell lysates. **(B)** Cells were similarly treated as in  $(A)$  with the difference that 30  $\mu$ M Tofacitinib or AG490 were added to the CM. (**C**) MDA-MB-231 chemotaxis response to conditioned media harvested from adipocytes was performed as described in the Methods section in the absence (vehicle), or presence of Tofacitinib (closed circles), or AG490 (closed triangles). (**D**) MDA-MB-231 chemotaxis response to conditioned media harvested from adipocytes was performed as described in the Methods section in control siScrambled cells (open circles), or in siSTAT3-transfected cells (closed circles). Insert shows a representative Western blot monitoring the extent of STAT3 silencing from siScrambled and siSTAT3-transfected cells. GAPDH was used as a loading control.

2.5.5 Adipocyte Secretome Triggers *In Vitro* 3D-Capillary-Like Structure Maturation, and STAT3 Inhibition Prevents such Maturation.

The paracrine regulation of ADMSC and of mature adipocyte secretome was next assessed on *in vitro* vasculogenic mimicry (VM), a process known to in part be responsible for TNBC chemotherapy resistance (Jitariu *et al.*, 2017). MDA-MB-231 cells were seeded on Matrigel and cultured for 24 h as described in the Methods section in order to generate 3D capillary-like structures. Representative pictures were taken (Figure 2. 6A, upper panels), and digitalized structures were used for the analysis presented (Figure 2. 6A, lower panels). Analysis of the 3D capillary-like structure maturation on Matrigel was performed (Figure 2. 6B) and shows that unstimulated cells cultured on Matrigel and in the presence of serum-deprived basal media (unstimulated condition) led to the formation of 3D structures, which was accelerated by the Preadipo-CM and furthermore by the Adipo-CM (stimulated conditions). The Adipo-CM generated with EGCG added during adipocyte differentiation (Adipo-CM + EGCG (i)), was ineffective in preventing 3D structure maturation. On the contrary, acute additions of EGCG, Tofacitinib, or AG490, were all shown to prevent STAT3 phosphorylation in response to adipocyte secretome, and effectively altered VM processes. Taken together, these results suggest that efficient targeting of the STAT3 signaling pathway may be achieved through diet-derived polyphenols and can prevent the acquisition of an aggressive phenotype in MDA-MB-231 cells, a model of the TNBC.



Figure 2. 6: Adipocyte secretome triggers *in vitro* 3D-capillary-like structure maturation, and STAT3 inhibition prevents such maturation.

(**A**) MDA-MB-231 TNBC-derived cells were seeded on Matrigel and cultured for 24 h as described in the Methods section. Representative pictures were taken (upper panels), and digitalized structures used for the analysis presented (lower panels). (**B**) Analysis of the 3D capillary-like structure maturation on Matrigel was performed using ImageJ and was assessed in the presence of either serum-deprived basal media (unstimulated condition), or stimulation with Preadipo-CM, Adipo-CM, or Adipo-CM (i) (CM harvested upon ADMSC differentiation in the presence of 30  $\mu$ M EGCG). Acute additions of EGCG, Tofacitinib, or AG490 (all at 30  $\mu$ M) were done in the presence of Adipo-CM to the cell culture. Significance:  $* p < 0.05$ .

#### 2.6 Discussion

Adipogenesis is a critical step in adipocyte physiology and consists in the terminal differentiation of adipocyte precursor cells (pre-adipocytes) into adipocytes that allows increased storage of fatty acids (Avram *et al.*, 2007). Here, ADMSC differentiation into mature adipocytes has been validated by increased expression of PPARG and C/EBPA, two transcription factors considered among the master regulators of this process (Farmer, 2005). Interestingly, expression of both biomarkers was prevented by EGCG (Figure 2. *1*), and consequently, it was anticipated that this would alter the state of differentiation as well as the secretome profile of mature adipocytes. Accordingly, distinct pro-inflammatory profiles are shown to characterize the ADMSC and adipocyte respective phenotypes (Figure 2. *1*D). In accordance with previous studies, IL6 was more expressed in ADMSC than in mature adipocytes (Harkins *et al.*, 2004), and the expression of NOS2, IGF-1, and IL-1B were higher in mature adipocytes than in ADMSC (Kloting *et al.*, 2008; Lowenstein and Padalko, 2004; Tang and Lane, 2012). Apart from the regulation of the body's energy balance, factors secreted from adipose tissue in obesity play key roles in the modulation of metabolic processes, insulin sensitivity and immunological responses (Gregoire, 2001), and are believed to provide protumorigenic chemokines to promote breast cancer progression (Raman *et al.*, 2007). Unfortunately, the detailed mechanisms involved in adipose tissue paracrine regulation of breast cancer cells are still not well understood.

Here, we provide evidence for a specific and increased paracrine regulatory impact of the adipocyte secretome on several TNBC-derived cell models. Chemotaxis response was found to be significantly induced by the secretome of differentiated adipocytes when compared to that of undifferentiated adipocytes, and this required the activation of the AKT and STAT3 signaling pathways. EGCG, as well as JAK/STAT inhibitors Tofacitinib and AG490, all prevented the increase in chemotactic response to cytokines and growth factors originating from mature adipocytes. Intriguingly, AKT phosphorylation was also induced but could not be prevented by EGCG. Whereas AKT-targeted therapy is believed to be a promising strategy to overcome drug resistance in breast cancer (Jabbarzadeh Kaboli *et al.*, 2020), such selective targeting of signaling pathways by EGCG prompts for more research.

The adipose microenvironment in obese people bears many similarities with the tumor microenvironment with respect to associated cellular composition, chronic lowgrade inflammation, and a high ratio of reactive oxygen species to antioxidants (Zimta *et al.*, 2019). In addition, the secretion of a number of inflammation-related adipokines is upregulated by hypoxia, which is present in some areas of the expanded adipose

tissue (Trayhurn, 2013). Hence, obesity creates a pro-inflammatory environment that is believed to favor the incidence of several cancers (Calle et Thun, 2004) through numerous signal transduction pathways, including the JAK/STAT3 pathway (Loh *et al.*, 2019). Targeting oncogenic transcription factors by polyphenols has recently been inferred (Rajagopal *et al.*, 2018), and inhibition of JAK/STAT3 transducing events by EGCG has been reported in numerous cancers (Farooqi *et al.*, 2020; Wang *et al.*, 2013; Xiao *et al.*, 2019). More recently, emerging evidence of dietary phytochemicals in our fight against cancer has ascribed a role in targeting cancer stem cells (CSC) often associated with chemoresistance and cancer recurrence (Naujokat and McKee, 2021; Singh *et al.*, 2017). Such an avenue towards CSC targeting has prompted preclinical and clinical settings to repurpose pre-existing drugs to treat TNBC on the basis of molecular mechanisms and signaling pathways such as STAT3 (Aggarwal *et al.*, 2021; Avalos-Moreno *et al.*, 2020). In our study, we demonstrate that EGCG prevents the differentiation of ADMSC and modulates the secretome profile of these cells. Furthermore, once the cells are fully mature, EGCG can hinder its paracrine regulation over the TNBC cells within the tumor microenvironment, which highlights the potential benefit of its consumption.

Paracrine-mediated regulation of an increased invasive phenotype can, in part, involve EMT processes (Davis *et al.*, 2014). Here, we show that part of the chemotactic response could be achieved through such processes as the expression of the EMT biomarker Fibronectin and was induced upon incubation with differentiated adipocyte secretome, but not with that from the ADMSC. Interestingly, EGCG prevented both the chemotactic response of TNBC cells as well as the induction of Fibronectin in accordance with its capacity to inhibit EMT (Negri, 2018). EGCG targeting of EMT processes has also recently been documented in ES-2 ovarian cancer cells where cell migration and *in vitro* VM were abrogated (Sicard *et al.*, 2021). In the current study, we demonstrate that the paracrine regulation of MDA-MB-231-mediated *in vitro* VM was abrogated by all three JAK/STAT3 inhibitors (EGCG, Tofacitinib, AG490) tested.

Adipocytes, and their precursors ADMSC, are thought to sustain tumor phenotypes in part through secretion of signaling molecules and vesicles containing proteins, lipids and nucleic acids (D'Esposito *et al.*, 2020). On the other hand, during their interaction with cancer cells, ADMSC can in return be reprogrammed into cancerassociated adipocytes to further secrete adipokines, which stimulate the adhesion, migration, and invasion of cancer cells (Nieman *et al.*, 2013). Such bidirectional communication between adipose and breast cancer cells has laid foundations for the recruitment of macrophages to the mammary tumor inflammatory microenvironment through increased release of cytokines, growth factors and extracellular matrix components (Lengyel *et al.*, 2018; Santander *et al.*, 2015). Our findings are in accordance with the previous statements, as we found that both ADMSC and mature adipocytes secrete factors that could contribute to tumor development like IL-6, EGF, PTGS2 and IL-4 in ADMSC, and CCL5, IL-1Band IGF in adipocytes. Recently, FABP4, a member of a family of circulating adipose fatty acid binding proteins, has emerged as a new link in the obesity-associated breast/mammary tumor development (Hao *et al.*, 2018b; Zeng *et al.*, 2020). Of particular interest, circulating blood concentration FABP4 levels have been proposed as a new independent breast cancer biomarker as it was found increased in breast cancer patients (Guaita-Esteruelas *et al.*, 2017). Here, we report that FABP4 transcript levels were increased upon adipocyte differentiation and, more importantly, that such an induction can efficiently be prevented by EGCG. More studies will be needed to identify, among the secreted factors, which one(s) have a leading role in order to design pharmacological interventions.

In conclusion, this study first validated our preadipocytes differentiation protocol at both the cellular and transcriptional levels. Both the cellular staining and the transcriptomic data demonstrated clear modulation by EGCG. This last evidence strongly suggests that, although beyond the immediate scope of this study, the overall soluble secreted growth factors (secretome) from preadipocytes and mature adipocytes may trigger differential chemotactic response. The exact identification of these

individual growth factors/cytokines would be a logical follow-up although the current approach used, which is the use of the cells' conditioned media to reflect the synergistic action of the complete actors of the secretome, better reflects the pathophysiological tissue microenvironment. One may envision later and address the impact of hypoxia, and EGCG tissue biodistribution/bioavailability using *in vivo* approaches, as these remain major concerns in obesity.

Our study further provides new molecular evidence demonstrating how dietary intervention upon adipogenesis could alter the secretome profile during adipocyte maturation, and the paracrine regulation of TNBC cell acquisition of an invasive phenotype (Figure 2. *7*). Data also highlights the critical role of the JAK/STAT3 signaling pathway in cell chemotaxis and VM, which can be targeted by EGCG as efficiently as by the pharmacological agents Tofacitinib and AG490. Preventing the onset of an obesogenic environment should help reduce the incidence of TNBC development. In Figure 2. 7 we summarized the main findings in our study.





of the cell types have characteristic and distinct secretome profiles composed of different levels of pro-inflammatory cytokines, chemokines, and growth factors (Figure

1D). Whereas ADMSC secretome was characterized by some chemotactic properties towards TNBC cells (dotted arrow), this was significantly triggered by the secretome resulting from mature adipocytes (large arrow). EGCG was able to prevent such an effect by inhibiting adipogenesis (Preventive experimental condition). Increased EMT explains, in part, the resulting increases in TNBC cell migration and vasculogenic mimicry in response to the adipocyte secretome, the response of which can be reduced through the inhibition of STAT3-mediated signaling by EGCG, AG490, and Tofacitinib (Acute experimental condition).

#### CHAPTER III

### ARTICLE 2

# EGCG PREVENTS THE ONSET OF AN INFLAMMATORY AND CANCER-ASSOCIATED ADIPOCYTE-LIKE PHENOTYPE IN ADIPOSE-DERIVED MESENCHYMAL STEM/STROMAL CELLS IN RESPONSE TO THE TRIPLE-NEGATIVE BREAST CANCER SECRETOME

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Manuscript published in Nutrients **2022**, 14, 1099 https://doi.org/10.3390/nu14051099

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*Narjara Gonzalez Suarez*: Performed the experiments, analyzed the data, and drafted the manuscript.

*Yuniel Fernandez-Marrero*: Performed the transcriptomic analysis and reviewed the manuscript.

*Sima Torabidastgerdooei*: Performed the gene array experiments and analyzed the data.

*Borhane Annabi*: Designed the study, analyzed the data, drafted the manuscript and provided the financial support.

All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.
# 3.1. Résumé

Contexte: Le sécrétome des cellules du cancer du sein triple négatif (TNBC) induit un microenvironnement pro-inflammatoire au sein du tissu adipeux hébergeant à la fois des adipocytes matures et des cellules souches/stromales mésenchymateuses adipocytaires (ADMSC). Les mécanismes d'acquisition d'un phénotype de type adipocytes associés au cancer (CAA) sont cependant peu connus. Alors que les études épidémiologiques suggèrent que la consommation d'un régime riche en polyphénols réduit l'incidence de certains cancers liés à l'obésité, l'impact chimiopréventif de l'épigallocatéchine-3-gallate (EGCG) dérivée du thé vert envers les signaux qui déclenchent le phénotype CAA reste peu documenté dans les ADMSC. Méthodes : Des cellules ADMSC humaines ont été exposées à du milieux conditionné par les cellules MDA-MB-231 dérivées du TNBC humain (sécrétome des cellules TNBC) en présence ou non d'EGCG. L'expression génique différentielle a été évaluée par analyse RNA-Seq et confirmée par RT-qPCR. Les niveaux d'expression des protéines et l'état d'activation des médiateurs des voies de transduction du signal ont été déterminés par immunobuvardage. La chimiotaxie des ADMSC a été évaluée par un test de migration cellulaire en temps réel. Résultats : Le sécrétome des cellules TNBC induit dans les cellules ADMSC l'expression des cytokines CCL2, CCL5, IL-1Bet IL-6, et des immunomodulateurs COX2, HIF-1A, VEGFA et PD-L1. Nos résultats montrent que le biomarqueur de la transition épithéliale-mésenchymateuse SNAIL1 contrôle le phénotype CAA. L'EGCG inhibe l'induction des gènes liés au phénotype CAA et l'activation de SMAD2 et NF-kB. La réponse chimiotactique induite a également été inhibée par l'EGCG. Conclusion : L'induction d'un phénotype inflammatoire et de type CAA dans les ADMSC peut être déclenchée par le sécrétome des cellules TNBC, tout en étant efficacement empêchée par les polyphénols dérivés de l'alimentation.

# 3.2. Abstract

Background: Triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC) cells' secretome induces a proinflammatory microenvironment within the adipose tissue, which hosts both mature adipocytes and adipose-derived mesenchymal stem/stromal cells (ADMSC). The subsequent acquisition of a cancer-associated adipocyte (CAA)-like phenotype is, however, unknown in ADMSC. Epidemiological studies suggest that consuming a polyphenol-rich diet reduces the incidence of some obesity-related cancers, and the chemopreventive impact of green tea-derived epigallocatechin-3-gallate (EGCG) against the cues that trigger the CAA phenotype remain undocumented in ADMSC. Methods: Human ADMSC were exposed to human TNBC-derived MDA-MB-231 conditioned media (TNBC cell's secretome) supplemented or not with EGCG. Differential gene expression was assessed through RNA-Seq analysis and confirmed by RT-qPCR. Protein expression levels and the activation status of signal transducing pathway mediators were determined by Western blotting. ADMSC chemotaxis was assessed by a real-time cell migration assay. Results: The TNBC cells' secretome induced in ADMSC the expression of the CAA cytokines CCL2, CCL5, IL-1β, and IL-6, and of immunomodulators COX2, HIF-1A, VEGFA, and PD-L1. The epithelial-tomesenchymal biomarker Snail was found to control the CAA phenotype. EGCG inhibited the induction of CAA genes and the activation status of SMAD2 and NF-KB. The induced chemotactic response was also inhibited by EGCG. Conclusion: The induction of an inflammatory and CAA-like phenotype in ADMSC can be triggered by the TNBC cells' secretome, while still efficiently prevented by diet-derived polyphenols.

# 3.3 Introduction

The acquisition of a cancer-associated adipocyte (CAA) phenotype can be viewed as an adaptive characteristic of cells residing within the adipose tissue and that respond to cues that originate from the tumor microenvironment (TME) (Lee *et al.*, 2017; Zhao *et al.*, 2020). Accordingly, tumor infiltration of adipocytes has been reported in breast, ovarian, colorectal, and pancreatic cancers, ultimately leading to the instauration of a pro-inflammatory state that promotes carcinogenic events in return (Cai *et al.*, 2019; Pu et Chen, 2021). Such pro-malignancy role of the adipose tissue has been described primarily in breast cancer, where the residing adipocytes represent the most abundant stromal cell type and constitute the main source of pro-inflammatory cytokines and growth factors (Dirat *et al.*, 2011; Rybinska *et al.*, 2021; Wu *et al.*, 2019).

The CAA phenotype characterizes adipose tissue-derived cells with morphologically smaller and irregular sizes, as well as with decreased content and dispersed pattern of lipid droplets (Suarez-Najera *et al.*, 2018). These cells also present an activated state attributable to the overexpression and secretion of the chemokine (C-C motif) ligand 2 (CCL2, also known as MCF-1), the chemokine (C-C motif) ligand 5 (CCL5, also known as RANTES), inflammatory cytokines including interleukin (IL)- 1β, IL-6, tumor necrosis factor (TNF)-α, and matrix metalloproteinase (MMP)- 11(Dirat *et al.*, 2011). The CAA phenotype further associates with increased releases of metabolites such as lactate, pyruvate, free fatty acids, and ketone bodies (Attane et Muller, 2020). Such adaptive metabolic state is believed to mimic the hypoxic status and to contribute to immunosuppressive events within the TME, in part through the upregulation of hypoxia-inducible factor-1α (HIF-1A) and c-Myc (Brown et Ganapathy, 2020; Masoud et Li, 2015; Wang *et al.*, 2021b). In terms of TME localization, these cells have been ascribed to the invasive front of human breast cancer tumors (Andarawewa, 2005; Bochet *et al.*, 2013; Dirat *et al.*, 2011).

Epidemiological studies have implied the existence of an association between excess adipose tissue and a higher incidence/progression of breast cancer (Protani *et* 

*al.*, 2010; Sung *et al.*, 2021). In obesogenic conditions, the excessive expansion in adipose tissue triggers a chronic low-grade inflammation state recognized to create an environment that can sustain tumoral progression (Ramos-Nino, 2013). Therefore, a dynamic crosstalk between resident adipocytes and paracrine response to TME signals appears to play a crucial role in the onset of an aggressive tumor phenotype (Lengyel *et al.*, 2018; Pascut *et al.*, 2020). Epidemiological studies indicate that consumption of a polyphenol-rich diet reduces the incidence of obesity-related cancers (Andersen *et al.*, 2010; Fund, 2018). Nevertheless, the cues triggering the CAA phenotype remain less understood at the early stages of adipocyte maturation as well as in adipocytederived mesenchymal stem/stromal cells (ADMSC, also referred to as pre-adipocytes (Gonzalez Suarez *et al.*, 2021; Ullah *et al.*, 2015)). Those cells have been demonstrated to have the ability to differentiate into mesodermal tissue lineages including adipose through the regulation of key transcriptional factors involved in early adipogenesis (Ullah *et al.*, 2015).

Among the phytochemicals targeting adipogenesis, the green-tea-derived epigallocatechin 3-gallate (EGCG) prevented the acquisition of a more invasive phenotype in a triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC)-derived MDA-MB-231 cell model, triggered by the secretome of mature adipocytes but not by the secretome from human ADMSC (Gonzalez Suarez *et al.*, 2021). The adipose tissue microenvironment also promoted TNBC cell invasiveness and dissemination by producing CCL5 (D'Esposito *et al.*, 2016). ADMSC were also suggested to promote progression and metastatic spread in breast cancer by switching to a more malignant phenotype, leading to a worse prognosis (Kamat *et al.*, 2015). The sum of this evidence supports the concept that diet-derived phytochemicals could prevent the onset of an inflammatory obesogenic environment that favors the acquisition of a CAA-like phenotype.

To unveil the key mediators in the crosstalk between cancer cells and resident adipose tissue cells, studies have so far mostly characterized the promoting role of adipocytes in tumor progression (Rybinska *et al.*, 2020). However, fewer have focused on how the TME-mediated reshaping of preadipocytes or ADMSC, or how

dedifferentiated mature adipocytes arise. Therefore, the present study aims at characterizing how soluble factors secreted from the TNBC-derived MDA-MB-231 cell line can mediate the acquisition of an inflammatory and CAA phenotype, and the chemotactic response in ADMSC. Finally, the chemopreventive impact of EGCG was assessed as a model for nutraceutical intervention against the acquisition of a CAAlike phenotype in ADMSC.

#### 3.4 Materials and methods

#### 3.4.1 Materials

Sodium dodecylsulfate (SDS), epigallocatechin-3-gallate (EGCG) and bovine serum albumin (BSA) were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich Canada (Oakville, ON, Canada). Electrophoresis reagents were purchased from Bio-Rad (Mississauga, ON, Canada). The enhanced chemiluminescence (ECL) reagents were from Amersham Pharmacia Biotech (Baie d'Urfé, QC, Canada). Micro bicinchoninic acid protein assay reagents were purchased from Pierce (Rockford, IL, USA). The polyclonal antibodies against Snail, Slug, phosphorylated and total NF-KB (p105), SMAD2, and STAT3 were obtained from Cell Signaling Technology Inc. (Danvers, MA, USA). Monoclonal antibody (mAb) against human IL-6 was purchased from (New England Biolabs Ltd., Whitby, ON, Canada), rabbit IgG isotype control was obtained from Abcam (Toronto, ON, Canada); and a mAb against glyceraldehyde 3-phosphate dehydrogenase (GAPDH) was from Advanced Immunochemical Inc. (Long Beach, CA, USA). Horseradish peroxidase-conjugated donkey anti-rabbit and anti-mouse IgG secondary antibodies were obtained from Jackson ImmunoResearch Laboratories (West Grove, PA, USA). Protein A sepharose beads were obtained from GE Healthcare (Uppsala, Sweden). Gelatin was obtained from Sigma Aldrich (Oakville, ON, Canada).

#### 3.4.2 Cell Culture and TNBC Cells' Secretome Collection

The human adipose-derived mesenchymal stem/stromal cells (ADMSC) and TNBC-derived cell line MDA-MB-231 were purchased from the American Type Culture Collection (ATCC, Manassas, VA, USA). ADMSC were grown in Mesenchymal Stem Cell Basal Medium (ATCC, PCS-500-030) and supplemented with Mesenchymal Stem Cell Growth Kit Low Serum (ATCC, PCS-500-040). They were further reported to have the capacity to undergo adipogenesis (Robert *et al.*, 2020). MDA-MB-231 were grown in EMEM Medium (Wisent, Saint-Jean-Baptiste, QC, Canada) supplemented with 10% of fetal bovine serum. All cells were cultured at 37°C under a humidified  $95-5\%$  (v/v) mixture of air and CO2. The TNBC cells' secretome was generated upon a 48h serum deprivation of a  $\sim$ 70% confluent MDA-MB-231 culture. Next, the conditioned media (CM) was harvested and centrifuged at 1500× *g* for 20 min to eliminate cell debris. CM was aliquoted and kept at −20 °C. To evaluate the induction of the CAA phenotype, ADMSC were cultured with the TNBC cells' secretome in the presence or absence of 10 μM EGCG for 24 h. Then, cells were collected for total RNA extraction, protein isolation, or cell migration studies.

## 3.4.3 Total RNA Isolation, cDNA Synthesis, and Real-Time Quantitative PCR

Total RNA was extracted from cell monolayers using 1 mL of TriZol reagent for a maximum of  $3 \times 10^6$  cells as recommended by the manufacturer (Life Technologies, Gaithersburg, MD, USA). For cDNA synthesis, 1–2 µg of total RNA was reversetranscribed using a high-capacity cDNA reverse transcription kit (Applied Biosystems, Foster City, CA) or, in the case of the gene array, R2 First Strand kit (QIAGEN, Valencia, CA, USA). The cDNA was stored at -80°C prior to PCR. Gene expression was quantified by real-time quantitative PCR using iQ SYBR Green Supermix (Bio-Rad, Hercules, CA, USA). DNA amplification was carried out using an Icycler iQ5 (Bio-Rad), and product detection was performed by measuring binding of the fluorescent dye SYBR Green I to double-stranded DNA. The following primer sets

were from QIAGEN: Snail (Hs\_SNAI1\_1\_SG, QT00010010), IL-6 (Hs\_IL6\_1\_SG, QT00083720), RPS18 (Hs\_RPS18\_2\_SG, QT02323251) and PPIA (Hs\_PPIA\_4\_SG, QT01866137). The relative quantities of target gene mRNA were normalized against internal housekeeping genes PPIA and RPS18. The RNA was measured by following a ∆CT method employing an amplification plot (fluorescence signal vs. cycle number). The difference ( $\Delta C_T$ ) between the mean values in the triplicate samples of target gene and the housekeeping genes was calculated with the CFX manager Software version 2.1 (Bio-Rad), and the relative quantified value (ROV) was expressed as  $2^{-\Delta CT}$ .

# 3.4.4 Total RNA Library Preparation and Sequencing

Total RNA (500 ng) was used for library preparation. RNA quality control was assessed with the Bioanalyzer RNA 6000 Nano assay on the 2100 Bioanalyzer system (Agilent technologies, Mississauga, ON, Canada), and all samples had an RNA integrity number (RIN) above eight. Library preparation was carried out with the KAPA mRNA-Seq HyperPrep kit (Roche, Laval, QC, Canada). Ligation was made with Illumina dual-index UMI, and 10 PCR cycles were required to amplify cDNA libraries. Libraries were quantified by QuBit and BioAnalyzer DNA1000. All libraries were diluted to 10 nM and normalized by qPCR using the KAPA library quantification kit (KAPA; Cat no. KK4973). Libraries were pooled to equimolar concentrations. Three biological replicates were generated. Sequencing was performed with the Illumina Nextseq500 using the Nextseq High Output 75 ( $1 \times 75$  bp) cycles kit. Around 15–20 M single-end PF reads were generated per sample. Library preparation and sequencing was performed at the Genomic Platform of the Institute for Research in Immunology and Cancer (IRIC, Montreal, QC, Canada).

3.4.5 Reads Alignment and Differential Expression Analysis

Reads were 30 trimmed for quality and adapter sequences using Trimmomatic version 0.35, and only reads with at least 50 bp in length were kept for further analyses. Trimmed reads were aligned to the reference human genome version GRCh38 (gene annotation from Gencode version 37, based on Ensembl 103) using STAR version 2.7.1a (Dobin *et al.*, 2013). Gene expressions were obtained both as read count directly from STAR and computed using RNA-Seq by Expectation Maximization (RSEM) (Li et Dewey, 2011) to obtain normalized gene and transcript-level expression, in TPM values, for these stranded RNA libraries. Differential expression analysis was performed using *DESeq2* version 1.22.2 (Love *et al.*, 2014). The package *limma* (Ritchie *et al.*, 2015) was used to normalize expression data and read counts data were analyzed using DESeq2. Principal component analysis (PCA) for the first two most significant components was conducted with R packages (Team, 2017) found in iDEP (integrated Differential Expression and Pathway) analysis (Ge *et al.*, 2018). iDEP was also used to determine significant differentially expressed genes (DEGs) with DESeq2 false discovery rate (FDR) adjusted *p*-value of 0.05 and fold-change with a cutoff of two.

# 3.4.6 Gene Ontology Pathway Enrichment Analysis

The genes were filtered by absolute fold change (FC) and FDR ( $|FC| > 2$ , FDR < 0.001) and then used for pathway enrichment analysis on active subnetworks prepared using the library pathfindR (Ulgen *et al.*, 2019). Genes common to samples treated with EGCG or vehicle were z-normalized and clustered using a consensus from ten independent k-means runs. The results were visualized as a heatmap using the package ComplexHeatmap (Gu *et al.*, 2016). All analyses were performed using R version 4.1.1 (10 August 2021). Gene ontology (GO) enrichment analysis for protein class and molecular function of the genes in clusters 5–7 was performed using the GO online resource (geneontology.org). The enrichment of the upregulated genes per cluster was

determined using all genes detected in the control sample as background. An FDR < 0.05 was used as cut off.

# 3.4.7 Human Cancer Inflammation and Immunity Crosstalk PCR Array

The  $RT^2$  Profiler<sup>TM</sup> PCR Array for Human Cancer Inflammation and Immunity Crosstalk (PAHS-181Z) was used according to the manufacturer's protocol (QIAGEN). The detailed list of the key genes assessed can be found on the manufacturer's website (https://geneglobe.qiagen.com/us/product-groups/rt2-profilerpcr-arrays; accessed on 13 January 2022). Using real-time quantitative PCR, we reliably analyzed the expression of a focused panel of genes related to the inflammatory response, including some of the cancer-associated adipocytes markers already published. Relative gene expression was calculated using the  $2^{-\Delta\Delta CT}$  method ("deltadelta" method), in which  $C_T$  indicates the fractional cycle number where the fluorescent signal crosses the background threshold. This method normalizes the  $\Delta C_T$  value of each sample, using five housekeeping genes (B2M, HPRT1, RPL13A, GAPDH, and ACTB). The normalized FC values are then presented as average FC = 2 (average  $\triangle^{\Delta}$ ). To minimize false positive results, only genes amplified less than 35 cycles were analyzed. The resulting raw data were then analyzed using the PCR Array Data Analysis Template (http://www.sabiosciences.com/pcrarraydataanalysis.php; accessed on 13 January 2022). This integrated web-based software package automatically performs all ∆∆C<sub>T</sub>-based FC calculations from the uploaded raw threshold cycle data.

## 3.4.8 RNA Interference

Cells were transiently transfected with siRNA using Lipofectamine-2000 transfection reagent (Thermo Fisher Scientific, Waltham, MA, USA). Gene silencing was performed using 20 nM siRNA against SNAIL1 (Hs SNAI1\_5 HP siRNA, SI02636424), IL-6 (Hs IL6 1 siRNA, SI00012572) or scrambled sequences (AllStar

Negative Control siRNA, 1027281). The above small interfering RNA and mismatch siRNA were all synthesized by QIAGEN and annealed to form duplexes.

#### 3.4.9 Western Blot

Cells were lysed in a buffer containing 1 mM each of NaF and Na<sub>3</sub>VO<sub>4</sub>, and proteins (10–20 µg) were separated by SDS-polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis (PAGE). Next, proteins were electro-transferred to polyvinylidene difluoride membranes and blocked for 1 h at room temperature with 5% nonfat dry milk in Trisbuffered saline (150 mM NaCl, 20 mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.5) containing 0.3% Tween-20 (TBST, TWN510-500). Membranes were washed in TBST and incubated over night with the appropriate primary antibodies (1/1000 dilution) in TBST containing 3% BSA and 0.1% sodium azide (Sigma-Aldrich) at 4°C and in a shaker. After three washes with TBST, the membranes were incubated 1 h with horseradish peroxidase-conjugated anti-rabbit or anti-mouse IgG at 1/2500 dilutions in TBST containing 5% nonfat dry milk. Immunoreactive material was visualized by ECL

## 3.4.10 Multiplex Cytokine ELISA Array

MDA-MB-231 cells were serum-starved for 24 and 48 h. Then, conditioned media was collected, clarified by centrifugation, and stored at −20°C until further evaluations. The relative abundance of the secreted cytokines was determined using a Multiplex Human Cytokine ELISA Kit (MyBioSource, San Diego, CA, USA) and following the manufacturer's instructions. The optical density (OD) values of the samples were obtained at 450 nm.

## 3.4.11 Immunoprecipitation Procedures

Protein A beads (30 μL slurry) were co-incubated overnight under rotation at 4°C in 4 mL of TNBC conditioned media (CM), with either the anti-IL-6 mAb diluted 1/100 or the IgG isotype control  $(2 \mu g)$ . Next, each mixture was centrifuged, the supernatants collected, filtered through a 0.2 µm filter, and frozen until further evaluation. The beads were boiled with Laemmli buffer and applied to a 7.5% SDS-PAGE alongside the supernatants, then transferred to PVDF membranes and immunoblotted to determine the efficiency of the immunoprecipitation.

# 3.4.12 Chemotactic Cell Migration Assay

Cell migration assays were carried out using the Real-Time Cell Analyzer (RTCA) Dual-Plate (DP) Instrument of the xCELLigence system (Roche Diagnostics, Basel, Switzerland). Adherent ADMSC monolayers were trypsinized and seeded (30,000 cells/well) onto CIM-Plates 16 (Roche Diagnostics). These migration plates are similar to conventional transwells (8 µm pore size) but have gold electrode arrays on their bottom side of the membrane to provide real-time data acquisition of cell migration. Prior to cell seeding, the underside of the wells from the upper chamber were coated with 25 µL of 0.15% gelatin in PBS and incubated for 1 h at 37°C. Cell migration was continuously monitored for 8 h using serum-free, CM obtained from MDA-MB-231 cells (CM or TNBC cells' secretome) grown in the presence or absence of EGCG. Serum-free media was used as a cell migration negative control (NM). Basal migration experiments consisted of pre-treating the cells with NM or CM +/− EGCG 10 μM for 24 h and then allowing cells to migrate without chemoattractant (NM). In all cases, the impedance values were measured by the RTCA DP Instrument software and were expressed as Normalized Cell Migration Index. Each experiment was performed two times in triplicate.

#### 3.4.13. Statistical Data Analysis

Data and error bars were expressed as mean  $\pm$  standard error of the mean (SEM) of three or more independent experiments unless otherwise stated. Hypothesis testing was conducted using the Kruskal–Wallis test followed by a Dunn Tukey's post-test (data with more than 3 groups) or a Mann–Whitney test (two group comparisons). Probability values of less than 0.05 (\*) or 0.01 (\*\*) were considered significant and denoted in the figures. All statistical analyses were performed using the GraphPad Prism 7 software (San Diego, CA, USA).

# 3.5 Results

# 3.5.1 Transcriptomic Analysis of Human Adipocyte-Derived Mesenchymal Stem/Stromal Cell Response to Variations of the TNBC Secretome

In order to first identify the genes and molecular pathways involved in the acquisition of a CAA phenotype, human ADMSC were cultured for 24 h in conditioned media (CM) isolated from serum-starved TNBC-derived MDA-MB-231 cells (TNBC cells' secretome). Total RNA was isolated as described in the Methods section and submitted to RNA-Seq. We found 13,284 genes differentially expressed in both conditions (FDR  $\leq$  0.05), from which roughly two thirds were downregulated in the presence of EGCG (Figure 3. 1A). Next, we selected genes with at least a two-fold change expression variation with respect to the control and a maximum corrected *p*value of 0.001 to perform gene and pathway enrichment analysis. Using the previous criteria, we found 1331 differentially expressed genes (DEGs), among which 107 were up-regulated and 1224 were down-regulated. The DEGs were cross-referenced with actual protein–protein interactions to build active-subnetworks, onto which pathway enrichment analysis was performed to decipher which biological pathways were enriched in response to the TNBC cells' secretome. Among the pathways involved in the adaptive response of ADMSC to the TNBC cells' secretome, nine reached statistical significance below a *p*-value < 0.01 (Figure 3. 1B, left panel). The following ones were highlighted: nuclear factor-kappa B (NF-KB) signaling, cytokine-cytokine receptor interaction, pathways related to cytokine intracellular signaling such as the tumor necrosis factor (TNF)-α and TGFB, insulin resistance, breast cancer, central carbon metabolism in cancer, HIF-1A, and the interaction between advance glycation end products (AGE)- and their receptors (RAGE). Interestingly, the highlighted pathways have a significant degree of connectivity, with upregulated IL-6, IL-1, and other soluble cytokines acting as network hubs (Figure 3. 1C). In addition, ADMSC exposed to the TNBC cells' secretome acquired a pro-inflammatory phenotype. To

validate the CAA- and immunomodulatory-related genes found in our RNA-Seq experiment, an  $RT^2$  Profiler RT-qPCR gene array was performed. The TNBC cell secretome induced more than 10-fold the expression of CAA genes identified from the RNA-Seq analysis. These included CCL2, CCL5, IL-1β, IL-6, and vascular endothelial growth factor alpha (VEGFα) (Figure 3. 1D). Other upregulated immunomodulatory genes included cytokines with a chemotactic role, such as C-X-C Motif Chemokine Ligand 5 and 8 (CXCL5 and CXCL8), and C-C motif ligand 20 (CCL20). In addition, mediators of the inflammatory response also included cyclooxygenase 2 (COX2), indoleamine 2,3-dioxygenase (IDO), programmed death-ligand 1 (PD-L1), IL-1β, and IL-6. These results confirm the DEG found in our transcriptomic analysis and demonstrate the effective induction of a CAA-like phenotype in ADMSC in response to the TNBC cells' secretome at the gene expression level.



Figure 3. 1. Transcriptomic modulation of ADMSC (adipose-derived mesenchymal stem/stromal cell) response to variations of the TNBC cell secretome*.* 

Human pre-adipocytes mesenchymal stem/stromal cells (ADMSC) were incubated for 24 h with serum-free media conditioned for 48 h by TNBC-derived MDA-MB-231 cells (TNBC cells' secretome) in the presence of 10  $\mu$ M EGCG (epigallocatechin gallate) or Ethanol (vehicle). Total RNA was extracted from triplicate samples, and gene expression modulation was assessed through RNA-Seq analysis, as described in the Methods section. (**A**) Fold change gene expression compared to control cells considered below the significant threshold (FDR < 0.05) in the presence or absence of EGCG. (**B**) KEGG pathways enrichment analysis of differentially expressed genes (DEGs) with an absolute fold change (FC)  $>$  and adjusted p-value  $< 0.001$  in each experimental condition. (**C**) Network graph showing enriched pathways and their respective DEGs in the absence of EGCG. Upregulated and downregulated genes are color-coded in green and red, respectively. (**D**) Expression of selected genes associated with cancer-associated adipocyte (CAA) phenotype and immunomodulation was confirmed by RT-qPCR, as described in the Methods section using a Human Cancer Inflammation and Immunity Crosstalk RT2-Profiler gene array kit. (**E**) Venn diagram

showing the number of DEGs in each experimental condition, followed by a robust kmeans clustering visualized as a heatmap. Number of genes per cluster is shown in parenthesis. Representative genes shared in both conditions with a log2FC > 2 and pvalue  $< 0.001$ . CCL20 (C-C motif ligand 20); CXCL8 and CXCL5 (C-X-C Motif Chemokine Ligand 8 and 5); IL-1\_ and IL-6 (interleukin 1 beta and 6); COX2 (cyclooxygenase 2); CCL5 and CCL2 (chemokine C-C motif ligand 5 and 2); VEGFa (vascular endothelial growth factor alpha); IDO (indoleamine 2,3-dioxygenase); HIF1a (hypoxia inducible factor 1 alpha) and PD-L1 (programmed death-ligand 1).

3.5.2 EGCG Inhibits the Expression of Biomarkers Associated with the CAA Phenotype, Epithelial-to-Mesenchymal Transition, and Inflammatory Signaling Pathways induced by the TNBC Cell Secretome

Once the increase in expression of genes linked to a CAA phenotype was demonstrated, we analyzed the effect of EGCG on this adaptive response. ADMSC were incubated 24 h with the TNBC cell secretome in the presence of 10  $\mu$ M of EGCG, vehicle (ethanol), or negative media (NM). After harvesting the cells and extracting the total RNA, we performed RNASeq and analyzed the output, as described in the Methods section. The cells incubated with NM were used as a control group. Gene and pathway enrichment analysis of the samples challenged with EGCG showed few common pathways compared to the control (Figure 3. 1B, right). Then, we restricted our analysis to those genes with a corrected p-value < 0.001 and an absolute FC greater than two. A Venn diagram depicting the percentage and absolute number of DEGs found in each condition was shown (Figure 3. 1E, left). The cells receiving EGCG had six times more DEGs than the vehicle-treated cells compared to the NM-treated cells. From the 8,818 genes modulated by EGCG, 8070 DEGs were unique to these samples, while 748 were present in both conditions. Our next goal was to identify and characterize the expression pattern of common DEGs. We performed a robust k-means clustering, identifying seven clusters based on the gene expression distribution in the samples (Figure 3. 1E, right). Genes from clusters 1–4 are downregulated in both samples, and their intra-cluster differences result from the magnitude and pattern of downregulation. On the other hand, cluster 6 contained genes switched-on in both EGCG and vehicle-treated samples compared to NM-treated samples (Supplementary Figure S3. 1. Enrichment analysis of the DEGs in Cluster 6.). The most attractive genes were clustered in groups 5 and 7, with antagonizing expression patterns associated with CM. The EGCG inhibited the genes assigned to cluster 5, which, according to gene ontology (GO) enrichment analysis using an FDR < 0.05 corresponded to growth factors, intracellular signaling molecules and modification enzymes with acyltransferase activity (Supplementary Figure S3. 2). The genes listed in Table 3. 1 evidenced the antagonist effect of EGCG over the CM-mediated induction of genes associated with cholesterol and lipid biogenesis (HMGCS1, HMGCR, IDI1, STARD4, GPAM, and ACSL4), proliferation (PID1, BMP6, and FGF7), invasion and metastasis (PLOD2, MMP1, CEMIP2, PAPPA, COL8A1, and ADAM12), glucose transport (STEAP1, STEAP2), cell survival and oncogenesis (CCN4, WNT5A, and FGF7), and vesicular trafficking (RAB27B, TRFC). Surprisingly, the genes from cluster 7 could not be associated statistically with a particular protein class or molecular functions. More detailed information on all shared genes is provided as a supplementary EXCEL data sheet (Supplementary Table S3. 1).

Following the transcriptomic RNA-Seq analysis, RT-qPCR was performed to validate the inhibition of key CAA markers in ADMSC upon treatment with the TNBC cell secretome in the presence or absence of 10 μM EGCG. The addition of EGCG reduced or completely abrogated the induction of CCL2, CCL5, CXCL8, IL-1β, IL-6, VEGFα, HIF-1α, COX2, and IDO (Figure 3. 2A, black bars), while it did not affect that of PD-L1. In addition to altering ADMSC gene expression plasticity, we assessed the chemotactic response of ADMSC to TNBC cells' secretome by a real-time cell migration assay. An increased ADMSC migration index was observed in response to the direct exposure to TNBC cells' secretome (Figure 3. 2B, black circles), or when ADMSC were cultured for 24 h with it (conditioned ADMSC) and then left to migrate without chemoattractant (Figure 3. 2C, black circles). EGCG prevented the induced chemotactic (Figure 3. 2B) or acquired response (Figure 3. 2C) in both scenarios.

<b>ENSEMBL</b>	Gene	FC <b>Vehicle</b> VS. Control	FC <b>EGCG</b> VS. Control	<b>Gene Description</b>	<b>Enriched Terms by KEGG Analysis *</b>
<b>ENSG00000</b> 122641	<b>INHBA</b>	5.36	$-2.51$	Follicle-Stimulating Hormone-Releasing Protein/secreted	- TGF-beta signaling pathway - Signaling pathways regulating pluripotency of stem cells - Cytokine-cytokine receptor interaction - Associated with cancer cachexia in human patients *
<b>ENSG00000</b> 152952	PLOD <sub>2</sub>	4.51	$-4.00$	2 procollagen- lysine/cisternae of the RER.	- Collagen formation and degradation of the extracellular matrix * - Oxidoreductase activity *
<b>ENSG00000</b> 170961	HAS2	4.25	$-2.99$	Hyaluronan synthase 2 Polysaccharide/extracell ular matrix	- Glycosaminoglycan metabolism * - Hyaluronan synthase activity *
<b>ENSG00000</b> 105835	<b>NAMPT</b>	3.94	$-1.54$	Nicotinamide phosphoribosyltransferas e; enzime	- NOD-like receptor signaling pathway - Cytokine with immunomodulating properties * - Adipokine with anti-diabetic properties * - Stress response *
<b>ENSG00000</b> 104321	TRPA1	3.87	$-4.76$	Transient receptor potential cation channel, subfamily a/transmembrane proteins	- Regulation of TRP channels - Signal transduction * - Growth control *
<b>ENSG00000</b> 112972	<b>HMGCS</b> 1	3.73	$-2.37$	$3-\alpha$ -hydroxy-3- methylglutaryl-coa synthase 1/	- PPAR signaling pathway - Terpenoid backbone biosynthesis - Cholesterol and lipid homeostasis *
<b>ENSG00000</b> 196611	MMP1	3.68	$-1.80$	Matrix metalloproteinase l/interstitial collagenase	- PPAR and relaxin signaling pathway - Calcium ion binding * - Metallopeptidase activity *
<b>ENSG00000</b> 067064	IDI1	3.56	$-2.33$	Isopentenyl-diphosphate delta isomerase	- Terpenoid backbone biosynthesis - Regulation of cholesterol biosynthesis *

Table 3. 1. The effect of EGCG (epigallocatechin gallate) over Cluster 5 genes upregulated by the TNBC secretome.







FC: Fold Change; KEGG: Kyoto Encyclopedia of Genes and Genomes; GO: Gene Ontology; GC GeneCards; RER: rough endoplasmic reticulum; NOD: nucleotide-binding oligomerization domain; PPAR: peroxisome proliferator-activated receptors; mTOR: mechanistic target of rapamycin; GTP: guanine nucleotide-binding proteins; WNT1: wingless-type MMTV integration site family, member 1; TGF-beta: transforming growth factor beta; Rap1: Ras-proximate-1; MAPK: mitogen-activated protein kinase; and JAK-STAT: Janus kinase (JAK)-signal transducer and activator of transcription (STAT).



Figure 3. 2. EGCG alters the acquisition of a CAA (cancer-associated adipocyte) phenotype and chemotactic response.

(**A**) ADMSC response to TNBC cells' secretome was monitored after 24 h in vehicletreated cells (white bars), or in the presence of  $10 \mu M$  EGCG (black bars). Total RNA was isolated, cDNA was synthetized, and the induction of CAA genes was evaluated using a RT2-Profiler RT-qPCR gene array kit. A representative experiment out of two screens is shown. (**B**) Relative cell migration rate of ADMSC in response to TNBC cells' secretome (CM, closed circles), CM with 30 µM of EGCG (closed triangles), or serum-free negative media (NM, open circles). (**C**) Basal cell migration response: ADMSC were treated for 24 h with CM (closed circles) or in the presence of CM supplemented  $10 \mu$ M EGCG (closed triangles); then, basal cell migration was assessed. Data are representative from two independent experiments performed in triplicate. (ND, not detectable). Statistical differences were determined with a Mann–Whitney two tail test with a  $p < 0.05$  (\*). CCL5 and CCL2 (chemokine C-C motif ligand 5 and 2); IL-1\_ and IL-6 (interleukin 1 beta and 6); CXCL8 (C-X-C motif chemokine ligand 8); COX2 (cyclooxygenase 2); VEGFa (vascular endothelial growth factor alpha); IDO (indoleamine 2,3-dioxygenase); HIF1a (hypoxia inducible factor 1 alpha) and PD-L1 (programmed death-ligand 1).

3.5.3 The Epithelial-to-Mesenchymal Transition (EMT) Contributes to the CAAinduced Phenotype in ADMSC

We found a robust induction of the transcription factors Slug and Snail and of the pro-inflammatory cytokine IL-6 at the protein level (Figure 3. 3A). As expected, EGCG reduced their expression by at least 50% (Figure 3. 3B). Complementing our transcriptomic results, we also found a CM-dependent activation of signaling cascades involving the phosphorylation of NF-KB and SMAD2 transcription factors (Figure 3. 3A), which was reduced in the presence of EGCG (Figure 3. 3B).



Figure 3. 3. EGCG inhibits the induction of the pro-inflammatory cytokine IL-6, epithelial-to-mesenchymal transition (EMT) markers, and NF-κβ and SMAD2 signal transducing pathways.

ADMSC were incubated for 24 h with the TNBC cells' secretome and protein lysates collected, as described in the Methods section for Western blotting. (**A**) Immunoblotting of Snail, Slug, IL-6, and the phosphorylated and total forms of NF-κβ and SMAD2 (20 µg of protein/well). (**B**) Representative densitometric analysis of Snail, Slug, IL-6, and the ratio of phosphorylated/total forms of NF-κβ and SMAD2. Data are expressed as the percent of maximal effect for each marker in ADMSC treated with the TNBC cell secretome (grey bars). Cells treated with negative media (NM, white bars) and TNBC cell secretome in the presence of  $10 \mu$  EGCG (black bars). Data are representative of three independent experiments. Snail (Snail family transcriptional repressor 1); Slug (Snail family transcriptional repressor 2); IL-6 (Interleukin 6); NF-KB (nuclear factor kappa beta); SMAD2 (mothers against decapentaplegic homolog 2); GAPDH (glyceraldehyde 3-phosphate dehydrogenase).

3.5.4 Snail as a Crucial Intermediate in the Upregulation of CAA Genes in Response to TNBC Cell Secretome

Since incubation of the ADMSC with the TNBC cells secretome triggered expression of the EMT biomarker Snail, we investigated its contribution to regulating other CAA genes. We silenced SNAIL in ADMSC using siRNA (siSnail) and then exposed these cells to the TNBC cells' secretome for 24 h. Our siRNA efficiently reduced Snail transcript and protein expression (Figure 3. 4A, B) and impaired the production of CAA genes, except for VEGF $\alpha$  and HIF-1 $\alpha$  (Figure 3.4C). This suggests that selective Snail-mediated transcriptional control is involved in the transcriptional regulation of CAA genes in ADMSC in response to TNBC cells' secretome.



Figure 3. 4. Role of Snail in the upregulation of the CAA phenotype genes. Transient gene silencing of Snail (siSnail) or of control (siScrambled) was performed in ADMSC, followed by an incubation with the TNBC cells' secretome for 24 h. Cell lysates and total RNA were isolated, and levels of protein and gene expression assessed by Western blotting and RT-qPCR, respectively. (**A**) Protein levels of Snail and IL-6 were assessed by immunoblotting in ADMSC transfected with siScr or siSnail. (**B**) Snail gene expression was evaluated by RT-qPCR in ADMSC transfected with siScr

or siSnail and treated with TNBC cell secretome (black bars) or negative media (white bars). (**C**) CAA gene expression resulting from the comparison of ADMSC transfected with siSnail in response to the TNBC cell secretome vs. siScr cells incubated with the same CM (reference group).

#### 3.5.5 The TNBC-Derived MDA-MB-231 Secrete High Levels of IL-6

Our bio-informatics analysis revealed a strong activation of the cytokine-receptor interaction pathway in the ADMSC response to the TNBC cell secretome (Figure 3. 1). This suggests a contribution of the cytokines secreted by the TNBC cell-derived MDA-MB-231 to the phenotypic modification and chemotaxis of ADMSC. Using a protein cytokine array, we aimed to identify the main cytokines present in the CM upon 24 and 48 h of serum starvation. IL-6 was identified as the preponderant cytokine present in the CM, followed by VEGFα, and to a lesser extent IL-1β, epithermal growth factor (EGF), and transforming growth factor beta (TGFB) (Figure 3. 5A). Interestingly, exogenous addition of IL-6 to ADMSC triggered a biphasic chemotactic doseresponse, with the maximal migration rate observed at 10 pg/mL (Figure 3. 5B). This suggests that ADMSC are responsive to both the autocrine and paracrine effects of IL-6.



Figure 3. 5. Cytokine levels present in the TNBC cells' secretome. (**A**) Human TNBC-derived MDA-MB-231 cells were cultured for 24 h (white bars) and 48 h (black bars) in serum free media, and then their respective secretome collected and the cytokine concentrations determined using an ELISA array as described in the Methods section. (**B**) IL-6-mediated chemotaxis of ADMSC was assessed in real time, as described in the Methods section using the exCELLigence system (one out of three independent experiments is shown).

3.5.6 The IL-6 Secreted by the TNBC-Derived MDA-MB-231 Is Required for the Chemotactic Response of the ADMSC but Does not Trigger the CAA Phenotype

To test the role of IL-6 in the chemotactic response of the ADMSC to the TNBC cell secretome, we depleted the CM from IL-6 by immunoprecipitation (CM, Figure 3. 6A). This inhibited ADMSC chemotaxis as we compared the chemotactic capacity of IL-6 immunoprecipitated from the TNBC cell secretome (Figure 3. 6B, black triangles) to that of the CM immunoprecipitated with an IgG isotype control (Figure 3. 6B, black circles). In another approach, IL-6 was silenced in TNBC-derived MDA-MB-231 cells (Figure 3. 6C, left), and then CM harvested upon 24 h of incubation with serumdeprived culture media. Reduced IL-6 concentration was confirmed by ELISA (Figure 3. 6C, right), and the reduced level of IL-6 negatively impacted the ADMSC chemotactic response (Figure 3. 6D). Altogether, these results suggest that IL-6 exerts a significant role in ADMSC mobilization in response to TME cues.



Figure 3. 6. Role of IL-6 in the ADMSC chemotactic response to the TNBC cell secretome.

MDA-MB-231 cells were cultured in serum free media for 48 h and the conditioned media harvested (TNBC cell secretome). (**A**) Immunoprecipitation (IP) of IL-6 from the TNBC cell secretome was performed as described in the Methods section. The efficiency of the IP was evaluated by immunoblotting of the pellet (P), supernatant (SN), or of the conditioned media before the IP (CM). IgG indicates the heavy chain of the anti-IL-6 antibody used for the IP. (**B**) Chemotactic response of the ADMSC in response to negative media (open circles), to CM upon control IgG isotype IP (closed circles), or to CM upon anti-IL-6 IP (closed triangles). (**C**) Transient gene silencing of IL-6 was performed in MDA-MB-231 cells as described in the Methods section. Control cells were transfected with siRNA-Scrambled (siScr). Cells were then serum starved for 24 h. Total RNA was extracted, and RT-qPCR performed to monitor IL-6 silencing efficiency (left). CM was collected to assess secreted IL-6 levels using an ELISA. (**D**) ADMSC chemotactic response to TNBC cell secretome was monitored in CM harvested from siScr-transfected MDA-MB-231 cells (closed circles), CM harvested from siIL-6-transfected cells (closed triangles), or in response to negative media (NM, open circles). One out of two independent experiments performed in triplicate is shown. Statistical differences were determined with a Mann–Whitney two tail test with a  $p < 0.05$  (\*) or  $p < 0.01$ (\*\*).

Lastly, we inquired about the extent to which IL-6 contributed to the paracrine upregulation of Snail, autocrine regulation of IL-6, and the signal-transducing pathways activated upon the response to TNBC cells' secretome. ADMSC were thus treated for 24 h with IL-6 at 10 pg/mL, a concentration corresponding to its maximal chemotactic effect, and at 10 ng/mL that corresponded to the naturally occurring concentration of IL-6 in the TNBC cells' secretome (data not shown). Cells were harvested and protein lysates prepared to detect the CAA signature. Unexpectedly, neither Snail nor IL-6 were induced by both of the IL-6 concentrations tested (Figure 3. 7A). However, when ADMSC were incubated with IP-CM (IgG isotype control vs. anti-IL-6 mAb), the IL-6 depleted-CM still induced Snail and IL-6 expression as well as activated the NF-κB and SMAD2 pathways to the same extent as the control IP-CM did (Figure 3. 7B). This suggests that, although Snail controls the acquisition of a CAA phenotype, and that IL-6 is involved in the chemotactic response of ADMSC (Figure 3. 7B), unknown factors within the TNBC cells' secretome, beyond IL-6, are involved in the acquisition of the CAA phenotype in ADMSC.



Figure 3. 7. IL-6 is not sufficient to trigger the CAA phenotype in ADMSC. (**A**) ADMSC were incubated **A**) ADMSC were incubated for 24 h with negative media (NM), TNBC cell-derived secretome (MDA-MB-231 conditioned media, CM), or 10 pg/mL or 10 ng/mL IL-6 in NM. Cell lysates were next isolated and protein expression of Snail, IL-6, and β-Actin assessed by immunoblotting. (**B**) Immunoblots showing the phosphorylation status of SMAD2 and NF-κB, and the expression of Snail and IL-6 in cells treated with NM, IL-6-IP depleted media (αIL-6), or IgG isotype-IP control media (IgG). Data are representative of one experiment out of two.

# 3.6 Discussion

The TME is a highly dynamic niche composed of multiple cell types constantly interacting with each other. Accordingly, tumor cells can recruit not only immune cells but also those cells residing from adjacent tissues like the adipose tissue (Catalan *et al.*, 2013). The adipose tissue is predominant within the breast anatomy, and its endocrine functions recognized to support tumor cells at their early stages of malignant transformation (Cozzo *et al.*, 2017). To understand the role of adipocytes in tumor progression, previous studies have co-cultured human breast cancer cells with human mature adipocytes (D'Esposito *et al.*, 2016; Dirat *et al.*, 2011; Picon-Ruiz *et al.*, 2016), leading to an increase in the invasiveness of the cancer cells, and the onset of a proinflammatory state characterized by the induction of cytokines such as IL-6, IL-1 $\beta$ , and CCL5 (D'Esposito *et al.*, 2016; Picon-Ruiz *et al.*, 2016). Histological analysis of human breast tumors has shown that the adipocytes present at their invasive front also expressed high levels of MMP-11 and IL-6, in contrast to adipocytes from healthy tissues where these proteins are absent (Dirat *et al.*, 2011). This suggests a transducing mechanism that transitions from a healthy adipocyte to a CAA phenotype. Therefore, our findings support that TNBC cells can also mobilize and promote the reprogramming of undifferentiated ADMSC with inflammatory and CAA-like phenotypes. This finding is particularly relevant in the context of obesity, where the abnormal extent of the adipose tissue provides a substantial source of inflammatory cytokines for neoplasms (Picon-Ruiz *et al.*, 2017), and where ADMSC as well as earlystages of adipocyte maturation may also contribute.

Here, the TNBC cells' secretome triggered significant chemotaxis in ADMSC and induced a pro-inflammatory phenotype characterized by the overexpression of IL-1 $\beta$ , COX2, VEGFα, and IL-6 among other immunomodulators, as well as a CAA phenotype including the induction of CCL2 and CCL5. These results were further supported herein by the identification of signaling pathways such as NF- $\kappa$ B, HIF-1 $\alpha$ , and AGE-RAGE, all induced as highlighted from the bio-informatics analysis, and where the upregulation of IL-6 connected pathways was modulated by obesity-like insulin resistance, TNF signaling, AGE-RAGE, and cytokine-receptor interaction (Figure 3. 1). Such evidence at early stages of adipocyte maturation is supported by data showing that ADMSC were primed and permanently altered by tumor presence in breast tissue, resulting in increased tumor cell invasiveness (Plava *et al.*, 2020). Interestingly, our data support these studies as the EMT biomarker Snail is induced in ADMSC in response to the soluble factors present in the MDA-MB-231 CM. More importantly, Snail induction was proved to be essential for sustained upregulation of IL-6, IL-1β, CCL2, and CCL5.

Despite its abundance in the TNBC cells' secretome and its clear contribution to the ADMSC chemotaxis, exogenous addition of IL-6 failed to switch on its autocrine upregulation of Snail. Remarkably, EGCG acted as a potent inhibitor of the proinflammatory state triggered by the TNBC cells' secretome, generating a robust inhibition of CAA markers and pro-inflammatory cytokines. This role for EGCG was partially attributed to reduced induction of Snail. Furthermore, EGCG decreased the chemotactic potential of the TNBC cells' secretome and inhibited the activation of the NF-κB and SMAD2 signaling cascades.

The pathway involving HIF-1α, classically activated by low oxygen concentrations (hypoxia), upregulates the expression of pro-angiogenic and mitogenic cytokines such as leptin and VEGFα while reducing the levels of the antimitogenic adipokine adiponectin (Trayhurn, 2013). Harvesting of the TNBC-cells-derived secretome through cell culture serum starvation is typically reflected by enriched lactate levels, which has been proposed to mimic a biochemical "perception" of hypoxia regardless of the level of oxygen, leading to the secretion of angiogenic and inflammatory growth factors/cytokines (Trabold *et al.*, 2003). Besides the increased HIF-1α observed in ADMSC, our transcriptomic screen identified the AGE-RAGE pathway, which may play an important role in acquiring the CAA phenotype; oxidative stress; and activation of the SMAD2 and NF-κB signaling, thus leading to the secretion of inflammatory cytokines and growth factors (Asadipooya and Uy, 2019; Chawla *et*  *al.*, 2014; Tornatore *et al.*, 2012). Interestingly, adipose tissue inflammation occurs in obesogenic conditions due to hypoxia and is thought to originate from enlarged adipocytes distant from the vasculature (Trayhurn *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, hypoxia has now been directly demonstrated to occur in adipose tissue of several obese mouse models ( $ob/ob$ , KKAy, diet-induced) and to lead to increased HIF-1 $\alpha$  levels (Trayhurn, 2013; Trayhurn *et al.*, 2008).

Our experimental approach exploits the paracrine up-regulation of CCL2, CCL5, IL-1β, and IL-6 in ADMSC in response to TNBC cell secretome, confirming and complementing prior co-culture approaches mixing cancer cells and adipocytes (D'Esposito *et al.*, 2016; Dirat *et al.*, 2011). In addition, relevant cytokines for acquiring a tumor malignancy phenotype, such as CCL5/RANTES, have also been shown to increase cell motility and invasiveness in high-glucose culture conditions (D'Esposito *et al.*, 2016). Interestingly, such conditions mimic the adaptive cellular responses triggered during the onset of insulin resistance associated with obesity. Nevertheless, we still need validation at protein levels for all the genes found in our transcriptomic analysis, those including IL-6, IL-1β, CCL2, CXCL2, and HIF-1α were present in our dataset and bridged several pathways associated with pro-tumoral roles.

On the other hand, we validated the autocrine induction of IL-6 in ADMSC, both at gene and protein levels. Paradoxically, despite ADMSC producing IL-6 after incubation with the TNBC cell secretome, this was not a direct response to paracrine IL-6. One must conclude that irrespective of its massive levels in the CM, the IL-6 paracrine induction certainly requires a combination of stimuli. Noteworthily, the production of IL-6 by ADMSC exposed to the TNBC cell secretome depended on Snail expression. This signaling interplay between Snail and IL-6 has been proposed in myofibroblast trans-differentiation during oral submucosal fibrosis, a premalignant disorder of the oral cavity (Peng *et al.*, 2020).

Once we identified the main upregulated genes and pathways involved in the acquisition of the CAA phenotype in ADMSC in response to the TNBC cell secretome, we investigated the impact of EGCG. This catechin is known to modulate molecular targets and signaling pathways associated with cell survival, proliferation, differentiation, migration, angiogenesis, hormone activities, detoxification enzymes, and immune response (Chokor *et al.*, 2014; Djediai *et al.*, 2021; Sicard *et al.*, 2021; Zgheib *et al.*, 2013; Zhou *et al.*, 2016). Our differential transcriptomic analysis performed in ADMSC treated in the presence or absence of EGCG revealed six times more modulated genes in samples treated with EGCG (92%, 8070 DEGs). The presence of EGCG drastically reduced the expression of genes encoding growth factors, intracellular signaling intermediates, and cytokines, all of which prevented the acquisition of a CAA-like phenotype.

# 3.7 Conclusions

The present study revealed EGCG's ability to inhibit the chemotactic properties of the TNBC cells' secretome, primarily through NF-κB and SMAD2 signal-transducing pathways, suggesting that a diet-derived intervention could efficiently alter the signaling crosstalk that links TNBC cells to the CAA phenotype within the adipose tissue environment. Most importantly, our study presents evidence that EGCG can efficiently target the CAA-like phenotype of ADMSC and prevent the onset of a TME that would favor breast cancer development.

3.8 Supporting information

Supplementary Figure S3.1



Supplementary Figure S3. 1. Enrichment analysis of the DEGs in Cluster 6. **A)** Pie charts of protein class variation after a GO enrichment analysis showing the behavior of background genes and genes clustered in 6. **B)** Fold enrichment values for protein class and molecular functions with a FDR  $\leq 0.05$  as a cut off, and using as background all genes detected.
## Supplementary Figure S3.2



Supplementary Figure S3. 2. Gene ontology (GO) enrichment analysis results of genes from cluster 5.

Pie chart of protein class variation with a false discovery rate (FDR)  $\leq 0.05$  as a cutoff, and using all genes detected as background.

Supplementary Table S3.1

**ENSEMBL** Gene  $\begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|c|}\n\hline\n\text{E}}\n\end{array}$ **(FC) CM + EGCG (FC) Cluster Genes minimal description**   $\overline{ENSG00000196616}$   $\overline{ADH1B}$   $\overline{-1.04}$   $\overline{-5.99}$  Cluster 1 Alcohol dehydrogenase 1b ENSG00000145242 | EPHA5 | -2.82 | -4.91 | Cluster 1 | Ephrin receptor 5  $ENSG00000101265$   $RASSF2$   $-2.88$   $-4.85$  Cluster 1 Ras association domain family protein 2 ENSG00000178573 | MAF  $\vert$  -3.16 | -4.35 | Cluster 1 | Zip transcription factor ENSG00000013297 | CLDN11 -3.20 -4.48 | Cluster 1 | Claudin 11, oligodendrocyte transmembrane protein  $ENSG00000116117$  PARD3B  $-3.21$   $-4.87$  Cluster 1 | Par-3 family cell polarity regulator beta  $ENSG00000164342 | TLR3$   $-3.22 | -4.72 | Cluster 1 | Toll-like receptor 3$  $ENSG00000137727 | ARHGAP20 | -3.29 | -4.18 | Cluster 1 | RHG T Pase-activating protein 20$  $ENSG00000151322 | NPAS3$   $-3.31 | -5.15 | Cluster 1 | Neuronal pas domain protein 3$ ENSG00000136040 | PLXNC1 -3.43 -5.07 | Cluster 1 | Plexin c1, virus-encoded semaphorin protein receptor

Supplementary Table S3. 1. List of the shared DEGs (748 genes) identified within the ADMSC treated with CM or CM+EGCG, with a p-value  $< 0.001$ .











































ENSG00000129194	SOX15	$-2.73$		Cluster <sup>-</sup>	Transcription factor 15 srv-box 15
ENSG00000165507	DEPP1	$-3.59$	1.41	Cluster <sup>'</sup>	Depp1 autophagy regulator
ENSG00000103316	<b>CRYM</b>	$-4.06$	2.44	Cluster <sup>'</sup>	<b>Prvstallin</b>
ENSG00000111728	ST8SIA1	$-4.43$	5.46	Cluster 7	St8 alpha-n-acetyl-neuraminide alpha-2.8-sialyltransferase

Results are shown as fold changes (FC). The *p*-values come from the comparison using NM as baseline. CM (MDA-MB-231 conditioned media), NM (negative media), DEGs (differential expressed genes) and EGCG (epigallocatechin-3 gallate).C

## CHAPTER IV

### ARTICLE 3

# EGCG INHIBITS THE INFLAMMATION AND SENESCENCE-INDUCING PROPERTIES OF MDA-MB-231 TRIPLE-NEGATIVE BREAST CANCER (TNBC) CELLS-DERIVED EXTRACELLULAR VESICLES IN HUMAN ADIPOSE-DERIVED MESENCHYMAL STEM CELLS

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Manuscript submitted to Cancer Cell International

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#### 4.1 Résumé

CONTEXTE: Le sécrétome des cellules du cancer du sein triple négatif (TNBC) peut induire un phénotype pro-inflammatoire dans les cellules souches mésenchymateuses adipocytaires humaines (hADMSC). Cela peut être inhibé par l'épigallocatéchine-3 gallate (EGCG), un polyphénol du thé vert. L'impact de l'EGCG sur la régulation paracrine des vésicules extracellulaires (VE) au sein du sécrétome reste très peu compris. MÉTHODES: Les VE ont été obtenues de la lignée cellulaire MDA-MB-231 dérivée de TNBC, dans un milieu dépourvu de sérum et traité ou non avec de l'EGCG dans des conditions de culture normoxiques ou hypoxiques  $(1\% 0_2)$ . L'analyse du contenu génique des VE a été faite par RNASeq. La modulation des marqueurs inflammatoires et de sénescence dans les cellules hADMSC a été évaluée par RT-qPCR à l'aide de puces à ADNc et a été validée par immunobuvardage. Des puces de protéines phospho-kinases ont été utilisées pour évaluer l'induction des voies de signalisation. RÉSULTATS: Alors que les conditions de culture hypoxiques n'ont pas modifié de manière significative le contenu génique des VE sécrétées par les cellules MDA-MB-231, l'ajout d'EGCG a altéré le matériel génique des VE à une faible tension d'oxygène. Les hADMSC traitées avec les VE ont augmenté l'expression des marqueurs adipocytaires associés au cancer *CXCL8*, *CCL2* et *IL-1B*. Les VE isolées des cellules MDA-MB-231 traitées avec l'EGCG (EGCG-EV) régulaient à la baisse l'expression de *CCL2* et *IL-1B*, tout en induisant une expression plus élevée des niveaux de CXCL8 et d'IL-6. Les VE ont activé les voies de signalisation CHK-2, c-Jun, AKT et GSK-3β dans les cellules hADMSC. Les EGCG-VE ont spécifiquement réduit l'expression des marqueurs de sénescence induits par le seriage P21 et β-gal. Enfin, nous avons démontrons que le contenu mitochondrial était réduit dans les VE dérivées de TNBC lors du traitement par EGCG. CONCLUSION: Les polyphénols dérivés de l'alimentation représentent une stratégie de ciblage efficace pour inhiber la régulation pro-tumorale des cellules cancéreuses sur le tissu adipocyte environnant dans le TNBC

#### 4.2 Abstract

BACKGROUND: Triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC) cell secretome can induce a pro-inflammatory phenotype in human adipose-derived mesenchymal stem cells (hADMSC). This can be prevented by the green tea polyphenol epigallocatechin-3 gallate (EGCG). The impact of EGCG on the paracrine regulation that the extracellular vesicles (EV) exert within the TNBC cell secretome remains unknown. METHODS: EV were obtained from a TNBC-derived serum-starved MDA-MB-231 cell model treated or not with EGCG under normoxic or hypoxic  $(1\% O_2)$  culture conditions. RNA-Seq analysis was used to assess the EV' genetic content. The modulation of inflammatory and senescence markers in hADMSC was evaluated by RT-qPCR using cDNA arrays and validated by immunoblotting. A protein profiler phospho-kinase array was used to explore signaling pathways. RESULTS: Hypoxic culture conditions did not significantly alter the genetic content of MDA-MB-231-secreted EV, but the addition of EGCG significantly modified EV genetic material at low oxygen tension. Gene expression of cancer-associated adipocyte pro-inflammatory markers *CXCL8*, *CCL2* and *IL-1B* was increased in hADMSC treated with EV. Concomitantly, EV isolated from MDA-MB-231 treated with EGCG (EGCG-EV) downregulated *CCL2*  and *IL-1B,* while inducing higher expression of *CXCL8* and *IL-6* levels. EV activated CHK-2, c-Jun, AKT and GSK-3β signaling pathways in hADMSC, whereas EGCG-EV specifically reduced the latter two as well as the serum starvation-induced senescence markers P21 and β-galactosidase. Finally, the mitochondrial content within the TNBC cells-derived EV was found reduced upon EGCG treatment. CONCLUSION: This proof-of-concept study demonstrates that the chemopreventive properties of diet-derived polyphenols may efficiently target the paracrine regulation that TNBC cells could exert upon their surrounding adipose tissue microenvironment.

#### 4.3 Significance statement

The present study reveals that diet-mediated intervention, such as through circulating EGCG, can alter the genetic material found within the TNBC cell-derived extracellular vesicles (EV). EGCG further reduced the capacity of the EV to trigger the pro-inflammatory and senescence processes that often are associated with a chemoresistance phenotype. EGCG caused a reduction in the mitochondrial content of cancer cells-derived EV, reinforcing its overall antitumoral role. Circulating dietderived polyphenols may therefore represent an efficient chemopreventive strategy to reduce the paracrine regulation that TNBC cells exert within their surrounding adipose tissue environment.

#### 4.4 Introduction

The release of extracellular vesicles (EV) loaded with proteins, lipids, and nucleic acids is an efficient mechanism for cell-to-cell communication (Tkach and Thery, 2016). EV differ in size and origin, but they are all delimited by a phospholipid bilayer. Exosomes are the most accepted term for smaller EV with a diameter between 30-150 nm and from endosomal origin (Stein and Chiang, 2014). On the other hand, microvesicles (also termed microparticles or ectosomes) represent a more heterogeneous population of particles that emerge from the plasmatic membrane budding with a size ranging from 100-1000 nm (Taylor and Bebawy, 2019). Specific RNA, DNA and proteins can be sorted into these secreted vesicles and regulate the gene expression of other cells in distant tissues or within the metastatic niche (Becker *et al.*, 2016; Taylor and Bebawy, 2019). Several studies have reported the role of EV in mediating processes like inflammation (Chimen *et al*., 2020; Duchez *et al.*, 2015; Mause *et al*., 2005; Wadey *et al*., 2019) and tumor progression (Becker *et al*., 2016). For instance, glioma-derived-EV harbouring the mutated variant III of the epidermal growth factor receptor (EGFRvIII) transferred this oncoprotein to other cancer cells and promoted the expansion of a more aggressive tumor phenotype (Al-Nedawi *et al*., 2008).

Nowadays, it is well-accepted that tumors control and pre-condition the metastatic niche in part through the release of EV (Sundararajan *et al*., 2018). However, little is known about the EV-mediated paracrine regulation of cells within the tumor tissue microenvironment and how the neighbouring resident cells, particularly those from the adipose tissue, can be impacted in response to triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC) cells' secretome. In this regard, it has been reported that tumor-derived EV can mediate the differentiation of normal fibroblasts into cancer-associated fibroblasts (CAF) (Wei *et al.*, 2017), induce immune suppression throughout the release of immune checkpoints (Li *et al.*, 2021; Poggio *et al*., 2019), and promote tumor metastasis (Jain, 2014).

Many factors can influence the molecular signature and composition of cell secretome and must be considered during *in vitro* studies using cell cultures. These include low oxygen hypoxic culture conditions, which mimic conditions found within solid tumors and in which cancer cells must survive through high proliferation rates and oxygen consumption (Kucharzewska et al., 2013). The effect of hypoxia on the release mechanisms of EV has been reviewed for different cell types (Bister et al., 2020), and some studies have emphasized its impact on the EV' cargo (Kucharzewska et al., 2013). The main focus has been on the content and identity of the miRNAs (small non-coding RNAs) profile within the hypoxic-EV because of their capacity to regulate gene expression (Bartel, 2004). In addition, EV have been reported to carry and deliver functional mitochondria, free mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) and their components with a regulatory impact on inflammation (Boudreau et al., 2014; Duchez et al., 2015; Todkar et al., 2021). Consequently, the horizontal transfer of mitochondrial components between cells can modulate the recipient cell's phenotype, including cell respiration (Spees et al., 2006) and cell viability (Kitani et al., 2014; Wang et Gerdes, 2015), and trigger a tumorigenic potential of the recipient cell (Dong et al., 2017; Tan et al., 2015). Studies in this topic have been carried out in platelets (Boudreau et al., 2014) or neutrophils (Yousefi et al., 2009), and only few have investigated the role of tumor-derived EV packed with mitochondrial components. In this regard, Sansone et al. reported that mtDNA transferred from EV leads to the exit from dormancy of therapy-induced cancer stem-like cells, inducing resistance to hormone therapy in metastatic breast cancer patients (Sansone et al., 2017).

Our previous research demonstrated that the secretome of a TNBC-derived cell line triggered the migration and acquisition of a pro-inflammatory phenotype in a human mesenchymal stem cell line derived from the adipose tissue (hADMSC) (Gonzalez Suarez et al., 2022). Furthermore, acquisition of this inflammatory phenotype was prevented by the green tea polyphenol epigallocatechin-3-gallate (EGCG) (Gonzalez Suarez et al., 2022). EGCG has a well-known antitumoral and antioxidant effect (Min et Kwon, 2014). More recently, it has been reported in a murine

model that EGCG inhibited the exosome-mediated infiltration of tumor-associated macrophages (TAM) by transferring miR-16 (Jang et al., 2013). Breast adipose tissuederived mesenchymal stromal/stem cells are crucial components prone to respond to cues from the tumor microenvironment, and a critical step initially involved in this process, might be their de-differentiation into tumor-supporting phenotypes (Ritter *et al.*, 2023), blocking their response within the tumor microenvironment could therefore serve as a novel chemopreventive strategy effective against breast cancer cell paracrine regulation.

In the present study, we aimed to evaluate the contribution of the tumoral-elicited EV in the induction of a pro-inflammatory phenotype in hADMSC, and whether the genetic content of EV isolated from TNBC-derived MDA-MB-231 cells treated with EGCG was altered. Given the recently discovered link between inflammation and senescence processes (Pribluda et al., 2013; Schmitt et al., 2022), we addressed if EV could trigger senescence in hADMSC and whether this can be prevented by EGCG. Since the mitochondrial content could also contribute to the acquisition of such phenotype in hADMSC, we also analyzed the effect of EGCG on the sorting of mitochondrial components within the EV.

#### 4.5 Materials and methods

### 4.5.1 Materials

Bovine serum albumin (BSA), sodium dodecyl-sulphate (SDS) and epigallocatechin-3-gallate (EGCG) were obtained from Sigma-Aldrich Canada (Oakville, ON). Phosphate-buffered saline (PBS) buffer solution (pH  $\sim$ 7.4) was purchased from (Wisent, Saint-Jean-Baptiste, QC, Canada). For the SDSpolyacrylamide gel electrophoresis (SDS-PAGE), the reagents were from Bio-Rad (Mississauga, ON), as well as the enhanced chemiluminescence (ECL) reagents. Micro

bicinchoninic acid (BCA) protein assay reagents were purchased from Pierce (Rockford, IL). The antibodies against BIP, P16, IL-6, phospho-AKT, AKT, phospho-GSK-3β, and GSK-3β were obtained from Cell Signaling Technology Inc (Danvers, MA). The anti-Tubulin antibody was purchased from ICN Biomedical (Aurora, OH), anti-P21 was from Abcam (Cambridge, UK), and anti-CD9, CD63 and CD81 from ThermoFisher Scientific (Waltham, MA). Horseradish peroxidase-conjugated antirabbit and anti-mouse IgG secondary antibodies were from Jackson ImmunoResearch Laboratories (West Grove, PA).

#### 4.5.2 Cell culture and procedure to generate the conditioned media for EV isolation

The human adipose-derived mesenchymal stem/stromal cells (hADMSC) and TNBC-derived cell line MDA-MB-231 were purchased from the American Type Culture Collection (ATCC, Manassas, VA). hADMSC were grown in Mesenchymal Stem Cell Basal Medium (ATCC, PCS-500-030) and supplemented with Mesenchymal Stem Cell Growth Kit Low Serum (ATCC, PCS-500-040). They were further reported to be able to undergo adipogenesis (Gonzalez Suarez et al., 2022). MDA-MB-231 cells were grown in EMEM Medium (Wisent, 320-036-CL) supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum (FBS). All cells were cultured at 37°C under a humidified 95-5% (*v*/*v*) mixture of air and CO2. The TNBC cell secretome was generated upon a 48-hour serum deprivation of a  $\sim$ 70% confluent MDA-MB-231 cell culture. To generate the conditioned media for the vesicle's isolation, approximately  $2-5 \times 10^6$  of MDA-MB-231 cells were seeded in 175 cm<sup>2</sup> cell culture flasks and cultured in EMEM (Wisent, Saint-Jean-Baptiste, QC, Canada) supplemented with 10% FBS. When the cells reached approximately 70-80% confluence, the monolayer was washed twice with negative media (NM) and left in a 20 mL/flask of NM with or without 30 µM of EGCG for 48 hours. Then, the conditioned media was harvested and clarified by centrifugation at 1,500g for 20 minutes to remove cell debris and stored at 4°C for a maximum of one week pending EV's isolation. For the experiments at different oxygen tensions, after

the monolayers reached a 70% of cell confluency, cells were incubated for 48 hours at 37°C under normoxic (21% of O<sub>2</sub> and 5% CO<sub>2</sub>) or in hypoxic (O<sub>2</sub>  $\leq$  1% and 5% CO<sub>2</sub>) culture conditions. Next, RNA was extracted for genes expression analysis.

#### 4.5.3 Extracellular vesicle isolation

The clarified conditioned media was concentrated form 40 mL to 10 mL by centrifugation using Amicon Ultra-3K (Millipore, Oakville, ON). EV were then isolated with ExoQuick-TC Exosomes precipitation Solution Kit (SBI) following the manufacturer protocol. The exosomal pellet was resuspended in 500 µL of PBS for dynamic light scattering (DLS) particle size analysis or in Trizol for the RNA-Seq analysis. In the case of *in vitro* experiments, the vesicles' pellet was resuspended in 200 µL of unsupplemented Mesenchymal Stem Cell Basal Medium (BM). Vesicles obtained under normoxia and in the presence of EGCG were labelled as EGCG-EV to distinguish them from those obtained without the catechin (EV).

#### 4.5.4 Extracellular vesicles relative quantification

A portion of the EV's pellet was used for the relative quantification of the particles. Samples were incubated in the presence of membrane-specific dye MemGlowTM 488 (100 nM, Cytoskeleton Inc., Denver, CO) in a total volume of 100 µL containing 20 µL of the EV's pellet suspension and incubating 20 minutes at room temperature in the dark. Samples were then diluted with the addition of  $100 \mu L$  of PBS and processed for flow cytometry analysis for total number of EV's particles. Briefly, using the high-resolution flow cytometer Cytoflex (Beckman Coulter, Indianapolis, IN), we quantified the number of MemGlow-positive vesicles in an acquisition volume of 30 µL (gating strategy shown in Supplementary Fig.S4.1). EV's count in the original sample was obtained using the following equation: number of particles/ $\mu$ L=  $(P2*6.7)/20.$ 

#### 4.5.5 Dynamic light scattering

EV's size/diameter was assessed by dynamic light scattering (DLS). The mean hydrodynamic diameter of EV was calculated by fitting a Gaussian function to the measured size distribution. Prior to DLS measurements, each sample was centrifuged at 300g for 10 seconds to pellet large aggregates; 50 μL of the sample was added to a ZEN00400 cuvette, and DLS measurements were conducted at 25°C using a Nano ZSP Zetasizer (Malvern Instruments Ltd., UK) operating at 633 nm and recording the backscattered light at an angle of 175°. The sample was allowed to equilibrate for 2 minutes before each measurement. DLS was recorded for 200 seconds with three replicate measurements. Signal intensity was transformed to volume distribution, assuming a spherical shape of EV, using the Malvern Instruments Ltd. software.

#### 4.5.6 Western blotting

The hADMSC were lysed in a buffer containing 1 mM NaF, 1 mM Na3VO4 and a phosphatase inhibitory cocktail (END Millipore, Germany). Then, the proteins (10 µg) were separated in a polyacrylamide gel at 7.5% or 12% during an SDS-PAGE in denaturing conditions. Next, proteins were electro-transferred to polyvinylidene difluoride (PVDF) membranes and blocked with non-fat dry milk (5%) in Tris-buffered saline (150 mM NaCl, 20 mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.5) at 0.3% Tween-20 (TBS-T, TWN510- 500), for 1 hour at room temperature. PVDF membranes were washed three times in TBS-T and incubated with the appropriate primary antibodies (1/1,000 dilution) overnight at 4°C with agitation. All primary antibodies were resuspended in a solution of TBS containing 3% BSA and 0.1% sodium azide (Sigma-Aldrich). Finally, the PVDF membranes were incubated for 1 hour with horseradish peroxidase-conjugated donkey anti-rabbit or anti-mouse IgG at 1/2,500 diluted in TBS-T at 5% of non-fat dry milk. ECL was used to visualize the immunoreactive material (Bio-Rad, Mississauga,

ON, Canada). Tubulin detection within the hADMSC lysates was used as loading control. To confirm the presence of exosomes, the EV were lysed in RIPA buffer 1X (NaCl 150 mM, NP-40 1%, SDS 0.1%, TRIS 50 mM, at pH 7.5), and 4 µg of protein were separated by SDS polyacrylamide, in a 12% gel during electrophoresis (SDS-PAGE), and under non-denaturing conditions. Next, the standard Western blot protocol was used to detect CD63, CD9 and CD81 exosome markers. A human phosphor-kinase array kit (Proteome ProfilerTM, R&D System® Inc, Minneapolis, MN) was used to screen the activated pathways in the hADMSC upon 1 hour treatment with the EV and EGCG-EV. The detection was performed according to the manufacturer's instructions. Densitometry analyses were performed using ImageJ software version 1.53e.

#### 4.5.7 Characterization of MDA-MB-231-derived EV interaction with hADMSC

The EV preparations were evaluated by flow cytometry for their capacity to interact with the targeting hADMSC. Once the vesicles isolated, they were labelled using MemGlowTM 488 as described above, then washed with PBS by ultracentrifugation at 100,000g for 1 hour at 4°C and resuspended in basal media. The hADMSC (10,000 cells/mL) were incubated with the EV at a ratio of 1:1 (cells: EV) in basal media and suspensions kept for 2 hours at 37°C. Next, the population of fluorescent cells was analyzed by flow cytometry using an Accury C6 device (Beckman Coulter, Indianapolis, IN).

#### 4.5.8 Confocal microscopy

To detect the presence of EV within the hADMSC, 10,000 cells were seeded in EBD plates (New Biotechnology Ltd). The next day, growth media was collected, and 500 µL of basal media with and without the MemGlow-labelled EV were added for a 2-hour incubation on cells. Fluorescent vesicles attached to the cells were visualized using a live imaging confocal microscope (Nikon Instruments Inc., Melville, NY). The

experiment was performed two times, and pictures of three different fields were taken. To determine whether the mitochondrial components present within the EV could be efficiently transferred to the hADMSC, MDA-MB-231 cells were seeded in 175 cm flasks and incubated over night with mitoTracker Deep Red (MTR) at a final concentration of 200 nM in negative media (NM). Then, the monolayer of cells was washed with PBS and kept for 24 hours in NM and EV (MTR+EVs) were isolated as described in the Methods section and protected from light. hADMSC were seeded on top of tissue culture glass slides (Falcon, NY, USA) previously coated with Poly-lysine. 200 µl of MTR+EVs were then resuspended in NM and incubated for 4 hours. Cells were then labelled with 100 nM MemGlow, incubated for 20 minutes at RT and in the dark. Finally, cells were fixed in 1% paraformaldehyde solution and DAPI was added to stain the nucleus. Pictures were taken using a fluorescence microscope.

#### 4.5.9 Senescence detection assay

The level of β-galactosidase (β-gal) activity was assessed using the CellEvent™ Senescence Green Detection kit (ThermoFisher Scientific). hADMSC (8,000 cells/well) were seeded onto a poly-L-lysine (Sigma Aldrich, Oakville, ON) pre-coated glass chamber (Nunc, NY, USA). Once the cells adhered, the growth media was removed. EV, EGCG-EV or basal media were added for 24 hours and at a ratio of 1:2 (Cells:EV). Then, cells were washed and stained according to the manufacturer's instructions for the detection of β-gal activity. The nucleus was stained with DAPI. Experiments were performed in duplicate per biological condition, and three pictures/well were taken. The results were presented as the percent (%) of positive cells per field (number of β-gal positive cells/total of cells)\*100.

4.5.10 Chemotactic cell migration assay
The experiments performed to evaluate the migration induction caused by the EV were carried out using the Real-Time Cell Analyzer (RTCA) Dual-Plate (DP) Instrument of the xCELLigence system (Roche Diagnostics, Mississauga, ON). The migration plates (CIM-Plates 16) have conventional trans-wells  $(8 \mu m)$  pore size) with gold electrode arrays on the upper chamber to record real-time cell migration. Before seeding the cells, the wells of the upper chamber were coated with  $25 \mu L$  of  $0.15\%$ gelatin in PBS and incubated for one hour at 37°C, followed by a wash with PBS. Then, hADMSC (10,000 cells/well) were added and co-cultured with the EV at a ratio of 1:1 (cells:EV) in the upper chamber of the device. The RTCA-DP Instrument software measured the impedance values and expressed them in arbitrary units as Normalized Cell Migration Index. Chemotaxis in response to basal media supplemented with 1% FBS, added to the bottom chamber, was monitored for 8 hours.

## 4.5.11 Quantification of the mitochondria-containing vesicles

The cell culture media supernatant was filtered using a 1.2 µm syringe filter to remove any remaining cell contaminants. This is a well validated approach to evaluate clinical samples without performing ultracentrifugation (Witwer *et al.*, 2013). For each sample, 5  $\mu$ L of the supernatant was combined with 1  $\mu$ L of anti-CD44-FITC (Biolegend), 1 µL of MitoTracker Deep Red (100 nM final concentration, ThermoFisher Scientific) and 93 µL of 0.2 µm filtered PBS (Corning). Labeling was performed by incubating the mixture for 15 minutes at room temperature in the dark. Samples were then processed on the Attune NxT flow cytometer (ThermoFisher Scientific) for quantification of the EV's subpopulation as previously reported (Boudreau *et al.*, 2014; Gharib *et al.*, 2023; Leger *et al.*, 2022). Gating strategies were established using a non-relevant anti-CD41-FITC antibody (Biolegend) for the MDA-MB-231 cell line. EV's subpopulation profile was determined by quantification of the CD44+/MitoTracker Deep Red- events (MPs) and the CD44+/MitoTracker Deep Red+ events (mitoMPs).

## 4.5.12 Citrate synthase activity assay

The citrate synthase activity was performed as previously described (Thibault, 1997). Briefly, imidazole (Sigma-Aldrich) was resuspended in water at 6.8 mg/mL (pH 8.0). The reaction medium was then prepared by adding 0.1 mM of DTNB (5,5-dithiobis-(2-nitrobenzoic acid)) sodium salt (Sigma-Aldrich) and 0.1 mM of AcetylCoA (Sigma-Aldrich) to the imidazole solution. The oxaloacetate solution was prepared by dissolving oxaloacetic acid in imidazole buffer at 0.2 mg/mL. The cell culture medium supernatant (100  $\mu$ L) was centrifuged at 17,800g for 90 minutes with the resulting pellet resuspended in 5  $\mu$ L of imidazole solution. In a 96-well plate, 200  $\mu$ L of the reaction medium, 20  $\mu$ L of the oxaloacetate solution and 5  $\mu$ L of sample were subsequently added to the wells. The plate was then placed in a Biotek Synergy H1 Hybrid Microplate Reader where the absorbance was measured at 412 nm for 4 minutes at 30-second intervals (9 total reads) with continuous plate shaking between reads. The slopes (ΔA/min) obtained from the reads were used to calculate the activity (AE; U/mL). For consideration, the DTNB has an extinction coefficient (ε) of 13.6 mL/(cm\*µmol), the total volume is 225 µL, the sample volume is 5 µL and the light path is 0.643 cm. Each well of the 96-well plate has a diameter (d or 2x radius (r)) of 6.675 mm.

4.5.13 Total RNA isolation, cDNA synthesis, and RT2 Profiler PCR arrays

Total RNA was extracted from cell monolayers using 1 mL of Trizol reagent for a maximum of 3 x  $10^6$  cells as recommended by the manufacturer (Life Technologies, Gaithersburg, MD). For cDNA synthesis, 1 µg of total RNA was reverse transcribed using the R2 First Strand kit (QIAGEN, Valencia, CA). The cDNA was stored at -80°C prior to PCR. To detect the genes modulated upon treatment with EV and EGCG-EV, the hADMSC (100,000 cells/well) were seeded in a six-well plate (SARSTEDT,

Montreal, QC). The next day the growth media was removed, and the cells were coincubated with BM or with the EV or EGCG-EV resuspended in BM and at a ratio of 1:0.5 (cells:EV) for twenty-four hours at 37°C and 5% of CO2. Then, cells were resuspended in Trizol for RNA isolation. The RT2 ProfilerTM PCR Array for Human Inflammatory Cytokines and Receptors (PAHS-181Z) and Human Cellular Senescence (PAHS-050ZD) were used according to the manufacturer's protocol (QIAGEN). The detailed list of the genes assessed can be found at the manufacturer's website (https://geneglobe.qiagen.com/us/product-groups/rt2-profiler-pcr-arrays). Using realtime quantitative PCR, we analyzed the expression of a panel of genes related to the inflammatory response and senescence markers that have already been published. Relative gene expression was calculated using the  $2^{\Delta\Delta C}$ <sub>T</sub> method ("delta-delta" method), in which  $C_T$  indicates the fractional cycle number where the fluorescent signal crosses the background threshold. This method normalizes the  $\Delta\Delta C_T$  value of each sample using five housekeeping genes (B2M, HPRT1, RPL13A, GAPDH, and ACTB). The normalized fold change (FC) values are then presented as average  $FC = 2$  (average  $\Delta\Delta C_T$ ). Only genes amplified less than 35 cycles were analyzed. The resulting raw data were then analyzed using the PCR Array Data Analysis Template (http://www.sabiosciences.com/pcrarraydataanalysis.php). This integrated web-based software package automatically performs all  $\Delta\Delta C_T$ -based FC calculations from the uploaded raw threshold cycle data.

# 4.5.14 Total RNA library preparation and sequencing

The isolated vesicles preparations were resuspended in 500 µL of Trizol in triplicate per condition for library preparation. Total RNA was isolated using Trizol (ThermoFisher) and RNeasy mini kit (Qiagen) according to the manufacturer's instructions. RNA was quantified using Qubit (ThermoFisher Scientific), and RNA quality control was assessed with the Bioanalyzer RNA 6000 Nano assay on the 2100 Bioanalyzer system (Agilent Technologies, Mississauga, ON). Transcriptome libraries

were generated using the KAPA mRNA-Seq HyperPrep kit (Roche) using a poly-A selection (ThermoFisher Scientific). **S**equencing was performed on the Illumina NextSeq500, obtaining around 20M single-end 75bp reads per sample.

### 4.5.15 Reads alignment and differential expression analysis

Reads were 30 trimmed for quality and adapter sequences using the Trimmomatic (version 0.35). Only reads with at least 50 bp length were kept for further analyses. Trimmed reads were aligned to the reference human genome version GRCh38 (gene annotation from Gencode version 37, based on Ensembl 103) using STAR version 2.7.1a (Dobin et al., 2013). Gene expressions were obtained as read count directly from STAR and computed using RNA-Seq by Expectation Maximization (RSEM) (Li et Dewey, 2011) to get normalized gene and transcript level expression, in TPM values, for these stranded RNA libraries. Differential expression analysis was performed using DESeq2 version 1.22.2 (Love et al., 2014). The package limma (Ritchie et al., 2015) was used to normalize expression data and read counts data were analyzed using DESeq2. Principal component analysis (PCA) for the first two most significant components was conducted with R packages (Team, 2017). iDEP (integrated Differential Expression and Pathway) analysis (Ge et al., 2018) was also used to determine significant differentially expressed genes (DEG) with a DESeq2 false discovery rate (FDR) adjusted p-value of 0.05 and fold-change with a cut-off of two. Gene expression was scaled and centered across samples using the mean and standard deviation and k-means clustering was performed using the consensus of least 10-independent runs using the R package ComplexHeatmap (Gu et al., 2016). Pathways enrichment analysis were performed with selected genes using the PathfindR package tool (Ulgen et al., 2019). Gene ontology (GO)-SLIM PANTHER 7.0 (protein annotation through evolutionary relationship) analysis of biological process and protein class were performed in the online platform (Gene Ontology Resource), using the Homo sapiens database as reference list.

## 4.5.16 Statistical data analysis

Unless otherwise stated, data was expressed as mean  $\pm$  standard error of the mean (SEM) from three or more independent experiments. Hypothesis testing was conducted using the Mann–Whitney test (two-group comparisons) or Wilcoxon signedrank tests for independent or paired samples respectively. Critical values below 0.05 were deemed statistically significant and accordingly denoted in the figures (\*: p < 0.05, \*\*: p < 0.01). All statistical analyses were performed using the GraphPad Prism 8.0.1 software (San Diego, CA).

## 4.6 Results

4.6.1 Characterization of the MDA-MB-231-derived EV and validation of the *in vitro* approach.

To characterize the EV's release, serum-starved TNBC-derived MDA-MB-231 cells were cultured in the presence or absence of 30 µM EGCG for 48 hours. This concentration of EGCG has been previously documented to not alter MDA-MB-231 cell viability (Banerjee et Mandal, 2022; Xie *et al.*, 2021). Conditioned media was next collected, and EV were isolated as described in the Methods section. Particle distribution of both EV's preparations were analyzed using DLS. EV samples showed a single peak with a mean diameter of  $~100$  nm, which corresponds with the expected exosome size, whether isolated from control cells (Figure 4. 1A, upper panel) or EGCG-treated cells (Figure 4. 1B, upper panel). However, when the peaks were analyzed as percent of intensity, we detected the presence of an additional population with sizes bigger than those expected for exosomes (Figure 4. 1A and B, lower panels). This suggests that samples are heterogeneous, and this is also reflected by the polydispersity index which approximated 1. Nevertheless, the expression of the exosome enriched proteins CD9, CD63 and CD81 was confirmed by immunoblotting in the EV lysates (Figure 4. 1C), using BiP as a protein not expected to be enriched within this fraction since it rather associates with secretory pathways (Thery *et al.*, 2018). Hence, one may safely consider our EV samples as a mixture of particles with different origins and will be termed from now on as EV rather than exosomes.

Next, EV capacity to interact with the hADMSC and their impact on the recipient cell's behaviour was investigated. EV were labelled using MemGlow, an amphiphilic probe with high specificity for the plasma membrane and incubated for 2 hours with hADMSC. Flow cytometry analysis confirmed that fluorescent EV highly interacted  $(\geq 99\%)$  with hADMSC (Figure 4. 1E). In addition, confocal fluorescent microscopy

further demonstrated the presence of fluorescent EV associated with hADMSC (Fig.4.1F). Finally, hADMSC were treated with the EV at a 1:1 ratio (cell:EV) and cell migration assessed in response to basal media supplemented with 1% FBS. hADMSC treated with EV had a 3-4-fold increase in cell migration rate than untreated cells (Fig.4.1D). These results demonstrate that the MDA-MB-231 derived-EV can trigger a pro-migratory adaptive response in hADMSC, confirming a potential bidirectional movement from adipose tissue cells towards the tumor microenvironment.



Figure 4. 1. Characterization of the EV isolated from the MDA-MB-231 cells conditioned media.

Serum-starved triple-negative breast cancer-derived MDA-MB-231 cells were cultured for 48 hours in the absence or presence of 30 µM EGCG. Conditioned media was next collected, concentrated, and extracellular vesicles (EV) isolated as described in the Methods section. Dynamic light scattering particle size analysis of the **A)** EV and **B)**  EGCG-EV showing the distribution of the particles by number and by intensity of the refracted light. A representative experiment out of four is presented. **C)** Immunoblotting of the proteins enriched in exosomes CD9, CD63 and CD81, and of the negative marker BIP in MDA-MB-231 cell lysate and EV lysate. **D)** Relative cell migration rate of hADMSC treated with EV (closed circle) or basal media (BM, open circle) in response to basal media supplemented with 1% FBS. Migration experiments were performed three times in quadruplicate. **E)**. Gating strategy of the flow cytometry experiment performed to assess MemGlow-488 labelled EV interaction with hADMSC. Merged histogram was obtained by the measurement by flow cytometry of the untreated cells (black lines) and the cells incubated with stained-EV (red lines). One representative experiment out of two is presented. **F)** Representative microscopy images of hADMSC incubated for two hours with the MDA-MB-231 cells-derived EV labelled with MemGlow-488. One representative experiment out of three is presented (scale bar is 20 µm). *Diameter in nanometers* (d.nm), *polydispersity index* (Pdl), intensity weighted mean hydrodynamic size of the particles (Z-Average). Statistically significant differences were determined by the non-parametric comparison test Mann-Whitney,  $*$  p<0.05.

4.6.2 Transcriptomic analysis and impact of EGCG on the EV load released by MDA-MB-231 cells.

MDA-MB-231-EV are heterogeneous, and many factors can influence their content. Next, we investigated the specific transcript content packaged into the EV following EGCG treatment. Our RNA-Seq analysis identified a total of 1116 differentially expressed genes (DEG) between EV isolated from control (EV) or EGCG-treated cells (EGCG-EV) (**Error! Reference source not found.**A, and Supplementary Table S4. 1). An asymmetric DEG distribution was observed with a slight tendency to gene downregulation in EGCG-EV (619 downregulated vs 497 upregulated). Next, we searched for pathways enrichment containing the identified DEG using an active subnetwork-based algorithm (Ulgen *et al.*, 2019). Among the pathways enriched, cellular senescence, cell cycle, signaling pathways associated with IL-17, HIF-1 and Notch were observed (**Error! Reference source not found.**B). Interestingly, the highest genes induced in EGCG-EV, were found to associate with mitochondria-related pathways, and further included oxidative phosphorylation,

chemical carcinogenesis-reactive oxygen species, and mitophagy (**Error! Reference source not found.**B). The latter further interconnected with thermogenesis, proteoglycans in cancer and small cell lung cancer biomarkers (**Error! Reference source not found.**C).



Figure 4. 2. Modulation of the EV's cargo by EGCG.

The extracellular vesicles (EV) were isolated from serum-starved MDA-MB-231 cells treated or not with 30  $\mu$ M EGCG for 48 hours. **A)** Volcano plot for the expression profile of differentially expressed genes (DEG) with an adjusted *p*-value < 0.05 was selected as the threshold. **B)** KEGG pathway enrichment analysis resulted from the comparison of DEG (EGCG-EV vs EV) with absolute fold change (FC) > 2, and adjusted *p*-value < 0.05. **C)** Network graph showing the enriched pathways and their respective genes. Enriched terms are coloured in beige, while upregulated and downregulated genes are coloured in red and green, respectively.

4.6.3 TNBC cell-derived EV trigger specific signaling pathways in hADMSC.

To address whether both MDA-MB-231-derived EVs' preparations activated different downstream signaling cascades in hADMSC, we first quantified the EV by flow cytometry as described in the Methods section (Supplementary Figure S4. 1A-C). Importantly, no statistical difference in the mean of fluorescence intensity (MFI) between the MemGlow-labelled EV and EGCG-EV was observed (Supplementary Figure S4. 1D), and neither in their interaction capacity with hADMSC (

Supplementary Figure S4. *2*). Interestingly, in terms of number of particles, EGCG-treated MDA-MB-231 were found to release more EV than untreated cells (Supplementary Figure S4. 1E).

Next, downstream phosphorylated intermediates were evaluated with a phosphokinase immunoblotting array in hADMSC lysates isolated upon incubation with basal media (BM), EV, or EGCG-EV (Figure 4. 3A). Densitometry analysis performed on duplicate lysates from two independent membranes demonstrated that P38A, STAT5A/B and P53 phosphorylation status were induced, but unmodified upon any treatment (Figure 4. 3B). Such screen further revealed that checkpoint kinase 2 (CHK-2) and c-Jun N-terminal kinases JNK (c-Jun) phosphorylation were induced upon EV and EGCG-EV treatments (Figure 4. 3B). Interestingly, EGCG-EV demonstrated an inhibitory effect on the protein kinase B signaling pathway (AKT) and the glycogen synthase kinase-3 beta (GSK-3β) (Figure 4. 3B). The latter two were further validated using individual antibodies against their phosphorylated and total protein states (Figure 4. 3C). Levels of phosphorylation status profiles confirmed the phospho-kinase array results (Figure 4. 3D), suggesting that MDA-MB-231-derived EV and EGCG-EV can exert differential downstream signaling pathways involved in cell survival and proliferation.



Figure 4. 3. Signaling cascades triggered by the EV.

The hADMSC were incubated for one hour in basal media (BM), EV, or EGCG-EV using a Cell:EV ratio of 1:0,5 (#:#). Cells were next lysed as described in the Methods section for Western blotting analysis. A phospho-kinase array was used to detect the pathways activation state. **A)** Immunoblotting results, and **B)** Densitometric analysis of the highlighted immunoreactive spots was performed using the ImageJ software. **C)**  Validation of the phosphorylated and total states of GSK-3β and AKT by immunoblotting. **D)** Ratios of the phosphorylated/total forms of AKT and GSK-3β resulting from the densitometric analysis performed with ImageJ. Mitogen-activated protein kinases (p38); signal transducer and activator of transcription 5A/B (STAT5A/B); Checkpoint kinase-2 (CHK-2); c-Jun N-terminal kinases JNK (c-Jun); protein kinase B signaling pathway (AKT); glycogen synthase kinase-3 (GSK-3); tumor protein 53 (P53).

4.6.4 MDA-MB-231-derived EV trigger the induction of a pro-inflammatory phenotype in hADMSC.

Induction of a pro-inflammatory phenotype by the TNBC secretome was previously reported in hADMSC, and this was prevented by EGCG (Gonzalez Suarez *et al.*, 2022). Here, we assessed whether the different EV isolated had any biological effect on hADMSC. Then, cells were incubated for 24 hours in serum-free media in the presence of EV or EGCG-EV, and total RNA extracted from hADMSC and transcribed to cDNA. Levels of gene expression associated with inflammation were then assessed by qPCR using the Human Inflammatory Cytokines and Receptors  $RT^2$ Profiler gene array. A cut-off of a fold change (FC) greater or equal to two was defined. Genes related to the cancer-associated adipocytes (CAA) phenotype were induced, and these included the C-C motif chemokine ligand 2 (*CCL2*), interleukin-1 beta (*IL-1B*), and C-X-C motif chemokine ligand 8 (*CXCL8*) (Figure 4. 4A). However, the C-C motif chemokine ligand 5 (*CCL5*) and the tumor necrosis factor (*TNF*) were not induced. Interestingly, the EGCG-EV induced a higher upregulation of *CXCL8* and interleukin-6 (*IL-6*) (Figure 4. 4A), and the latter IL-6 expression was also confirmed at the protein level (Figure 4. 4B).

In addition to the induction of the CAA biomarkers, other pro-inflammatory genes were increased upon incubation with the EV and included the C-C motif chemokine ligands 7, 11, 20 (*CCL7*, *CCL11*, *CCL20*), FAS ligand (*FASLG*), the C-X-C motif chemokine ligands 5 and 10 (*CXCL5*, *CXCL10*), and interleukin-27 (*IL-27*) (Figure 4. 4C). At the same time, EGCG-EV reduced their expression, except for *CXCL5*, while increased the expression of *CXCL1-3*. EGCG-EV also downregulated several interleukins (*IL-16*, *IL-13*, *IL-17C*), and other pro-inflammatory markers such as lymphotoxin-beta also known as tumor necrosis factor C (*LTB/TNF-C*), vascular endothelial growth factor A (*VEGFA*), and the C-X-C motif chemokine ligands 2 (*CXCR2*) (Figure 4. 4C).



Figure 4. 4. Induction of a pro-inflammatory molecular signature by the MDA-MB-231 cells-derived EV.

The hADMSC were incubated for 24 hours in Basal Media (BM, Control), EV (white bars) or EGCG-EV (black bars) with a Cell:EV ratio of 1:0,5. Next, total RNA was isolated, and cDNA was synthesized. Gene expression levels were determined by qPCR using a Human Inflammatory Cytokine and Receptors RT2-Profiler gene array kit. Densitometric analysis was performed using the ImageJ software. **A)** The fold change (FC) expression of genes related to the cancer-associated adipocyte (CAA) phenotype, using the values obtained with BM as reference. **B)** Immunoblotting of interleukin-6 (IL-6) and tubulin (10 µg protein/well). **C)** FC of selected genes from the array to highlight the modulatory effect of the EGCG-EV.

## 4.6.5 MDA-MB-231-derived EV trigger hADMSC senescence.

Cancer-associated inflammation is one of the hallmarks of cellular senescence (Pribluda *et al.*, 2013). Since our experiments were performed without growth factors, we wished to assess the impact of serum starvation-induced hADMSC senescence in the presence or not of either EV or EGCG-EV. Senescence was effectively found to be induced upon 24 hours of serum starvation as P21 expression was triggered (BM condition) independently of the presence of EV (Figure 4. 5A). However, EGCG-EV treatment completely prevented serum-starvation induction of senescence. This was further assessed at the cellular level through the expression of primary senescence marker β-galactosidase (β-gal) (Dimri *et al.*, 1995). Hence, hADMSC were incubated with EV or EGCG-EV at 1:2 cells/EV ratio, then washed and stained for the expression of β-gal as described in the Methods section (Figure 4. 5B). In line with the increased expression of P21, the extent of β-gal positive cells increased with either BM or EVtreated cells, and the increase was prevented upon treatment with EGCG-EV (Figure 4. 5C). Total RNA was extracted, and cDNA was synthetized and used to screen for the modulation in the expression of senescence biomarkers with the Human Senescence RT2 -Profiler RT-qPCR gene array. EV treatment triggered NADPH oxidase 4 (*NOX4*), cell division cycle 25C (*CDC25C*), early growth response 1 (*EGR1*), cyclin-dependent kinase inhibitor 2B (*CDKN2B*), plasminogen activator urokinase (*PLAU*), thrombospondin 1 (*THBS1*), insulin-like growth factor 1 (*IGF1*) and the secreted protein acidic and rich in cysteine (*SPARC*) which were all significantly reduced in EGCG-EV-treated hADMSC (Figure 4. 5D). The only gene increased by the EGCG-EV, while not induced by the EV, was the superoxide dismutase 2 (*SOD2,* data not shown). Taking all these results together, it appears that the EGCG-EV can rescue hADMSC from senescence induced by serum starvation.



Figure 4. 5. EGCG-EV rescue hADMSC from serum-starvation-induced senescence. hADMSC were incubated for 24 hours in complete media (CM), serum-deprived basal media (BM), EV or EGCG-EV at a ratio Cell:EV of 1:0.5. hADMSC were collected for protein and total RNA as described in the Methods section. **A)** Immunoblotting detection of the senescence biomarker p21 and of the loading control tubulin from control hADMSC lysates, treated with CM, BM, or the respective EV. **B)** Confocal microscopy of hADMSC treated for 48 hours at a Cell:EV ratio of 1:2. The nucleus was stained with DAPI (red), and the expression of the senescence-associated βgalactosidase (β-gal) marker is coloured in green. **C)** Histograms showing the percent of positive β-gal cells obtained upon 48 hours of treatment. **D)** Gene expression of other senescence markers modulated in hADMSC by EGCG-EV compared with the expression level of the genes in cells incubated with EV, using as cut-off a log2 FC  $\geq$ 2 and quantified by qPCR using the Human Senescence RT2-Profiler gene array kit. The percent of positive β-gal cells/field was calculated using the following equation: (number of positive cells /total of cells)\*100. The non-parametric two-tailed Mann-Whitney test determined statistically significant differences, showing a  $** p<0.01$ .

# 4.6.6 Presence of mitochondria within MDA-MB-231-derived EV.

Significant expression of genes related to mitochondrial processes were highlighted during the RNA-Seq analysis performed in the genetic material within the EV. Hence, we took a deeper look into those mitochondria-related genes and found that most of them were effectively detected in EV and downregulated in the EGCG-EV samples (Table 4. 1). Consequently, we tracked mitochondrial content within isolated EV and checked whether EGCG treatment altered it. CD44 cell surface expression was used to quantify the total population of MDA-MB-231 derived EV (MPs, Figure 4. 6A) while MitoTracker Deep Red (MTR) was used to identify mitochondrial material in the vesicles (mitoMPs, Figure 4. 6B). EGCG-EV had a tendency to have higher MPs content, but a decrease in the mitoMPs subpopulation. Our flow cytometry results were supported by citrate synthase activity, which correlates with mitochondrial content, and in which the EGCG-EV supernatant had less activity (Figure 4. 6C). Moreover, when hADMSC were incubated with the MTR-stained EV or MTR-stained EGCG-EV, 17% and 13% respectively, of the cells were positive (Figure 4. 6D) whereas the MFI was reduced by more than half for those cells treated with the MTR-stained EGCG-EVs (Figure 4. 6E). The potential inhibitory effect of the EGCG over the mitoTracker dye was ruled out since no variation in the MFI was detected in the stained MDA-MB-231 after being incubated at two different concentrations of the polyphenol (Supplementary Figure S4. 3). Moreover, uptake of mitoMPs within hADMSC and mitochondria delivery were observed confirming that the EVs cargo material can be taken up by the recipient cells (

Supplementary Figure S4. *4*). Altogether, these results suggest that EGCG causes a reduction in the EV mitochondrial content that would eventually be transferred to the recipient cells upon EV fusion (Figure 4. 6F).

<b>Genes</b>	$log2$ FC	<i>p</i> -adjusted value	Protein	
MT-ATP8	$-6.64$	3.99E-33	ATP synthase 8	
<b>MCUB</b>	$-5.60$	0.013846	Mitochondrial Calcium Uniporter Dominant Negative Subunit Beta. An integral component of the mitochondrial inner membrane	
MT-ATP6	$-4.50$	1.75E-11	ATP synthase 6	
MT-ND <sub>2</sub>	$-4.33$	4.73E-64	NADH dehydrogenase 2	
MT-ND4	$-3.90$	1.67E-44	NADH dehydrogenase 4	
MT-CO <sub>2</sub>	$-3.81$	8.09E-15	Cytochrome C oxidase II	
MT-CYB	$-3.38$	4.72E-12	Cytochrome b	
MT-ND5	$-3.35$	1.97E-34	NADH dehydrogenase 5	
MT-CO <sub>3</sub>	$-3.16$	4.84E-11	Cytochrome C oxidase III	
MT-ND3	$-3.15$	4.86E-44	NADH dehydrogenase 3	
MT-ND4L	$-3.01$	3.07E-38	NADH 4L dehydrogenase	
MT-ND1	$-2.98$	3.01E-29	NADH dehydrogenase 1	
MT-CO1	$-2.41$	9.83E-19	Cytochrome C oxidase I	
MT-ND <sub>6</sub>	$-2.03$	$3.01E-10$	NADH dehydrogenase 6	
FIS1	$-2.03$	0.0415208	Component of a mitochondrial complex that promotes mitochondrial fission	
VDAC1	$-1.08$	0.0247492	Voltage Dependent Anion Channel 1. A major component of the outer mitochondrial membrane.	

Table 4. 1. Fold change regulation of mitochondria-related genes detected in the EGCG-EV vs EV*.* 

FC: fold change



Figure 4. 6. EGCG reduces the mitochondrial content within the EV. Serum-starved MDA-MB-231 cells were cultured for 48 hours in the presence or absence of 30 µM EGCG. EV were isolated, stained with anti-CD44-FITC and MitoTracker Deep Red (MTR), and analyzed by flow cytometry. Four independent

experiments were spaced in time and with a different cell passage. The dots represent the mean of the counting, and results from the same experimental day, were connected with a line in graphs A-C. Paired *t*-test was performed;  $*P < 0.01$ . A) The total number of CD44<sup>+</sup> /MTR- microparticles (MPs) detected in EV or EGCG-EV. **B)** Quantification of the mitochondria-containing particles (CD44<sup>+</sup>/MTR<sup>+</sup>, mitoMPs) in the EV or EGCG-EV. Four independent experiments were performed. **C)** Citrate synthase activity was measured in particles isolated from the conditioned media as described in the Methods section. **D)** Dot plot resulting from the flow cytometry analysis detecting the presence of mitochondria delivered by the EV in hADMSC after incubation with basal media (BM, negative control), mitoTracker-labelled EV (MTR-EV), or mitoTracker-labelled ECGC-EV (MTR-EGCG-EV). **E)** The percent of hADMSC positive for the presence of mitochondria delivered by the EV or EGCG-EV. **F)** Mean of the fluorescence intensity of the EV or EGCG-EV-delivered mitochondria within hADMSC.

4.6.7 Impact of EGCG and low oxygen tension on the sorted genes within the EV.

We next questioned whether EV content is altered in conditions which mimic the patho-physiological conditions of a solid tumor microenvironment, where nutrients are limited, and oxygen tension is low. Given that such starvation and hypoxic conditions have a direct impact on cell metabolism, we assessed the mRNA cargo of the EV derived from MDA-MB-231 cells and whether EGCG additionally altered such content. EV and EGCG-EV were isolated from normoxic  $(21\% O_2)$  and hypoxic (1% O2) culture conditions, and total RNA extracted for RNA-Seq analysis. Principal component analysis (PCA) shows that EV samples obtained from cells cultured in normoxia (EV\_N) or hypoxia (EV\_H) are very similar (cluster 1, C1) (

Figure 4. 7A). Comparing the transcript content of EV H and EV N (C1,

Figure 4. 7A), nine DEG were identified (fold change  $FC > |2|$  and adjusted *p*value < 0.05) (Table 4. 2). Among those genes, five were upregulated and were directly involved in the hypoxia-mediated process. These included cell death (*FAM162A*), mitochondrial function (*ISCA1*), metabolism (*PM20D2*, *SLC2A3*), and angiogenesis

(*ADM*). The four downregulated genes were associated with gene expression machinery (*NIP7*, *MRPS7*, *MT-TP*, *ZNF585A*).

<b>Gene Ensemble</b> ID	$log2$ FC	<i>p</i> -adjusted value	<b>GenCards annotations</b>	
<b>PM20D2</b>	4.27	0.032	Peptidase M20 Domain Containing 2. Hydrolase activity.	
ENSG00000146281,6			Function in metabolite repair mechanism.	
<b>FAM162A</b>			Family With Sequence Similarity 162 Member A. Hypoxia-	
ENSG00000114023,15	3.52	0.001	induced cell death, the release of cytochrome C, caspase activation	
			(CASP9) and inducing mitochondrial permeability transition.	
ISCA1	2.60	0.049	Iron-Sulfur Cluster Assembly 1. Mitochondrial protein.	
ENSG00000135070,15			Function in electron-transfer reactions	
<b>ADM</b>	2.23	0.001	Adrenomedullin. Functions in vasodilation, hormone secretion	
ENSG00000148926,10			regulation, angiogenesis promotion, and antimicrobial activity.	
SLC <sub>2</sub> A <sub>3</sub>	2.09	0.001	GLUT3. Glucose and other monosaccharides transporter.	
ENSG00000059804,16				
NIP7	$-2.20$	0.049	Nucleolar Pre-rRNA Processing Protein NIP7. RNA binding	
ENSG00000132603,15				
MRPS7	$-2.41$	0.036	Mitochondrial Ribosomal Protein S7. RNA binding and	
ENSG00000125445,11			structural constituent of ribosome.	
MT-TP	$-2.69$	0.032	Mitochondrially Encoded TRNA-Pro (CCN). Associated with	
ENSG00000210196,2			the tRNA class	
ZNF585A	$-3.97$	0.048	Zinc Finger Protein 585A. Function as a transcription factor.	
ENSG00000196967,11				

Table 4. 2. Genes modulated in hypoxia vs normoxia with a p-adjusted value  $< 0.05$  and a log2 FC  $>$  |2|.

FC: fold change

Interestingly, while oxygen levels have no significant impact on the transcript content of vesicles produced by untreated cells, the addition of EGCG drives the production of vesicles with distinctive transcript signatures linked to oxygen levels (

Figure 4. *7*A, C2 and C3). This suggests that hypoxic conditions may potentiate the action of EGCG. The analysis of the transcripts isolated in EV  $HE (C3)$  vs EV NE (C2) resulted in the detection of 2,640 gene products, from which 553 were differentially regulated between the experimental conditions (Table 4. 3).

Table 4. 3. DESeq results obtained from the comparison of the EV HE vs EV NE

<i>p</i> -adjusted value	<b>Fold change</b>	<b>Numbers of genes</b>
Significant	Upregulated	107
Significant	Downregulated	446
No significant		2087

#### The Volcano Plot in

Figure 4. *7*B depicts the behaviour of the DEG with an absolute fold change greater than two-fold and colored according to their adjusted *p*-value (red or grey for DEG statistically significant or not respectively). Addition of EGCG in hypoxic cell culture conditions showcases a noticeable gene downregulation (446 downregulated genes vs. 107 upregulated genes). Among the most upregulated genes with the highest statistical differences were the sialic acid acetylesterase enzyme (*SIAE*), the bone morphogenetic protein receptor type 2 (*BMPR2*), the oncogene breast carcinoma amplified sequence 4 (*BCAS4*), genes associated with the vesicular transport like the sorting nexin 32 (*SNX32*), and the GRIP and coiled-coil domain containing 2 (*GCC2*). In contrast, among those genes with the highest downregulation, we found the cytoskeleton constituent tubulin alpha 1c (*TUBA1C*), the high mobility group AT-Hook 1 (*HMGA1*) associated with gene transcription, the scaffolding protein neuroblast differentiation-

associated (*AHNAK*), the coding genes associated with ribosomal functionality, the eukaryotic translation elongation factors 1 alpha 1 and 1 gamma (*EEF1A1* and *EEF1G*), and the transmembrane protein encoded gene solute carrier family 3 member 2 (*SLC3A2*).





**A)** Principal Component Analysis (PCA) of the top 500 differential expressed genes (DEG) identified in the samples. **B)** Volcano Plot showing the number of DEG detected with a log2  $FC \geq |2|$  in the EV obtained by adding 30  $\mu$ M EGCG at different oxygen tensions. The analysis was performed by comparing the EGCG-EV obtained in hypoxia (EV\_HE, C3) vs EGCG-EV obtained in normoxia (EV\_NE, C2). Genes with a

significant or non-significant value were coloured in red and grey respectively. **C)** Robust k-means clustering visualized as a heatmap of the individual samples and their DEG with a  $log2$  FC  $\ge$  |2| and p-adjusted value < 0.05. **D**) Gene ontology (GO)-SLIM PANTHER analysis showing the biological process that involves genes downregulated by HE (cluster 1, heat map). **E)** GO-SLIM PANTHER analysis of the downregulated genes in cluster 1 of the heatmap, showing their protein class. Fisher's exact test and the false discovery rate (FDR) correction were used during the GO-SLIM analysis.

Next, we performed a *k*-means clustering analysis with the 553 DEG and generated the heat map containing each condition replicate (

Figure 4. *7*C). As expected, we detected two major clusters comprising 107 genes, and the other one with the remaining 446 genes. A detailed information of these DEG is provided in a supplementary EXCEL data sheet (Supplementary Table S4. 1). Unfortunately, no association was found upon Gene ontology (GO) enrichment analysis performed (FDR  $< 0.05$ ) for the upregulated genes (cluster 2,

Figure 4. *7*C). Nevertheless, most of the upregulated genes coded for proteins involved in the regulation of gene expression, mitochondrial components and protein trafficking and recycling. Importantly, there were genes upregulated within the EGCG-EV that associated with the inflammatory response (*HAVCR2*, *LRRFIP2*), cell proliferation (*CCPG1*, *EXOSC2*), apoptosis (*BBC3*) and oncogenesis (*ZMAT3*, *ZNF124*, *ErbB-3*, *SH3D19*, *REL*). When the same analysis was performed with the genes downregulated in EV\_HE (cluster 1,

Figure 4. *7*C), we identified genes that were attributed to biological processes associated with regulation of cell metabolism, biosynthesis, and cell mobility like the polymerization/depolymerization of actin (

Figure 4. *7D*). Furthermore, in comparison with the EV NE, the EV HE vesicles had less genes coding for cytoskeletal proteins, chaperones, and transcription factors (

Figure 4. *7*E).

## 4.7 Discussion

The release of small EV loaded with bioactive macromolecules is an efficient communication and paracrine regulation mechanism linking the tumor niche to its neighbouring cells. Cancer cells attract and trigger dedifferentiation of neighbouring cells to acquire a pro-tumoral role like it has been described for the TAM (Wyckoff et al., 2004), cancer-associated fibroblasts (CAF) (Gentric et Mechta-Grigoriou, 2021), and cancer-associated adipocytes (CAA) (Zhao et al., 2020). In our previous study, we demonstrated that the secretome of a TNBC cell line (MDA-MB-231) induced the CAA-like phenotype in hADMSC, a process inhibited by EGCG (Gonzalez Suarez et al., 2022). To decipher the different components within that secretome, the present study focused on the role of the tumor-derived EV and their paracrine regulation over the hADMSC, as well as the effect of EGCG on the vesicle's load and biological effect.

EV have been demonstrated to regulate processes like inflammation and tissue repair, as well as to condition the premetastatic niche (Sundararajan et al., 2018). EV can travel to distant sites and transfer biological information to the recipient cells (Al-Nedawi et al., 2008; Becker et al., 2016; Li et al., 2021). This can be achieved through direct fusion of the vesicles to the plasma membrane via receptor-ligand interactions, membrane fusion or by releasing their load within the cytosol (Nicholson et al., 2020). Our samples were enriched in exosomes according to the isolation method used and the detection of exosomal markers, but the presence of vesicles with different sizes cannot be dismissed. With regards to such size distribution, both EV and EGCG-EV vesicles behaved similarly. In addition to its antioxidant properties, pro-oxidant properties have also been reported for EGCG both *in vitro* and *in vivo* (Kim *et al*., 2014; Li *et al*., 2010). How this could directly affect the membrane composition of the vesicles, as well as the response of the targeted cells, remains to be addressed. However, in our experimental conditions no differences were observed in terms of MFI in the labelled vesicles (**Error! Reference source not found.**D) or in the recipient cells (**Error! Reference source not found.**C) implying that the staining and interaction capacity of the vesicles remained unaltered.

Here, we demonstrate that TNBC cell-derived EV can interact with hADMSC and induce a pro-migratory and pro-inflammatory phenotype. Accordingly, the inflammation-associated IL-17 pathway was enriched during the transcriptomic analysis of the EV's cargo. Next, we validated the regulation of other inflammatory markers as EV induced several of the genes involved in this signaling cascade including IL-1B, CXCL1 and CXCL2, CCL2, CCL7 and CCL20 (Onishi and Gaffen, 2010), while EGCG-EV reduced most of them. We highlighted the modulation of the CAA markers by the vesicles suggesting that this phenotype can be induced in the hADMSC. Similar observations were found in adipocytes in co-culture with exosomes derived from hepatocellular carcinoma, where the induction of pro-inflammatory cytokines IL-6, IL-8, IL-1Band CCL2 promoted tumor growth and angiogenesis (Wang *et al*., 2018a). Interestingly, EGCG-EV specifically induced IL-6 along with the chemokines CXCL1, CXCL3 and CXCL8. These cytokines are key regulators of the acute response during inflammation and immune response and can contribute to tissue homeostasis by inducing the recruitment of innate immune system cells (Jones et Jenkins, 2018; Vilotic et al., 2022).

By interacting with hADMSC, both preparations of EV (EV and EGCG-EV) specifically triggered the DNA damage response pathway CHK-2 and the stressactivated protein kinase c-Jun/JNK pathway. CHK-2 is activated in response to oxidative stress generated upon nutrient deprivation and maintains the redox homeostasis (Guo et al., 2020). Hence, there appears to be some cellular stress mediated by the EV's preparations, in addition to the nutrient deprivation. In opposition to the EV-mediated effect, the EGCG-EV failed to activate the AKT pathway and reduced the activation state of the GSK-3β pathway. AKT activation has a positive regulation on several processes including metabolism, proliferation, and cell survival (Hemmings et Restuccia, 2012). On the other hand, GSK-3β relays a signal transduction cascade involved in cellular processes like gene transcription, cell

proliferation, and apoptosis (Chargaff et West, 1946). This protein can be phosphorylated on different serine residues by other kinases including AKT (Medina et Wandosell, 2011) and P38 (Thornton et al., 2008), correlating with the inhibition of its kinase activity, or by MEK1/2 leading to its induction (Hartigan et al., 2001). The role of AKT mediating the activation of the c-Jun/caspase-3 axis in response to the endoplasmic reticulum stress, which renders in attenuation of the P21 expression level in a prostate cancer cells' model was recently documented (Rasool et al., 2017). Then, cells exited from a senescence state to enter apoptosis-mediated cell death. Here, the genetic content of EGCG-EV altered pathways associated with ROS, cell cycle, cellular senescence, HIF-1 $\alpha$  and Notch. The latter has been also associated with the induction of AKT signaling pathway and P21 expression in T-cell lymphoblastic leukemia (Guo et al., 2009). Besides, we detected a sustained activation of the P38/MAPK pathways that corresponds with the induction of senescence in response to chronic DNA-damage (Ruhland *et al.*, 2016a). These results may suggest that EGCG-EV can rescue cells from senescence since we detected their capacity to reduce the P21 and β-gal expression. In our study, SOD2 was the only senescence marker induced explicitly by the EGCG-EV (data not shown), a fact previously reported for EGCG during an *in vivo* study and linked to its capacity to prevent the oxidative stress caused by free fatty acid-induced insulin resistance (Li et al., 2011b).

The pro-tumoral role of senescent cells has been described as promoting lowgrade inflammation (Pribluda et al., 2013) and the CCL2-mediated recruitment of myeloid and NK cells (Lasry et Ben-Neriah, 2015). Also, senescent tumor cells have been reported to have increased migration capacity and to be often present at the tumor invasive front (Kim et al., 2017b). Here, the EV increased the expression of proinflammatory and senescence markers in hADMSC, as well as their migration rate. These shreds of evidence highlight the predominant inhibitory effect of EGCG-EV in both biological processes. These vesicles triggered IL-6 and CXCL8 expression, then further studies will be required to clarify how such induction may impact tumor progression.

In addition, we detected the presence of mtDNA and mitochondrial content within a percentage of the isolated vesicles, which could be potentially transferred to the donor cells. It has been reported that mitochondria and their components, when transferred to recipient cells, induce an inflammatory response (Boudreau *et al.*, 2014; Todkar et al., 2021), and increase invasiveness in tumor cells (Rabas *et al*., 2021; Takenaga *et al*., 2021). Previous studies have shown that intercellular transfer of functional mitochondrial content can rescue injured or UV-treated prostate cancer cells (PC12) (Wang et Gerdes, 2015; Yang *et al.*, 2020). Since the integrity of the extracellular mitochondrial content is affected by the EGCG treatment, the bioenergetic state of the recipient cells could be significantly modulated. However, the nature of the factors transmitted varies according to the cell culture conditions (Amari and Germain, 2021) and cell line models used. Our findings support what has been previously reported since mitophagy was detected among the pathways enriched during our transcriptomic analysis of the EGCG-EV, and this was confirmed later by the reduction in the mitochondrial content within these vesicles. Whether this correlates with the anti-inflammatory properties of the EGCG-EV has yet to be established.

The influence of culture conditions in the loading selection of the EV's content has also been extensively studied for the micro-RNA (miRNA) profile (Robert *et al*., 2022). In the present study, we focused on the sorting of the RNA content that can be transcribed and translated into proteins. Considering the impact of hypoxia on cell metabolism and secretory profile, we expanded our analysis on how low oxygen tension influences the transcriptomic profile within the vesicles in combination with EGCG. Contrary to what has been published (Jiang *et al*., 2022), in our experimental condition, hypoxia per se did not affect the transcripts levels sorted into the vesicles. However, when EGCG was added, cells behaved differently, and two different EV clusters were identified (

Figure 4. 7A). Overall, the combined effects of hypoxia and EGCG (EV HE) caused the downregulation of most genes identified in the EV\_NE. The main protein classes that were downregulated in the EV\_HE were associated with cytoskeleton and actin polymerization/depolymerization processes that are involved in exosome biogenesis and secretion mechanisms (Mathieu *et al*., 2019). Transcription factors and chaperones were also identified, suggesting their involvement in the regulation of metabolic and biosynthetic cellular processes. In general, the combination of hypoxia and EGCG appeared to attenuate the paracrine regulatory effect of the vesicles obtained without the stress of low oxygen tension. However, we observed that the EV HE was enriched in genes associated with inflammation, cell survival and oncogenesis. This further highlights the importance of mimicking *in vitro* as closely as possible the tumor microenvironment through cell culture conditions in studying the paracrine regulation mechanisms of EV.

## 4.8 Conclusions

The present proof of concept study reveals that EGCG can alter the sorted genetic material found within the TNBC cells-derived EV, and this will require to be further explored in other breast cancer cell models. As evidenced, EGCG reduced the capacity of the EV to trigger the expression of pro-inflammatory and senescence markers that, otherwise, could contribute to the acquisition of a chemoresistance phenotype. How gene expression changes translate into functional consequences upon EGCG treatment, in combination with current chemotherapeutic approaches, should be investigated in further studies to confirm the potential chemoresistance phenotype induced by the horizontal transfer of mitochondrial content. This evidence was further supported by its inhibitory effects over crucial pathways involved in cell proliferation and cell death including, in part, GSK-3β and AKT. Of importance, EGCG caused a reduction in the mitochondrial content of the cancer cells-derived EV, reinforcing its overall antitumoral role. Circulating diet-derived polyphenols may therefore represent an efficient chemopreventive strategy to reduce the paracrine regulation that TNBC cells exert within their surrounding adipose tissue.

# 4.9 Supporting information

Supplementary Figure S4. 1. Quantification by flow cytometry of the EV samples.



Supplementary Figure S4. 1. Quantification by flow cytometry of the EV samples*.*

EV and EGCG-EV were isolated, and 20 µL of the samples were stained with 100 nM MemGlow followed by flow cytometry analysis. **A)** Gating strategy and definition of the unstained population. **B)** Representative quantification of a batch of EV (N170622). **C)** Representative quantification of a batch of EGCG-EV (NE170623). Highlighted in red are the P2-positive population with the number of vesicles counted in an acquisition volume of 30 µL. **D)** Paired experimental means of each EV batch's mean fluorescence intensity (MFI). **E)** Paired experimental counting of the number of particles. Wilcoxonmatched pairs signed rank test was used to establish significant statistical differences.





Supplementary Figure S4. 2. Comparing the fusion capacity of MemGlow-stained EV.

EV and EGCG-EV were isolated, labelled with 100 nM MemGlow, washed by ultracentrifugation (1 hour at 100,000g) and resuspended in basal media (BM). Next, hADMSC (10,000 cells/condition) were incubated in suspension with the vesicles at a ratio Cells:EV of 1:1, for 1 hour at 37°C and 5% CO2 atmosphere. Flow cytometry determination of the number of FL-1-positive cells. **A)** Gating strategy used for samples incubated with BM as a negative control. **B)** Representative plotting of the MemGlow-488-positive cells resulting from the co-incubation with EV or EGCG-EV. **C)** Representative plots of the mean of fluorescence intensity (MFI) of the hADMSC incubated with BM (black line), EV (aqua-coloured line) or with EGCG-EV (dark blue line).

Supplementary Figure S4. 3



Supplementary Figure S4. 3. Evaluating the effect of EGCG over the mitoTracker dye.

MDA-MB-231 cells were seeded in a 6-well plate, incubated with mitoTracker Deep Red (MT), resuspended in negative media (NM), and added at a final concentration of 200 nM. After washing, the cells were kept for 24 hours in negative media (NM) or NM+EGCG at 10 or 30 µM, respectively. Then, cells were analyzed by flow cytometry. **A)** A representative dot plot of unstained cells (negative control, MT-), cells stained with MT and maintained in NM (positive control, MT+), cells stained and incubated with 10 µM (MT+ EGCG-10) or with 30 µM (MT+ EGCG-30). **B)** Bar graph of the mean of the fluorescence intensity (MFI) of the positive population  $(n=2)$ .

# Supplementary Figure S4. *4*.



Supplementary Figure S4. 4. Mitochondrial components present within MDA-MB-231-derived EVs can be transferred into hADMSC.

MDA-MB-231 cells were seeded in 175 cm flasks at a 70-80% of confluence. Next, mitoTracker Deep Red (MTR) was added at a final concentration of 200 nM, resuspended in negative media (NM), and cells were incubated overnight. Next day, the monolayer was washed with PBS and kept for 24 hours in NM. Then, cell culture media was collected and EVs were isolated as described in the Methods section and protected from light. hADMSC were then seeded on top of tissue culture glass slides and incubated for 4 hours with 200µL of MTR+EVs resuspended in NM. Afterwards, cells were labelled with 100 nM MemGlow, and fixed. Dapi was added to stain the nucleus and pictures taken using a fluorescence microscope. Pictures from the center section of the cells are represented. Red staining is representative of mitochondrial material delivered within hADMSC (stained in green).
## Supplementary Table S4.1



Supplementary Table S4. 1. List of the shared DEGs (1116 genes) identified within the h-ADMSC treated with EGCG-EV vs EV, and with a p-value  $< 0.05$ .























































Results are shown as fold changes (FC). The *p*-values come from the comparison using EV as reference. DEGs (differential expressed genes), EV (extracellular vesicles collected from MDA-MB-231 cultured in negative media), EGCG (extracellular vesicles collected from EGCG-treated MDA-MB-231) and EGCG (epigallocatechin-3-gallate).

## Supplementary Table S4.2


























































Results are shown as fold changes (FC). The *p*-values come from the comparison using EV\_NE as reference. DEGs (differential expressed genes) and EGCG (epigallocatechin-3-gallate). EV samples obtained from cells cultured with EGCG in normoxia (EV\_NE) or hypoxia (EV\_HE).

## CHAPTER V

#### GENERAL DISCUSSION

Adipose tissue is more than an energy reservoir; it is a secretory gland that regulates several metabolic pathways and it is one of the main components of the breast (Perez *et al.*, 2016). During the development of obesity, this tissue expands, and adipocytes hypertrophy with an altered pro-inflammatory secretion profile (Pischon and Nimptsch, 2016). It has been reported that it contributes to BC progression through the secretion of FFA (Madak-Erdogan *et al.*, 2019), adipokines and pro-inflammatory cytokines (Avgerinos *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, adipose tissue serves as a donor of CAF resulting from the differentiation of resident mesenchymal stem cells (Bertolini *et al.*, 2015), and of CAA originating from adipocytes that undergo a dedifferentiation process (Bochet *et al.*, 2013). However, the molecular mechanisms involved in these processes and their impact on tumor development and resistance still need to be fully elucidated. In our study we demonstrated that, besides mature adipocytes, committed preadipocytes (ADMSC) can acquire a CAA-like phenotype, and this can be mediated by soluble factors and EV secreted by the cancer cells. Whether this is a transitional state toward the acquisition of a CAF final phenotype needs to be further addressed. Nevertheless, we are providing insights with our study toward the bidirectional mechanisms of collaboration between the components within the adipose tissue and BC cell development. Therefore, we addressed not only the gap of knowledge in this area but also the contribution of diet-derived polyphenols, like EGCG, in preventing cancer progression by targeting several pathways involved in BC-adipose tissue cooperation. This catechin has anti-inflammatory (Mokra *et al.*, 2022; Nomura *et al.*, 2000), anti-adipogenic (Li *et al.*, 2013), and anti-tumoral (Rady, 2018) effects, which make it a suitable candidate for targeting obesity-associated comorbidities. We confirmed in our experimental conditions that EGCG inhibited adipogenesis by reducing the expression of adipogenic markers and the proper formation of lipid droplets, in agreement with previously reported data (Kim *et al.*, 2010).

We started by understanding how the secreted factors (secretome) originating from different cellular components of the adipose tissue affected the behavior of tumor cells. Then, we found differences in the composition of the pro-inflammatory genetic profile from ADMSC and adipocytes. The immature phenotype was characterized by a high expression of genes like *IL-6*, *CCL2* and *EGF*; while in adipocytes, *CCL5*, *BCL2*, *IL-1B* and *IGF-1* were among the most upregulated genes. The secretome of both ADMSC and adipocytes, showed chemoattractant capacity in the selected TNBC cell line model, but the secretome of mature adipocytes induced the greatest invasive response. This enhanced chemoattractant effect of the adipocyte secretome was later confirmed using a panel of TNBC, suggesting a global impact on this aggressive subtype. Nevertheless, expanding the study to different BC subtypes will be of interest. Also, it is important to mention that the secretomes were collected from cells cultured without proinflammatory or tumor-induced stimulations. Therefore, co-culturing ADMSC and adipocytes with tumor cells or proinflammatory cytokines may impact on their secretory profiles and should be addressed further.

The EGCG-mediated reduction of STAT3 activation appears to be essential to decrease the chemoattractant and proangiogenic potential of the adipocyte secretome. I believe it will be relevant to identify the soluble factors secreted by the mature adipocytes that activate the STAT3-mediated migratory response of the TNBC cell lines. Intriguingly, EGCG showed a selective targeting toward STAT3 in the MDA-MB-231 because it could not prevent the AKT induction. Previous studies have reported contradictory results regarding the capacity of EGCG to regulate the AKT pathway and have been related to the concentration used and the cell line model (Liu *et al.*, 2013). This suggests that even though EGCG has a broad mechanism of action, its molecular targets appear to change according to the cell model investigated.

The IL-6/JAK/STAT3 oncogenic signaling axis has been reported to mediate BC progression by promoting cell proliferation, metastasis, and apoptosis inhibition (Manore *et al.*, 2022; Siersbaek *et al.*, 2020). In BC patients, high circulating IL-6 levels have been associated with poor prognosis (Salgado *et al.*, 2003). Studies have revealed that the STAT3/IL-6 axis has a pro-oncogenic role by upregulating the expression of BCL2 (Real *et al.*, 2002), cyclin D1 (Leslie *et al.*, 2006), c-MYC and metalloproteinases (Hsieh *et al.*, 2005; Zhang *et al.*, 2015). Besides, other EMT markers, such as TWIST and SNAIL, are upregulated in BC cells upon STAT3 activation (Lo *et al.*, 2007; Saitoh *et al.*, 2016). Also, IL-6 impacts the TME by enriching cancer stem cell populations (Sansone *et al.*, 2007) and driving macrophage polarization toward the M2 phenotype (Weng *et al.*, 2019), which increases tumor aggressiveness. Remarkably, this cytokine was upregulated in ADMSC cultured without stimulation and also detected in high levels within the MDA-MB-231 secretome, where it demonstrated a capacity to recruit ADMSC into the TME. More importantly, our study found that IL-6 upregulation is a node that interconnects several intracellular pathways involved in the ADMSC response to the TNBC secretome, such as NF-KB, HIF-1, AGE-RAGE, TNF, and insulin resistance. The AGE-RAGE pathway is essential in diabetes complications and inflammation, increasing oxidative stress and NF-KB activation (Korwar *et al.*, 2012). Besides, it has been proposed to mediate carcinogenesis development in breast cancers by activating pro-tumoral pathways such as VEGF-mediated migration, ERK1/2, STAT3, P38/MAPK and MMP9 (Ishibashi *et al.*, 2012; Sharaf *et al.*, 2015). Taken together, our results emphasize the role of IL-6 as a molecular mediator between BC and adipose tissue crosstalk. In addition, the cellular source of IL-6 also regulates adipose tissue inflammation; when derived from adipocytes it induces macrophage infiltration, while when secreted by myeloid cells it inhibits this process (Han *et al.*, 2020). In the context of obesity, adipocytes become an important source for the pro-inflammatory role of IL-6, contributing to the chemoresistance of anti-VEGF therapies in BC patients (Incio *et* 

*al.*, 2018). This highlights the inhibitory effect observed for EGCG over the cytokine expression and associated signalling pathways.

On the other hand, the acquisition of a CAA phenotype by the adipocytes present within the invasive front of the BC has been linked to a process of dedifferentiation defined by the reduction of differentiated terminal markers (PARPG, C/EBPG and FABP4) (Rybinska *et al.*, 2020). In this process, adipocytes acquire an activated phenotype characterized by delipidation and the expression of proinflammatory molecules such as IL-6, IL-8/CXCL8, IL-1B, TNFA, CCL2 and CCL5 (Dirat *et al.*, 2011; Rybinska *et al.*, 2021). The cues that trigger this process have yet to be fully understood. Nevertheless, tumor-secreted soluble factors have been described to mediate this process (Bennett *et al.*, 2002; Bochet *et al.*, 2013; Chirumbolo et Bjorklund, 2016; de Winter et Nusse, 2021; Gustafson et Smith, 2010).We demonstrate that, in addition to adipocytes, ADMSC can also be turned into a CAA-like phenotype in response to the secretome of the TNBC cell line MDA-MB-231. Moreover, the induction of the CAA markers IL-6, CCL5, CCL2, COX2 and IL-1B was partially sustained by SNAIL activation; an EMT marker specifically triggered in the ADMSC in response to the TNBC secretome. Identifying the factors responsible for SNAIL induction will require further assessments. Nevertheless, our findings are relevant, especially in obesity, where the adipose tissues are an abundant source of ADMSC and fully mature adipocytes.

 Importantly, recent studies have suggested that the fibroblast-like cells observed at high density in the solid tumor center are derived from dedifferentiated adipocytes (Bochet *et al.*, 2013). In addition, we demonstrated that ADMSC can be reshaped and recruited by tumors in response to soluble factors like IL-6. Besides, most of the studied pathways responsible for the emergence of CAA have been selected based on their role in physiological adipogenesis. However, aberrant signaling can be implied in this phenomenon. We observed the activation of NF-kB and SMAD2 within the ADMSC, in response to the TNBC secretome enriched especially with IL-6 and VEGF. Both

cytokines have been found in high circulating levels in BC patients, associated with advanced tumor stages, and low survival mainly in the HER2- cancer subtypes (Raghunathachar Sahana *et al.*, 2017; Tawara *et al.*, 2019).

EGCG had a potent inhibitory effect on the induction of SNAIL, CAA-associated markers, pro-inflammatory cytokines and pathways, and migration of the ADMSC. This catechin has a broad mechanism of action that goes from impeding receptor signaling by acting as an antagonist (Sicard *et al.*, 2021) or disturbing membrane lipid rafts (Patra *et al.*, 2008) to receptor-mediated signaling activation (Yamada *et al.*, 2016) through passive diffusion into the cytoplasm (Hong *et al.*, 2002). Further studies are needed to clarify the molecular interplays used by EGCG and the concentration range required for its inhibitory effect in our *in vitro* experimental conditions.

Other mechanisms proposed to mediate CAA phenotypes are molecules and mRNAs delivered by BC-secreted EV (Rybinska *et al.*, 2021). The role of EV in cellto-cell communication has become relevant in the context of cancer and its paracrine regulation of the TME and distant tissues. Exosomes derived from the tumor and associated cellular stroma have been reported to precondition the metastatic niche and determine metastatic organotropism (Becker *et al.*, 2016; Kong *et al.*, 2019; Nogues *et al.*, 2018). For example, it has been reported that EV secreted by BC-associated CAF activate the Wnt pathway in BC cells, promoting their motility (Luga *et al.*, 2012). In the other sense, BC-derived exosomes switched ADMSC into a myofibroblastic phenotype by activating the TGF-B/SMAD2 pathway, inducing the expression of protumoral factors like TGF-B, VEGF and CCL5 (Cho *et al.*, 2012). Also, it has been reported that EV derived from hepatocarcinoma cells induced an inflammatory phenotype in adipocytes by activating the NF-kB signaling pathway (Wang *et al.*, 2018a). Our results agree with these findings since both pathways were induced in the ADMSC in response to the MDA-MB-231 secretome, however when the EV fraction was isolated and used, the pathways induced were AKT and GSK-3B.

Another group documented that adipocytes pre-incubated with tumoral-derived EV promote tumors of a larger size, macrophage infiltration and angiogenesis in a xenograft mice model (Wang *et al.*, 2018a). However, few studies have covered the specific interaction between adipocytes or preadipocytes and BC tumor cells (Wang *et al.*, 2019a). Therefore, we focused on the contribution of TNBC-derived EV in the acquisition of a pro-inflammatory and CAA-like phenotype by the ADMSC. We observed that TNBC-derived EV could bind with the ADMSC, altering their behaviour for a more pro-migratory and pro-inflammatory phenotype. Besides, we found that TNBC-derived EV activate signaling pathways such as CHK-2, c-Jun, AKT and GSK-3β, increasing the expression of some CAA markers (CCL2, CCL5 and IL-1B). Further studies must be conducted to identify whether the EV stimulate the cells by activating receptors and/or releasing their content within the ADMSC. Moreover, an extended protein validation of the inflammatory and CAA markers will be an asset for the study. Nevertheless, we provided evidence that BC cell secreted EV could trigger a CAA phenotype-like within the ADMSC.

To prevent EV-mediated cell-to-cell communication is an attractive strategy to avoid cancer progression, and studies targeting EV biogenesis and release have been conducted in adjuvant therapies (Chalmin *et al.*, 2010; Marleau *et al.*, 2012). Nevertheless, none of these studies have reached clinical trials, mainly due to a lack of knowledge on how to discriminate between EV derived from tumor or normal cells, and concerns about cytotoxicity risks. Therefore, we considered evaluating the chemopreventive effect of a natural, non-toxic polyphenol like EGCG with a broad mechanism of action. However, its impact in altering the cargo of tumor-derived EV and their paracrine regulation of ADMSC has yet to be addressed. In addition to protein interchange, most studies have focused on the EV-mediated regulation of microRNAs expression (Pan *et al.*, 2020; Wei *et al.*, 2014). However, we aimed to start characterizing the mRNA content altered by EGCG within the EV and later complemented the study with proteomic and microRNA characterization.

Our analysis showed that most identified genes in the EV obtained from EGCGtreated TNBC were involved in oxidative stress and mitophagy pathways. Also, ADMSC treated with these vesicles showed a less activated state of the AKT and GSK-3β pathways, which regulate biological processes like adipogenesis (Park *et al.*, 2012) and EMT (Zhang *et al.*, 2021), among others. Despite reducing the induction of most pro-inflammatory and CAA markers, these vesicles triggered the expression of IL-6 and CXCL8/IL-8. A study quantifying the serum levels of both cytokines in patients with BC ductal carcinoma showed their increased level in comparison to healthy controls (Ma *et al.*, 2017). The high levels of IL-6 and CXCL-8/IL-8 correlated with advanced stages of the malignancy (II and III), lymph node metastasis and the expression of ER and HER2 (Ma *et al.*, 2017). Regarding these antigen expressions, they observed a correlation between high levels of IL-6 with ER+ or HER2- tumors and the opposite with higher CXCL-8 levels and no direct correlation between both cytokines was found (Ma *et al.*, 2017). However, whether the cytokines contributed to the tumor progression or resulted from an advanced tumor remains unclear.

Genes related to senescence mechanisms were enriched within the EV and the occurrence of this biological process was subsequently detected in ADMSC cultured under nutrient deprivation and EV. This is a cell program used to switch into a nonproliferative but metabolic active survival state (Hayflick et Moorhead, 1961). A senescent cell can resume proliferation when favourable conditions emerge, hence associated with cancer chemoresistance (Guillon *et al.*, 2019). They are characterized by cell cycle arrest (overexpression of the inhibitors CDKN2A and P21), apoptosis resistance and increased lysosomal activity, expressing high levels of the lysosomal enzyme β-galactosidase (β-gal) (Wang *et al.*, 2022). Senescent cells secrete proinflammatory mediators that contribute to tumor growth and progression (Wang *et al.*, 2022), and several studies describe the pro-tumoral role of senescence linked to inflammation and immunosuppression (Pribluda *et al.*, 2013; Ruhland et Alspach, 2021). Obesity increases inflammation mediated by cellular senescence and tissue

dysfunction. (Escande *et al.*, 2015). *In vivo* experiments have revealed that obese mice have an elevated number of senescent cells, that correlates with highly proliferative and poorly immunogenic tumors (Fournier *et al.*, 2023). Activation of senescence has been associated with tumor-derived EV-mediated stimulation of AKT and P38/MAPK pathways, resulting in endoplasmic reticulum stress and chronic DNA damage (Guo *et al.*, 2009; Ruhland *et al.*, 2016a). Remarkably, the EV obtained from EGCG-treated MDA-MB-231 decreased senescence markers. These results suggest the capacity of EGCG-EV to protect the ADMSC from oxidative stress damage. Hence, our findings highlight the indirect effects of EGCG in preventing the acquisition of a senescent phenotype by the ADMSC. Whether this results from more apoptosis induction by the EGCG-EV or restoring an average cell cycle proliferation rate remains to be confirmed.

Mitochondrial dysfunction is another senescence signature hallmark (Wang *et al.*, 2022). Mitochondrial transfer can trigger an inflammatory response in cells (Boudreau *et al.*, 2014), and some mitochondrial components, like DNA, mediate increasing tumor aggressiveness (Takenaga *et al.*, 2021). Cancer cells import these organelles from non-malignant cells through mechanisms including cell-cell fusion, tunneling nanotubes, and gap junctions (Zampieri *et al.*, 2021). Also, it has been reported that EV containing mitochondrial DNA or proteins can trigger an inflammatory response, acting as damage-associated molecular patterns (DAMPs) (Boudreau *et al.*, 2014; Todkar *et al.*, 2021) and enhancing invasiveness in the MDA-MB-231 TNBC cell model via TLR9 activation (Rabas *et al.*, 2021). Remarkably, we detected mitophagy pathway-related genes and reduced mitochondrial content in the EV obtained from EGCG-treated TNBC cells. Besides, we showed that MDA-MB-231-derived EV can transfer mitochondria to the ADMSC. Yet, the functionality of these mitochondria within the EV and their role in the regulation of the ADMSC phenotype must be thoroughly addressed in future studies.

Lastly, we studied the impact of hypoxia on the mRNA load of the EV, considering its *in vivo* relevance during obesity and in the TME. In previous reports, culturing BC cell lines under hypoxic conditions showed an increase in the release of TGF-B (Rong *et al.*, 2016), miR210 (Jung *et al.*, 2017; King *et al.*, 2012) and lncSNHG1 (Dai *et al.*, 2022) within exosomes; and were associated with T cell suppression, increases in survival, invasion and angiogenesis (Jiang *et al.*, 2022). Our results demonstrate that no significant changes were detected in the sorted mRNA since only nine genes were expressed differentially. From these genes, five were upregulated and related to hypoxia-induced cell death, mitochondrial function, glucose transport and angiogenesis. However, EGCG added to the hypoxic cell cultured caused a significant change in the mRNA content of the TNBC-released EV. Gene downregulation was the tendency in the hypoxic-EGCG-released EV and was associated with processes such as secretion mechanisms and regulation of the metabolic and biosynthetic cellular process, suggesting a reduction of the EV's regulatory capacity. EGCG downregulated an important protooncogene for BC aggressiveness like SLAC3A2 (El Ansari *et al.*, 2018). However, genes associated with inflammation and oncogenesis were detected to be enriched within the TNBC-derived EV cultured under low oxygen tension and EGCG. For instance, we saw the upregulation of BCAS4, an essential gene for the development and progression of breast tumors (Chen *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, the overall impact of EGCG in the axis BC-ADMSC/adipocytes during hypoxic cell culture conditions must be fully addressed in further studies.

# CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

In conclusion, we demonstrated that EGCG is a diet-derived compound with the capacity to prevent the onset of an obesogenic environment that favours TNBC development by acting at different nodes:

- 1) Preventing the expansion of the adipose tissue by targeting the induction of master regulators of adipogenesis, hence reducing the capacity of ADMSC to differentiate into mature adipocytes.
- 2) Reducing the chemotactic response of TNBC and ADMSC by inhibiting the activation of pathways like JAK/STAT3, NK-KB and SMAD2, and the expression of EMT markers such as SNAIL, SLUG and fibronectin.
- 3) Abrogating the pro-inflammatory modulation of adipocyte and tumor cells' secretome profile, efficiently altering their signaling crosstalk.
- 4) Modulating the tumor-derived EV' genetic content and reducing their capacity to trigger pro-inflammatory and senescence markers, potentially impacting chemoresistance.

Importantly, our study proves that ADMSC and adipocytes' secretomes have differential chemoattractant and pro-inflammatory capacities over TNBC cell line models. Besides, we demonstrate that ADMSC can differentiate into a CAA-like phenotype in response to factors secreted by the tumor cells. This represents a molecular insight into the different ways in which adipose tissue contributes to carcinogenesis. In addition, our study discloses the role of tumor-derived EV in acquiring a pro-inflammatory phenotype of the ADMSC. The effect of EGCG on the reduction of mitochondrial content within the EV was a new finding adding a potential anti-tumoral mechanism for the catechin.

Perspectives and open questions of the study:

In our study, we extended the knowledge about possible molecular players that lead to the cooperation between BC tumor cells and the adipose tissue-resident cells within the TME. However, further studies must be performed to fully unveil the missing parts. First, to model the TME, it will be relevant to include hypoxia during the *in vitro* studies since it can affect not only what cells are secreted but also their resulting phenotypes. A crucial missing aspect of our research was the protein validation of the upregulated genes in ADMSC and adipocytes and the inflammatory and CAA markers triggered in the ADMSC by the TNBC secretomes. In this aspect, it raises the question of whether the BC subtypes interact differentially with the preadipocytes or adipocytes. Therefore, it is essential to identify the specific factors present within the TNBC secretome that triggered CAA and the upregulation of SNAIL. In addition, to have a complete picture, it would be relevant to compare the effects of TNBC and other BC subtypes in acquiring a pro-inflammatory phenotype for the ADMSC compared with mature adipocytes. The latter will allow us to determine whether CAA originated from ADMSC, or whether mature adipocytes are phenotypically different, and if there are common mediators in the induction of this phenotype secreted by cancer cells. Likewise, a latter identification of the soluble factors secreted by the adipocytes that mediate the enhanced migration response in the TNBC cell line models would be a logical follow-up for the study.

Our *in vitro* approach agreed with several previously reported studies obtained using co-culture experiments of tumor cells with adipocytes (D'Esposito *et al.*, 2016; Dirat *et al.*, 2011). Nevertheless, it will be pertinent to include aspects of the autocrine regulation to contrast with the paracrine effects. Hence, co-culture experiments can be performed under hypoxic cell culture conditions, followed by detecting the transcribed genes, secreted factors, and protein expression. Additionally, it has been proposed that EGCG added *in vitro* at concentrations higher or equal to 30 µM caused cell production of H2O2, which mediates the induction of apoptosis (Yang *et al.*, 1998; Yang *et al.*, 2000). Therefore, further studies testing the inhibitory effect of EGCG at low physiological concentrations will also be pertinent (Zeng *et al.*, 2014). Indeed, a study in BC patients showed that EGCG detected in human plasma can reach a peak concentration of  $7 \mu M$ , while maintaining its anti-cancer and pro-apoptotic effects at 1 µM (Zeng *et al.*, 2014). Remarkably, in this study, EGCG inhibited the expression of molecules linked to growth and survival in cancer cells but not in normal cells (Zeng *et al.*, 2014).

Other aspects that need to be addressed in subsequent studies are how the TNBCderived EV modulate the ADMSC response, whether they bind with the plasma membrane, activate receptor downstream signaling cascades, and/or fuse with the plasma membrane and release their intravesicular content into the ADMSC. Besides, it has been reported that EGCG can bind membranes (Hong *et al.*, 2002). Then, it can be incorporated into the secreted EGCG-EV, transferred into the recipient cells, and mediates some of the described effects for these vesicles. Hence, it is relevant for our study to determine whether EGCG or its oxidative products are present in the EV and if this alters their interaction mechanism with the ADMSC. Additionally, we foresee fully characterizing the EV and EGCG-EV obtained at low oxygen levels, including their protein and microRNA content. Interestingly, we detected the capacity of reduced senescence markers by the EGCG-EV, a result that must be re-evaluated in hypoxic conditions and under lower EGCG concentrations. Then, protein characterization must be extended to other markers besides P21 and β-gal for the senescence phenotype in both the TNBC and ADMSC. The evaluation of the apoptosis levels induced by EGCG-EV will be essential to elucidate their mechanism of action.

One of the most exciting results we obtained was the detection of mitochondria within our vesicles. Competent mitochondria mediate carcinogenic processes involved in proliferation, migration, and metastasis (Nahacka *et al.*, 2021). To our knowledge, its effect on the acquisition of a pro-tumoral phenotype by ADMSC has not been

addressed. Hence, further studies must be conducted to determine 1) whether these tumor-derived EV contain functional mitochondria or components, 2) their direct effect on the ADMSC phenotype, and 3) the mechanisms by which EGCG reduces mitochondrial package within the EV.

Finally, pre-clinical *in vivo* experiments must be performed to evaluate the overall effect of EGCG in obese mice harboring experimentally induced BC tumors. In addition, treatments combining EGCG and clinically approved drugs, are needed in *in vivo* experiments. In this regard, EGCG has been proposed as an adjuvant in cancer therapy for hepatocellular carcinoma during *in vivo* preclinical settings (Bimonte *et al.*, 2019; Li *et al.*, 2016) and with synergic effects during *in vitro* approaches for lung cancer cell models (Zhang *et al.*, 2019a).

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