Article

Imbalance of circuit plasticity and consolidation in autism model marmosets is adjusted by oxytocin administration

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Abstract

Impairments in the experience-dependent elaboration of neural circuits are assumed to underlie autism spectrum disorder (ASD). However, the phenotype underlying synaptic plasticity is poorly understood. Here, we used a valproic acid–induced ASD marmoset model and in vivo two-photon microscopy to investigate the structural dynamics of dendritic spines in the dorsomedial prefrontal cortex, which is involved in ASD core symptoms. In model marmosets compared to controls, spine turnover was upregulated and spines were actively generated in clusters. Clustered emerging spines were predominant in carryover of generated spines in the model marmosets. Presynaptic boutons of local axons, but not long-range commissural axons, showed hyperdynamic turnover. Furthermore, nasal oxytocin administration reduced the clustered emergence of spines. Finally, we confirmed the high molecular conformity of adult animal models with human ASD. Our study suggests that an altered balance between synaptic plasticity and consolidation underlies ASD, and may be a potential therapeutic target.

Introduction

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disorder characterized by deficits in social communication and interaction, stereotyped behaviors, and sensory hypo- and hypersensitivity[1, 2]. Individuals with ASD often have learning disabilities and have difficulty learning to recognize verbal or non-verbal social information[3]. Learning impairments in ASD may be associated with the formation of inflexible habits, ritualistic behavior[4], and difficulty in adapting quickly to a temporally changing environment, which may limit sociality[5]. Proper refinement of neural networks during learning is achieved by coordinated synaptic remodeling, including the generation and elimination of dendritic spines[6-8]. In ASD, these synaptic functions are likely maladjusted. ASD-related genes include a substantial number of synapse-related genes and those that regulate these genes' expression. Humans with ASD and ASD model animals exhibit altered dendritic spine morphology[9-11]. In addition to the aberrant synaptic E/I balance[12], accelerations in

spine turnover in motor cortices and the primary sensory area are the dominant phenotype in ASD model mice[13, 14], including inbred BTBR[15], Fmr1 knock-out[16, 17], and Neurolign-3 R451C knock-in mice[15], as well as those with 15q11–13 duplications[15]. To understand the pathophysiology of ASD, it is essential to elucidate the mechanisms of altered features on circuit remodeling in ASD-related brain structures, especially in the context of synaptic disorders.

Therapeutic approaches for the core symptoms of ASD have not yet been established. Oxytocin is a potentially effective treatment for these symptoms, and investigation of its mechanism of action is expected to provide necessary insights into its clinical use. Oxytocin is a neurohormone that is produced in the hypothalamus and released into the blood by the pituitary gland. The axons of oxytocin-producing neurons also project to several brain regions, where they release oxytocin as a neuropeptide[18]. Because oxytocin modifies the social skills of typically developed human individuals, and improves sociality in mouse ASD models[19-21], its potential as a therapeutic agent for ASD has long been anticipated. However, the therapeutic benefits of oxytocin in human clinical trials are currently inconclusive[22-25]. The reported variations in oxytocin efficacy are thought to be due to a combination of differences in doses, schedules, ASD subpopulations, and concomitant psychosocial interventions. In order to improve oxytocin treatments for ASD, it is critical to evaluate the mechanisms of the neurobiological effects of oxytocin administration in ASD.

The common marmoset (*Callithrix jacchus*), a small New World monkey, has attracted significant attention in ASD research due to its rich repertoire of social behaviors, a well-developed prefrontal cortex (PFC) that supports high-level social ability, and gene expression networks that are similar to those in humans[26]. Comparative studies on synapse biology showed that marmosets are more similar to humans than rodents in terms of their synaptic proteome[27]. We previously developed a marmoset model of ASD by orally administrating valproic acid (VPA)

74 to a pregnant marmoset and obtaining affected offspring[11]. The ASD model marmosets
75 demonstrated deficits in higher social decision-making, a process that may require a well-
76 developed PFC[28, 29]. In a reversal learning task that mimicked habit formation, the marmosets
77 exhibited perseverance[30]. They also showed variations in brain structure and cell biology[11]. In
78 particular, juvenile VPA-exposed model marmosets reproduced gene expression variations of
79 human idiopathic ASD involving gene groups (modules) associated with the four major cell types
80 of the brain: neurons, oligodendrocytes, astrocytes, and microglia, all of which are involved in
81 synaptic plasticity[11, 31]. By contrast, rodent ASD models demonstrated human ASD–like changes
82 in only some of the modules, and in fewer cell types[11]. Discrepancies in the therapeutic efficacy
83 of candidate molecules between rodents and primates, including humans, may depend on
84 differences in receptor molecules and their expression. For instance, differences between rodent
85 and primate oxytocin systems suggest that primate models are superior for oxytocin research,
86 which may lead to clinical applications[32]. These results support the high translational value of
87 VPA-exposed marmosets as an ASD model.
88
89 The current study monitored the temporal remodeling of neural circuits using in vivo two-
90 photon longitudinal imaging in an ASD model involving VPA-exposed adult marmosets. It
91 investigated synaptic dynamics at 3-day intervals in the apical dendrites of pyramidal neurons in
92 the primate-specific dorsomedial PFC (dmPFC). The dmPFC is involved in social cognition and
93 habit formation, and is impaired in ASD[33]. Our study revealed that in VPA-exposed marmosets,
94 turnover of postsynaptic dendritic spines was upregulated, and spines were actively generated in
95 clusters but seemed to be rather randomly eliminated. Increased rates of clustered spine generation
96 during learning have been reported to correlate with learning performance[34, 35]. Clustering of
97 dynamic spines is also currently of interest in terms of disease pathogenesis and therapeutic
98 efficacy[36]. A larger fraction of emergent spines survived in model animals than in controls,
99 especially spines that appeared in clusters. These synaptic characteristics are consistent with the

behavioral characteristics of model animals in a reversal learning paradigm[30]. Furthermore, nasal administration of oxytocin reduced the clustered emergence of spines without affecting turnover rate. These results suggest that there is an imbalance in circuit plasticity and consolidation in ASD and that the regulation of these processes may be a therapeutic target of ASD.

Results

Two-photon imaging of the dendrites of PFC L2/3 pyramidal neurons in living marmosets

Dendritic spines are the postsynaptic sites of the most excitatory synapses in cortical pyramidal neurons. Changes in dendritic spine density have been observed in the brains of ASD individuals[9], and alterations in synaptic plasticity have been reported in ASD animal models[11, 37]. Moreover, increased generation and elimination rates of cortical dendritic spines have been reported in rodent ASD models[13-17]. In the present study, we used a marmoset ASD model to investigate spine dynamics in the dmPFC. We used three adult VPA-exposed marmosets and four adult unexposed (UE) marmosets (See **Methods**). We inoculated the marmoset dmPFC with adeno-associated virus (AAV) and expressed fluorescent proteins mainly in layer-2/3 pyramidal neurons[38]. To obtain sufficiently strong but sparse fluorescent protein expression on pyramidal neurons, we used the tetracyclin tTA–TRE expression system and the Thy1S promoter[38]. We constructed three AAV vectors: in one, the tTA component was under the control of the Thy1S promoter (AAV: Thy1S-tTA), while in the others, tdTomato (left hemisphere of all monkeys; red fluorescent protein) or mClover (right hemisphere of five monkeys; green fluorescent protein) was under the control of TRE (AAV:TRE-tdTomato; AAV:TRE-mClover)[38]. These AAV combinations showed better fluorescent protein brightness than cre-dependent AAV combinations (results not shown). The fluorescent protein–expressing neurons were locally distributed with an average diameter of 1.81 mm (range: 1.02–2.87) axially and 1.53 mm (range: 0.86–2.21) laterally. Post-experiment

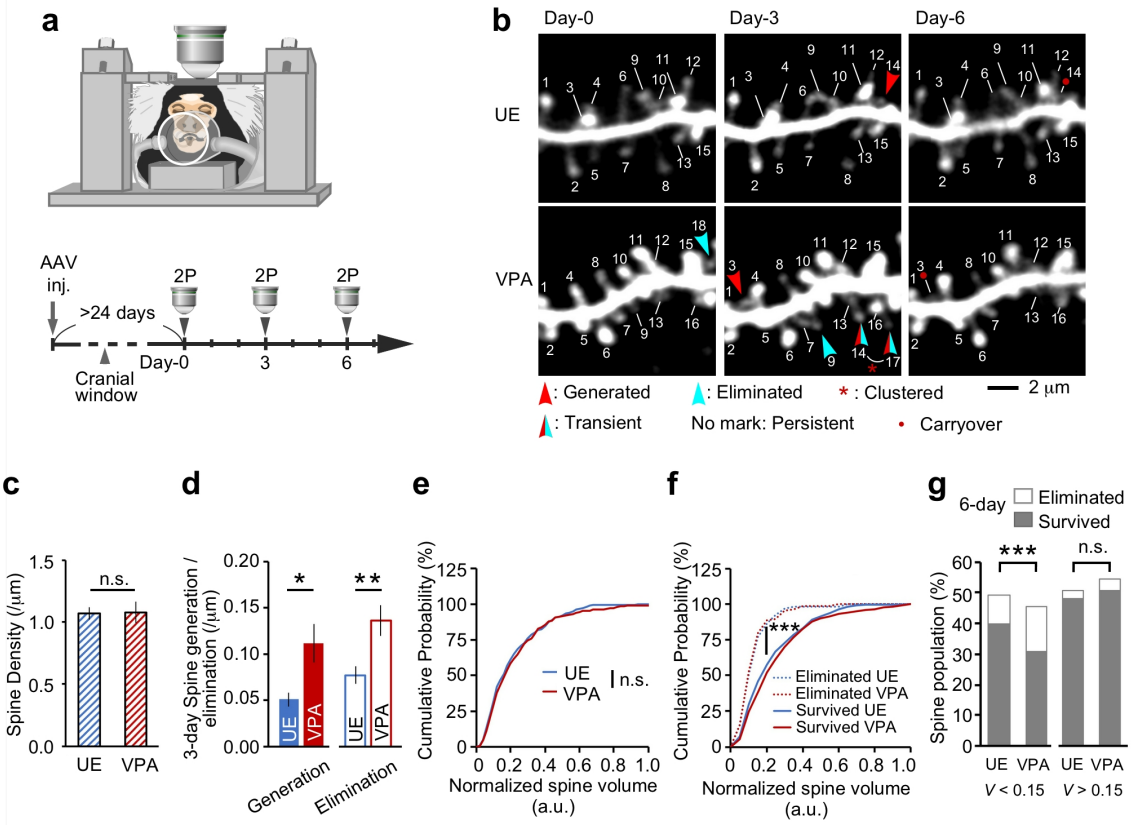


Fig. 1 In vivo two-photon imaging of mature marmoset dendrites. **a** A marmoset was anesthetized for two-photon (2P) imaging. The lower panel shows the experimental schema. **b** Longitudinal 2P imaging from the PFC layer 2/3 pyramidal neuron tuft dendrites. Every 3 days, the same dendrites were imaged in UE (unexposed; control animals) and VPA-exposed (ASD model) marmosets, and the same spines were labeled using the same numbers throughout the period. **c** Mean spine densities of dendrites (mean ± s.e.m.; P = 0.85, Mann-Whitney U test; *n* = 14 and 12 dendrites in four and three UE and VPA-exposed animals, respectively). **d** Three-day spine generation per unit dendrite length (mean ± s.e.m.; *P* = 0.0404, Mann-Whitney U test; the same dendrites as in (c)), and 3-day elimination (*P* = 0.0037). **e, f** Cumulative plots of the normalized spine volume distribution (e) (*P* = 0.72; Kolmogorov-Smirnov test; n = 536 and 473 spines in UE and VPA-exposed animals, respectively), and cumulative plots of eliminated UE, eliminated VPA-exposed, surviving UE, and surviving VPA-exposed spines during the 6-day observation (f) (*P* < 0.001; *n* = 65, 87, 471, and 386 spines, respectively). **g** The population of eliminated and surviving spines during the 6-day observation are shown separately for groups with a spine volume of *V* < 0.15 and *V* > 0.15 (*V* < 0.15; *P* = 0.001; Fisher's exact test; *n* = 50, 69, 214, and 146 spines as in (f)) (*V* > 0.15; *P* = 0.59; *n* = 15, 18, 257, and 240 spines as in (f)). ***P* < 0.001; ***P* < 0.01; **P* < 0.05; n.s., not significant.

immunohistochemistry using antibodies for Iba-1 and GFAP showed no obvious signs of activation of microglia or astrocytes, respectively (results not shown).

We performed time-lapse observation of the dmPFC using a two-photon microscope[38, 39] (Fig. 1a, b). We conducted three imaging sessions every 3 days. We found no significant differences

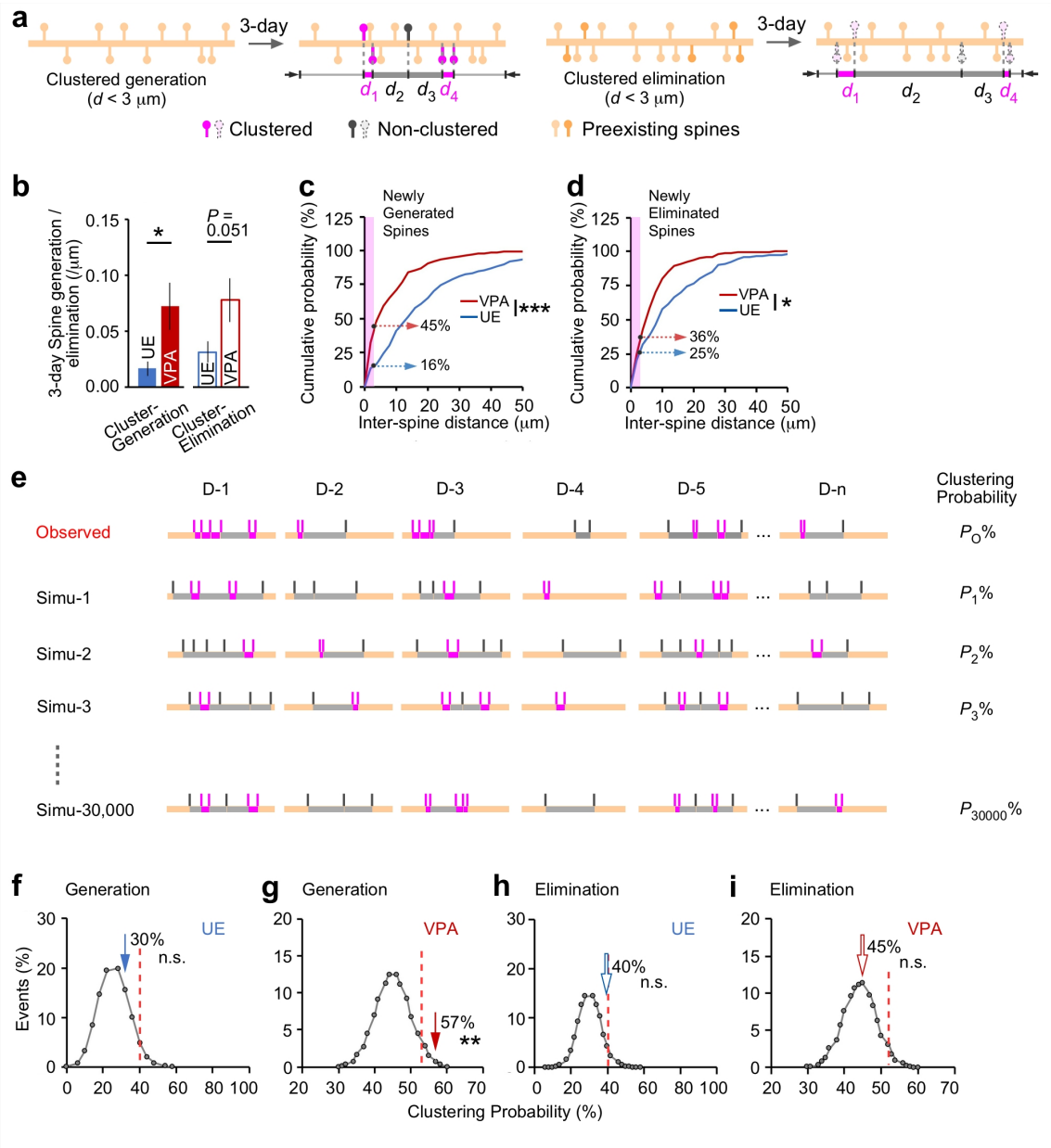
130 in dendritic spine density on apical tufts between the VPA-exposed and UE marmosets (Fig. 1c).
131 Although there is a report of increased postmortem dendritic spine density in humans with ASD[9],
132 spines on dendritic tufts have not been examined in human tissues. We next compared the spine
133 generation and elimination rates between the VPA-exposed and UE groups (Fig. 1b, d). We found
134 that the rates of both spine generation and elimination were approximately two-fold higher in
135 VPA-exposed than UE marmosets (Fig. 1d). This is consistent with a previous report on the
136 somatosensory barrel cortex in juvenile ASD mouse models (BTBR mouse, 15q11–13 duplication,
137 Neuroligin mutant)[15], and the other on the visual cortex in an adult Fragile-X syndrome mouse
138 model[17], both of which demonstrated increased rates of spine generation and elimination than
139 wild-type animals.
140

141 ## Smaller spines in the ASD model marmoset were more prone to elimination

142 We then performed an analysis of spine volume, which is an important measure of synaptic weight.
143 We calculated the normalized spine volume by dividing each spine's fluorescent intensity with
144 the dendrite shaft intensity, and pooled the results of all dendrites (See **Methods** section for
145 details). The results showed no significant difference in the distribution of spine volume between
146 the VPA-exposed and UE groups (Fig. 1e). There was a significant difference in volume
147 distribution between spines that were eliminated during the 6-day period and those that survived
148 in both groups (Fig. 1f). The volume distribution of the VPA-exposed and UE groups did not
149 differ when the eliminated and surviving groups were analyzed separately (Fig. 1f); however, for
150 the smaller spines, the proportion of eliminated spines was significantly larger in the VPA-
151 exposed group (Fig. 1g). As in previous studies[40, 41], spine elimination was more likely in smaller
152 spines in UE animals (Fig. 1f). Similarly, in the VPA-exposed animals, smaller spines were
153 associated with spine elimination, and the rate of the elimination was twice as high as that in UE
154 animals (Fig. 1g).
155

156 Newly generated spines clustered more frequently in VPA-exposed marmosets
157 than in controls

158 The generation of spines in close proximity, or clustered spine generation, is considered to have
159 functional significance, especially in learning and memory[7, 14, 34, 35]. We next examined whether
160 the generated and eliminated spines in the VPA-exposed and UE marmosets were clustered or not
161 (Fig 2a). We chose a 3-μm window for our analyses, since a number of biochemical,
162 physiological, and structural studies have suggested that a 3- to 10-μm distance between spines
163 facilitates sharing of resources, spine co-activation, and learning-induced structural plasticity[42-47].
164 Clustered spine generation occurred much more frequently (4.4-fold) in the VPA-exposed
165 animals than in the UE animals (Fig. 2b), even though the total number of spine occurrences in
166 the VPA-exposed marmosets was only about twice as large as in the UE marmoset (Fig. 1d).
167 Clustered spine elimination was also more common in VPA-exposed marmosets than in UE
168 marmosets, although not statistically significant (Fig. 2b). The difference in the clustered spine
169 elimination was only 2.5-fold, which is approximately the same magnitude (2-fold) as for overall
170 spine elimination (Fig. 1d). Next, we created a cumulative plot of the distance between generated
171 spines and between eliminated spines. As shown in Fig. 2c and 2d, there was a significant
172 difference in the distribution of interspine distances between the VPA-exposed and UE groups in
173 both generated and eliminated spines. Again, the difference between the VPA-exposed and UE
174 animals in terms of the probability of clustered spine generation was large (2.8 fold; Fig. 2c),
175 while that of clustered spine elimination was small (1.4 fold; Fig. 2d). These results suggest the
176 existence of a mechanism by which dendritic spines actively appear in clusters in the animals
177 exposed to VPA. Therefore, we conducted a Monte Carlo simulation experiment to determine
178 whether there was more clustering bias in VPA-exposed marmosets than in the hypothetical
179 uniform random spine distribution (Fig. 2e). The distribution of the probability of cluster
180 formation after 30,000 simulation trials is shown in Fig. 2f–i by the gray connected lines. The
181 actual clustering probabilities are indicated by the arrows. The clustering probability of the



182 generated spine pair was approximately twice as high in the VPA-exposed group (57%) than in
183 the UE group (30%). In addition, the clustering probability of the generated spine pairs was
184 greater than the 95th percentile of the simulation distribution in the VPA-exposed group (Fig. 2g),
185 but remained below the 95th percentile in the UE group (Fig. 2f). The clustering probabilities of
186 the eliminated spine pairs did not exceed the 95th percentile in either the UE group (Fig. 2h) or
187 the VPA-exposed group (Fig. 2i). We conclude that the clustering of newly generated spines, but

Fig. 2 Dendritic spine clustered generation is more predominant than clustered elimination in VPA-exposed marmosets. **a** Schematic drawing of clustered spine generation (left panel) and elimination (right panel). Pairs of newly generated or eliminated spines were considered to be clustered if they occurred within 3 μm of each other. Spines colored magenta or gray represent clustered and non-clustered spines, respectively. **b** Comparison of the density of clustered generated spines between UE and VPA-exposed animals (mean ± s.e.m.; $P = 0.016$, Mann-Whitney U test; $n = 14$ and 12 dendrites in four and three UE and VPA-exposed animals, respectively; left panel), and the density of clustered eliminated spines (right panel). **c, d** Distribution of inter-spine distances between newly generated spines (c) ($P = 0.0009$; Kolmogorov-Smirnov test; n = 45 and 85 spine pairs in UE and VPA-exposed animals, respectively) and between newly eliminated spines (d) ($P = 0.013$; $n = 69$ and 101 spine pairs in UE and VPA-exposed animals, respectively). Magenta-shaded areas indicate inter-spine distances shorter than 3 μm, and numbers indicate the probabilities of clustering within 3 μm. To prevent underestimation of the inter-spine distance, a resampling method was used. See Methods for details. **e** Validation of clustering bias by Monte Carlo simulation. In the simulation, the new spine positions were randomly determined with a uniform distribution without changing the spine number or length and number of each dendrite. Clustering probabilities for all inter-spine distances were calculated for each simulation, and the distributions of the clustering probability from 30,000 iterations are shown in (f)-(i). f-i Circles connected with gray lines represent probability plots of clustering events from 30,000 simulations; the actual numbers of spine clusters are represented by arrows ($P = 0.30$ and 0.006; $n = 23$ and 65 newly generated spine pairs in 14 and 12 dendrites in UE and VPA-exposed animals, respectively) ($P = 0.0503$ and 0.37; $n = 43$ and 78 newly eliminated spine pairs in 14 and 12 dendrites in UE and VPA-exposed animals, respectively). Dotted red lines show 95th percentiles. See Methods for details. $^{***}P < 0.001$; $^{**}P < 0.01$; $^{*}P < 0.05$; n.s., not significant.

not of eliminated spines, in the dendrites of VPA-exposed marmosets is enhanced rather than randomly distributed.

The carryover fraction of newly generated spines was higher in VPA-exposed marmosets than in controls

The neuronal turnover rate supposedly represents the pace of change in the neural circuitry. However, the turnover rate alone does not provide information on how long the effects of circuitry changes will persist. Three consecutive imaging sessions allowed us to monitor the fate of pre-existing and newly generated spines over 3 days[16]. The carryover fraction was defined as the fraction of newly generated spines that survived to the last session (Fig. 3a, b, GS). The carryover fraction was two times higher in VPA-exposed marmosets than in UE marmosets (Fig. 3c). This suggests that experience-induced changes in spines may be more likely to persist in VPA-exposed marmosets. We further divided the newly generated spines into clustered and non-clustered spines and computed their carryover fractions. The carryover fraction of clustered spines in VPA-

202 exposed marmosets was six times higher than that in UE marmosets (Fig. 3d). On the other hand,
203 there was no difference in the carryover fraction of non-clustered spines with or without VPA
204 treatment (Fig. 3d). Thus, clustered emerging spines were predominant in the carryover of
205 generated spines in the model marmosets.
206
207 Having analyzed the collective nature of spines, we next analyzed the temporal stability of
208 individual spines. Spine stability was defined as the percent ratio of newly generated or pre-
209 existing spines that survived to the last session. Both in the VPA-exposed and UE groups, the
210 spine stability of newly generated spines (~50%) was considerably lower than that of pre-existing
211 spines (~90%) (Fig. 3e). However, the spine stability of these two types of spines did not differ
212 between the VPA-exposed and UE groups (Fig. 3e). Furthermore, spine stability in both the VPA-
213 exposed and UE groups was independent of the presence or absence of clustering (Fig. 3f). The
214 fact that spine stability was the same regardless of clustering suggests that interactions among
215 newly formed spines have little effect on spine stability after a sufficient time has elapsed since
216 spine generation. In summary, clustered carryover spines comprised a much higher proportion of
217 total spines in the VPA-exposed marmosets than in the UE animals, while the stability of
218 individual spines was equivalent in the two groups.
219

220 Axonal boutons had a higher turnover rate in VPA-exposed marmosets than in 221 controls

222 Deficits in projection-specific connectivity or cortical interaction have often been discussed in
223 ASD, as exemplified by local overconnectivity and long-range underconnectivity[48, 49]. Spine
224 turnover may depend on which neuron the coupled axons originate from[15]. We next analyzed
225 marmoset axons that were transfected with differently colored fluorescent proteins depending on
226 the dmPFC hemisphere from which they projected (Fig. 4a). We expressed red fluorescent protein
227 in neurons ipsilateral to the observation window in the PFC, and green fluorescent protein in

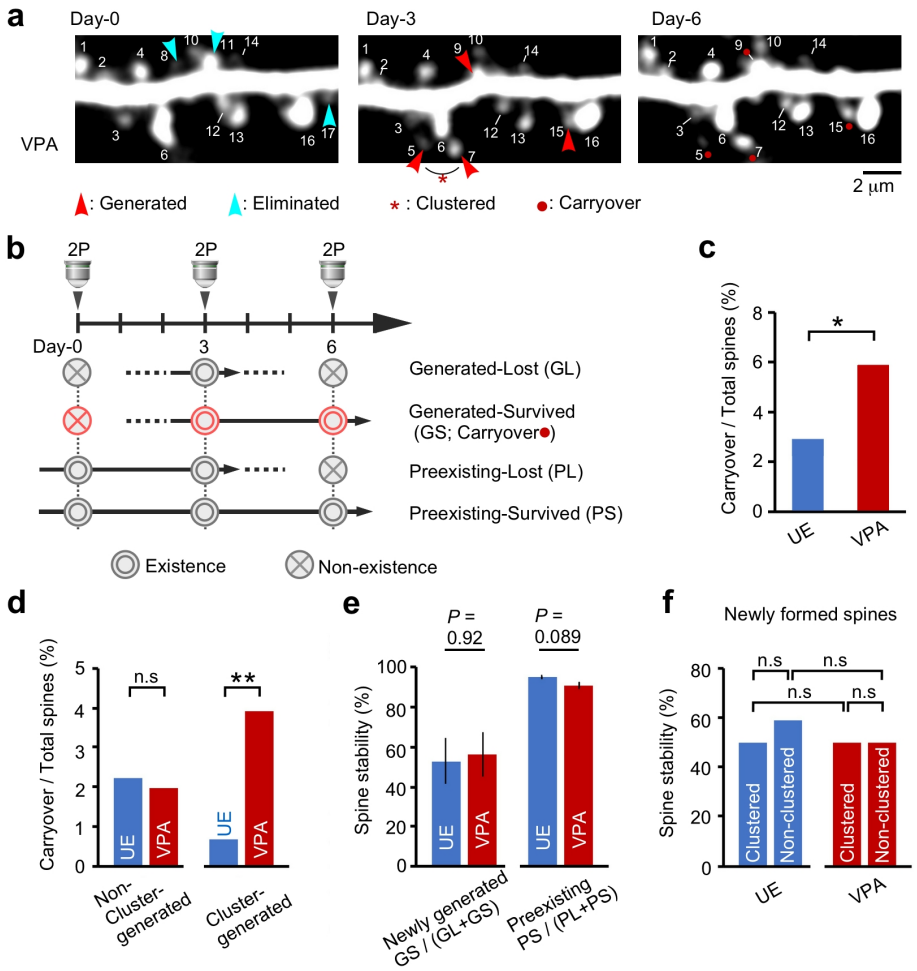
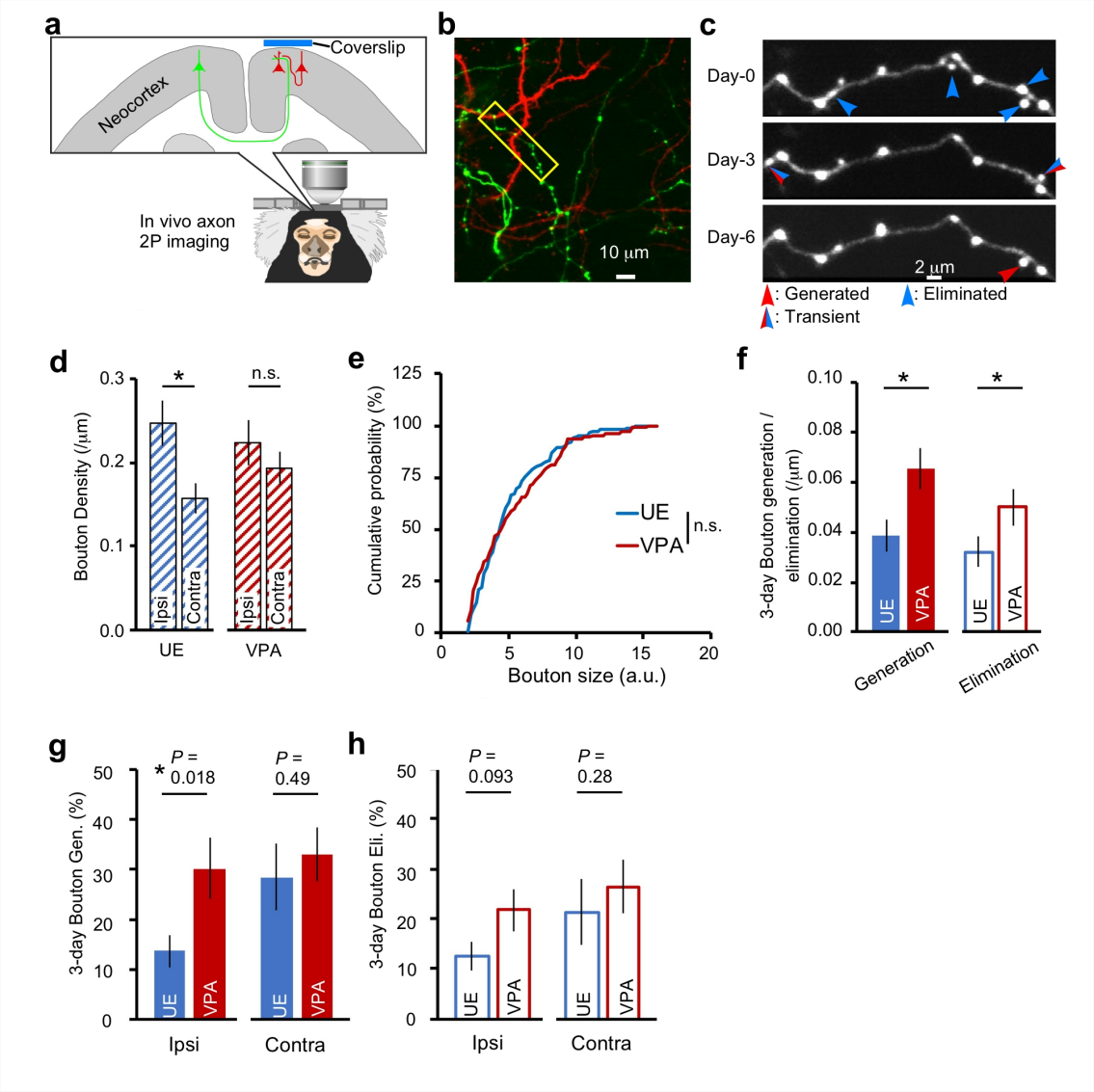


Fig. 3 The surviving fraction of newly generated spines (carryover spines) was much larger in VPA-exposed marmosets than in controls, although the survival rate of each spine did not differ. a Representative dendrite images taken every 3 days are presented as in Fig. 1b. **b** A diagram showing four patterns of spine generation and elimination. The red dot in the legend indicates the carryover spines labeled with a red dot in Figs. 1b and 3a. **c** The ratio of the surviving fraction of newly formed spines (carryover spines) to the total spines was larger in VPA-exposed animals than in UE animals. (P = 0.046; Pearson's Chi-square test; n = 13, 448, 21, and 357 for UE carryover spines, UE total spines, VPA-exposed carryover spines, and VPA-exposed total spines, respectively). **d** Among clustered spines, the ratio of the carryover spine fraction to the total spines was much larger in VPA-exposed animals than in UE animals (P = 0.0018; Pearson's Chi-square test; n = 3, 448, 14, and 357 for UE carryover, UE total, VPA-exposed carryover, and VPA-exposed total spines, respectively). By contrast, the carryover spine fraction was not significantly different among non-clustered spines (P = 0.79; Pearson's chi-square test; n = 10, 448, 7, and 357 for UE carryover, UE total, VPA-exposed carryover, and VPA-exposed total spines, respectively). **e** The survival rate of each newly generated and pre-existing spine was not significantly different between UE and VPA-exposed animals (mean ± s.e.m.; Mann-Whitney U test; n = 11 and 10 (newly generated), and 13 and 11 (pre-existing) dendrites from three and three UE and VPA-exposed animals, respectively). f The survival rate of each newly formed spine was not significantly different between the clustered and non-clustered spines (P > 0.99; Fisher's exact test; n = 3,10, 3, and 7 for clustered GS, non-clustered GS, clustered GL, and non-clustered GL spines, respectively, in UE animals) (P > 0.99; Fisher's exact test; n = 14,7, 14, and 7, respectively, in VPA-exposed animals). **P < 0.01; *P < 0.05; n.s., not significant.

228 neurons on the contralateral side of the brain (same axial position, and same distance from the

229 midline; See **Methods** section; Fig. 4a). Therefore, we were able to observe red dendrites and red
230 axons from local neurons, as well as green axons from contralateral neurons (Fig. 4b). In the
231 magnified images, varicosities called presynaptic boutons were seen on the axons; new generation
232 and elimination of these varicosities were seen on each of the 3 observation days (Fig. 4c).
233 Previous studies have shown that these boutons constitute pre-synapses[50], although some
234 synapses apparently lack boutons. Most boutons in our sample were en passant boutons, and there
235 were relatively few terminal boutons with a neck between a varicosity and a parental axon shaft
236 (Fig. 4c). We considered the boutons to represent the existence of pre-synapses in the present
237 study. We first measured the axonal bouton density and found a significant difference between
238 the mean values of the ipsilateral and contralateral UE marmoset axons. By contrast, the
239 difference between the ipsilateral and contralateral axons in VPA-exposed marmosets was not
240 significant (Fig. 4d). Next, we calculated the bouton size under the assumption that it was
241 proportional to the maximum fluorescence intensity, and found that the distribution of bouton size
242 was almost identical between the VPA-exposed and UE groups (Fig. 4e). We then calculated the
243 3-day bouton generation and elimination rates. Consistent with the rates of spine generation and
244 elimination, those of bouton generation and elimination were higher in VPA-exposed animals
245 (Fig. 4f). Detailed analysis of each type of axon showed a significant difference in ipsilateral
246 bouton gain between the two groups, whereas there was no significant difference in contralateral
247 bouton gain (Fig. 4g). This suggested that the difference in the generation and elimination of
248 synapses between the VPA-exposed and UE groups may have been caused by the alteration of
249 ipsilateral axons. The 3-day bouton turnover rate was much larger than the spine turnover rate
250 (spine: 10.2% and 12.6% for VPA-exposed group, 5.2% and 7.8% for UE group, for generation
251 and elimination, respectively). We set the bouton threshold as twice the thickness (brightness) of
252 the axon shaft. Since we do not detect axonal synapses below the bouton threshold, the
253 subthreshold boutons can be misidentified as newly generated boutons when they enlarge and
254 exceed the threshold. As a consequence, the number of newly generated boutons can be



overestimated. Likewise, the number of boutons that are eliminated can be also overestimated. Although including such overestimations, the results presented here are the first results showing that synaptic turnover varies with the cortical origin of the input. Abnormalities of diverse brain connectivity in ASD have been demonstrated by functional brain imaging techniques such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and magnetoencephalography (MEG) / electroencephalography (EEG), using the degree of brain activity coherence as an indicator[1, 48, 49]. Our finding of divergent plasticity in local and long-distance connections in VPA-exposed animals introduces a new dimension to projection-specific variation in ASD. Mismatch in plasticity control involving local and long-range connections may contribute to autonomous local

Fig. 4 Two-photon in vivo axon imaging in ASD model marmosets. a AAV vectors expressing different colored fluorescent proteins were inoculated into each hemisphere of the dmPFC. **b** Axons from the contralateral hemisphere had green fluorescence, and axons from the ipsilateral hemisphere and dendrites had red fluorescence. **c** A representative axon from a VPA-exposed animal (the axon surrounded by the yellow rectangle in (b)) was imaged every 3 days. **d** Mean bouton densities are significantly larger in ipsilateral axons than in contralateral axons in UE animals ($P = 0.035$, Mann-Whitney U test; $n = 28$ and 21 ipsilateral and contralateral axons, respectively, from three animals). They are not significantly different between ipsilateral and contralateral axons in VPA-exposed animals ($P = 0.36$, Mann-Whitney U test; $n =$ 22 and 25 ipsilateral and contralateral axons, respectively, from two animals). The mean densities of terminal boutons were much lower than those of en passant boutons in our sample (mean terminal bouton density: 0.023, 0.012, 0.021, and 0.010 boutons/μm for UE ipsilateral, UE contralateral, VPA-exposed ipsilateral, and VPA-exposed contralateral axons, respectively). **e** The bouton size distribution between these animals ($P = 0.57$; Kolmogorov-Smirnov test; $n = 149$ and 107 boutons and 49 and 47 axons in three and two UE and VPA-exposed animals, respectively). **f** There is a significant difference in the mean bouton generation per unit length between these animals ($P = 0.012$, Mann-Whitney U test; $n = 49$ and 47 axons in three and two UE and VPA-exposed animals, respectively), and also in 3-day bouton elimination ($P =$ 0.043). **g, h** Three-day mean bouton generation (g) and elimination (h) percentages for each axon type are shown (mean ± s.e.m.; Mann-Whitney U test) ($n = 28$, 22, 21, and 25 for UE ipsilateral, VPA-exposed ipsilateral, UE contralateral, and VPA-exposed contralateral axons, respectively). The mean bouton turnover rates were higher than those of spines (5.2%, 10.2%, 7.8%, and 12.6% for UE generation, VPA-exposed generation, UE elimination, and VPA-exposed elimination of spines, respectively). $^*P < 0.05$; n.s., not significant.

circuit remodeling without regard for the highly contextualized information computed in the brain-wide global network.

Oxytocin nasal administration modified dendritic spine clustering

Clinical trials on oxytocin in humans are currently inconclusive[22-25]. In order to better understand the clinical applications of oxytocin, it is therefore important to investigate its mechanism of action on synaptic phenotypes, which were characterized in this study in VPA-exposed marmosets. Thus, we next examined how the aforementioned properties of cortical synapses changed after the administration of oxytocin, which has been reported in some studies to be effective in treating the core symptoms of ASD. Marmosets were administered saline and then oxytocin intranasally, in the manner described in the **Methods** section (Fig. 5a). The average results from all marmosets failed to show a significant effect of oxytocin on spine generation and elimination, although a monotonically increasing trend of non-clustered spine generation and elimination was observed (Fig. 5b, c). Thus, we next examined the effect of oxytocin

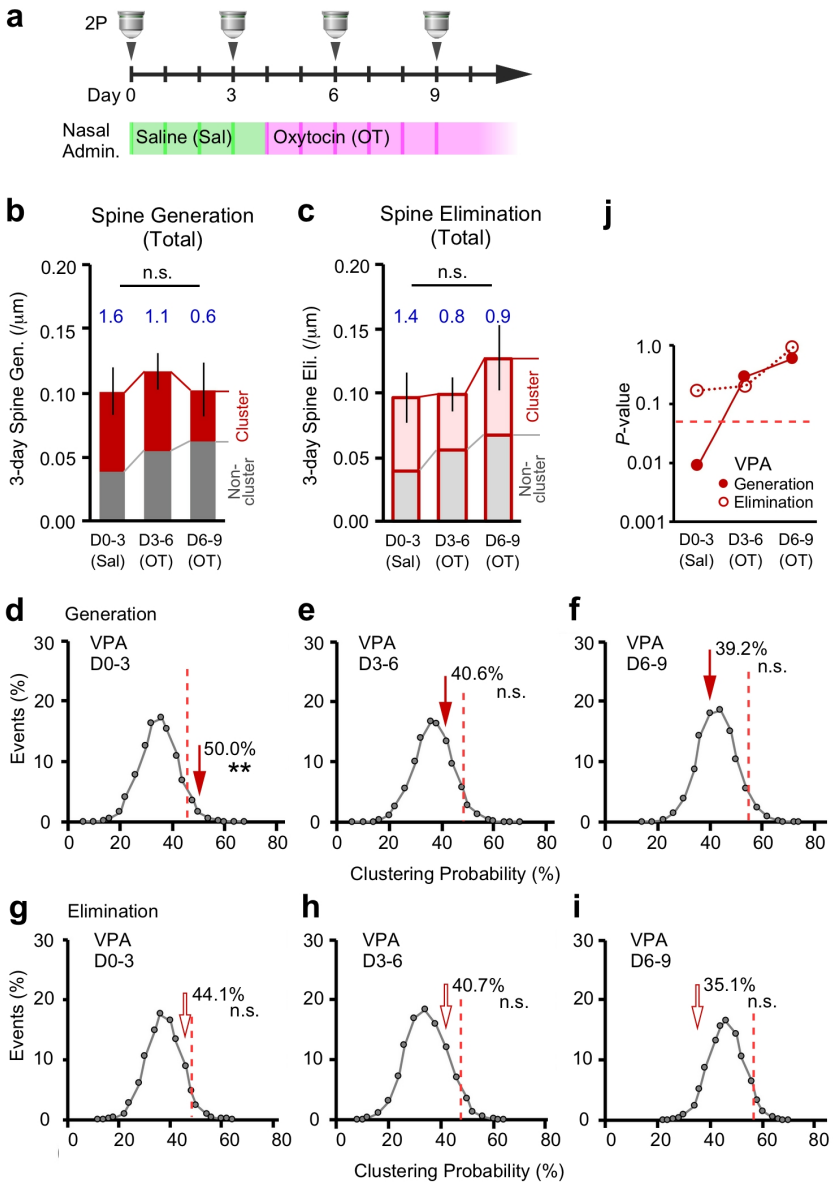


Fig. 5 Oxytocin modifies the proximity of spine generation in the model marmosets. a A schema of oxytocin nasal administration and two-photon (2P) imaging. Saline was given to marmosets in the green-shaded period, while oxytocin was given in the magenta-shaded period (See Methods for details). **b, c** Mean values of 3-day spine generation (b) and elimination (c) are not significantly different before and after oxytocin administration. (mean ± s.e.m.; $P = 0.25$ and $P = 0.62$ for spine generation and elimination, respectively, Friedman test; $n = 12$ dendrites in three VPA-exposed animals). The blue numbers indicate the ratio of clustered to non-clustered spines. **d–i** Effects of oxytocin on clustering bias of newly generated (d–f) and eliminated (g–i) spines. The graphs are shown as in Figs. 2f-i. ($n = 32$, 32, and 28 newly generated spine pairs and n = 34, 27, and 37 newly eliminated spine pairs during the D0–3, D3–6, and D6–9 periods, respectively, in three VPA-exposed animals). **j** The *P*-values expressed in logarithm from (d)–(i) are indicated. The red dotted line indicates 0.05. $^{**}P < 0.01$; n.s., not significant.

administration on spine clustering (Fig. 5d–j). Unexpectedly, the proximity between generated spines observed in VPA-exposed animals (Fig. 2g) during saline administration, was alleviated

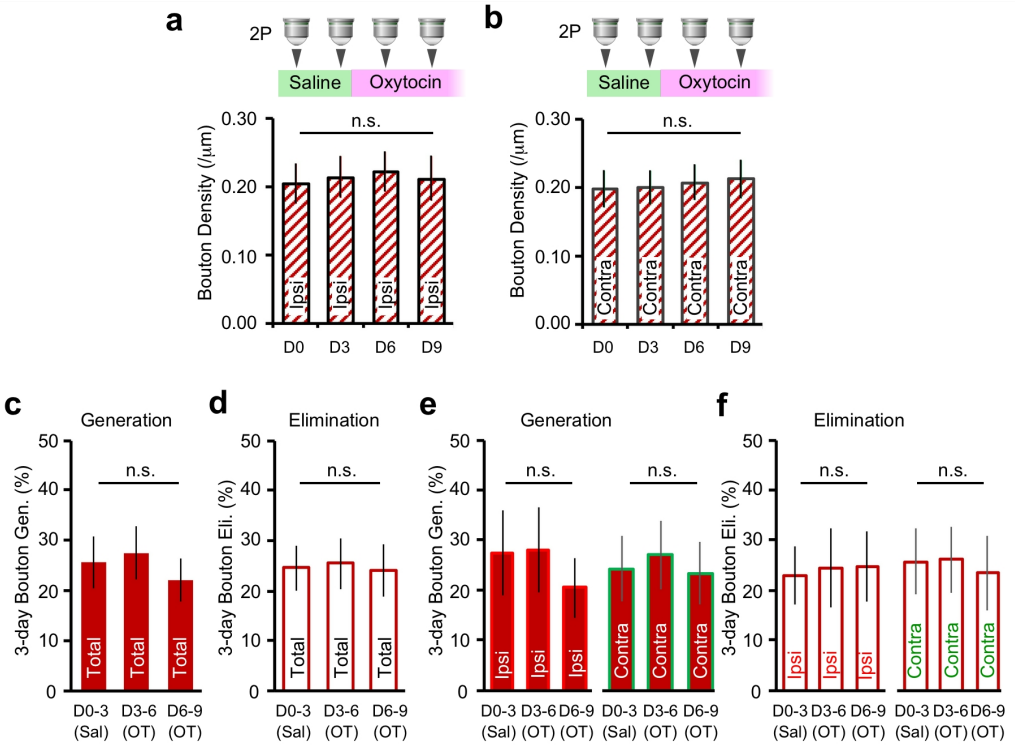


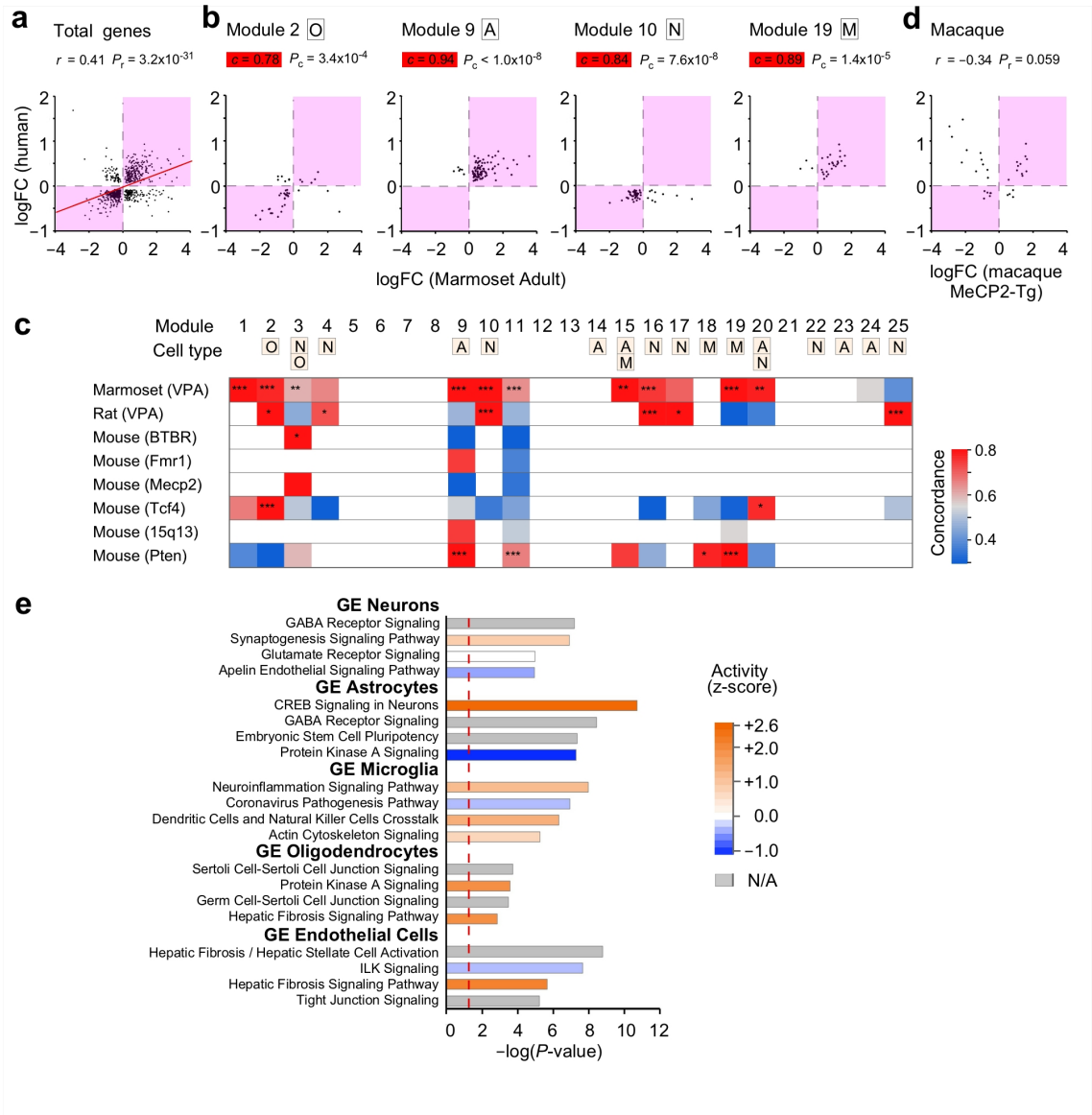
Fig. 6 Oxytocin does not significantly modify axonal bouton generation or elimination. a, b Mean bouton density values of ipsilateral (a) and contralateral (b) axons in VPA-exposed animals are not significantly different before and after oxytocin administration. (mean ± s.e.m.; $P = 0.997$ and $P = 0.898$ for ipsilateral and contralateral axons, respectively, Kruskal-Wallis test; $n = 17$ and 21 for ipsilateral and contralateral axons, respectively) **c, d** Three-day bouton generation (c) and elimination (d) during the D0–3, D3–6, and D6–9 periods for each axon type are shown (mean ± s.e.m.; $P = 0.85$ and $P = 0.96$ for bouton generation and elimination, respectively, Kruskal-Wallis test; n = 38 axons in two VPA-exposed animals). **e, f** Three-day bouton generation (e) and elimination (f) during the D0–3, D3–6, and D6–9 periods for the total axons in the VPA-exposed animals are shown as in (c, d) (mean ± s.e.m.; $P = 0.85$ and $P = 0.97$ for ipsilateral and contralateral bouton generation, respectively, $P = 0.99$ and $P = 0.91$ for ipsilateral and contralateral bouton elimination, respectively, Kruskal-Wallis test; $n = 17$ and 21 ipsilateral and contralateral axons in two VPA-exposed animals). n.s., not significant.

by nasal oxytocin administration (Fig. 5d–f, j). By contrast, oxytocin had a less pronounced effect on the proximity between eliminated spines (Fig. 5g–i, j).

We next analyzed the effect of oxytocin on axons. The bouton density, generation, and elimination of each axon species were not significantly different before and after oxytocin administration (Fig. 6a–f).

287 Gene expression analysis in adult ASD model marmosets

288 To explore the molecular mechanisms of abnormal spine dynamics in VPA-exposed marmosets
289 and to assess the validity of adult VPA-exposed marmosets as a model of idiopathic ASD, we
290 performed transcriptome analysis of the cerebral cortex using custom-made marmoset
291 microarrays. Among 9,296 genes expressed in the cortical tissues, there were 2,484 differentially
292 expressed genes (DEGs) with an adjusted p-value for multiple comparison (P_{adj}) of < 0.05. First,
293 we compared the DEGs in the cortical regions associated with social behavior between VPA-
294 exposed marmosets and the postmortem brains of humans with ASD, and found a significant
295 positive correlation between the two groups[31] (Fig. 7a). This was similar to the property we had
296 previously reported in juvenile VPA-exposed marmosets[11]. In addition, the modulation of gene
297 expression in adult marmoset models and in human ASD was compared in each gene module that
298 was previously configured by weighted gene co-expression network analysis (WGCNA) for
299 typically developed and ASD human samples[11, 31]. In both the marmoset model and human ASD,
300 the majority of genes in modules associated with neurons and oligodendrocytes were
301 downregulated (Fig. 7b), while genes in modules associated with astrocytes and microglia were
302 upregulated (Fig. 7b). The direction of gene expression modulation of adult VPA-exposed
303 marmosets was significantly similar to that of human ASD samples in 10 modules, one module
304 greater than that of juvenile VPA-exposed animals[11] (Fig. 7c). Note that the human ASD
305 transcriptomes that were analyzed were derived from individuals of various ages, from children
306 to adults. The high similarity between VPA-exposed marmosets and human ASD contrasts with
307 the representative rodent monogenic ASD models, which replicated human modulations only in
308 limited gene modules and cell types (Fig. 7c). One explanation for this may be that these
309 transgenic mice are a model of a specific type of ASD in which one gene contributes particularly
310 strongly, which is not the case in idiopathic ASD. We further confirmed that the correlation
311 between the transcriptome of the macaque MeCP2-Tg model and that of human ASD was low
312 (Fig. 7d).



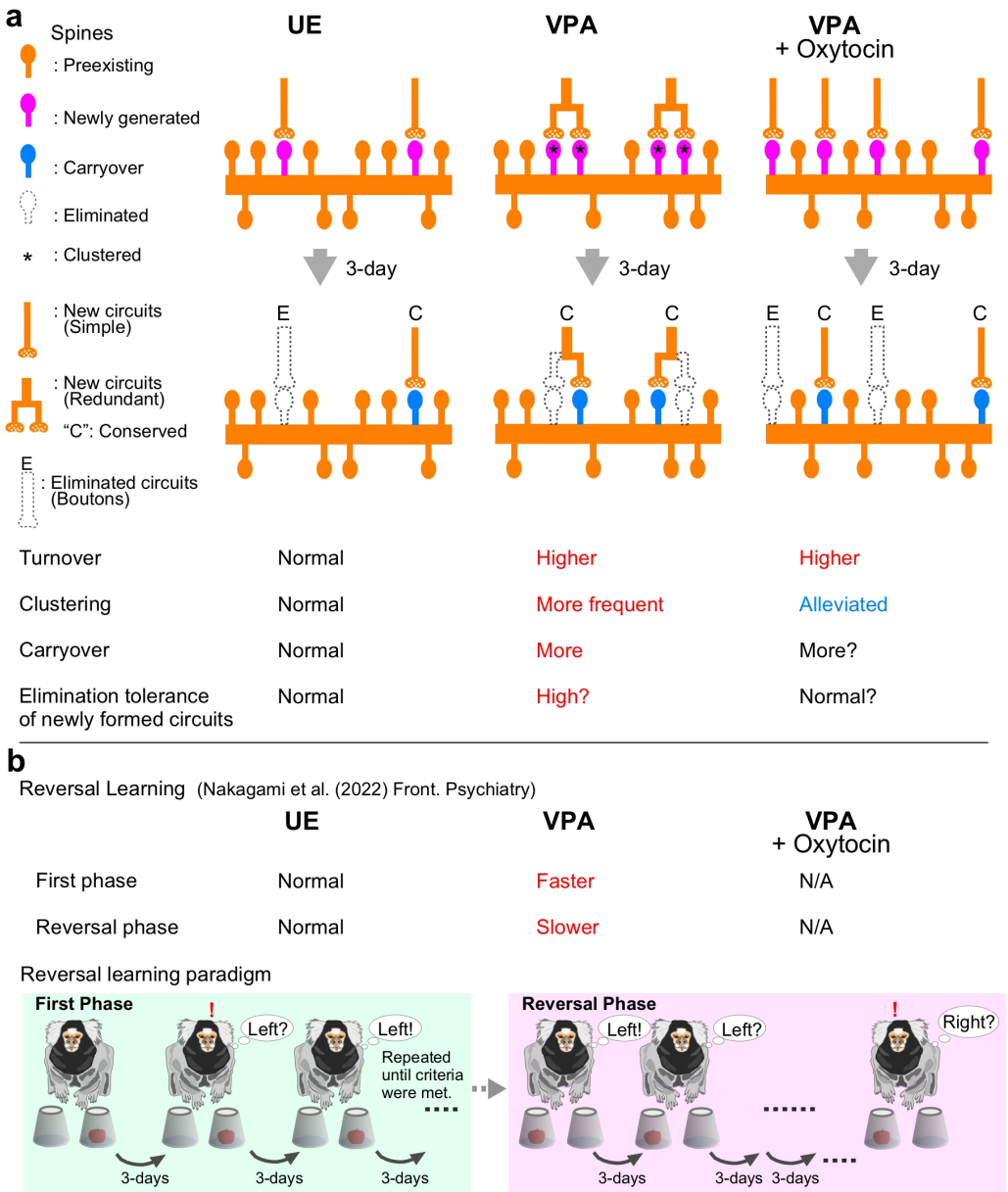
We also analyzed DEGs in each cell type. This analysis confirmed the presence of a VPA-exposed marmoset–specific phenotype across the four cell types, as well as in vascular endothelial cells in the brain (Fig. 7e). Pathway analysis of cell type–specific DEGs showed pathway abnormalities in each of these cell types. For example, microglial modules exhibited abnormalities associated with inflammation, which fits well with the inflammation hypothesis of ASD[51].

Fig. 7 Gene expression modulations in adult marmoset social neocortical areas reflect those in human ASD as determined by microarray analysis. a, b, d Relationship of gene expression modulation between adult marmosets and postmortem samples from humans with ASD (a, b), and between a MeCP2-Tg macaque model and human ASD (d). As a measure of gene expression modulation, log fold-change (logFC) values were computed between ASD model animals and control animals, and then compared with human ASD data. Modulated genes with $P_{adj} < 0.1$ are plotted. Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) and the P-values for the correlation coefficient (P_r) was shown in (a) and (d). As a measure of concordance in the direction of gene expression modulation, two-sided P-values for concordance (P_c) are shown in (b). The magenta-shaded areas represent the first and third quadrants, indicating that the two elements have changed in the same positive or negative direction. The red line in (a) is the linear regression. See Methods section and Supplementary Methods file for detailed procedures. **c** Concordance of gene expression modulations across human modules. The color indicates concordance between animal model and human ASD modules with at least eight genes in common. Asterisks represent P-values determined using the one-sided binomial test: $^*P < 0.05$, $^{**}P < 0.01$, $^{***}P < 0.001$. Precise information for obtaining the concordance between human and model animals other than the adult VPA-exposed marmosets were described in Supplementary Methods. For the rat VPA-exposed model and BTBR mice, genes with $P_{adj} < 0.05$ were selected; for other models and human ASD, those with $P_{adj} < 0.1$ were selected. **e** Enriched pathways for each cell type. The genes most closely associated with neurons, astrocytes, microglia, oligodendrocytes, and endothelial cells were analyzed. The color of the bars represents the direction of regulation of the pathway based on the logFC values. The p-values of enrichment were provided by the IPA software. The red dotted line represents the significance threshold ($P = 0.05$).

Discussion

In this study, we used in vivo two-photon imaging to monitor synaptic dynamics in the apical tufts of layer 2/3 pyramidal neurons in the dmPFC of VPA-exposed marmosets, an improved model of idiopathic ASD. This study resulted in several important findings (Fig. 8a). (1) Synaptic turnover was enhanced in VPA-exposed marmosets. (2) Newly generated spines actively formed clusters in the model marmosets. (3) These animals also had a higher carryover of generated spines. The difference was particularly large for clustered spines. These results suggest that there are maladjustments of synaptic updating and inter-synaptic interaction in VPA-exposed marmosets. Finally, (4) nasal administration of oxytocin to model marmosets reduced the tendency of spines to cluster without affecting their turnover rate. These synaptic effects of oxytocin may underlie its therapeutic potential in individuals with ASD.

ASD model mice that have thus far been examined by in vivo two-photon microscopy showed higher spine dynamics as a common phenotype in motor cortices and early sensory areas, which



are less associated with ASD core symptoms than the PFC[13-17]. These mice comprise diverse genetic alteration models and inbred BTBR strains. Accumulating evidence, including the results of the current study, suggests that ASD-related genes and environmental factors may converge across species and result in the phenotype of increased spine dynamics, suggesting ongoing enhanced remodeling of neural circuits. In human adults with ASD, the PFC tends to have elevated levels of N-acetyl aspartate (NAA), a metabolite indicating neural activity[52]. This phenotype could be related to the increased spine turnover that is associated with neural activity.

Fig. 8 Schematic drawing of the effects of spine dynamics in VPA-exposed model marmosets. a An overview diagram illustrating how redundantly generated spines may provide circuit stability. In VPA-exposed marmosets, there were approximately two times more newly generated spines (magenta) than in UE marmosets. More generated spines were clustered (asterisk; 4.4 fold) and survived for 3 days (blue; carryover spines; 5.9 fold) in the VPA-exposed animals than in the UE animals. The clustered generated spines are expected to form functionally redundant neural circuits (likely with local axons) that are resistant to random spine erasure ("C" in the figure shows the conserved circuits). This model suggests that learning effects may last longer in VPA-exposed marmosets, and may be difficult to erase. The clustering was alleviated by oxytocin administration, which may increase the flexibility of the circuit. The elimination of pre-existing spines and axons are omitted from the diagram for clarity. The figure key is shown in the upper left. **b** The above model for circuit reconfiguration in VPA-exposed marmosets may explain the following features of reversal learning in the ASD-model animals. In the previous study, our group performed an operant task and its reversal paradigm (30). In the first discrimination phase of the paradigm, a marmoset learned to obtain a hidden reward, which is consistently placed on the left or right side of two options every 3 days. Once the success rate reached the specified criterion, the reward was moved to the opposite side beginning in the next session, and the marmoset continued to engage in the task. The VPA-exposed marmosets learned faster in the first phase and slower in the reversal and re-reversal phases than the UE animals.

In our study, the newly generated spines in the basal state tended to cluster, and these clustered spines exhibited a high carryover rate in the ASD model marmosets. The clustering in synaptic plasticity is often discussed in the context of learning and memory[35, 53]. CCR5 KO and MeCP2 duplication mice commonly exhibit elevated spine turnover and clustering, as well as higher learning efficiency[14, 34]. On the other hand, FMR1 KO mice show lower learning efficiency with increased spine turnover but no clustering of generated spines[16, 54]. Consistent with these findings, our group previously showed that VPA-exposed marmosets learned faster than UE marmosets during the first discrimination phase of a spatial reversal learning task (Fig. 8b)[30].

The process by which co-activated spines are formed in proximity to each other during an operant task was recently elucidated using the combination of a behavioral task and functional two-photon imaging[7]. According to an electron microscopy study, adjacent spines often serve as postsynaptic targets of single axons[55]. In layer 2/3 pyramidal neuron dendrites of the ferret visual cortex, neighboring spines tend to have similar visual representations[56]. Clustered generated spines, due to their redundant involvement in the circuit, may help stabilize the formed circuit and

358 accelerate learning[57]. At the same time, however, they may overstabilize the circuit and thereby
359 compromise its flexibility. This is more likely in VPA-exposed marmosets, which exhibited no
360 significant clustering tendency in terms of spine disappearance (Fig. 8a). Interestingly, the VPA-
361 treated marmosets in the study[30] had a slower learning rate during the reversal phase of the
362 reversal learning task (i.e., after paradigm reversal) (Fig. 8b). Note that in the particular reversal
363 learning task for analyzing mid-term (days to weeks) cognitive inflexibility, the training interval
364 between sessions was set at ~3 days, which was close to the interval used in our two-photon
365 microscopy experiments[30] (Fig. 8b). We propose that a similar phenotype of spine dynamics
366 might contribute to the superior memory of individuals with ASD and their adherence to habits
367 formed without apparent training. However, further research is needed to test this hypothesis.
368
369 In this study, oxytocin reduced the clustering of emerging spines without altering spine
370 turnover in ASD model marmosets (Fig. 8a). Although there are studies on the effects of oxytocin
371 on synaptic plasticity[18, 20], its impact on spine clustering is unexpected, indicating the possibility
372 that spine turnover and clustering can be controlled separately. This effect of oxytocin could
373 restrain excessively prolonged circuit stability and mitigate behavioral perseverance, as reported
374 in human ASD[58]. In fact, oxytocin reduced the levels of metabolites of excitatory
375 neurotransmitters in the PFC of humans with ASD[59]. A mouse model of major depression also
376 demonstrated a relationship between treatment effects on symptoms and changes in clustered
377 spine dynamics[36]. It remains to be tested whether oxytocin can improve the low performance in
378 the reversal phase in VPA-exposed marmosets (Fig. 8b). Differences in oxytocin systems between
379 rodents and primates may significantly affect therapeutic efficiency, which underscores the
380 importance of primates in translational research on oxytocin[32]. For instance, oxytocin receptors
381 are rarely expressed in the primate cortex[32, 60]. This contrasts with rodents, in which oxytocin
382 receptors are enriched in various cortices, including the medial PFC. In the PFC, oxytocin may
383 preferentially bind to vasopressin receptors, which are relatively abundant in the primate cortex[32,

384 [60]. Another characteristic of primates is that the cholinergic system in the basal forebrain, which
385 projects throughout the cortex, is enriched in oxytocin receptors, a feature not found in rodents[60].
386 The pathway by which oxytocin influences cortical synaptic dynamics in VPA-exposed
387 marmosets remains an important open question.
388
389 To identify therapeutic targets, it would be valuable to determine the molecular mechanisms[61]
390 that govern synaptic turnover and spine clustering in VPA-exposed marmosets. The spine
391 clustering in the MeCP2 duplication mouse model was suppressed by an inhibitor of Ras–ERK
392 signaling without altering the spine generation rate[62]. Ras, like other proteins such as Rho, Rac,
393 and cofilin, has been reported to diffuse from activated spines to neighboring spines via dendrites
394 and is thought to alter the plasticity of neighboring spines[7, 43, 45, 63]. Interestingly, transcriptome
395 analysis of our model marmosets showed two-fold higher upregulation of TrkB (NTRK2), which
396 is upstream of the Ras–ERK pathway. Synaptic plasticity involves not only neurons but also
397 diverse glial cells. We found that microglia demonstrated activation of signals related to viral
398 infection, inflammation, and reorganization of the actin cytoskeleton (Fig. 7d). Suppression of
399 excessive microglial activation with minocycline or other matrix metalloproteinase-9 inhibitors
400 has been reported to suppress excessive spine turnover in fragile-X model mice[17]. Our
401 transcriptomic analysis also revealed significant down-regulation of diverse myelin-related genes
402 (such as *MBP*, *PLP1*, and *MOBP*) that suppress heightened cortical plasticity, even during the
403 critical period of the rodent visual cortex development (See **Supplementary Data 1**).
404 On the other hand, enhanced synaptic remodeling may be caused not only by alterations in the
405 innate properties of central nervous tissues, but also by aspects of the brain environment. For
406 example, it has been shown that the stress hormone corticosterone increases synaptic turnover in
407 mice[64]. Indeed, as in mouse ASD strains[65] and humans with ASD[66], our ASD model marmosets
408 have aberrant cortisol responses[67], suggesting that anxiety and disorders of the endocrine system
409 could be responsible for the increase in synaptic remodeling.

410

411 In this study, we demonstrate novel features of spine dynamics in adult ASD model marmosets,
412 and suggest these features as a potential therapeutic target in ASD. Our previous study has shown
413 that an imbalance between circuit remodeling and consolidation also occurs in young VPA-
414 exposed marmosets, including changes in long-term depression (LTD) and reduced expression of
415 critical period–related genes[11]. However, we also acknowledge that particular phenotypes
416 associated with synapse and related gene expression domains continue to change as individuals
417 grow. For example, LTD abnormalities in infant marmosets are far less evident in more grown
418 child marmosets[11]. Atypical gene expression in model marmosets is concordant with that in
419 human ASD in a higher number of modules in their adulthood than in childhood (Fig. 7c). A more
420 detailed comparative study of the ASD model marmosets in childhood and adulthood should
421 provide deeper insights into age-dependent precision medicine.

422

423 **Methods**

424 Animals

425 All experimental procedures were approved by the Animal Research Committee of the National
426 Center of Neurology and Psychiatry. Common marmosets (*Callithrix jacchus*) were housed in
427 captivity at the National Center of Neurology and Psychiatry under a 12-h/12-h light/dark cycle
428 and were fed food (CMS-1; Clare Japan) and water ad libitum. Temperature was maintained at
429 27–30°C and humidity at 40–50%.

430

431 Marmoset ASD model

432 Serum progesterone levels in female marmosets were regularly measured to determine the date
433 of fertilization. Four percent VPA dissolved in 10% glucose solution was administered
434 intragastrically to pregnant marmosets at 200 mg/kg/day daily for 7 days starting on gestation day
435 60. No doses were given to control mothers. The obtained ASD model offspring from VPA-

436 administered mothers and control offspring from UE mothers were kept in their home cages until
437 the day of inoculation with AAV vector. We used four UE marmosets (monkeys KR (f, 1.3), TR
438 (f, 3.2), VR (m, 2.2), and BH (m, 1.3)) and three VPA-exposed marmosets (monkeys PR (f, 1.5),
439 SH (f, 1.4), and MS (m, 1.3)); f or m and numbers in parentheses indicate sex and age in years at
440 the time of AAV inoculation, respectively.
441

442 ## AAV vector inoculation of the marmoset neocortex

443 Each experimental marmoset was pretreated with the antibiotic cefovecin sodium (8 mg/kg body
444 weight, intramuscular (i.m.); Zoetis), prednisolone (2 mg/kg body weight; i.m.), the analgesic
445 ketoprofen (2 mg/kg body weight, i.m.), and atropine (0.15 mg/kg body weight, i.m.). It was then
446 anesthetized with ketamine (15 mg/kg body weight, i.m.; Daiichi-Sankyo) and xylazine (1.2
447 mg/kg body weight, i.m.; Bayer), which were supplemented with sevoflurane inhalation (2–4%).
448 The marmoset was then fixed to a stereotaxic instrument (SR-6C-HT; Narishige, Tokyo, Japan).
449 During all surgical procedures, marmosets were also supplied with humidified oxygen as needed,
450 and warmed to 37–39 °C with a heating pad (FST-HPS; Fine Science Tools, North Vancouver,
451 Canada). Body temperature, SpO_2, heart rate, cardiac electrogram, respiratory rate, and actual
452 concentration of oxygen and sevoflurane were measured using a biomonitor (BSM-5132;
453 Nihonkoden, Tokyo). After incision of the skin at the midline, the skull was exposed and a 1-mm-
454 diameter hole was made bilaterally above the PFC Brodmann area 8 (11.5 mm anterior to the
455 interaural line, 3 mm lateral to the midline) using a dental drill.
456

457 A puller (PC-100; Narishige) was used to create a micropipette (tip diameter 30–50 μm) from a
458 micro glass tube (1.0-mm diameter; TW100F-4; WPI, USA). The pulled micropipette was then
459 beveled using a micro grinder (EG-402; Narishige) and was sterilized by overnight exposure to
460 UV light or ethylene oxide. The pipette was set to a glass microsyringe (Model 1701,10 μL;
461 Hamilton, USA) using a Priming kit (55750-01; Hamilton), and the microsyringe was back-filled

462 with silicon oil and attached to a microsyringe pump (LEGATO 130; WPI) fixed to the
463 manipulator of a stereotaxic instrument (SM-15R; Narishige). The micropipette was then tip filled
464 with AAV vector suspension and slowly inserted through the dura and into the neocortex,
465 avoiding large blood vessels. The total 0.5-μL volume of AAV vector was then inoculated at 0.1
466 μL/min at a depth of 0.8 mm from the surface. The viral preparations were adjusted to the
467 following final concentrations: 1×10^{9} vg/mL for rAAV1-Thy1S-tTA and 1×10^{12} vg/mL for
468 AAV1-TRE3-tdTomato, expressing red fluorescence protein; 5×10^{9} vg/mL for rAAV2/1-Thy1S-
469 tTA and 1×10^{12} vg/mL for rAAV2/1-TRE3-mClover, expressing green fluorescence protein.
470 After the 5-min incubation period, the micropipette was retracted, a silicon plug was stuffed into
471 the cranial hole, and the skin incision was closed with sutures. After recovery from anesthesia,
472 the marmoset was returned to its home cage.
473

474 ## Imaging window preparation

475 Each experimental marmoset was pretreated with the antibiotic cefovecin sodium, prednisolone,
476 the analgesic ketoprofen, and atropine. It was then anesthetized with ketamine and xylazine,
477 which were supplemented with sevoflurane inhalation (2–4%). The marmoset was then fixed to
478 a stereotaxic instrument. The marmoset was also supplied with humidified oxygen and warmed
479 up to 37–39 °C. After skin incision at the midline, the skull was exposed and a 4-mm-diameter
480 hole was made at the point where the AAV was inoculated using a dental drill fixed to a
481 stereotaxic manipulator (SM-15R; Narishige). The dura mater was carefully removed using
482 microsurgical ophthalmic scissors, fine forceps, and a microhook to minimize any pressure
483 applied to the surface of the brain. A piece of coverslip, consisting of three laminated circular
484 coverslips (5-mm diameter + 3-mm diameter × 2), was used to cover the exposed brain surface[38].
485 The coverslip was fixed using dental acrylic (Fuji-Lute; GC Corp., Tokyo, Japan) to create an
486 imaging window in the skull. A custom-made stainless-steel recording chamber (ICM, Tsukuba,
487 Japan) was then attached to the skull using dental resin (Bistite II; Tokuyama Dental, Japan) such

488 that the imaging window was in the center of the chamber. After the imaging window was covered
489 with an acrylic lid, the marmoset was allowed to recover from the anesthesia in the monkey ICU
490 room and was then returned to its home cage.
491

492 ## In vivo two-photon excitation microscopy

493 In vivo two-photon imaging of neurites was performed using an upright microscope (BX61WI;
494 Olympus) equipped with a laser scanning microscope system (FV1000; Olympus) and a water-
495 immersion objective lens (XLPlanN, 25×, NA 1.05; Olympus). The system included mode-locked,
496 femtosecond-pulse Ti:sapphire lasers (MaiTai; Spectra Physics) set at a wavelength of 980 nm.
497

498 Imaging sessions were conducted every 3 days. A marmoset was pretreated with atropine and
499 anesthetized with sevoflurane inhalation (3–5%). The marmoset was laid in the prone position
500 and its head was fixed using the imaging chamber and brass posts (Fig. 1a). In each case, the
501 imaging location was identified based on blood vessel morphology. Tuft dendritic branches (<
502 100 μm depth) of layer 2/3 pyramidal neurons were used for two-photon imaging experiments.
503 An objective lens correction collar was manually set just before imaging so as to minimize
504 spherical aberrations (i.e., to acquire the brightest image possible). The reciprocal scan mode was
505 used to scan each *xy*-image (256 by 256 pixels; 65 msec/frame). Three-dimensional fluorescent
506 images with 51 *xy*-images, each separated by 0.5 μm, were obtained at each imaging site.
507

508 ## Dendritic spine and axonal bouton analysis

509 We applied a 2-pixel spatial Gaussian filter and then registered the obtained *xyz*-images using the
510 StackReg or Multi-StackReg plug-in function of Image-J (Fiji)[68]. Spines were identified as
511 protrusions from dendrites with an apparent head structure. Filopodial protrusions (which have
512 no apparent spine head) were excluded from the analysis. Two spines observed during different
513 sessions were considered to represent the same spine if the initial position subsequently exhibited

514 the same distances from adjacent landmarks. A spine was interpreted as lost if it temporarily
515 disappeared. The minimum spine length was set at 0.4 μm. Snowman-shaped spines (shaped like
516 two spheres stuck together) were interpreted as two separate spines. Only spines that appeared
517 laterally were included in the analysis (this underestimated the spine density). Dendrites that were
518 visible in all sessions were used in the analysis.
519
520 We also analyzed the axons that appeared in the same images as the dendrites. For axon analysis,
521 we used five marmosets that expressed mClover in the right hemisphere and tdTomato in the left
522 hemisphere (UE monkeys: TR, VR, BH; VPA-exposed monkeys: SH, MS). We applied a 2-pixel
523 spatial Gaussian filter to the *xyz*-images and obtained *z*-substacked average images for a
524 predetermined z number for each axon. By combining images obtained at the optimal depths, we
525 created montage images for each axon, avoiding dendrites and other axons present at other
526 imaging depths. We then examined the brightness along the axon shaft using the Plot-profile
527 function of Image-J[68]. The ratio of bouton brightness to neighboring axon shaft brightness was
528 then calculated. We did not see axons that were much thicker than the diffraction limit of our two-
529 photon imaging, and discarded areas that overlapped with other dendrites and axons. Boutons
530 were detected as bright swellings along axons, with intensity values at least two-fold higher than
531 that of the flanking axon backbone[69]. The 3-day bouton generation and elimination for unit axon
532 length were obtained by dividing the number of boutons generated and eliminated over a 3-day
533 period by the axon length. The 3-day bouton generation and elimination as a percentage were
534 calculated by dividing the 3-day bouton generation and elimination for unit axon length by the
535 mean bouton density. We did not exclude varicosities of transfer vesicles. In the next session,
536 boutons located within 1 μm of the expected point were interpreted as identical to those in the
537 previous session.
538

539 The percentage of newly formed spines or boutons was calculated as the number present at time
540 point 2 but not at time point 1, divided by the total number present at time point 1 and multiplied
541 by 100. The percentage of eliminated spines or boutons was calculated as the number present at
542 time point 1 but not at time point 2, divided by the total number present at time point 1 and
543 multiplied by 100.
544
545 To prevent underestimation of the inter-spine distances between the newly generated/eliminated
546 spines, inter-spine distances were measured after concatenating all measured dendrites into one
547 long dendrite in Figs. 2c and 2d. The concatenation was repeated 500 times, each time randomly
548 rearranging the order of the dendrites; the average plots of all 500 trials are shown in Figs. 2c and
549 2d.
550

551 ## Monte Carlo simulation of newly generated or eliminated dendritic spines

552 Monte Carlo simulation was performed to determine whether a clustering bias exists in the
553 process of spine generation/elimination[34]. We used values obtained from actual measurement for
554 the dendrite number and lengths, and the number of generated/eliminated spines in the simulation.
555 The positions of the generated/eliminated spines on the dendrites were then regenerated with a
556 uniform random distribution using Excel software. The distance between the
557 generated/eliminated spines was computed for all dendrites and the percentage of clustered events
558 was calculated (Fig. 2e). We set the clustering threshold at 3 μm, based on the diffusion distance
559 of calcium ions and molecules along the dendrite shaft[45, 47, 63], and the inter-spine interaction
560 distance of spine plasticity[42]. The above operations were performed 30,000 times to obtain the
561 distribution of clustering events, and the results are shown in Figs. 2f–i and 5d–i by connected
562 gray lines.
563

564 ## Dendritic spine volume measurement

565 We calculated the spine-head volume by partially summing the fluorescence values of five
566 sequential *z*-images by taking the moving average of the image stack along the *z*-plane. This was
567 done to avoid summing other dendrites or axonal fibers present in different imaging planes.
568 Because the thickness of dendritic spines is near the diffraction limit of a two-photon microscope,
569 partially summed values (2 μm range in the *z*-direction) can be used to reflect spine volumes.
570 Thus, the maximum value of *z*-moving average images allowed us to obtain good approximations
571 of the total *z*-summed stacked images. The normalized spine volume was obtained by dividing
572 the spine fluorescence intensity by the fluorescence intensity of the adjacent dendrite shaft.
573

574 ## Nasal oxytocin administration to VPA-exposed marmosets

575 New World monkey oxytocin (Pro-8 oxytocin[70]) was custom synthesized (GenScript, Piscataway,
576 NJ, USA) and was dissolved in 0.5 mg/mL of 0.9% NaCl solution. The oxytocin solution was
577 typically administered 2.5 h before the two-photon imaging and at approximately same time on
578 days without two-photon imaging. Oxytocin solution was applied to the nasal cavities of each
579 marmoset at a dose of 150 μg/kg body weight as in a previous study[70], using a micropipette
580 equipped with a soft silicon tube on the tip. Oxytocin was administered every day (monkey MS)
581 or every other day (monkeys PR and SH) starting on day −4 (Fig. 5a). Verification of oxytocin
582 delivery to the cerebral interstitial fluid was verified by measuring the plasma Pro8-oxytocin
583 concentration using a sandwich competitive chemiluminescent enzyme immunoassay (CLEIA)
584 (ASKA Pharma Medical, Fujisawa, Japan). The Pro8-oxytocin concentration in all blood samples
585 was monotonically increased 30 min after nasal oxytocin administration (mean ± s.d. = 30.6 ±
586 14.8 pg/mL; n = 2 males and 3 females) but not 30 min after nasal saline administration (mean ±
587 s.d. = 9.9 ± 1.7 pg/mL; n = 2 males and 3 females); thus, we concluded that Pro8-oxytocin was
588 successfully delivered to the interstitial fluid of the neocortex.
589

590 ## Microarray gene expression analysis

591 Microarray analysis of marmoset gene expression was performed using brain samples from three
592 adult VPA-exposed and three UE marmosets, as previously described[11]. To increase data
593 reliability, we pooled the data from the social brain areas (area 12 and area TE) that are affected
594 in humans with ASD. Tissue sampling and GeneChip analysis were conducted as previously
595 reported[11]. Briefly, marmosets were anesthetized with ketamine hydrochloride (50 mg/kg, i.m.)
596 and sodium pentobarbital (90–230 mg/kg, intraperitoneal; Kyoritsu Seiyaku). After reflections
597 had completely disappeared, the animals were transcardially perfused with diethyl pyrocarbonate-
598 treated phosphate-buffered saline, and the cortical tissue was isolated and immersed in RNAlater
599 (Thermo Fisher Scientific). Total RNA was extracted using the RNeasy Mini Kit (Qiagen). RNA
600 integrity was assessed using a Bioanalyzer (Agilent Technologies), and samples with RNA
601 integrity number values >7 were evaluated. Biotin-labeled cRNA probes were prepared using the
602 GeneChip 3'IVT Express Kit (Affymetrix). The probes were hybridized to a custom-made
603 microarray (Marmo2a520631F) using the GeneChip Hybridization, Wash, and Stain Kit
604 (Affymetrix). Microarrays were scanned using a GeneChip Scanner 3000 (Affymetrix) and
605 processed using MAS5, and the reliability of probe detection was examined. Data were
606 normalized using GCRMA. Genes with log2 expression values greater than 5 were considered to
607 be expressed in brain tissue. The log fold-change (logFC) value was used as a measure of gene
608 expression modulation and evaluated using Welch's t-test with Benjamini-Hochberg adjustment
609 (P_{adj}). For affected genes with multiple probes, the data from the probe with the lowest P_{adj} was
610 used. The precise methods for the comparison of logFC values between human ASDs and animal
611 models were described in **Supplementary Methods**. Pathway analysis of marmoset genes was
612 conducted using the IPA software (Qiagen, Summer Release 2020) and the precise methods were
613 described also in **Supplementary Methods**.
614

615 Statistical analysis

616 All data are presented as mean ± s.e.m (n = dendrite or axon numbers) unless otherwise stated.
617 The Mann-Whitney rank sum test was used to analyze the data shown in Figs. 1c, 1d, 2b, 3e, 4d,
618 and 4f–h. The difference in probability distribution between cumulative plots was calculated
619 using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, as shown in Figs. 1e, 1f, 2c, 2d and 4e. The differences
620 between means were analyzed using the Friedman test, as shown in Figs. 5b, 5c, and the Kruskal-
621 Wallis test in Figs. 6a–f. The Pearson's chi-square test was used to examine the frequency of the
622 carryover spines and that of the total spines, with results shown in Figs. 3c and 3d. Fisher's exact
623 test was also used to examine the spine survival rates for each condition in Fig. 1g, 3f. The P-
624 values in Fig. 5j were obtained from the distribution of the simulation. The r and P-values in Figs.
625 7a and 7d show Pearson's correlation coefficients (r) and their P-values (P_r) against zero. The
626 concordance values (c) and their P-values (P_c) in Fig. 7b show the number of genes exhibiting
627 concordant changes between the animal model and human ASD divided by the total number of
628 genes, and the probability was calculated using the one-sided binomial test. Other statistical tests
629 are specified in the text or figure legends or elsewhere in the **Methods** section. Quantification,
630 simulation, and statistical analysis were performed using Microsoft Excel, GraphPad Prism 9.3.1.,
631 and Real Statistics software (for Kolmogorov-Smirnov test; www.real-statistics.com.). Data
632 collection and analysis were not performed in a blinded manner, and data were not randomized
633 for analysis. No statistical methods were used to predetermine sample sizes, although our sample
634 sizes are similar to those previously reported[17, 38].
635
636

637 ## Data availability

638 The microarray data generated in this study have been deposited at NCBI GEO under accession
639 number GSE199560. All other data supporting the findings of this study are in **Supplementary**
640 **Data 1-2**. All public domain data used in this study are listed in the **Methods** section and
641 **Supplemental Methods** file.

642

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Author contributions

J.N. and N.I. designed the study; J.N., S.W., R.I., and K.S. performed the in vivo two-photon imaging; K.N. created the autism model marmosets; J.N. and R.I. conducted image analyses; E. S., H.T., H.M., A.W., and T.Y. prepared the AAV vectors.; S.W., T.O., K.S., K.H., K.S., and I.M. conducted the microarray analysis.; J.N. and N.I. wrote the manuscript. All authors agreed to the manuscript of the paper.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Additional information

Supplementary information **Supplementary Methods** (attached at the end of this manuscript), **Supplementary Data 1** and **2** (omitted)

Correspondence and requests for data should be addressed to J.N. or N.I.

853 # Supplementary Methods

854 Comparison of log fold change (logFC) values between human autism spectrum disorder (ASD)
855 and animal models, as determined by the coexpression modules.

856 To examine gene expression changes in the ASD group compared to the typically developed
857 human group or in the ASD model animals compared to the controls, logFC values were
858 calculated for the genes analyzed by the gene chip. The concordance values were then calculated
859 for each gene module[1, 2] to show consistency in the direction of gene expression changes between
860 human ASD and the animal models (Fig. 7c). Practically, the concordance value was the
861 percentage of genes that changed in a common direction (first and third quadrants in Fig. 7a, b,
862 d) in human ASD and the model animal. For modules with at least 8 common genes between the
863 animal model and human ASD, the concordance values were shown by the color in Fig. 7c. The
864 logFC values of VPA rats[3] (35–day), BTBR mice[4] (4–month), FMR1 mice[5] (8-14–week),
865 MeCP2 heterozygous mice[6] (5–week), Tcf4 mice[7] (60-80–day), 15q13 mice[8] (10-22–week), and
866 Pten^{m3m4} mice[9] (6–week) were obtained from the literatures previously published; The numbers
867 in parentheses show their age. To compare gene expression modulations in the marmoset model
868 with those in human ASD of postmortem samples[2], commonly modulated genes with $P_{adj} < 0.1$
869 were used. For the rat VPA models and BTBR mice, the genes with $P_{adj} < 0.05$ were selected; for
870 other models and human ASD, $P_{adj} < 0.1$ were selected. To compare gene expression modulations
871 in the rodent models with those in human ASD, gene symbols were converted using HomoloGene
872 (NCBI, https:// www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/homologene, release 68). Due to the small number of
873 genes that are commonly affected, mouse models of maternal immune activation[10] and Shank3
874 knockout[11] were not included in the list.

875

876

877 Signaling pathway estimation of marmoset genes

878 Pathway analysis of marmoset genes was conducted using the IPA software (Qiagen, Summer
879 Release 2020). Brain cell type (neuron, astrocyte, microglia, oligodendrocyte, and endothelial
880 cell) specific genes were selected from genes with mean logFC gene enrichment values > 2, in
881 the top ranked cell type-enriched genes based on the human single cell analysis data in the
882 previous report[12].
883

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