Ultra-Fast Multi-Organ Proteomics Unveils Tissue-Specific Mechanisms of Drug Efficacy and Toxicity

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Abstract

Rapid and comprehensive analysis of complex proteomes across large sample sets is vital for unlocking the potential of systems biology. We present UFP-MS, an ultra-fast mass spectrometry (MS) proteomics method that integrates narrow-window data-independent acquisition (nDIA) with short-gradient micro-flow chromatography, enabling profiling of >240 samples per day. This optimized MS approach identifies 6,201 and 7,466 human proteins with 1- and 2-min gradients, respectively. Our streamlined sample preparation workflow features high-throughput homogenization, adaptive focused acoustics (AFA)-assisted proteolysis, and Evotip-accelerated desalting, allowing for the processing of up to 96 tissue samples in 5 h. As a practical application, we analyzed 507 samples from 13 mouse tissues treated with the enzyme-drug L-asparaginase (ASNase) or its glutaminase-free Q59L mutant, generating a quantitative profile of 11,472 proteins following drug treatment. The MS results confirmed the impact of ASNase on amino acid metabolism in solid tissues. Further analysis revealed broad suppression of anticoagulants and cholesterol metabolism and uncovered numerous tissue-specific dysregulated pathways. In summary, the UFP-MS method greatly accelerates the generation of biological insights and clinically actionable hypotheses into tissue-specific vulnerabilities targeted by ASNase.

Introduction

The past decade witnessed remarkable technological and scientific strides that paved the way for advances in systems biology(*1, 2*). Innovations in genome sequencing have enabled the generation of large molecular datasets spanning a range of biological systems and matrices, from cells to tissues to biological fluids(*3, 4*). Concurrently, mass spectrometry (MS)-based proteomics has emerged as an essential tool for high-throughput protein-level measurements, becoming indispensable for functional genomics and systems biology(*5-7*).

MS-based proteomics studies can typically be divided into three major steps: sample preparation, MS data acquisition, and data analysis. Whereas data analysis tools have improved significantly in recent years(*8-12*), sample pretreatment and MS-based data acquisition remain limiting steps in proteomics investigation. A variety of sample preparation workflows have been developed for proteomic studies with specific sample types and experimental goals(*13, 14*). However, most workflows are limited in the number of samples that can be processed simultaneously, precluding their application to larger systems biology studies. For MS data acquisition, proteome coverage is a critical challenge due to the wide dynamic range of protein expression levels in cells, ranging from tens to over a million copies per cell. The most common approach to address that complexity has been multi-shot proteomics with offline peptide fractionation(*15-17*), but this approach necessitates extensive instrument time and large sample volumes. Prompted by those limitations, ongoing effort has been allocated to the development of improved single-shot strategies. Recently, narrow-window DIA (nDIA) was reported to achieve the identification of ~10,000 proteins within 1 h, and ~7,000 proteins in a 5-min gradient on the Orbitrap Astral MS(*18*).

Here, building on recent advances with nDIA, we introduce a workflow that combines an optimized nDIA-MS method with high-throughput sample preparation to facilitate rapid and in-depth proteome profiling. The method employs 1-Th quadrupole isolation windows and achieves identification of 6,201 and 7,466 proteins with 1- and 2-min LC gradients, respectively. Our streamlined sample preparation incorporates high-throughput tissue homogenization, adaptive focused acoustics (AFA)-assisted proteolysis, and Evotip-accelerated desalting, enabling the processing of up to 96 tissue samples within 5 h. To demonstrate the utility of our approach, we conducted a systems proteomics analysis of 507 biological samples across 13 tissue types to examine the systems pharmacology of L-Asparaginase (ASNase). The results provided a quantitative landscape of 11,472 proteins, uncovering distinct tissue-specific responses that shed new light on mechanisms of ASNase sensitivity, resistance, and toxicity.

Results

Identification of 6,201 proteins per minute with UFP-MS

The Orbitrap Astral MS system combines a modified Orbitrap Exploris 480 MS with the asymmetric track lossless (Astral) analyzer[19] (Fig. 1a). The Astral analyzer supports parallel MS2 scanning and achieves MS acquisition rates of up to 200 Hz, making it well suited for ultra-high-throughput proteomics analysis[20, 21].

As a benchmark for ultra-high-throughput analysis, the Evosep One system (Evosep, #AN-024A-500SPD) coupled with a timsTOF Pro 2 identifies 2,500 proteins with a 2.2-min LC gradient, achieving a protein identification rate of over 1,000 proteins per min (Supplementary Fig. 1). Based on that, we first coupled an Evosep One system with an Orbitrap Astral MS (Fig. 1b). Using a similar LC gradient and nDIA MS method, we identified an average of 5,160 proteins and 34,173 peptides from 200 ng of HeLa digest (Fig. 1c). To further improve proteome coverage, we modified the LC system by transferring the Evosep endurance column (Evosep, #EV1107, 4 cm x 150 μm, 1.9 μm particle size) and stainless-steel emitter (Evosep, #EV1086, ID 30 μm) to a Vanquish Neo UHPLC system. This modification permitted greater LC gradient flexibility. With an optimized 2-min gradient, proteome coverage was improved to an average of 6,549 proteins and 54,306 peptides (Fig. 1c).

Thereafter, we evaluated various MS data acquisition parameters (Fig. 1b). Consistent with previous studies[18], decreasing MS2 maximum injection time (IT) from 3.5 ms to 2.5 ms improved peptide detection (Fig. 1d). Further decreases below 2 ms led to decreased identifications. We next investigated the impact of mass range (MR) on duty cycle, comparing mass ranges of 380-980, 400-800, and 495-745 Th with corresponding isolation windows (Fig. 1e). The 495-745 Th mass range with a 1 Th isolation window delivered optimal results at the protein level. Further exploration of isolation windows from 0.8 to 2.0 Th confirmed that a 1 Th isolation window yielded the highest number of protein identifications (Fig. 1f). Automatic gain control (AGC) target values ranging from 100 to 600 produced similar results, with an AGC of 500 marginally improving precursor ion detection (Fig. 1g). Based on the evaluations, we established a modified nDIA method with an injection time of 2.5 ms, mass range of 495-745, 1 Th isolation window, and an AGC value of 500.

We next assessed the performance across LC gradients from 1 to 5 min. Notably, even with a 1-min gradient, we still identified ~6,201 human proteins from 1 ug HeLa digest, albeit with a decrease in peptide number (Fig. 1h). A 2-min gradient yielded 7,466 proteins and 59,919 peptides. Proteome coverage remained at nearly 8,000 proteins with gradients from 3 to 5 min. The protein identification rate of up to 6,201 proteins per min greatly exceeds that of previous reports[22-24] (Supplementary Fig. 1a, b).

To evaluate the quantitative performance of the new method, we analyzed proteome samples from three species (human, yeast, and *Escherichia coli*) mixed in various ratios. Overall, an average of 9,434 proteins were identified in each mixed sample (Fig. 1i). Quantitative analysis demonstrated accurate protein quantitation across six different ratios (1:9, 1:4, 2:3, 3:2, 4:1, and 9:1) (Fig. 1j). By comparing the different mixtures, we found that the total MS intensities of yeast and *Escherichia coli peptides* increase linearly with respect to sample input (Fig. 1k).

High-throughput sample preparation accelerates large-scale tissue proteomics

To address the next rate-limiting step, sample preparation, we developed a rapid workflow integrating high-throughput tissue homogenization, adaptive focused acoustic (AFA)-

accelerated proteolysis, and Evotip desalting (Fig. 2a). The Precellys Evolution tissue
homogenizer performs bead-based protein extraction for up to 24 samples simultaneously,
achieving thorough homogenization in less than 1 min. Protein digestion is accelerated using a
Covaris R230 Focused-Ultrasonicator, which can handle 96 samples concurrently. Peptide
desalting with racked Evotips enabled simultaneous cleaning of up to 96 peptide samples in 30
min.

We next compared proteolytic digestion performance with and without sonication across
durations from 30 min to 15 h (Fig. 2b-d). MS results showed that 4-h digestion with AFA-
assisted sonication provided the highest number of peptides and proteins, although minor
differences were observed across conditions (Fig. 2b, c). Over 90% of peptides had only one or
no missed cleavage sites across all conditions (Fig. 2d), with AFA-assisted digestion exhibiting
slightly better performance in all scenarios. We ultimately chose 4-h digestion to maximize
protein recovery, which translates to a total of ~5 h to process 96 samples (Fig. 2a).

We next analyzed three mouse tissues (brain, kidney, and lung) to compare the output obtained
from a standard workflow and the optimized high-throughput workflow (Fig. 2e, Supplementary
Fig. 1c). The high-throughput method identified an average of 6,976, 5,665, and 6,355 proteins
from brain, kidney, and lung, respectively, which was comparable to the results from the
standard workflow. Pairwise comparisons of protein abundance ratios between two tissues at a
time demonstrated Pearson correlation coefficients consistently exceeding 0.83 (Fig. 2f-h),
indicating comparable quantitative performance between the two methods.

We next estimated the sample preparation time required to process 507 tissue samples (Fig. 2i,
j). The standard workflow requires 369 work hours, equivalent to 46.1 x 8-h workdays. The high-
throughput workflow, however, needs only 46.9 work hours (5.9 workdays), providing more than
seven times higher throughput for large-scale studies.

Multi-organ quantitative profiling of 11,472 proteins following ASNase treatment

L-Asparaginase (ASNase) is a critical component of the standard of care for pediatric acute
lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL). However, its application to adult leukemias and solid tumors is
hindered by significant side effects and drug resistance(*25*). ASNase toxicity is attributed in part
to its glutaminase co-activity(*25*). There has been interest in engineering glutaminase-free
variants that decrease side effects while maintaining efficacy(*26*). We previously demonstrated
the anticancer activity of the glutaminase-free Q59L mutant (ASNase[Q59L]) against ASNS-
negative cell lines(*27-29*), but those findings failed to translate to a preclinical mouse model(*28*),
suggesting that ASNase glutaminase activity is necessary for its anticancer efficacy (Fig. 3a).
To aid in the development of new ASNase-based therapeutic strategies, it is essential to gain a
systems-level understanding of the mechanisms through which ASNase mediates anticancer
activity and toxicity.

To that end, we applied the optimized method to analyze tissue samples from NSG mice treated
with PBS (vehicle control), 20,000 U/kg ASNase[WT] (Spectrila®), or 20,000 U/kg ASNase[Q59L] for
0, 1, 3, 5, and 8 d (Fig. 3b). At each time point, mice were euthanized, and 13 tissues were
collected, including subcutaneous white adipose tissue (SQWAT), gonadal adipose tissue
(GAT), lung, spleen, stomach, small and large intestine, liver, kidney, heart, leg muscle, brain,
and bone marrow (Fig. 3c). Analysis of a total of 507 collected tissue samples yielded 11,472
proteins and 104,784 peptides across all samples (Fig 3d, Supplementary Fig. 1d). The highest
numbers of proteins and peptides were observed in the brain, followed by the large intestine,
stomach, lung, spleen, GAT, bone marrow, and SQWAT. The lowest identifications were found
in leg muscle and heart. As anticipated, the correlation matrix displayed strong associations

between the two fat depots, SQWAT and GAT (Fig. 3e). Lung protein expression correlated strongly with that of spleen, bone marrow, and kidney. Large intestine protein expression was more strongly correlated with that of stomach than with small intestine (Fig. 3e). Unsupervised clustering using t-SNE confirmed the similarity of stomach and large intestine (Fig. 3f). We then used heatmaps to illustrate the quantitative overview of protein expression following ASNase treatment in each tissue (Fig. 3g). In most organs, we observed significant differences in protein expression between ASNase^{WT} and PBS treatments, whereas ASNase^{Q59L} yielded only minor differences compared to PBS (Fig. 3g). For example, we saw notable changes in the spleen, but ASNase^{Q59L} also induced unique changes in the bone marrow, kidney, and GAT. These results suggest organ-specific drug effects. We next mined these data to generate new insights into the mechanisms of ASNase efficacy and toxicity across different tissues.

Amino acid metabolodynamics in whole blood confirm the efficacy of ASNase

To confirm the efficacy of ASNase^{WT}, we measured the levels of asparagine (ASN) and aspartic acid (ASP) in whole blood samples (Fig. 4a). Consistent with our previous results(*28, 29*), ASN reached a trough level after one day of treatment with ASNase^{WT} and remained at trough level throughout the 8-day time course, while ASP levels were essentially unaffected (Fig. 4b, c). In contrast, treatment with ASNase^{Q59L} yielded only partial and transient depletion of ASN followed by rapid restoration, suggesting that the body mounted resistance by up-regulating production of ASN.

Our previous studies observed that ASNase^{WT} and ASNase^{Q59L} had subtly different effects on glutamine (GLN) and glutamic acid (GLU) levels in a 24-h time course(*28, 29*). In this study, the extended 8-d time course revealed significant increases of both GLN and GLU levels following ASNase^{WT} but not ASNase^{Q59L} treatment (Fig. 4d, e), consistent with the reported up-regulation of glutamine synthetase (GLUL) and glutaminases (GLS, GLS2) following ASNase^{WT} treatment *in vitro(30, 31)*. These data confirm the *in vivo* efficacy of ASNase^{WT} and highlight key differences between ASNase^{WT} and ASNase^{Q59L}.

Organ-specific resistance and vulnerability to ASNase

To assess the system-wide pharmacodynamic and metabolodynamic effects of ASNase in solid tissues, we monitored ASN, ASP, GLN, and GLU levels across six tissues: SQWAT, lung, spleen, liver, brain, and bone marrow (Fig. 4f). Consistent with observations in blood, ASNase^{WT} treatment resulted in a sustained depletion of ASN in all six tissues, whereas ASNase^{Q59L} initially decreased ASN levels but subsequently up-regulated ASN at these sites (Fig. 4f). We did not observe significant changes in ASP, GLN, or GLU levels after drug treatment in most tissues, except in the liver, where ASNase^{WT} induced increases in all three amino acids after prolonged treatment. Notably, we observed a decrease in ASP levels in the spleen following ASNase^{WT} but not ASNase^{Q59L} treatment. These findings contrast with the observed blood effects, highlighting spleen-specific suppression of ASP metabolism as a targeted vulnerability of ASNase^{WT} treatment.

Asparagine synthetase (ASNS) is a well-established mediator of resistance to ASNase(*25, 27, 28, 32, 33*). However, multiple reports have also described ASNS-low cancer cells exhibiting resistance to ASNase *in vivo(28, 34, 35)*. In assessing ASNS expression levels we observed rapid and extensive up-regulation in the lung, small intestine, large intestine, liver, and kidney following both ASNase^{WT} and ASNase^{Q59L} treatments (Fig. 4g), suggesting that broad ASNS up-regulation could potentially explain the resistance of low-ASNS tumors to ASNase treatment. In

contrast, both ASNase variants suppressed ASNS up-regulation in brain, bone marrow, heart, and muscle. Strikingly, only spleen exhibited down-regulation of ASNS following ASNase[WT] but not ASNase[Q59L] treatment. The spleen, a vital organ in the immune system, filters and stores blood and produces white blood cells that protect the body from infection. Given the association of the spleen with blood cells, our findings prompt the hypothesis that spleen-specific suppression of ASNS is a feature of the ASNase mechanism of action against ALL. If future experiments confirm that to be true, combination therapy with an ASNS inhibitor could present a path for extending ASNase treatment to solid tumors.

In addition to ASNS, we examined the effects of ASNase on the broad network of proteins associated with ASN, ASP, GLN, and GLU metabolism (Supplementary Fig. 2a, b). Many of the observed changes suggested adaptive responses to ASNase[WT]. Specifically, we observed up-regulation of: GLUL in spleen, stomach, small intestine, kidney, and heart; GLS in SQWAT, lung, spleen, stomach, small intestine, and kidney; GLUD1 in spleen, stomach, and bone marrow; at least one transaminase (GOT1, GOT2, GPT, GPT2) in all 13 tissues; at least one glutamine transporter (SLC1A5, SLC38A3) in stomach, and liver; and at least one glutathione metabolism component (GCLC, GCLM) in SQWAT, GAT, small intestine, large intestine, brain, and bone marrow. Up-regulation of those glutamine metabolism sub-pathways at the indicated organ sites suggests adaptive resistance mechanisms (i.e., compensatory mechanisms to maintain levels of the four amino acids during nutrient stress).

Nevertheless, five organs exhibited down-regulation of glutamine metabolism in response to ASNase[WT] treatment (Supplementary Figure 2a, b). SQWAT exhibited down-regulation of CPQ, FOLH1, GOT1, GOT2, and SLC25A22. Spleen exhibited down-regulation of ALDH18A1, CAD, CTPS1, DARS2, GCLM, GMPS, PAICS, PFAS, PPAT, and SLC1A5. Liver exhibited down-regulation of ABAT, CPQ, GGCX, GLS, GLS2, GLUL, GOT2, and NADSYN1. Kidney exhibited down-regulation of ACY1, ACY3, BCAT1, CAD, CTPS1, GATB, GCLC, GPT, and SLC25A22. And muscle exhibited down-regulation of ABAT, ASNS, ASPA, ASS1, BCAT2, CAD, CPQ, DARS2, GCLC, GCLM, GLS, GLUD1, GMPS, GOT1, GOT2, GPT, NARS2, OPLAH, PAICS, PFAS, SLC1A5, and SLC25A22.

Overall, these analyses indicate that most organ sites mount an adaptive response to ASNase[WT]. Nevertheless, potentially vulnerable organs include spleen, SQWAT, liver, kidney, and muscle (Fig. 4g). Among those, spleen uniquely exhibited suppression of ASNS protein (Fig. 4g). No clinical toxicities of ASNase have been associated specifically with spleen, muscle, or kidney, suggesting that using ASNase to treat tumors arising from or supported by those tissues may be safe. Liver and SQWAT were vulnerable organs that have been linked to clinical toxicities.

System-wide suppression of anticoagulants and cholesterol metabolism as likely drivers of ASNase toxicity

To explore other coordinated stress responses following drug treatment across tissues, we next compared protein expression profiles between ASNase-treated and PBS-treated samples at the pathway level. Proteins with an average fold change in expression greater than 2 or less than 0.5 and a p-value < 0.05 were classified as differentially modulated (Fig. 5a-d, Supplementary Fig. 3-15). ASNase[WT] treatment significantly modulated (positively or negatively) the vast majority of proteins in liver and spleen (Fig. 5a, b). ASNase[Q59L] treatment mainly up-regulated proteins in the liver, GAT, and small intestine, while down-regulating proteins in kidney, bone marrow, stomach, liver, and brain (Fig. 5c, d).

KEGG pathway enrichment analysis provided several notable insights (Supplementary Fig. 8-12). First, the suppressive effects of ASNase[WT] were highly consistent across organ sites, with pathways such as "complement and coagulation cascades," cholesterol metabolism, and coronavirus disease being nearly uniformly downregulated in all tissues (Fig. 5e). No pathways were uniformly up-regulated across all tissues (Fig. 5e), indicating that the up-regulated pathways are highly tissue-specific. Similarly, ASNase[Q59L] also did not uniformly modulate any pathways across organ sites (Fig. 5f).

Closer inspection of the MS proteomic data confirmed that most identified proteins in the complement and coagulation cascade and cholesterol metabolism pathways were down-regulated across all 13 tissue types following ASNase[WT] but not ASNase[Q59L] treatment (Fig. 6a). Focusing on proteins that were consistently dysregulated across multiple tissues, 28 proteins were commonly up-regulated, and 68 proteins were commonly down-regulated across at least three tissues following ASNase[WT] treatment (Fig. 6b, c). ASNase[Q59L] treatment up- or down-regulated 56 and 24 shared proteins, respectively (Fig. 6d, e). Around 50% of all proteins commonly down-regulated by ASNase[WT] were involved in cholesterol metabolism or the complement and coagulation cascades (Fig. 6f-h). Together, these results suggested that well-known ASNase toxicities—hypertriglyceridemia and venous thromboembolism (VTE)—result from system-wide down-regulation of cholesterol metabolism and the complement and coagulation pathways.

ASNase[WT] modulation of metabolites and proteins converge on inhibition of DNA replication and activation of ferroptosis in spleen

Although down-regulation of cholesterol metabolism and the complement and coagulation pathways was observed in nearly all tissues tested, this was not the case in the spleen (Fig. 5e). As noted previously, spleen uniquely exhibited decreased ASP levels (Fig. 4f) and decreased ASNS protein levels following ASNase[WT] treatment (Fig. 4g). Considering the strong association between spleen and blood cells, we next analyzed the quantitative MS proteome profiles of the spleen following drug treatment. We compared PBS- and ASNase[WT]-treated spleen proteomes and subjected differentially modulated proteins with a p-value < 0.05 and fold change > 2 or < 0.5 to functional clustering against the KEGG pathways database (Fig. 6a-c)(36). Since no dysregulated pathways were enriched prior to 3 d of treatment, we focused on effects at 3, 5, and 8 d. Notably, proteins associated with the "lysosome" pathway were significantly up-regulated at all time points, and DNA replication was significantly down-regulated at all time points (Fig.7a-c). At 8 d, "glutathione metabolism" and "ferroptosis" were significantly up-regulated (Fig. 7c). ASNase[Q59L] did not affect those pathways (Supplementary Fig. 5).

Consistent with previous reports of ASNase-induced autophagy (a lysosome-driven process)(37), our data showed up-regulation of: i) lysosomal cysteine proteases CTSA, CTSB, CTSD, CTSF, and CTSZ; ii) lysosomal glycosidases GLA, GLB1, GNS, GUSB, HEXB, and NAGA; and iii) lysosomal phosphatases ACP2 and ACP5 following treatment of ASNase[WT] (Fig. 7d). ASNase[Q59L] did not significantly modulate lysosomal proteins. The induction of lysosomal proteins may be a consequence of decreased ASP and ASN, since lysosome-driven autophagy plays an important role in producing amino acids via recycling of proteins(38).

Prolonged ASNase[WT] treatment also up-regulated glutathione (GSH) metabolism and ferroptosis (Fig.7c). In parallel, our metabolomic data revealed that GSH was decreased by ASNase[WT] and significantly increased by ASNase[Q59L] in the spleen (Fig. 7e). Most up-regulated GSH metabolism proteins were catalytic enzymes (Fig. 7d), including glutathione peroxidase 3 (GPX3), glutathione hydrolase 5 heavy chain (GGT5), and glutathione transferases (GSTA3, GSTK1, and MGST1). Their up-regulation following ASNase[WT] treatment was consistent with

the decrease of GSH level (Fig. 7e). Since GSH is a key reducing equivalent and negative modulator of ferroptosis, its concurrent down-regulation with the up-regulation of ferroptosis was mechanistically consistent(39). The up-regulated ferroptosis pathway encompassed four proteins including CYBB, FTH1, FTL1, and HMOX1 (Fig. 7d). We also observed down-regulation of porphyrin metabolism following ASNase[WT] for 3 and 8 days (Fig. 7a, c), prompting the hypothesis that down-regulation of porphyrin metabolism permits accumulation of free iron, which is required for ferroptosis (Fig.7c).

A number of DNA replication proteins were down-regulated by ASNase[WT] treatment (Fig. 7a-d): a) DNA polymerases POLA1, POLA2, POLD1, POLD3, and POLE; b) components of the MCM2-7 complex MCM2, MCM3, MCM4, MCM5, MCM6, and MCM7; c) DNA primases PRIM1 and PRIM2; d) ribonuclease H2 subunits RNASEH2A and RNASEH2B; and e) other DNA replication-associated proteins PCNA, RPA1/3, RFC2/5, FEN1, and LIG1 (Fig. 7d). Down-regulation of DNA replication may be associated with the decrease of ASP (Fig. 4f), which contributes to *de novo* synthesis of purine and pyrimidine nucleotides(40). Interestingly, of all amino acids in spleen following ASNase treatment, only ASP and ASN were clearly down-regulated (Fig. 7f, Supplementary Fig. 16). Correspondingly, metabolomics indicated significant decrease of several deoxyribonucleotides, including dTDP, dUMP, dTMP, dCDP, dCTP, and dGTP (Fig.7g), further supporting the observed down-regulation of nucleotide synthesis at the protein and pathway levels.

Spleen-specific down-regulation of ASNS may be associated with up-regulation of aminopeptidases LAP3 and ANPEP (Fig. 7d) and down-regulation of ribosome and translation pathways (Fig. 7a, b, d, Supplementary Fig 17a, b). A number of mitochondrial proteins that were specifically down-regulated in spleen (Fig. 7d, Supplementary Fig.17a, b), which is consistent with previous reports that mitochondrial electron transport chain enables synthesis of ASP(41). To note, in addition to the deoxyribonucleotides that described above, adenosine triphosphate (ATP) was also decreased in spleen following ASNase[WT] treatment (Supplementary Fig 17c).

Collectively, integrated analysis of proteomic and metabolomic data implicates the spleen as a highly vulnerable target of ASNase[WT]. That vulnerability is potentially explained by signaling cascades that modulate amino acid metabolism, energy metabolism, redox metabolism, and global protein synthesis converging on inhibition of DNA replication and induction of cell death (ferroptosis) (Fig. 7h), suggesting a plausible mechanism supported by our findings: 1) ASNase[WT] decreases ASN and ASP in spleen (Fig. 7f); 2) endoplasmic reticulum stress and protein misfolding are up-regulated(42, 43)); 3) lysosomal enzymes are activated (Fig. 7d); 4) reactive oxygen species (ROS) accumulate; 5) GSH is consumed (Fig. 7d, e); 6) damaged mitochondria accumulate; 7) mitophagy clears damaged mitochondria (Fig. 7d) and further decreases ASP production and nucleotide synthesis (Fig. 7f, g) and ATP levels (Supplementary Fig 17c); 8) DNA replication is suppressed (Fig. 7a-d); 9) recycling of damaged RBCs together with suppression of porphyrin synthesis leads to accumulation of free iron (Fig. 7a, c); and 10) ferroptosis is activated (Fig. 7c, d). The observed decrease of ASNS expression is likely due to the combined impairment of protein synthesis (Fig. 7d), decrease of ASP (substrate of ASNS) availability (Fig. 7f), and increased lysosomal degradation (Fig. 7d).

ASNase dysregulates system-wide and tissue-specific pathways

In addition to findings in spleen, our analysis revealed numerous tissue-specific dysregulated pathways in other tissues following ASNase treatment. These observations offer further insights into the effects of ASNase[WT] at the system-wide and tissue-specific levels. Those results are discussed in the Supplementary Information.

Discussion

MS-based proteomics has become an essential tool for high-throughput investigation of cellular proteins. While RNA sequencing technologies are adept at quantifying gene expression levels, the direct analysis of proteins—the principal executors of cellular functions—remains indispensable in biological research.

To improve upon the latest advances of ultra-high-throughput LC (Evosep, #AN-024A-500SPD) and MS (nDIA on Orbitrap Astral MS(*44*)) technologies, we present a novel LC-MS approach that integrates optimized nDIA with short-gradient micro-flow chromatography, yielding identification of 6,201 and 7,466 proteins with 1- or 2-min LC gradients, respectively. The achieved protein identification rate of up to 6,201 proteins per min represents more than a two-fold improvement over previously reported cutting-edge methods (Supplementary Fig. 1a, b)(*18, 22-24, 45*).

Sample preparation also represents a critical rate-limiting step for large-scale proteomics experiments. To address this, we designed a rapid tissue proteomics workflow capable of processing up to 96 tissue samples within 5 h, including a 4 h proteolysis step. We used the workflow to obtain more than seven-fold increased throughput (Fig. 2i) in a multi-organ systems proteomics project involving 507 tissue samples (Fig. 2i). Decreasing the protein digestion time to 30 min increases overall processing speed to 96 samples per hour but results in a marginal decrease (2.2%) in protein identification (Supplementary Table 8). Our chosen application was tissue proteomics, but the workflow can be adapted to other biological matrices.

We chose the systems pharmacology of ASNase as an application primarily because its toxicity has prevented application to adult patients and cancers beyond pediatric ALL(*25*). Additionally, despite >50 years of research, the effects of its glutaminase activity and the mechanistic underpinnings of ASNase sensitivity and resistance are poorly understood.

The quantitative profile of 11,472 proteins provides a detailed multi-organ roadmap of dysregulated cellular pathways following ASNase treatment. New insights regarding ASNase toxicities included the association of VTE with suppression of the complement and coagulation system, and association of hypertriglyceridemia with widespread suppression of cholesterol metabolism.

The complement and coagulation pathways are crucial for host defense against pathogen infection and injury, involving blood-based defense systems that are proteolytically activated to produce active molecules crucial for immunity and clotting(*46*). Genes associated with the coronavirus disease pathway also include complement factors and immune response elements. Within the 44 down-regulated proteins associated with the complement and coagulation cascades, 11 have anti-coagulant function (CPB2, KNG1, KNG2, PLG, PROC, SERPINA1B, SERPINA1D, SERPINC1, SERPIND1, SERPINF2, SPERING1), and the remaining 33 have pro-coagulant function. Most of the 11 anti-coagulant proteins were down-regulated in up to 9 of the 13 tissue types (Fig. 6a). Similarly, previous research on the VTE side effects of ASNase identified down-regulation of plasminogen (PLG), antithrombin III (SERPINC1), and fibrinogen (FGA, FGB, FGG) (*47, 48*). SERPINC1 is of primary interest in current clinical practice; guidance recommends weekly monitoring of SERPINC1 levels in patients and administration of recombinant SERPINC1 when levels fall below 60% with a repletion target of 80% to 120%(*49*). Our findings reveal that SERPINC1 was widely down-regulated in most of the 13 tissues (Fig. 6a) and exhibited a significant decrease in three specific tissues including stomach, liver, and kidney (Fig. 6h). Additionally, PLG, SERPINA1B (human homolog SERPINA1), SERPINA1D (human homolog SERPINA1), and SERPIND1 were even more significantly down-regulated than SERPINC1 (Fig. 6g), representing potentially more impactful targets for mitigating ASNase-induced VTE. Although no recombinant variants of PLG or SERPIND1 exist yet,

INBRX-101, a recombinant Fc fusion protein of SERPINA1 (alpha-1 antitrypsin) is entering Phase 2/3 testing(*50*). Given that only 60% of patients with VTE respond to SERPINC1 repletion, our results provide a rationale for testing INBRX-101 for further mitigation of ASNase-induced VTE. All in all, our data confirm previous findings and identify additional changes in complement and coagulation cascade proteins following ASNase treatment, further linking the down-regulation of these pathways to VTE.

Within the 17 down-regulated proteins in the cholesterol metabolism pathway, 6 (APOA1, APOA2, APOA4, APOC2, LCAT, and SORT1) are negative modulators of triglyceride levels, and their down-regulation potentially explains ASNase-induced hypertriglyceridemia(*51, 52*). It has been hypothesized that ASNase-induced hypertriglyceridemia, which occurs in up to 50% of patients, is the result of very low-density lipoprotein (VLDL) up-regulation(*53, 54*). That hypothesis is not sufficiently granular, though, because VLDL components can be positive or negative modulators of triglyceride levels based on whether they facilitate secretion or uptake of triglycerides. Considering VLDL components as a whole, our data revealed prominent down-regulation of APOA4, APOC1, APOC2, APOE, and APOH in SQWAT, lung, liver, large intestine, and heart tissues (Fig. 5e, Fig. 6a, c, h). All of those except APOE are negative modulators of triglyceride levels; their down-regulation could potentially explain ASNase-induced hypertriglyceridemia. In four tissues we also observed a notable increase in adiponectin (ADIPOQ), which promotes the catabolism of VLDL triglycerides and may explain the observed down-regulation of VLDL apolipoproteins (Fig. 6b)(*55*). Together, these findings support the following mechanistic hypothesis to explain ASNase-induced hypertriglyceridemia: i) nutrient stress triggers lipogenic processes culminating in triglyceride synthesis; ii) ASNase suppresses the capacity of organs (primarily the liver) to assemble triglyceride-VLDL complexes, and/or ASNase-induced ADIPOQ rapidly catabolizes such complexes before they can be exported; and iii) free triglycerides are secreted into systemic circulation without a mechanism to distribute them into tissues (mainly fat), leading to triglyceride accumulation in the blood.

In considering therapeutic strategies to mitigate ASNase-induced hypertriglyceridemia, our results identify ADIPOQ as one potential target, but no inhibitors are currently available. Additional candidate targets include the two known positive modulators of triglyceride levels— APOC3 and APOE. Indeed, our data indicates that APOC3 was maintained near baseline levels or elevated in SQWAT, spleen, stomach, large intestine, kidney, muscle, brain, and bone marrow (Fig. 6a). APOC3 was recently identified as a target for lowering triglycerides by up to 77% using the antisense inhibitor volanesorsen(*56*). APOE, as noted previously, was down-regulated in most tissues, but it was strikingly up-regulated in the small intestine by ASNase. Since APOE-targeted drugs (pioglitazone, rosiglitazone) are available, our findings provide a rationale for testing these and volanesorsen for mitigation of ASNase-induced hypertriglyceridemia.

New insights regarding ASNase efficacy suggested that the spleen and kidney may represent targetable organ vulnerabilities. In response to ASNase^WT treatment, spleen exhibited suppression of ASNS, suppressed glutamine metabolism including ASP production, impaired DNA replication, and induction of ferroptosis. Those observations prompt the hypothesis that ASNase may be effective against a broad range of hematological-related malignancies. Although kidney exhibited up-regulation of ASNS, it remains a potential target due to broad suppression of glutamine metabolism induced by ASNase^WT treatment. Future work will be required to test the hypothesis that ASNase is effective for treating renal cancers.

New insights regarding ASNase resistance identified system-wide up-regulation of ASNS as a key resistance factor, building upon the reported association between the tumor microenvironment and ASNase resistance(*25, 57*). The observed up-regulation of liver protein synthesis may also contribute to ASNase resistance. Importantly, our findings explain how low-

ASNS tumors can still be resistant to ASNase; if ASNase dosage is insufficient to maintain
durable depletion of ASN, tumor proliferation can continue. Because virtually every organ
throughout the body up-regulates ASNS to produce ASN following ASNase treatment, the battle
between the drug and the body can only be won if ASN depletion is sustained. These findings
highlight the critical need for new therapeutic drug monitoring protocols focused on ASN
measurement in whole blood, rather than relying on methods that measure only enzyme activity
levels.

The use of ASNS as a predictive biomarker of response to ASNase therapy presents complex
considerations. Our findings indicate that ASNase suppresses ASNS up-regulation in selected
tissue types, and tumors that exhibit that phenotype are likely to respond well to ASNase.
However, because most tissue types exhibit significant up-regulation of ASNS in response to
ASNase treatment, tumor-specific ASNS expression may play a relatively minor role in ASNase
resistance. Until further clarity is achieved, efforts to extend ASNase therapy to new indications
should continue to prioritize testing against tumors with low ASNS expression.

Finally, we hasten to emphasize that integrated analysis of amino acids—particularly ASN, ASP,
GLU, and GLN—and their associated proteins proved to be particularly valuable for
characterizing organ-level nutrient dependencies.(*58*)

In summary, ultra-fast, quantitative proteome profiling enabled deep analysis of the systems
pharmacology of ASNase, facilitating the generation of novel insights into the enzyme-drug's
efficacy and toxicity. This work highlights the transformative potential of nDIA-based ultra-fast
proteomics and demonstrates its applicability to a broad range of life science investigations,
including the systems biology of dietary interventions, exercise interventions, environmental
factors, genetics, and beyond.

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Author contributions

Y.X., W.K.C., and P.L.L. conceived the project. Y.X. performed all experiments with assistance from L.T., W.K.C., E.S.Y., S.R.D., J.D., B.W., B.T., S.M., I.M., H.I.S., and D.J.H. L.T., B.T., and S.M. conducted the metabolomics analysis. W.K.C., E.S.Y., and S.R.D. carried out the mouse experiments. Y.X. handled data analysis and figure preparation. Y.X. wrote the manuscript, while P.L.L. and J.N.W. revised it with input from all authors. P.L.L. and J.N.W. supervised the study.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Data and materials availability

All data are available in the main text or the supplementary materials. The mass spectrometry proteomics data have been deposited to the ProteomeXchange Consortium via the PRIDE partner repository with the dataset identifier PXD055919 and PXD055590.

Supplementary Materials

Supplementary Results

Supplementary Discussion

Online methods

Supplementary Figs. 1 to 19

Supplementary Tables 1 to 27

References (1-35)

 Figure legends

 Fig. 1 | Ultra-fast nDIA enables identification of 6,201 proteins with a one-minute LC gradient

a, Schematic overview of the Orbitrap Astral MS instrument. **b,** The optimization process of the nDIA method used in this study. **c,** Comparison of the number of identified protein groups and peptides using Evosep-Astral and Neo-Evosep-Astral methods. **d,** Comparison of the number of identified protein groups and peptides with indicated maximum injection time (IT) ranging from 1 ms to 3.5 ms. **e,** Comparison of the number of identified protein groups and peptides with different combinations of mass range (MR) and isolation window (IW). **f,** Comparison of the number of identified protein groups and peptides with MS2 IW ranging from 0.8 Th to 2.0 Th. **g,** Comparison of the number of identified protein groups and peptides with automatic gain control (AGC) value ranging from 100 to 600. **h,** Number of the identified protein groups and peptides using the refined nDIA method with 1- to 5-min LC gradients. **i,** Protein groups identified from mixed samples containing protein digests from *E. coli* (E), human (H), or yeast (Y) in various ratios (E5H50Y45, E10H50Y40, E20H50Y30, E30H50Y20, E40H50Y10 and E45H50Y5). **j,** Peptide Ion intensity as a function of ratio for all runs in (**i**). Dashed lines represent expected log2(A/B) values for proteins from humans (green), yeast (purple) and *E. coli* (orange). FC_9, FC_4, and FC_1.5 are calculated from log2(E45H50Y5/E5H50Y45), log2(E40H50Y10/E10H50Y40), and log2(E30H50Y20/E20H50Y30), respectively. **k,** Correlation between MS intensity and peptide input for *E. coli* and yeast from runs performed in (**i**).

Fig. 2 | High-throughput sample preparation accelerates large-scale tissue proteomics

a, Workflows for standard and high-throughput sample preparation for large-scale tissue proteomics. **b,c,** Number of identified peptides (**b**) and proteins groups (**c**) using indicated proteolytic digestion durations with or without adaptive focused acoustics (AFA)-assisted proteolysis. **d,** Percentages of identified peptides with 0, 1, 2, or 3 missed cleavage sites for indicated proteolytic digestion durations with or without AFA-assisted proteolysis. **e,** Number of identified protein groups with samples prepared from brain, kidney, and lung tissues using the standard and high-throughput workflows. **f-h,** Correlation analysis of the pairwise ratios among three mouse tissues (brain, lung, and kidney) calculated using the data generated by standard and high-throughput workflows. **i,j,** Comparison of the estimated time cost for the standard and high-throughput workflows.

Fig. 3 | Tissue proteomic landscape of ASNase treatment

a, Biochemical reactions catalyzed by ASNase[WT] and ASNase[Q59L]. **b,** Schematic overview of the experimental design. **c,** Overview of the mouse tissues collected for mass spectrometry proteomic analysis. **d,** Total number of proteins identified in each tissue across all treatment groups. **e,** Correlation matrix heatmap of the data generated from 13 mouse tissues. The heatmap was generated using Python. The Pearson correlation coefficient values were calculated based on the MS intensities of each protein in certain samples. **f,** Unsupervised clustering of tissue proteomics data via t-SNE. **g,** Protein abundance in 13 tissues over an 8-d time course of PBS, ASNase[WT], or ASNase[Q59L] treatments. t, time.

Fig. 4 | Validation of ASNase efficacy on amino acid metabolism

a, System environment architecture of asparaginase (ASNase). **b-e,** The metabolodynamics of asparagine (ASN) (**b**), aspartic acid (ASP) (**c**), glutamine (GLN) (**d**), and glutamic acid (GLU) (**e**)

in blood following either PBS, ASNase^{WT}, or ASNase^{Q59L} treatment. **f,** The metabolodynamics
of ASN, ASP, GLN, and GLU in the six indicated solid tissues following either PBS, ASNase^{WT},
or ASNase^{Q59L} treatment. **g,** The dynamic protein levels of ASNS in thirteen indicated solid
tissues following either PBS, ASNase^{WT}, or ASNase^{Q59L} treatment.

Fig. 5 | Statistical overview and KEGG pathway enrichment analysis of proteins
modulated by ASNase treatment

a, Protein expression levels following ASNase^{WT} treatment were compared with PBS-treated
controls. Proteins with a fold change greater than 2 and a p-value less than 0.05 were classified
as up-regulated. Data from all the time points (1d, 3d, 5d, and 8d) were grouped together. **b,**
Same as (**a**) except proteins with a fold change less than 0.5 and a p-value less than 0.05 were
classified as down-regulated. **c,** Same as (**a**) except ASNase^{Q59L} compared to PBS treatment. **d,**
Same as (**b**) except ASNase^{Q59L} compared to PBS treatment. **e,** KEGG pathway analysis of the
up- or down-regulated proteins following ASNase^{WT} treatment in the indicated tissues. **f,** Same
as (**e**) except ASNase^{Q59L} treatment.

Fig. 6 | ASNase dysregulates a common set of proteins across multiple tissue types

a, Heatmap overview of the dynamic protein levels change of proteins involved in the
complement and coagulation cascades (top) and the cholesterol metabolism pathway (bottom)
following ASNase^{WT} or ASNase^{Q59L} treatment across all the tested tissues. Protein expression
levels following ASNase^{WT} or ASNase^{Q59L} treatment were compared to PBS-treated controls,
with the Log2 fold change values presented. **b-e,** Statistical summary of the dysregulated
proteins that were common in certain number of tissues. Dysregulation proteins were filtered
with a p-value < 0.05 and fold change > 2 or < 0.5. Proteins commonly dysregulated in at least
three tissues were colored in red (up-regulation) or blue (down-regulation). **f,** Venn diagram of
proteins downregulated by ASNase^{WT}, proteins involved in the complement system, and
proteins involved in cholesterol metabolism. **g,h,** Downregulated proteins involved in (**g**)
complement system or (**h**) cholesterol metabolism following ASNase^{WT} treatment. Only proteins
significantly modulated in at least three tissues are displayed.

Fig. 7 | Modulation of the spleen proteome by ASNase. a-c, KEGG pathway analysis of the
upregulated or downregulated proteins following 3 days (**a**), 5 days (**b**), and 8 days (**c**)
ASNase^{WT} treatment in the spleen. **d,** Heatmap overview of the dynamic protein levels change
of proteins involved in lysosome, glutathione metabolism, ferroptosis, DNA replication, ribosome
and translation, and mitochondria following ASNase^{WT} or ASNase^{Q59L} treatment across all the
tested tissues. Protein expression levels following ASNase^{WT} or ASNase^{Q59L} treatment were
compared to PBS-treated controls, with the Log2 fold change values presented. **e,** Glutathione
levels in spleen samples from mice treated with PBS, ASNase^{WT}, or ASNase^{Q59L} for 8 d. **f,** The
dynamic regulation of indicated amino acid levels following 8 days treatment with ASNase^{WT} or
ASNase^{Q59L} treatment in the spleen. **g,** Polar metabolite levels in spleen samples from mice
treated with ASNase^{WT} for 8d. **h,** Model of spleen vulnerability to ASNase^{WT} treatment.

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6

a Fold change (ANSase vs PBS, Log2)

Figure 7