Centrosome Loss in Embryonic Development Disrupts Axonal Pathfinding and

Muscle Integrity

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Abstract

Centrosomes, the primary microtubule-organizing centres (MTOCs), are crucial for early

neuronal development, particularly in establishing polarity and promoting axon formation.

Once thought dispensable in many terminally differentiated cells, growing evidence shows that

many cells retain active centrosomes, while others do not, highlighting context-dependent

roles in specialized functions. In some mammalian neurons, centrosome-mediated

microtubule (MT) remodelling is essential for axon elongation, with centrosome dysfunction

leading to axonal misrouting and growth defects. Although active centrosomes have been

detected in embryonic tracheal terminal cells of *Drosophila melanogaster*, their activity in

neurons *in vivo* has not been observed. Their gradual loss during embryogenesis has been

reported as non-essential for organogenesis, as adult flies can eclose without centrioles.

To investigate centrosome activity in neurons, we revisited *Drosophila Sas-4* mutants, which

exhibit centrosome loss (CL), and observed that 50% of homozygous mutant individuals fail

to hatch as larvae. We analysed their development, focusing on the expressivity and

penetrance of nervous system phenotypes, and examined centrosome localization in neurons.

Our findings confirm the presence of centrosomes in wild-type motor and sensory neurons in

Drosophila and their localization near the nascent axon in motor neurons. CL conditions

resulted in axonal misrouting and muscle developmental abnormalities. Targeted

downregulation of Sas-4 in the pioneer motor neurons aCC, pCC and RP2 induced axon

guidance errors, indicating an autonomous role for centrosomes in axonal navigation.

Colocalization of acetylated- and γ-tubulin with centrosomes in motor neurons and MT

repolymerization analysis further confirmed the presence of active centrosomes in these cells.

Analysis of motor axons revealed that CL leads to motor axon tortuosity, a characteristic

associated with neurodegeneration. This is the first direct association of CL with axonal

morphological phenotypes, highlighting the role of centrosomes in neuronal development and

their broader influence on nervous system structure and function.

Introduction

Centrosomes are small membrane-less organelles that serve as primary microtubule-

organizing centres (MTOCs). Composed of a mother-daughter centriole pair surrounded by

pericentriolar material (PCM), they anchor and nucleate microtubules (MTs) through γ-tubulin

ring complexes (γ-TuRCs) (Bettencourt-Dias & Glover, 2007). During mitosis, centrosomes

organize the spindle apparatus, while their role in interphase is more variable (Conduit *et al*,

2015). Abnormalities in centrosomes are linked to disorders like microcephaly and

neurodevelopmental disorders, highlighting the importance of centrosome function in early

neurodevelopment (Goundiam & Basto, 2020; Marthiens *et al*, 2013). However, how

centrosome numbers affect differentiated cells and their involvement in post-cell-division

organogenesis is not yet fully understood. Although traditionally studied in dividing cells, recent

insights suggest centrosomes also regulate cellular behaviours in differentiated cells, contradicting the assumption that centrosome-based MTOCs are largely inactive in such contexts.

In vertebrates, centrosomes are critical for embryonic development, often because they are tightly linked to checkpoint controls that ensure accurate cell division and developmental progression (Meyer-Gerards & Bazzi, 2025). Null mutations in mouse *Cenpj* (also called *Sas4*) lead to centriole loss and embryonic arrest at embryonic day 9, and *Sass6*-mutant mouse embryos arrest at mid-gestation (Bazzi & Anderson, 2014; Grzonka & Bazzi, 2024). In contrast, *Drosophila melanogaster* embryos have been reported to develop to adulthood using maternally supplied Sas-4 and Sas-6, despite gradual centrosome loss (CL) (Basto *et al*, 2006; Fatalska *et al*, 2021; Gogendeau & Basto, 2010). However, these adults are sterile, uncoordinated, unable to form cilia, and die shortly after eclosion (Basto *et al.*, 2006). Without maternal Sas-4, Sas-4 and Asterless (Asl) *Drosophila* embryonic development arrests early (Stevens *et al*, 2007; Varmark *et al*, 2007), as observed in *C. elegans Sas-4* mutants (Leidel & Gönczy, 2003). In *Drosophila* neural progenitor and epithelial cells, centrosome absence impairs spindle assembly and orientation, leading to defects like neural apoptosis and altered brain size, mimicking either human microcephaly or tumourigenesis (Basto *et al.*, 2006; Castellanos *et al*, 2008; Poulton *et al*, 2014; Poulton *et al*, 2017).

Centrosomes are also important for differentiated cellular functions. In mouse fibroblasts, myoblasts and endothelial cells, centrosome position is important for nuclear positioning and cell migration (Chang *et al*, 2015; Gomes *et al*, 2005; Kushner *et al*, 2014). During kidney development, CL leads to decreased branching morphogenesis and small dysplastic kidneys at birth (Cheng *et al*, 2023). In *Drosophila* tracheal terminal cells (TCs), centrosome numbers influence the formation of subcellular lumina during tubulogenesis (Ricolo *et al*, 2016). Increasing centrosome numbers or depleting centrosomal proteins alters this process, stressing centrosome importance in cells with specialized architectures (Ricolo *et al*, 2021).

In some neurons, centrosomes play critical roles as MTOCs during early development, particularly in axon formation, a process reliant on microtubule remodelling to establish

neuronal polarity (Meka *et al*, 2022). However, other neuronal types need centrosomal

microtubule nucleation for migration but not axon formation (Vinopal *et al*, 2023). In

mammalian neurons, centrosomes nucleate MTs in the soma, which are subsequently

severed and transported into neurites via motor-driven sliding, enabling axon elongation and

polarity establishment (Ahmad & Baas, 1995; del Castillo *et al*, 2015; Stiess *et al*, 2010; Yu *et*

al, 1993). In hippocampal neurons *in vitro,* suppression of centrosome-mediated functions

prevents axonal growth and neurons with more than one centrosome sprout more than one

axon (Anda *et al*, 2005). In addition, aberrant centrosome localization, leads to misplaced

axonal outgrowth (Anda *et al*, 2010). In human iPSC-derived neurons, depleting centrioles

causes significant axonal defects, including mislocalization of axonal MT-associated proteins

and affected growth cone morphologies (Lindhout *et al*, 2021). However, as neurons mature,

γ-tubulin (γ-tub) remains essential, but centrosomes lose MTOC activity and become

dispensable in mammals and flies (Leask *et al*, 1997; Nguyen *et al*, 2011; Sanchez-Huertas

et al, 2016; Stiess *et al.*, 2010).

These findings collectively suggest that while centrosomes are essential in specific cells,

stages and contexts, many differentiated cells can adapt to their loss through alternative

MTOCs. However, in many cases, CL induces phenotypes which indicate its important function

in cytoskeletal remodelling and the acquisition of specialised cell shapes (Araújo, 2019).

To investigate the role of centrosomes in neuronal development, we revisited *Drosophila Sas-*

4 mutants with reduced centriole numbers and analysed their embryonic development. We

quantified the expressivity and penetrance of nervous system phenotypes and examined

centriole localization within neurons. Our findings indicate that loss of centrosomal protein

function results in variable expressivity and penetrance of embryonic phenotypes, which likely

accounts for inconsistencies in previously reported results. We observed that centrosomes

are present and active in *Drosophila* motor and peripheral nervous system (PNS) neurons.

Importantly, CL during embryogenesis leads to axonal misrouting and abnormalities in muscle

development, emphasising a critical role of centrosomes in proper nervous system and muscle

structure formation. To confirm centrosome importance for neuronal cell-shape changes, we

were able to specifically observe axonal phenotypes associated with CL.

Results

Sas-4 **mutant conditions induce axonal misrouting phenotypes**

Spindle assembly abnormal 4 (Sas-4) protein is essential for centriole replication in *Drosophila*

and early embryonic development (Basto *et al.*, 2006; Stevens *et al.*, 2007). However, in

contrast to *Sas-4* maternal mutants, *Sas-4* zygotic mutant embryos initially progress through

early development due to the maternal contribution, gradually losing centrioles during

embryonic and larval stages. This progressive centriole loss makes these mutants an excellent

model for studying the role of centrosomes in differentiated cells. By embryonic stages 15–16,

centrioles have been reported to be undetectable in 50–80% of cells (Basto *et al.*, 2006). By

these stages, *Sas-4* mutant embryos exhibit defects in tracheal subcellular lumen formation,

showing the importance of centrioles in some differentiated cells (Ricolo *et al.*, 2016).

Nevertheless, *Sas-4* homozygous mutants have been reported to reach adulthood, yet, they

exhibit early lethality soon after eclosion (Basto *et al.*, 2006). This early adult lethality suggests

a critical role for Sas-4 in maintaining cellular and developmental processes essential for

organismal viability.

To investigate the role of centrosomes in embryonic development, we first analysed the

viability of *Sas-4* loss-of-function (LOF) mutants during embryonic, larval and adult stages. As

previously reported, we were able to raise *Sas-4* mutant adults; however, only a proportion of

Sas-4 individuals were found to eclose. These mutants were uncoordinated and became

trapped in the food upon eclosion. When isolated at the pupal stage and placed in Petri dishes,

they were able to eclose and survive for longer, but with available food, they died within 24-36

hours, which is significantly less than the reported survival rates of unfed flies (2-3 days)

(Kopeć, 1928; Pearl & Parker, 1921). These adult individuals exhibited severe motor

impairments, barely moving and failing to extend their wings (Fig. 1A). To obtain survival rates,

we quantified the percentage of *Sas-4* mutants that reached adulthood, compared to the total

number expected, based on Mendelian proportions, from a cross between heterozygous *Sas-*

4/*TM3twiGFP* individuals and a cross between *Sas-4*/*TM3twiGFP* and a balanced deficiency,

which uncovers the *Sas-4* locus (*Df(3R)BSC221/TM3twiGFP*). Since the homozygous

balancer chromosome embryos are early embryonic lethal, we could detect a proportion of

33.3% mutant embryos surviving to embryonic stage 16, corresponding to all *Sas-4*

homozygous embryos. However, we only detected 16.7% of *Sas-4* homozygous L1 larvae 36h

after egg laying (AEL) (Fig. 1B, n=407), corresponding to 50% of all *Sas-4* homozygous

embryos. This proportion was maintained to wandering L3, pupal and adult stages, suggesting

that once the barrier of embryonic stages is passed, centrosomes are no longer necessary for

viability, and individuals can reach adult stages as previously reported (Basto *et al.*, 2006).

Nevertheless, our results show that only 50% of the *Sas-4* homozygous embryos (16.7% of

the total number of individuals, n= 407) successfully reached the larval and adult stages,

indicating that CL induces embryonic lethality in the remaining 50% of cases. Although we

used a *Sas-4* mutant chromosome from which all other mutations had been removed by

recombination, we also assessed the viability of a transheterozygous combination of *Sas-4*

and a deficiency that uncovers the *Sas-4* genomic region. Transheterozygous individuals

reached adulthood at a rate of 14.6% (n = 337, Fig. 1B), a result comparable to that observed

in *Sas-4* homozygotes and confirming this lethality in *Sas-4* null conditions.

We then asked if the *Sas-4* embryos exhibited mutant nervous system phenotypes. To do so,

we first analysed FasII positive neurons focusing on the trajectories of their motor axons,

particularly on the Intersegmental Nerve (ISN) (Fig. 1C). The penetrance of the ISN phenotype

was 52.8% (n=53) quantified as at least 2 defects per embryo, despite variability in the

expressivity of the phenotype (Fig. 1E and H and Sup. Fig. 1B and K), which agrees with the

larval viability observed. The aberrant pathways included the following: synaptic phenotypes,

which were evident when the nerve fibres innervated the wrong target or failed to innervate

(Fig. 1E and Sup. Fig. 1B, arrow); misrouting phenotypes, which involved defects in nerves

that do not follow the wild-type (wt) stereotypical routes (Fig. 1E and Sup. Fig. 1B, asterisk);

and crossing phenotypes, which included aberrant crossing between segments (Fig. 1E

arrowhead). The same type of anomalous phenotypes was detected in *Sas-4/Df* mutant

embryos (Fig. 1F and H), penetrance 56% (n=25), as well as RNAi *Sas-4* downregulation (Fig.

1G and H), penetrance 33.3% (n=15). We downregulated Sas-4 using a *UAS-Sas-4RNAi*

expressed in all post-mitotic neurons, by an elavGal4 driver (Sup. Fig. 1 D and K) and

specifically in a subset of neurons, such as the anterior corner cell (aCC), posterior corner cell

(pCC) and RP2 pioneers, using RN2-Gal4 (Fujioka *et al*, 2003). Interestingly, when Sas-4 was

specifically downregulated only in these neurons, we observed an additional phenotype:

fasciculation/defasciculation defects (Fig. 1G arrow) ISN misrouting and defasciculation

phenotypes (Fig. 1G and Sup. Fig. 1K, asterisks and arrowhead). In addition, we observed

shorter nerve extensions (Fig. 1G, dot), also observed in some *Sas-4* and *Sas-4/Df* mutant

embryos (Fig. 1F' and Sup. Fig. 1C). This suggested these motor axon phenotypes were

induced cell-autonomously. We confirmed these downregulation results, using a different

RNAi line and could observe similar types of phenotypes (Sup. Fig. 1M-O). Ubiquitous

expression of *Sas-4* using a *pUbqSas-4* insertion (Peel *et al*, 2007), could partially rescue the

mutant phenotypes, particularly by reducing the number of defects (Fig. 1H and Sup. Fig. 1 E

and K).

We followed by analysing the peripheral nervous system (PNS) phenotypes of *Sas-4* mutant

conditions specifically focusing on their axonal misrouting phenotypes. We could detect axonal

misrouting phenotypes in all three mutant conditions: *Sas-4* (penetrance 60% n=20), *Sas-4/Df*

(penetrance 55% n=20) and *UAS-Sas-4RNAi* (penetrance 60% n=20) (Fig. 1J-L and M, Sup.

Fig. 1F-J) expressed in PNS neurons using *P0163Gal4* (Hummel *et al*, 2000). We could

partially rescue these phenotypes by expressing *Sas-4* ubiquitously (Fig.1M and Sup. Fig. 1J

and L). Taken together, these results indicate that *Sas-4* mutant and downregulation conditions

lead to mutant phenotypes in the nervous system, characterized by incomplete penetrance

and variable expressivity. These phenotypes appear to be at least partially cell-autonomous,

as Sas-4 downregulation only in motor and sensory neurons results in axonal misrouting

errors.

Sas-4 mutant conditions disrupt muscle development

Since the phenotypes induced by RNAi expression exclusively in neurons did not fully replicate

the strength of the motor axon defects observed in _Sas-4_ embryos, we next decided to

investigate the muscle phenotypes in _Sas-4_ mutants. Muscles play a critical role in guiding

motor neurons by providing chemical and physical cues essential for accurate axonal

pathfinding and target selection (Jeong, 2021). These signals ensure proper neuromuscular

connections, essential for coordinated movement. In _Drosophila_ mutants lacking muscular

structures, such as _twist_ (_twi_) embryos, the absence of these cues disrupts motor axon

trajectories (Younossi-Hartenstein & Hartenstein, 1993).

In stage 16 _Drosophila_ embryos, each abdominal hemisegment (A2–A7) displays a consistent

and repeating pattern of 30 somatic muscle fibres, which can be visualized using a myosin-

specific antibody (Fig. 2A and C, wt). These 30 syncytial muscle fibres are innervated by two

motor nerves: the anterior ISN, which targets the dorsal muscles, and the posterior SN, which

innervates the ventral muscles (Fig. 2C, wt). We first analysed the muscle pattern of _Sas-4_

mutant embryos and could detect defects that ranged from misplaced to missing muscle fibres

(Fig. 2 B, B´). We then analysed these muscle fibre phenotypes in parallel to the axonal defects

and were able to correlate many of the axonal defects in _Sas-4_ embryos to the location of the

muscle pattern disruptions (Fig. 2E'', asterisk and Sup. Fig. 2B'). In fact, 100% of _Sas-4_

embryos with detectable muscle mutant phenotypes also exhibited ISN axonal trajectory

disruptions, while 11% of embryos displayed ISN axonal misrouting without any observable

muscle phenotypes (n = 27). Accordingly, Sas-4 downregulation in muscle cells, using a _Mef2_

driver, induced muscle mutant phenotypes in 80% of embryos, with ISN defects spatially

correlating with muscle defects in 63% of the cases (n = 19, Fig. 2G'' asterisk). Sas-4

downregulation in muscle cells, using a _Mef2_ driver together with a _Twist_ (_Twi_) driver, induced

stronger, more penetrant ISN phenotypes that were dose dependent (Sup. Fig. 2E, F)

Consistent with these findings, downregulation of Sas-4 in pioneer neurons using the RN2

driver resulted in axonal misrouting phenotypes in 33% of the embryos (n = 15) and very mild

muscle mutant phenotypes in only 20% of the embryos (n = 10). Collectively, these findings

suggest that axonal misrouting phenotypes arise from two distinct contributions: an

autonomous component originating from their own CL and a non-autonomous one driven by

CL-affected muscle cells (Fig. 2C, *Sas-4*).

Sas-6 mutants have axonal guidance and muscle developmental defects

Centrosome assembly depends on a small set of conserved proteins, the absence of any of

which results in centrosome loss; *Sas-4* and *Sas-6* are key components of this process

(Gartenmann *et al*, 2020). To rule out the possibility that the observed axonal and muscle

defects were specifically due to mutations in *Sas-4*, we began by analysing the viability of *Sas-*

6 LOF mutants during the embryonic, larval, and adult stages. We used a CRISPR-Cas9

generated *Sas-6* induced deletion mutant, *Sas-6$^{\Delta b}$* (Z. Novak and J. Raff, unpublished). We

successfully raised *Sas-6* adults (Fig. 3A), which, like *Sas-4* adults, died within 24-36 hours

(Fig. 1A). To corroborate that this *Sas-6* allele induced CL in embryos, we counted the number

of centrosomes in *Sas-6$^{\Delta b}$* embryos and observed a reduction at stage 16 (Fig. 3B). Like *Sas-*

4 mutants, 33.3% of *Sas-6$^{\Delta b}$* and *Sas-6$^{\Delta b}$/Def* embryos reached embryonic stage 16,

corresponding to all *Sas-6$^{\Delta b}$* homozygous and *Sas-6$^{\Delta b}$/Def* embryos. We only detected 11.7%

(n=571) of *Sas-6$^{\Delta b}$* and 16.8% (n=486) of *Sas-6$^{\Delta b}$/Def* homozygous L1 larvae 36h after egg

laying (AEL) (Fig. 3C), corresponding to 35% of all *Sas-6* homozygous individuals and 50% of

Sas-6$^{\Delta b}$/Def individuals. This proportion was maintained through the wandering L3, pupal, and

adult stages, suggesting that, like in *Sas-4* mutants, centrosomes seem not to be essential for

larval and pupal development once the embryonic stages are completed.

We then investigated whether *Sas-6* embryos exhibited mutant axonal guidance and muscle

phenotypes. We observed ISN axonal misrouting in *Sas-6$^{\Delta b}$* and *Sas-6$^{\Delta b}$/Def* embryos (Fig.

3D, F), with a penetrance of 59.1% (n=22) for *Sas-6$^{\Delta b}$* and 54.1% (n=24) for *Sas-6$^{\Delta b}$/Def*,

similar to what we observed in *Sas-4* mutant conditions. The severity of the defects was also

like *Sas-4* mutant conditions, with axonal misrouting (Fig. 3F'', asterisks) and synapse (Fig.

F'', arrowhead) phenotypes. In most cases, the ISN axonal misrouting also correlated with

muscle phenotypes (Fig. 3E'' and F'', asterisks). Altogether, these findings support the role of

centrosomes in regulating axon guidance of motor neurons.

Pioneer neurons have centrosomes localizing to the sites of axon outgrowth

In *Drosophila*, the aCC and RP2 motor neurons are pioneer neurons which influence growth

of the ISN (Sánchez-Soriano & Prokop, 2005) (Fig. 4 A). Pioneer neurons extend growth cones

that navigate a future fibre tract, and must interpret the full complexity of environmental cues

to define the path of the nerve (Harrison, 1910; Jacobs & Goodman, 1989). Therefore, we

investigated whether centrosomes could be detected in the soma of these neurons in stage

12-13 when they are starting to extend their axons. We used an antibody against Pericentrin-

like protein (Plp, CP309) to detect the centrosome and we showed that this colocalized with

Asl in most cases (Sup. Fig. 3) making it a good tool to detect centrosomes in these cells. We

found that centrosomes were present in the soma of both aCC (Fig. 4 B and C) and RP2 motor

neurons (Fig. 4 D). Specifically, in the case of the aCC, a centrosome was observed in the

quadrant where the axon exit point is first detected in 72% of the cases (Fig. 4B n=75).

Additionally, we did not detect centrosomes in the quadrant opposite the axon exit point (Fig.

4B n=75). In *Sas-4* mutants, centrosomes were largely undetected in both aCC/pCC neurons

and RP2 neurons. (Fig. 4 E, F). At these stages, the aCC and pCC neurons are very close

together, making it difficult to differentiate between the somas of the two neurons. Therefore,

we quantified the number of centrosomes in aCC+pCC and RP2 neurons in both control and

Sas-4 mutant embryos. In control embryos, we observed around 2.53 centrosomes per pair

of aCC and pCC neurons, while in *Sas-4* mutant, this number was significantly reduced to

0.81 (Fig. 4G n=76). Similarly, for RP2 neurons, control embryos exhibited 0.81 centrosomes

per RP2 neuron, whereas *Sas-4* embryos showed a reduction to 0.26 (Fig. 4G n=76). This

significant decrease in the number of centrosomes further supports the critical role of Sas-4

in centriole formation in pioneer neurons of the ventral nerve cord (VNC) during *Drosophila*

embryogenesis.

Pioneer motor neurons have active centrosomes

After revealing that ISN pioneers have centrosomes, we were interested in knowing if these

could be active MTOCs. To determine if the centriole could organize a functional centrosome

and serve as a major site of neuronal microtubule nucleation in aCC and RP2 neurons, we

analysed the localization of acetylated-tubulin (ace-tub) and γ-tubulin (γ-tub). MTs are

nucleated and anchored by the microtubule nucleator γ-tub, which is embedded within the

pericentriolar material (PCM) of the centrosome (Lin *et al*, 2015). In both neurons we could

see stable acetylated MTs extending from the centrosomes (Fig. 5A and B, arrowheads) and

these colocalized with γ-tub (Fig. 5C and D, arrowheads). We quantified the number of

centrioles colocalizing with γ-tub (Fig. 5E) and could detect co-localization in 50% of the cases,

meaning that there are centrioles in these neurons which are not active as MTOCs at these

stages (Fig. 5C'' asterisk). In conclusion, these results suggest that at least some microtubule

organization in pioneer neurons of the VNC is dependent on the centrosome.

To determine whether centrosomes function as active microtubule-organizing centres

(MTOCs) in these neurons, we tested their ability to nucleate microtubules *in vivo* using two

complementary approaches. First, we performed time-lapse imaging of EB1-GFP in aCC

neurons to visualize microtubule dynamics (Movie 1 and Fig. 5J). Second, we depolymerized

microtubules and monitored their regrowth from the centrosome (Fig. 5F–I) (Brodu *et al*, 2010).

Live imaging of aCC neurons expressing EB1-GFP and Asl-Tomato revealed EB1 comets

emerging from the centrosome and moving toward the cell periphery, providing direct evidence

of microtubule nucleation from neuronal centrosomes (Movie 1 and Fig. 5J). To strengthen this

observation, we performed a microtubule depolymerization/polymerization assay, which

unequivocally demonstrated that microtubule regrowth initiates at the centrosome following

depolymerization (Fig. 5F–I). This confirms that centrosomes act as active microtubule-organizing centers in these neurons. Together, these findings establish that neuronal centrosomes are functionally active during early axonal development.

PNS neurons maintain active centrosomes

In *Drosophila* embryos, the dorsal cluster neurons project their axons in a highly organized manner to form the sensory axonal tracts (Ghysen *et al*, 1986). During development, the axons of these neurons extend dorsally and medially, connecting with their target regions and fasciculating with the intersegmental nerve (ISN) to form a bundled tract for efficient sensory signal routing (Hartenstein, 1988). Sensory neurons in *Drosophila* embryos are known to have centrioles. These centrioles are crucial for forming basal bodies in ciliated cells, including type-I sensory neurons, which are essential for the development of cilia (Jana *et al*, 2016). Since we detected axonal guidance phenotypes in the axons extending from the dorsal cluster, we tested for the presence of centrioles in dorsal cluster sensory neurons (Fig. 6A). We detected centrioles in the soma of most of these neurons and quantified the number of centriole-positive ddaC neurons (Fig. 6A", B, and C', arrowhead), finding centrioles in 81.4% of the total (Fig. 6B, n=43). Importantly, we also detected centrioles in dorsal bipolar neuron (dbp, also known as dbd), the proposed pioneer neuron of the dorsal cluster (Fig. 6A'' and C', arrow) (Martin *et al*, 2008; Merritt & Whitington, 1995). In *Sas-4* embryos, the presence of centrioles in the dorsal cluster neurons was significantly lower (Fig. 6D). In many embryos, we could not detect any centrioles in the soma of the dorsal cluster neurons (Fig. 6E).

Based on our findings in the CNS and PNS, we decided to quantify the total number of centrosomes in *Sas-4* embryos and compare them to controls. To do so, we selected equal segmental areas spanning the dorsal cluster and the lateral chordotonal organs (lch) and counted the total number of centrioles in stage 16 control embryos, *Sas-4* homozygous embryos displaying mutant PNS phenotypes, *Sas-4* homozygous embryos with no apparent mutant phenotype and *Sas-4* mutants rescued by ubiquitous Sas-4 expression (Fig. 6F). We observed that *Sas-4* mutants had approximately one-third of the centrioles found in the control

group. Embryos without defects had significantly higher centrosome numbers compared to

those with mutant phenotypes. Additionally, ubiquitous expression of Sas-4 in *Sas-4* mutant

embryos could increase centriole numbers to levels like the control (Fig.6F). These results

confirm that *Sas-4* embryos gradually lose their centrioles during embryonic development. We

also found a correlation between axonal guidance phenotypes and the numbers of centrioles

per embryo (Fig. 6F).

To assess whether sensory neuron centrosomes are associated with MT nucleation

machinery, we analysed their colocalization with α-tubulin and γ-tubulin. We found that

sensory neuron centrosomes consistently colocalise with both markers (Fig. 6 G and H),

indicating the presence of structural microtubules and nucleation components at the

centrosome. This suggests that sensory neuron centrosomes, like motor neuron centrosomes,

are active during early stages of axon development.

Centrosome loss induces motor axon fibre tortuosity

Axonal tortuosity (wiggliness) is a measure of the irregularities or abnormalities in the

morphological structure of axons which can be associated with neurodegeneration (Bando *et*

al, 2015). When axons are "wiggly," it suggests that they are not following their usual straight

or organized paths, possibly due to changes in axonal cytoskeletal structure or cell-adhesion,

but not much is known about what triggers axonal wiggliness. Qualitative examination of

confocal projections showed that aCC and RP2 axons are straighter in controls than in *Sas-4*

mutants, revealing the tortuosity of these axons (Fig. 7 A-E, asterisks). Apart from the

previously characterised phenotypes such as axonal crossings (Fig. 7 B, arrowhead) and

misrouting, we could observe axonal wiggliness at the CNS exit points of *Sas-4* motor neurons

(Fig. 7 B', D and E, asterisks). Since we were interested in determining the proportion of wiggly

axons in the *Sas- 4* mutant and *Sas-4 RNAi* embryos, we quantified this for the aCC and RP2

neurons (Fig. 7 G). In *Sas-4* mutants we could detect an average of 23% aCC and 30% RP2

wiggly axons per total number of aCC and RP2 axons, which was significantly different from

the proportion of wiggly axons in the controls (6% wiggly aCC and 8% wiggly RP2 axons). The

same was observed for the Sas-4 downregulation in aCC, pCC and RP2 neurons (24% aCC

and 25% RP2 wiggly axons per total number of aCC and RP2 axons). We also quantified

axonal wiggliness via the ratio of Path Length in 2D (PL2D) normalized to Euclidean Distance

in 2D (PL2D/ED2D) for each aCC and RP2 axonal path (Arshadi *et al*, 2021). We could detect

significant differences between control and *Sas-4* mutant conditions (Fig. 7H). It was

previously shown increased JNK activity, can result in axonal wiggliness (Karkali *et al*, 2023).

However, when we checked JNK signalling, we could not detect any increase in JNK activity

in *Sas-4* neurons (Supl. Fig. 4). In conclusion, although CL does not completely inhibit axonal

extension, it induces significant morphological alterations (Fig. 7F), emphasising the critical

role of the centrosome in axonal growth.

Discussion

With this work we provide evidence that the centrosome plays a role in axonal extension,

navigation, and muscle development *in vivo*. Previous studies have shown that *Sas-4* and

Sas-6 mutant flies can reach adulthood (Basto *et al.*, 2006; Fatalska *et al.*, 2021; Peel *et al.*,

2007), which initially seems incompatible with an important role for the centrosome during

embryonic development. However, we found that *Sas-4* and *Sas-6* homozygous null

conditions result in 50% of embryonic lethality.

Sas-4 and *Sas-6* LOF embryos display motor axon mutant phenotypes (Fig. 1 and 3),

revealing that centrosomes are important for axonal extension and guidance. Additionally,

Sas-4 and *Sas-6* LOF embryos exhibit muscle mutant phenotypes (Fig. 2 and 3), indicating

that centrosomes are also important for muscle development. Hence, the embryonic axon

guidance phenotypes have a dual contribution: non-autonomous one from muscle CL (Fig.

8A) and an autonomous one from axonal CL (Fig. 8B). Since innervation does not influence

the patterning, morphogenesis, maintenance, or physiological development of somatic

muscles in *Drosophila* embryos, the muscle defects observed are most likely due to CL in

muscle cells (Broadie & Bate, 1993). CL in muscle cells may impair cilia formation and nuclear

positioning, two processes important for muscle fibre development (Loh *et al*, 2023; Metzger

et al, 2012; Tillery *et al*, 2018). Expressing *Sas-4 RNAi* under the control of the muscle-specific

Mef2-GAL4 driver induced penetrant muscle phenotypes, consistent with previous results

reporting the lethality of these embryos (Schnorrer *et al*, 2010). *Sas-6* embryos exhibited

milder muscle phenotypes than *Sas-4*, aligning with previous findings that driving *Sas-6 RNAi*

with a Mef2-GAL4 driver induced adult pharate lethality (Schnorrer *et al.*, 2010).

What could explain the variability in the consequences of CL during embryonic development?

Many disease-causing mutations exhibit mild or no effects in some individuals, a phenomenon

known as incomplete phenotype penetrance. This phenomenon is still poorly understood, but

recent studies in *Drosophila* suggest it is stochastic, akin to flipping a coin (Marmion *et al*,

2023). Although the reported study focuses on fluctuations in signalling, a similar scenario

could be imagined for centrosomes. In cases of centrosome duplication impairment which

induce CL, distribution would vary among dividing cells as development proceeds. Early

embryonic mitotic cycles can partly explain the differences in phenotype expressivity. The first

13 mitotic cycles of *Drosophila* embryos are rapid, synchronous, and occur without cell

division. Subsequently, three rounds of patterned mitosis occur (mitoses 14, 15, and 16).

Following mitosis 16, many cells enter their first G1 phase (Edgar & O'Farrell, 1990). However,

the nervous system lineage does not enter a terminal interphase after mitosis 16 and

continues to divide according to an independent program (Bodmer & Jan, 1987; Hartenstein

et al, 1987). Similarly, muscle cells, continue dividing until embryonic stage 10 (Nabel-Rosen

et al, 2005). These extra cell divisions can account for the appearance, variability and severity

of the phenotypes observed, as centrosome loss is exacerbated with each cell division, which

depletes the maternal contribution. In agreement with this, when we quantified the number of

centrioles present in *Sas-4* embryos displaying axonal phenotypes, we could detect a

decrease of about 1/3 (Fig. 6), with consistent results when we quantified the numbers of

centrioles in *Sas-4* aCC, pCC and RP2 neurons (Fig. 4)

Centrosome localization in neurons and implications for axonal morphology

Here we show that centrosomes are present in motor and sensory neurons and that in motor

neurons these centrosomes colocalize with acetylated- and γ-tubulin and are actively involved

in MT polymerization suggesting that they are active MTOCs in these cells (Fig. 4, 5 and 6).

Previous studies failed to detect colocalization of centrosomes with γ-tub in neurons (Nguyen

et al., 2011). However, this study used Fizzy-related-GFP (Fzr-GFP) to visualise centrioles

and while it is clear Fzr is localized to centrioles during the cell cycle (Meghini *et al*, 2016), it

is not clear this localization is maintained in all fully differentiated cells (Djabrayan *et al*, 2014;

Huynh *et al*, 2009). This, or differences in microscopy techniques, could account for the

inconsistency between our results and those of others. Furthermore, centrosome localization

and its ability to organise MTs is more likely to be important at initial axon outgrowth stages

(during embryonic stages 12-13) and not once the axon has already grown (at embryonic

stages 15-16), which is when many of these observations were made.

Regarding centrosome localization and activity in neurons, we show that axonal morphology

in embryos with fewer centrosomes is altered. This is the first example of a morphological

defect in axons associated with CL in *Drosophila*, and one we consider very significant. Under

conditions of CL, we observe tortuous (wiggly) axons, suggesting that while CL does not

prevent neurons from extending axons, it does affect axonal outgrowth. CL could induce this

phenotype by disrupting the neuronal cytoskeleton and preventing MTs to form, be severed

and transported into the axons. It is known that alterations in the neuronal cytoskeleton,

caused by signalling deregulation such as increased JNK activity, can result in axonal

wiggliness (Karkali *et al.*, 2023). Also, alterations in MT dynamics in mammalian neurons have

been shown to decrease axonal elongation, but not its formation, giving rise to wiggly axons

(Rochlin *et al*, 1996). In addition, axonal tortuosity is one of the hallmarks of

neurodegeneration (Salvadores *et al*, 2020), which makes this phenotype a good entrance

point for the analysis of the progression of various neurodegenerative diseases.

The loss of centrosome function has been documented to disrupt various developmental

stages in vertebrates. In humans, CL is associated with hereditary spastic paraplegia, Bardet-

Biedl syndrome, the formation of cystic kidneys, disrupted left-right asymmetry, and

microcephaly (Badano *et al*, 2005; Jaiswal & Singh, 2021). Demonstrating that CL in

Drosophila affects the development of the nervous and muscular systems paves the way for

using this model organism to further explore these human diseases.

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Author contributions

459 Conceptualization: S.J.A. Methodology and Experiments: B.G., J.P., J.S.-A., J.C.-R. and

460 S.J.A. Analysis: B.G., J.P., J.S.-A. and S.J.A. Writing: S.J.A. Reviewing and editing: S.J.A. and

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Figure legends

Fig. 1 – *Sas-4* loss of function induces axonal misrouting defects.

(A) *Sas-4* homozygous adult fly at 6h after eclosion. (B) Graphical representation of the

percentage of *Sas-4* (n=407) and *Sas-4/Def* (n=337) surviving individuals at different life cycle

stages. Homozygous flies that survive to adult stages die after 24-36 hours. (C) Highlight of

the three main FasII positive nerves over a microscope image of two embryonic lateral

segments. (D-G) Details of three segments from stage 16 embryos stained with anti-FasII

antibody; scale bar 10 µm. (D'-G') Confocal lateral views of stage 16 embryos stained with

anti-FasII antibody; scale bar 50 µm. (H) Penetrance and expressivity of the ISN mutant

phenotypes in different *Sas-4* mutant conditions; control is *w* (n=35); *Sas-4^{s2214}* (n=53); *Sas-*

4^{s2214}/Df (n=25); *RN2Gal4xUASSas-4RNAi* (n=15); *UbqSas-4GFP;Sas-4/Df* (n=28). (I-L)

Details of three segments from stage 16 embryos stained with anti-Futsch antibody; scale bar

5 µm (I'-L') Confocal lateral views of stage 16 embryos stained with anti-Futsch antibody; scale

bar 50 µm. (H) Penetrance and expressivity of the sensory axon mutant phenotypes in

different *Sas-4* mutant conditions; control is *Sas-4/+* (n=20); *Sas-4^{s2214}* (n=20); *Sas-4^{s2214}/Df*

(n=20); *P0163Gal4xUASSas-4RNAi* (n=20); *UbqSas-4GFP;Sas-4/Df* (n=20).

Fig. 2 - *Sas-4* loss of function induces muscle defects.

(A,B) Stage 16 embryos stained with an antibody against myosin to mark the embryonic

muscle structure in green. (A-A') Control embryo and (B-B') *Sas-4* mutant embryo. (C)

Schematic representation of the motor axon muscle innervation pattern of a control (*w*) and

Sas-4 mutant embryo. TN, transverse nerve; ISN, intersegmental nerve, and SN, segmental

nerve. (D-H) Confocal projections of four segments from stage 16 embryos of different mutant

conditions stained with anti-myosin (green and D') and anti-FasII (magenta and D'') antibodies;

scale bar 10 µm. (D''-H'') composite images with the two channels (anti-myosin in green and

anti-FasII in magenta). (D'''-H''') Myosin-stained muscle single-stacks. Scale bar 10 µm. (I)

Penetrance and expressivity of the ISN mutant phenotypes in different *Sas-4* mutant

conditions; control is *Sas-4/+* (n=27); *Sas-4^{s2214}* (n=27); *Sas-4^{s2214}/Df* (n=25);

Mef2Gal4xUASSas-4RNAi (n=19); *RN2Gal4xUASSas-4RNAi* (n=15). (J) Penetrance and

expressivity of the muscle mutant phenotypes in different *Sas-4* mutant conditions; control is

w (n=16); *Sas-4^{s2214}* (n=16); *Sas-4^{s2214}/Df* (n=10); *Mef2Gal4xUASSas-4RNAi* (n=10);

RN2Gal4xUASSas-4RNAi (n=16).

Fig. 3 - *Sas-6* loss of function induces axonal misrouting and muscle defects.

(A) *Sas-6* homozygous adult fly at 6h after eclosion. (B) Quantification of the number of

centrosomes per stage 16 embryonic segmental area in Control, *Sas-6$^{\Delta b}$/+* embryos, (mean

165.9 ± 26.4, n=10) and *Sas-6$^{\Delta b}$* embryos displaying PNS mutant phenotypes (mean 53.2 ±

21.9, n=15); unpaired t-test with Welch's correction p<0.0001. (C) Graphical representation of

the percentage of *Sas-6$^{\Delta b}$/Sas-6$^{\Delta b}$* (n=571) and *Sas-6$^{\Delta b}$/Def* (n=486) surviving individuals at

different life-cycle stages. (D) Penetrance and expressivity of the ISN mutant embryonic

phenotypes in *Sas-6$^{\Delta b}$* and *Sas-6$^{\Delta b}$/Def* embryos; controls are heterozygous *Sas-6$^{\Delta b}$/+* (n=17);

mutants are *Sas-6$^{\Delta b/\Delta b}$* (n=22) and *Sas-6$^{\Delta b}$/Def* (n=24). (E, F) Confocal projections of four

segments from stage 16 embryos of control and *Sas-6$^{\Delta b}$/Def* mutants stained with anti-myosin

(magenta and E', F') and anti-FasII (green and E, F) antibodies. (E''-F'') Composite projections

with the two channels; scale bar is 10 µm. (E'''-F''') Composite projections of the two channels

showing the whole embryo; scale bar is 50µm.

Fig. 4 - Pioneer neurons have centrosomes localizing to the sites of axon outgrowth

(A) Confocal image showing 3 segments of the embryonic Ventral Nerve Cord (VNC) midline marked with an antibody against FasII and GFP driven by the RN2 driver marking the aCC, pCC and RP2 in green. (B) Confocal section showing an aCC neuron and its centriole at the axonal exit point, marked with an antibody against Plp (CP309); quantification of centrioles present in different aCC quadrants and the percentage of aCC with centrioles present at the axonal exit point (72%, n=75). (C, D) Plp (CP309) marking all centrosomes and the neuronal body drawn from the channel marking the neuron (C', D'). (C'') aCC+pCC and RP2 (D'') marked in green and Plp (CP309) in magenta. Scale bar is 5µm. (G) Quantification of centriole numbers in control and *Sas-4* aCC+pCC and RP2 pioneer neurons; Control RP2 average 0.81 (n=22), control aCC+pCC average 2.53 (n=41), *Sas-4* RP2 average 0.26 (n=34) and *Sas-4* aCC+pCC average 0.87 (n=38); unpaired t-test with Welch's correction control RP2 vs *Sas-4* RP2 p=0.0005, control aCC+pCC vs *Sas-4* aCC+pCC p<0.0001.

Fig. 5 – PNS neurons maintain their centrosomes

(A) Dorsal cluster neurons in a stage 15 embryo marked with anti-Futsch (22C10) in magenta to mark the sensory neurons and Asterless (Asl) in green to mark the centrosomes. (A') Inverted channels with neurons identified and (A'') cell bodies drawn to show the centrosomes within each neuron. Scale bar is 8 µm (B) Stage 16 dorsal cluster with the neurons identified and ddaC marked in green with ppkGAL4 driving UASCD8GFP marking class IV dendritic arborisation neurons, with centriole in cyan and Futsch in green. Scale bar is 5 µm. Quantification of the number of ddaC neurons with centrosomes (81.4% n=43). (C) Control and *Sas-4* (D,E) dorsal clusters marked with Futsch in magenta and Plp (CP309) in green. (C', D' and E') Plp (CP309) marking all centrosomes and cell bodies drawn from the other channel (C'', D'' and E''); scale bar Is 5 µm. (F) Quantification of the number of centrosomes per stage 16 embryonic segmental area in Control, *Sas-4/+* embryos, (mean 179.4 ± 30.1, n=25), *Sas-4* embryos displaying PNS mutant phenotypes (mean 68.2 ± 21.6, n=23), *Sas-4*

embryos without detectable PNS mutant phenotypes (mean 86.3 ± 23.8, n=24) and *Sas-4*

embryos rescued by ubiquitous expression of Sas-4 (mean 157.3 ± 51.45, n=23); unpaired t-

test with Welch's correction control vs *Sas-4* p<0.0001, control vs *Sas-4* no defects p<0.0001,

control vs *Sas-4* rescue p=0.08 and *Sas-4* vs *Sas-4* no defects p=0.009. (G) Detail of the

dorsal part of the dorsal cluster stained marked with Futsch (green), Plp (CP309) (magenta),

and alpha-tubulin (blue); arrowheads point to the colocalization of centrosomes with MTs. (H)

Detail of the dorsal part of the dorsal cluster stained marked with Futsch (green), Plp (CP309)

(magenta), and gamma-tubulin (blue); arrowheads point to the colocalization of centrosomes

with gamma-tubulin; scale bar is 2.5 µm.

Fig. 6 – Pioneer motor neurons have active centrosomes

(A) RN2>CD8GFP with aCC+pCC and RP2 (B) marked in green, Plp (CP309) in magenta and

ace-tub in blue; scale bar 5 µm. (A', B') Plp (CP309) marking all centrioles and the neuronal

body drawn from the channel marking the neuron (A, B). (A'', B'') Plp (CP309) marking all

centrioles and acetylated-tubulin antibody marking stable MTs with the neuronal body drawn

from the channel marking the neuron (A, B). (C) aCC+pCC and RP2 (D) marked in green, Plp

(CP309) in magenta and γ-tub in blue. (C', D') Plp (CP309) marking all centrosomes and the

neuronal body drawn from the channel marking the neuron (C, D). (C'', D'') Plp (CP309)

marking all centrosomes and anti-acetylated-tubulin antibody marking stable MTs with the

neuronal body drawn from the channel marking the neuron (C, D). (E) Quantification of the

total number of centrioles in aCC+pCC and RP2 neurons and quantification of the numbers of

these which colocalize with γ-tub (n=18). (F-I) RN2>CD8GFP with aCC+pCC marked in green,

Plp (CP309) in magenta and alpha-tub in blue; scale bar 5 µm. (F'-I') Plp (CP309) marking all

centrosomes and anti-alpha-tubulin antibody marking all MTs, with the neuronal body drawn

from the channel marking the neuron (F-I). (F) Control embryos, 0h at 4°C; (G) embryos

incubated 6h at 4°C; (H) embryos incubated 6h at 4°C and allowed to recover for 90 seconds

at RT; (I) embryos incubated 6h at 4°C and allowed to recover for 5 min at RT. Scale bar 5 µm.

(J) Frames from Movie 1 showing the localization of EB1-GFP with the centrosome (asterisks)

and its displacement towards the axon (arrows) in an aCC neuron; scale bar 5 μm. (K)

Colocalization of EB1(arrow) with the centrosome (asterisk) in a fixed aCC neuron; scale bar

5 μm.

Fig. 7 - *Sas-4* loss of function induces wiggly axon phenotypes

(A-E) Confocal images of stage 16 RN2GAL4, UASCD8GFP embryonic lateral segments

(A,B) or the ventral midline (CEF) in wt (A, C), *Sas-4* mutant background (B, D) or Sas-4 RNAi

downregulation (E). (A',B') axons marked with anti-FasII and (A'', B'', C, D, E) axons marked

with anti-GFP antibody, marking the axonal membranes. Scale bar is 10 μm in A-E. (F)

Schematic representation of the wiggly axon phenotypes; in *Sas-4* aCC and RP2 neurons, the

absence of active centrosomes gives rise to axonal tortuosity. **(**G) Quantification of the

proportion (wiggly/normal axons) of wiggly axons in control, *Sas-4* mutant and Sas-4 RNAi

downregulation for aCC and RP2 neurons; Mann-Whitney test p=0.025 in control vs *Sas-4*

aCC (n=8 embryos); p= 0.0026 in control vs Sas-4 RNAi aCC (n=8 embryos) and p=0.0065

in control vs *Sas-4* RP2 (n=8 embryos); p=0.0149 in control vs Sas-4 RNAi RP2 (n=8

embryos). (H) Quantification of axonal wiggliness via the ratio of Path Length in 2D (PL2D)

normalized to Euclidean Distance in 2D (PL2D/ED2D) for each aCC and RP2 axonal path.

Mann-Whitney test p=0.0002 in control (n= 33 axons) vs *Sas-4* aCC (n=36 axons); p< 0.0001

in control vs Sas-4 RNAi aCC (n=41 axons) and p< 0.0001 in control (n=35 axons) vs *Sas-4*

RP2 (n= 36 axons); p< 0.0001 in control vs Sas-4 RNAi RP2 (n= 41 axons).

Fig. 8 – Centrosome loss affects axonal morphogenesis and muscle development

Schematic representations of CL induced axonal phenotypes. CL disrupts axonal

morphogenesis and pathfinding through two distinct mechanisms. (A) First, in a neuron non-

autonomous manner, CL impairs muscle development, which in turn leads to axon guidance

defects. (B) Second, in a neuron-autonomous manner, CL compromises the integrity of the

MT cytoskeleton, resulting in defective axon pathfinding and increased axonal tortuosity.

Together, these effects unravel the multifaceted role of the centrosome in coordinating both

extrinsic and intrinsic cues essential for proper axonal development.

Fig. 1

Fig 2

A A ⟵⟶ P
aCC
RP2
pCC
VNCMidline
RN2>CD8GFP FasII

B aCC
RN2>CD8GFP
CP309
With centrosomes
Without centrosomes
72%

RN2>GFP			
CTRL		***Sas-4^s2214***	
aCC + pCC	RP2	aCC + pCC	RP2

CP309

C V A
D V A
E V A
F V A

GFP

C'
D'
E'
F'

GFP CP309

C''
D''
E''
F''

G

Sas-4 RP2
Control RP2
Sas-4 aCC + pCC
Control aCC + pCC

***

****

centriole number
0   1   2   3   4   5

Fig. 8

A

Wild-type

Centrosome
loss (CL)

B

Wild-type

Centrosome loss (CL)

| Ctrl | *Sas-4^s2214* | *Sas-4^s2214/Def* | Elav>Sas-4RNAi | *pUbSas-4; Sas-4^s2214/Def* |

FasII

| Ctrl | *Sas-4^s2214* | *Sas-4^s2214/Def* | P0163> Sas-4RNAi | *pUbSas-4; Sas-4^s2214/Def* |

Futsch

K CNS

Defects per lateral (%)

Control, Sas-4^s2214, Sas-4^s2214/Df, elav>Sas-4RNAi, UbqSas-4GFP;Sas-4/Df

☐ 0-1
▨ 2-3
■ >4

L PNS

Defects per lateral (%)

Control, Sas-4^s2214, Sas-4^s2214/Df, P0163>Sas-4RNAi, UbqSas-4GFP;Sas-4/Df

☐ 0-1
▨ 2-3
■ >4

| Ctrl | *RN2>Sas-4RNAi (2)* |

FasII

FasII DsRed	
Control	***Sas-4***

TRERed