Title: An Autophagy-Inducing Compound Reduces Tau Pathology, Microglia Reactivity, and Rescues Working Memory in 3xTg AD Mice

Running Title: Autophagy-Inducing Compound in 3xTg AD Mice

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Abstract

Background

Recent advancements in Alzheimer's disease (AD) therapeutics have validated the use of amyloid beta (Aβ)-clearing antibodies, which reduce Aβ pathology but leave other disease hallmarks largely unaddressed. Since AD involves multiple pathological processes, additional strategies are needed to target complementary mechanisms. One such target is autophagy, a lysosomal mediated degradation pathway essential for cellular homeostasis that removes toxic protein aggregates and damaged organelles. This process is implicated in AD, as impaired lysosomal function promotes Aβ and tau

accumulation. Our laboratory recently identified a novel natural mitophagy-inducing compound (MIC) that may serve as a therapeutic intervention for AD.

Methods

We evaluated the effects of MIC in aged 3xTgAD mice, a transgenic model displaying both Aβ and tau pathology. Mice received either standard diet or diet containing MIC beginning at age 4 months until 20 months on alternating weeks. Age-matched non-transgenic (NonTg) controls were included under standard and MIC-supplemented diets to assess compound effects during normal aging. Neuropathological changes were assessed using immunohistochemistry (IHC) for Aβ, phosphorylated tau (pTau), and microglial reactivity. Cognitive performance was evaluated using the Morris Water Maze (MWM) to assess spatial learning and memory and the Y-maze to measure working memory.

Results

At 20 months of age, our neuropathological assessment showed that 3xTgAD mice fed an MIC-supplemented diet had a significant reduction in pTau accumulation and microglial reactivity, although Aβ burden remained unchanged. At 15 months, MIC diet also improved spatial learning and memory in aged NonTg controls but not in 3xTgAD mice. However, in younger 8-month-old 3xTgAD mice, MIC restored working memory performance to NonTg levels, indicating an age-dependent therapeutic response.

Conclusion

MIC emerges as a potential modulator of tau pathology and neuroinflammation. As a naturally derived compound, MIC offers potential for combination therapy with FDA-

approved Aβ-clearing antibodies, enabling a multimodal approach to AD treatment that addresses amyloid, tau, and microglia-related pathology.

Abbreviations

3xTg AD: Triple-transgenic Alzheimer's disease mouse model

AD: Alzheimer's disease

ADRDs: Alzheimer's disease and related dementias

Aβ: Amyloid-beta

pTau: Phosphorylated tau

NFTs: Neurofibrillary tangles

APP: Amyloid precursor protein

PSEN1/2: Presenilin 1/2 genes

TFEB: Transcription Factor EB

ALP: Autophagy-lysosomal pathway

NonTg: Non-transgenic (control) mice

IHC: Immunohistochemistry

MIC: Mitophagy-Inducing Compound

MWM: Morris Water Maze

Y-maze: Behavioral test for working memory

CTRL: Control diet

Iba1: Ionized calcium-binding adaptor molecule 1 (microglial marker)

DAPI: 4',6-diamidino-2-phenylindole (nuclear stain)

PBS: Phosphate-buffered saline

TBS: Tris-buffered saline

NDS: Normal donkey serum

ROI: Region of interest

PHFs: Paired helical filaments

ASO: Antisense oligonucleotide

UA: Urolithin A

IACUC: Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee

OCT: Optimal Cutting Temperature compound

RRID: Research Resource Identifier

SEM: Standard error of the mean

ANOVA: Analysis of variance

Introduction

Alzheimer's disease (AD) and related dementias (ADRDs) currently affect an estimated 47 million people worldwide, a number projected to rise to 75 million by 2030 and 131 million by 2050, underscoring the urgent need for effective interventions [1]. AD is characterized by progressive neuronal degeneration, extracellular Aβ plaques and intracellular neurofibrillary tangles (NFTs) composed of hyperphosphorylated tau protein aggregates [2, 3]. While it is well documented that these protein aggregates and neuronal loss are indicators of disease progression, the upstream molecular mechanisms that trigger AD pathogenesis are not fully understood.

The amyloid hypothesis proposes that aggregation of Aβ initiates a cascade of neurotoxic events that culminate in synaptic dysfunction, neuroinflammation, and

88 neuronal loss [4-8]. Aβ is generated through sequential proteolytic cleavage of amyloid
89 precursor protein (APP), first by β-secretase and then by γ-secretase, whose catalytic
90 subunit is encoded by the PSEN1 and PSEN2 genes [4]. Cleavage within the APP
91 transmembrane domain releases Aβ peptides that aggregate into fibrils and eventually
92 form extracellular amyloid plaques, a key pathological hallmark of AD [7, 9].
93 Recently, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved several monoclonal
94 antibodies targeting Aβ, designed to facilitate microglial clearance of amyloid plaques
95 [10-13]. Although these therapies effectively reduce amyloid burden, their impact on
96 cognitive decline remains modest, underscoring the need for complementary or
97 alternative approaches that address additional mechanisms underlying Alzheimer's
98 pathology [14-16].
99 Alongside Aβ pathology, tau pathology represents a defining hallmark of AD [2, 3]. In
100 AD, Tau proteins become hyperphosphorylated and disassociate from microtubules
101 causing microtubules to disassemble [17]. Axonal pTau aggregates can reach the soma
102 and form paired helical filaments (PHFs) leading to the development of NFTs [18]. It is
103 well documented that the somatodendritic re-localization of pTau and subsequent
104 aggregation into NFTs is what contributes to neuronal dysfunction and cell death
105 associated with AD [19, 20].
106 Tau pathology is also targeted in AD clinical trials [21]. Tau targeting compounds in
107 phase I clinical trials include APNmAb005, MK02214, and NIO752, in phase II BII080,
108 Bepranemab, E2814, and JNJ-63733657, and in phase 3 E2814 [21, 22]. Tau-targeting
109 antibodies are thought to act by preventing the trans-synaptic spread of toxic tau
110 species [22]. ASO (e.g. BII080) acts by inhibiting tau RNA into tau proteins in neurons,

111 thereby reducing total tau [21, 23] However, there remain no FDA approved
112 interventions that have been shown to enhance intracellular protein clearance of pTau
113 aggregates.
114 Cognitive dysfunction in AD extends beyond canonical Aβ and tau pathologies to
115 encompass pathological microglial activation, characterized by a pronounced shift from
116 a resting surveillant phenotype to a pro-inflammatory reactive state [24-26]. This
117 phenotypic transition has been mechanistically linked to chronic exposure and aberrant
118 sensing of AD associated pathogenic proteins.
119 Microglia mediated neuroinflammation in AD has also been targeted for therapeutic
120 intervention [24, 25]. OLT1177 an oral NLRP3 inflammasome inhibitor, acts upstream to
121 prevent IL-1β maturation from microglia [24]. XPro1595 (Pegipanermin), a TNF-
122 neutralizing protein in Phase 2 trials, demonstrated decreased neuroinflammation
123 biomarkers and improved white matter structure in mild-to-moderate AD patients [25].
124 These complementary therapeutic approaches highlight the emerging recognition that
125 modulating pathological microglial immune activation represents a promising strategy
126 for slowing cognitive decline in Alzheimer's disease.
127 Cellular protein and organelle clearance are mediated by the autophagy-lysosomal
128 pathway (ALP), which relies on fusion of autophagosomes with lysosomes [26-28].
129 Autophagic and lysosomal dysfunction are well documented in AD studies [29-34].
130 Transcription factor EB (TFEB) is established as the master regulator of the ALP [35]. In
131 pursuit of therapeutic strategies to modulate TFEB activity, we conducted a natural
132 product screen in N27 rat dopaminergic neural cells and identified a compound we
133 called mitophagy inducing compound (MIC) via its ability to enhance mitochondrial

134 turnover via increased TFEB promoter activity 6-fold. Validation in *C. elegans*
135 demonstrated that MIC increases activity of HLH-30—the TFEB ortholog in worms—
136 enhances lysosomal function, reduces proteotoxicity and extends lifespan as well as
137 lysosomal function in mammalian cells [36]. Here we report that in aged 3xTg AD mice,
138 longitudinal dietary supplementation with MIC resulted in significant reductions in pTau,
139 nuclear localized pTau, and perinuclear pTau, without affecting Aβ pathology.
140 Furthermore, MIC administration led to significant reduction in microglia reactivity in
141 aged 3xTg AD mice while having no effect on microglia reactivity in aged nonTg mice.
142 MIC was found to improve working memory independently of locomotive behavior at the
143 8-month timepoint in the 3xTg AD mice, which was lost at later disease stages. This
144 corresponded with a lack of effects on spatial memory performance in 3xTg AD mice.
145 However, MIC did elicit significant improvement in spatial memory in aged nonTg mice.

146 Materials and Methods

147 Animals

148 All experiments involving mice were approved by the Buck Institute for Research on
149 Aging Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) and were conducted in
150 compliance with all relevant ethical regulations for animal research. 3xTg-AD female
151 mice and B6129SF2/J non-transgenic female mice were obtained from The Jackson
152 Laboratory (Ellsworth, ME). All animals were housed in the Buck Institute vivarium
153 (Novato, CA) under standard conditions for social housing and environmental
154 enrichment, in accordance with institutional animal care guidelines.

155 ## MIC Treatments

156 From birth to 4 months of age, all mice were fed a vivarium diet (irradiated food rodent
157 diet, Cat TD-2918, Envigo Teklad, Madison, WI). Starting at 4 months, 3x-Tg AD mice
158 (n=15) and non-Tg mice (n=15) were fed either a control (CTRL) diet (D110700GI, AIN-
159 93G containing sterile casein; Dyets, Inc, Bethlehem, PA) or MIC (25 mg/kg MIC in AIN-
160 93G containing casein, 104252GI on alternating weeks with fed of CTRL diet until
161 euthanization at 20 months (Fig. 1a).

162 ## Y-maze

163 Working memory was assessed in the Y-maze test following established protocols [37,
164 38]. The Y-maze apparatus consisted of with three symmetrical arms measuring 40 × 8
165 × 15 cm (length × width × height). Mice were acclimated to the testing room for 1 hour
166 prior to testing. Each mouse was positioned in the center zone and allowed unrestricted
167 exploration for 10 minutes. Arm entries and alternations were automatically tracked and
168 quantified using the EthoVision XT software (Noldus Information Technology, Leesburg,
169 VA; RRID: SCR_000441). In accordance with established protocols [37], mice that did
170 not move throughout the duration of the test were re-trialed. Mice that remained still
171 during trial and retrial were excluded from the spontaneous alternation analysis to
172 assess working memory, but still included in the arm entry analysis to assess
173 locomotion.

174 ## Open Field

175 The Open Field Test was performed as previously described by our laboratory with
176 small variations [39]. Locomotory and exploratory behavior was assessed using the

177 TruScan photobeam apparatus (Coulbourn Instruments, Holliston, MA, USA). Mice were
178 placed in the open field chamber and allowed to explore freely for 15 minutes. The
179 distance traveled during the 15-minute period was quantified using TruScan 2.0
180 software (Coulbourn Instruments).

181 Morris Water Maze (MWM)

182 The MWM was adapted from previously described procedures [40, 41]. The MWM
183 consisted of a circular pool (122 cm diameter, 50 cm height) filled with water maintained
184 at 22 ± 1 °C and rendered opaque with non-toxic white paint. A hidden escape platform
185 was submerged just below the surface in the center of the northwest quadrant. The
186 testing room contained fixed distal visual cues that remained unchanged throughout the
187 experiment. Mice underwent acquisition training with two trials per day for five
188 consecutive days. On day 1, trial 1, mice were placed at the southernmost point of the
189 pool and given 60 seconds to locate the hidden platform. If unsuccessful, they were
190 guided to the platform and allowed to rest for 10 seconds. Trial 2 followed the same
191 procedure. On days 2–5, trial 1 also began from the southernmost point, while trial 2
192 began from the easternmost point, following the same timing and placement protocol as
193 day 1. Twenty-four hours after the final training session, the platform was removed, and
194 mice underwent one 30-second probe trial in the morning followed by a rest and then a
195 60-second probe trial in the afternoon, both initiated from the southeasternmost point.
196 The number of crossings over the platform's previous location was recorded. Behavior
197 was recorded and tracked using EthoVision XT software (Noldus Information
198 Technology, Leesburg, VA; RRID: SCR_000441).

199 ## Tissue Collection and Histology Preparation

200 Mice from all 4 conditions were euthanized in a CO_2 chamber at 20 months of age. Mice
201 were exsanguinated via transcardial perfusion with 1X phosphate buffered saline (PBS).
202 These timepoints were selected to enable a standardized comparison for
203 neuropathological analysis as previously described [42]. Brains were dissected and
204 stored at 4° C in 4% paraformaldehyde for 48 hours and then transferred to PBS. Tissue
205 Sectioning

206 For tissue sectioning, the brains were embedded in 4% agarose at room temperature or
207 in Optimal Cutting Temperature (OCT) compound (4583, Tissue-Tek, Torrance, CA)
208 and frozen at -80 °C. They were sectioned at a thickness of 40 μm per section along the
209 coronal plane, from rostral to caudal using a cryostat (CM 1950, Leica) respectively.
210 Sections were collected in ice cold tris buffer saline (TBS); and transferred to a 48-well
211 plate containing cryobuffer (0.1 M Potassium Acetate, 40% Ethylene Glycol, 1% Poly
212 Vinyl Pyrrolidone in PBS, Sigma-Aldrich, Darmstadt, Germany). Sections were stored at
213 -20°C.

214 ## Immunohistochemistry

215 Sections from each mouse were regionally matched, hemisected and selected for
216 staining. All sections were stained with the following protocol at room temperature
217 unless otherwise noted. Free-floating sections were washed three times with TBS to
218 remove the cryobuffer. For antigen retrieval, individual sections were placed in 2 mL
219 Eppendorf tubes containing 1 mL of citrate buffer (6.0 pH; sodium citrate tribase
220 dehydrate, citric acid anhydrous, Sigma-Aldrich), tightly wrapped with parafilm and then

221 put into a 90º C water bath for 10 minutes. Sections were then washed three times in
222 TBS, permeabilized for 1 h in 0.2% Triton X-100 (Thermo Fisher Scientific, Waltham,
223 MA) in TBS, and blocked for 1 h in 5% normal donkey serum (NDS; 017-000-121,
224 Jackson ImmunoResearch, West Grove, PA) prepared in 0.2% Triton-TBS. Tissue
225 sections were incubated overnight at 4 °C with primary antibodies diluted in 5% NDS
226 and 0.2% Triton-TBS. The following day, sections were washed three times with TBS
227 containing 0.1% Tween-20 (TBS-Tween, Sigma-Aldrich) then incubated with secondary
228 antibodies diluted in TBS-Tween for 1 h at room temperature. Sections were
229 subsequently washed in TBS-Tween for 2 h to remove unbound antibody. For
230 conjugated antibody staining, sections were incubated in TBS-Tween for 1 h at room
231 temperature following completion of the primary and secondary antibody steps. After
232 final washes in TBS-Tween, sections were counterstained with DAPI (1:10,000;
233 Invitrogen) for 10 min, mounted onto microscope slides (VWR Premium Superfrost Plus
234 Microscope Slides, Avantor, Visalia, CA) and coverslipped (VWR Rectangular Micro
235 Cover Glasses, Avantor) using ProLong Gold Antifade Mountant (P36930, Invitrogen).

236 **Antibodies**

237 Primary antibodies: anti-phospho-Tau Ser202, Thr205 AT8 mouse antibody (1:200
238 dilution) (MN1020, Invitrogen), anti-Iba1 (1:200 dilution) (019-19741, FUJIFILM Wako
239 Diagnostics, Mountain View, CA, US), and Alexa Fluor 488 conjugated anti-β-amyloid 1-
240 16 6E10 (1:200) (Biolegend, 803019). Secondary antibodies: donkey anti-mouse Alexa-
241 Fluor 647 (A31471, Invitrogen) and donkey anti-rabbit Alexa-Fluor 555 (A31572,
242 Invitrogen).

Confocal Imaging and Image Processing

Images were acquired with an LSM-980 confocal microscope (Zeiss, Jena, Germany.) with a 20x objective lens using Zen Image Acquisition software (Zeiss, RRID: SCR_013672). Z-stack tile scan images of 707 um^2 of the dorsal subiculum (Bregma -3.16mm, Supplemental Fig. 1) directly adjacent to but not in view of the dorsal CA1 pyramidal cell layer were acquired. IMARIS (Zurich, Switzerland, RRID: SCR_007370) was used for 3D visualization, video generation, and processing of 3D confocal images. A standardized volume was selected from within the tile scans to ensure equivalent regions were compared in the z-plane. Standardized 3D regions of interest (ROI) for Aβ, pTau, Iba1, and DAPI-positive voxels (volumetric pixel) were then generated using the surface function of IMARIS. The algorithms used to generate the ROIs were standardized for each replicate to eliminate user bias. **Aβ and pTau volume analysis:** The total volume of Aβ and pTau was obtained from the sum volume of 3D ROIs calculated from voxels positive for each marker. **Aβ and Iba1 protein quantification:** Total protein levels of Aβ and Iba1 were quantified in arbitrary units to assess amyloid burden and microglial reactivity, respectively. For each sample, the total sum voxel fluorescence intensity within the 3D ROIs corresponding to Aβ or Iba1 immunoreactivity was summed to obtain total protein levels. Additionally, mean microglial protein levels were determined by averaging the mean voxel fluorescence intensity within individual Iba1-positive 3D ROIs. **Percent pTau positive cells:** 3D ROI based on DAPI were used to identify nuclei and 3D ROI based on the pTau channel were used to identify pTau-positive structures. The distance function in IMARIS was used to assess distances between the ROI types. DAPI ROI in direct contact (distance = 0 μm) to pTau ROI was

266 used to identify pTau positive nuclei. The percentage of pTau-positive nuclei was used
267 as a proxy for pTau-positive cells. **Nuclear and perinuclear localized pTau:** pTau
268 positive nuclei generated as described above were used to partition perinuclear and
269 nuclear pTau 3D ROI. Briefly, pTau signal within DAPI-positive neuclei was categorized
270 as nuclear pTau and the remaining pTau that was < 2 μm from the edge of nuclei was
271 categorized as perinuclear pTau. The sum voxel pTau fluorescence intensity for nuclear
272 or perinucluear pTau ROIs was normalized to the total number of nuclei assessed per
273 image and used as proxies of total nuclear and perinuclear pTau protein.

274 Statistical Analysis

275 Statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics (Chicago, IL, RRID:
276 SCR_002865) and data was graphed using GraphPad Prism (San Diego, CA, RRID:
277 SCR_002798). Independent samples t-tests and two-Way ANOVAs with post hoc
278 Tukey's multiple comparisons were run to compare groups. Statistical significance was
279 set at $p < 0.05$, two-tailed. Assumptions tests were carried out to detect extreme outliers
280 (box plots), normality (Shapiro-Wilk test, $p > 0.05$), and homogeneity of variances
281 (Levene's test, $P > 0.05$). When statistical assumptions were violated, appropriate data
282 transformations were applied, and all assumption tests were subsequently re-evaluated
283 to confirm compliance. Non-parametric Kruskal–Wallis tests with Bonferroni-corrected
284 all-pairwise comparisons on ranks were conducted when data transformations failed to
285 meet the assumptions required for parametric analyses. For behavioral data, figures
286 display non-transformed values to facilitate visual interpretation. Comprehensive results
287 for both transformed and non-transformed datasets—including assumption tests,

omnibus analyses, and post hoc comparisons—are provided in Supplemental Tables 1–6. Exact p-values are reported for all outcomes, regardless of significance.

Results

Neuropathology in 3xTg AD and nonTg Mice

3xTg AD mice are a widely used model of AD that develop age-dependent pathology, originally generated by Oddo et al. through co-injection of Presenilin 1 Methionine-146-Valine (PS1M146V) and Amyloid Precurser Protein Swedish (APPSwe) transgenes, which are linked to familial Alzheimers Disease (fAD), as well as the tauP30IL transgene, which is linked to frontotemporal dementia (FTD) [43, 44]. In these mice, Aβ plaques progressively accumulate in the hippocampus (80% of mice at 6 months, 100% of mice at 12 months) and are found in the subiculum, CA1 field, and entorhinal cortex, while pTau localizes both intraneuronally and extracellularly in pyramidal cells, increasing in an age-dependent manner starting as early as 4 months of age [42, 45]. Only female mice were used because they develop Aβ pathology [46] and pTau pathology [42] earlier and in greater amounts than their male siblings. We used age-matched female B6129SF2/J nonTg groups as controls.

MIC or control diet begun at 4 months for the 3xTg AD (CTRL n = 15, MIC n = 15) and nonTg control (CTRL n = 15, MIC = 15) groups to determine the drug's ability to suppress the age-dependent accumulation Aβ ant tau pathology as well as microglia reactivity (Fig. 1a). Five mice from 3xTg AD CTRL diet group, 4 mice from the nonTg CTRL diet group, 8 mice from the 3xTg AD MIC diet group, and 2 mice from the nonTg

309 MIC diet died from natural causes and were not included in the studies of
310 neuropathology.
311 The remaining mice were humanely euthanized at 20 months of age and
312 immunohistochemistry (IHC) was performed on 40 μm-thick regionally matched
313 hippocampal slices from the dorsal subiculum (Sup. Fig. 1), critical for spatial memory
314 and learning in mice [47]. Tissue sections were immunolabeled to detect Aβ using the
315 6E10 antibody, microglial activation using Iba1 antibodies, and hyperphosphorylated tau
316 (Ser202/Thr205) using the AT8 antibody (Fig. 1b) [48-50]. Cell nuclei were
317 counterstained with DAPI (Fig. 1b). As expected, the comparison between 3xTgAD and
318 nonTg mice confocal microscope images revealed substantial Aβ plaque deposition
319 (6E10), pTau accumulation (AT8), and microglia reactivity (Iba1) in 3xTg AD mice
320 regardless of the diet (Fig. 1b).

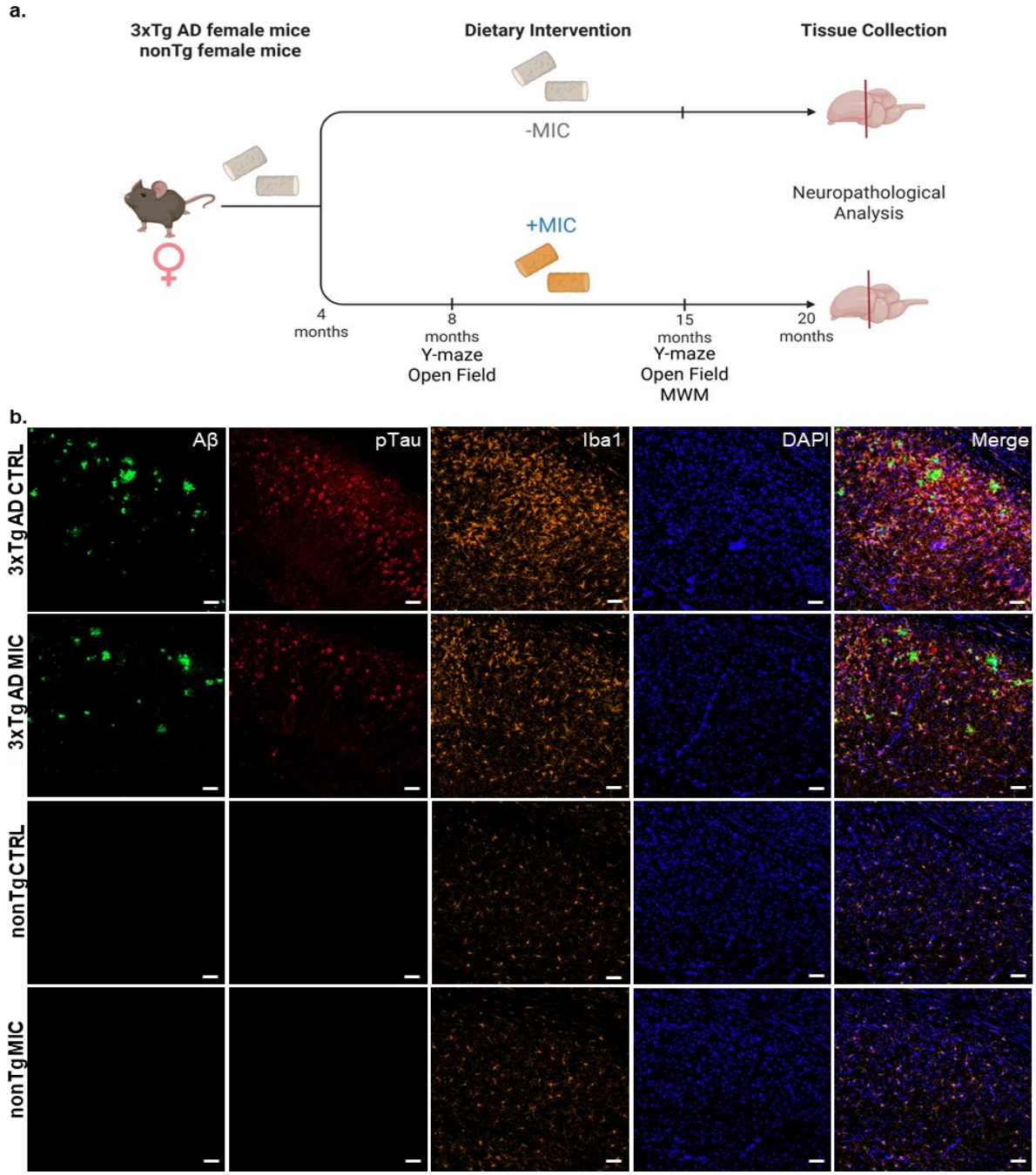

Figure 1: Project timeline and neuropathological analysis of aged 3xTg AD mice and nonTg mice. **(a)** Schematic depicting female 3xTg AD mice and female nonTg mice started on a normal chow vivarium diet from birth to 4 months. At 4 months, mice were switched to a CTRL diet or MIC diet every other week with CTRL diet on off weeks until 20 months when all mice were euthanized for neuropathological analysis. Longitudinal behavioral analyses were performed as described at 8 and 15 months of age. **(b)** Immunofluorescence staining of regionally matched 40 µm thick slices of the dorsal subiculum from the caudal hippocampus of 20 month-old 3xTg AD and nonTg mice fed on CTRL and MIC diets. Visualization of Aβ, (6e10, [1-16]) (green), pTau (AT8 [Serine 202/Threonine 205]) (red), microglia [Iba1] (orange) and cell nuclei [DAPI] (blue). Scale bar = 50 µm.

330 **MIC does not reduce Aβ neuropathology in 3xTg AD mice**

331 In 20-month-old 3xTgAD mice, confocal imaging revealed readily identifiable large,
332 compact plaques with strong Aβ signal (red boxes) as well as more diffuse aggregates
333 exhibiting fainter Aβ labeling (yellow boxes) in both MIC- and control (CTRL)-fed groups
334 (Fig. 2a; Sup. Fig. 2).

335 To evaluate potential differences in the overall abundance of Aβ aggregates, 3D ROIs
336 were generated using Imaris image analysis software to quantify the total Aβ-positive
337 volume within dorsal subiculum sections. This volumetric analysis measures aggregate
338 abundance independent of fluorescence intensity, allowing direct comparison of Aβ
339 burden between MIC- and CTRL-fed mice regardless of variations in signal brightness.
340 For the comparison between 3xTgAD CTRL and MIC diet groups, an independent *t*-Test
341 revealed no significant difference in total Aβ volume ($t(15) = 0.171$, $p = 0.8664$; Fig. 2b;
342 Sup. Table 1a), indicating that MIC did not reduce overall Aβ aggregate load.

343 To further assess potential changes in Aβ protein abundance, the total Aβ fluorescence
344 signal—a relative measure of total Aβ content—was quantified within the same ROIs.
345 Consistent with the volumetric findings, no significant difference was observed between
346 3xTgAD CTRL and MIC diet groups ($t(15) = 0.428$ $p = 0.6746$; Fig. 2c; Sup. Table 1b).
347 Taken together, MIC did not reduce the total volume of Aβ aggregates nor the
348 abundance of Aβ within aggregates over the 16-month treatment period.

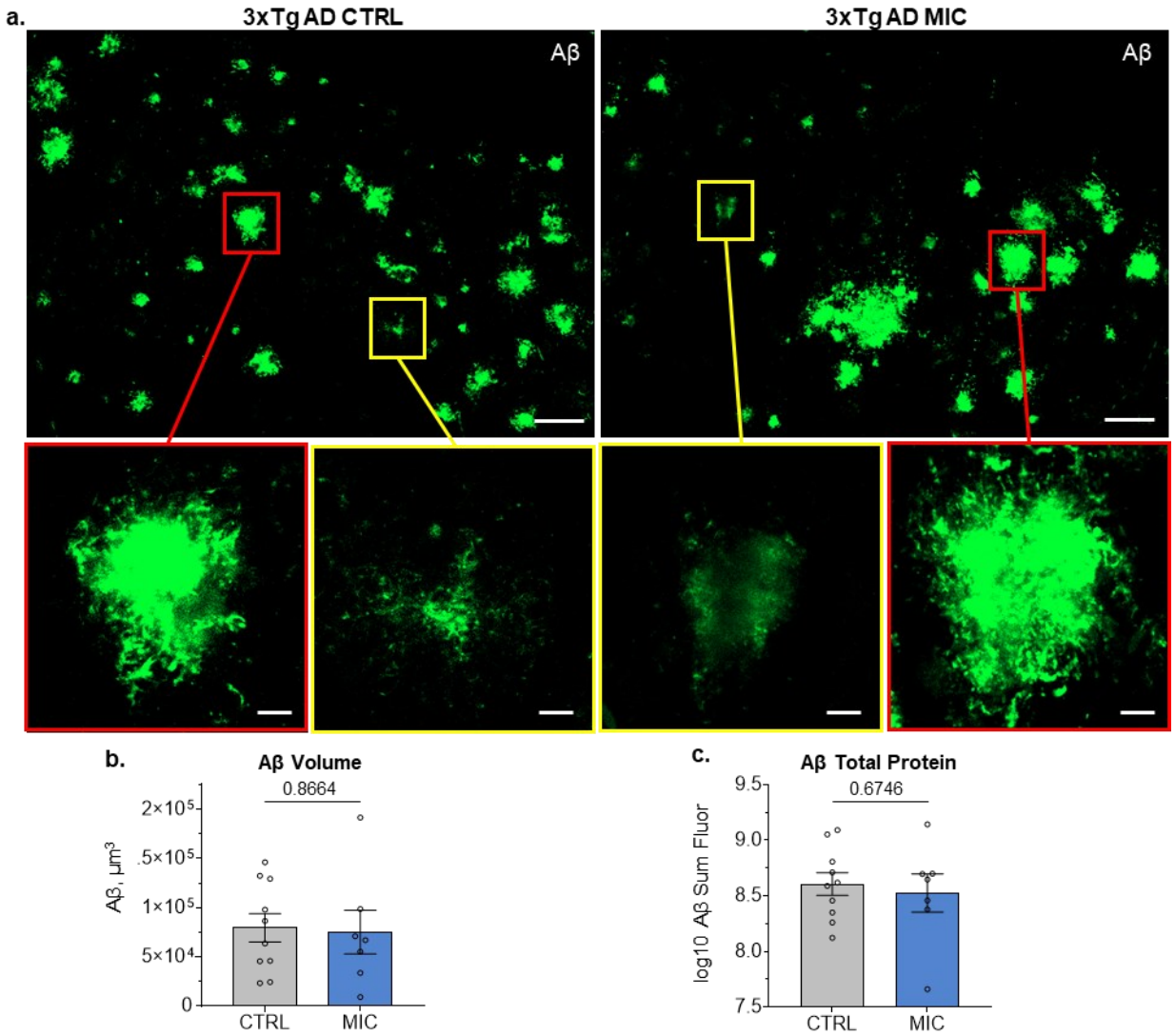

Figure 2: Aβ pathology in dorsal subiculum of 3xTg AD mice is not altered with MIC treatment. **(a)** Representative images from 3xTg AD mice on CTRL and MIC diet Aβ plaques in the dorsal subiculum of 3xTg AD mice. Scalebar, 50 µm. Boxes in top image are expanded bellow, showing details of compact (red boxes) and diffuse (yellow boxes) Aβ aggregates. Scalebar, 10 µm. Independent *t*-Test for **(b)** Aβ volume (µm^3) and **(c)** log10 transformed sum fluorescence intensity. Log10 transform was performed to meet the assumption of normality. For full statistical analysis see Sup. Table 1. CTRL (n = 10), MIC (n = 7). For Bars display mean ± SEM.

MIC significantly reduces pTau in 3xTg AD mice

In contrast to Aβ, confocal imaging revealed visible differences in pTau labeling between 3xTgAD CTRL and MIC diet groups, with noticeably reduced pTau signal in MIC-treated mice (Fig. 3a; Sup. Fig. 3). To further quantify this observation, we performed the same volumetric analysis previously applied to Aβ aggregates. The total pTau-positive volume

361 was significantly reduced in MIC-treated mice compared to CTRL animals ($t(15) =$
362 3.333, $p = 0.0045$; Fig. 3b; Sup. Table 2a), indicating a reduction in pTau-positive
363 structures following MIC supplementation.

364 To determine whether this volumetric decrease was accompanied by a reduction in
365 intracellular pTau protein levels in live cells, we next analyzed fluorescence signal
366 intensity within cellular compartments. Specifically, we identified pTau signal within 2 μm
367 of DAPI-positive nuclei (Fig. 2a, white arrows), representing pTau localized to live cells.
368 The signal was further subdivided into perinuclear and nuclear pTau, depending on
369 whether it overlapped with DAPI staining or not (Sup. Video 1).

370 Perinuclear AT8+ pTau represents early detectable somatic accumulation of pTau,
371 marking a critical transition point where tau escapes its normal axonal compartment and
372 begins aggregating in the neuronal soma before progressing to mature NFTs [51, 52].
373 Perinuclear fluorescence intensity was highly significantly decreased in MIC-treated
374 mice ($t(15) = 3.451$, $p = 0.0036$) (Fig 3c; Sup. Table 3b), evidencing MIC was reducing
375 signal associated to pathological tau in live cells.

376 Under normal conditions, nuclear tau regulates DNA stability and heterochromatin
377 structure in both human iPSC derived neurons and mouse primary cortical neurons [53-
378 55]. In our 3xTg AD mice, we observed the colocalization of AT8+ pTau with DAPI,
379 indicating pTau is localizing inside of cell nuclei. For nuclear pTau, we quantified both
380 the percentage of cells positive for nuclear pTau as well as the intensity of nuclear pTau.
381 Statistical analysis revealed that MIC treatment highly significantly reduced both
382 percentage of pTau-positive nuclei ($t(15) = 4.487$, $p = 0.0004$) (Fig 3d, Sup. Table 3c)

383 and total nuclear pTau fluorescence intensity ($t(15) = 2.882$, $p = 0.0011$) (Fig 3e; Sup.
384 Table 3d).
385 These results demonstrate that chronic MIC administration significantly attenuated tau
386 pathology in 3xTgAD mice. Notably, the reduction encompassed both perinuclear and
387 nuclear pTau compartments, indicating that MIC mitigates intracellular tau accumulation
388 and may act, at least in part, by reducing tau burden within viable neurons.
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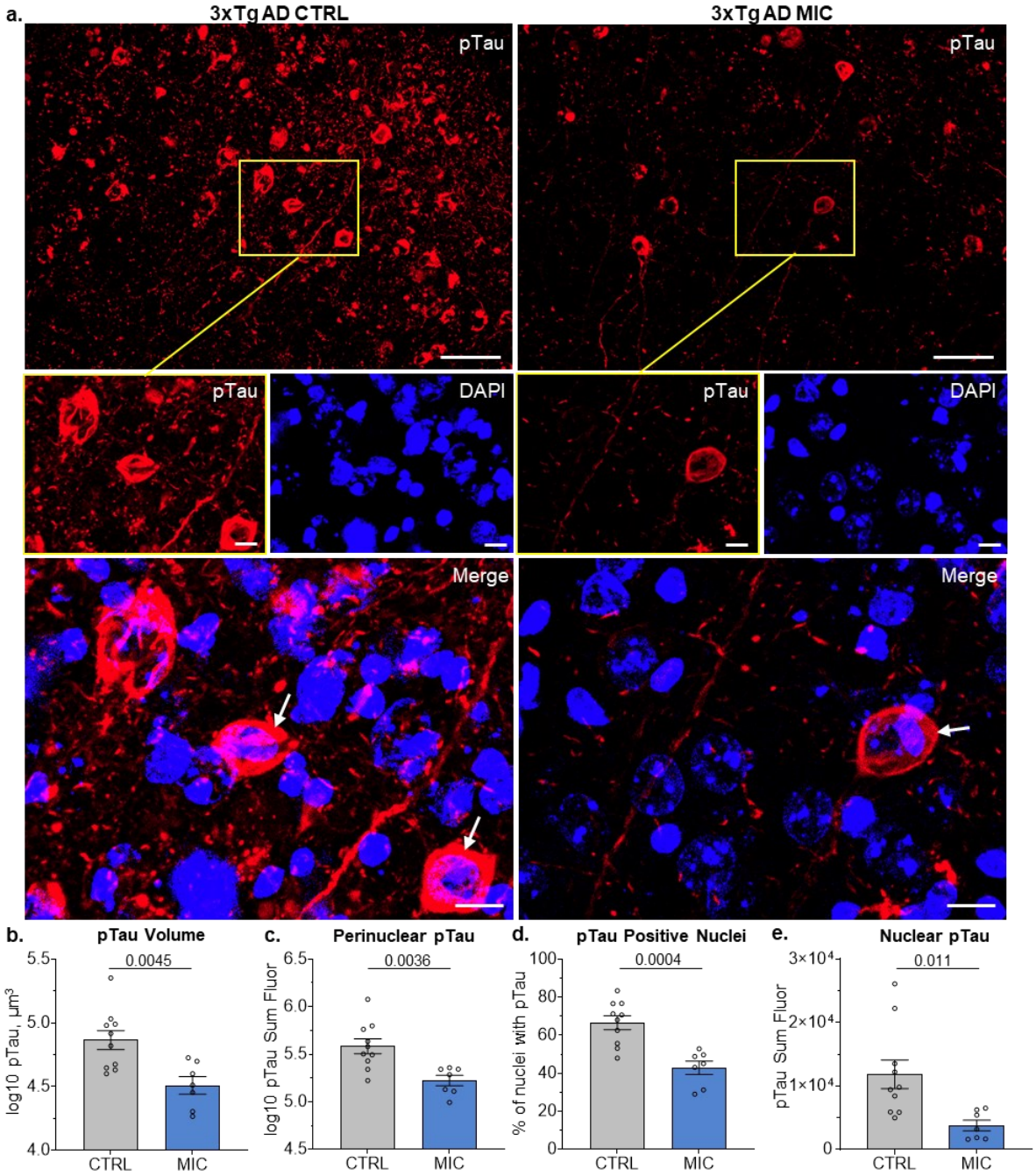

Figure 3: Tauopathy in the dorsal subiculum of 3xTg AD mice is reduced with MIC treatment. **(a)** Representative images (top) from 3xTg AD mice on the CTRL and MIC diet visualizing pTau (AT8) in the dorsal subiculum. Scale bar, 50 µm. Detailed images (middle) of square regions in top images showing pTau and DAPI as separate channels as well as their merged image (bottom). Scale bar, 10 µm. **(b)** Independent *t*-Tests for pTau volume, **(c)** perinuclear pTau fluorescence, **(d)** percent-positive pTau nuclei, and **(e)** nuclear pTau fluorescence. **(b, c, e)** Log10 transforms were performed to meet ANOVA assumptions. For full statistical analysis see Sup. Table 2. CTRL (n = 10), MIC (n = 7). Significance, $p < 0.05$. Bars display mean ± SEM.

400 **MIC significantly reduces microglia reactivity in 3xTg AD mice.**

401 In contrast with Aβ and pTau absent from nonTg, Iba1 signal was readily detected in
402 both 3xTg AD and nonTg mice (Fig. 1b). Iba1 is calcium-binding protein that serves as a
403 widely used marker for detecting microglia throughout the brain in health and pathology.
404 Iba1 is upregulated during microglial activation and plays crucial roles in membrane
405 ruffling and cytoskeleton reorganization [49, 56]. Accordingly, Iba1 staining was
406 analyzed in both nonTg and 3xTgAD mice to assess microglial distribution and
407 activation status.

408 Confocal images of nonTg and 3xTg AD mice revealed distinct morphological
409 differences between experimental groups (Fig. 4a, Sup. Fig. 4a, b, Supp Fig. 5).
410 In nonTg mice, microglia display the characteristic ramified morphology found in healthy
411 aging brains, with thin, highly branched processes extending radially from small cell
412 bodies (Sup. Fig. 5, white arrows) [57, 58]. Compared to nonTg mice, 3xTg AD
413 mice show markedly different microglial morphology with increased Iba1 intensity and
414 thicker processes, characteristic of the activated state observed in the AD mouse
415 models with amyloid pathology [42, 45, 59, 60] (Fig. 4a, Sup. Fig. 4a & 4b).

416 For quantitative comparison of Iba1 across genotypes and diet groups, we first
417 measured the summed fluorescence intensity of Iba1 as a relative indicator of total
418 microglial reactivity. A two-way ANOVA revealed no significant interaction between
419 genotype and diet ($F_{(1, 24)} = 3.300$, $p = 0.082$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.121$; Sup. Table 3a). An
420 interaction assessment analyzes whether the effect of one independent variable on the
421 outcome depends on the level of another independent variable. As expected, there was
422 a highly significant main effect of genotype, with Iba1 levels markedly higher in 3xTgAD

423 mice than in nonTg controls ($F_{(1, 24)}$ = 39.152, p < .001, partial η^2 = 0.620; Fig. 4b, Sup.
424 Table 3a). Main effects represent the independent influence of each factor on the
425 outcome variable, averaged across all levels of other factors. A non-significant trend
426 was also observed for diet, suggesting a possible reduction in Iba1 signal in MIC-fed
427 mice compared to CTRL-fed mice ($F_{(1, 24)}$ = 4.185, p = 0.052, partial η^2 = 0.148; Fig. 4c
428 Sup. Table 3a). Multiple comparisons followed to identify potential biologically
429 meaningful effects. Tukey's multiple comparison test revealed a significant reduction in
430 total Iba1 signal in MIC-fed relative to CTRL-fed 3xTgAD mice (p = 0.0258), an effect
431 not observed in nonTg animals (p = 0.9988; Fig. 4d, Sup. 3a). These findings indicate
432 that the trend toward reduced Iba1 levels in the main diet effect (p = 0.052) was
433 primarily driven by the MIC-associated decrease in microglial reactivity within the
434 3xTgAD group (p = 0.0258), indicating a potentially biologically relevant effect of MIC
435 specifically in 3xTgAD mice.
436 We next analyzed the mean fluorescence intensity of Iba1 per 3D ROI as a proxy of
437 average microglial activation. As with the total Iba1 signal, the two-way ANOVA showed
438 no significant interaction between genotype and diet ($F_{(1, 24)}$ = 2.412, p = 0.133, partial
439 η^2 = 0.091; Sup. Table 3b) and a highly significant main effect of genotype ($F_{(1, 24)}$ =
440 30.912, p < 0.001, partial η^2 = 0.563; Fig. 3e; Sup. Table 3b). In contrast to the summed
441 Iba1 signal, the mean Iba1 intensity did not display a trend for the main effect of diet
442 ($F_{(1, 24)}$ = 2.569, p = 0.122, partial η^2 = 0.097, Fig. 4f, Sup. Table 3b). Follow-up Tukey's
443 multiple comparison tests revealed no significant differences between MIC- and CTRL-
444 fed 3xTgAD mice (p = 0.0854) or between diet groups in nonTg mice (p > 0.9999; Fig.
445 4g, Sup. Fig. 3b).

446 In summary, MIC supplementation did not significantly affect either total or mean Iba1
447 signal in nonTg mice. In 3xTgAD mice, the MIC diet produced a potentially biologically
448 meaningful reduction in total Iba1, but not in mean intensity. This pattern may suggest
449 that MIC could reduce the number of reactive microglia, while maintaining the same
450 average activation level in the microglial population.

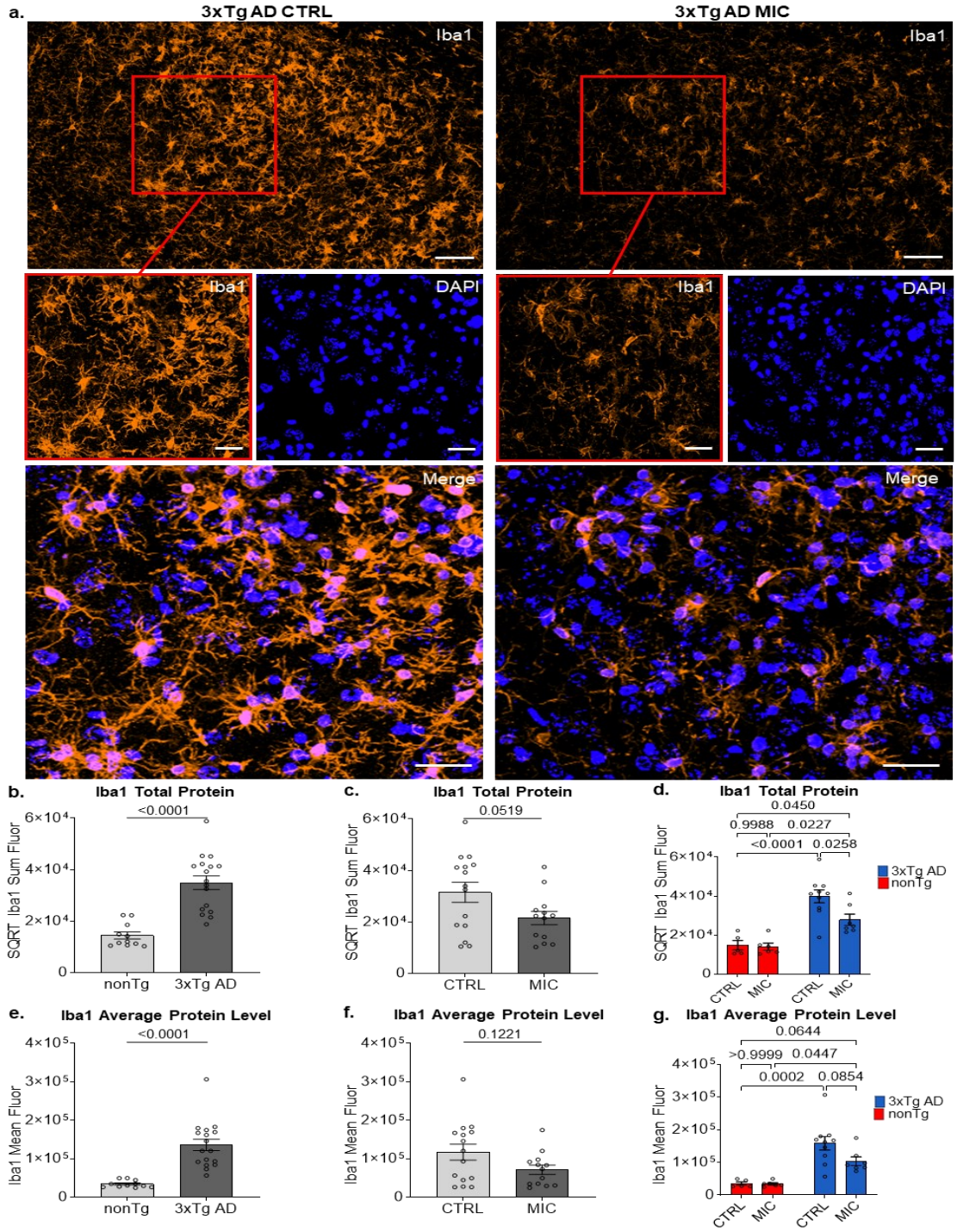

Figure 4: MIC treatment reduces microglia reactivity in the dorsal subiculum of 3xTg AD mice. (a) Representative images (top) from 3xTg AD mice on the CTRL and MIC diets visualizing Iba1 in the dorsal subiculum. Scale bar, 50 µm. Detailed images (middle) of square regions in top images showing Iba1 and DAPI as separate channels as well as their merged image (bottom). Scale bar, 20 µm. **(b)** Genotype main effects (nonTg & 3xTg AD), **(c)** diet (CTRL & MIC) ANOVA main effects, and **(d)** Tukey multiple comparisons for sum Iba1. Iba 1 fluorescent intensity was square root transformed to meet ANOVA assumptions. **(b)** Genotype main effects (nonTg & 3xTg AD), **(c)** diet (CTRL & MIC) ANOVA main effects, and **(d)** Tukey multiple comparisons for mean Iba1 fluorescent intensity. For full statistical analysis see Sup. Table 3. nonTg CTRL (n = 5), nonTg MIC (n = 6), 3xTg AD CTRL (n = 10), 3xTg AD MIC (n = 17). Significance, $p < 0.05$. Bars display mean ± SEM.

461 **MIC rescues working memory in 8 but not 15 month-old 3xTg AD mice**

462 While the neuropathological analyses described above were conducted in 20-month-old
463 mice, behavioral testing using the Y-maze spontaneous alternation task was performed
464 at both 8 and 15 months of age to enable a longitudinal assessment of MIC effects. The
465 Y-maze spontaneous alternation test assesses spatial working memory in rodents
466 based on their innate tendency to explore novel environments [61, 62]. Mice alternate
467 between maze arms at rates significantly above chance with this behavior dependent on
468 hippocampal integrity [63, 64]. Following established protocols, we measured both
469 spontaneous alternation percentage (working memory) and arm entries (locomotor
470 activity) to distinguish cognitive deficits from behavioral confounds [37, 38].

471 At 8 months of age, a two-way ANOVA revealed no significant interaction between
472 genotype and diet on the percentage of spontaneous alternations ($F_{(1, 52)} = 3.579$, p =
473 0.064, partial $\eta^2 = 0.064$, Sup. Table 4a). In contrast, the main effects for genotype ($F_{(1,}$
474 $_{52)} = 4.971$, p = 0.030, partial $\eta^2 = 0.087$) and diet ($F_{(1, 52)} = 10.541$, p = 0.002, partial η^2
475 = 0.169, Sup. Table 4a) were both significant. Follow-up Tukey's multiple comparisons
476 indicated a significant increase in spontaneous alternation performance in MIC-fed
477 3xTgAD mice compared to CTRL-fed counterparts (p = .0023), rescuing performance to
478 levels that were not significantly different from nonTg controls (p = 0.8828, Fig. 5a, Sup.
479 Table 4a). There were no significant differences observed between diet groups in nonTg
480 mice (p = 0.7920, Fig. 5a, Sup. Table 4a). Thus, despite the significant main effects for
481 diet (p = 0.002), post-hoc analysis suggest that the effect of MIC was primarily driven by
482 a rescue of working memory performance in 3xTgAD mice.

483 To control for potential confounding differences in locomotor activity that may influence
484 the above reported Y-maze results, we analyzed the total number of arm entries,
485 irrespective of alternation sequence. The two-way ANOVA revealed no significant
486 interaction between genotype and diet ($F_{(1, 55)} = 0.629$, $p = 0.431$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.011$) and
487 no significant main effect of diet ($F_{(1, 55)} = 1.074$, $p = 0.305$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.019$; Sup. Table
488 4b). In contrast, the main effect of genotype was highly significant ($F_{(1, 55)} = 26.548$, $p <$
489 0.001, partial $\eta^2 = 0.326$; Sup. Table 4b), reflecting a reduction in total arm entries in
490 3xTgAD mice compared to nonTg controls. Post hoc multiple comparisons revealed no
491 significant differences between MIC- and CTRL-fed mice within either genotype
492 (3xTgAD: $p = 0.5637$; nonTg: $p = 0.9982$; Fig. 5b; Sup. Table 4b).
493 Overall, these results indicate that while 3xTgAD mice exhibited reduced locomotor
494 activity relative to nonTg animals, MIC treatment did not alter movement behavior within
495 either group. Therefore, the enhanced spontaneous alternation performance observed
496 in MIC-fed 3xTgAD mice reflects a true improvement in working memory, rather than
497 differences in general motor activity.
498 The Y-maze test was repeated at 15 months of age to assess whether the effects of
499 MIC persisted at later stages. At this age, the two-way ANOVA revealed no significant
500 interaction between genotype and diet ($F_{(1, 40)} = 0.152$, $p = 0.698$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.004$;
501 Sup. Table 4c) and no significant main effects of either diet ($F_{(1, 40)} = 0.278$, $p = 0.601$,
502 partial $\eta^2 = 0.007$; Sup. Table 4c) or genotype ($F_{(1, 40)} = 2.116$, $p = 0.154$, partial $\eta^2 =$
503 0.050; Sup. Table 4c) on the percentage of spontaneous alternation. In contrast to
504 results at 8 months, Tukey's multiple comparisons indicated no difference between MIC-
505 and CTRL-fed 3xTgAD mice ($p = 0.9298$; Fig. 5c, Sup. Table 4c).

506 Consistent with the 8-month analysis, the locomotor activity assessment at 15 months
507 revealed no significant interaction ($F_{(1, 50)} = 0.801$, $p = 0.375$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.016$) and no
508 main effect of diet ($F_{(1, 50)} = 0.080$, $p = 0.778$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.002$), but there was a again
509 highly significant main effect of genotype indicating reduced locomotion in 3xTg AD
510 mice ($F_{(1, 50)} = 46.216$, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.480$; Sup. Table 4d). Post hoc multiple
511 comparisons again mirrored earlier findings, showing no significant differences between
512 MIC- and CTRL-fed mice within either genotype (3xTgAD: $p = 0.9341$; nonTg: $p =$
513 0.8722; Fig. 5d; Sup. Table 4d).
514 The reduced motor activity observed in the Y-maze was corroborated by open-field
515 testing which measured total distance for the 15-minute duration of the test. At 8 months
516 of age, there were no significant interaction effects ($F_{(1, 55)} = 0.414$, $p = 0.522$, partial η^2
517 $= 0.007$) or main effects of diet ($F_{(1, 55)} = 0.002$, $p = 0.962$, partial $\eta^2 < 0.001$; Sup. Table
518 5a). Tukey's post hoc comparisons revealed no significant differences between diets
519 within either genotype (nonTg, $p = 0.9753$; 3xTg AD, $p = 0.9602$; Sup. Fig. 6a, b; Sup.
520 Table 5a). However, a significant main effect of genotype was detected, indicating
521 reduced locomotion in 3xTg AD mice ($F_{(1, 55)} = 11.615$, $p = 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.174$;
522 Sup. Table 5a). Similarly, at 15 months of age, there were no significant interaction
523 effects ($F_{(1, 51)} = 0.137$, $p = 0.713$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.003$) or main effects of diet ($F_{(1, 51)} =$
524 1.844, $p = 0.180$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.035$), nor differences between diets within either
525 genotype (nonTg, $p = 0.6229$; 3xTg AD, $p = 0.8947$; Sup. Fig. 6c, d; Sup. Table 5b). In
526 contrast, a highly significant main effect of genotype was again observed, reflecting
527 markedly reduced motor activity in 3xTg AD mice ($F_{(1, 51)} = 43.264$, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 =$
528 0.459, Sup. Table 5b).

The combined results from the Y-maze and open-field tests demonstrate that 3xTg AD mice exhibit robust genotype-dependent reductions in exploratory and locomotor activity at both 8 and 15 months of age, consistent with the progression of neuropathology. Importantly, the MIC diet specifically improved spatial working memory performance in 8-month-old 3xTg AD mice without altering general locomotor activity, indicating a targeted cognitive benefit rather than a nonspecific enhancement of motor behavior.

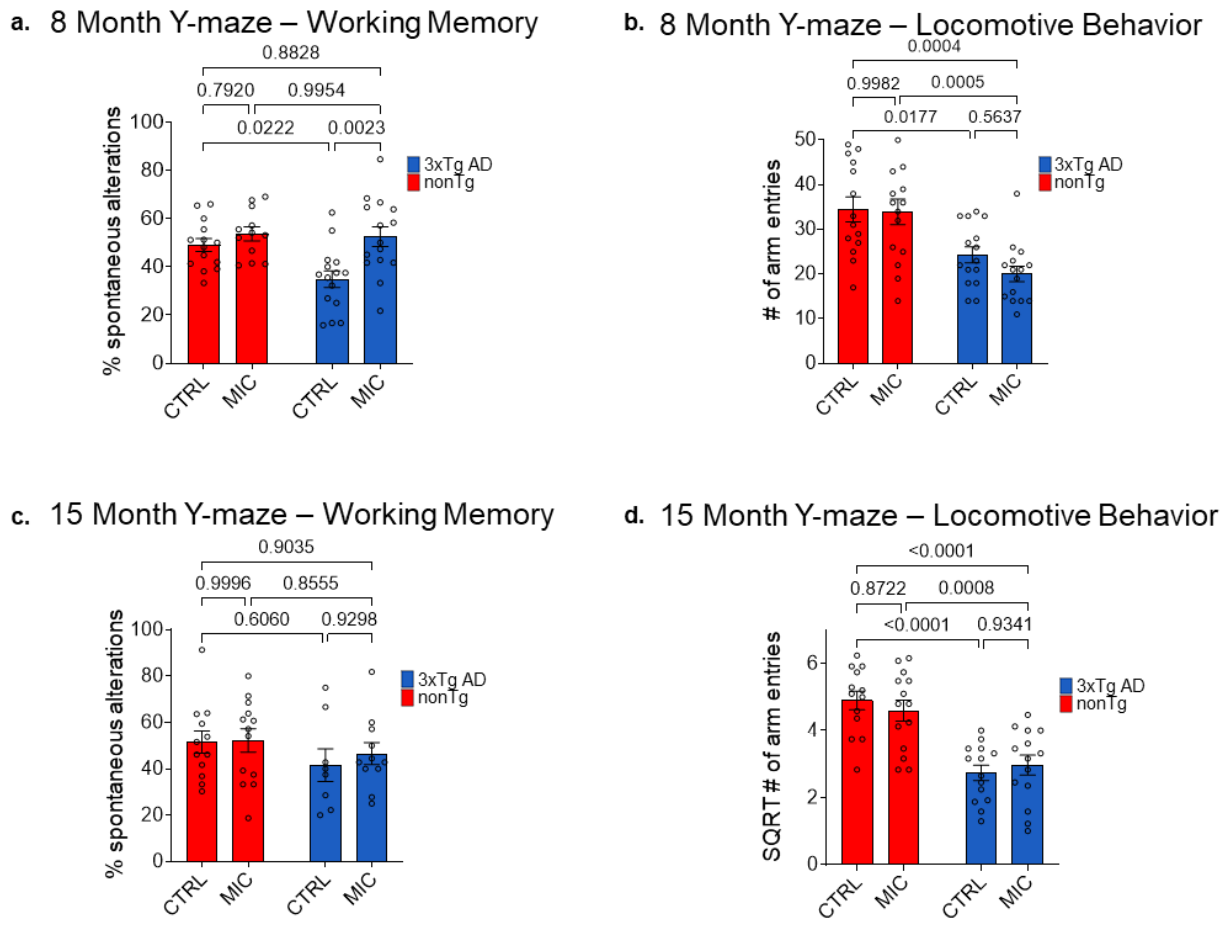

Figure 5: **Y-maze performance in 8-month and 15-month old female mice.** (**a, b**) Percent spontaneous alternation (**a**) and number (#) of total arm entries (**b**) at 8 months of age. Animals that did not perform any arm entries were excluded from the percent alternation analysis. (**a**) nonTg CTRL (n = 14), nonTg MIC (n = 12), 3xTg AD CTRL (n = 15), 3xTg AD MIC (n = 15). (**b**) For total arm entries, all animals were included. nonTg CTRL (n = 14), nonTg MIC (n = 15), 3xTg AD CTRL (n = 15), 3xTg AD MIC (n = 15). (**c, d**) Percent spontaneous alternation (**c**) and number (#) of total arm entries (**d**) at 15-months of age. Animals that did not perform any arm entries were excluded from the percent alternation analysis. (**c**) nonTg CTRL (n = 12), nonTg MIC (n = 13), 3xTg AD CTRL (n = 8), 3xTg AD MIC (n = 11). (**d**) For total arm entries, all animals were included. nonTg CTRL (n = 13), nonTg MIC (n = 14), 3xTg AD CTRL (n = 14), 3xTg AD MIC (n = 14). (**a-d**) Tukey multiple comparisons. For full statistical analysis see Supplemental Table 5. Significance, $p < 0.05$. Bars display mean ± SEM.

MIC enhances spatial learning and memory in nonTg mice but not 3xTg AD mice

The Morris water maze (MWM) was performed at 15 months to evaluate spatial learning and allocentric memory performance, as previously described [40, 41]. Mice were trained twice daily for five consecutive days to locate a hidden platform, followed by probe trials on day six to evaluate memory retention of the platform location in its absence.

Throughout the five-day training period, all groups progressively reduced their escape latencies, indicating effective learning (Fig. 6a). Between-group comparisons for days 1–4 revealed no significant interaction effects ($p \geq 0.162$) or main effects of genotype ($p \geq 0.165$) or diet ($p \geq 0.360$; Fig. 6a; Supp Table 6a). On day 5, however, a non-parametric Kruskal–Wallis H test detected significant group differences ($H_{(3)} = 13.757$, $p = 0.003$, Sup. Table 6a). Bonferroni-corrected rank-based post hoc tests showed significantly shorter latencies for MIC-fed compared with control-fed nonTg mice ($p = 0.025$; Fig. 6a, Sup. Table 6a), indicating that MIC improved performance in nonTg but not 3xTg AD mice.

Because 3xTg AD mice displayed reduced locomotor activity in prior assays, we further evaluated performance in the MWM using measures less sensitive to motor differences. We analyzed the percentage of time spent in the target quadrant as well as within a 35 cm^2 zone centered on the platform location, the latter providing greater sensitivity for detecting spatial memory deficits than traditional quadrant analysis [41, 65-68]. We also evaluated the path length to the platform for training days, as well as proximity to

platform for probe trials as a swimming-speed-independent index of spatial learning, minimizing potential confounds from motor impairment [41].

Percent time in the target quadrant showed no significant effects for any of the 5 training days (Fig. 6b; Sup. Table 6b). In contrast, for day 5, the more sensitive 35 cm² zone analysis showed a significant genotype effect ($F_{(1,50)} = 7.011$, $p = 0.011$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.123$), although without a diet effect ($F_{(1,50)} = 3.604$, $p = 0.113$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.050$; Fig. 6c; Sup. Table 6c). However, most of the genotype effects in day 5 seemed to be driven by better performance in nonTg MIC-fed mice (Fig. 6c, Sup. Table 6c). In fit, post-hoc tests only indicated a potentially biologically relevant increase in performance in nonTg MIC-fed mice compared to 3xTg AD MIC ($p = 0.0142$; Fig. 6c; Sup. Table 6c). This was further supported by a significant interaction in path-length analysis at day 5 ($F_{(1,50)} = 9.867$, $p = 0.003$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.165$), where MIC reduced path length in nonTg ($p = 0.009$) but not 3xTg AD mice ($p = 0.6785$; Fig. 6d; Supp Table 6d). Furthermore, the reduction in pathlength for nonTg MIC-fed mice was also significantly different from 3xTg AD MIC-fed mice ($p = 0.0012$; Fig. 6d; Sup. Table 6d). Taken together, these analyses indicate that group differences emerged on the fifth day of training, primarily reflecting improved performance in MIC-fed nonTg mice.

Twenty-four hours after the final training day, memory retention was assessed in 30- and 60-second probe trials by quantifying platform crossings, the percentage of time spent within the larger 35 cm² zone centered on the previous platform location, and proximity to platform. For the 30-second probe trial platform crossings, a non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis H-test did not show statistically significance differences ($H_{(3)} = 5.275$, $p = 0.1153$; Fig. 6e, Sup. Table 6e). A two-way ANOVA for assessment of the percent time in

592 the 35 cm² target zone did not reveal a significant interaction ($F_{(1,50)} = 2.611$, $p = 0.112$,
593 partial $\eta^2 = 0.050$) nor main effects for diet ($F_{(1,50)} = 1.085$, $p = 0.303$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.021$),
594 but did show a significant effect for genotype ($F_{(1,50)} = 4.923$, $p = 0.031$, partial $\eta^2 =$
595 0.045; Sup. Table 6f). Albeit there was not a significant interaction, multiple comparisons
596 indicate a potentially biologically relevant enhanced performance in MIC-fed nonTg
597 compared to MIC-fed 3xTg AD ($p = 0.0387$; Fig. 6f; Sup. Table 6f), similar to the 35 cm²
598 target zone analysis carried out for the 5th training day (Fig. 6c). A two-way ANOVA
599 assessment for proximity to platform did not reveal a significant interaction effect ($F_{(1,50)}$
600 $= 0.886$, $p = 0.351$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.135$), but did show a significant main effect for
601 genotype ($F_{(1,50)} = 7.812$, $p = 0.007$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.135$) and for diet ($F_{(1,50)} = 0.037$, $p =$
602 0.849, partial $\eta^2 = 0.001$; Sup. Table 6g). Multiple comparisons indicate trending
603 improvement in MIC-fed nonTg compared to MIC-fed 3xTg AD ($p = 0.0509$; Sup. Fig.
604 6a; Sup. Table 6g).
605 For the 60-second probe trial, a Kruskal–Wallis H-test revealed significant group
606 differences in platform crossings ($H_{(3)} = 9.127$, $p = 0.028$; Sup. Table 6h). However,
607 Bonferroni-corrected post-hoc comparisons did not identify significant pairwise group
608 differences (Fig. 6g; Sup. Table 6h). A two-way ANOVA examining the percentage of
609 time spent within the 35 cm² target zone did not detect a significant interaction ($F_{(1,50)} =$
610 1.642, $p = 0.206$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.032$) or main effect of diet ($F_{(1,50)} = 0.004$, $p = 0.951$,
611 partial $\eta^2 < 0.001$), but again revealed a significantly higher performance for nonTg
612 compared to 3xTg AD ($F_{(1,50)} = 9.84$, $p = 0.003$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.164$; Sup. Table 6i).
613 Although the interaction effect was not significant, as for the 30 second probe trial (Fig.
614 6f), post-hoc comparisons indicated a potentially biologically meaningful improvement in

615 MIC-fed nonTg mice compared with MIC-fed 3xTg AD mice ($p = 0.0131$; Fig. 6h; Sup.
616 Table 6i). A two-way ANOVA assessment for proximity to platform did not reveal a
617 significant interaction effect ($F_{(1,50)} = 1.450$, $p = 0.234$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.028$), nor a
618 significant main effect for diet ($F_{(1,50)} = 0.257$, $p = 0.614$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.005$) but did show
619 a significant main effect for genotype ($F_{(1,50)} = 10.648$, $p = 0.002$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.176$; Sup.
620 Table 6j). Multiple comparisons indicated significant improvement in performance in
621 MIC-fed nonTg compared to MIC-fed 3xTg AD ($p = 0.0128$; Supp Fig. 6b; Supp Table
622 6j).
623 In summary, omnibus analysis of main effects for genotype in probe trials indicate better
624 performance for nonTg over 3xTg AD mice in probe trials, as assessed by percentage
625 of time spent in the 35 cm^2 target zone. However, in fit with the results found in the fifth
626 and final day of training (Fig. 6a, c, d), multiple comparisons support a persistent
627 genotype effect for MIC and suggested better performance in MIC-fed nonTg mice
628 compared to MIC-fed 3xTg AD mice (Fig. 6f, g, i, j). Together, these results indicate that
629 MIC enhances spatial learning and memory in healthy aging mice but does not reverse
630 cognitive impairments associated with the 3xTg AD genotype at 15 months of age.
631

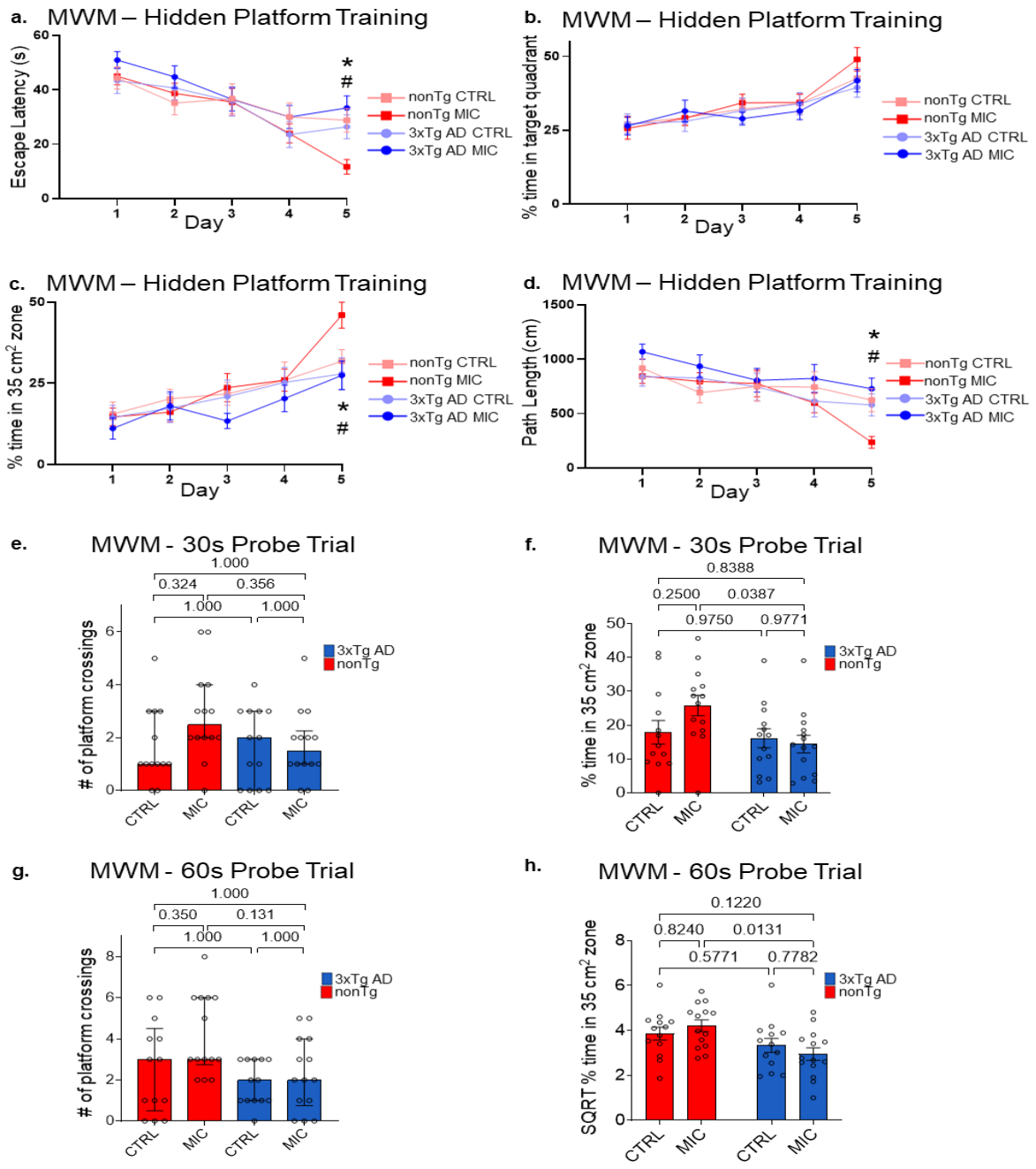

Figure 6: MIC improves spatial memory performance in 15-month-old nonTg mice but not 3xTg AD mice **(a-d)** Assessment of spatial acquisition during the 5 training days for **(a)** scape latency, **(b)** percent time in target quadrant, **(c)** percent time in 35 cm^2 target zone, and **(d)** path length. * nonTg CTRL vs. nonTg MIC, **#** nonTg MIC vs 3xTg MIC, p value < 0.05. Tukey multiple comparisons: **(a)** Day 2 – Day 5**; (b)** Day 1 – 5**; (c)** Day 2 & 5**; (d)** Day 2 – 5. Bars display mean ± SEM. Bonferroni-corrected multiple comparisons on ranks: **(a)** Day 1 & 5 **(c)** Day 1,3 & 4 **(d)** Day 1. Bars display median ± interquartile range (IQR). **(e, f)** Assessment of 30 second probe trials for **(e)** number (#) of platform crossings and **(f)** percent time in 35 cm^2 target zone. **(g, h)** Assessment of 60 second probe trials for **(g)** number (#) of platform crossings and **(h)** percent time in 35 cm^2 target zone. **(e, g)** Tukey multiple comparisons. **(f, h)** Bonferroni-corrected multiple comparisons on ranks. If data violated assumptions of normality or homogeneity of variance, a transformation was applied and marked with a single asterisk. If transformation failed to correct these violations, non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis tests with Bonferroni-corrected pairwise comparisons were used and marked with a double asterisk For full statistical analysis, see Sup. Table 6. Significance, p < 0.05. Bars display mean ± SEM.

646 # Discussion

647 **Effects of MIC on Neuropathology**

648 Analysis of pTau in hippocampal tissue revealed that MIC reduced tau pathology in the
649 dorsal subiculum of 3xTg AD mice (Fig. 3b–3e). Leveraging 3D image reconstruction
650 enabled reliable detection of perinuclear and intranuclear pTau species (Sup. Video 1),
651 which would not be readily distinguishable in conventional 2D projections. Under normal
652 conditions, nuclear tau regulates DNA stability and heterochromatin structure in both
653 human iPSC derived neurons and mouse primary cortical neurons [53-55]. We
654 observed intranuclear pTau in 3xTg AD mice was significantly reduce by a MIC diet (Fig.
655 3e). Although nuclear tau has been reported to have protective function on DNA, the
656 mechanistic implications of MIC-mediated reductions in intranuclear pTau were not
657 investigated here. Rather, this analysis provides a foundation for future studies
658 examining the functional consequences of intranuclear pTau modulation in 3xTg AD
659 mice.

660 Perinuclear pTau was defined as signal located within 2 μm of DAPI-labeled nuclei,
661 capturing somatic pTau closely associated with the nuclear compartment. Thus, while
662 the whole-field pTau intensity alone would include axonal labeling that cannot be
663 attributed to specific cells (Fig. 3b), the DAPI-pTau proximity-based approach allowed
664 assignment of pTau to individual cells and quantification of both the proportion of pTau-
665 positive cells and intranuclear signal intensity. We show MIC significantly reduced both
666 the percentage of pTau-positive cells and perinuclear pTau intensity in the dorsal
667 subiculum (Fig. 3c, d), specifically evidencing a reduction in intracellular pTau burden in
668 3xTg AD mice. The early somatic accumulation of perinuclear AT8+ pTau marks the

669 transition from axonal tau to soma-based aggregation preceding NFT formation [51, 52].
670 Since an MIC-supplemented diet reduced perinuclear pTau accumulation in 3xTg-AD
671 mice, MIC may exert neuroprotective effects by reducing somatic pTau aggregation, and
672 preventing the neurotoxicity associated with NFTs.

673 In a previous study we demonstrated that MIC enhances macroautophagy via
674 upregulation of the master transcriptional regulator of lysosomal function, transcription
675 factor EB (TFEB) [36]. In tau P301S mice, muscle-specific TFEB expression reduced
676 both pTau immunoreactivity and Iba1+ microglial reactivity in hippocampal tissue by 9
677 months [69]. Similarly, viral TFEB delivery in rTg4510 tau transgenic mice reduced pTau
678 and improved cognition through lysosomal-dependent pTau clearance [70]. Importantly,
679 TFEB overexpression in 5xFAD mice (expressing only Aβ pathology) showed no effect
680 on amyloid deposition, indicating TFEB's selectivity for clearing tau over Aβ pathology.
681 Thus, the clearance of pTau but not Aβ pathology by MIC in 3xTg AD that we have
682 reported here aligns with evidence demonstrating TFEB-mediated clearance of Tau but
683 not Aβ pathology.

684 Previous work shows 3xTg AD mice display significantly increased protein levels of
685 microglial Iba1 compared to nonTg control animals [42, 45, 71]. In our analysis of Iba1,
686 we found that 3xTg AD mice that received MIC had significantly reduced Iba1 total
687 protein levels and a trending reduction in average protein levels compared to 3xTg AD
688 CTRL mice (Fig. 4d & 4g), paralleling the pTau reduction. To determine whether this
689 reflected direct MIC-mediated effects on microglia or secondary effects from pTau
690 reduction, we examined aged nonTg controls. Iba1 levels remained unchanged
691 between nonTg CTRL and nonTg MIC-treated mice, indicating MIC does not directly

692 modulate microglial reactivity during normal aging. Considering pTau independently
693 drives microglia reactivity in mouse models [72], it is likely that MIC-induced reductions
694 in pTau are driving decreases in microglial activation, as evidenced in tauopathy mouse
695 models treated with TFEB therapeutics [69, 70].

696 **Effects of MIC on Cognition**

697 Consistent with previous studies reporting reduced locomotor behavior in 3xTg AD mice
698 [86, 87], we observed that 8-month-old 3xTg AD mice displayed decreased total
699 distance traveled in the open-field test and fewer arm entries in the Y-maze relative to
700 nonTg controls (Supp Fig. 6a & Fig. 5b). Despite this motor impairment, MIC-fed 3xTg
701 AD mice showed significantly higher spontaneous alternation rates compared to control-
702 fed 3xTg AD mice, achieving nonTg control level performance (Fig. 5a). These results
703 demonstrate that MIC improved spatial working memory at 8 months of age in 3xTg AD
704 mice in a manner independent of locomotor activity. However, by 15 months of age the
705 beneficial effects of MIC on 3xTgAD mice spatial working memory as assessed by the
706 Y-maze were no longer observable (Fig. 5c). Similarly, the analysis of the MWM results
707 at this age also showed MIC could not rescue 3xTg AD spatial learning during the 5
708 acquisition days (Figs. 6a - 6d) or spatial allocentric memory during the probe trials
709 (Figs. 6e - 6h).

710 The age-dependent effects of MIC on 3xTg AD mice cognitive performance may be
711 explained by our neuropathological observations. By reducing pTau and partially
712 attenuating microglial reactivity, MIC may be able to restore cognitive function in earlier
713 stages of diseases development. However, MIC did not reduce Aβ pathology, indicating
714 that amyloid burden progresses unchecked. Thus, MIC may not be sufficient to offset

715 the cumulative burden of persistent Aβ pathology and other age-related processes at
716 later disease stages. This concept aligns with outcomes from anti-Aβ monotherapy in
717 AD, where selective targeting of one pathology has proven insufficient to halt cognitive
718 decline [14-16]. Our findings therefore suggest that combining MIC with Aβ-targeting
719 therapeutics may be required to restore cognition in late-stage disease.

720 Even in the absence of transgenic pathology, aging itself introduces cognitive deficits
721 [73]. Accordingly, 3xTg AD mice at 15 months likely experience both AD-driven
722 degeneration and physiological age-related decline. Notably, while MIC did not prevent
723 age-related cognitive loss in aged 15-month-old 3xTg AD mice, nonTg animals of the
724 same age fed with MIC performed significantly better than nonTg controls on the final
725 acquisition day of the Morris water maze (Fig. 6a–6d). This improvement suggests that
726 MIC confers cognitive benefits during normal aging, independent of its earlier disease-
727 modifying effect in 3xTg AD mice.

728 Together, these findings suggest that MIC exerts dual actions, enhancing spatial
729 learning in healthy aged nonTg mice and rescuing working memory in earlier but not
730 advanced stages of AD-like pathology in 3xTg AD mice.

731 **Other lysosomal enhancing compounds**

732 Urolithin A (UA), a compound that enhances lysosomal function, upregulates lysosomal
733 genes and improves protein degradation in SH-SY5Y cells and degrades A oligomers in
734 mouse neuronal cells [74]. Similarly, MIC enhanced lysosomal function and improved
735 protein degradation in mouse muscle cells [36]. When administered to 3xTg AD mice,
736 UA reduced both Aβ and pTau [74-76], while in the present study, MIC selectively
737 reduced pTau without affecting amyloid pathology. Studies support that Aβ pathology

promotes tau pathology, but not vice versa in AD mouse models [77-80]. Thus, it is possible that UA's primary effect was on lowering Aβ, which could have indirectly reduced pTau due to the known potentiation of tau pathology by Aβ. In contrast, MIC's effects appear uniquely targeted toward pTau, independent of Aβ, highlighting a novel mechanistic action for treating tau pathology. These results suggest that combining agents with complementary mechanisms—such as MIC's selective pTau targeting and UA's ability to reduce Aβ—may provide a multifaceted and synergistic approach to AD therapy.

Limitations and Future Directions

Here, we evaluated the effects of MIC on Aβ, pTau and microglial reactivity. Although these findings help define the specific pathological targets affected by MIC diet, additional studies will be required to characterize these effects in greater detail, and whether and how they are linked to lysosomal dysfunction. Additionally, while there are studies characterizing the function of nuclear localized Tau in *in vitro* systems [53-55], there is a lack of research on the effects of nuclear localized pTau. We propose that in future studies, researchers investigate the colocalization, or lack thereof, of pTau with nuclear protein markers to further our understanding of its effects on cellular function.

We have evaluated neuropathology in aged 20-month-old mice and cognitive performance in 8 and 15-month-old mice. Evaluating both neuropathology and cognition simultaneously and at earlier timepoints may afford additional mechanistic insights into how and to which extent MIC can affect cognition.

The same mice underwent several behavioral tests. Prior studies indicate that repeated cognitive testing can improve performance [81-83], which may have masked MIC effects

761 on cognition assessed at 15 months of age. Future experiments using behaviorally
762 naïve mice may be necessary to determine the full cognitive impact of MIC without
763 potential pre-training effects.

764 **Conclusions**

765 Dietary supplementation of 3xTg AD mice with MIC was interrogated for its effects on
766 neuropathology and cognition in the 3xTg AD mouse model. While MIC had little effect
767 on Aβ, it robustly reduced pTau and had a less pronounced but significant effect on
768 microglia reactivity. MIC also displayed dual effects on cognition, improving cognitive
769 performance during normal aging in nonTg mice and rescuing working memory in
770 intermediate stages of disease progression in 3xTg AD mice.

771 Despite FDA-approved Aβ therapies in AD, Tau pathology remains untreated and is
772 more closely linked to cognitive decline [19]. Our results highlight MIC as a promising
773 candidate for treating tau pathology alone or in combination with Aβ-targeting therapies,
774 addressing an unmet need in AD.

775 Acknowledgments

776 We thank Dr. Gordon Lithgow, Dr. Shankar Chinta, Dr. Minna Schmidt, Dr. Shika Shukla,
777 the Andersen and Lithgow lab members as well as Stella Breslin and Harris Ingle from
778 the Buck Institute morphology core staff for their invaluable support and contributions.
779 We also thank Dr. Mary Sevigny from Dominican University of California. Figure 1a was
780 prepared using BioRender. Graphs were prepared using GraphPad Prism.

Funding

This work was funded by the National Institute on Aging of the National Institutes of Health under award number R01AG067325.

Contributions

ZM, AR, GW, SS and AK performed the experiments. Behavior was performed by AR, GW and SS. Tissue dissection was performed by AR, GW and MC. Tissue processing and Immunohistochemistry was performed by ZM, GW and AK. Confocal imaging and image processing was performed by ZM. Behavioral analysis and statistical analysis were performed by ZM. JKA supervised the project with additional guidance from CCW and MC. CCW and JKA edited the manuscript. ZM wrote the manuscript, with input from all other authors.

Competing Interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Data Availability

The datasets used and/or analyzed during this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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