# From spikes to intercellular waves:
# tuning intercellular Ca$^{2+}$ signaling dynamics
# modulates organ size control

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**Abstract**

Information flow within and between cells depends in part on calcium ($Ca^{2+}$) signaling dynamics.

However, the biophysical mechanisms that govern emergent patterns of $Ca^{2+}$ signaling dynamics

at the organ level remain elusive. Recent experimental studies in developing *Drosophila* wing

imaginal discs demonstrate the emergence of four distinct patterns of $Ca^{2+}$ activity: $Ca^{2+}$ spikes,

intercellular $Ca^{2+}$ transients, tissue-level $Ca^{2+}$ waves, and a global "fluttering" state. Here, we used

a combination of computational modeling and experimental approaches to identify two different

populations of cells within tissues that are connected by gap junctional proteins. We term these

two subpopulations "initiator cells" defined by elevated levels of Phospholipase C (PLC) activity

and "standby cells," which exhibit baseline activity. We found that the strength of hormonal

stimulation and extent of gap junctional communication jointly determine the predominate class

of $Ca^{2+}$ signaling activity. Further, single-cell $Ca^{2+}$ spikes are stimulated by insulin, while

intercellular $Ca^{2+}$ waves depend on Gαq activity. Our computational model successfully

recapitulates how the dynamics of $Ca^{2+}$ transients varies during organ growth. Phenotypic

analysis of perturbations to Gαq and insulin signaling support an integrated model of cytoplasmic

$Ca^{2+}$ as a dynamic reporter of overall tissue growth. Further, we show that perturbations to $Ca^{2+}$

signaling tune the final size of organs. This work provides a platform to further study how organ

size regulation emerges from the crosstalk between biochemical growth signals and

heterogeneous cell signaling states.

**Author Summary**

Calcium ($Ca^{2+}$) is a universal second messenger that regulates a myriad of cellular processes

such as cell division, cell proliferation and apoptosis. Multiple patterns of $Ca^{2+}$ signaling including

single cell spikes, multicellular $Ca^{2+}$ transients, large-scale $Ca^{2+}$ waves, and global "fluttering"

have been observed in epithelial systems during organ development. Key molecular players and

biophysical mechanisms involved in formation of these patterns during organ development are

not well understood. In this work, we developed a generalized multicellular model of $Ca^{2+}$ that

captures all the key categories of $Ca^{2+}$ activity as a function of key hormonal signals. Integration

of model predictions and experiments reveals two subclasses of cell populations and

demonstrates that $Ca^{2+}$ signaling activity at the organ scale is defined by a general decrease in

gap junction communication as organ growth. Our experiments also reveal that a "goldilocks

zone" of optimal $Ca^{2+}$ activity is required to achieve optimal growth at the organ level.

## Introduction

Epithelial cells do not observe social distancing. This is evident during epithelial morphogenesis when cells communicate and coordinate their activities to generate functioning organs (Leptin, 1995; Schöck and Perrimon, 2002). One modality of intercellular communication occurs through gap junctions (GJ), intercellular channels that permit direct cell-cell transfer of ions and other small molecules (Levin, 2007). Calcium ions ($Ca^{2+}$) act as second messengers that regulate a myriad of cellular processes such as proliferation, differentiation, transcription, metabolism, cellular motility, fertilization, and neuronal communication (Berridge, 2005; Carafoli, 2002; Clapham, 2007; Cuthbertson and Cobbold, 1985; Giorgi et al., 2018; Humeau et al., 2017; La Rovere et al., 2016; Martin and Bernard, 2017; Orrenius et al., 2003; Wei et al., 2009). $Ca^{2+}$ signaling also regulates developmental processes at the multicellular level. For instance, $Ca^{2+}$ signaling has been shown to regulate scale development in butterfly wings (Ohno and Otaki, 2015). It also mediates autophagic and apoptotic processes required for hearing acquisition in the developing cochlea (Ceriani et al., 2016; Mammano and Bortolozzi, 2018; Takeuchi et al., 2020). However, a systems-level description of $Ca^{2+}$ signaling during organ development is lacking.

A major challenge in reverse engineering $Ca^{2+}$ signaling during organ development is the lack of an in vivo model system to identify how cells interpret and integrate information across the broad range of input molecules that dynamically vary concentrations of cytosolic $Ca^{2+}$ ions. In particular, it remains unclear how single-cell $Ca^{2+}$ dynamics are coordinated to regulate tissue-level $Ca^{2+}$ patterns. To overcome these challenges, we developed a computational model based on a realistic geometry of epithelial cells to model $Ca^{2+}$ signaling in the *Drosophila* wing imaginal disc. The *Drosophila* wing imaginal disc is an experimentally amenable system for investigating systems-level regulation of cell signaling (Figure 1A) (Balaji et al., 2017; Brodskiy et al., 2019; Restrepo and Basler, 2016). *Drosophila* wing imaginal discs are a premier system to gain insights into several organ-intrinsic and organ-extrinsic mechanisms that control organ growth (Buchmann

et al., 2014; Gou et al., 2020; Hariharan, 2015; Restrepo et al., 2014; Vollmer and Iber, 2016;

Vollmer et al., 2017).

Previous experimental investigations revealed four classes of $Ca^{2+}$ signaling activity in the

developing wing disc: single-cell $Ca^{2+}$ spikes, multicellular transients, intercellular waves, and

global fluttering (Figure 1B, C). Recently we showed that these patterns depend on the strength

of agonist stimulation (Brodskiy et al., 2019).  We and others have previously reported that $Ca^{2+}$

patterns observed in the wing disc are dependent on phospholipase C (PLC) and the inositol

trisphosphate receptor ($IP_3R$) pathway mediated by gap junctional communication (Balaji et al.,

2017; Brodskiy et al., 2019; Restrepo and Basler, 2016). In non-excitable cells, stimulation of

receptors in the cell surface results in activation of PLCs to generate $IP_3$, which binds to and

activates $IP_3R$ (Figure 1D) (Clapham, 2007). Upon binding, $IP_3Rs$ channel $Ca^{2+}$ from the

endoplasmic reticulum (ER) to the cytosolic space (Berridge, 1987; Berridge et al., 2000;

Clapham, 2007). However, the specific receptors involved in stimulation of PLCs in the *Drosophila*

wing imaginal disc remain to be more fully defined. The key physical/chemical parameters and

their interactions that define multicellular $Ca^{2+}$ dynamics in response to agonist stimulation is not

fully characterized. How these different spatiotemporal modes of signaling encode information

from upstream signals to impact downstream cellular processes during organ development is not

characterized. We have previously shown that inhibition of $Ca^{2+}$ regulators $IP_3R$, PLC21C, Gαq

and gap junctional protein innexin 2 (Inx2) in the wing disc results in reduction in size of adult

wing blade (Brodskiy et al., 2019).  Whether changes to multiscale $Ca^{2+}$ signaling patterns in wing

disc alters overall adult blade wing size remains unknown.

| Variable description | Defining equations |
|---|---|
| **E** Cytosolic [Ca$^{2+}$] and [IP$_3$] intercellular flux | $Flux\ of\ species\ m = J_m \approx \mathcal{F}_m \left[ \displaystyle\sum_{j \in N_i} m_j l_j - m_j \left( \sum_{j \in N_i} l_j \right) \right]$ |
| Cytosolic [Ca$^{2+}$] denoted by (c) | $\dfrac{dc}{dt} = J_c + \left[ k_1 \left( r \dfrac{c}{K_a + c} \dfrac{p}{K_p + p} \right)^3 + k_2 \right] (s - c) - V_{serca} \dfrac{c^2}{c^2 + K_{serca}^2}$ |
| Cytosolic [IP$_3$] denoted by (p) | $\dfrac{dp}{dt} = J_p + V_{PLC} \dfrac{c^2}{c^2 + K_{PLC}^2} + k_{5P}\, p$ |
| ER [Ca$^{2+}$] denoted by (s) | $s(t) = \dfrac{c_{tot} - c(t)}{\beta}$ |
| Fraction of inactivated IP$_3$ receptors denoted by (r) | $\dfrac{dr}{dt} = \dfrac{1}{\tau_{max}} \dfrac{k_\tau^4 + c^4}{k_\tau^4} \left( 1 - r \dfrac{K_i + c}{K_i} \right)$ |

**Figure 1: Multicellular Ca$^{2+}$ signaling in a developing organ. (A)** (*Left panel*) Image of third instar *Drosophila* wing imaginal disc. The larval wing disc includes four regions: pouch (blue), hinge (red), notum (green) and peripodium (yellow). The pouch cells are the region of interest for this study. (*Right panel*) A schematic of the side view of the wing disc showing the peripodial membrane composed of squamous epithelial cells. **(B)** Kymographs illustrate two-dimensional slices of three-dimensional (X, Y and t planes respectively) spatiotemporal signaling. Ca$^{2+}$ signaling activity is related to the fluorescence intensity of the GCaMP6f sensor. A line in the X-Y plane (blue), the X-t plane (red), and Y-t plane (green) are overlaid to illustrate the positions of 2D projections in 3D data set. **(C)** Four classes of Ca$^{2+}$ signaling patterns are observed both in vivo and ex vivo: single-cell spikes, intercellular transient, intercellular waves and fluttering (Brodskiy et al., 2019). In ex vivo cultures, the occurrence of these patterns depend on the concentration of fly extract added to the culture media. Red arrows highlight subtle cellular Ca$^{2+}$ activity. **(D)** Major components of Ca$^{2+}$ toolkit: G protein–coupled receptors (GPCR), receptor tyrosine kinase (RTK), gap

junctions (GJ), Inositol trisphosphate (IP$_3$), diacylglycerol (DAG), Phospholipase C (PLC),
Phosphatidylinositol 4,5-bisphosphate (PIP$_2$), sarco/endoplasmic reticulum Ca$^{2+}$-ATPase (SERCA) and IP$_3$
receptors (IP$_3$R). Parameters for our computational model are denoted in purple. K$_{PLC}$ values are
presumably a function of the specific PLC isoforms active in the cell. **(E)** A summary of baseline Ca$^{2+}$
signaling model. More details on each dynamical equation and meaning of the parameters in the model are
described in Supporting Information and text.

Overall, the computational models of calcium signaling in developing epithelial systems

have to date received sparse attention. Here, we report the necessary conditions to generate the

full spectrum of experimentally observed spatiotemporal patterns by employing a computational

modeling approach. To do so, we built a geometrically accurate 2D-model of a wing disc based

on experimental data. We discovered that in silico replication of wing disc Ca$^{2+}$ patterns requires

two distinct classes of cells, which we term as "initiator cells" and "standby cells." We show how

the standby cells organize themselves with respect to a V$_{PLC}$ Hopf bifurcation threshold, and how

the range of standby cell V$_{PLC}$ values determine the final patterns of Ca$^{2+}$ signaling. Next,

computational simulations and experiments demonstrate that gap junctional communication alters

Ca$^{2+}$ signaling response resulting in more Ca$^{2+}$ spikes in the absence of external stimuli. Finally,

we provide computational and experimental evidence for the role of Ca$^{2+}$ signaling in imaginal

disc morphogenesis. Our findings suggest a "goldilocks zone" of Ca$^{2+}$ where lower levels of Ca$^{2+}$

is correlated with reduced organ growth and higher levels of Ca$^{2+}$ is also correlated with reduced

growth dependent upon the stimulus triggering the Ca$^{2+}$ signal. Overall, we identify crucial

crosstalk between biochemical growth signals, such as insulin and Gαq, and heterogeneous cell

signaling states during the growth of an organ.

**Results**

**Relative rate of IP$_3$ production governs transitions between classes of spatiotemporal Ca$^{2+}$**

**patterns at the tissue level**

Multiple spatiotemporal classes of $Ca^{2+}$ activity are observed in vivo and ex vivo in the

wing disc. However, an understanding of how this activity is regulated requires developing a

systems-level description. To summarize, these include: (i) single-cell $Ca^{2+}$ spikes, (ii) intercellular

$Ca^{2+}$ transients (ICTs), (iii) intercellular $Ca^{2+}$ waves (ICWs), and a (iv) global fluttering

phenomenon (Figure 1C, Table S1, SI videos 1-8) (Balaji et al., 2017; Brodskiy et al., 2019;

Restrepo and Basler, 2016). The frequencies of these observed classes are dependent on the

age of the larvae in both in vivo and ex vivo experiments. Younger larva with smaller discs (4-5

days after egg laying) exhibit higher occurrences of ICWs and fluttering states while older, larger

larval discs (6-8 days after egg laying) predominantly show ICTs and spikes (Brodskiy et al.,

2019). For ex vivo cultures, the transition from limited to tissue-wide calcium activity depends on

the amount of fly extract (FEX) added to the culture. Low concentrations of FEX stimulated $Ca^{2+}$

spikes. Progressively increasing levels of FEX resulted in ICTs, ICWs, and eventually fluttering.

Further, FEX-stimulated $Ca^{2+}$ dynamics is based on $IP_3R$-based release of $Ca^{2+}$ from the ER to

the cytosol as shown in Figure 1D (Brodskiy et al., 2019).

These experimental findings motivated us to ask what specific cellular properties of the

wing disc result in the emergence of these distinct patterns. To systematically investigate the

underlying principles governing the emergence of these patterns, we formulated a two-

dimensional image-based geometrically realistic computational model of $Ca^{2+}$ signaling in the

wing disc pouch where the columnar epithelial cells are connected by gap junctions (Figure S1),

(Jursnich et al., 1990; Ryerse, 1982; Weir and Lo, 1982, 1985). Image-based modelling enables

the wholistic characterization of molecular mechanisms and tissue dynamics during

organogenesis (Gómez et al., 2017). Given the near universal conservation of the $Ca^{2+}$ signaling

pathway across model systems (Berridge, 1987; Berridge et al., 2000), the baseline single-cell

$Ca^{2+}$ model in our study was adapted from Politi and colleagues (Politi et al., 2006). The model

equations and the descriptions of the parameters are shown in Figure 1 D, E and Table S1. We

modified the rate of IP$_3$R inactivation term, $r$, to replicate our experimental Ca$^{2+}$ dynamics. The

modified equation is described below:

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$$\frac{dr}{dt} = \frac{1}{\tau_{max}} \frac{k_\tau^4 + c^4}{k_\tau^4} (1 - r \frac{K_i + c}{K_i})$$

A similar modification to the rate of inactivation term, $r$, has been proposed previously (Sneyd et

al., 2017).

To reproduce the four distinct patterns in silico, we varied the V$_{PLC}$ parameter progressively

in individual cells across a range of parameters (Table S1). Given that our patterns were

dependent on the concentration of FEX, we varied V$_{PLC}$ as a lumped-parameter representing the

level of agonist stimulation. The computational model successfully reproduced the four different

spatiotemporal classes of Ca$^{2+}$ signaling dynamics observed in vivo and ex vivo (Figure 2A-D, SI

videos 9-12). Interestingly, we discovered that the formation of these patterns is dependent on

the number of cells having a V$_{PLC}$ value below, above, or equal to the Hopf bifurcation threshold

for single-cells (V$_{PLC}$ = 0.774) (Figure 2E). Simulated cells that have a V$_{PLC}$ value above the Hopf

threshold are termed "initiator cells" and are posed to exhibit high levels of IP$_3$ production.

Neighboring simulated cells with V$_{PLC}$ values below the Hopf threshold are termed "standby cells"

that receive a signal from initiator cells to propagate a signal. For instance, if a majority of standby

cells have V$_{PLC}$ values significantly below the critical Hopf bifurcation threshold, single-cell Ca$^{2+}$

spikes occur only where initiator cells are present (Figure 2A, E). When we increased standby

cell V$_{PLC}$ values close to the lower end of the Hopf bifurcation point (Figure 2B, E), we noticed the

formation of ICTs. Finally, we observed the formation of ICWs and fluttering phenotypes (Figure

2C, D, E) for cases when the majority of cells in the system were assigned a V$_{PLC}$ above the

bifurcation threshold, thereby placing most cells in an initiator state. In the absence of initiator

cells, Ca$^{2+}$ activity is not observed. This suggests that initiator cells are necessary for the formation

of Ca$^{2+}$ transients in developing tissues.

**Figure 2: A progression of hormonal stimulation governs the spatial extent of intercellular Ca²⁺ communication. (A-D)** Computer simulations recapitulating the key classes of multicellular Ca²⁺ activity observed in vivo and ex vivo. **(A)** When the majority of cells have V$_{PLC}$ values below the Hopf bifurcation threshold (*left*), single-cell Ca²⁺ spikes are seen (*right*). **(B)** Intercellular Ca²⁺ transients are observed (*right*) as the distribution of V$_{PLC}$ in cells is increased (*left*). **(C)** A further increase in V$_{PLC}$ (*left*) results in the emergence of periodic intercellular Ca²⁺ waves (*right*). **(D)** "Fluttering" occurs (*right*) when V$_{PLC}$ levels in all of the cells in the disc is above Hopf bifurcation (*left*). **(E)** Quantification of V$_{PLC}$ distribution in the initiator and the standby cells for each of the classes of Ca²⁺ signaling activity. The dashed line indicates the region in V$_{PLC}$ parameter space permitting Ca²⁺ oscillations. **(F-G)** The single-cell version of our model predicts that the frequency and width at half maximum (WHM) of Ca²⁺ oscillations is altered by varying V$_{PLC}$ and $k_\tau$. This prediction matches the WHM of Ca²⁺ activity observed in ex vivo discs cultured with variable concentrations of fly extract. Error bars are reported as standard error of the means (SEM).

The "single-cell" version of the model predicts that differences in Ca²⁺ signal amplitude and frequency are tunable by varying the V$_{PLC}$ and $k_\tau$ parameters (Figure S2 A,B). To further examine the influence of these and other parameters on Ca²⁺ signaling dynamics, two-dimensional computational model simulations of the tissue were performed by varying V$_{PLC}$, $k_\tau$ and $\tau_{max}$ (Figure S3B-D) as a percentage of the baseline signal while holding other parameters constant. The

baseline parameter set was selected such that the simulation resulted in intercellular Ca$^{2+}$ waves

(Figure S3, red box). Reducing $k_\tau$ leads to a narrower width at half maximum (WHM) of Ca$^{2+}$

transients (Figure S3B). A similar result is observed when a reduction of $\tau_{max}$ results in a

decrease in WHM, whereas an increase in $\tau_{max}$ results in an increase in WHM (Figure S3C). A

decrease in the $\tau_{max}$ parameter increases the frequency of signals in the simulated tissue, while

an increase reduces the frequency of Ca$^{2+}$ transients. This suggests that the system is more

sensitive to $\tau_{max}$, and variations in $\tau_{max}$ have much greater impact in how quickly the system

responds to stimulus.

These results indicate that tissue-level Ca$^{2+}$ patterns depend on the spatial distribution of

cell states defined by their maximal IP$_3$ production rates, in relation to the effective tissue-level

Hopf bifurcation threshold. Further, key parameters in the model can be modified in a manner to

allow tunable Ca$^{2+}$ signaling patterns to influence signal strength, duration, and propagation.

**GJ communication limits Ca$^{2+}$ spikes in the absence of hormonal stimulation**

To elucidate how gap junctional proteins alter Ca$^{2+}$ signals, we simulated a scenario where

the initiator cells chosen at random had their V$_{PLC}$ values set to the Hopf bifurcation threshold

value of 0.774 and standby cells had a V$_{PLC}$ values that were randomly uniformly distributed

between 0.1 and 0.5 (Figure 3A). Under these conditions, no Ca$^{2+}$ activity was observed in the

presence of normal functioning GJ communication (Figure 3A'). Next, we compared the effect of

blocking gap junctional communication in silico. To do so, we set the permeability terms for Ca$^{2+}$

(F$_c$) and for IP$_3$ (F$_p$) to zero. Strikingly, we observed Ca$^{2+}$ spikes in simulated wing disc cells in the

absence of GJ communication (Figure 3A''). We explored this phenomenon computationally by

considering a single stimulated cell connected to neighboring cells by GJ communication by

performing bifurcation analysis on our modified model for a single-cell. We observed the

emergence of a Hopf bifurcation as expected (Figure S4A). Next, the effect of the initial Hopf

bifurcation point (HB$_1$) on gap junctional permeability of IP$_3$, F$_p$, was analyzed. Setting F$_c$ to zero

and progressively increasing $F_p$ increased the critical maximum rate of $IP_3$ activation threshold

$V_{PLC}^*$ where $HB_1$ occurred (Figure S4B). Similar trends were observed when $F_c$ was increased to

0.05.

**Figure 3: Gap junction (GJ) communication decreases the proportion of cells exhibiting Ca²⁺ spikes.**
**(A)** Simulation of Ca²⁺ signaling in wing disc where the $V_{PLC}$ values of initiator cells were set to the Hopf
bifurcation threshold 0.774, and standby cell $V_{PLC}$ values were randomly distributed between 0.1 and 0.5.
**(A')** Allowing GJ communication by letting permeability of $IP_3$ ($F_p$) and Ca²⁺ ($F_c$ ) be 0.005 and 0.0005
respectively, resulted in no Ca²⁺ activity (GJ Enabled). $F_p$ and $F_c$ were set to zero to simulate inhibition of GJ
communication (GJ Blocked). Inhibition of GJ communication resulted in Ca²⁺ spike activity. **(B)** Ex vivo
time lapses of nub>GCaMP6f x UAS-RyR[RNAi] (control) wing discs in Grace's low ecdysone media were
generated by imaging for 1 h at 10 sec intervals. Under this condition, we observed no Ca²⁺ activity in the

wing disc cells. **(B')** Time-projection of the time lapse stack. The wing disc boundary is indicated with the
yellow dashed line. **(B'')** A kymograph generated further demonstrates no instances of $Ca^{2+}$ activity. **(C)** GJ
communication was blocked by culturing wing discs in Grace's low ecdysone media with 100 mM of
Carbenoxolone (CBX). Instances of spike activity are denoted by red arrows. The intensity of a region of
interest (yellow dashed circle) is overlaid to demonstrate a spike in local $Ca^{2+}$ activity. $Ca^{2+}$ spike is observed
when the intensity normalized to basal intensity is plotted (yellow line, $F/F_0$). **(C')** Time-projection of the time
lapse movies. We observed a significant number of $Ca^{2+}$ spikes in the 1 h time interval when GJs were
inhibited. Yellow dashed lines indicated disc boundary**. (C'')** A kymograph generated demonstrates
instances of $Ca^{2+}$ spike activity.

A closer look into the importance of GJ permeability on the formation of $Ca^{2+}$ signals was

done by varying $F_c$ and $F_p$ in computational simulations. Starting from a baseline ICW, a decrease

in GJ permeability resulted in a transition from ICWs to ICTs, and eventually to single-cell $Ca^{2+}$

spikes, while an increase in GJ permeability did not perturb the baseline signal (Figure S3A).

These findings show that gap junctional permeability alters the cytosolic residence time for critical

messengers such as $IP_3$ and $Ca^{2+}$ whose cytosolic concentrations affects $Ca^{2+}$ release from ER

in both initiator cells and standby cells. This is consistent with bifurcation analysis demonstrating

that gap junctional permeability influences stimulation threshold required for $Ca^{2+}$ oscillations in

cells (Figure S4B).

We tested these computational modeling predictions experimentally. To do so, we

pharmacologically inhibited the gap junctional protein Inx2 using Carbenoxolone (CBX) and

observed the emergence of $Ca^{2+}$ spikes in the absence of FEX in the culture media (Figure 3B-

B'', C-C'', SI movies 13,14). This further demonstrates that gap junction communication regulates

$Ca^{2+}$ dynamics in the wing disc pouch.

**Figure 4: Gap junctional permeability determines total tissue-level signaling activity as development progresses**. **(A-B)** Simulations of $Ca^{2+}$ signaling for wing discs of increasing size. In **A**, *(Left column)*, the fraction of initiator cells was varied according to the following equation: $Fraction\ of\ initiator\ cells = 29{,}451 \cdot N_{cells}^{-1.8}$. The $V_{PLC}$ range of standby cells was restricted to range from $0.25 - 0.6$ with initiator cells being denoted by dark blue cells with $V_{PLC}$ values between 1.3 and 1.5. *(Right column)* Associated 2D kymographs of the simulated pouches shown in **A**. In **B** *(Left column)*, the gap junction permeability is varied holding the fraction of initiator cell constant. Gap junction permeability was varied according to the following equation: $F_p = 1000 \cdot N_{cells}^{-1.8}$ and $F_c = 0.1 \cdot F_p$. The total number of initiator cells were held constant in this scenario ($N_{initiator} = 65$). *(Right column)* Associated kymographs of the simulated pouches. **(C-D)** Experimental validation of the computational predictions in which the discs were cultured ex vivo in Grace's low 20E media (basal media) for 1 h in the absence of any stimulus triggering $Ca^{2+}$. **(C)** Quantification of total number of $Ca^{2+}$ spikes in different sized wing disc pouch during 1 h culture. A linear regression line was fit to the data set and the p-value for the slope of the fitted line is shown. Since

309    the *p*-value is less than 0.05 (level of significance), a positive correlation between size and the number of
310    spikes could be inferred. Grey region corresponds to 95% confidence bands of the trend line. **(D)**
311    Quantification of total number of spikes in disc pouch scaled with respect to pouch size during various
312    stages of larval development. *p*-values were obtained by Mann Whitney U test.

**Gap junction permeability shapes Ca$^{2+}$ signaling during development**
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Of note, integrated intensity of Ca$^{2+}$ throughout the wing disc pouch decreases during

development suggesting an inverse relationship between calcium activity and organ growth rates

(Brodskiy et al., 2019). Here, we investigated the role of tissue size in altering Ca$^{2+}$ dynamics to

propose an explanation for this finding. To do so, we simulated Ca$^{2+}$ signaling in different sized

wing discs. We hypothesized two different possible scenarios that could explain a decrease in

integrated Ca$^{2+}$ activity.  In the first scenario, the total fraction of initiator cells was allowed to

decrease in a power law fashion as development proceeds resulting in a decay in total calcium

signaling activity with a transition to predominantly single-cell spiking activity. In the second

scenario, gap junction permeability was set to decrease with increasing organ size. Simulations

corresponding to each scenario shows an orderly decrease in progression of Ca$^{2+}$ activity starting

from ICWs and intercellular transients in smaller simulated discs and decaying to intermittent

single-cell spikes in larger simulated discs (Figure 4A, B). This suggests that both scenarios

provide a possible explanation for the decrease in integrated Ca$^{2+}$ activity observed in wing discs

as development progresses.

To distinguish between these scenarios, we cultured wing discs from multiple

developmental stages from days 5-7 after egg laying (AEL) without any agonist stimulation and

observed the resulting Ca$^{2+}$ dynamics. We observed single-cell Ca$^{2+}$ spikes that we interpret as

characteristic of "initiator" cells in all samples independent of sizes. We did not observe Ca$^{2+}$

transients or waves in unstimulated smaller wing discs obtained day 5 AEL. We next

characterized the total number of spikes in the discs of all sizes. We found a positive correlation

between the total number of spikes and the size of the disc pouch (Figure 4C). The difference in

spiking activity between discs of varying ages was not significant when scaled for pouch size

(Figure 4D). This is consistent with a scenario of a relatively constant number of initiator cells in

the system with overall gap junction permeability decreasing as the organ reaches its terminal

size. This scenario is further supported by findings from previous reports showing a decrease in

gap junctional permeability as larval development proceeds (Weir and Lo, 1982, 1985).

Furthermore, a decrease in gap junction permeability increases the net cytosolic residence time

and effective concentrations of $IP_3$ and $Ca^{2+}$ within the cytosol leading to an increased instance

of cytosolic $Ca^{2+}$ spikes.

**Gαq overexpression induces intercellular $Ca^{2+}$ waves and reduces wing size**

Next, using the GAL4/UAS system, we overexpressed the wild type splice 3 variant of

*Drosophila* Gαq in the wing disc to characterize how different classes of upstream signals impact

the spatiotemporal patterns of $Ca^{2+}$ signaling (Ratnaparkhi et al., 2002). G protein-coupled

receptor (GPCR) activation stimulates Gαq-driven PLC$\beta$ activity to generate $IP_3$ and $Ca^{2+}$ (Hanlon

and Andrew, 2015). Strikingly, ectopic Gαq expression was sufficient to generate robust formation

of intercellular waves independent of the presence of FEX in the media (Figure 4D, D'). The waves

were periodic in nature and were similar to FEX-induced waves (Figure 1C). This experimental

finding most likely resembles our previous simulation of ICWs with a small fraction of randomly

located initiator cells surrounded by standby cells (Figure 2C).

Strikingly, the wing disc size (day 6 AEL) and adult wing size were significantly reduced

when Gαq was overexpressed (Figure 4E-F). To understand whether the reduction in the wing

size was due to changes in proliferation or cell growth, we quantified the total number of cells in

the region bounded by the LIII, LIV, ACV wing veins and the wing margin. We observed a

reduction in the total number of trichomes, which each individual trichome correspond to a cell

(García-Bellido et al., 1994). Furthermore, we found that cell size was reduced when Gαq was

overexpressed (Figure S5F). However, the wing shape is not significantly affected when Gαq is

overexpressed (Figure S5G). In sum, increasing the concentration of Gαq in the pouch is sufficient

to generate periodic Ca$^{2+}$ waves. Further, these periodic Ca$^{2+}$ waves are correlated with reduction

in wing and disc size suggesting that tissue-wide Ca$^{2+}$ wave activity may play a role in determining

final organ size via growth inhibition.

**Insulin signaling increases wing size but only generates localized Ca$^{2+}$ signals**

Because FEX is an undefined cocktail of biochemical factors, we tested whether specific

ligands added to the organ culture affects Ca$^{2+}$ activity and growth. In addition to FEX, insulin is

often added to organ culture media to stimulate cell proliferation (Wyss, 1982; Zartman et al.,

2013). Hence, we tested whether insulin signaling regulates Ca$^{2+}$ activity independent of FEX.

Similar to other experiments, we upregulated and downregulated insulin signaling in the wing disc

using the GAL4/UAS expression system. As expected, wing disc size and adult wing size were

decreased when insulin signaling is downregulated (Figure 4B, E, F). Strikingly, we observed that

activation of insulin stimulated pathways results in localized Ca$^{2+}$ spikes and ICTs (Figure 4B, B',

C, C'). Titrated the concentration of insulin in the culture media demonstrated that a higher

concentration of insulin increased the number of spikes (Figure 4G). Quantification of the Ca$^{2+}$

spikes showed a positive correlation between spikes normalized to area of the pouch with log of

insulin concentration (Fig 4G). However, even high concentrations of insulin were not sufficient to

generate periodic ICWs. In contrast, expressing a dominant negative form of the insulin receptor

resulted in minimal Ca$^{2+}$ spiking activity (Figure 4C, C') (Hevia et al., 2017). These results

demonstrate that insulin signaling stimulates Ca$^{2+}$ activity in the wing disc.

In silico simulations with parameter variations in half activation of the PLC parameter, $K_{PLC}$,

and GJ permeability were performed to test scenarios of how insulin signaling can only generate

Ca$^{2+}$ spiking activity even under saturating conditions (Figure S3A, S3D, and S6). Although $K_{PLC}$

variations influenced signal frequency, there was no instance in which varying $K_{PLC}$ resulted in

production of Ca$^{2+}$ spikes. Single-cell spikes were only observed when gap junction

communication was inhibited either experimentally (Figure 3B, C) or in silico (Figure

S3A). Thus, the computational model suggests that insulin signaling must not only stimulate $IP_3$

production, but also inhibits gap junction permeability.

As a first step to assess whether $Ca^{2+}$ levels in the cell directly control organ sizes, we

exploited the $Ca^{2+}$ buffering effects induced by high levels of GCaMP6f sensor expression. The

GCaMP6f sensor consists of a M13 fragment of myosin light chain kinase, GFP and Calmodulin

(CaM) to which $Ca^{2+}$ binds (Nakai et al., 2001). To elucidate the role of $Ca^{2+}$ signaling in insulin

mediated growth, we compared the effects of co-expressing the GCaMP6f sensor ($K_d = 375 \pm$

$14\,nM$) to decrease the amount of free cytosolic $Ca^{2+}$ (Chen et al., 2013). We found that co-

expressing GCaMP6f sensor increased wing size when insulin signaling was also stimulated

(Figure S7). This increase in size was also observed in control wing disc without insulin

upregulation (Figure S7A, B). This analysis provides additional evidence that buffering cytosolic

$Ca^{2+}$ signaling influences the final tissue size. In contrast, when we expressed Gαq and GCaMP6f,

we did not observe a significant decrease in size when compared to just expressed Gαq without

GCaMP6f (Figure S7 C, D). This may be due to the inability of GCaMP6f expression to buffer the

high levels of $Ca^{2+}$ in the cytosol when Gαq is overexpressed. We also observed a severe

reduction in the wing size, along with vein defects, in flies that were homozygous for the GCaMP6f

sensor, consistent with a buffering role for high concentrations of GCaMP6f expression (Figure

S8). To validate this finding, we compared the adult wing sizes from flies expressed one and two

copies of GCaMP6f. Strikingly, increasing the dose of the relative GCaM6f expression decreased

the size (Figure S8 C, D). We observed a severe reduction in size as expression of the transgene

was further increased with the presence of two copies of the GAL4 driver. To further elucidate the

sponging effects of $Ca^{2+}$, we expressed CaMKII, which binds to $Ca^{2+}$/CaM complex (Yamauchi,

2005). Similar to overexpressing GCaM6f, we observe a significant increase in the wing area

(Figure S8E, F). Collectively, these results support a role of cytosolic $Ca^{2+}$ concentration as either

a growth enhancer or suppressor and that an optimal amount of $Ca^{2+}$ signaling is required for

**Figure 5: GPCR and insulin signaling regulate wing size and differentially regulate Ca²⁺ signaling.**
**(A-D)** Montages of time-lapse movies of wing discs cultured ex vivo. **(A'-D')** Kymographs of the
corresponding time-lapse movies. **(A"-D")** Adult wings from the indicated genetic perturbation. **(E)**
Quantification of the wing disc sizes for the indicated genetic perturbations. **(F)** Quantification of the adult
wing sizes for the indicated perturbations. **(G)** Quantification of Ca²⁺ spikes when insulin dose is
progressively increased in ex vivo cultures. A linear regression trend line was fit to the data and the *p*-value
of the slope is shown. Since the *p*-value is less than 0.05, a positive correlation between spikes and the
log(concentration) can be inferred. Grey region illustrates 95% confidence bands of the linear regression
**(I)** Summary of key findings based on the proposed model for tissue-level regulation of dynamics in
epithelial tissues. Scale bars in (A-D) and (A"-D") represent 100 μm, while yellow dotted lines indicate pouch
boundaries, and red lines indicate x-y positions in the kymograph. Horizontal scale bars in (A'-D') represent
50 μm. Vertical scale bars in (A'-D') represent 6 min. Student t-test was performed. Labels in (E) represent
crosses of UAS-transgene to parental nub>GCaMP6f in the case of InsR$^{CA}$ and InsR$^{DN}$ or nub>GCaMP6f;
mcherry in the case of RyR$^{RNAi}$ or Gαq. The UAS lines used are UAS-RyR$^{RNAi}$ (BL#31540), UAS InsR$^{CA}$
(BL#8248), UAS-InsR$^{DN}$ (BL#8252) and UAS-Gq (BL#30734) respectively.

## Discussion

The main finding of this work is the discovery of a parsimonious mechanistic model that

links global hormonal stimulation of Ca²⁺ signaling to emergent spatiotemporal classes of

signaling dynamics. Further, we identify downstream correlations to the final organ size that

suggest these signaling dynamics may mediate growth-related information used by the system to

tune organ size. To do so, we developed a geometrically accurate computational model of Ca²⁺

signaling in the *Drosophila* wing imaginal disc, a premier model for studying conserved cell

signaling mechanisms (Hariharan, 2015; Johnston and Gallant, 2002; Potter, 2001). Previously,

we discovered a correlation between Ca²⁺ signaling during larval growth and final organ size. Four

distinct patterns of Ca²⁺ signaling activity occur in the wing imaginal disc pouch as observed in

vivo and ex vivo (Brodskiy et al., 2019). Through systems-level computational analysis, we

established the essential conditions required for generating the different patterns.

The model predicts two cell types with different levels of IP₃ production: "initiator cells" with

high IP₃ production and "standby cells" with baseline IP₃ production levels. The presence of

initiator cells is necessary, but not sufficient, to induce multicellular Ca²⁺ signaling. Additionally,

the distribution of the maximal rate of IP₃ production, $V_{PLC}$, in the standby cells determines the

spatial range of Ca²⁺ signaling. As $V_{PLC}$ values of standby cells approaches the Hopf bifurcation

threshold, Ca²⁺ activity transitions from single-cell signals toward global signals.

What are the possible functional implications of a tissue consisting of initiator and standby

cells? A recent study on electrical signal transmission in bacterial communities suggests that the

transition from localized short-range signaling to global community-level communication is

associated with a cost-benefit balance (Larkin et al., 2018). In that context, long-range signaling

increases the overall fitness of the community against chemical attacks, while a reduction in

growth rate is the cost to individual cells. In the wing disc, a similar analogy can be drawn where

significant generation of long-range $Ca^{2+}$ signals due to overexpression of Gαq results in reduced

wing disc growth. Thus, the proposed model in this work can also be characterized as a cost-

benefit tradeoff within the context of tissue-level signaling. For instance, it has been suggested

that the fast $Ca^{2+}$ waves facilitate migration and proliferation of the healing cells by inhibiting

excessive apoptotic response during wound healing in epithelia (Justet et al., 2016).

Our model also predicts that the inhibition of GJs lowers the Hopf threshold necessary for

generating $Ca^{2+}$ spikes. We have validated this prediction experimentally where inhibition of GJs

results in the formation of $Ca^{2+}$ spikes in the absence of external agonist. Further, computational

simulations demonstrate that as GJ permeability decreases, there is a transition of activity from

synchronous global to asynchronous local $Ca^{2+}$ activity. How gap junctional mediated $Ca^{2+}$

signaling is connected to the regulation of cell mechanics is not currently understood and warrants

further investigation. One possibility is that tension impacts the level of gap junction

communication between cell and may also influence the activity of mechanosensitive ion channels

(Kaouri et al., 2019). Feedback between calcium signaling and cell mechanics may play important

roles in ensuring tissue growth and morphogenesis. This is evident from our previous

experimental work and other experimental studies in the literature where knockdown of gap

junctional proteins such as Inx2 leads to a reduction in wing and eye size in *Drosophila* (Brodskiy

et al., 2019; Richard et al., 2017).

Upregulated insulin signaling increases the formation of $Ca^{2+}$ spikes. One possible

implication is that insulin signaling inhibits GJs in addition to increasing PLC$\gamma$ activity. This

implication is consistent with the role of insulin signaling in inhibiting gap junction proteins

Connexin43 (Homma Nobuo et al., 1998; Lin et al., 2003; Warn-Cramer and Lau, 2004). Thus,

the increase of adult wing and developing wing disc size from higher insulin activity correlates

with higher levels of localized $Ca^{2+}$ spiking activity, which has a limited total integrated calcium

signal at that tissue level. In contrast, $Ca^{2+}$ waves induced by Gαq overexpression are correlated

with smaller adult wings and wing discs. Higher Gαq expression, which activates PLC$\beta$ activity

results in robust production of tissue-scale intercellular $Ca^{2+}$ waves. We show experimentally that

insulin signaling controls $Ca^{2+}$ spike activity in the wing disc, potentially through GJ inhibition or

PLC$\gamma$ activation, whereas GPCR-based Gαq signaling is sufficient to generate global $Ca^{2+}$ waves.

These results are consistent with previous reports of $Ca^{2+}$ spikes being observed in discs that

have reached their final size, and $Ca^{2+}$ waves being observed in smaller developing discs

(Brodskiy et al., 2019). A recent study reported after we archived this study as a preprint found

that $Ca^{2+}$ signals are initiated in response to wounding by the G-protein coupled receptor

Methuselah like 10 (Mthl10) (O'Connor et al., 2020). Mthl10 is activated by Growth-blocking

peptides (Gbps) (O'Connor et al., 2020). Whether Mthl10 also is involved in developmental growth

requires further investigation, but may be consistent with our findings that intercellular calcium

wave activity inhibit organ growth. These findings suggest that $Ca^{2+}$ acts as both a growth

enhancing and growth inhibiting signal dependent upon the tissue-level scale of the activity and

level of gap junction coupling.

The spatial range of tissue-level signaling is determined by how the $IP_3$ production is

organized with respect to a Hopf bifurcation threshold throughout the tissue. Localized transients

are correlated with larger wings induced by insulin-stimulated growth. Global signaling is

correlated with smaller wings that are stimulated by upstream GPCRs and Gαq upregulation. This

resembles a paradoxical network motif where the $Ca^{2+}$ signaling has two opposite effects on the

same target, dependent upon the tissue-level scale of the $Ca^{2+}$ signal. Within the context of the

hypothesized $IP_3$/shunt model proposed in our previous study, the strong induction of $Ca^{2+}$ waves

will reduce the level of phosphatidylinositol 4,5-bisphosphate ($PIP_2$), a key substrate for growth

(Brodskiy et al., 2019). This may occur as high levels of $G\alpha q$/PLC activity are proposed to deplete

$PIP_2$ levels (Loew, 2007). This is likely due to substrate depletion of $PIP_2$ through promotion of $IP_3$

generation and downstream activity by stimulation of PLC activity. In turn, this would lead to

reduced availability of $PIP_2$ for conversion of $PIP_2$ to phosphatidylinositol-trisphosphate ($PIP_3$), a

key second messenger for stimulating protein kinase AKT and downstream growth promotion

(Czech, 2000).

Similar to the reduced wing size observed in this study due to overexpression of $G\alpha q$, we

have also reported that knockdown of $G\alpha q$ gene decreases wing size in our previous study (Table

S3) (Brodskiy et al., 2019). Comparing the reduction in wing size due to perturbation of $Ca^{2+}$

signaling components with known size control genes such as morphogens (Dpp, Wg, Hippo) and

mechanical transducers (RoK) indicate that the reduction in size is comparable to when $Ca^{2+}$

signaling is perturbed (Table S3). Taken together, these experimental findings imply that $G\alpha q$

signaling is paradoxical in nature. In the context of conserved network motif observed in biological

systems, paradoxical components have the ability to activate and inhibit the downstream target

despite a single source of stimulus (Hart and Alon, 2013). $G\alpha q$ could possibly be a growth

promoter and growth inhibitor. This correlation motivates further studies that map out the exact

molecular players that are downstream of $G\alpha q$ signaling. This will require careful quantification of

$PIP_2$ and $PIP_3$ under genetic perturbations of GPCR signaling. Additionally, future work is needed

to quantify the metabolic benefits and costs of $Ca^{2+}$ signaling during tissue growth to observe if

abundant use of metabolic resources to consistently propagate global activity is explanatory for

the reduction in size in $G\alpha q$ overexpression wings.

**Materials and Methods**

*Drosophila genetics.*

We used the GAL4/UAS system to express modulators of the $Ca^{2+}$ signaling pathway in the wing disc (Brand and Perrimon, 1993; Duffy, 2002). A nub-GAL4, UAS-GCaMP6f reporter tester line was created by recombining nub-GAL4 and UAS-GCaMP6f lines (Narciso et al., 2015). Additionally, a second tester line was used that also includes UAS-mcherry. Gene perturbations were generated by crossing the tester line to either RNAi-based transgenic lines (UAS-Gene $X^{RNAi}$) or gene overexpression (UAS-Gene X). The following UAS transgenic lines were used: UAS-RyR$^{RNAi}$ (BL#31540) (Perkins et al., 2015), UAS-Gq (BL#30734) (Perkins et al., 2015), UAS-InsR$^{CA}$ (BL#8248) (Werz et al., 2009), UAS-InsR$^{DN}$ (BL#8252) (Kakanj et al., 2016). Progeny wing phenotypes are from F1 male progeny emerging form the nub-Gal4, UAS-GCaMP6f/CyO x UAS-X cross or nub-Gal4, UAS-GCaMP6f/CyO; UAS-mcherry x UAS-X cross. Flies were raised at 25 °C and on a 12-hour light cycle.

*Live imaging.*

Wandering third instar larva approximately 6 days after egg laying were dissected in ZB media with 15% fly extract to obtain wing discs (Brodskiy et al., 2019). ZB media + 15% fly extract contains 79.4% (v/v) ZB media, 0.6% (v/v) of 1 mg/ml of insulin (Sigma aldrich), 15% ZB-based fly extract and 5% penicillin/streptomycin (Gibco). Wing discs were loaded into the previously described REM-Chip (Narciso et al., 2017) and imaged using Nikon Eclipse Ti confocal microscope with a Yokogawa spinning disc and MicroPoint laser ablation system. Image data were collected on an IXonEM+colled CCD camera (Andor technology, South Windsor, CT) using MetaMorph v7.7.9 software (Molecular devices, Sunnyvale, CA). Discs were imaged at three z-planes with a step size of 10 μm, 20x magnification and 10-seconds intervals for a total period of one hour, with 200 ms exposure time, and 50 nW, 488 nm laser exposure at 44 % laser intensity. We blocked GJ by inhibiting innexin-2 using Carbenoxolone (Cbx, Sigma Aldrich) drug (Narciso et al., 2015). Wing discs were incubated in ZB + 15% FEX with 30 μM Cbx for one hour before

imaging. To induce $Ca^{2+}$ transients, we imaged wing discs in ZB media  + 2.5 % FEX (Burnette

et al., 2014) . $Ca^{2+}$ waves were induced by imaging the wing disc in ZB media + 15% FEX. $Ca^{2+}$

fluttering was observed when discs were imaged in ZB media + 40% FEX respectively.

***Image processing***

All the images were processing in FIJI. Volume viewer plugin was used to generate 3D

Kymographs. Briefly, TIFF stacks had background subtracted using the rolling ball background

subtraction algorithm with a rolling ball radius of 15. The TIFF stack was then processed by the

volume viewer plugin. Stacks were adjusted using the base Fire LUT setting to portray the

signaling intensities. A similar approach was followed for the simulation outputs.

***Model formulation.***

Figure 1 summarizes the experimental system and data. Different classes of patterns emerge at

the tissue-level as the level of global stimulation increases: spikes, intercellular $Ca^{2+}$ transients

(ICTs), intercellular $Ca^{2+}$ waves (ICWs) and global fluttering (Brodskiy et al., 2019). However, a

mechanistic understanding linking hormonal stimulation levels to transitions in these qualitative

classes of organ-level signaling is lacking. We therefore formulated a computational model to test

mechanistic hypotheses that could explain the observed $Ca^{2+}$ signaling dynamics.

***Intracellular model.***

A modified model of $Ca^{2+}$ signaling toolkit is based on adaptation of previous single-cell model of

calcium signaling (Politi et al., 2006). The model is summarized in Figure 1E. A more

comprehensive description can be found in Supporting Information. To recapitulate the same time

resolution as the experiments, the simulation time is 1 hour and for generating videos, samples

are obtained every 10 s.

***Tissue model.***

For constructing a realistic model of the tissue, we used experimental images of a wing pouch to

build an accurate model of the tissue structure. Figure S1 depicts the structure of the tissue used

for simulations and the statistics of the corresponding network. More details on the geometry of

the model are discussed in Supporting Information.

***Multicellular model.***

The realistic model of the tissue was combined with proposed intracellular model. Diffusion of the

second messengers $IP_3$ and $Ca^{2+}$ between adjacent cell was incorporated into the 2D model.

Therefore, the tissue level model is a system of coupled ODE's. A complete description of the

model is provided in Supporting Information.

**Quantification and Statistical Analysis**

***Quantification of adult wings and statistics.***

Total wing area was measured using ImageJ. We traced the wing margin by following veins L1

and L5 and the wing hinge region was excluded from the size analysis. All statistical analyses

were performed using MATLAB or R. For comparisons, we used student t-tests to assess the

statistical significance. *p*-value, standard deviation and sample size (n) are as indicated in each

figure and legend.

**Data and Code Availability**

All the data and simulation codes are available on our lab GitHub repository:

https://multicellularsystemslab.github.io/MSELab_Calcium_Cartography_2021/

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