1 Title

2 Neonatal LPS exposure reduces ATP8A2 level in the prefrontal cortex in mice via
3 increasing IFN- γ level

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40 **Abstract**

41 Neonatal lipopolysaccharide (LPS) exposure can cause depressive-like behaviors in
 42 rodents involving elevated interferon (IFN)- γ . Studies have linked down-regulation of
 43 prefrontal cortex (PFC) ATPase phospholipid transporting 8A2(ATP8A2) expression
 44 to depressive-like behaviors. In non-neuronal cells, IFN- γ could reduce ATP8A2
 45 expression. We therefore hypothesized that neonatal LPS exposure might induce PFC
 46 ATP8A2 down-regulation by increasing IFN- γ level. Here, C57BL6/J mice of both
 47 sexes received 3-dose-injections of LPS (50 μ g/kg bodyweight, i.p.) on postnatal day
 48 (PND)5, PND7 and PND9. LPS-treated mice showed a transiently decreased PFC
 49 ATP8A2 expression. Moreover, a negative correlation of PFC ATP8A2 expression
 50 was found with IFN- γ level. Using neutralizing mAb, IFN- γ was identified as the key
 51 mediator of LPS-induced PFC ATP8A2 decrease. Besides, neutralizing IFN- γ during
 52 neonatal LPS exposure attenuated the depressive-like behaviors in adulthood. In sum,
 53 neonatal LPS exposure reduced ATP8A2 level in PFC in mice via increasing IFN- γ
 54 level, maybe associated with mechanism underlying LPS-induced brain and behavior
 55 impairments.

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57 **Keywords:** Immune activity; Cytokine; P4-ATPase; Brain; Depression

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60 **Introduction**

61 ATP8A2, a member of the P4-ATPase family in mammals, is highly expressed in the
62 brain, spinal cord, testis, and retina, which flipping phosphatidylserine and
63 phosphatidylethanolamine across the cell membrane (Andersen et al.,2016). It plays
64 an important role in maintaining the stability and normal function of the cell
65 membrane (Coleman et al.,2009). Therefore, ATP8A2 in the brain is vital for normal
66 neural development and function (Coleman and Molday,2011; Xu et al.,2012), since
67 these processes involve cell proliferation, migration, synapses pruning of neurons
68 (Brandon and Sawa,2011). ATP8A2 expressed in the brain has received extensive
69 attention recently and researches have shown that reduced expression of ATP8A2
70 leads to axonal mutation and neurodegenerative diseases (Choi et al.,2019; Zhu et
71 al.,2012). There is also research reporting that ATP8A2 expression decreases in
72 conditions of Alzheimer's disease and bacterial infection (Aaron et al.,2018; Ross et
73 al.,2011). Moreover, depressive-like behavior has been reported to be associated with
74 decreased ATP8A2 expression in the prefrontal cortex (PFC) (Chen et al.,2017).
75 Although ATP8A2 has been widely studied, little is known about how ATP8A2
76 expression is regulated.

77 Recently, IFN- γ was shown to significantly reduce the expression of ATP8A2 in
78 non-neuron cells (Shulzhenko et al.,2018). IFN- γ produced in the periphery can
79 penetrate brain parenchyma across the immature blood-brain barrier and even increase
80 the permeability of the mature blood-brain barrier (Hansen-Pupp et al.,2005; Wong et

81 al.,2004). IFN- γ may mediate the neonatal lipopolysaccharide (LPS)
82 exposure-induced depressive-like behaviors in mice (Campos et al.,2014), which is
83 associated with the function of PFC. Besides, IFN- γ expression in PFC increased
84 more than twice after LPS treatment (Laumet et al.,2018). Based on the background
85 mentioned above, it was postulated that neonatal LPS exposure might induce ATP8A2
86 down-regulation in PFC in mice by increasing the IFN- γ level. There is yet no report
87 addressing this issue.

88 To test this hypothesis, we challenged neonatal mice with LPS and observed a
89 transiently decreased expression of ATP8A2 in PFC. Using a series of experiments,
90 we further identified IFN- γ as the key mediator of LPS-induced ATP8A2
91 down-regulation in PFC in mice. These findings may reveal a potential mechanism by
92 which early inflammation leads to impairment of the central nervous system
93 development and function.

94

95 **2. Materials and methods**

96 *2.1. Animals designing*

97 Litters of newborn C57BL6/J mice (one-day-old) consisting approximately evenly
98 of both sexes were ordered together with their mothers from Guangdong Medical
99 Laboratory Animal Center (Guangzhou, China). They were housed in a specific
100 pathogen-free condition under 12 h light-12 h dark conditions with food and water

101 available ad libitum.

102 In this study, a randomized block design was used to minimize the effects of
 103 systematic error according to publications by statisticians who stated that if the
 104 experimenters aim to focus exclusively on the differences between/among different
 105 treatment conditions, the effects due to variations between the different blocks should
 106 be eliminated by using a randomized block design ANOVA (Refer to
 107 https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-32833-1_344; <http://www.r-tutor.com/elementary-statistics/analysis-variance/randomized-block-design>). In such design, there is only one
 108 primary factor under consideration in the experiment. Similar test subjects are
 109 grouped into blocks. Then, subjects within each block are randomly assigned to
 110 treatment conditions. Each block is tested against all treatment levels of the primary
 111 factor at random order. Thus, possible influence by other extraneous factors will be
 112 eliminated.

114 To be specific, a randomized block design was conducted for each of the
 115 experiments for investigating potential differences between or among treatment
 116 conditions. Each of the blocks consisted of two (for experiments reported in Fig.1 and
 117 Fig.2), three (for experiment reported in Fig.5) or five (for experiments reported in
 118 Fig.4 and Fig.6) same-sex pups from a same dam. The pups in each block were
 119 randomly assigned to different treatment conditions (only one pup in each block for
 120 receiving each kind of the different treatment conditions). The sex of n pups in
 121 different blocks were same or different, while the litter background of pups in

different blocks were certainly different. The detailed information indicating how many litters were used and how many pups from each litter were included in each group of each experiment in this study were shown in Supplementary table 1 to table 6 (Supplementary Material). Pups subjected to behavioral tests were weaned on postnatal day (PND) 21. Pups subjected to other tests were sacrificed on PND 11. This study was approved by the Institutional Animal Ethics Committee of Guangdong Pharmaceutical University.

2.2. LPS treatment

Mice were intraperitoneally injected with 3 doses of LPS dissolved in 0.1 mol phosphate balanced solution (PBS) (*Escherichia coli* O111: B4; Sigma-Aldrich) (50 µg/kg bodyweight for each dose;) on PND5, PND7 and PND9. The dosage and schedule for LPS injection were determined based on previous studies (Dinel et al., 2014; Doosti et al., 2013; Liang et al., 2019). The experiment was controlled by intraperitoneal injection of PBS. Littermates were toe-clipped for identification randomly assigned to each of the groups in each experiment as described in Results.

2.3 Administration of anti-IFN-γ neutralizing mAb and an isotype IgG1

For experiments conducted in this study as reported in Section 3.3 and Fig. 4 to Fig. 6, anti-IFN-γ neutralizing mAb and/or an isotype IgG1 (Invitrogen, Thermo Fisher Scientific, Waltham, MA, USA) were intraperitoneally injected daily to mice from PND5 to PND10. By a special experiment, the optimal dosage was first

142 determined as 0.6 mg/kg body weight of anti-IFN- γ neutralizing mAb. The dosage of
143 isotype IgG1 was determined as 0.6 mg/kg body weight accordingly.

144 *2.4 Western blot*

145 After being over-anesthetized with 10% chloral hydrate, the mice were decapitated
146 and killed. The mouse PFC tissues were immediately taken on ice, and then
147 homogenized in RIPA lysate containing protease inhibitors (Beyotime, Wuhan,
148 China). After centrifuged at 13000g for 30 min at 4°C, the supernatant was taken. The
149 BCA protein analysis method was used to determine the total protein content of the
150 sample. After mixed with 5×SDS-PAGE loading buffer at the volume ratio of V
151 (protein sample solution): V (5×SDS-PAGE Loading Buffer) = 4:1, the samples were
152 boiled and denatured for 5 min, save for later use. The samples of each group were
153 subjected to SDS polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis. The gel used here is a
154 simplified hand-poured gradient gel, in which the ratio was 40% of the volume being
155 6% acrylamide and 60% of the volume being 12% acrylamide (using an SDS-PAGE
156 Gel Quick Preparation Kit, Beyotime, Shanghai, China). The procedure to make this
157 gradient gel was according to a previous study (Miller et al.,2016) with modification
158 with respect to the concentrations of acrylamide. When proteins were transferred to
159 PVDF membranes, the membranes were cut according to the indication of the color
160 marker (10-180 kDa, ThermoFisher, Shanghai, China). Two parts of each membrane,
161 one located in the marker's range 70-180 kDa and the other in the range 25-55 kDa,
162 containing the target proteins ATP8A2 (129 kDa) and the internal control proteins

163 β -actin (43 kDa) were subjected to the subsequent treatment. These membranes were
164 blocked with 5% skimmed milk powder at RT for 2 h. After this, these membranes
165 were put into the corresponding primary antibody incubation solutions, one
166 containing anti-ATP8A2 antibodies (1:500, Abcam, Cambridge, MA, USA) and the
167 other containing anti- β -actin antibodies (1:5000, Abcam, Cambridge, MA, USA) and
168 incubated at 4°C overnight. After rinsing with TBST, these membranes were put into
169 the corresponding secondary antibodies incubation solutions, one containing
170 horseradish peroxidase (HRP)-conjugated goat anti-rabbit antibodies (1:5000,
171 Bioworld, Atlanta, GA, USA) and the other containing HRP-conjugated goat
172 anti-rabbit antibodies (1:5000, Bioworld, Atlanta, GA, USA) and incubated at RT for
173 1 h. After rinsing with TBST, ECL luminescent solution is added on the membranes
174 in a dark room for exposure and development. Chemiluminescent images were
175 obtained with Carestream XBT X-ray Film (Rayco, Xiamen, Fujian, China), and
176 subsequently scanned and quantified by densitometry using ImageJ software.

177 *2.5 Determination of cytokines levels*

178 Forty-eight h after the last LPS injection, the mice were anesthetized deeply with
179 10% chloral hydrate before the blood was collected from the heart immediately. After
180 blood collection, it was allowed to stand at room temperature for 1 h, and after
181 centrifugation, the supernatant was taken and stored at -70°C for the experiment. Then
182 the mice were transcranial perfused with 0.9% NaCl and PFC was collected
183 immediately on ice. A mouse cytokine/chemokine magnetic bead panel

184 (MCYTOMAG-70K-06; Millipore, Billerica, MA, USA) was employed to detect the
185 levels of IFN- γ , tumor necrosis factor (TNF)- α , interleukin(IL)-1 β , IL-6 both in the
186 serum and PFC (Yang et al.,2016). Each of the serum samples was diluted at 1:2 in
187 assay buffer. PFC tissue was prepared as homogenates before assayed. The total
188 protein concentration of each sample was adjusted to 4.5 mg/ml using a BCA protein
189 assay kit (Beyotime, Shanghai, China). Then, the prepared serum and PFC samples
190 were used strictly according to the manufacturer's protocols for the multiplex assays.
191 The data were collected on a Bio-Plex-200 system (Bio-Rad, Hercules, CA, USA) and
192 analyzed using professional software (Bio-Plex Manager).

193 *2.6 Immunofluorescence and cell quantification*

194 Forty-eight h after the last LPS injection, the mice were over-anesthetized with 10%
195 chloral hydrate and transcranial perfused with 0.9% NaCl followed by 4%
196 paraformaldehyde (PFA). After removed, the brains were immediately post-fixed in 4%
197 PFA overnight at 4 °C. Then, the brains were gradient dehydrated with 10%, 20%,
198 and 30% sucrose for 24 h each at 4°C. Free-floating, serial coronal sections (40 μ m)
199 were collected on a Leica SM2000R freezing microtome (Leica Microsystems,
200 Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada) and stored at 4°C for immunostaining. Sections
201 were washed in PBS three times and then blocked in PBS containing 1% bovine
202 serum albumin (BSA) and 0.25% Triton X-100 (Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA)
203 for 1 h at 37°C. The slices were then incubated in the primary antibodies overnight at
204 4°C. The primary antibodies, including rabbit anti-ATP8A2 (1:200; Abcam,

205 Cambridge, MA, USA) and mouse anti-NeuN (1:1000; Abcam, Cambridge, MA,
206 USA), were diluted in PBS containing 1% BSA and 0.25% Triton X-100. Afterward,
207 the specimens were washed three times in PBS and then were incubated with
208 secondary antibodies, including Alexa Fluor 555-conjugated goat anti-rabbit and
209 Alexa Fluor 488-conjugated donkey anti-mouse for 2 h at 37°C. Both secondary
210 antibodies (Invitrogen, Thermo Fisher Scientific, Waltham, MA, USA) were diluted
211 to 1:400.

212 A Stereo Investigator stereological system (MicroBrightField, Williston, USA) was
213 used for quantitative analyses of the ATP8A2⁺ cells in the unilateral PFC of each
214 mouse. Coronal sections of the PFC were collected through the rostrocaudal axis
215 spanning approximately from +3.20 mm to +2.10 mm relative to bregma (Xiong et
216 al.,2017)to count the interested cells. Measurements were recorded from an
217 equidistant series of six coronal sections. After the actual section thickness was
218 measured, appropriate guard zones at the top and bottom of each section were defined
219 to avoid oversampling. The 40× objective of a Nikon microscope was used for all
220 stereological analyses. The numbers of ATP8A2⁺/NeuN⁺ and NeuN⁺ cells within the
221 traced region (PFC) in each of the six selected sections were straightly quantified
222 without using a grid or counting frames. A Zeiss LSM780 confocal laser-scanning
223 microscope (Carl Zeiss AG, Oberkochen, Germany) was used to capture the
224 representative confocal micrographs of the labeled cells.

225 For ATP8A2 in situ densitometric analysis, one 40-μm-thick coronal section at the

226 middle of the PFC (+2.10 mm relative to bregma) was collected from each animal.
227 Single labeling for ATP8A2 immunofluorescently was performed, rather than double
228 labeling for ATP8A2/NeuN, to minimize the possible interference with ATP8A2
229 positive immunofluorescence signal intensity during staining practice. A Zeiss
230 LSM780 confocal laser-scanning microscope (Carl Zeiss AG, Oberkochen, Germany)
231 was used to capture the micrographs of the same field as the double-labeled
232 micrographs shown in Fig.6D-F. The ATP8A2 signal was measured as a mean gray
233 value using the software ImageJ and the data were shown in Fig.6 as a relative
234 influence. The procedures were: 1) Image-Type-8bit; 2) Image-Adjust-Threshold; 3)
235 Image-Adjust-Auto Threshold; 4) Analyze-Set Measurements; 5) Analyze-Measure.

236 2.7. Forced swim test (FST)

237 FST is a standard test used as a screen for measuring depressive-like behaviors in
238 mice. The experiment was carried out on the PND90, the mice were brought to the
239 laboratory one week in advance to let them adapt to the environmental room. In this
240 experiment, mice were placed in a plastic cylinder (40 cm in-depth, 20 cm in diameter
241 and filled with water at $24\pm^{\circ}\text{C}$ with the water's height at 25 cm above from the
242 bottom. Each mouse was put in the plastic cylinder in the same way and forced to
243 swim for 6 min in the plastic cylinder. The first two minutes of mouse behavior was
244 not recorded. The following 4 minutes were recorded by a video tracking system
245 EthoVision (Noldus Information Technology B.V., Wageningen, Netherlands) for the
246 analysis of the total time spent by each animal in staying on the water surface without

247 any struggling or swimming during the test. At the end of the experiment, the hair of
248 the mice was blown dry to prevent them from catching a cold.

249 2.8 Tail-suspension test (TST)

250 TST is also one of the most commonly used experiments to evaluate
251 depressive-like behavior in rodent models. In the present study, TST was performed
252 on the second day after the FST. During this test, each mouse was held below its tail
253 to the edge of the clip and suspended 60 cm above from the floor. The performances
254 of mice were recorded by a video tracking system EthoVision (Noldus Information
255 Technology B.V., Wageningen, Netherlands) four minutes with a 2-min-gap left prior
256 to the recording. The total time spent by each animal in not struggling during the test
257 was analyzed. After all behavioral tests were done, animals were killed by
258 over-anesthetized with 10% chloral hydrate.

259 2.9 Statistical analyses

260 The data were statistically analyzed using the SPSS 25.0 statistical software
261 (Chicago, IL, USA). *Pearson's* correlation analysis was used for data shown in Fig.3.
262 Data shown in Fig.1, Fig.2, Fig.4, Fig.5 and Fig.6 were statistically analyzed using a
263 randomized block design ANOVA to account for the effects of treatment (such as LPS
264 injection and/or anti-IFN- γ neutralizing mAb injection) by modeling both litter factor
265 and sex factor as a fixed effect described as “block effect” in section Results and the
266 treatment factor as a random effect described as “treatment effect” in section Results.

For data obtained from more than two treatment groups, the performance of randomized block design ANOVA were followed by Tukey's *post hoc* test. *p* values are displayed as follows: n.s. = not significant, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

3. Results

3.1 Neonatal LPS exposure induced a transiently down-regulated expression of ATP8A2 in the PFC in mice

To determine whether neonatal LPS exposure influence the expression of ATP8A2 in the PFC in mice and how long this potential influence would last following LPS exposure, the first experiment was carried out. Mice in the LPS group were injected with LPS and those in the CON group with PBS of the same volume. Two groups of mice were sacrificed after 1 day, 2 days, 4 days, or 10 days after the last LPS injection. The left unilateral PFC tissue from every mouse was taken on ice to be homogenate immediately for Western blot analyses of ATP8A2 level. The right unilateral PFC tissue was taken on ice and stored at -70°C at once for ELISA analyses of LPS-induced pro-inflammatory cytokines if necessary.

As shown in Fig.1, the ATP8A2 levels significantly decreased at the former three test time points: 1 day (randomly block design ANOVA, block effect: $F_{(5,5)} = 1.120$, $p = 0.452$, $n = 6$; treatment effect: $F_{(1,5)} = 44.835$, $p = 0.001$, $n = 6$), 2 days (randomly block design ANOVA, block effect: $F_{(5,5)} = 1.369$, $p = 0.369$, $n = 6$; treatment effect:

287 $F_{(1,5)} = 102.221, p < 0.001, n = 6$) and 4 days (randomly block design ANOVA, block
288 effect: $F_{(5,5)} = 0.811, p = 0.588, n = 6$; treatment effect: $F_{(1,5)} = 37.424, p = 0.002, n =$
289 6) after the last LPS injection. However, such decrease was no longer detectable 10
290 days after the last LPS injection (randomly block design ANOVA, block effect: $F_{(5,5)}$
291 $= 0.489, p = 0.775, n = 6$; treatment effect: $F_{(1,5)} = 0.078, p = 0.791, n = 6$) (Fig.1). It
292 is worth noting that the largest extent of the decrease in PFC ATP8A2 expression was
293 observed in the sample obtained 48 h after the last LPS injection (Fig.1). These
294 findings verified the expected influence of neonatal LPS exposure on the PFC
295 ATP8A2 expression in mice and revealed the time curve of PFC ATP8A2 expression
296 following neonatal LPS exposure.

297 *3.2 PFC ATP8A2 level was only significantly correlated to IFN- γ level among all four*
298 *elevated pro-inflammatory cytokines both in serum and in the PFC*

299 Given the initial finding that PFC ATP8A2 expression was reduced to the largest
300 extent 48 h after the last LPS injection (Fig.1), the prepared serum and PFC samples
301 ($n = 6$) obtained at the same time point in the last experiment were then subjected to
302 ELISA analyses for the levels of LPS-induced pro-inflammatory cytokines, including
303 IFN- γ , IL-1 β , IL-6 and TNF- α .

304 Moreover, another experiment was performed in which the animal was treated all
305 the same way and the levels of PFC ATP8A2 as well as the levels pro-inflammatory
306 cytokines both in the serum and PFC were detected specifically 48 h after the last LPS
307 injection, using a larger sample size ($n = 9$) so as both to provide a repetitive

308 verification of the very novel finding of ATP8A2 in the brain and to make the total
309 sample size up to $n = 15$ (together with $n = 6$) for this chosen test time point.
310 *Pearson's* correlation analysis between PFC ATP8A2 level and the level of each of
311 the LPS-induced pro-inflammatory cytokines would get good confidence in the case
312 of $n = 15$.

313 As shown in Fig.2A-B, the PFC ATP8A2 level decreased by more than 90% in LPS
314 group (randomly block design ANOVA, block effect: $F_{(8,8)} = 1.062$, $p = 0.467$, $n = 9$;
315 treatment effect: $F_{(1,8)} = 112.127$, $p < 0.001$, $n = 9$). All the detected cytokines,
316 whether in serum (Fig.2C-F) or in PFC (Fig.2G-J), showed a dramatically increased
317 expression (serum IFN- γ : randomly block design ANOVA, block effect: $F_{(8,8)} = 2.310$,
318 $p = 0.129$, $n = 9$; treatment effect: $F_{(1,8)} = 68.475$, $p < 0.001$, $n = 9$; serum IL-6:
319 randomly block design ANOVA, block effect: $F_{(8,8)} = 0.983$, $p = 0.509$, $n = 9$;
320 treatment effect: $F_{(1,8)} = 170.514$, $p < 0.001$, $n = 9$; serum IL-1 β : randomly block
321 design ANOVA, block effect: $F_{(8,8)} = 1.485$, $p = 0.295$, $n = 9$; treatment effect: $F_{(1,8)} =$
322 104.142 , $p < 0.001$, $n = 9$. serum TNF- α : randomly block design ANOVA, block
323 effect: $F_{(8,8)} = 0.928$, $p = 0.541$, $n = 9$; treatment effect: $F_{(1,8)} = 133.012$, $p < 0.001$, $n =$
324 9 ; PFC IFN- γ : randomly block design ANOVA, block effect: $F_{(8,8)} = 0.722$, $p = 0.672$,
325 $n = 9$; treatment effect: $F_{(1,8)} = 107.626$, $p < 0.001$, $n = 9$; PFC IL-6: randomly block
326 design ANOVA, block effect: $F_{(8,8)} = 1.001$, $p = 0.499$, $n = 9$; treatment effect: $F_{(1,8)} =$
327 129.968 , $p < 0.001$, $n = 9$; PFC IL-1 β : randomly block design ANOVA, block effect:
328 $F_{(8,8)} = 1.130$, $p = 0.433$, $n = 9$; treatment effect: $F_{(1,8)} = 42.304$, $p < 0.001$, $n = 9$; PFC

329 TNF- α : randomly block design ANOVA, block effect: $F_{(8,8)} = 1.159, p = 0.420, n = 9$;
330 treatment effect: $F_{(1,8)} = 250.424, p < 0.001, n = 9$)

331 Taken all the data from 48 h time point samples from LPS-treated mice together,
332 *Pearson's* correlation analysis was performed between PFC ATP8A2 level and the
333 level of each of the LPS-induced pro-inflammatory cytokines ($n = 15$). There was a
334 significant negative correlation between ATP8A2 expression in PFC and IFN- γ level
335 both in serum ($p < 0.01$, *Pearson's* correlation analysis, $n = 15$) (Fig.3 A) and in PFC
336 ($p < 0.001$, *Pearson's* correlation analysis, $n = 15$) (Fig.3E). No significant
337 correlations were found between ATP8A2 level and all the other pro-inflammatory
338 cytokines (all p values > 0.05) (Fig.3 B-D, F-H). These results suggest that IFN- γ
339 plays an important role in the PFC ATP8A2 down-regulation caused by neonatal LPS
340 exposure.

341 3.3 IFN- γ mediated the PFC ATP8A2 down-regulation caused by neonatal LPS 342 exposure

343 To further explore the potential role of IFN- γ in mediating the PFC ATP8A2
344 down-regulation following neonatal LPS exposure, an IFN- γ -blocking experiment
345 was conducted using anti-IFN- γ neutralizing mAb and an isotype IgG1. Before this
346 IFN- γ -blocking experiment, another experiment was carried out to determine the
347 optimal dosage of anti-IFN- γ neutralizing mAb. The dosage of 0.6 mg/kg body weight
348 restored the IFN- γ levels to normal physiological levels both in serum (randomly
349 block design ANOVA, block effect: $F_{(7,35)} = 0.449, p = 0.864, n = 8$; treatment effect:

350 $F_{(5,35)} = 78.511, p < 0.001, n = 8$; *post hoc test*, LPS+anti-IFN- γ (0.6) group vs. CON
351 group: $p = 1.000$) (Fig.4A) and in PFC (randomly block design ANOVA, block effect:
352 $F_{(7,35)} = 0.718, p = 0.657, n = 8$; treatment effect: $F_{(5,35)} = 35.581, p < 0.001, n = 8$;
353 *post hoc test*, LPS+anti-IFN- γ (0.6) group vs. CON group: $p = 0.821$) (Fig.4B). Then,
354 we proceeded to the IFN- γ -blocking experiment and five groups of mice were set. To
355 be specific, the CON group and LPS group were set as above. LPS+anti-IFN- γ (0.6)
356 group was set by injecting LPS combined with anti-IFN- γ neutralizing mAb. The
357 LPS+IgG1 group was set by injecting LPS combined with an isotype IgG1. The last
358 group was set by injecting mere anti-IFN- γ neutralizing mAb (anti-IFN- γ (0.6)).

359 Randomly block design ANOVA revealed significant differences in IFN- γ levels
360 among five groups (Fig.4C, serum IFN- γ level: randomly block design ANOVA,
361 block effect: $F_{(7,28)} = 0.611, p = 0.742, n = 8$; treatment effect: $F_{(4,28)} = 52.663, p <$
362 $0.001, n = 8$) (Fig.4D, PFC IFN- γ level: randomly block design ANOVA, block effect:
363 $F_{(7,28)} = 0.276, p = 0.958, n = 8$; treatment effect: $F_{(4,28)} = 95.873, p < 0.001, n = 8$).
364 We first confirmed that administration of anti-IFN- γ neutralizing mAb blocked the
365 increase of IFN- γ levels both in systemic blood (LPS+anti-IFN- γ (0.6) group vs. CON
366 group: $p = 0.998$) (Fig.4C) and PFC (LPS+anti-IFN- γ (0.6) group vs. CON group: $p =$
367 0.903) (Fig. 4D), while isotype IgG1 failed to block the LPS-induced IFN- γ increase
368 either in serum (LPS+IgG1 group vs. CON group: $p < 0.001$; LPS+IgG1 group vs.
369 LPS group: $p = 0.976$) (Fig.4C) or in PFC (LPS+IgG1 group vs. CON group: $p <$
370 0.001 ; LPS+IgG1 group vs. LPS group: $p = 0.563$) (Fig.4D). In the absence of LPS

371 exposure, the anti-IFN- γ neutralizing mAb significantly neutralized the physiological
372 IFN- γ both in blood (anti-IFN- γ (0.6) group vs. CON group: $p = 0.013$; LPS+IgG1
373 group vs. LPS group: $p = 0.976$) (Fig.4C) and in brain of mice (anti-IFN- γ (0.6) vs.
374 CON group: $p < 0.001$; LPS+IgG1 group vs. LPS group: $p = 0.563$) (Fig.4D).

375 Randomly block design ANOVA of Western blot data revealed significant
376 differences in PFC ATP8A2 levels among five groups (Fig.4E, randomly block design
377 ANOVA, block effect: $F_{(7,28)} = 1.274$, $p = 0.299$, $n = 8$; treatment effect: $F_{(4,28)} =$
378 122.680 , $p < 0.001$, $n = 8$). We found that neutralization of IFN- γ blocked the
379 LPS-induced ATP8A2 decrease in PFC (LPS+anti-IFN- γ (0.6) group vs. CON group:
380 $p = 1$) (Fig.4E-F), while the isotype IgG1 showed no significant blocking effect on the
381 LPS-induced ATP8A2 decrease in PFC (LPS+IgG1 group vs. LPS group: $p = 0.922$;
382 LPS+IgG1 group vs. LPS+anti-IFN- γ (0.6) group: $p < 0.001$) (Fig.4E-F). Interestingly,
383 in the absence of LPS exposure, mere anti-IFN- γ neutralizing mAb administration led
384 to no significant influence on the PFC ATP8A2 level (anti-IFN- γ (0.6) group vs. CON
385 group: $p = 1$) (Fig.4E-F), although it neutralized the physiological IFN- γ both in the
386 blood (Fig.4C) and in the brain of mice (Fig.4D).

387 We next performed another experiment to observe the role of IFN- γ using
388 immunofluorescence detection, with a total of three groups set, CON group, LPS
389 group, and LPS+anti-IFN- γ (0.6) group. The groups by giving isotype IgG1 or mere
390 anti-IFN- γ neutralizing mAb were no longer set due to the confirmed results shown
391 above. The results of randomly block design ANOVA of immunofluorescence

392 detection of PFC ATP8A2 levels showed similar findings to Western blot.

393 Neutralization of IFN- γ blocked the LPS-induced ATP8A2 decrease in PFC, indicated

394 by the mean fluorescence intensity (randomly block design ANOVA, block effect:

395 $F_{(5,10)} = 0.473$, $p = 0.788$, $n = 6$; treatment effect: $F_{(2,10)} = 47.276$, $p < 0.001$, $n = 6$;

396 *post hoc test*, LPS+anti-IFN- γ (0.6) group vs. CON group: $p = 0.849$) (Fig.5K) and

397 ATP8A2⁺/NeuN⁺ cells (randomly block design ANOVA, block effect: $F_{(5,10)} = 0.121$,

398 $p = 0.985$, $n = 6$; treatment effect: $F_{(2,10)} = 88.596$, $p < 0.001$, $n = 6$; *post hoc test*,

399 LPS+anti-IFN- γ (0.6) group vs. CON group: $p = 0.532$) (Fig.5L). Besides, there were

400 no significant differences among three groups in the number of neurons (NeuN⁺ cells)

401 in PFC (data are not shown) although nearly all patchy ATP8A2⁺ signals were

402 co-located with NeuN⁺ signals (Fig.5G-I). The findings shown in this section

403 identified IFN- γ as the key mediator of the PFC ATP8A2 down-regulation caused by

404 neonatal LPS exposure. Moreover, ATP8A2 alterations were not accompanied by a

405 detectable change in the number of neurons (NeuN⁺ cells) in PFC.

406 *3.4 IFN- γ plays a role in depressive-like behaviors in adulthood induced by neonatal*

407 *LPS exposure*

408 Abnormality in PFC, especially during the critical development period, is an

409 important pathophysiological basis of depression and it has been verified that

410 *neonatal LPS exposure* could result in depression in adulthood (Dinel et al.,2014;

411 Walker et al.,2013). Therefore, we investigated whether neutralization of IFN- γ

412 affects the behavioral performances in the FST and TST of the LPS-treated mice. The

413 floating immobility time was partially but significantly restored toward the levels of
 414 CON group in FST task (randomly block design ANOVA, block effect: $F_{(11,44)} = 0.883$,
 415 $p = 0.563$, $n = 12$; treatment effect: $F_{(4,44)} = 43.424$, $p < 0.001$, $n = 12$; *post hoc test*,
 416 LPS+anti-IFN- γ (0.6) group vs. CON group: $p = 0.002$) (Fig.6A). In TST task,
 417 neutralization of IFN- γ also resulted in an obvious restoring trend although Tukey
 418 *post hoc test* reported the p value > 0.05 of the comparison between
 419 LPS+anti-IFN- γ (0.6) group and CON group (randomly block design ANOVA, block
 420 effect: $F_{(11,44)} = 0.466$, $p = 0.914$, $n = 12$; treatment effect: $F_{(4,44)} = 32.685$, $p < 0.001$,
 421 $n = 12$; *post hoc test*, LPS+anti-IFN- γ (0.6) group vs. CON group: $p = 0.245$) (Fig.6B).
 422 However, an LSD *post hoc test* after the same randomly block design ANOVA
 423 reported a significant decrease in TST floating immobility time of
 424 LPS+anti-IFN- γ (0.6) group than CON group ($p = 0.043$).

425 The isotype IgG1 failed to block the LPS-induced behavioral alterations either in
 426 FST (LPS+IgG1 group vs. CON group: $p < 0.001$; LPS+IgG1 group vs. LPS group: p
 427 $= 0.769$) (Fig.6A) or in TST (LPS+IgG1 group vs. CON group: $p < 0.001$; LPS+IgG1
 428 group vs. LPS group: $p = 0.963$) (Fig.6B). In the absence of LPS exposure, the
 429 anti-IFN- γ neutralizing mAb led to no significant behavioral alterations in FST
 430 (anti-IFN- γ (0.6) group vs. CON group: $p = 0.319$; LPS+IgG1 group vs. LPS group: p
 431 $= 0.769$) (Fig.6A) or in TST (anti-IFN- γ (0.6) vs. CON group: $p = 0.999$) (Fig.6B).
 432 These results suggested a role of IFN- γ in depressive-like behaviors in adulthood
 433 induced by neonatal LPS exposure.

434 3.5 No sex dimorphism in ATP8A2 levels or cytokines levels despite a sex dimorphism 435 in depressive-like behaviors in mice

436 All the analyses described above were intended to exclusively detect the effects of
437 different treatment conditions to test the hypothesis that neonatal LPS exposure might
438 influence PFC ATP8A2 expression in mice involving an increased IFN- γ level and
439 therefore the sex factor was not under consideration as stated in section 2.1. However,
440 previous studies showed that sex may affect immune activation (Cai et al.,2016). So,
441 we also analyzed the data collected from the experiments mentioned in section 3.1
442 and 3.2 shown in Fig.2 as well as in the bars in Fig.1 indicated as day2 using another
443 statistical method to observe whether there were significant differences in PFC
444 ATP8A2 expression and the levels of proinflammatory cytokines between two sexes
445 either in the presence of LPS challenge or not. The results showed no significant
446 differences in the levels of these molecules between male and female animals either in
447 the presence of LPS challenge or not (all p values > 0.05 , Supplementary Fig.1).
448 Furthermore, data collected from behavioral tests and shown in section 3.4 (Fig.6)
449 were also subjected to additional analysis for differences between two sexes. The
450 results showed no significant differences in the behavioral task performances of
451 LPS+anti-IFN- γ (0.6) group between male and female animals (FST:
452 LPS+anti-IFN- γ (0.6) group: $p = 0.536$; TST: LPS+anti-IFN- γ (0.6) group: $p = 0.827$;
453 Supplementary Fig.2). However, in all the other groups, significant differences
454 between two sexes were found in FST (CON group: $p < 0.001$; LPS group: $p < 0.001$;

455 LPS+IgG1 group: $p = 0.018$; anti-IFN- γ (0.6) group: $p = 0.013$; Supplementary Fig.2A)
 456 and TST (CON group: $p < 0.001$; LPS group: $p < 0.029$; LPS+IgG1 group: $p < 0.001$;
 457 anti-IFN- γ (0.6) group: $p = 0.006$; Supplementary Fig.2B) task performances with
 458 opposite directions of alterations in the presence of LPS challenge or not. Specifically,
 459 female mice showed higher depressive-like behaviors in the absence of LPS challenge,
 460 whereas they showed lower depressive-like behaviors in the presence of that.

461

462 **Discussion**

463 Our research revealed that neonatal LPS exposure reduced ATP8A2 level in PFC in
 464 mice via increasing IFN- γ level. This finding, based on a series of studies concerning
 465 the influence of LPS on brain development and behavior (Bilbo and Schwarz,2012;
 466 Doosti et al.,2013), is the first to report the change of ATP8A2 in the central nervous
 467 system and to further report the mechanism underlying how LPS affects PFC ATP8A2
 468 expression. Moreover, this study further extends our understanding of the mechanism
 469 underlying behavioral effects of early life immune activation.

470 Intraperitoneal LPS injection has been shown to cause a range of acute
 471 physiological, pathological, and psychological disorders in rodents. Impairments both
 472 in food intake and social exploratory behavior in rodents have been demonstrated in
 473 rodents administered intraperitoneally with LPS (Haba et al.,2012; O'Reilly et
 474 al.,1988). It has also been reported that LPS exposure can induce depressive and
 475 anxiety-like behaviors (Depino,2015; Doosti et al.,2013). Moreover, LPS may reduce

476 acutely the level of prefrontal cortical neurogenesis in adult rodents (Wang et
477 al.,2016). The data from the LPS-treated mice in the present study enriched these
478 widely reported neurobehavioral impairments.

479 LPS challenge may induce a large extent release of cytokines both in the periphery
480 and brain, particularly pro-inflammatory cytokines, including IFN- γ , IL-1 β , IL-6, and
481 TNF- α (Klimstra et al.,1999). These pro-inflammatory cytokines not only play an
482 important role in immunity but also may affect brain function and mediate
483 disease-like behaviors. For example, these pro-inflammatory factors have been shown
484 to cause depressive-like behavior in mice (Gupta et al.,2016; Hashimoto,2015; Kohler
485 et al.,2014; Pokryszko-Dragan et al.,2012). The results of cytokines in our study
486 showed clearly that their levels in the periphery and the brain were highly consistent.
487 this fact may partially due to the immature blood-brain barrier or increased
488 permeability of it during inflammation.

489 ATP8A2 is a protein located in the membrane, functioning to transport
490 phosphatidylserine into the inner layer of membrane, and thus it is important to
491 maintain the structural stability and normal function of the membrane (Andersen et
492 al.,2016; Coleman et al.,2009). Since the distribution of ATP8A2 in the brain has been
493 determined recently (Andersen et al.,2016), little has been known about the potential
494 factors involved in the regulation of its expression. ATP8A2 expression
495 down-regulation has been observed in certain pathological conditions including
496 Alzheimer's disease and bacterial infection (Aaron et al.,2018; Ross et al.,2011).

497 However, the study reported a mechanism underlying such regulation could not be
498 seen so far. Decreased level of ATP8A2 in the PFC also occurs in the presence of
499 stress and depressive situation (Chen et al.,2017), but the causal relationship between
500 ATP8A2 change and behavior change is unclear. The current study revealed that
501 ATP8A2 expression in the PFC could be down-regulated by a high concentration of
502 IFN- γ , which is consistent with another study verifying that IFN- γ down-regulated the
503 expression of ATP8A2 in non-neuron cells (Shulzhenko et al.,2018). This finding
504 deepens the understanding of how depression is induced during infections by
505 LPS-producing gram-negative bacteria.

506 LPS exposure can induce neuroinflammation in various brain regions and result in
507 functional abnormalities, such as hippocampal neuroinflammation and impaired
508 learning and memory (Lee et al.,2008; Shaw et al.,2001). In this study, the animal
509 model that simulates a depressive-like phenotype caused by early bacterial infection
510 was used to investigate whether LPS caused alteration in ATP8A2 expression.
511 Therefore, PFC was selected as the brain region to observe ATP8A2 expression that
512 it's the area of the brain mostly focused on by studies about depressive-like behavior
513 (Myers-Schulz and Koenigs,2012). In future studies, we will investigate the
514 expression of ATP8A2 in other pathological conditions and/or in other brain zones
515 such as the hippocampus.

516 As well-known, LPS-induced inflammation is transient. Likewise, the first
517 experiment in this study has shown the ATP8A2 levels decreased transiently and

518 restored within 10 days after the end of LPS administration (Fig.1). Therefore, the
519 animals were killed after finishing behavioral tasks by over-anesthetized without
520 investigating their PFC ATP8A2 levels or peripheral/cerebral cytokines in adulthood.
521 Understandably, a transient ATP8A2 decrease in PFC might mediate a delayed
522 depressive-like behavior phenotype due to the existing theory of early-life
523 programming (Dinel et al.,2014; Karrow,2006), saying that the brain is susceptible to
524 external stimuli, such as immune activation, which modulates the course of normal
525 brain development.

526 It has been reported that sex could affect the outcomes in behavior development by
527 itself or combining neonatal immune activation (Cai et al.,2016), which is confirmed
528 by the current study due to the observed between-sexes effects in FST and TST tasks
529 performances (Supplementary Fig.2). However, the PFC ATP8A2 expression and
530 cytokine levels both in blood and in PFC have not been significantly influenced by the
531 sex factor tested at PND11 (Supplementary Fig.1). This may be because the sex factor
532 exerts its effects mainly by gonadal hormones. These endocrine sex differences often
533 come to be obvious from the beginning of puberty and these hormonal disparities
534 contribute to the emerging sex differences in the brain (Cai et al.,2016). Further study
535 is required to address whether the sex factor makes a difference in ATP8A2
536 expression in the brain during puberty as well as adulthood.

537 In sum, neonatal LPS exposure reduced ATP8A2 level in PFC in mice via
538 increasing IFN- γ level, which may be associated with mechanism underlying brain

539 and behavior impairments induced by neonatal LPS exposure.

540

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560

561 **Additional information**

562 **Competing interests**

563 JD, LS, ZY, SZ, ZD, LL, JL, XJ and JY declare that there are no conflicts of
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565 **Author contributions**

566 JD: Data curation, Investigation, Methodology, Writing-original draft, Writing-review
567 and editing.

568 LS: Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology.

569 ZY: Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology.

570 SZ: Validation, Investigation.

571 ZD: Validation, Investigation.

572 LL: Resources, Funding acquisition.

573 JL: Resources.

574 XJ: Resources.

575 JY: Conceptualization, Supervision, Funding acquisition, Writing - original draft,
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577

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694

695 Legends

696 **Fig.1. Neonatal LPS exposure induced a transiently down-regulated expression**

697 **of ATP8A2 in the PFC in mice. (A)** Representative results for the Western blot

698 analysis of ATP8A2. **(B)** The relative quantification of ATP8A2 in each group of mice

699 was normalized using the level of β -actin. Data are expressed as means $\pm$ SEM.

700 Randomly block design ANOVA; $n = 6/\text{group}$; * $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$.

701 **Fig.2. Neonatal LPS exposure induced a down-regulated expression of ATP8A2**

702 **accompanied by inflammation both in periphery and in PFC in mice.**

703 **(A)** Representative results for the Western blot analysis of ATP8A2. **(B)** The relative

704 quantification of ATP8A2 in each group of mice was normalized using the level of

705 β -actin. **(C-J)** The bars represent the average levels of IFN- γ , IL-1 β , IL-6, TNF- α in

706 the serum and IFN- γ , IL-1 β , IL-6, TNF- α in the PFC. Data are expressed as means $\pm$

707 SEM. Randomly block design ANOVA; $n = 9/\text{group}$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p <$

708 0.001.

Fig.3. The correlation of PFC ATP8A2 level with the serum and PFC levels of pro-inflammatory cytokines in mice. (A) The positive negative correlation of the PFC IFN- γ level with the ATP8A2 expression level in LPS-treated mice. (B-D) Correlation analyses between the PFC IL-1 β , IL-6 and TNF- α levels and the level of ATP8A2 LPS-treated mice. (E) The positive negative correlation of the serum IFN- γ level with the ATP8A2 expression level in LPS-treated mice. (F-H) Correlation analyses between the serum IL-1 β , IL-6 and TNF- α levels and the level of ATP8A2 LPS-treated mice. $n = 15$ per analysis ; *Pearson's* correlation analysis.

Fig.4. Western blot analyses showed that IFN- γ mediated the PFC ATP8A2 down-regulation caused by neonatal LPS exposure.

(A-B) The mean levels of IFN- γ in the serum and PFC were shown from the experiment carried out to determine the optimal dosage of anti-IFN- γ neutralizing mAb. (C-D) The mean levels of IFN- γ in the serum and PFC were shown from the IFN- γ -blocking experiment. (E) The relative quantification of ATP8A2 in each group of mice was normalized using the level of β -actin. (F) Representative results for the Western blot analysis of ATP8A2. Data are expressed as means $\pm$ SEM. Randomly block design ANOVA followed by Tukey's *post hoc* test; $n = 8$ /group; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; n.s., no significant. anti-IFN- γ (0.6), the anti-IFN- γ dosage of 0.6 mg/kg body weight.

Fig.5. Immunofluorescence analyses showed that IFN- γ mediated the PFC ATP8A2 down-regulation caused by neonatal LPS exposure. (A-C) Representative

730 immunofluorescence staining results in the PFC for ATP8A2(red)/NeuN(green)
 731 co-labeling in CON group (A), LPS group (B) and LPS+anti-IFN- γ (0.6) group (C).
 732 **(E-F)** Exhibition of the single red channel that shows ATP8A2 signal of the same
 733 micrographs shown in (A), (B), (C), respectively. **(G-I)** Representative high
 734 magnificent photos show the immunofluorescence staining results in the PFC for
 735 ATP8A2/NeuN co-labeling. Thick arrows indicate ATP8A2/NeuN co-labeling cells.
 736 Thin arrows indicate NeuN single labeling cells. **(J)** The larger scope shows the
 737 location in PFC where the photos shown in (G-I) come from. **(K)** Bars represent mean
 738 fluorescence intensity of the signal of immunofluorescence staining for ATP8A2 in
 739 each group. **(I)** Bars represent mean numbers of ATP8A2/NeuN co-labeling cells in
 740 unilateral PFC in each group. Data are expressed as means $\pm$ SEM. Randomly block
 741 design ANOVA followed by Tukey's *post hoc* test; $n = 6/\text{group}$; *** $p < 0.001$;
 742 anti-IFN- γ (0.6), the anti-IFN- γ dosage of 0.6 mg/kg body weight. Scale bar in (A-F),
 743 300 μm ; in (G-I), 10 μm ; in (J), 200 μm .

744 **Fig.6. IFN- γ plays an important role in depressive-like behaviors in adulthood**
 745 **induced by neonatal LPS exposure.** (A) Bars represent the mean immobility time of
 746 mice in FST of each group. (I) Bars represent the mean immobility time of TST in
 747 each group. The data represent the mean $\pm$ SEM; randomly block design ANOVA
 748 followed by Tukey's *post hoc* test; $n = 12/\text{group}$; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$;
 749 anti-IFN- γ (0.6), the anti-IFN- γ dosage of 0.6 mg/kg body weight.

A **B** **C** **D** **E** **F** **G** **H** **I** **J**

NeuN/ATP8A2

- CON
- LPS
- LPS+anti- $\text{IFN-}\gamma(0.6)$