



Prostanoids and Resolution of Inflammation – Beyond the Lipid-Mediator Class Switch

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Bioactive lipid mediators play a major role in regulating inflammatory processes. Herein, early pro-inflammatory phases are characterized and regulated by prostanoids and leukotrienes, whereas specialized pro-resolving mediators (SPM), including lipoxins, resolvins, protectins, and maresins, dominate during the resolution phase. While pro-inflammatory properties of prostanoids have been studied extensively, their impact on later phases of the inflammatory process has been attributed mainly to their ability to initiate the lipid-mediator class switch towards SPM. Yet, there is accumulating evidence that prostanoids directly contribute to the resolution of inflammation and return to homeostasis. In this mini review, we summarize the current knowledge of the resolution-regulatory properties of prostanoids and discuss potential implications for anti-inflammatory, prostanoid-targeted therapeutic interventions.

Keywords: prostaglandin, prostacyclin, thromboxane, specialized pro-resolving mediator, inflammation, resolution, macrophage

INTRODUCTION

Inflammation is an integral part of protective host responses against pathogens or injury (1). Herein, inflammatory processes usually follow a defined sequence of reactions characterized by the rapid induction of a pro-inflammatory response, which is closely followed by an anti-inflammatory response. To regain homeostasis resolution of inflammation represents an integral and crucial part of acute inflammation. In fact, failure to completely resolve inflammatory processes is associated with the emergence of chronic inflammatory conditions. While resolution was considered to merely represent the downregulation or inactivation of inflammatory mediators for a long time, it is now appreciated to be active and complex, involving the formation of pro-resolving mediators (2). Moreover, it is widely accepted that resolution processes are initiated early during inflammation, and classical pro-inflammatory mediators have been shown to directly impact on resolution as well (3). Therefore, pro-resolving therapeutic approaches are increasingly being considered rather than anti-inflammatory ones as the latter might diminish the host response against pathogenic challenges (4, 5). Since lipid mediators play a crucial, yet often ambivalent role during the inflammatory process, and prostanoid synthesis represents a major target for anti-inflammatory therapies, the present mini review aims to recapitulate the current understanding of the role of prostanoids in the context of resolution of inflammation.

THE COURSE OF INFLAMMATION

Cellular Mediators

Upon an insult (e.g., pathogen contact, injury) local resident immune cells are the first responders. Among these, tissue resident macrophages (MΦ) represent not only an important first line of defense but even more importantly they establish an environment prone to recruit neutrophils and monocytes from the circulation. Neutrophils are main executors in the acute inflammatory environment, i.e. they produce high amounts of reactive oxygen and nitrogen species to eliminate pathogens, and secrete a plethora of inflammatory mediators (6). Within the inflammatory environment neutrophils rapidly die by apoptotic processes and are phagocytosed by MΦ in a process termed efferocytosis (7, 8). Importantly, uptake of apoptotic cells (AC) induces a shift in MΦ polarization from a pro-inflammatory to an anti-inflammatory and immunomodulatory phenotype (9–14). MΦ and other antigen-presenting cells such as dendritic cells (DC) eventually activate adaptive immune responses, which ensures complete removal of the invading pathogens and enables accelerated responses upon anew contact to the triggering stimulus (15). The return to cellular homeostasis further requires successful emigration of infiltrated immune cells from the cleared site of inflammation (16). In contrast to the concept of a rapid return to homeostasis, recent reports provided evidence that resolution is followed by a longer lasting, immune-suppressive post-resolution phase characterized by infiltrating regulatory T cells (Treg) and myeloid-derived suppressor cells (MDSC), but also MΦ, which might be decisive for a successful adaptation vs. chronic inflammation and/or autoimmunity (17–19).

Lipid Mediators

Regulation and execution of inflammatory reactions is mediated by soluble mediators, such as cytokines and chemokines. In addition, bioactive lipids emerged as crucial factors during all phases of the inflammatory process (20, 21). Specifically, while leukotrienes and prostaglandins appear early during the onset of inflammation, specialized pro-resolving mediators (SPM), such as lipoxins, resolvins, and maresins, are produced later on, facilitating the resolution of inflammation (22). Prostanoids, like leukotrienes, belong to the eicosanoid family of lipid mediators (23). Both classes are synthesized from arachidonic acid (AA) after the latter is released from membrane phospholipids by phospholipase A₂ (24). While leukotrienes are synthesized by the lipoxygenases, prostanoid formation initially requires conversion of AA to the unstable prostaglandin H₂ (PGH₂) via the bifunctional cyclooxygenases 1 (Cox-1) and 2 (25, 26). In line with the established pro-inflammatory function of the prostanoids, the cyclooxygenases became an important target in the therapy of inflammatory diseases, and as of today, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) rank amongst the most important anti-inflammatory drugs (27, 28). Of note, while Cox-1 is constitutively expressed in most cells, Cox-2 often is inducible and emerged as the more important cyclooxygenase in the context of inflammation. Consequently Cox inhibitors (Coxibs) selectively targeting Cox-2 emerged as promising novel anti-inflammatory

therapeutics (29, 30). The short-lived Cox product PGH₂ is then substrate to specific synthases, which produce potent prostanoids including PGD₂, PGE₂, PGF_{2α}, and PGI₂, as well as thromboxane A₂ (TXA₂) (Figure 1).

Interestingly, the production of the different lipid mediators appears to be tightly connected across the course of inflammation. For example, the presumably pro-inflammatory PGE₂ was shown to attenuate the synthesis of leukotrienes and to induce the production of SPM, thus initiating the so-called lipid-mediator class switch (31). While the SPM-regulatory impact of prostanoids on the resolution of inflammation is rather well characterized, there is accumulating evidence that prostanoids also directly impinge on other aspects of the resolution process. In the following sections, we will therefore summarize the current understanding of the role of the most prominent prostanoids in resolution of inflammation, aside from the aforementioned lipid-mediator class switch, with a special focus on PGE₂.

PROSTANOIDS IN THE RESOLUTION OF INFLAMMATION

Thromboxane A₂

TXA₂ is predominantly produced by platelets, but also at appreciable amounts by MΦ (32). Interestingly, while thromboxane synthase (TXAS) appears to be coupled to the activity of Cox-1 and Cox-2 constitutes the dominant Cox in inflammatory conditions, the activity of TXA₂ is largely pro-inflammatory (33, 34). In fact, there is little evidence that TXA₂ might contribute to the resolution of inflammation. In line, Kupffer cell-derived TXA₂ was shown to contribute to liver fibrosis, a common outcome of ineffective resolution (35). The observation that TXA₂ synthesis is induced by pro-inflammatory stimuli, while it is suppressed upon inflammatory restimulation (36), further suggest that the prevention of TXA₂, e.g. via redirection of Cox-1-provided PGH₂ towards PGE₂ synthesis, might be part of the immune-suppressive environment typical for the post-resolution phase (18).

Prostaglandin I₂ (Prostacyclin)

PGI₂ (prostacyclin) has been characterized as the counterpart of TXA₂ as it inhibits platelet aggregation and acts as a potent vaso- and bronchodilator (37). It is produced primarily by vascular endothelial and smooth muscle cells, yet other cells such as fibroblasts and dendritic cells also synthesize PGI₂ (38). In the context of inflammation, PGI₂ was shown to inhibit LPS-induced expression of pro-inflammatory cytokines in MΦ, DC, CD4⁺ T cells, and endothelial cells (39–42). PGI₂ further synergizes with anti-inflammatory cytokines interleukin-4 (IL-4) and IL-13 to suppress pro-inflammatory cytokines (43). Along the same lines, PGI₂ receptor (IP) deficient mice displayed stronger allergic inflammation, which was attributable to enhanced Th2 cell function (44). Thus, PGI₂ emerges as a predominant anti-inflammatory mediator, positioning it also as a counterpart of TXA₂ in the context of inflammation.

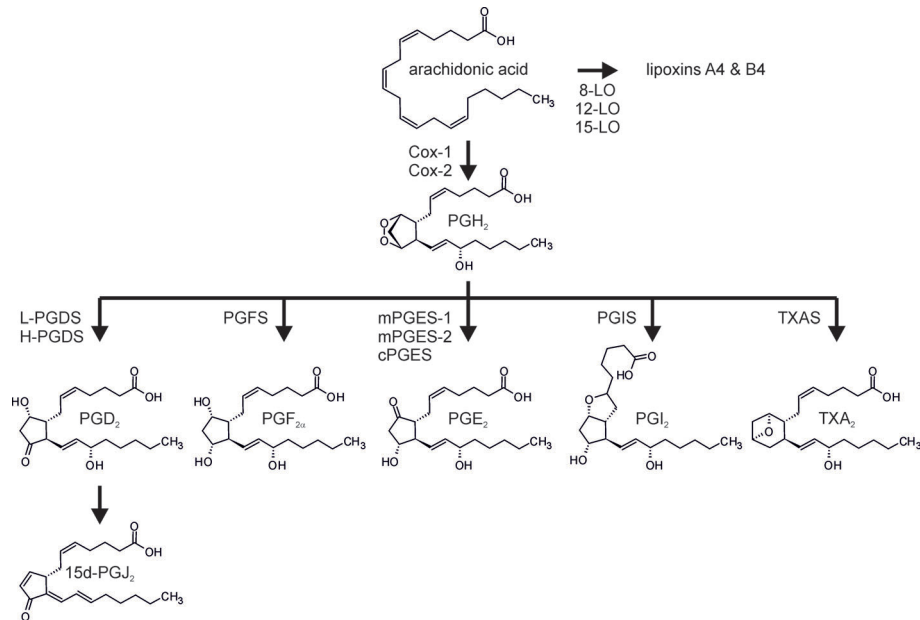


FIGURE 1 | Prostanoid synthesis. Arachidonic acid, liberated from membrane phospholipids by phospholipase A₂, is converted to prostaglandin H₂ (PGH₂) by the dual peroxidase/cyclooxygenase activity of the cyclooxygenases (Cox-1, Cox-2). PGH₂ serves as the substrate for the terminal synthetases to produce PGD₂, PGE₂, PGF_{2α}, PGI₂, and thromboxane A₂ (TXA₂). PGD₂ is further dehydrated and isomerized spontaneously to 15-deoxy-Δ^{12,14}-PGJ₂ (15d-PGJ₂). Alternatively, arachidonic acid can be converted to lipoxins, i.e. SPM, via the activity of the lipoxygenases (LO). L-PGDS, lipocalin-type PGD synthase; H-PGDS, hematopoietic-type PGDS; mPGES, microsomal PGES; cPGES, cytosolic PGES; TXAS, TXA synthase.

Prostaglandin D₂

PGD₂ is produced by numerous immune cells including activated MΦ, DC, Th2 cells, eosinophils, platelets, but also endothelial cells (45). However, since its main source are mast cells (46, 47), PGD₂ has been characterized extensively in the context of allergic reactions (48). PGD₂ can further be metabolized to the cyclopentenone, PGJ₂-type prostanoids, including PGJ₂ and 15d-PGJ₂, which also display biological activity in the context of resolution of inflammation (49). PGD₂ binds to the PGD₂ receptors 1 (DP1) and DP2 [also known as chemoattractant receptor-homologous molecule expressed on Th2 cells (CRTH2)] (50). Activation of DP2 is of specific importance in allergic inflammation, where mast cell-derived PGD₂ stimulates the recruitment of innate lymphoid type 2 cells (51) and Th2 cells (52), and causes activation of these as well as of basophils and eosinophils (53). While PGD₂ was shown to contribute to allergic inflammation, PGD₂ synthase (PGDS) decreases during the acute inflammatory phase, while it rises again at later stages corresponding to the resolution phase in animal models (54). PGD₂ and 15d-PGJ₂ both exert pro-inflammatory functions *via* CRTH2 (55). In contrast, PGD₂-dependent activation of DP1 as well as 15d-PGJ₂-mediated activation of peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor γ (PPARγ) inhibit the production of inflammatory cytokines and chemokines by antigen-presenting cells including DC or MΦ by interfering with inflammatory transcription factors nuclear factor kappa B (NFκB), activator protein 1 (AP1), and signal transducer and activator of transcription 3 (STAT3) (56–58) and additionally by enhancing

the activity of anti-inflammatory nuclear factor erythroid 2-like 2 (Nrf2) (59, 60). Consequently, PGD₂ and 15d-PGJ₂ support emigration of MΦ to the draining lymph nodes and attenuate the recruitment of leukocytes (54). They further inhibit effector functions of and induce apoptosis in T lymphocytes (57). Thus, PGD₂ contributes to normalize the local environment, an important aspect of the resolution of inflammation (61).

Prostaglandin F_{2α}

PGF_{2α} is produced by the aldo-keto reductase (AKR) 1C3, also known as PGF_{2α} synthase (PGFS) using PGH₂ or PGD₂ (62). Alternatively, PGE₂ can be converted to PGF_{2α} by AKR1C1 or AKR1C2 (63). While PGF_{2α} is synthesized in most tissues (64), its prime site of production is the female reproductive system (65), where PGF_{2α} has been shown to be of functional importance (66, 67). Nevertheless, PGF_{2α} also appears to be involved in inflammatory processes (64, 68). PGF_{2α} is elevated in rheumatoid arthritis (69) and was shown to contribute to and correlate with fibrosis (70, 71), which is characteristic for insufficient resolution. Interestingly though, PGFS expression and concomitantly PGF_{2α} levels decrease similar to PGD₂ during acute inflammation, only to increase again in the resolution phase (72), which might be indicative for an active role of PGF_{2α} in the resolution of inflammation. Yet, the exact role of PGF_{2α} in inflammation-resolving processes remains to be determined.

Prostaglandin E₂

The best characterized and presumably most important prostanoid in the context of inflammation is PGE₂. It can be

synthesized by all cell types. In the context of inflammation the prime producers are fibroblasts, epithelial cells, and immune cells (73). PGE₂ exerts its functions *via* four G-protein-coupled PGE₂ receptors (EP1-4) (74). While EP2 and 4 represent G α_s -coupled receptors increasing cAMP levels upon activation (75), the G α_i -coupled EP3 variants inhibit adenylate cyclase, thus reducing cAMP (76), and G α_q EP1 enhances intracellular Ca²⁺ levels (74). The distinct downstream signals as well as the cell type-specific distribution of the receptors, and their differential sensitivity for PGE₂ account for the diverse functions of PGE₂ also in inflammation (77).

Upon inflammatory stimulation, both the expression of Cox-2 and microsomal PGE₂ synthase 1 (mPGES-1) are induced in M Φ (78), skewing the prostanoid spectrum towards PGE₂ production in the acute inflammatory phase (73). PGE₂ signals towards enhanced recruitment of neutrophils, M Φ , and mast cells (79–81) and enhances the expression and secretion of pro-inflammatory cytokines in DC, M Φ , and T cells (82–84). Its NF κ B-activating properties further support neutrophil survival, thereby extending the pro-inflammatory impact of neutrophils in the inflammatory niche (85, 86). Yet, this initial increase in PGE₂ is only moderate and transient in character, and PGE₂ levels rise again during the resolution phase, eventually increasing to much higher levels in the post-resolution phase (18, 87, 88). This seemingly biphasic regulation of PGE₂ might at least in part be due to a shift from transcriptional to post-transcriptional programs governing not only PGE₂ production, but more generally the course of inflammation (89). With respect to the regulation of PGE₂ synthesis, Cox-2 rapidly accumulates during early inflammation. In a negative feedback loop, elevated PGE₂ induces the expression of dual specificity phosphatase 1 (DUSP1), thereby enhancing the activity of the RNA-binding protein tristetraprolin (TTP), which destabilizes the mRNA of Cox-2, but also of pro-inflammatory tumor necrosis factor (TNF) (90). The second wave of PGE₂ production by M Φ appears to be facilitated by another increase of Cox-2 expression induced by sphingosine-1-phosphate released from apoptotic cells, which activates the RNA-stabilizing protein human antigen R (HuR) in M Φ to increase Cox-2 expression (91). As a side note, while PGE₂ is predominantly produced in a Cox-2/mPGES-1 dependent manner during the inflammatory and early resolution phase, PGE₂ levels during the post-resolution phase are approx. 3-fold higher, which is due to enhanced Cox-1/mPGES-1 expression in M Φ (18). While these findings might explain the kinetics of PGE₂ production and even some of the inhibitory effects of PGE₂ on pro-inflammatory mediators, further evidence for an immunosuppressive function of M Φ -derived PGE₂ emerged in the tumor context, where PGE₂ inhibits CD80 expression *via* EP2, thereby attenuating activation of cytotoxic T cells (92, 93). Similarly, PGE₂ suppresses cytolytic functions of NK cells (94, 95) and inhibits phagocytic and bacteria killing activities of M Φ , thus preventing the establishment of appropriate inflammatory, anti-microbial responses largely *via* EP2-dependent cAMP induction (96–98). In line, EP2- and EP4-signaling limits secretion of TNF and IL-1 β , and enhances expression of anti-inflammatory IL-10 in

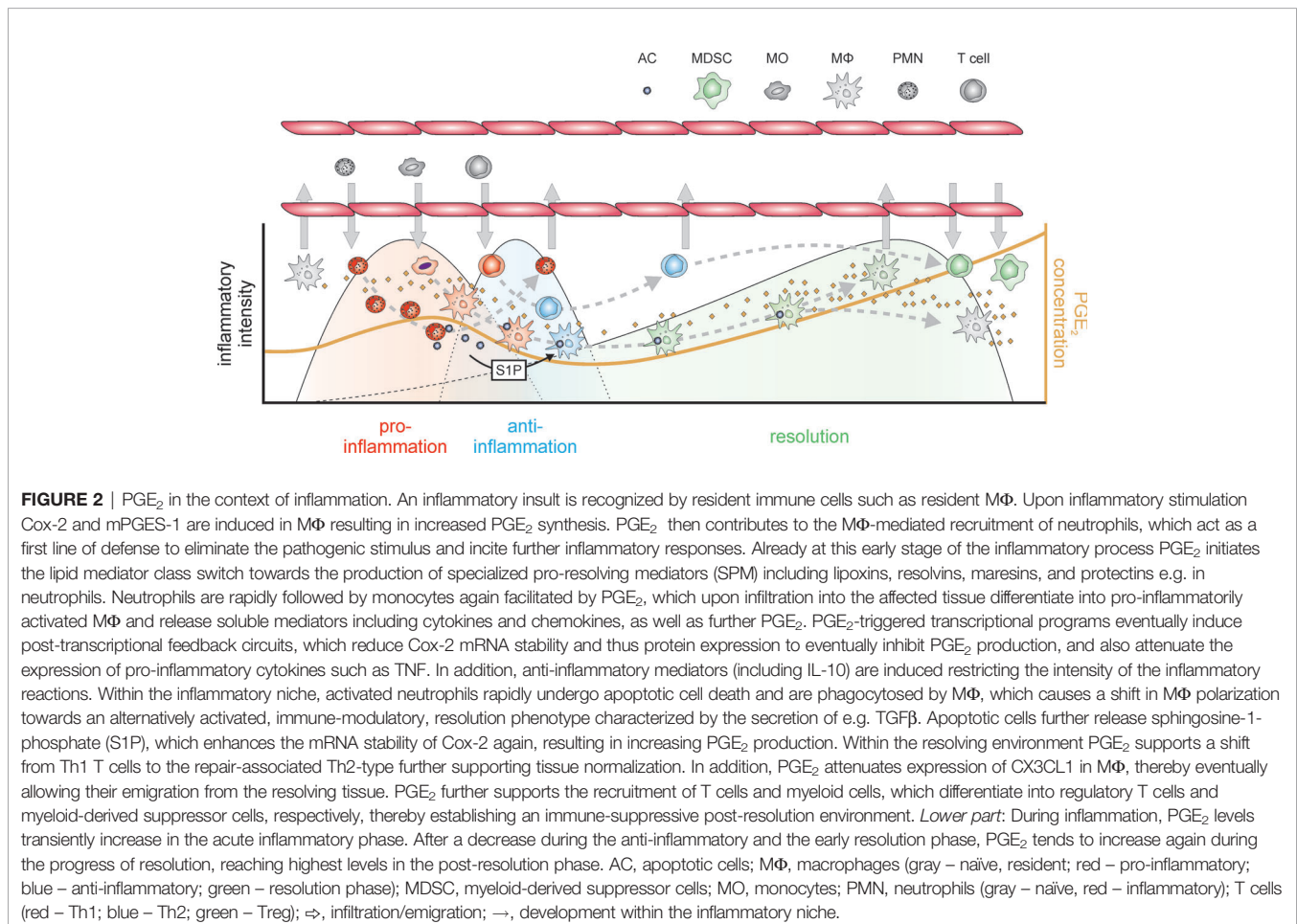
response to LPS by microglia (99), i.e. resident M Φ of the central nervous system (100). In general, EP2- and EP4-activation by PGE₂ appears to be crucial to establish an anti-inflammatory and resolving M Φ phenotype (101, 102), which is characterized by further immune-modulatory factors such as transforming growth factor β (TGF β) (103). Nevertheless, there are contradictory reports regarding the exact impact of PGE₂ on T cell functions. On the one hand, PGE₂ appears to inhibit IL-2 production by T cells, thereby attenuating both T cell activation and activation-dependent apoptosis (104–106). On the other hand, while PGE₂ appears to contribute to sustained inflammation by differentiation and activation of Th1 and $\gamma\delta$ T cells, considered to support inflammation (107–109), other findings indicate that PGE₂ selectively inhibits Th1 cytokine production leaving Th2 cytokines, such as IL-4 and IL-5, unaffected (110, 111), thus provoking a PGE₂-dependent shift towards Th2 responses, which are associated with repair mechanisms instead (112–114). This notion is substantiated by the high levels of PGE₂ observed in Th2-driven diseases such as atopic allergy (115). Indeed, the intricate impact of PGE₂ on the balance between different T cell subtypes might be one of the key mechanisms how PGE₂ affects a self-limiting inflammation throughout resolution and post-resolution phases. Elevated PGE₂ impairs interferon γ (IFN γ) synthesis, thereby directly attenuating Th1 responses, while leaving Th2 responses unaltered (110, 111). PGE₂ further favors Th17 responses *via* EP2 and EP4 by shifting the IL-12/IL-23 balance towards Th17-supportive IL-23 (116–118). While Th17 cells are largely inflammatory in nature contributing to severe inflammatory diseases (107, 119), they have been shown to be highly plastic, being able to trans-differentiate into Treg thereby contributing to resolution of inflammation (120). Yet, PGE₂ not only promotes differentiation of naïve T cells or Th17 cells towards Tregs (121, 122), it also supports further expansion of differentiated Tregs (123). Conclusively, the concentration, source, and timing of PGE₂ appear critical to determine the exact T cell response in the context of inflammatory responses. Moreover, while the pro-resolving activity of cyclooxygenase metabolites has long been attributed predominantly to PGD₂ and 15d-PGJ₂ (124), PGE₂ emerged as an important facilitator of the lipid-mediator class switch inducing not only the production of PGD₂ and its derivatives, but also of the so-called specialized pro-resolving mediators (SPM) (20). SPM, synthesized by 15-lipoxygenase (ALOX15) (31, 125–127), are key players in the resolution of inflammation (114, 128). PGE₂ induces the expression of the relevant lipoxygenases, thereby skewing the balance towards a pro-resolving lipid mediator profile (129, 130). While SPM levels are mostly considered to reciprocally reflect PGE₂ levels during the course of inflammation, they in fact coexist (131). The exact temporal and spatial distribution of both PGE₂ and SPM might eventually determine the course of the resolution of inflammation. Of note, SPM also have been shown to affect the T cell balance (132–134). Yet, there is mounting evidence that PGE₂ also directly supports further resolution-associated functions. Along these lines, PGE₂ has been shown to inhibit pro-inflammatory cytokine production (99, 135) and to stimulate the expression of anti-inflammatory cytokines (136, 137), thereby

contributing to the early steps of the resolution process (138). Furthermore, blocking PGE₂ synthesis attenuated efficient resolution in a peritonitis model by preventing the emigration of MΦ from the site of inflammation in a CX3CL1-dependent manner (87). Extending beyond its impact on the resolution phase, PGE₂ contributes to the immune suppressive post-resolution phase, where PGE₂ suppresses innate immune responses, inhibits lymphocyte functions, and contributes to the generation and activity of Treg (121, 139) and MDSC (140). While these immune suppressive effects appear negative in the context of novel infections, they lower the risk of autoimmune responses (18, 19) (**Figure 2**). The complexity of the resolution of inflammation both at cellular as well as (lipid) mediator level, highlights the need for further studies unraveling details of the resolution phase to allow for the development of refined therapeutic intervention strategies, especially for chronic inflammatory diseases lacking proper resolution mechanisms.

THERAPEUTIC CONSIDERATIONS

Cox inhibitors are amongst the most widely used over the counter anti-inflammatory drugs worldwide (141). Despite the

undisputed beneficial effects of the broad spectrum Cox inhibitors, specific Cox-2 inhibitors (Coxibs) were developed to more selectively interfere with the production of inflammation-associated prostanoids (142). Due to the prominent role of PGE₂ in the establishment of inflammatory processes, recent therapeutic approaches aimed at inhibiting the inflammation-associated terminal PGE₂ synthase mPGES-1 to selectively block the production of PGE₂ only (73, 143, 144). Yet, considering the major impact of PGE₂ on successful resolution of inflammation, therapeutic approaches targeting PGE₂ synthesis should be critically revisited as continued PGE₂ inhibition in inflammatory diseases might be expected to lead to chronic diseases due to insufficient resolution. In fact, even attenuating inflammation itself might interfere with successful resolution, since the process of resolution is initiated already very early during the inflammatory process (3). Thus, it might be warranted to focus on therapeutic approaches promoting resolution rather than on anti-inflammatory ones in the future (4, 145). Indeed, there are numerous efforts to target SPM production or receptors (146). Considering promising effects of PGE₂ receptor antagonists (e.g. EP4) in the context of chronic inflammatory diseases (147), it will be interesting to see combinatorial approaches in the future.



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TS and BB wrote and edited the manuscript. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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