A Review on Repositioning Antidiabetic Therapies for Alzheimer's and Parkinson's Disease: Targeting the Metabolic–Neurodegenerative Interface

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***Abstract*—The escalating prevalence of Alzheimer's disease and Parkinson's disease, juxtaposed with the global epidemic of type 2 diabetes mellitus, has compelled the scientific community to reconsider the traditional dichotomy between metabolic and neurodegenerative disorders. Contemporary molecular investigations reveal that defective insulin signalling, cerebral glucose hypometabolism, mitochondrial bioenergetic collapse, and chronic neuroinflammation constitute convergent pathological denominators shared by these seemingly disparate conditions. The brain, once regarded as an insulin-insensitive organ, is now recognized as critically dependent upon finely tuned insulin receptor–mediated cascades for maintenance of synaptic plasticity, neuronal survival, and proteostatic equilibrium. Antidiabetic agents developed for peripheral glycemic regulation exhibit a multitude of pleiotropic actions capable of modulating these neural pathways, including enhancement of autophagic clearance of misfolded proteins, attenuation of microglial activation, stabilization of mitochondrial dynamics, and suppression of oxidative stress.**

Drug repositioning, defined as the strategic redeployment of established pharmacotherapies for novel clinical indications, provides an economically rational and temporally efficient approach to address the therapeutic stagnation that has characterized neurodegenerative drug development for decades. This review undertakes an exhaustive analysis of the scientific rationale underpinning the repurposing of metformin, glucagon-like peptide-1 receptor agonists, dipeptidyl peptidase-4 inhibitors, thiazolidinediones, and sodium–glucose cotransporter-2 inhibitors for Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease. Emphasis is placed upon mechanistic intersections at the metabolic–neurodegenerative interface, critical appraisal of preclinical models, interpretation of emerging human trials, and pharmaceutical challenges related to blood–brain barrier penetration and geriatric safety. By integrating endocrinological and neurological perspectives, this manuscript seeks to delineate a coherent roadmap toward disease-modifying interventions for disorders that presently impose irreversible cognitive and motor decline.

***Index Terms*—metabolic neurodegeneration, insulin resistance, drug repurposing, GLP-1 agonists, metformin, mitochondrial dysfunction, α-synuclein, amyloid beta, neuroinflammation**

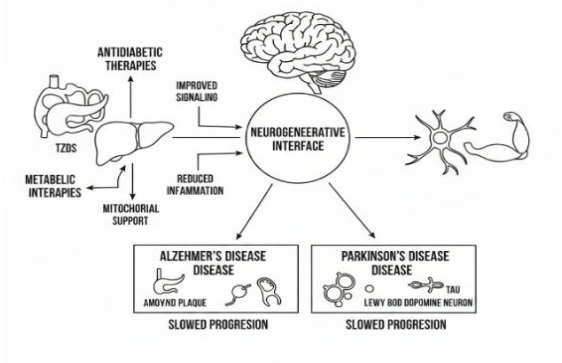
I. INTRODUCTION

Neurodegenerative diseases have evolved from relatively rare clinical entities into dominant public health crises as global life expectancy expands.

Alzheimer's disease alone affects tens of millions of individuals worldwide, while Parkinson's disease prevalence is projected to double within the next two decades. Despite extraordinary advances in molecular neuroscience, therapeutic progress has remained disappointingly incremental. Cholinesterase inhibitors, NMDA antagonists, and dopaminergic replacement strategies mitigate symptoms but exert negligible influence on the relentless progression of neuronal death. The repeated failure of amyloid-centric and synuclein-centric drug programs has provoked critical reassessment of foundational assumptions regarding disease etiology.

Concurrently, type 2 diabetes mellitus has emerged as one of the most pervasive chronic illnesses of the modern era. Large prospective cohorts and meta-analyses consistently demonstrate that diabetes confers a 1.5–2.5-fold increased risk of Alzheimer's disease and significantly heightens vulnerability to Parkinsonian syndromes. Importantly, this association persists after adjustment for cerebrovascular complications, indicating a direct biological linkage rather than mere comorbidity. Neuroimaging studies reveal that diabetic patients exhibit cerebral glucose hypometabolism patterns strikingly similar to those observed in early Alzheimer's disease, particularly within the hippocampus and posterior cingulate cortex. Such observations have fostered the provocative notion of Alzheimer's disease as "type 3 diabetes," a disorder of brain-specific insulin resistance.

The conceptual integration of metabolic and neurodegenerative pathology necessitates exploration of therapeutic agents capable of restoring cellular energy homeostasis. Antidiabetic medications represent compelling candidates in this regard. Unlike experimental neuroprotectants, these drugs possess extensive post-marketing safety data and globally accessible manufacturing pipelines. Their molecular targets—AMP-activated protein kinase, PPAR-γ, incretin receptors, and renal glucose transporters—intersect with pathways implicated in neuronal survival and protein quality control. The present review therefore interrogates whether modulation of systemic metabolism can translate into meaningful neuroprotection and clinical benefit.



II. THE METABOLIC–NEURODEGENERATIVE INTERFACE

The human brain, though comprising merely two percent of body mass, consumes approximately twenty percent of total glucose-derived energy. Neuronal function is exquisitely sensitive to fluctuations in ATP availability, as maintenance of ionic gradients, vesicular trafficking, and axonal transport demand uninterrupted oxidative phosphorylation. Insulin receptors are abundantly expressed within hippocampal pyramidal neurons, cortical interneurons, and dopaminergic cells of the substantia nigra. Activation of these receptors initiates PI3K/Akt and MAPK signaling cascades that regulate synaptic potentiation, dendritic spine formation, and long-term memory consolidation. Contrary to earlier dogma, the brain is not an insulin-independent organ; rather, it is an insulin-responsive tissue whose cognitive operations depend upon metabolic fidelity.

In the state of systemic insulin resistance, transport of glucose across the blood–brain barrier and into neurons via GLUT-4 becomes markedly impaired. The resultant energetic insufficiency triggers maladaptive compensations including upregulation of β-secretase activity and enhanced cleavage of amyloid precursor protein toward amyloidogenic peptides. Simultaneously, diminished Akt signaling fails to restrain glycogen synthase kinase-3β, a kinase centrally implicated in tau hyperphosphorylation and microtubule destabilization. These molecular events directly converge upon the histopathological hallmarks of Alzheimer's disease. In Parkinson's disease, analogous mechanisms potentiate α-synuclein misfolding and heighten susceptibility of nigral neurons to apoptotic stimuli.

Mitochondrial dysfunction constitutes another pivotal nexus. Chronic hyperglycemia and lipotoxicity generate excessive reactive oxygen species that damage mitochondrial membranes, disrupt complex I activity, and initiate opening of the permeability transition pore. Neurons, possessing limited glycolytic reserve, are particularly vulnerable to such insults. Dopaminergic neurons with extensive axonal arborization exhibit extraordinary energy demands, explaining their selective degeneration in Parkinson's disease. Moreover, mitochondrial failure impairs autophagic flux, allowing accumulation of defective organelles and aggregated proteins that further exacerbate oxidative stress—a vicious cycle intimately linked to both AD and PD.

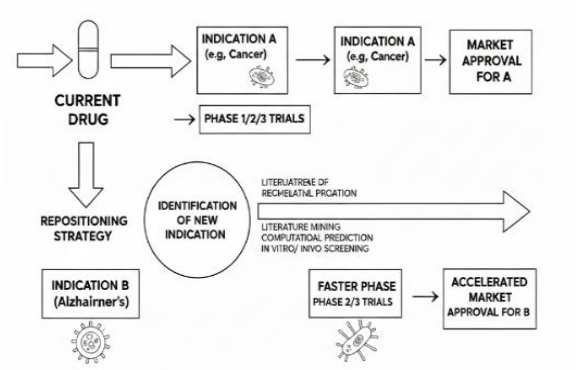
Neuroinflammation provides the third pillar of this interface. Peripheral metabolic syndrome elevates circulating levels of TNF-α, IL-1β, and IL-6, which traverse the blood–brain barrier and prime microglia toward a pro-inflammatory phenotype. Activated microglia secrete nitric oxide and additional cytokines that disrupt neuronal insulin signaling, thereby coupling immune activation to metabolic impairment. Advanced glycation end products, abundant in diabetes, bind to RAGE receptors on endothelial and glial cells, intensifying inflammatory cascades and promoting vascular dysfunction. The cumulative consequence is a cerebral milieu in which metabolic, oxidative, and immune stresses reinforce one another to drive progressive neurodegeneration.

III. DRUG REPOSITIONING AS A TRANSLATIONAL STRATEGY

The persistent failure of conventional neurodegenerative drug discovery has compelled a strategic reorientation toward therapeutic repositioning. Over the past three decades, more than two hundred candidate molecules directed against amyloid or α-synuclein have entered clinical evaluation, yet only a negligible fraction have achieved regulatory approval, and even those provide modest symptomatic benefit without altering disease trajectory. This sobering landscape reflects the biological complexity of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease, the limitations of reductionist animal models, and the immense financial burden associated with de novo drug development. In this context, repositioning of established antidiabetic agents offers a scientifically rational and economically sustainable alternative, enabling rapid exploration of disease-modifying hypotheses grounded in human safety experience.

Drug repositioning is not merely a matter of convenience; it represents a fundamentally different philosophy of therapeutic innovation. Rather than designing molecules to neutralize a single pathological hallmark, repositioning seeks to exploit medications that influence upstream regulators shared by multiple disease processes. Antidiabetic drugs act upon master controllers of cellular metabolism—AMPK, PPAR-γ, incretin receptors, and sodium–glucose transporters—whose activity extends far beyond glycemic regulation. These targets intersect with pathways governing mitochondrial quality control, inflammatory transcription, endothelial integrity, and synaptic plasticity. Consequently, the pleiotropic nature of antidiabetic pharmacology aligns more closely with the multifactorial reality of neurodegeneration than do highly specific anti-amyloid antibodies or monoaminergic agents.

From a translational perspective, the advantages of this strategy are considerable. The pharmacokinetics, toxicity profiles, and drug–drug interactions of antidiabetic medications have been characterized through decades of global use involving millions of patients. Manufacturing processes are standardized, costs are comparatively low, and post-marketing surveillance has generated extensive real-world data across diverse age groups. These factors permit accelerated progression to mid-stage clinical trials, bypassing many early uncertainties that traditionally derail neurological drug programs. Moreover, the presence of robust biomarkers in diabetes—such as insulin sensitivity indices, inflammatory mediators, and mitochondrial function assays—provides quantifiable endpoints that can be correlated with neurological outcomes.



Nevertheless, repositioning for central nervous system indications is not without formidable challenges. The blood–brain barrier imposes a stringent pharmacological filter, and many antidiabetic agents were never optimized for cerebral penetration. Geriatric patients with Alzheimer's or Parkinson's disease often exhibit altered renal and hepatic clearance, polypharmacy, and frailty, necessitating careful reassessment of dosing paradigms originally developed for middle-aged diabetic populations. Furthermore, regulatory frameworks demand demonstration of clinically meaningful cognitive or motor improvement rather than peripheral metabolic changes alone. Designing trials that satisfy these requirements while maintaining feasibility represents a delicate balance between scientific rigor and practical constraints.

An additional conceptual hurdle lies in redefining therapeutic goals. Neurodegenerative diseases evolve over decades before clinical diagnosis; by the time symptoms emerge, substantial neuronal loss has already occurred. Repositioned antidiabetic therapies may therefore be most effective as early-intervention or preventive strategies in metabolically at-risk individuals rather than as rescue treatments in advanced stages. This necessitates integration of endocrinology and neurology, with collaborative screening programs capable of identifying prodromal patients through metabolic and imaging biomarkers. Such interdisciplinary convergence exemplifies the broader significance of repositioning: it dissolves artificial boundaries between specialties and reframes brain disorders as systemic diseases requiring holistic management.

In summary, drug repositioning constitutes a pragmatic bridge between molecular insight and clinical necessity. Antidiabetic agents embody this opportunity by targeting the metabolic roots of neuronal vulnerability while offering the logistical advantages of established therapeutics. Realizing their potential will require rigorous mechanistic studies, innovative trial designs, and close cooperation between pharmaceutical scientists, neurologists, and regulatory authorities. If successful, this strategy could inaugurate a new era in which modulation of metabolism becomes a cornerstone of neurodegenerative therapy rather than a peripheral consideration.

IV. MOLECULAR PHARMACOLOGY OF ANTIDIABETIC AGENTS AT THE METABOLIC–NEURODEGENERATIVE AXIS

The repositioning of antidiabetic medications for neurodegenerative disorders derives its legitimacy from the intricate molecular overlap between glucose homeostasis and neuronal viability. These agents were originally engineered to regulate peripheral metabolism; however, subsequent discoveries have revealed that their targets participate directly in central nervous system signaling networks. Unlike symptomatic neurotransmitter modulators, antidiabetic drugs engage upstream regulators that determine cellular fate—energy sensing, mitochondrial turnover, inflammatory transcription, and proteostatic equilibrium. Detailed exploration of each pharmacological class elucidates how modulation of metabolic pathways may counteract the canonical lesions of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease.

Metformin: AMPK-Directed Reprogramming of Neuronal Energetics

Metformin occupies a unique position as both the oldest and most extensively studied antidiabetic agent considered for neurological repurposing. Its primary biochemical effect—partial inhibition of mitochondrial complex I—initiates an adaptive rise in the AMP/ATP ratio, thereby activating AMP-activated protein kinase. AMPK functions as a cellular governor that suppresses energy-consuming biosynthesis while promoting catabolic processes essential for survival during metabolic stress. Within neurons, AMPK activation stimulates autophagic flux through ULK1 phosphorylation and mTOR inhibition, mechanisms directly relevant to the clearance of amyloid-β oligomers and hyperphosphorylated tau aggregates.

Experimental models provide compelling evidence that metformin remodels the neuronal proteome toward a less toxic configuration. Transgenic mice receiving chronic therapy demonstrate reduced amyloid plaque deposition, enhanced synaptic protein expression, and preservation of long-term potentiation. Metformin also induces PGC-1α–mediated mitochondrial biogenesis, replenishing populations of organelles compromised by oxidative damage. Restoration of mitochondrial dynamics improves axonal transport and reduces release of pro-

apoptotic cytochrome c, processes particularly relevant to dopaminergic neurons vulnerable in Parkinson's disease.

The drug additionally modulates inflammatory tone by inhibiting NF-κB transcriptional activity and decreasing production of TNF-α and IL-6 from activated microglia. Such anti-inflammatory actions are crucial because neuroinflammation perpetuates insulin resistance within the brain. Nevertheless, metformin's influence is not uniformly protective. Overactivation of AMPK may disinhibit GSK-3β, enhancing tau phosphorylation and potentially accelerating tangle formation under certain conditions. Furthermore, long-term therapy can precipitate vitamin B12 deficiency, itself associated with cognitive impairment. These complexities mandate carefully controlled neurological dosing distinct from diabetic regimens.

GLP-1 Receptor Agonists: Incretin-Based Neurotrophism

Glucagon-like peptide-1 receptor agonists have emerged as the most persuasive candidates for disease modification due to their direct neurotrophic properties. The GLP-1 receptor is widely distributed in hippocampal CA1 neurons, cortical association areas, and the substantia nigra, regions critically affected in Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease. Ligand binding activates adenylate cyclase, elevating intracellular cAMP and stimulating protein kinase A and PI3K/Akt pathways. These cascades converge on CREB phosphorylation, promoting transcription of brain-derived neurotrophic factor, synapsin, and anti-apoptotic molecules such as Bcl-2.

In Alzheimer's models, GLP-1 agonists reduce amyloidogenic processing by downregulating β-secretase and enhancing non-amyloidogenic α-secretase activity. They also inhibit tau phosphorylation through Akt-mediated suppression of GSK-3β. The cumulative effect is restoration of dendritic spine density and normalization of hippocampal network oscillations. Importantly, these benefits occur even in non-diabetic animals, demonstrating intrinsic central mechanisms independent of peripheral glycemia.

Parkinsonian research has yielded equally notable findings. Exenatide and liraglutide preserve nigrostriatal dopaminergic neurons exposed to rotenone or MPTP toxins, reducing α-synuclein aggregation and improving mitochondrial membrane potential. Enhancement of autophagic degradation of misfolded α-synuclein appears to be a key mechanism. Early clinical trials have reported sustained motor improvement in treated patients, persisting beyond drug discontinuation, a pattern suggestive of genuine neuroprotection rather than transient dopaminergic stimulation.

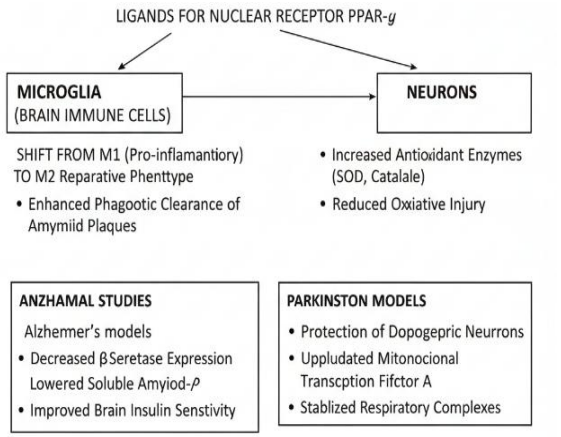
DPP-4 Inhibitors: Augmentation of Endogenous Incretin Signaling

Dipeptidyl peptidase-4 inhibitors prolong the half-life of native GLP-1 and glucose-dependent insulinotropic peptide, thereby amplifying incretin signaling without exogenous peptides. Although their penetration of the blood–brain barrier is more limited than that of GLP-1 analogues, they exert systemic effects that indirectly benefit the brain. Suppression of peripheral inflammation reduces cytokine trafficking into neural tissue, while improvement of endothelial function enhances cerebral perfusion.

Preclinical studies demonstrate that DPP-4 inhibition attenuates microglial activation and decreases markers of oxidative stress such as malondialdehyde and 4-hydroxynonenal. These changes correlate with improved performance in cognitive tasks in diabetic rodent models. Additionally, DPP-4 inhibitors increase levels of stromal-derived factor-1α, a chemokine involved in neurogenesis and neuronal repair. However, the magnitude of direct neuronal impact remains uncertain, and human data are largely observational, necessitating controlled trials to clarify therapeutic relevance.

Thiazolidinediones: PPAR-γ–Mediated Anti-Inflammatory Reprogramming

Thiazolidinediones, exemplified by pioglitazone and rosiglitazone, act as ligands for the nuclear receptor PPAR-γ, orchestrating transcription of genes involved in lipid handling, glucose utilization, and immune modulation. Activation of PPAR-γ within microglia shifts these cells from a pro-inflammatory M1 phenotype toward a reparative M2 state, enhancing phagocytic clearance of amyloid plaques. In neuronal cultures, PPAR-γ stimulation increases expression of antioxidant enzymes such as superoxide dismutase and catalase, reducing oxidative injury.



Animal studies reveal that pioglitazone decreases β-secretase expression and lowers soluble amyloid-β levels, while simultaneously improving insulin sensitivity in the brain. In Parkinsonian models, thiazolidinediones protect dopaminergic neurons against mitochondrial toxins by upregulating mitochondrial transcription factor A and stabilizing respiratory complexes. Clinical translation has been constrained by adverse effects including weight gain, edema, and cardiovascular concerns, yet selective PPAR-γ modulators with improved safety profiles are under development.

SGLT2 Inhibitors: Systemic Metabolic Correction with Central Consequences

Sodium–glucose cotransporter-2 inhibitors operate through a mechanism distinct from classical insulin pathways, promoting urinary glucose excretion and consequent improvement in insulin sensitivity. Their relevance to neurodegeneration lies in secondary effects on oxidative stress, ketone body metabolism, and vascular health. Enhanced ketogenesis provides alternative fuel substrates for neurons experiencing glucose hypometabolism, while reductions in blood pressure and arterial stiffness improve cerebral microcirculation.

Recent experimental work suggests that SGLT2 inhibitors decrease activation of the NLRP3 inflammasome and reduce expression of inducible nitric oxide synthase within the brain. Improvements in endothelial nitric oxide bioavailability may counteract the cerebrovascular dysfunction commonly observed in Alzheimer's disease. Although clinical evidence remains preliminary, the cardiovascular and renal benefits of this class render them attractive components of multimodal therapeutic strategies.

V. INTEGRATIVE MECHANISMS AND PATHWAY CONVERGENCE

The diverse pharmacodynamics of antidiabetic agents ultimately intersect upon a limited number of molecular hubs that govern neuronal fate, and appreciation of this convergence is essential for rational therapeutic design. Insulin signaling represents the most prominent node, as restoration of the PI3K/Akt axis not only enhances glucose uptake but also suppresses pro-apoptotic mediators and regulates synaptic protein synthesis. Through Akt-mediated inhibition of glycogen synthase kinase-3β, antidiabetic therapies exert downstream control over tau phosphorylation, microtubule stability, and axonal transport. This single regulatory step links metabolic correction directly to the structural integrity of neurons, illustrating how modulation of peripheral endocrinology can reshape central neuropathology.

Autophagy constitutes a second critical intersection. Both Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease are characterized by failure of cellular waste disposal systems, leading to accumulation of amyloid-β plaques, hyperphosphorylated tau tangles, and α-synuclein inclusions. Activation of AMPK by metformin, as well as incretin-mediated stimulation of mTOR-independent autophagic pathways, rejuvenates lysosomal function and promotes clearance of these toxic aggregates. Importantly, enhanced autophagy also facilitates removal of damaged mitochondria through mitophagy, preventing release of pro-oxidant species and maintaining neuronal bioenergetic competence. The coordination between proteostasis and mitochondrial quality control underscores why metabolic agents may influence multiple pathological hallmarks simultaneously.

Mitochondrial regulation forms a third axis of convergence. Antidiabetic drugs augment PGC-1α expression, stabilize mitochondrial transcription factors, and normalize fission–fusion dynamics. These actions restore ATP generation required for synaptic vesicle cycling and long-range axonal transport, processes that are among the earliest casualties in neurodegeneration. In dopaminergic neurons with exceptionally high energetic demands, such restoration may determine survival. Moreover, improved mitochondrial function dampens activation of the intrinsic apoptotic pathway, reducing

cytochrome c release and caspase activation that culminate in neuronal death.

The inflammatory milieu represents the fourth integrative domain. Chronic microglial activation bridges systemic metabolic syndrome with central neuronal injury. GLP-1 agonists, thiazolidinediones, and even SGLT2 inhibitors suppress NF-κB signaling, decrease production of TNF-α and IL-1β, and encourage a phenotypic shift toward reparative glial states. By interrupting cytokine-driven impairment of insulin receptors, these agents break the vicious cycle in which inflammation begets further metabolic resistance. Restoration of endothelial function and cerebral microcirculation further complements this effect, ensuring delivery of oxygen and nutrients to vulnerable neural territories.

Collectively, these intersecting mechanisms suggest that antidiabetic therapies operate not as single-target interventions but as systems-level modulators of the neurodegenerative network. Such breadth may be essential given the multifactorial etiology of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease, where amyloid, tau, α-synuclein, vascular dysfunction, and metabolic failure interact in complex feedback loops. The challenge moving forward lies in identifying optimal combinations and treatment windows that harness this convergence without provoking metabolic adverse effects. Detailed understanding of these pathways provides the conceptual scaffold upon which subsequent clinical evidence must be interpreted.

VI. PRECLINICAL EVIDENCE IN ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE MODELS

Experimental exploration of antidiabetic therapies in Alzheimer's disease has generated a substantial body of data derived from transgenic animals, cellular systems, and ex-vivo human tissues. These investigations collectively demonstrate that modulation of metabolic signaling can influence virtually every recognized pathological hallmark of the disorder. In amyloid precursor protein/presenilin-1 (APP/PS1) mice, chronic administration of metformin has been shown to reduce cortical and hippocampal amyloid burden through enhancement of insulin-degrading enzyme activity and promotion of autophagic flux. Detailed morphometric analyses revealed not only a decline in plaque number but also a transformation toward less compact, more soluble deposits, suggesting qualitative remodeling of amyloid architecture rather than simple quantitative reduction. Parallel studies using GLP-1 receptor agonists such as liraglutide and exenatide documented significant preservation of dendritic spine density and synaptic proteins including PSD-95 and synaptophysin, correlating with improved performance in Morris water maze and novel object recognition paradigms.

Beyond amyloid pathology, antidiabetic agents exert notable effects on tau biology. In streptozotocin-induced models of brain insulin resistance, pioglitazone normalized hyperphosphorylation of tau at multiple epitopes by suppressing GSK-3β and CDK5 activity. Electron microscopic evaluation demonstrated stabilization of microtubule networks and restoration of axonal transport of mitochondria and neurotrophic vesicles. These structural benefits were accompanied by reductions in neuronal apoptosis markers, particularly Bax/Bcl-2 ratios and caspase-3 cleavage. Importantly, several laboratories reported that the neuroprotective actions persisted even when glucose levels were experimentally controlled, implying direct central mechanisms independent of peripheral glycemic correction.

Cell culture systems have allowed more granular interrogation of molecular pathways. In primary cortical neurons exposed to oligomeric amyloid-β, metformin and GLP-1 analogues attenuated calcium dyshomeostasis, prevented NMDA receptor overactivation, and reduced generation of reactive oxygen species from mitochondrial complex I. Transcriptomic profiling revealed up-regulation of genes involved in synaptic plasticity, cholesterol transport, and anti-oxidant defense, while pro-inflammatory transcripts associated with microglial activation were suppressed. Co-culture experiments further illustrated that treated astrocytes released higher levels of lactate and neurotrophic factors, thereby improving neuronal resilience. Such findings emphasize the multicellular nature of therapeutic response, extending beyond neurons to the entire neurovascular unit.

Not all preclinical data are uniformly positive, and critical nuances have emerged. High doses of metformin in aged rodents occasionally exacerbated amyloid accumulation, possibly through excessive AMPK activation and enhanced β-secretase expression. Similarly, some SGLT2 inhibitors showed limited brain penetration, raising questions regarding

target engagement. These discrepancies underscore the importance of dose selection, disease stage, and blood–brain barrier permeability. Nevertheless, the overall preclinical landscape strongly supports the concept that antidiabetic drugs can modify Alzheimer-related processes through convergent metabolic and anti-inflammatory mechanisms.

VII. CLINICAL EVIDENCE OBSERVATIONAL STUDIES

Human observational research provided the earliest signals that antidiabetic therapies might influence dementia risk. Large population-based cohorts from North America, Europe, and East Asia consistently reported lower incidence of Alzheimer's disease among patients with type 2 diabetes who were treated with metformin compared with those receiving sulfonylureas or insulin alone. Meta-analyses encompassing millions of participants estimated risk reductions ranging from 20 to 35 percent after adjustment for age, vascular comorbidities, and socioeconomic status. Particularly compelling were studies demonstrating a duration-response relationship, where prolonged exposure to metformin conferred progressively greater cognitive protection.

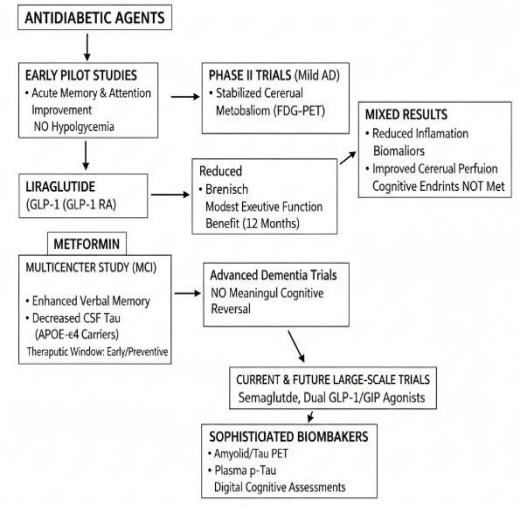
Thiazolidinediones also attracted attention following analyses of electronic health records showing decreased conversion from mild cognitive impairment to dementia among users of pioglitazone. Neuroimaging sub-studies revealed slower rates of hippocampal atrophy and reduced white matter hyperintensity progression, findings compatible with improved cerebral insulin sensitivity and microvascular function. However, concerns regarding cardiovascular safety and weight gain tempered enthusiasm and limited widespread preventive use. Data regarding incretin-based therapies are more recent but increasingly persuasive; several registries indicated that GLP-1 receptor agonists were associated with better cognitive trajectories than dipeptidyl peptidase-4 inhibitors, hinting at class-specific central actions.

Interpretation of observational evidence requires caution because of confounding by indication and healthy-user bias. Patients prescribed modern antidiabetic agents often receive more comprehensive medical care and exhibit better adherence to lifestyle measures, factors that independently affect dementia risk. Nevertheless, the convergence of results across diverse methodologies and geographic settings provides a rationale for prospective interventional trials.

VIII. CLINICAL EVIDENCE INTERVENTIONAL TRIALS

Randomized clinical trials evaluating antidiabetic agents in individuals with Alzheimer's disease remain relatively few but have yielded informative outcomes. Early pilot studies of intranasal insulin demonstrated acute improvements in memory and attention without significant hypoglycemia, supporting the hypothesis of central insulin deficiency. Subsequent phase II trials of liraglutide in patients with mild Alzheimer's disease showed stabilization of cerebral glucose metabolism on FDG-PET and modest benefits on executive function scales over 12 months. Exenatide trials produced mixed results; while some cohorts exhibited reduced inflammatory biomarkers and improved cerebral perfusion, cognitive endpoints did not consistently reach statistical significance.

Metformin has been assessed both as monotherapy and in combination with lifestyle interventions. A multicenter study involving participants with amnestic mild cognitive impairment reported enhanced verbal memory and decreased cerebrospinal fluid tau following 24 weeks of treatment, effects most pronounced in individuals carrying the APOE-ε4 allele. Conversely, trials in more advanced dementia stages failed to demonstrate meaningful cognitive reversal, suggesting that therapeutic window is critical and that metabolic modulation may be more effective as an early or preventive strategy.



Several large-scale studies are currently underway, including evaluations of semaglutide and dual GLP-1/GIP agonists with primary cognitive endpoints. These programs incorporate sophisticated biomarkers—amyloid and tau PET imaging, plasma phosphorylated tau, and digital cognitive assessments—to delineate responders and mechanistic pathways. The evolving clinical landscape therefore reflects cautious optimism tempered by recognition of heterogeneity in disease biology.

IX. BIOMARKER AND MECHANISTIC INSIGHTS FROM HUMAN STUDIES

Integration of biomarker research has deepened understanding of how antidiabetic therapies influence Alzheimer pathology in vivo. Cerebrospinal fluid analyses from treated patients revealed reductions in inflammatory cytokines, normalization of insulin signaling intermediates, and shifts toward non-amyloidogenic processing of amyloid precursor protein. Advanced neuroimaging demonstrated that GLP-1 receptor stimulation enhances connectivity within the default mode network and improves neurovascular coupling during cognitive tasks. Magnetic resonance spectroscopy studies further identified restoration of neuronal energetics, evidenced by increased N-acetylaspartate levels.

Genetic and metabolic stratification appears crucial. Individuals with prominent insulin resistance, metabolic syndrome, or APOE-ε4 genotype derive the greatest benefit, whereas those with purely amyloid-driven pathology respond less robustly. Such observations reinforce the concept of Alzheimer's disease as a spectrum in which metabolic dysfunction constitutes a major subtype amenable to repositioned antidiabetic therapy.

The accumulated evidence in Alzheimer's disease therefore portrays antidiabetic agents as multifaceted modulators capable of engaging core disease mechanisms. While definitive proof of disease modification awaits ongoing trials, the convergence of preclinical and clinical data provides a persuasive foundation for continued exploration and for extension of this strategy to related neurodegenerative disorders.

X. METABOLIC DYSFUNCTION IN PARKINSONIAN NEURODEGENERATION

Parkinson's disease, although traditionally conceptualized as a primary synucleinopathy, is increasingly recognized as a disorder in which metabolic failure plays a decisive role in neuronal vulnerability. Dopaminergic neurons of the substantia nigra possess exceptionally high energetic requirements owing to autonomous pacemaking activity, extensive axonal arborization, and dependence on calcium-mediated neurotransmission. These features render them acutely sensitive to disturbances in mitochondrial oxidative phosphorylation and glucose utilization. Epidemiological studies have consistently demonstrated that individuals with type 2 diabetes exhibit a higher incidence of Parkinson's disease and experience faster motor progression, implicating systemic insulin resistance as a modifier of neurodegenerative trajectory. Post-mortem analyses further reveal reduced insulin receptor expression and impaired Akt signaling within nigral neurons, mirroring alterations observed in Alzheimer's pathology and providing a mechanistic rationale for antidiabetic repositioning.

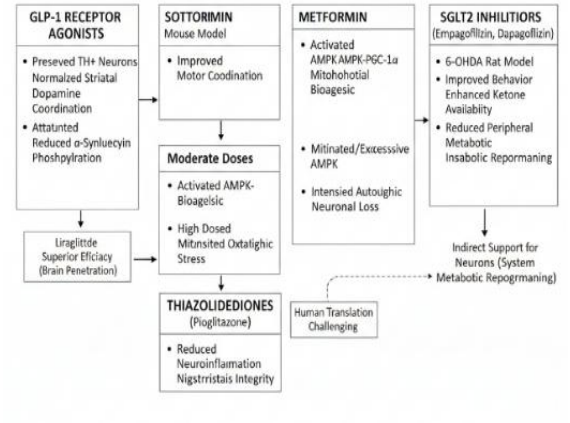
XI. PRECLINICAL STUDIES IN PARKINSON'S MODELS

Extensive experimentation in toxin-induced and genetic models has evaluated the capacity of antidiabetic drugs to protect dopaminergic circuits. In the classical MPTP mouse model, administration of GLP-1 receptor agonists preserved tyrosine hydroxylase–positive neurons, normalized striatal dopamine levels, and improved motor coordination on rotarod and pole tests. These benefits were accompanied by attenuation of microglial activation and reduction of α-synuclein phosphorylation at serine-129, a modification associated with aggregation propensity. Liraglutide and semaglutide demonstrated superior efficacy to earlier incretin analogues, possibly reflecting enhanced brain penetration and receptor affinity.

Metformin has shown more complex effects. At moderate doses, it activated AMPK-PGC-1α signaling, promoted mitochondrial biogenesis, and mitigated oxidative stress generated by rotenone

exposure. Cultured dopaminergic neurons treated with metformin exhibited increased expression of antioxidant enzymes such as superoxide dismutase and catalase, along with stabilization of mitochondrial membrane potential. However, excessive AMPK stimulation in certain paradigms intensified autophagic stress and precipitated neuronal loss, highlighting the narrow therapeutic window that must be respected. Thiazolidinediones, particularly pioglitazone, consistently reduced neuroinflammation and preserved nigrostriatal integrity across multiple laboratories, although translation to humans has proven challenging.

SGLT2 inhibitors represent a newer area of inquiry. Despite limited direct neuronal targets, empagliflozin and dapagliflozin improved motor behavior in 6-OHDA rats by enhancing cerebral ketone availability and reducing peripheral insulin resistance. These findings suggest that systemic metabolic reprogramming may indirectly support vulnerable neurons, an idea aligned with the growing interest in ketogenic and mitochondrial-supportive strategies for Parkinson's disease.



XII. CLINICAL TRIAL EXPERIENCE

The most influential clinical evidence to date derives from the exenatide program. In a randomized, placebo-controlled trial involving patients with moderate Parkinson's disease, weekly exenatide injections for 48 weeks produced sustained improvements in the Movement Disorder Society Unified Parkinson's Disease Rating Scale (MDS-UPDRS) that persisted after a 12-week washout, implying disease-modifying rather than purely symptomatic effects. Neuroimaging substantiated these observations, revealing preservation of dopaminergic terminals on DAT-SPECT scans. Subsequent open-label extensions confirmed long-term safety and suggested slowing of motor decline compared with historical controls.

Trials of pioglitazone yielded less encouraging outcomes. Despite strong preclinical rationale, a large phase II study failed to demonstrate significant motor benefit, and concerns regarding fluid retention and cardiovascular risk curtailed further development. Metformin has not yet been tested in adequately powered Parkinson cohorts, though small observational analyses indicate potential reduction in dyskinesia severity among diabetic patients receiving the drug. Ongoing investigations of semaglutide and dual GLP-1/GIP agonists aim to replicate and extend the exenatide findings with agents offering more convenient dosing and superior central exposure.

XIII. NON-MOTOR SYMPTOMS AND QUALITY OF LIFE

An important dimension of antidiabetic repositioning involves non-motor manifestations of Parkinson's disease, which often dominate patient burden. Incretin therapies have demonstrated favorable effects on cognitive slowing, depressive symptoms, and gastrointestinal dysmotility in exploratory analyses. Improvement in insulin sensitivity may enhance enteric nervous system function and modify the gut–brain axis implicated in α-synuclein propagation. Sleep architecture, particularly rapid eye movement behavior disorder, has shown modest normalization in small cohorts treated with GLP-1 agonists. These multidomain benefits underscore the systemic nature of metabolic intervention, extending beyond motor circuitry to encompass whole-person outcomes.

XIV. SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS IN PARKINSON POPULATIONS

While antidiabetic drugs are generally well characterized, their application in Parkinson's disease introduces unique safety issues. Gastrointestinal intolerance to GLP-1 agonists can exacerbate pre-existing nausea and weight loss common in advanced disease. Thiazolidinediones may worsen peripheral edema and precipitate heart failure in susceptible individuals. Metformin requires vigilance regarding

vitamin B12 deficiency, which itself can aggravate neuropathy and cognitive impairment. Careful patient selection, dose titration, and interdisciplinary monitoring are therefore essential components of any therapeutic strategy.

XV. COMPARATIVE INTERPRETATION

The collective Parkinson's evidence suggests that incretin-based therapies currently hold the strongest translational promise, supported by convergent mechanistic, preclinical, and clinical data. Other antidiabetic classes offer valuable insights into metabolic contributions but require further optimization to balance efficacy with tolerability. Importantly, heterogeneity of Parkinson's disease—ranging from tremor-dominant to akinetic-rigid phenotypes and from early to late stages—likely dictates differential responsiveness. Future trials must incorporate biomarker-guided stratification, including measures of insulin resistance, mitochondrial function, and α-synuclein burden, to identify those most likely to benefit.

The experience in Parkinson's disease complements that in Alzheimer's by demonstrating that metabolic modulation can influence distinct neurodegenerative pathways centered on α-synuclein and dopaminergic loss. Together, these findings strengthen the overarching hypothesis that antidiabetic therapies target a shared metabolic–neurodegenerative interface with potential to modify the course of multiple disorders.

XVI. PHARMACOKINETIC AND FORMULATION CONSIDERATIONS

The successful repositioning of antidiabetic therapies for Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease requires rigorous attention to pharmacokinetics and formulation strategies. Many agents originally designed to act peripherally do not easily cross the blood–brain barrier (BBB), a significant hurdle given the need for sufficient central concentrations to modulate neuronal insulin signaling, mitochondrial activity, or neuroinflammatory pathways. GLP-1 receptor agonists have been engineered with molecular modifications to increase lipophilicity and resistance to enzymatic degradation, allowing detectable cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) levels and engagement of central targets. Semaglutide, liraglutide, and exenatide differ in receptor affinity, half-life, and BBB penetration, influencing their pharmacodynamic profiles and the likelihood of achieving neuroprotective effects. Notably, pharmacokinetic variability between individuals is substantial, influenced by age, renal function, concurrent medications, and vascular integrity, highlighting the need for personalized dosing.

Metformin, despite being hydrophilic, is transported into the brain via organic cation transporters, particularly OCT1 and OCT3. Within neurons, it activates AMPK, induces autophagy, and improves mitochondrial dynamics. However, achieving concentrations sufficient for neuroprotective activity without precipitating systemic adverse effects such as lactic acidosis, gastrointestinal intolerance, or B12 deficiency remains challenging, particularly in elderly patients with altered pharmacokinetics. Strategies such as controlled-release formulations, nanoparticle-based carriers, and intranasal delivery are under investigation to optimize central delivery while minimizing peripheral toxicity.

Thiazolidinediones (TZDs) like pioglitazone and rosiglitazone are lipophilic and cross the BBB effectively, modulating PPAR-γ signaling within neurons and glia. Nevertheless, systemic adverse effects—including weight gain, edema, fluid retention, and increased cardiovascular risk—limit their utility in frail, elderly populations. The development of selective PPAR-γ modulators with brain specificity represents a critical next step in expanding their therapeutic potential.

SGLT2 inhibitors primarily act via renal glucose excretion and exhibit minimal direct CNS penetration. Their neuroprotective effects likely arise indirectly through improved systemic insulin sensitivity, reduction of chronic inflammation, modulation of ketone body production, and vascular improvements that enhance cerebral perfusion. Optimizing formulations to leverage both peripheral and central effects remains an active area of pharmaceutical research, particularly with regards to combination therapy with GLP-1 receptor agonists or ketogenic interventions.

XVII. DRUG–DRUG INTERACTIONS AND POLYPHARMACY

Polypharmacy is a ubiquitous challenge in neurodegenerative disorders, as patients often require multiple agents for comorbidities including hypertension, diabetes, depression, and cardiovascular disease. Drug–drug interactions may influence absorption, metabolism, and pharmacodynamic activity, necessitating careful evaluation. GLP-1 receptor agonists, for example, delay gastric emptying, which can alter the pharmacokinetics of levodopa or cholinesterase inhibitors, potentially diminishing efficacy. Metformin's interference with vitamin B12 absorption can exacerbate cognitive decline or peripheral neuropathy if unmonitored, while TZDs influence cytochrome P450-mediated metabolism, impacting plasma levels of antidepressants, antipsychotics, or statins commonly used in these patients. SGLT2 inhibitors may increase the risk of dehydration or hypotension when combined with diuretics, affecting cerebral perfusion. Addressing these interactions requires meticulous clinical oversight, individualized dosing strategies, and the integration of pharmacists into multidisciplinary care teams.

XVIII. METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES IN CLINICAL DEVELOPMENT

Designing clinical trials for repurposed antidiabetic therapies in neurodegenerative disease is fraught with methodological challenges. The slow and heterogeneous progression of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease necessitates large cohorts and extended follow-up periods to detect meaningful changes in cognitive or motor endpoints. Traditional outcome measures such as the Mini-Mental State Examination (MMSE) or MDS-UPDRS may lack sensitivity to early or subtle improvements, emphasizing the need for composite scales, digital cognitive assessments, and biomarker-driven endpoints.

Disease heterogeneity further complicates trial design. Metabolic dysfunction, vascular comorbidities, and genetic variants such as APOE-ε4 significantly influence responsiveness, and failure to stratify participants may dilute observed effects. Additionally, many early trials enrolled patients with advanced disease when extensive neuronal loss limited the potential for meaningful recovery. Future trials should focus on prodromal or early symptomatic populations, leveraging sensitive neuroimaging modalities (amyloid-PET, tau-PET, DAT-SPECT), cerebrospinal fluid biomarkers (amyloid-β, phosphorylated tau, neurofilament light chain), and plasma markers (insulin resistance indices, inflammatory cytokines) to identify optimal candidates for intervention.

Regulatory considerations add another layer of complexity. Existing frameworks were designed for symptomatic drugs, not pleiotropic metabolic modulators targeting multiple pathological pathways. Clear demonstration of disease modification requires surrogate endpoints that reliably correlate with clinical outcomes, an area where ongoing biomarker research is essential.

XIX. ETHICAL AND HEALTH-ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS

Repurposing antidiabetic drugs for neurodegeneration offers economic and societal advantages by leveraging extensive safety data, low manufacturing costs, and global accessibility. Nevertheless, long-term administration in non-diabetic populations raises ethical questions regarding exposure to potential side effects without established efficacy. Rigorous informed consent processes, patient education, and careful monitoring for adverse metabolic or cardiovascular events are essential.

Health-economic considerations extend beyond drug cost. The potential for delayed institutionalization, reduced caregiver burden, and improved quality of life may offset upfront expenditures. Cost-effectiveness analyses should incorporate real-world data, including hospitalization rates, fall-related injuries, and cognitive decline metrics. In low- and middle-income countries, where the prevalence of both diabetes and dementia is rising, equitable access to these therapies is a pressing public health concern.

XX. PRECISION MEDICINE AND BIOMARKER-GUIDED STRATEGIES

Precision medicine approaches are increasingly critical for repositioning antidiabetic therapies. Peripheral insulin resistance indices, cerebrospinal fluid phosphorylated tau, neurofilament light chain,

and advanced imaging measures of cerebral glucose metabolism provide stratification tools to identify patients most likely to benefit. Early data suggest that individuals with metabolic syndrome, inflammatory phenotypes, or APOE-ε4 genotype experience the most pronounced neuroprotective effects. Integration of these biomarkers into predictive algorithms may allow tailoring of dosing, timing, and agent selection, minimize adverse effects while maximize efficacy.

Machine learning and systems biology approaches are also being applied to model complex interactions between metabolic, inflammatory, and neurodegenerative pathways. Such computational frameworks can predict synergistic drug combinations, identify optimal therapeutic windows, and guide patient selection for clinical trials.

XXI. COMBINATION THERAPY AND MULTI-TARGET STRATEGIES

Given the multifactorial nature of neurodegeneration, monotherapy is unlikely to fully halt disease progression. Combining antidiabetic agents with disease-specific therapeutics—such as anti-amyloid antibodies, α-synuclein-targeted therapies, or neurotrophic factor analogues—offers a rational approach. Metabolic drugs may prime neurons for enhanced response to these interventions by restoring insulin signaling, reducing oxidative stress, and improving mitochondrial function. Nutritional strategies including ketogenic diets, intermittent fasting, or exogenous ketone supplementation may synergize with SGLT2 inhibitors and GLP-1 agonists to enhance cerebral energy availability. Future studies should rigorously evaluate additive, synergistic, or antagonistic effects of such combinations, incorporating biomarker endpoints and functional outcomes.

XXII. TRANSLATIONAL ROADMAP AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Realizing the therapeutic potential of antidiabetic repositioning requires a structured translational roadmap. Preclinical studies must employ disease-relevant models, clinically applicable dosing, and endpoints translatable to human trials. Early-phase clinical studies should incorporate pharmacodynamic biomarkers to confirm CNS target engagement and allow iterative optimization of dosing regimens. Regulatory engagement is essential to establish frameworks that recognize pleiotropic, metabolic-targeting therapies as legitimate disease-modifying candidates.

Collaboration across disciplines—neurology, endocrinology, pharmacology, and industry—is critical to accelerate progress. Patient-centered outcome measures, including cognitive and motor function, caregiver-reported metrics, and quality-of-life assessments, should complement traditional clinical scales to provide a holistic evaluation of therapeutic impact.

XXIII. FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

The metabolic–neurodegenerative interface represents one of the most promising frontiers in modern therapeutics. Antidiabetic agents, once limited to glycemic control, are now recognized as versatile modulators of neuronal survival, proteostasis, inflammation, and mitochondrial dynamics. Emerging precision medicine tools, advanced imaging, and digital health technologies will refine patient selection, optimize dosing, and elucidate mechanisms of action. Over the next decade, integration of these therapies with disease-specific interventions and lifestyle modifications may redefine the standard of care in Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease, potentially delaying onset, slowing progression, and improving patient-centered outcomes on a global scale.

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