Neurexins regulate presynaptic GABA<sub>B</sub>-receptors at central synapses

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Diverse signaling complexes are precisely assembled at the presynaptic active zone for dynamic modulation of synaptic transmission and synaptic plasticity. Presynaptic GABA<sub>B</sub>-receptors nucleate critical signaling complexes regulating neurotransmitter release at most synapses. However, the molecular mechanisms underlying assembly of GABA<sub>B</sub>-receptor signaling complexes remain unclear. Here we show that neurexins are required for the localization and function of presynaptic GABA<sub>B</sub>-receptor signaling complexes. At four model synapses, excitatory calyx of Held synapses in the brainstem, excitatory and inhibitory synapses on hippocampal CA1-region pyramidal neurons, and inhibitory basket cell synapses in the cerebellum, deletion of neurexins rendered neurotransmitter release significantly less sensitive to GABA<sub>B</sub>-receptor activation. Moreover, deletion of neurexins caused a loss of GABA<sub>B</sub>-receptors from the presynaptic active zone of the calyx synapse. These findings extend the role of neurexins at the presynaptic active zone to enabling GABA<sub>B</sub>-receptor signaling, supporting the notion that neurexins function as central organizers of active zone signaling complexes.

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A ction potential-evoked neurotransmitter release occurs with high speed and precision at the presynaptic active zone, which is tightly organized at the nanometer level in the nerve terminal. Four key functions of the presynaptic active zone have been proposed: tethering synaptic vesicles to release sites, priming synaptic vesicles for rapid Ca\(^{2+}\)-triggered fusion, clustering voltage-gated Ca\(^{2+}\)-channels to release sites, and coordinating the trans-synaptic alignment of presynaptic and postsynaptic signaling complexes. Studies have revealed that every aspect of active zone functions is mediated by evolutionarily conserved scaffolding molecules, including RIMs, RIM-binding proteins, ELKS/Bruchpilot, and Munc13. These molecules interact with each other and other signaling proteins to determine the number of Ca\(^{2+}\)-channels and their spatial coupling with primed synaptic vesicles, both of which are critical for determining the release probability of a synapse. Moreover, the expression, distribution, and functional properties of Ca\(^{2+}\)-channels at the presynaptic active zone are extensively modulated by diverse G-protein coupled receptors (GPCRs).

GABA\(_{B}\)-receptors are GPCRs activated by GABA, the main inhibitory neurotransmitter in the mammalian brain. GABA\(_{B}\)-receptors are widely expressed in both presynaptic and postsynaptic compartments of almost all neurons as well as in astrocytes, and play important roles in regulating synaptic function and short-term plasticity. In particular, activation of presynaptic GABA\(_{B}\)-receptors prominently inhibits neurotransmitter release at excitatory and inhibitory synapses by suppressing the activity of Ca\(^{2+}\)-channels, and by additional mechanisms independent of Ca\(^{2+}\)-channels.

GABA\(_{B}\)-receptors are assembled as heterodimers of two principal subunits, GABAB\(_{1}\) and GABAB\(_{2}\). Both subunits are essential for the formation of functional receptors. Two GABAB\(_{1}\) isoforms are generated from distinct promoters, GABAB\(_{1A}\) and GABAB\(_{1B}\), that contain or lack, respectively, N-terminal “sushi” domains. GABAB\(_{1A}\)-receptors are preferentially targeted to presynaptic terminals via interactions mediated by these sushi domains. GABAB\(_{1A}\)-receptor complexes contain additional proteins that may regulate their pharmacological and kinetic properties, and control their surface expression and stability. Quantitative proteomics of the macromolecular composition of native GABA\(_{B}\)-receptor complexes identified multiple interacting proteins, including Ca\(^{2+}\)-channels, APP, and calsyntenin, suggesting that these proteins’ association with GABA\(_{B}\)-receptors may increase the diversity of GABA\(_{B}\)-receptor signaling. For example, it has been shown that the secreted cleaved APPs fragment of APP binds directly to the GABAB\(_{1A}\) sushi domain to regulate synaptic transmission, and short-term facilitation in mouse hippocampal synapses. Additionally, APP may associate with JIP and calsyntenin to promote axonal trafficking of GABA\(_{B}\)-receptors. Interestingly, quantitative proteomic analysis of the molecular composition of Ca\(^{2+}\)-channel complexes also suggested that GABA\(_{B}\)-receptors interact with Ca\(^{2+}\)-channels. Thus, GABA\(_{B}\)-receptors, G-proteins, and Ca\(^{2+}\)-channels may act as a single signaling complex in presynaptic terminals. However, it remains unclear how the complex is formed and regulated.

Neurexins are evolutionarily conserved cell adhesion molecules that play key roles in shaping the properties of synapses. A recent study has uncovered that conditional deletions of all neurexins in different synapses produce severe but dramatically different phenotypes, suggesting that neurexins may act as synapse-specific functional organizers instead of playing a canonical role in all synapses. Further, pan-neurexin ablation at the calyx of Held, a model synapse allowing precise characterization of synaptic properties, showed that neurexins are crucial organizers for the clustering of Ca\(^{2+}\)-channels at the active zone and their tight coupling to the release machinery and to BK-channels that modulate presynaptic action potentials. However, it remains unclear whether neurexins organize the general assembly of active zone signaling complexes. Here, we addressed this question by testing whether GABA\(_{B}\)-receptor-mediated modulation of presynaptic Ca\(^{2+}\)-channels, and neurotransmitter release is impacted after deletion of all neurexins. We show that at the calyx of Held synapse, deletion of all neurexins strongly impaired GABA\(_{B}\)-receptor mediated modulation of neurotransmitter release. Interestingly, we replicated these effects in three other central synapses, including excitatory and inhibitory synapses formed on CA1 pyramidal neurons in the hippocampus, and inhibitory synapses formed on Purkinje cells of the cerebellum. These data suggest that neurexins universally regulate presynaptic GABA\(_{B}\)-receptor signaling at various central synapses.

Results

Neurexins are required for GABA\(_{B}\)-receptor function at the calyx of Held. To analyze the potential role of neurexins in organizing presynaptic GABA\(_{B}\)-receptors, we first studied the calyx of Held, a giant glutamatergic synapse in the medial nucleus of the trapezoid body (MNTB). At calyx synapses, presynaptic terminals wrap around the soma of principal MNTB neurons and form 500–600 synaptic contacts. Their large size makes it possible to patch calyx terminals, enabling direct access to their presynaptic cytosol (Fig. 1a). We crossed triple Nrxn123 conditional KO mice with Pv-Cre mice to delete all neurexins from parvalbumin-positive (Pv) neurons, including the presynaptic neurons of the calyx of Held synapse (Fig. 1b). We then analyzed littermate triple Nrxn123 conditional KO mice lacking (referred to as “control”) or containing the Pv-Cre allele (referred to as Nrxn123 TKO mice).

Previous studies revealed that GABA\(_{B}\)-receptors play an important role in controlling the release probability at the calyx of Held synapse. Consistent with this observation, activating GABA\(_{B}\)-receptors with the specific and potent agonist SKF 97541 (SKF) strongly decreased evoked EPSCs by 80% in calyx synapses of control mice (Fig. 1c, d). Moreover, SKF increased the paired-pulse ratio (PPR), consistent with a reduced release probability (Fig. 1f). The effect of SKF was reversible and could be completely prevented by pre-incubation of calyx synapses with the GABA\(_{B}\)-receptor antagonist CGP 55845 (Supplementary Fig. 1a, b). SKF had no effect on the amplitude, frequency, or kinetics of spontaneous EPSCs (sEPSCs, Supplementary Fig. 2), suggesting that SKF primarily acted on presynaptic GABA\(_{B}\)-receptors.

Deletion of all neurexins from calyx synapses significantly decreased EPSC amplitudes and increased the PPR of evoked EPSCs (Fig. 1c, d), as reported, previously. This decrease is due to a disorganization of active zones after the deletion of neurexins, leading to a loss of presynaptic Ca\(^{2+}\)-channels, BK-channels, and bassoon. Since GABA\(_{B}\)-receptors are localized to active zones, we hypothesized that the pan-neurexin deletion may impair the function of presynaptic GABA\(_{B}\)-receptors at the presynaptic active zone. Indeed, application of SKF no longer significantly reduced the EPSC amplitude in neurin-deficient synapses (Fig. 1d, e) or increased the PPR (Fig. 1f). Similar as in control mice, SKF had no effect on the properties of sEPSCs in Nrxn123 TKO mice (Supplementary Fig. 2). Therefore, deletion of neurexins impaired the inhibitory function of presynaptic GABA\(_{B}\)-receptors at the calyx of Held synapse.

The major mechanism of action of GABA\(_{B}\)-receptors is to inhibit presynaptic Ca\(^{2+}\)-channels. To test whether the pan-neurexin deletion affects the GABA\(_{B}\)-receptor-induced
suppression of Ca^{2+}-currents, we directly measured depolarization-induced Ca^{2+}-currents in patched calyx terminals (Fig. 2). SKF decreased total Ca^{2+}-currents by ~38% in control terminals without altering their I–V relationship (Fig. 2). The pan-neurexin deletion had no effect on total Ca^{2+}-currents but alleviated the SKF-induced decrease in Ca^{2+}-currents, reducing them only by ~19%, again without altering their I–V relationship (Fig. 2). Thus, the pan-neurexin deletion directly counteracts the SKF-induced decrease in Ca^{2+}–

The diagram of the calyx of Held synapse.

**Fig. 1 Neurexins are required for intact functional organization of GABAB-receptors at the calyx of Held.** a The diagram of the calyx of Held synapse. b Strategy for selective deletions of all neurexins at the calyx of Held by crossing PV-Cre mice with triple Nrxn123 cKO mice (Chen et al.33, Luo et al.34). c Representative traces of EPSC before and after application of 20 µM SKF-97541 (SKF), a potent and selective GABAB-receptor agonist, recorded in acute slices from littermate control and neurexin123 TKO mice at P12–P14. The normalized EPSCs before and after SKF are shown in inset. d Summary graphs of EPSC amplitudes before and after SKF for control and Nrxn123 TKO mice. P = 2.3E−7, P = 0.072, paired two-sided t-test. P = 0.0062, unpaired two-sided t-test. e Summary graphs of EPSC remaining unblocked by SKF application, P = 1.79E−7, unpaired two-sided t-test. f Summary graphs of the paired-pulse ratio (PPR) before and after SKF in control and Nrxn123 TKO mice. P = 2.81E−5, P = 0.09, paired two-sided t-test. P = 0.0038, unpaired two-sided t-test. Data are means ± SEM. Number of cells (from at least three mice per group) analyzed are indicated in the bars (d–f). Statistical differences were assessed by Student’s t-test. (*P < 0.05; **P < 0.01; ***P < 0.001). Source data are provided as a Source Data file.

The pan-neurexin deletion impairs presynaptic GABAB-receptor functions in excitatory hippocampal Schaffer-collateral synapses. To test whether the pan-neurexin deletion also affects the function of presynaptic GABAB-receptors at other synapses, we studied excitatory Schaffer-collateral synapses formed by CA3 pyramidal cells on CA1 pyramidal neurons, arguably the best-studied synapse in the brain, which is also known to be regulated by GABAB-receptors19. We performed stereotactic injection bilaterally in CA3 regions of Nrxn123 conditional TKO mice at P21 with AAVs encoding ΔCre-eGFP (control) or Cre-eGFP (Nrxn123 TKO). Only mice with successful bilateral AAV injections, as confirmed by monitoring the eGFP expression in the CA3 region, were analyzed by acute slice physiology at P35–P42 (Fig. 5a). In these analyses, we employed extracellular stimulation to induce action potentials in Schaffer collaterals, and recorded EPSCs in CA1 pyramidal neurons using whole-cell patch-clamp recordings (Fig. 5a).

Input/output measurements revealed a modest but significant decrease in synaptic strength in Nrxn123 TKO mice as compared to control (Fig. 5b–d). In contrast, the overall staining of GABA_B1 receptors was similar in control and Nrxn TKO mice, confirming that deletion of neurexins may only impact on presynaptic GABA_B1 receptors.

To further examine the spatial distribution of GABA_B1 receptors at the calyx of Held terminals, we performed high-resolution dSTORM imaging. Because of the transsynaptic nanocolumn alignment of presynaptic active zone and PSD molecules41, we co-labeled the calyx of Held synapse with Homer 1 and GABA_B1 or GABA_B2 receptors. Distribution of GABA_B1 receptors was quantified and compared in direct opponent to distribution of Homer 1 (Fig. 4 and Supplementary Fig. 3). No difference was found in the clusters of Homer 1 including their volume and particle count (Supplementary Fig. 3). However, the pan-neurexin knockout resulted in a significant reduction in GABA_B1 or GABA_B2 clusters, as compared to control mice (Fig. 4b, e). Interestingly, the volume of GABA_B2 cluster appeared slightly but significantly larger after pan-neurexin deletion (Supplementary Fig. 3), hinting at a looser clustering of GABA_B2 receptors. Together, these data suggest that neurexins not only impact the function of GABA_B1 receptors but also their distribution in the calyx terminals.
The pan-neurexin deletion disrupts the function of presynaptic GABA\textsubscript{B}-receptors in hippocampal inhibitory synapses. Because

![Diagram of I-V relationship of Ca\textsuperscript{2+}-currents before and after activation of GABA\textsubscript{B}R by SKF](image_url)

The activation of GABA\textsubscript{B}-receptors can strongly reduce the release probability of both excitatory synapses and inhibitory synapses\textsuperscript{17}, we asked whether neurexins are also required for the proper function of GABA\textsubscript{B}-receptors as autoreceptors in inhibitory synapses. We first examined Pav\textsuperscript{+} inhibitory synapses in hippocampus, and selectively stimulated Pav\textsuperscript{+} interneurons in hippocampal CA1 with an optogenetic approach (Fig. 6a, top). Using stereotactic injection of AAVs, we expressed Cre-dependent Chief-TdTomato in Pav-Cre mice that are also homozygous for the triple Nrxn123 conditional KO allele (the same mice we used for the experiments on calyx synapses) (Fig. 6a). As a control, we used Pav-Cre mice lacking Nrxn123 conditional KO alleles. Note the control and test mice were not littermates, the Pav-Cre control mice used in these experiments were generated from Pav-Cre/ Nrxn123 TKO mice by crossing with wild-type mice of a similar genetic background\textsuperscript{33}. We infected mice at P21, and analyzed acute slices derived from these mice at P35-42. In control mice, optogenetic stimulation using 0.5 ms pulses of blue light reliably triggered large IPSCs recorded from CA1 pyramidal cells (Fig. 6b), which are primarily GABAergic (Supplementary Fig. 5). Activation of GABA\textsubscript{B}R-receptors by SKF caused a robust decrease (~45%) of IPSC amplitudes (Fig. 6b–d), a significant increase (~25%) in the PPRs (Fig. 6b, e), and an enhancement (~120%) of the CV of IPSC amplitudes (Fig. 6f). These results confirm that GABA\textsubscript{B}R-receptor activation effectively decreases the release probability at inhibitory synapses under normal conditions. In mice with selective deletion of all neurexins from Pav\textsuperscript{+} interneurons, however, SKF induced a significantly smaller blocking effect (~20%) on IPSCs (Fig. 6b–d). In addition, SKF no longer induced a significant change in either the PPR (Fig. 6e) or the CV of IPSC amplitudes (Fig. 6f). Together, these data suggest that neurexins are required for the normal function of presynaptic GABA\textsubscript{B}R-receptors at the inhibitory synapse.
Surprisingly, application of SKF significantly reduced both the amplitude and frequency of spontaneous IPSCs (sIPSCs) in control mice but not in Nrxn123 TKO mice (Supplementary Fig. 4c, d). Because Pv+ interneurons mostly innervate the pyramidal cell peri-somatically, producing large sIPSCs, the selective loss of Pv+ interneuron-derived sIPSCs may result in the reduction in sIPSC amplitude. However, a postsynaptic effect of SKF could not be excluded. Furthermore, the frequency of sIPSCs also decreased in Nrxn123 TKO mice as compared to control mice in the absence of SKF, confirming the successful deletion of neurexins (Supplementary Fig. 4c, 4d).

The pan-neurexin deletion impairs the function of presynaptic GABA<sub>B</sub>-receptors at inhibitory Pv<sup>+</sup> basket-cell synapses in the cerebellum. Finally, to assess whether the role of neurexins in controlling GABA<sub>B</sub>-receptor function is truly universal, we analyzed inhibitory synapses established by cerebellar basket cells on Purkinje cells (Fig. 7a). Since basket cells are Pv+ interneurons<sup>34,35</sup>, we compared conditional triple Nrxn123 KO mice lacking (control) or containing Pv-Cre expression (Nrxn123 TKO). By stimulating basked cell axons with an electrode placed close to the soma of a Purkinje cell, large GABAergic IPSCs can be evoked in an all-or-none manner<sup>46</sup> (Supplementary Fig. 6). As compared to controls, afferent-fiber stimulation-evoked IPSCs were significantly smaller in Nrxn123 TKO mice (Fig. 7b, c), confirming the effective deletion of neurexins at Pv+ basket cells. Interestingly, deletion of neurexins caused a significant reduction in sIPSC frequency but not sIPSC amplitude (Supplementary Fig. 7). Application of SKF strongly depressed IPSCs in control synapses (Fig. 7c, d) and caused a significant increase in the PPR (Fig. 7e) and the CV of IPSC amplitudes (Fig. 7f). In contrast, deletion of all neurexins alleviated the inhibitory effect of SKF on IPSC amplitudes (Fig. 7d) as well as the SKF-induced increase in the PPR (Fig. 7e) and the CV of IPSC amplitudes (Fig. 7f), suggesting that neurexins are also required for the proper function of GABA<sub>B</sub>-receptors at cerebellar inhibitory synapses. Similar to the calyx of Held synapse, we found that application of SKF had no effect on the amplitude, frequency, or kinetics of sIPSCs in control or Nrxn123 TKO synapses (Supplementary Fig. 7).

**Discussion**

By examining four different central synapses, comprising two excitatory and two inhibitory synapses, we here provide strong evidence that neurexins universally regulate presynaptic GABA<sub>B</sub>-receptor functions and thereby shape synaptic transmission and synaptic plasticity. Activation of presynaptic GABA<sub>B</sub>-receptors in all control synapses caused a prominent reduction in release probability, as reflected by a decreased postsynaptic response, increased PPRs, and enhanced CVs of postsynaptic currents (Figs. 1 and 5–7). In neurexin-deficient synapses, activation of presynaptic GABA<sub>B</sub>-receptors produced a much smaller suppression of release probability, leading to a decreased inhibition of postsynaptic responses, a less pronounced elevation in the PPRs, and the CVs of postsynaptic currents (Figs. 1 and 5–7). The
**Fig. 4** Super-resolution dSTORM imaging of GABAB-receptors at the calyx of Held terminals. 

a  Representative dSTORM images of MNTB-containing brainstem slice with dual labeling of Homer1 (magenta) and GABAB2-receptor subunit 2 (GABA\(_{B2}\), yellow) from both littermate control and Nrxn123 TKO mice.  

b  Summary of the number of GABA\(_{B2}\) clusters normalized to the number of Homer1 clusters.  

P = 0.0051, unpaired two-sided t-test.  

c  Distribution of Homer1 and GABA\(_{B2}\) localizations.  

d–f  Similar as a–c, except for GABA\(_{B1}\) antibody used.  

P = 0.0057, unpaired two-sided t-test.  

Data are means ± SEM.  

Number of sections/animals for immunostaining are indicated in the bars (b, e).  

Statistical differences were assessed by Student’s t-test. (**P < 0.01).  

Source data are provided as a Source Data file.
magnitude of the effects differed between synapses in that the cerebellar inhibitory synapses exhibited the largest impairment in GABAB-receptor-mediated responses (Fig. 7) whereas the inhibitory synapses in the hippocampal CA1 region had the least impressive phenotype (Fig. 6), probably due to large heterogeneity of distinct GABAergic synapses. However, even in \( N_{\text{p}+} \) inhibitory synapses onto CA1 pyramidal cells, the deletion of neurexins completely abolished the strong increase in the PPR and CV of IPSCs induced by GABAB-receptor activation, suggesting an impairment in the function of GABAB-receptors at these synapses (Fig. 6).

Accumulating evidence demonstrates that presynaptic GABAB-receptors are expressed in almost all excitatory and inhibitory synapses. GABAB-receptors are primarily coupled to \( G_i/o \) proteins. Activation of presynaptic GABAB-receptors either by specific agonists or by endogenous GABA profoundly inhibits synaptic transmission in most synapses studied, but see ref. 47. One major mechanism by which presynaptic GABAB receptors regulate release probability is mediated by \( G_{\beta\gamma} \) direct binding to and inhibiting \( Ca^{2+} \)-channels. Consistent with the primary effect of GABAB receptors in inhibiting presynaptic \( Ca^{2+} \)-channels, our direct recordings of \( Ca^{2+} \)-currents...
in calyx terminals showed that activation of GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub> receptors by SKF inhibited Ca<sup>2+</sup>- influx in control synapse. Such SKF-induced inhibition of Ca<sup>2+</sup>- currents was significantly smaller in neurexin-deficient calyx synapses (Fig. 2). Thus, although the neurexin deletion did not change by itself the magnitude of presynaptic Ca<sup>2+</sup>-currents<sup>34</sup>, it altered the sensitivity of Ca<sup>2+</sup>-currents to GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub> receptor activation.

Strong studies have demonstrated the essential function of neurexins in shaping diverse synaptic properties in various animal species and preparations, although uncertainty still reigns about the precise role and mechanism of different isoforms of neurexins<sup>32</sup>. It has been shown that deletions of all neurexins in different synapses produce severe but dramatically different synaptic phenotypes<sup>33,34</sup>, ranging from reduced synapse numbers, decreased Ca<sup>2+</sup>-influx during action potentials, to decoupling of Ca<sup>2+</sup>-channels with synaptic vesicles. It seems that different neurexins may act as essential synaptic organizers in modulating different aspects of synaptic properties<sup>32,33</sup>. Such modulatory functions could be diverse and synapse-specific, depending on the unique isoforms and alternative splicing of neurexins as well as the presence of their interacting partners, which may explain the observed large variability of pan-neurexin deletion induced synaptic phenotypes in our current work and previous studies<sup>33,34</sup>. The consistent role of GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub> receptors in synaptic transmission and the crucial requirement for neurexins in this role of GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub> receptors that we have observed in all four synapses suggest a universal function of neurexins in organizing active zone signaling complexes. In the future, systematic studies of the function of specific neurexins at different synapses are necessary to address how all these mechanisms are integrated to regulate synaptic transmission and synaptic plasticity.

Another important question is how neurexins mediate the proper signaling of presynaptic GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub> receptors on the function of Ca<sup>2+</sup>- channels at the active zone. Two potential mechanisms may underlie the effect of pan-neurexin deletion on GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub> receptor inhibition of Ca<sup>2+</sup>- channels and thus neurotransmitter release. First, mis-localization of Ca<sup>2+</sup>- channels in neurexin-deficient synapse<sup>34</sup> may simply increase their distance to GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub> receptors and therefore render the inhibition less sensitive. However, we think that this possibility is highly unlikely because pan-neurexin deletion causes no change in Ca<sup>2+</sup>- channels, including their number and distribution, in mPFC PV<sup>+</sup> interneurons<sup>33</sup>. Second, pan-neurexin deletion may lead to a direct impairment in the distribution or functioning of GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub> receptors. Our immunohistochemistry analysis (Fig. 3) and dSTORM imaging of GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub> receptors (Fig. 4) at the calyx of Held terminals reveal a significant reduction in the abundance and localization of presynaptic GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub> receptors, suggesting that neurexins play an important role in the distribution of GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub> receptors. Moreover, we observe a strong ablation of GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub> receptor inhibition on Ca<sup>2+</sup>- channels in both hippocampal and cerebellar PV<sup>+</sup> interneurons (Figs. 6 and 7). The effects on the abundance and localization of presynaptic GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub> receptors appear to be modest, as compared to the strong impact on inhibition of EPSC/IPSC, which thus may warrant an additive role of neurexin in modulating the functioning of GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub> receptors.

Since direct interaction between neurexins and GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub> receptors is lacking, it is likely that neurexins may bind with other molecules, intracellularly and/or extracellularly, to facilitate the localization, stabilize the membrane expression, or enable the function of GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub> receptors. Further studies are required to address these issues by identifying the interacting proteins with which neurexins specifically organize the localization and function of GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub> receptors in the presynaptic active zone. It is expected that a complex molecular network may be involved. Several studies have been conducted to identify the interactome of GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub> receptors. Native GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub> receptors form macromolecular complexes containing multiple interacting proteins, including Ca<sup>2+</sup>-channels, AJAP1, APP, and calsyntenin<sup>13</sup>. These proteins are thought to regulate GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub> receptor trafficking, expression and signaling<sup>13,26</sup>. APP and secreted APP<sub>a</sub> bind to the sushí domain of GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub><sub>A<sub>B</sub></sub> receptors<sup>29,30</sup>. Deletion of APP may cause a reduction in the expression of GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub> receptors and a consequent alleviation of the inhibition of transmitter release by GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub> receptors<sup>29,30</sup>. Similarly, deletion of FMR1 produces a selective decrease in the expression level of GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub> receptors and a significant impairment in GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub> receptor-dependent presynaptic inhibition of neurotransmitter release in hippocampal excitatory synapses<sup>43</sup>. Such an impact of FMR1 on the presynaptic GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub> receptor signaling was not found in hippocampal inhibitory synapses<sup>43</sup>. Interestingly, calsyntenin-3, one of the integrated GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub> receptor macromolecule complexes<sup>26</sup>, has been shown to interact with both α-neurexin and β-neurexin extracellularly<sup>31,52</sup> and to mediate GABAergic and glutamatergic synapse formation<sup>32</sup>. Neurexophilin, another α-neurexin ligand with restricted expression in subpopulations of inhibitory neurons, has also been reported to support presynaptic GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub> receptor function<sup>55</sup>. Our findings thus strengthen the hypothesis that neurexins are central active zone organizers that orchestrate presynaptic signaling networks, including Ca<sup>2+</sup>-channel complexes and GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub> receptor complexes. On the other hand, neurexins are known to interact with diverse trans-synaptic ligands to shape many postsynaptic signaling complexes, such as AMPA-receptors, NMDA-receptors, and endocannabinoid signaling<sup>54–56</sup>. Therefore, a coherent picture is emerging that neurexins may integrate presynaptic and postsynaptic signaling complexes for specific and precise regulation of synaptic properties<sup>32,57</sup>.

**Fig. 5** Deletion of neurexins impairs the function of GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub> receptors at CA3-CA1 excitatory synapses. a Schematic of experimental approach for virus injection and electrophysiology recording (Top); GFP expression in AAV-transfected CA3 region of hippocampus (bottom). b Representative traces of EPSCs evoked by fiber stimulations with increased intensity, recorded in acute hippocampal slices from Nrxn123 cKO mice injected with AAV-ΔCre or AAV-Cre. c The input-output curve of EPSC amplitudes in relation to the stimulation intensity. P = 0.0113, unpaired two-sided t-test. d Example traces of paired-pulse EPSCs before and after addition of GAB<sub>A<sub>B</sub>-receptor agonist against SKF, the normalized EPSCs before and after SKF are shown in inset. The intensity of fiber stimulation was tuned to evoke EPSC1 at similar amplitude for each cell. e Summary graphs of EPSC1 amplitudes before and after SKF for control (ΔCre) and Nrxn123 TKO synapses (Cre). P = 0.0001, P = 0.00001, paired two-sided t-test. P = 0.09, unpaired two-sided t-test. f Summary graphs of EPSC1 rise time (left) and decay time constants (right). P = 0.0008, P = 0.6136, unpaired two-sided t-test. g Summary graphs of EPSC1 remaining unblocked by SKF application. P = 0.0013, unpaired two-sided t-test. h Summary graphs of the PPR before and after SKF in control and Nrxn123 TKO synapses. P = 0.0001, P = 0.0984, paired two-sided t-test. P = 0.2772, unpaired two-sided t-test. i Summary graphs of the CV of EPSC1 amplitude before and after SKF in control and Nrxn123 TKO synapses. P = 0.0385, P = 0.99, paired two-sided t-test. P = 0.4664, unpaired two-sided t-test. Data are means ± SEM. Number of cells (from at least three mice per group) analyzed are indicated in the graph (c) or bars (e-i); Statistical differences were assessed by Student's t-test. (•P < 0.05; **P < 0.01, ***P < 0.001). Source data are provided as a Source Data file.
**Methods**

**Mouse breeding, genotyping, and husbandry.** All experiments were approved by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee at Stanford University. All experiments were performed using littermates of either sex. Triple Nrxn123 conditional KO mice were crossed with PV-IRES-Cre driver line to generate cell-specific Nrxn123 deletion at the calyx of Held synapse. In brief, mice of postnatal day 12–14 were decapitated; brains were rapidly isolated and glued on the cutting chamber of a vibratome (VT1200s; Leica), which was immersed in oxygenated cold ACSF containing (in mM): 119 NaCl, 26 NaHCO3, 1.0 CaCl2, 0.05 MgCl2, 2.5 KCl, 1.25 NaH2PO4, 10 glucose, and 0.5 ascorbic acid, pH 7.4. Transverse 160–200 μm slices were sectioned and transferred into a beaker with bubbled ACSF containing (in mM): 119 NaCl, 26 NaHCO3, 10 glucose, 1.25 NaH2PO4, 2.5 KCl, 0.05 CaCl2, 3 MgCl2, 2 Na-pyruvate, and 0.5 ascorbic acid, pH 7.4. After recovery at 35 °C for 45 min, slices were stored at room temperature (~21–23 °C) for experiments.

**Preparation of brain slices for the calyx of Held electrophysiology.** Coronal brain slices containing the MNTB nucleus were prepared as described previously. In brief, mice of postnatal day 12–14 were decapitated; brains were rapidly isolated and glued on the cutting chamber of a vibratome (VT1200s; Leica), which was immersed in oxygenated cold ACSF containing (in mM): 119 NaCl, 26 NaHCO3, 10 glucose, 1.25 NaH2PO4, 2.5 KCl, 0.05 CaCl2, 3 MgCl2, 2 Na-pyruvate, and 0.5 ascorbic acid, pH 7.4. Transverse 160–200 μm slices were sectioned and transferred into a beaker with bubbled ACSF containing (in mM): 119 NaCl, 26 NaHCO3, 10 glucose, 1.25 NaH2PO4, 2.5 KCl, 0.05 CaCl2, 3 MgCl2, 2 Na-pyruvate, and 0.5 ascorbic acid, pH 7.4. After recovery at 35 °C for 45 min, slices were stored at room temperature (~21–23 °C) for experiments.

Whole-cell voltage-clamp recordings were made from cells visualized by infrared differential interference contrast (IR-DIC) video microscopy (Axioskop 2; Zeiss). Patch-clamp recording were made with the EPC 10 amplifier (HEKA, Lambrecht, Germany) and the software PatchMaster (HEKA, Lambrecht, Germany). Patch pipettes (resistance of 3–4 MΩ) were pulled using borosilicate glass (WPI) on a two-stage vertical puller (Narishige).

**Summary graphs of IPSC1 amplitudes before and after SKF in control and Nrxn123 TKO synapses.**

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**Fig. 6 Deletion of neurexins impairs the function of GABAB-receptors at the inhibitory synapse between PV interneurons and CA1 pyramidal cells in the hippocampus.**

**a** Schematic of experimental setup for virus injection and optogenetic stimulation of PV interneurons. **b** Example traces of paired-pulse light-evoked IPSCs before and after addition of GABAB-receptor agonist SKF, recorded in acute hippocampal slices from PVCre-expressing mice (control) or PVCre+/Nrxn123 cKO mice (TKO) injected with AAV-DIO-Chief-TdTomato. The normalized IPSCs before and after SKF are shown in inset. **c** Summary graphs of IPSC1 amplitudes before and after SKF for control and Nrxn123 TKO synapses. P = 0.0001, P = 0.0026, paired two-sided t-test. **d** Summary graphs of IPSC1 amplitude remaining unblocked by SKF. P = 0.0047, unpaired two-sided t-test. **e** Summary graphs of the PPR ratio before and after SKF in control and Nrxn123 TKO synapses. P = 0.0022, P = 0.6165, paired two-sided t-test. **f** Summary graphs of the CV of IPSC1 amplitude. P = 0.0143, P = 0.99, paired two-sided t-test. **g** Summary graphs of IPSC1 rise time (left) and decay time constant (right). P = 0.4974, P = 0.063, unpaired two-sided t-test. Data are means ± SEM. Number of cells (from at least three mice per group) analyzed are indicated in the bars (c–g); Statistical differences were assessed by Student’s t-test. (*P < 0.05; **P < 0.01; ***P < 0.001). Source data are provided as a Source Data file.
Fig. 7 Deletion of neurexins impairs the function of GABA<sub>B</sub>-receptors at the inhibitory synapse between basket cells and Purkinje cells in the cerebellum. a Schematic of cerebellum circuits and experimental approach for stimulating basket cell (BC)-Purkinje cell (PC) inhibitory synapse. b Example traces of paired-pulse IPSCs before and after addition of GABA<sub>B</sub>-receptor agonist SKF, recorded in acute cerebellar slices from littermate control and Nrxn123 TKO mice P35-49. The normalized IPSCs before and after SKF are shown in inset. c Summary graphs of IPSC1 amplitudes before and after SKF for control and Nrxn123 TKO synapses. P = 0.0016, P = 0.051, paired two-sided t-test. P = 0.0389, unpaired two-sided t-test. d Summary graphs of IPSC1 amplitude remaining unblocked by SKF for control and Nrxn123 TKO mice. P = 0.0028; unpaired two-sided t-test. e Summary graphs of the PPR before and after SKF in control and Nrxn123 TKO mice. P = 0.000101, P = 0.097, paired two-sided t-test. P = 0.762, unpaired two-sided t-test. f Summary graphs of the CV of IPSC1 amplitude before and after SKF and Nrxn123 TKO mice. P = 0.00073, P = 0.066, paired two-sided t-test. P = 0.348, unpaired two-sided t-test. g Summary graphs of IPSC1 rise time (left) and decay time constant (right). P = 0.000953, P = 0.977; unpaired two-sided t-test. Data are means ± SEM. Number of cells (from at least three mice per group) analyzed are indicated in the bars (c-g); Statistical differences were assessed by Student’s t-test. *(P < 0.05; **P < 0.01; ***P < 0.001). Source data are provided as a Source Data file.

For EPSCs recordings, the MNTB cells were voltage-clamped at −70 mV, and EPSCs were recorded in ACSF. Picrotoxin (100 μM), strychnine (2 μM), and D-AP5 (50 μM) were routinely added to block GABA<sub>A</sub>-receptors, glycine-receptors, and NMDA-receptors, respectively. The pipette internal solution contained (in mM): 120 Cs-glucuronate, 20 tetraethylammonium-Cl, 20 HEPES, 2 EGTA, 4 MgATP, 0.4 NaGTP, 10 phosphocreatine, and 2 Qx-314. Afferent stimulation, the calyces were patched and voltage-clamped routinely to resting −80 mV in whole-cell mode. Ca<sup>2+</sup> influx was evoked by a 50 ms step depolarization ranging from −60 mV to −40 mV. Ca<sup>2+</sup> currents were isolated pharmacologically with a bath solution containing (in mM): 103 NaCl, 20 TEA-Cl, 2.5 KCl, 1 MgCl<sub>2</sub>, 2 CaCl<sub>2</sub>, 25 NaHCO<sub>3</sub>, 1.25 NaH<sub>2</sub>PO<sub>4</sub>, 25 glucose, 0.4 ascorbic acid, 3 myo-inositol, 2 Na-pyruvate, 0.001 tetrodotoxin (TTX), 300–310 mOsm, pH 7.4 when bubbled with 95% O<sub>2</sub> and 5% CO<sub>2</sub>. The standard pipette solution contained (in mM): 125 Cs-glucuronate, 20 CsCl, 4 MgATP, 10 Na<sub>2</sub>-phosphocreatine, 0.3 NaGTP, 10 HEPES, 0.05 BAPTA, 310–320 mOsm, pH 7.2 adjusted with CsOH. Patch pipettes with resistance of 3–4 MΩ were used and series resistances, typically less than 20 MΩ, were compensated by 70–90%.

SKF 97541 (Tocris, Cat#: 0379) was prepared as 100 mM stock in distilled water and stored at −20 °C. During experiment, the stock was freshly resolved into ACSF at a final concentration of 20 μM. After 2–3 min baseline recording, the SKF-containing ACSF was perfused in and normally reached maximum effects within 5 min (Supplementary Fig. 1a). The blocking impact of SKF was calculated by comparing the steady-state current amplitude in SKF to the baseline current amplitude of the same neuron.

Stereotactic injections of AAV in hippocampal CA3. To delete neurexins in CA3 hippocampal pyramidal cells, we injected AAV-DJ-GFP strain expressing active or inactive cre-recombinase (Cre or ΔCre) under the control of the synapsin promoter<sup>49</sup>. To prepare the virus, AAV plasmids were co-transfected with pHelper and pRC-DJ into HEK293T cells. Seventy-two hours of post-transfection, cells were harvested, lysed and run on an iodixanol gradient by ultracentrifugation at 400,000×g for 2 h. The 40% iodixanol fraction containing AAV was collected, concentrated and washed in a 100 K MWCO ultracon filter.

For stereotactic injections into CA3, conditional Nrxn1/2/3 knockout mice at P21 were anesthetized. AAV expressing GFP-Cre or GFP-ΔCre recombinase was injected with a glass pipette bilaterally into the CA3 region of the hippocampus. Two injection sites per hemisphere were performed, using the following coordinates from the Bregma: AP: −2.1/−2.1 mm, ML: ±2.0/±2.8 mm, DV: −2.2/
Stereotactic injections of AAV in hippocampal CA1. To selectively express Cre-dependent Chief-TdTomato in PV+ positive interneurons in hippocampal CA1, we injected AAV-DIO-Chief-TdTomato into Nrxn123 CTkO mice lacking or expressing PVCre. The virus was prepared as previously described (see stereotactic injections of AAV in hippocampal CA1). Mice were injected at P21. One injection site per hemisphere was performed, using the following coordinates from the Bregma: AP: −1.8 mm, ML: ±1.45 mm, DV: −1.35 mm (flow rate = 0.35 µl/min; injected volume = 0.8 µl). Recordings were performed 2 weeks after injection, around P35–42.

Electrophysiology in hippocampal slices. For acute hippocampal slice electrophysiology, coronal hippocampal sections (250 µm) were cut in ice-cold solution containing (in mM): 228 Sucrose, 2.5 KCl, 1 NaH2PO4, 26 NaHCO3, 0.5 CaCl2, 7 MgSO4·7H2O, 11 α-Glucose saturated with 95% O2/5% CO2. Slices were transferred to a holding chamber containing ACSF (in mM): 119 NaCl, 26 NaHCO3, 2.5 KCl, 1 NaH2PO4, 2.5 CaCl2, 13 MgSO4·7H2O, 290 mM. Slices were allowed to recover at 32 °C for 30 min then at room temperature (−21 to −23 °C) for 1 h. Slices were transferred to a recording chamber perfused with oxygenated ACSF (1.5 ml/min) maintained at 32 °C. Whole-cell voltage-clamp recordings of CA1 pyramidal neurons were performed with the Axon Multiclamp 700 B amplifier and the software Clampex 10.4 (Molecular Devices, USA). Patch pipettes (resistance of 3–5 MΩ) were pulled using borosilicate glass (WPI) on a two-stage glass puller (Sutter Instruments, Novato, CA). Channels were sealed with a heat gun to inhibit Aβ42 receptors. To study the impact of Aβ42 receptors on CA3-CA1 synaptic transmission, baseline EPSCs were recorded at −70 mV and the stimulus intensity was adjusted for each cell to evoke a comparable EPSCs of −500 pA. After 5 min recording of baseline EPSCs, 20 µM SKF was washed in to activate Aβ42 receptors while Schaffer collateral inputs were continuously stimulated.

For recordings of PV interneuron synapses, CA1 pyramidal neurons were voltage-clamped at −70 mV and EPSCs were evoked by stimulating Schaffer collateral fibers with a bipolar electrode. For paired-pulse ratios, EPSCs were evoked with paired pulse stimulations at an inter-stimulus interval of 50 ms. Picrotoxin (100 µM) was added in the bath to inhibit GABAB receptors. To remove isolated particles and rendered as 50 nm points. The remaining localizations were filtered by a density based denoising algorithm to 70 nm axially (z) was determined by Fourier ring correlation.

Quantifications and statistical analyses. Electrophysiological data were analyzed in Igor Pro (WaveMetrics). For clarity, all stimulus artifacts were blanked and not shown in the figures. All data were shown as means ± SEM. The numbers of analyzed cells from at least two mice per group were shown in the graph as indicated in the figures. Student’s t-test was used for two-group comparisons. Statistical significance was defined and indicated in the figures and figure legends as follows: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Immunohistochemistry. Mice of postnatal day 12–14 were anesthetized and perfused with 1× PBS for 5 min followed by 2–4% paraformaldehyde (PFA) or 5 min. The brains were carefully extracted and post-fixed in 4% PFA for 2 h, followed by immersion in 20–30% sucrose for 48 h for complete cryo-protection. Transverse brain sections at 20–30 µm were cut at −20 °C using a cryostat (CM3050S, Leica). The slices containing the MNTB nucleus were pretreated in 0.5% Triton X-100 and 5% goat serum in PBS for 1 h at room temperature and incubated overnight at 4 °C with primary antibodies in blocking solution (0.1% Triton X-100 and 5% goat serum in PBS). The slices were washed with PBS and incubated with fluorescence-conjugated secondary antibodies for 2 h at room temperature. After wash, the slices were mounted with DAPI fluoromount (SouthernBiotech). Primary antibodies against VGluT1 (guinea pig, polyclonal, 1:1000, Millipore, Cat#: AB5905; BRID: AB_2301751), GABAβ2 (mouse, monoclonal, 1:500, NeuroMab Cat#: 75-183), and GABAβ3 (mouse, monoclonal, 1:500, NeuroMab Cat#: 75-125) were used. Secondary antibodies were Alexa Fluor conjugates (1:500; Invitrogen). Images were acquired using Nikon AI-RS confocal microscope with a 60× oil-immersion objective (1.45 numerical aperture) and analyzed in Nikon Analysis software.

Direct stochastic optical reconstruction microscopy (dSTORM) imaging. dSTORM images were recorded with a Vutara SR 352 (Bruker NanoSurfaces, Inc., Madison, WI) commercial microscope based on single molecule localization biplane technology16,13. Twenty micrometer thick brainstem slices containing the MNTB region were prepared as described and labeled with Homer1 (rabbit, 1:1000, Millipore, Cat#: AB1837), GABAβ2 (mouse, monoclonal, 1:1000, NeuroMab Cat#: 75-183), GABAβ3 (mouse, monoclonal, 1:1000, NeuroMab Cat#: 75-125) primary antibodies and secondary antibodies conjugated to Alexa647 (1:3000, Thermo-Fisher) or CF568 (1:3000, Biotium). The slices were mounted on a coverslip coated with poly-1-lysine and placed in dSTORM buffer containing (in mM) 50 Tris-HCl at pH 8.0, 10 NaCl, 20 MEA, 1% β-mercaptoethanol, 10% glucose, 150 μU catalase (Sigma Cat#: C40). Labeled proteins were imaged with 647 and 561 nm excitation power of 40 kW/cm2. Images were recorded using a 60×/1.2 NA Olympus water immersion objective and Hamamatsu Flash4 sCMOS camera with gain set at 50 and frame rate at 50 Hz. Data was analyzed by Vutara SRK software (version 6.04). Single molecules were identified in each frame by their brightness after removing the background. Identified molecules were localized in three dimensions by fitting the raw data in a 12 × 12-pixel region of interest centered around each particle in each plane with a 3D model function that was obtained from recorded datasets of fluorescent beads. Fit results were filtered by a density based denoising algorithm to 70 nm spaced particles and rendered as 50 nm point. The remaining localizations were classified into clusters by density-based spatial clustering of applications with noise (DBSCAN), a minimum of 30 localizations were connected around a 100 nm search radius. Localizations were rendered as 50 nm points for analysis by Pearson’s correlation. The experimentally achieved image resolution of 40 nm laterally (x, y) and 70 nm axially (z) was determined by Fourier ring correlation.

Reporting summary. Further information on research design is available in the Nature Research Reporting Summary linked to this article.

Data availability. All relevant data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding authors upon reasonable request. Source data are provided with this paper.

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