mTORC1 links pathology in experimental models of Still’s disease and macrophage activation syndrome

Still’s disease is a severe inflammatory syndrome characterized by fever, skin rash and arthritis affecting children and adults. Patients with Still’s disease may also develop macrophage activation syndrome, a potentially fatal complication of immune dysregulation resulting in cytokine storm. Here we show that mTORC1 (mechanistic target of rapamycin complex 1) underpins the pathology of Still’s disease and macrophage activation syndrome. Single-cell RNA sequencing in a murine model of Still’s disease shows preferential activation of mTORC1 in monocytes; both mTOR inhibition and monocyte depletion attenuate disease severity. Transcriptomic data from patients with Still’s disease suggest decreased expression of the mTORC1 inhibitors TSC1/TSC2 and an mTORC1 gene signature that strongly correlates with disease activity and treatment response. Unrestricted activation of mTORC1 by Tsc2 deletion in mice is sufficient to trigger a Still’s disease-like syndrome, including both inflammatory arthritis and macrophage activation syndrome with hemophagocytosis, a cellular manifestation that is reproduced in human monocytes by CRISPR/Cas-mediated deletion of TSC2. Consistent with this observation, hemophagocytic histiocytes from patients with macrophage activation syndrome display prominent mTORC1 activity. Our study suggests a mechanistic link of mTORC1 to inflammation that connects the pathogenesis of Still’s disease and macrophage activation syndrome.
development of MAS and hemophagocytosis. We demonstrate relevance of these findings in humans by analyzing transcriptomic datasets and tissue sections from patients with SD.

**Results**

**IL-1 induces mTORC1 activation in a murine model of SD**

To model IL-1-driven inflammation in SD, we studied mice deficient in the endogenous IL-1 receptor antagonist (IL1rn−/− mice). In addition to arthritis, by 6 weeks of age these mice developed features of systemic inflammation reminiscent of SD, including leukocytosis, thrombocytosis, anemia and hepatosplenomegaly (Fig. 1a). Further, like patients with SD, IL1rn−/− mice exhibited marked expansion of inflammatory (Ly6C+) monocytes in the peripheral blood and bone marrow (Fig. 1b and Supplementary Fig. 1a–d). Neutrophils were increased in the peripheral blood but not bone marrow while the proportions of resident (Ly6C−) monocytes and T cells were unaffected (Supplementary Fig. 1).

**Fig. 1 | Monocytosis and enhanced mTORC1 signaling in IL-1-mediated inflammation.** a Complete blood count in BALBc (n = 5) and IL1rn−/− mice (n = 6 per group), and spleen size in BALBc (n = 6) and IL1rn−/− mice (n = 8). b Flow cytometry quantification of circulating Ly6C+ monocytes in BALBc and IL1rn−/− mice at baseline (n = 10 per group) and (e) after anakinra treatment for 2 weeks (WT, n = 3; IL1rn−/− PBS, n = 8; IL1rn−/− + anakinra, n = 6). d Peripheral blood monocyte and lymphocyte count in SJIA patients pre-treatment and 2 weeks after initiation of anakinra (n = 8). e tSNE display of leukocyte clustering derived from single-cell RNA-seq of peripheral blood cells from BALBc and IL1rn−/− mice (4 mice pooled per group). f Volcano plot of differentially expressed genes in Ly6C+ monocytes of WT and IL1rn−/− mice. g Density plot of Hallmark mTORC1 gene set expression using AddmoduleScore. h Cluster plot of gene set enrichment in peripheral blood leukocyte subsets of BALBc and IL1rn−/− mice based on single-cell RNA-seq (4 mice pooled per group). i Phospho-flow analysis of mTOR substrates in bone marrow Ly6C+ monocytes from WT and IL1rn−/− mice at baseline (n = 6 per group) and (j) after daily anakinra treatment for 2 weeks (n = 6 per group for phospho-S6 and phospho-4EBP1; n = 3 for phosphor-Akt). Data in (a, b, c, d, i, and j) were pooled from 2 to 3 independent experiments. Mice were 8–9 weeks old for all experiments. Statistical analyses (all two-sided): Mann–Whitney U test (a, b, c, d, i, j); Wilcoxon signed-rank test with Bonferroni correction (f). Median and error bars representing interquartile range are displayed in (a, b, c, i, j). Source data are provided as a Source Data file.
Fig. 1a–d). We observed an expansion of myeloid progenitors in the bone marrow of IL1rn−/− mice as well as augmented differentiation of bone marrow mononuclear cells to macrophages in vitro (Supplementary Fig. 1e, f). Correspondingly, IL-1β augmented the differentiation and expansion of monocytes from myeloid progenitors in vitro (Supplementary Fig. 1g). Monocytosis was reversed by administration of recombinant human IL-1 receptor antagonist (anakinra) and reconstituted upon treatment withdrawal (Fig. 1c and Supplementary Fig. 2a, b). Patients with new-onset SD treated with anakinra showed a parallel reduction of circulating monocytes and improvement in laboratory features of inflammation (Fig. 1d and Supplementary Fig. 2c).

We next performed single-cell RNA sequencing analysis on circulating leukocytes from IL1rn−/− mice and wild-type BALBc controls (Fig. 1e and Supplementary Fig. 3a–c). We examined differential gene expression and utilized gene set enrichment analysis (GSEA) to explore the transcriptomic landscape of immune cell subsets (Supplementary Data 1 and 2). In addition to the expected enhancement of IL-1 signaling, GSEA identified prominent activation of the mTORC1 pathway in monocytes from IL1rn−/− mice (Fig. 1g, h and Supplementary Fig. 3d, e). Among the highly upregulated genes in IL1rn−/− monocytes were Socs3, Saa3, and S100a8 (Fig. 1f and Supplementary Data 1). Enhanced expression of these genes has been described in patients with SD15,16. The two mTOR complexes function to integrate environmental input and regulate cellular metabolism17. mTORC1 plays an essential role in nutrient sensing and immune signaling18. To quantify mTOR activity, we performed intracellular phospho-flow staining for the mTORC1 substrates 4E-BP1 (Thr37/46) and ribosomal S6 kinase 1 (S6K1; read out by phospho-S6 Ser240/244), and the mTORC2 target Akt (Ser473). Ly6C+ monocytes from IL1rn−/− mice demonstrated increased S6 phosphorylation compared to controls that reversed with anakinra treatment (Fig. 1i, j and Supplementary Fig. 4a). The mTORC1-S6K1 axis was preferentially activated in monocytes from IL1rn−/− mice, since augmented phosphorylation of S6 was not observed in neutrophils or lymphocyte subsets (Supplementary Fig. 4b). By contrast, the phosphorylation of Akt in all cell subsets was minimally affected by IL1rn deficiency or anakinra treatment. In vitro stimulation of myeloid progenitor cells with IL-1β also induced S6 phosphorylation and augmented cell expansion and monocyte differentiation (Supplementary Fig. 4c, d). Inhibitors of mTORC1 (rapamycin) or S6K1 (S6010-01) abrogated these effects (Supplementary Fig. 4d).

**mTORC1 inhibition reverses systemic inflammation in IL1rn−/− mice**

To evaluate whether enhanced mTORC1 signaling plays a pathologic role, we treated IL1rn−/− mice with rapamycin. Rapamycin decreased the phosphorylation of mTORC1 substrates as expected (Fig. 2a). Single-cell RNA-seq analysis of peripheral blood cells revealed reduced expression of genes associated with mTORC1 and IL-1 signaling in rapamycin-treated IL1rn−/− mice (Fig. 2b,c and Supplementary Fig. 5a). Data for differential gene expression and GSEA are provided in Supplementary Data 1 and 2. The enhanced expression of IL-1-inducible genes Socs3 and Saa3 in IL1rn−/− mice was also attenuated by rapamycin treatment (Fig. 2d, e). Compared to vehicle control, rapamycin strongly suppressed the expansion of inflammatory monocytes and reversed features of inflammation including anemia, leukocytosis, and thrombocytosis (Fig. 2f, g). Plasma levels of CXCLI, a chemokine induced by IL-1, were also lowered by rapamycin treatment (Supplementary Fig. 5b). While splenomegaly in IL1rn−/− mice was reduced by rapamycin treatment (Fig. 2h), the proportion of naive T cells, memory T cells and regulatory T cells in the spleen were comparable between the groups (Supplementary Fig. 5c).

Importantly, rapamycin suppressed the development of joint inflammation and bone erosion in IL1rn−/− mice (Fig. 3a–g). The anti-inflammatory effect of mTOR inhibition was also evident in 8–10-week-old IL1rn−/− mice with established arthritis (Fig. 3h, i). In addition to restricting the expansion of peripheral blood monocytes, rapamycin treatment reduced the number of Ly6C+ monocytes in the bone marrow and synovial fluid of IL1rn−/− mice (Fig. 3j, k). These findings and the earlier observation of prominent mTORC1 signaling in monocytes together suggest a potential pathogenic role of monocytes in this model. Indeed, depletion of BAVALys using clodronate liposomes suppressed the development of splenomegaly and arthritis in IL1rn−/− mice (Fig. 4a–f). The levels of IL-1β and CXCLI were not affected by clodronate liposome treatment (Supplementary Fig. 5d). Taken together, these data illustrate the therapeutic potential of targeting monocytes and mTORC1 signaling for IL-1-mediated systemic inflammation.

**mTORC1 signature predicts treatment response in SD**

To investigate whether excess mTORC1 signaling is associated with SD, we identified 8 transcriptomic studies that compared patients with SD and healthy controls (Supplementary Table 1). Except for one dataset on AOSD, most of these studies focused on children with sJIA. GSEA revealed consistent enrichment of the mTORC1 pathway in all datasets (Fig. 5a and Supplementary Table 2). Gene signatures that reflect IL-1, IL-6, IL-18 and IFN-γ signaling were also consistently detected in patients with SD (Fig. 5a). These inflammatory mediators have been implicated in the pathogenesis of SD and they all induced mTORC1 signaling in CD14+ monocytes from healthy volunteers (Supplementary Fig. 6a), suggesting that mTORC1 integrates the proinflammatory effects of these cytokines. The enrichment of mTORC1-regulated genes in children with sJIA was significantly stronger than in other childhood arthritides (Supplementary Fig. 6b, c).

We focused our analysis on the landmark trial of canakinumab (monoclonal anti-IL-1β) for sJIA from which early transcriptomic data (baseline and 3 days post-treatment) and long-term treatment response data (24 weeks) are publicly available. We calculated a standardized mTORC1 gene set score based on the expression of leading-edge genes from GSEA. In addition to distinguishing patients with sJIA from healthy controls (Fig. 3b), the mTORC1 signature correlated with treatment response to canakinumab (Fig. 5c). Patients with the best long-term clinical response after 24 weeks (based on American College of Rheumatology criteria19) displayed a particularly marked reduction of the mTORC1 gene signature 3 days after treatment initiation (Fig. 5d and Supplementary Fig. 6d, e). By contrast, patients with minimal transcriptional changes in the mTORC1 gene signature after 3 days generally showed suboptimal long-term clinical response.

Similar patterns were observed with gene sets that reflect IL-1 and IL-18 signaling, in keeping with the proinflammatory role of these cytokines in SD and their ability to activate mTORC1 (Supplementary Fig. 7a–d). Illustrating the specificity of these findings, expression of an unrelated gene set (Hallmark unfolded protein response pathway, as an example) did not show enrichment in patients with SD or correlation with treatment response (Supplementary Fig. 7e, f). These data provide evidence for heightened mTORC1 activation in SD and highlight the potential of the mTORC1 gene signature as a predictor of treatment response.

In line with the role of mTORC1 as a driver of cellular metabolism, genes that encode glycolytic enzymes including ALDOA, ENO1, G6PD, GPI and HK2 are among the targets regulated by mTORC120. Upregulated expression of these genes was often observed in patients with SD across the different studies (Supplementary Fig. 7g). Supporting these findings, analysis of recently published serum proteomics data revealed that increased levels of several glycolytic enzymes was associated with active sJIA (Fig. 5e)20. This pattern was particularly striking in sJIA complicated by MAS, a hyperinflammatory state characterized by cytokine storm, hemophagocytosis, and multi-organ system dysfunction21,22.
Excess mTORC1 activation drives MAS and hemophagocytosis

We hypothesized that overwhelming mTORC1 activation potentiates the development of MAS. To test this hypothesis, we examined the role of mTORC1 in a murine model of MAS induced by repeated exposure to the Toll-like receptor 9 ligand CpG DNA. Development of cytopenia, hyperferritinemia and hepatosplenomegaly in CpG-treated mice coincided with an expansion of Ly6Chi monocytes and enhanced mTORC1 signaling in these cells. Rapamycin treatment restored normal levels of mTORC1 activation, lessened the severity of cytopenia, hyperferritinemia, and hepatosplenomegaly, and downregulated the production of IFN-γ, an important cytokine in the pathogenesis of MAS. These findings collectively suggest a pathogenic role of mTORC1 in CpG-induced MAS.

To evaluate whether persistent mTORC1 signaling alone is sufficient to trigger the pathology of SD and MAS, we generated inducible Tsc2 KO mice (Tuberous sclerosis complex 2 iKO; MxCre Tsc2 fl/fl). The Tsc complex negatively regulates mTORC1 and disruption of the complex results in unopposed mTORC1 activation. Mice with induced deletion of Tsc2 spontaneously developed arthritis and an MAS-like syndrome characterized by cytopenia, elevated ferritin levels, and hepatosplenomegaly. Examination of the bone marrow of Tsc2 iKO mice showed fulminant hemophagocytosis, a hallmark finding of MAS. Confocal microscopy confirmed internalization of blood elements including erythrocytes (Ter119+), neutrophils (Ly6G+) and platelets (CD61+) by CD68+ macrophages. Electron microscopy of these cells further supported the presence of hemophagocytosis.
delineated large vacuoles that contained intact cells and digested remnants (Fig. 7e). mTORC1 signaling was required for these observations as rapamycin treatment fully prevented bone marrow hemophagocytosis (Fig. 7f).

Bone marrow transplant using Tsc2 iKO mice and CD45.1+ wild-type mice demonstrated that the development of hemophagocytosis required Tsc2 deletion in hematopoietic cells (Supplementary Fig. 8a). We generated Cre/ERT2 Tsc2^{fl/fl} mice and found that tamoxifen-induced deletion of Tsc2 in sorted myeloid progenitors and Ly6Chi monocytes was sufficient to induce hemophagocytosis in vitro (Supplementary Fig. 8b). In line with these findings, CRISPR/Cas9-mediated deletion of TSC2 in human CD14^{+} monocytes induced differentiation into large hemophagocytic histiocytes (Fig. 7g and Supplementary Fig. 8c, d). While mutations in TSC2 or its binding partner TSCI have not been described in SD, pooled analysis of available transcriptomic studies revealed that expression of both genes were significantly downregulated in PBMC from children with sJIA (Fig. 7h).

Finally, we searched for evidence of mTORC1 activation in hemophagocytic histiocytes from patients with MAS. Immunohistochemistry and immunofluorescence of bone marrow cells from 3 patients with SD-associated MAS showed prominent mTORC1 signaling in hemophagocytic histiocytes as suggested by phospho-S6 staining (Fig. 7i and Supplementary Fig. 8e). Similar observations were noted in patients with MAS in the setting of viral infection (Supplementary Fig. 8f), suggesting that enhanced mTOR1 signaling may be a shared feature of hemophagocytic syndromes.

**Fig. 3 | Rapamycin treatment reduces arthritis severity and bone erosion in IL1r^{−/−} mice.** a Representative depiction of ankle inflammation, (b) hematoxylin and eosin staining of ankle sections, (c) histologic scores of ankle arthritis (vehicle, n = 10; rapamycin n = 11), (d) ankle and wrist thickness (vehicle, n = 14; rapamycin n = 11), (e) composite arthritis score (vehicle, n = 14; rapamycin n = 11) and (f, g) micro-CT quantification of joint erosion in IL1r^{−/−} mice treated with rapamycin or vehicle for 10 weeks. h Ankle and wrist joint measurements (n = 8 per group) and i composite arthritis score (n = 5 per group) in IL1r^{−/−} mice with established arthritis treated with vehicle or rapamycin for 2 weeks. j Flow cytometry quantification of Ly6C^{+} monocytes and neutrophils in the bone marrow and k) synovial fluid of IL1r^{−/−} mice treated with vehicle control or rapamycin for 10 weeks (n = 5 per group). Data in (c, h, i) were pooled from 3 independent experiments. Mice were 4 weeks old for experiments in (a, g, j, k) and 10 weeks old for experiments in (b, i). Statistical analyses (all two-sided): Mann–Whitney U test (c, g, j, k); Student’s t test (d, e, h, i). *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001, ****p < 0.0001. Median and error bars representing interquartile range are displayed in (c, g, j, k). Mean and error bars representing standard errors are displayed in (d, e, h, i). Source data are provided as a Source Data file.
Discussion

SD is an intriguing inflammatory syndrome that bridges innate and adaptive immunity. Myeloid cells and multiple cytokines have been implicated in SD but how they contribute to disease pathogenesis and why some patients develop MAS remain unresolved. Using a combination of murine models and human studies, our work illustrates a role of mTORC1 signaling that connects the spectrum of inflammation in SD and MAS. These findings have direct therapeutic implications, as inhibitors of mTOR are already in clinical use.

Recent studies have revealed important roles of IL-1, IL-6, IL-18, and IFN-γ in SD and MAS. While the IL1rn−/− model does not address the role the other proinflammatory mediators, our survey of human transcriptomic data revealed consistent activation of mTORC1 in parallel with these cytokine signatures. We propose that mTORC1 may serve as a nexus that integrates signals from these cytokine pathways. Supporting this hypothesis, the pathology of IL1rn−/− mice treated with PBS–liposomes (n = 6) or clodronate–liposomes (n = 5) for 6 weeks. Data in (a, b, d, e) were pooled from 2 independent experiments. Mice were 6 weeks old for experiments in (a–f). Statistical analyses (all two-sided): Mann-Whitney U test (a, b, e); Student’s t test (c, d). *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01. Median and error bars representing interquartile range are displayed in (a, b, e). Mean and error bars representing standard errors are displayed in (c, d). Source data are provided as a Source Data file.

The downstream mechanism through which mTORC1 controls the inflammatory process in SD and MAS requires further investigation. Previous studies have shown that challenging wild-type mice with TLR agonists can recapitulate key features of infection-associated MAS. Wang and colleagues illustrated that glycolytic metabolism is responsible for the features of MAS triggered by sequential treatment with TLR3 and TLR4 agonists. It is possible that the pathology of TLR-induced MAS is also mediated via mTORC1. Alternatively, mTORC1 may modulate the differentiation and function of monocytes. Expansion of monocytes in the peripheral blood was associated with active disease in both patients with SD and IL1rn−/− mice. Single-cell RNA-seq revealed prominent mTORC1 signaling in monocytes from IL1rn−/− mice and clodronate treatment ameliorated both arthritis and systemic inflammation. Furthermore, overt activation of mTORC1 in monocytes was sufficient to drive the development of hemophagocytic histiocytes in a cell-intrinsic manner. These data suggest that monocytes may be another potential therapeutic target in SD and MAS.

A limitation of this study is the focus on myeloid cells and innate immunity. Adaptive immunity is thought to be involved in the chronic arthritis of SD, and T lymphocytes are required for the development of arthritis in IL1rn−/− mice. SD-associated MAS shares many clinical features with primary HLH caused by mutations that disrupt the lytic function of T lymphocytes and natural killer cells, leading to a vicious cycle of reciprocal immune activation and cytokine production by lymphocytes and macrophages. mTORC1 inhibition may interfere with the inflammatory cascade of SD and MAS by skewing T cell differentiation. Glycolytic metabolism governed by mTORC1 signaling promotes the differentiation of effector cells, while blockade of mTORC1 diverts the differentiation program towards memory T cells and regulatory T cells. This immunomodulatory function is considered to be the likely mechanism for the beneficial effects of mTOR inhibitors in autoimmune and immunodysregulatory diseases. The use of oral mTOR inhibitors was associated with clinical improvement in clinical trials for...

Nature Communications | (2022) 13:6915
SLE and rheumatoid arthritis. It is noteworthy that rapamycin was not effective in the perforin-deficiency model of primary HLH, which is dependent on CD8+ T cells. Further studies are needed to delineate the differential impact of mTOR inhibition in immune cell compartments in SD and primary HLH.

Up to one-third of patients with SD-associated MAS possess a deleterious variant in genes linked to primary HLH. Although a connection between human mutations in TSC2 and MAS is not established, analysis of published transcriptomic datasets suggests decreased expression of TSC1 and TSC2 in some patients with SD. These findings implicate reduced control of mTORC1 activation as a potential susceptibility factor for MAS development in SD. Since the available transcriptomic dataset are focused on SD without MAS, in-depth profiling of MAS in the peripheral blood and affected tissues (i.e. bone marrow and liver) are needed to further evaluate the pathogenic role of mTORC1. Future studies are also needed to understand the relative

Fig. 5 | mTORC1 signature in Still’s disease correlates with disease severity and treatment response. a Cluster plot of gene set enrichment analysis comparing healthy controls and patients with sJIA and AOSD using in publicly available transcriptomic dataset. b Gene set enrichment plot of Hallmark mTORC1 gene set and c calculation of mTOR gene set score from healthy controls (n = 22), sJIA patients at baseline (n = 82) and sJIA patients 3 days after canakinumab treatment (n = 69). d Stratification of mTOR gene set score before treatment and 3 days after canakinumab based on clinical response after 24 weeks. Clinical response was stratified according to American College of Rheumatology (ACR) Score: ACR 0/Non-responders (NR, n = 10), ACR30 (n = 6), ACR50 (n = 11), ACR70 (n = 16), ACR90 (n = 8), ACR100 (n = 12). Transcriptomic data for (b–d) are derived from GEO data series GSE80060 while proteomics data in (e) were derived from Chen et al. Statistical analyses (all two-sided): permutation test (a, b), Mann–Whitney U test (c, e), Kruskal–Wallis one-way analysis of variance (d). Median and error bars representing interquartile range are displayed in (c–e). Source data are provided as a Source Data file.
contributions of genetic and environmental factors to mTOR activation in SD and MAS.

Using a combination of murine models and human studies, our study illustrates a role of mTORC1 in the pathophysiology of SD. These findings connect the biology of SD and MAS directly to conserved metabolic pathways and introduce mTORC1 as potential therapeutic target.

**Methods**

**Study design and approval**

All experimental procedures on animals were conducted in accordance with the standards of Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) and approved by Brigham and Women’s Hospital and/or Boston Children’s Hospital. Approval for human subject research and waiver of consent were granted by Institutional Review Board (IRB).
of Massachusetts General Hospital (Protocol: 2017P000255) and Boston Children’s Hospital (Protocol: P00005723).

**Human subjects**

Data on hematologic parameters and inflammatory markers in sJIA patients were collected at Boston Children’s Hospital. For patients with sJIA, informed consent was provided by participants or legal guardians and assent was obtained from patients when appropriate. Retrospective chart review was performed to identify patients with new-onset sJIA diagnosed between January 2016 and December 2019. Deidentified laboratory data were collected from 8 subjects with new-onset sJIA (4 males, 4 females; median age = 5 years) without evidence of MAS at the
Fig. 7 | Unrestricted mTORC1 activation drives the development of hemophagocytosis and macrophage activation syndrome. a Hemoglobin levels (n = 5 per group), bone marrow cell count (n = 5 per group), plasma ferritin levels (Tsc2−/−, n = 5, Tsc2 Iko, n = 6), spleen weight (n = 5 per group), and change in ankle joint thickness (n = 6 per group) and (b) representative ankle pathology (H&E stain) in Tsc2 Iko mice and control mice. c Wright-Giemsa staining of bone marrow leukocytes from Tsc2 Iko and control mice. d Confocal microscopy and e electron microscopy of hemophagocytes from the bone marrow of Tsc2 Iko mice. f Quantification of bone marrow hemophagocytes in Tsc2 Iko mice treated with rapamycin or vehicle control (3 slides analyzed for each mouse; n = 3 per group). Mice were 6–8 weeks of age and analyses in (a–f) were performed 3 weeks after poly I:C treatment to induce Tsc2 deletion. g Wright-Giemsa staining of human bone marrow from patients with MAS, demonstrating hemophagocytic syndrome. h Time points before treatment with the recombinant IL-1 receptor antagonist anakinra while post-treatment data represent the average of 2–3 time points within the first month of anakinra treatment. Reagents Recombinant murine IL-1β, M-CSF (macrophage colony stimulating factor), and human IL-18 were purchased from Biolegend (San Diego, CA, USA). Human IL-1β, IL-6, IFN-γ, and murine SCF (stem cell factor) were purchased from Peprotech (Rock Hill, NJ, USA). Rapamycin was purchased from LC Laboratories (Woburn, MA, USA). Rapamycin was solubilized with Tween 80 and PEG-400 (Sigma Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA) as described17. SLO101-01 and 400HTamoxifen were purchased from Cayman Chemical (Ann Arbor, MI, USA). Poly I:C and Osteosoft solution were obtained from Sigma-Aldrich. C diarrhea isolate liposome and PBS liposome were purchased from ENcapsula NanoSciences (Brentwood, TN, USA). CpG was purchased from Integrated DNA Technologies (Coralville, IA, USA). Fixation and permeabilization buffer for intracellular staining were purchased from Biolegend. Tissue culture reagents and Hoechst 33342 were purchased from ThermoFisher Scientific (Waltham, MA, USA). Anakinra was manufactured by Sobi (Stockholm, Sweden). All antibodies used in this study, their sources and applied dilution are listed in Supplementary Table 4.

Animals and flow cytometry Wild-type BALB/c, wild-type C57BL/6, CD45.1 (B6.SJL-Ptprca Pepcb/Boyj), ubiquitin ERT2-Cre (B6.Cg-Tg(Ubcre/ERT2[Ieb/J]), and Mxl-Cre (B6.Cg-Tg(Mx1-Cre)Cgnj/J) were purchased from Jackson Laboratories. Tsc2−/−(Tsc2+/+Icnj/j) mice were kindly provided by Dr. Michael Gambello18 and bred with Mxl-Cre mice, ubiquitin-ERT2-Cre to generate CreTsc2 fl/fl mice. BALB/c Icnj/j mice (IL1rn−/−) were described previously19. Male and female mice were randomized to experimental groups with matched littermate controls. Mice were housed and bled under specific pathogen-free conditions in a vivarium at the Brigham and Women’s Hospital or Boston Children’s Hospital.

Poly I:C treatment. To induce deletion of Tsc2, 6 to 8-week-old Mx-Cre Tsc2−/− mice or Tsc2+/− controls were given poly I:C (250 μg i.p.) every other day for 3 doses.

Anakinra treatment. To study the effects of recombinant IL-1Ra treatment, IL1rn−/− mice (6 weeks old) were injected intraperitoneally with 10 mg/kg anakinra or vehicle control (PBS) daily for 1 or 2 weeks.

Rapamycin treatment. Rapamycin was dissolved in 100% ethanol and further diluted in a vehicle solution containing 5% PEG 400 and 5% Tween 80 prior to intraperitoneal injection17. IL1rn−/− mice (4 to 10 weeks old) were treated with rapamycin (2 mg/kg) or vehicle control daily for 2–10 weeks.

Cldronate-liposome treatment. IL1rn−/− mice (6 weeks old, male and female) were given intraperitoneal injection of cldronate-loaded liposomes (100 μl containing 18.4 mM cldronate; twice weekly) or PBS liposomes for 6 weeks.

CpG DNA treatment. Wild-type C57BL/6 mice (8 weeks old, male and female) were treated with intraperitoneal injections of CpG (50 μg) or PBS every other day for 10 days.

Bone marrow transplant Recipient CD45.1 mice and CD45.2 Mx-Cre Tsc2+/− mice (8 weeks old, male) were irradiated using two split doses of 500 rads and given 2×106 bone marrow mononuclear cells from CD45.2 Mx-Cre Tsc2+/− donors and CD45.1 donors via intravenous injection, respectively. Engraftment was confirmed by FACS analysis of PBMC after 4 weeks followed by induction of Tsc2 deletion by poly I:C.

Cell count and cytokine quantitation Complete blood cell count (CBC) was performed in a hematology analyzer (Sysmex, XP-300, Kobe, Japan). Plasma cytokines / chemokines were quantified using the Legendplex assay (Biolegend) according to manufacturer’s instructions. Plasma ferritin was quantified using a mouse ferritin ELISA Kit (Crystal Chem; Elk Grove Village, IL, USA).

Flow cytometry For surface staining, cells were stained with an optimized amount of primary antibody or the appropriate isotype control for 15 min at room temperature before washing and resuspending in PBS supplemented with 0.1% BSA. Intracellular staining was performed after surface staining using fixation and permeabilization buffer (Biolegend). Antibodies were added to cells after the permeabilization step and samples were incubated overnight on ice before analysis. Flow cytometry and analysis of mTOR substrates in bone marrow monocytes, cells were directly fixed by flushing femurs with 4% paraformaldehyde to prevent changes in mTORC1 activation during the process of cell isolation. Samples were acquired using a Becton-Dickinson FACS Canto II flow cytometer and analyzed with FCS Express 5 software (De Novo Software, Pasadena, CA, USA). In all experiments, intact cells were identified by size and singlets were gated for analysis. Isotype control antibodies were used to establish gates to determine cell population and quantify mean fluorescence intensity. A centrifugation speed of 400 g was used during the processing of samples for flow cytometry.
erythrocytes in ACK buffer, cells were washed in PBS supplemented with 0.1% BSA and resuspended in complete RPMI. Common myeloid progenitors (CMP, Lin-ckit+CD32−CD34+), granulocyte-monocyte progenitors (GMP, Lin-ckit+CD32+CD115+), common monocyte progenitors (CMoP, Lin-ckit+CD32−CD115+Ly6C−), and Ly6C+ monocytes (ckit+CD115+Ly6C+). Gene expression array analysis (GSEA) was performed on the DEGs, volcano plot and gene set enrichment analysis were performed with limma package (v3.46.0)45, IGSEA package (v1.16.0)45, complexheatmap package (v2.6.2)58 and ggplot2 package (v3.3.3)57 in R (v4.0.4)58. Gene sets were chosen to study major immune-related pathways and sources of all gene sets analyzed in this study are listed in Supplementary Table 1. Differentially expressed gene signatures for GSE80060 were calculated from the leading-edge genes in the Hallmark mTORC1 gene set that were enriched in sJIA patients compared to healthy controls (Supplementary Table 2). A standardized score of each gene was derived based on the number of standard deviations away from the mean of control group. The mTORC1 gene set score represents the sum of standardized score for all leading-edge genes. This method was previously described for the calculation of interferon gene signature60,61. For analysis of TSC1 and TSC2 expression, datasets derived from PBMC and whole blood were included and expression of these genes in each patient was normalized as a percentage of the control group average from the same study.

Single-cell RNA sequencing

Single-cell sequencing was performed by the Brigham and Women’s Hospital Single Cell Genomics Core. Whole blood was collected from BALB/c mice and IL1R+ mice treated with rapamycin or vehicle for 10 weeks. Leukocytes were isolated from whole blood after lysis of red blood cells. Leukocytes were incubated with Mouse TruStain FcX (BioLegend) for 10 mins at 4 °C followed by incubation with lineage antibodies (B220, CD11b, Ly6G) and hashing antibodies (TotalseqB HashTag-9, 10 and 11; BioLegend) for 30 mins at 4 °C. The cells were washed and resuspended in Cell Staining Buffer (BioLegend) for sorting by FACS Aria Fusion Cell Sorter (BD). Gates were preset to acquire...
20% neutrophils (Ly6G+), 20% monocytes (CD11b+ly6G−), 20% B lymphocytes (B220 +) and 40% cells negative for these markers (mostly T cells). This strategy was employed to capture a sufficient number of cells for each subset to allow downstream analysis. Therefore, the cell distribution from single-cell RNAseq is not expected to represent the natural distribution of peripheral blood cells in mice. Quantification of leukocyte subsets was performed separately by flow cytometry.

Sorted cells were loaded onto a Chromium chip G (10X Genomics) followed by encapsulation in a lipid droplet (Single Cell Next GEM kit V3.1, 10X Genomics). The scRNA-seq libraries were generated according to the manufacturer’s protocol. Using Illumina Novaseq, single-cell mRNA library was sequenced to an average of 30,000 reads per cell, and HTO (Cell Hashing antibodies) library sequenced to an average of 5,000 reads per cell. scRNA-seq reads were processed with Cell Ranger v3.1.25, including demultiplexing, alignment (using GRCm38/mm10), and barcode processing. The gene matrices were further analyzed by seurat package (v4.0.1)13, limma package (v3.46.0), FGSEA package (v1.16.0), complexheatmap package (v2.6.2) and ggplot2 package (v3.3.3) in R (v4.0.4).

**TSC2 deletion in human monocytes**

PBMC were isolated via Ficoll-Paque Plus gradient centrifugation and residual RBCs were lysed in ACK lysing buffer. Cells were resuspended in isolation buffer (PBS with 2% FBS, 1 mM EDTA) at room temperature at a concentration of 5 × 10⁶/mL. Monocytes were negatively isolated from PBMCs using EasySep™ Human Monocyte Isolation Kit (Stemcell technologies; Cambridge, MA, USA) following manufacturer’s instructions. Isolated monocytes were rested in RPMI 1640 (Sigma) supplemented with 10% FBS, 10 mM HEPES, 1 mM sodium pyruvate, 2500 mg/L glucose, 1% penicillin-streptomycin and 0.05 mM 2-mercaptoethanol for 1 h at room temperature.

Guide RNA targeting TSC2 (sequences: ‘-GAGGACAGAGCAGAUUCAU-3’ and control scrambled sgRNA (‘-GCACUACCAGAGCUAA-GAUGGACAGGACGAU-5’) were purchased from Synthego (Redwood City, CA, USA) and resuspended in TE buffer at a concentration of 40 μM. The selection of target sequences to maximize on-target and minimize off-target binding was aided by the web applications VBC SCORE. One micro-liter of sgRNA was mixed with 1 μl of 20 μM recombinant Streptococcus pyogenes Cas9 (Synthego) and incubated at 37 °C for 15 min to achieve equal representation of males and females in each experiment. For other quantitative variables, differences between two groups were analyzed by Mann–Whitney U test and Kruskal–Wallis test was used for comparison of multiple groups. Median and interquartile range are displayed unless stated otherwise. Student’s t-test was used for quantification of joint measurements and arthritis score. All tests were two-sided, and p < 0.05 was considered significant. For GSEA, p-values for each gene set were calculated by repeated permutation (set at 1000 for all analyses in this study)14. Wilkinson ranked sum test with Bonferroni correction was used for the comparison of gene expression in scRNAseq.

Each experimental group had at least 3 biological replicates. Mice were randomly assigned to treatment groups, and efforts were made to achieve equal representation of males and females in each experiment. No statistical method was used to predetermine sample size. No data were excluded from the analyses. Scoring of joint pathology was performed blindly by two investigators. The investigators were not blinded to the outcome assessment for other experiments. Except for the clinical data and immunohistochemistry studies of bone marrow sections from patients, all results were confirmed by two or more independent experiments. Statistical analyses were performed using Prism 9.0 software.

**Reporting summary**

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

**Data availability**

The Single cell RNA sequencing data used in this study are available in the NCBI Gene Expression Omnibus database under accession code GSE81243. Datasets analyzed in this study include GSE80325, GSE80060, GSE7753, GSE12521, GSE17590, GSE147608, GSE112057, and GSE113645. Source data are provided with this paper.

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Author contributions

Z.H., P.A.N., and P.Y.L. designed the study. Z.H., X.Y., L.C., K.B., Y.D., H.J., Q.W., R.D., M.H.C., A.W., B.M.W., M.T.G., P.C., Y.L., A.L., J.F.C., and P.Y.L. performed experiments. Z.H., X.Y., G.L., R.P.H., J.F.L., and P.Y.L. analyzed pathology studies. Z.H., X.Y., L.C., Y.D., K.B., H.J., Q.W., R.D., K.W., J.F.L., P.A.N., and P.Y.L. collected and analyzed data. Y.J., V.P., N.E.B., P.Q., T.L., L.A.H., D.B.S., E.D.M., S.W.C. provided key reagents and/or dataset. Z.H., P.A.N., and P.Y.L. drafted the manuscript, and all authors revised the manuscript.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Additional information

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Correspondence and requests for materials should be addressed to Peter A. Nigrovic or Pui Y. Lee.

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Zhengping Huang, Xiaomeng You, Liang Chen, Yan Du, Kailey Brodeur, Hyuk Jee, Qiang Wang, Grace Linder, Roxane Darbousset, Pierre Cunin, Margaret H. Chang, Alexandra Wactor, Brian M. Wauford, Marc J. C. Todd, Kevin Wei, Ying Li, Anais Levescot, Yoichiro Iwakura, Virginia Pascual, Nicole E. Baldwin, Pierre Quartier, Tianwang Li, Maria T. Gianatasio, Robert P. Hasserjian, Lauren A. Henderson, David B. Sykes, Elizabeth D. Mellins, Scott W. Canna, Julia F. Charles, Peter A. Nigrovic, & Pui Y. Lee.

1Division of Immunology, Boston Children’s Hospital, Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA, USA. 2Division of Rheumatology, Inflammation, and Immunity, Brigham and Women’s Hospital, Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA, USA. 3Department of Rheumatology and Immunology, Guangdong Second Provincial General Hospital, Guangzhou, China. 4Department of Orthopaedic Surgery, Brigham and Women’s Hospital, Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA, USA. 5Department of Rheumatology, The Second Affiliated Hospital of Zhejiang University School of Medicine, Hangzhou, China. 6Blood Bank and Transfusion Medicine Division, Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA, USA. 7Université Paris Cité, Institut Imagine, INSERM UMR1163, Laboratory Intestinal Immunity, Paris, France. 8Centre for Animal Disease Models, Research Institute for Biomedical Sciences, Tokyo University of Science, Chiba, Japan. 9Department of Pediatrics and Duker Institute for Children’s Health, Weill Cornell Medicine, New York, NY, USA. 10Baylor Scott & White Research Institute, Dallas, TX, USA. 11Pediatric Immunology, Hematology and Rheumatology Unit, Necker-Enfants Malades Hospital, Assistance Publique-Hopitaux de Paris, Université de Paris, Paris, France. 12Mass General Brigham Healthcare Center - Salem Hospital, Salem, MA, USA. 13Department of Pathology, Massachusetts General Hospital, Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA, USA. 14Center for Regenerative Medicine, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, MA, USA. 15Division of Rheumatology, Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA, USA. 16These authors jointly supervised this work: Peter A. Nigrovic, Pui Y. Lee. E-mail: peter.nigrovic@childrens.harvard.edu; pui.lee@childrens.harvard.edu