CD177 is a neutrophil-specific receptor presenting the proteinase 3 (PR3) autoantigen on the neutrophil surface. CD177 expression is restricted to a neutrophil subset, resulting in CD177pos/mPR3high and CD177neg/mPR3low populations. The CD177pos/mPR3high subset has implications for antineutrophil cytoplasmic autoantibody (ANCA)-associated autoimmune vasculitis, wherein patients harbor PR3-specific ANCs that activate neutrophils for degranulation. Here, we generated high-affinity anti-CD177 monoclonal antibodies, some of which interfered with PR3 binding to CD177 (PR3 “blockers”) as determined by surface plasmon resonance spectroscopy and used them to test the effect of competing PR3 from the surface of CD177pos neutrophils. Because intact anti-CD177 antibodies also caused neutrophil activation, we prepared nonactivating Fab fragments of a PR3 blocker and nonblocker that bound specifically to CD177pos neutrophils. We observed that Fab blocker clone 40, but not nonblocker clone 80, dose-dependently reduced anti-PR3 antibody binding to CD177pos neutrophils. Importantly, preincubation with clone 40 significantly reduced respiratory burst in primed neutrophils challenged with either monoclonal antibodies to PR3 or PR3–ANCA immunoglobulin G from ANCA-associated autoimmune vasculitis patients. After separating the two CD177/mPR3 neutrophil subsets from individual donors by magnetic sorting, we found that PR3–ANCAs provoked significantly more superoxide production in CD177pos/mPR3high than in CD177neg/mPR3low neutrophils, and that anti-CD177 Fab clone 40 reduced the superoxide production of CD177pos cells to the level of the CD177neg cells. Our data demonstrate the importance of the CD177:PR3 membrane complex in maintaining a high ANCA epitope density and thereby underscore the contribution of CD177 to the severity of PR3–ANCA diseases.

As the most abundant leukocytes, neutrophil granulocytes represent one of the first lines of defense against infectious agents and are therefore a pillar of the innate immune system. Among their most potent defense mechanisms are the respiratory burst to generate reactive oxygen species and degranulation, whereby stores of cytotoxic species housed in several types of intracellular and membrane-bound compartments called granules, are moved to the cell surface and released into the extracellular environment as a response to pathogen detection (1). This toxic cocktail is designed to kill foreign cells in the vicinity of the neutrophil. Given that healthy cells are also negatively affected, degranulation is a highly regulated process (though not yet fully understood) (2). The serine protease proteinase 3 (PR3) is found in large abundance in human neutrophils (3). It is a major component of neutrophil azurophilic granules but is interestingly also detectable on the outer surface of the neutrophil plasma membrane. In most individuals, two distinct neutrophil populations can be identified based on the amount of membrane-bound PR3 (mPR3) they harbor—one with low amounts of mPR3 (mPR3low) and another with orders of magnitude more detectable mPR3 (mPR3high) (4). The mPR3high population is further distinguished by the presence of a selectively expressed membrane receptor called CD177 (5, 6). CD177 is a glycosylphosphatidylinositol-anchored protein exclusively expressed in a subset of neutrophils and forms a high-affinity complex with PR3. It thus accounts for the increased mPR3 levels that are detectable on the mPR3high subset (7). The proportion of CD177pos/mPR3high versus CD177neg/mPR3low neutrophils in a given individual is genetically determined and remains constant throughout life (8–10). Although the function of CD177 is still unclear, several studies have identified a correlation between a large CD177pos/mPR3high neutrophil population and the occurrence and progression of a group of incurable autoimmune diseases called antineutrophil cytoplasmic antibody (ANCA) vasculitides (8, 11–14). In these disorders, autoantibodies directed against PR3 stimulate respiratory burst and degranulation. The resulting release of reactive oxygen species and cytotoxic enzymes and peptides—circumventing the normally strictly controlled degranulation process—causes considerable systemic damage to healthy tissue and is the hallmark of these conditions. It has been shown that, although all neutrophils are activated upon exposure to PR3–ANCAs, CD177pos/mPR3high neutrophils...
react more strongly to autoantibody binding, as measured by
degranulation, generation of superoxide (an initial product of the
respiratory burst—referred to as “oxidative burst”), and
increased phosphorylation of Akt kinase (15). AAV patients with
large CD177<sup>pos</sup>/mPR3<sup>high</sup> populations are more prone to relapse
and show poorer clinical outcomes than those with smaller
CD177<sup>pos</sup>/mPR3<sup>high</sup> populations (11–13).

The mechanism by which PR3–ANCAs cause neutrophil
activation is not known. Since all neutrophils display mPR3 and
are affected by PR3–ANCAs, the presence of PR3 seems critical
for the process. In the case of CD177<sup>pos</sup>/mPR3<sup>high</sup> neutrophils,
which are more strongly affected by the binding of PR3–ANCAs,
the questions arise whether and how CD177 itself may contribute
to ANCA-stimulated degranulation. Although CD177 does not
cross the plasma membrane, it could interact with other species
that and in this way enhance the sensitivity of
CD177<sup>pos</sup>/mPR3<sup>high</sup> neutrophils to the effects of PR3–ANCAs.

We sought to directly test the contribution of CD177 to PR3–
ANCA-stimulated neutrophil activation. To this end, we gener-
ated a series of anti-CD177 antibodies, some of which bound to
the CD177:PR3 complex and some of which blocked the binding
of PR3. We used Fab fragments derived from the latter to selec-
disrupt CD177:PR3 complexes on CD177<sup>pos</sup>/mPR3<sup>high</sup>
neutrophils. We then tested the effect of this treatment on PR3–
ANCA-induced respiratory burst using both mixed and sorted
neutrophil populations. We show that removing CD177-bound
PR3 reduces the sensitivity of mixed neutrophil pools to PR3–
ANCA treatment. When we separated CD177<sup>neg</sup>/mPR3<sup>low</sup>
and CD177<sup>pos</sup>/mPR3<sup>high</sup> populations, we found that while Fab
treatment had no effect on the PR3–ANCA-induced respiratory
burst of CD177<sup>neg</sup>/mPR3<sup>low</sup> neutrophils, the anti-CD177 Fab
reduced the response of the CD177<sup>pos</sup>/mPR3<sup>high</sup> population to
that of the CD177<sup>neg</sup>/mPR3<sup>low</sup> population. Thus, the excess
mPR3 on CD177<sup>pos</sup>/mPR3<sup>high</sup> neutrophils appears to account for
their enhanced sensitivity to PR3–ANCAs. The presence of
CD177 enables a higher density of PR3 epitopes that result in a
stronger activation effect in response to autoantibody binding
than seen in CD177<sup>neg</sup> neutrophils.

Results
Screening of anti-CD177 monoclonal antibodies identifies
binders that block the CD177:PR3 interaction

We used recombinant CD177 (7) for the generation of
mouse monoclonal antibodies against CD177. Ten of the
resulting hybridoma products were assessed by surface plas-
on resonance (SPR) spectroscopy to determine their binding
affinities for CD177. All 10 immunoglobulin Gs (IgGs) bound
CD177 with high affinity, ranging from 0.14 to 11.9 × 10<sup>-9</sup> M
(Table 1). We attempted to determine the ability of each IgG
to block the binding of PR3 to CD177 by competition ELISA
using an anti-PR3 antibody but were unable to optimize the
assay to produce unambiguous results. We therefore devised a
direct assay using SPR as depicted in Figure 1. We immobili-
zed each anti-CD177 IgG to the sensor chip and subjected them to
two back-to-back ligand flows: the first ligand sample con-
tained only CD177, which was allowed to flow over the
immobilized IgGs until the resonance units (RUs) indicated
near saturation of all binding sites (Fig. 1, A and B); the second
ligand sample containing CD177:PR3 complexes was then
injected, and the resulting effect on the RUs was observed.
Two possible RU responses could be expected. If the IgG in
question does not interfere with the PR3 interaction with
CD177 (i.e., the IgG was a nonblocker), then CD177:PR3
complexes could be exchanged for CD177 in the IgG-binding
sites, leading to a second pronounced increase in the RUs as
the extra mass from PR3 was added to each binding interac-
tion (Fig. 1B). Conversely, if the IgG does prevent interaction
of PR3 with CD177 (i.e., the IgG is a blocker), then no further
RU increase would be possible, but rather a decrease in RUs
during flow of the complex, since bound CD177 will be lost
from the immobilized IgG, and there is insufficient free CD177
in the complex mixture to take its place. To minimize the
concentration of free CD177 in the complex sample, the
concentration used was 10-fold higher than the PR3-binding
affinity, as measured also by SPR (7; Fig. 1B). Using this
assay, we unambiguously identified three PR3 blockers among
the tested IgGs (Fig. 1C, clones 7, 40, and 72), whereas the
remainder were nonblockers (Table 1).

Table 1
Summary of the binding affinities and complex blocking abilities of the anti-CD177 monoclonal antibodies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Antibody (clone)</th>
<th>Affinity (×10&lt;sup&gt;-9&lt;/sup&gt; M)</th>
<th>ELISA (blocking capacity)</th>
<th>SPR (blocking capacity)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7-3-1</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39-5-2</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-6-4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49-3-1</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72-3-1</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73-8-1</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-11-2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82-2-4</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-12-1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92-3-4</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ++ symbol indicates a clear blocking effect in ELISA experiments; – indicates no blocking effect; (+) indicates ambiguity as to a possible blocking effect.
We also tested purified Fab fragments derived from each IgG by papain digestion and, again, confirmed binding of each to CD177pos neutrophils by FACS staining (Fig. 2A).

Next, neutrophils were preincubated with our anti-CD177 IgGs and/or Fab fragments to test if PR3 blockers (clones 7, 40, and 72) interfered with subsequent anti-PR3 IgG binding (Fig. 2B). In contrast to PR3 nonblockers, the PR3 blockers reduced the anti-PR3 staining signal in the CD177pos neutrophil subset.

PR3 IgG-like PR3–ANCAs strongly activate neutrophils for respiratory burst, but their corresponding Fab fragments do not. We therefore tested whether our CD177 binders also produced this response. We incubated isolated primed neutrophils with either anti-CD177 IgG or their corresponding Fabs and then determined to what extent they initiated oxidative burst by measuring the production of superoxide in the resulting aliquots. Though to differing extents, in all cases, the multivalent anti-CD177 IgG provoked respiratory burst in mixed neutrophil pools (Fig. 2C). Their corresponding monovalent Fabs, however, showed no significant stimulatory effect, with most of the resulting superoxide concentrations comparable to the negative control value. These effects also
Figure 2. Anti-CD177 Fab fragments bind to, but do not activate, CD177pos neutrophils. A, freshly isolated neutrophils were incubated with 5 μg/ml anti-CD177 IgG (red line) and anti-CD177 Fab (green line) followed by incubation with a FITC-conjugated goat antimouse IgG (Fab-specific) secondary antibody. Isotype staining is shown in gray. Shown experiments were performed in two sets with two different human blood donors. B, neutrophils were primed with TNFα (2 ng/ml) and incubated with nonblocker or blocker anti-CD177 IgG or corresponding Fab (20 μg/ml), following incubation with anti-PR3-Alexa488 IgG (2.5 μg/ml). Histograms show isotype staining (light gray), mPR3 staining (dark gray), and the effect of anti-PR3-Fab on mPR3 staining.
showed no obvious correlation with either the blocking or nonblocking properties of the individual binders or their relative affinities to CD177. For all further experiments with neutrophils, we chose to proceed with the IgG blocker clone 40 ($K_D = 3.1 \times 10^{-9} \text{ M}$) and the nonblocker clone 80 ($K_D = 2.3 \times 10^{-9} \text{ M}$) since both binders have a CD177 affinity similar to that of PR3 ($K_D = 4.1 \times 10^{-9} \text{ M}$).

Previous work indicated that multivalent (Fab)₂ fragments prepared from patient-derived PR3–ANCAs also activated neutrophils, whereas (Fab)₂ fragments derived from murine anti-PR3 monoclonal IgG could not (16). We accordingly prepared (Fab)₂ fragments from our murine blocker clone 40 by pepsin digestion and assessed their effects on mixed neutrophil pools. Although intact IgG did elicit superoxide release, the corresponding (Fab)₂ did not show this stimulatory effect (Fig. 2D), consistent with the earlier study. These results potentially indicate a role for the Fc in this activation process.

Using neutrophils from CD177-deficient donors, we confirmed that the observed activation effect required CD177 binding. We isolated neutrophils from three donors having no CD177pos neutrophils by FACS staining, in parallel with three donors positive for CD177 showing the typical bimodal neutrophil distribution in FACS (Fig. 3A). We verified the FACS data by anti-CD177 immunoblotting of neutrophil lysates from each donor (Fig. 3B). We then repeated the activation assay with all neutrophil pools using intact blocker clone 40 IgG. As before, all three neutrophil pools from bimodal donors showed strong oxidative burst, whereas no substantial activation effect was seen in any pool from CD177-deficient donors (Fig. 3C).

A PR3 blocking Fab reduces anti-PR3 IgG-stimulated oxidative burst in mixed (CD177pos/mPR3high/CD177neg/mPR3low) neutrophil populations

We next tested whether preincubation of mixed population neutrophils with blocker Fab clone 40 had any effect on the stimulation of superoxide production by anti-PR3 IgG. We first incubated unsorted neutrophils with a saturating amount (20 μg/ml) of either blocker clone 40 or nonblocker clone 80 and, after washing, activated the neutrophils by addition of a monoclonal anti-PR3 antibody. The subsequent superoxide measurements showed that the anti-PR3 monoclonal IgG strongly stimulated the neutrophil pool in all cases, as opposed to treatment with an isotype IgG that provoked only a background response (Fig. 4A, left panel). While the degree of superoxide production in the presence of nonblocker clone 80 was not significantly different than that measured in the absence of Fab or the presence of a non-CD177 binding control Fab, the pool containing blocker clone 40 showed a clearly weaker stimulation and correspondingly less superoxide production, implying that the PR3 blocking effect of clone 40 protects CD177pos neutrophils from activation by anti-PR3 IgG.

FACS staining performed in parallel showed that pretreatment with blocker clone 40 significantly reduced anti-PR3 antibody binding to the CD177pos neutrophil subset, whereas nonblocker and control Fab showed no reduction in mPR3 level (Fig. 4A, right panel).

To verify that the blocker clone 40 Fab was displacing CD177-bound PR3 from the CD177pos neutrophils, we incubated unsorted neutrophils with increasing concentrations of clone 40 Fab and monitored changes in detectable mPR3 by FACS. In the absence of Fab, the peaks corresponding to the CD177pos/mPR3low and CD177pos/mPR3high populations were widely separated; upon addition of the clone 40 Fab, the separation between the peaks (stained for PR3) decreased dose-dependently until they merged, with very little difference distinguishable between them at the highest Fab concentration tested (Fig. 4B). We used two different anti-PR3 monoclonal IgGs recognizing two nonoverlapping PR3 epitopes (Fig. 4C, left panel) for detecting remaining PR3. Preincubation with blocker clone 40 Fab reduced the level of detectable PR3 as detected by both anti-PR3 IgGs, whereas nonblocker clone 80 did not. These observations confirmed that the blocker Fab 40 not only prevented PR3 binding to CD177 in SPR but also on the surfaces of living neutrophils. We then repeated our activation experiment with PR3–ANCAs obtained from AAV patient serum. As in the previous experiment with an anti-PR3 monoclonal IgG, only preincubation with blocker Fab 40 had a negative influence on the stimulation of superoxide production by PR3–ANCAs (Fig. 4D).

The effects on neutrophil activation demonstrated by Fab blocker clone 40 are restricted to the CD177pos/PR3high neutrophil population

Preincubation of unsorted neutrophils with the PR3 blocking clone 40 Fab not only displaced PR3 from the CD177pos population but also affected a clear reduction in the amount of superoxide produced as a result of stimulation with either monoclonal anti-PR3 IgG or PR3–ANCA IgG isolated from AAV patient serum. In order to more precisely define the effect of blocker clone 40, we repeated the PR3–ANCA stimulation experiments with sorted neutrophils. We used magnetic cell sorting with our isolated neutrophils to produce pure CD177pos/mPR3low and CD177pos/mPR3high preparations (Fig. 5A) and tested them separately by preincubation with 20 μg/ml blocker clone 40 Fab before washing and addition of the stimulatory PR3–ANCAs. As previously shown (15), both pure populations were activated by the addition of PR3–ANCAs, with the CD177pos/mPR3high population producing nearly twice as much superoxide as the CD177pos/mPR3low population (Fig. 5B). Preincubation with nonblocker clone 80
showed no effect on superoxide production; the values for both populations in the presence of this Fab were identical to those either without added Fab or preincubated with a control Fab. Preincubation with blocker clone 40 showed no measurable effect on superoxide production by stimulated CD177neg/mPR3low neutrophils but a substantial effect with CD177pos/mPR3high neutrophils. The presence of clone 40 completely eliminated the difference in superoxide production between the two pure neutrophil populations.

Preincubation with Fabs does not affect cell viability

To assess neutrophil viability during our experiments, we stained isolated neutrophils with necrosis and apoptosis markers with and without Fab incubation. Neutrophils were incubated alone, with blocker clone 40 Fab and with non-blocker clone 80 Fab for 2 h on ice. After incubation, washed cells were incubated with annexin V (Ann V; for detection of externalized phosphatidyserine, an indicator of apoptosis) and 7-aminoactinomycin D (7-AAD; a DNA intercalator, to determine membrane integrity that is lost during necrosis) and assessed by FACS. The staining results showed that >90% of the neutrophils remained viable for the duration of the incubations. No significant differences in either the number of apoptotic or necrotic cells was seen after incubation with either Fab, demonstrating that no blocker-induced decrease in superoxide generation was due to cell death (Fig. 6).

Discussion

PR3 is a member of a family of neutrophil serine proteases important in inflammation and is known to process extracellular matrix proteins (3), cell surface receptors (16, 17), cytokines (18, 19), and intracellular effectors, including kinase inhibitors (20), cytoskeletal proteins (21), and Ann V (22). As a major component of azurophilic granules, it is also released in abundance from neutrophils during degranulation. Although it is a soluble protein, it is detectable on the extracellular surface of all neutrophils and readily adheres to the membranes of nonmyeloid cells as well (7). PR3 possesses a patch of hydrophobic residues on its surface that have been suggested to be responsible for its interaction with membranes (23), though definitive proof for this supposition has yet to be reported. To date, the only confirmed (nonsubstrate) interaction partner for PR3 is CD177, a glycosylphosphatidylinositol-anchored protein with no clearly defined function. Because of its high-affinity complex with PR3, CD177 is responsible for the abundant mPR3 occurring in neutrophils expressing it. As the target of autoantibodies, mPR3 is a central player in ANCA vasculitis that, in an as yet unknown manner, facilitates autoantibody-induced respiratory burst and degranulation, a process normally requiring multiple receptor-initiated signaling cascades (2). An outstanding question here is exactly how molecules that do not obviously function as receptor ligands and do not themselves cross the plasma membrane can nevertheless activate the intracellular signaling pathways necessary for the degranulation process. The fact that CD177pos neutrophils react more strongly in this regard than CD177neg neutrophils could be an indication that CD177—though not recognized by PR3–ANCAs—has, like PR3, a role in facilitating ANCA-initiated neutrophil activation, beyond serving as a platform for additional ANCA epitopes because of complexation with PR3. The experiments presented here address this possibility directly by blocking CD177–PR3 complex formation in situ and probing the effect of this epitope removal on the ANCA-induced activation response.
The clear result was that once the bulk of the CD177-bound PR3 was titrated away from the neutrophil surface, the ANCA sensitivity of the CD177pos population was fully reduced to that of the CD177neg population. ANCA addition still elicited a respiratory burst from these neutrophils but this via the remaining directly membrane-bound mPR3 that exists in both populations. These results—along with the fact that CD177neg neutrophils are also sensitive to ANCAs—make clear that CD177 is not required for the ANCA-induced activation effect. They also support the simplest explanation for the enhanced ANCA sensitivity of CD177pos neutrophils, namely that the presence of CD177—likely all of which is "presents" PR3 to the extracellular environment in a uniform orientation that maximizes accessibility to the most common ANCA epitopes.
Reducing surface PR3 reduces PR3–ANCA-induced activation

PR3–ANCA epitopes (7). Our results imply that this increase in binding sites is sufficient to account for the increased ANCA sensitivity of these neutrophils, since physically removing them reduces ANCA sensitivity to that of CD177neg neutrophils.

The results do not answer the question of what function(s) CD177 actually has in neutrophils and why it is found in complex with PR3. They also do not rule out entirely that CD177 can participate in the ANCA-induced activation process; the fact that anti-CD177 IgGs provoke a response similar to that of PR3–ANCAs provides clues for further studies into the role of CD177 in neutrophil biology. The newly developed antibodies described here will be of great value in analyzing the function of CD177 in such experiments and may also be of

Figure 5. Blocking anti-CD177 Fab only affects the activation of CD177pos/PR3high neutrophils. A, neutrophils from CD177/mPR3 bimodal donors were separated by magnetic cell sorting. Panel shows a representative separation after sorting into CD177pos/mPR3high and CD177neg/mPR3low neutrophil subset. F, blocking of neutrophil activation by anti-CD177 Fab clone 40 is restricted to the CD177pos/mPR3high neutrophil subset. As described for Figure 3A; sorted neutrophils (CD177pos/mPR3high, dark gray bars and CD177neg/mPR3low, light gray bars) were assayed for superoxide generation. Because a PR3–ANCA epitope could be blocked by the monoclonal PR3 antibody used for the sorting procedure, polyclonal human PR3–ANCAs (75 μg/ml) were used for stimulation (n = 3). Single experiment data and means ± SD are depicted. Differences between groups were determined by multiple t test. Comparison between treatment was done using one-way ANOVA and Tukey’s multiple comparison test, * indicates p < 0.05, ** indicates p < 0.01. ANCA, antineutrophil cytoplasmic autoantibody; mPR3, membrane-bound PR3; PR3, proteinase 3.

Figure 6. Anti-CD177 Fabs do not influence neutrophil viability during incubation. Isolated neutrophils were incubated with buffer control, clone 40, or clone 80 Fabs (each 20 μg/ml), respectively. After 2 h, cells were washed and double stained with annexinV/7-AAD. Typical histograms and the corresponding statistical analysis of the percentage of viable (annexinVneg/7-AADneg, open bar), primary necrotic (annexinVneg/7-AADpos, dark gray bar), and apoptotic (annexinVpos, light gray bar) cells is depicted (n = 3). 7-AAD, 7-acetomycin D.
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value in the treatment of AAV. Since the removal of CD177-bound PR3 results in a substantial reduction in ANCA-induced neutrophil activation, blocking this interaction in vivo could prove beneficial for PR3–AAV patients, particularly those with large CD177pop neutrophil populations.

Experimental procedures

Hybridoma generation

Recombinant CD177 was prepared as described previously (7) and provided to Biogenes GmbH for inoculation of mice. Hybridomas delivered by Biogenes were cocultured on feeder cells obtained from peritoneal lavage of Black6 mice in hybridoma medium: Dulbecco’s minimal essential medium (catalog no.: D5871; Sigma) supplemented with 20% fetal calf serum (Merck), 2 mM glutamine (Gibco), 1 mM sodium pyruvate (catalog no.: S8636; Sigma), and antibiotics (penicillin/streptomycin; Gibco). All the IgGs used in this study were isotype IgG1.

IgG isolation and Fab preparation

Stable hybridoma cultures were grown in 300 cm² culture flasks (TPP) in 50 ml hybridoma medium. Cells were split 1:10 every 48 h (at 80–90% confluence) and with complete exchange into fresh medium. Collected medium aliquots containing IgG were pooled and passed over a 5 ml Protein G Agarose column (GE Healthcare) washed with PBS (Merck) and eluted with 1 M Tris, pH 8.0 for neutralization. Elution fractions were 50 mM glycine (Sigma), 150 mM NaCl (Sigma), pH 3.5 directly into 1 M Hepes, pH 7.4, concentrated in 10 kD MWCO Amicons, and subjected to size-exclusion chromatography as for the IgG.

(Fab)2 preparation

(Fab)2 fragments were prepared from purified IgG by incubation with immobilized pepsin (Pepsin–Agarose; Sigma) according to the manufacturer’s instructions. Digested IgG was passed over Protein G agarose to remove Fc, and undigested IgG- and Fab-containing fractions were pooled, concentrated in 10 kD MWCO Amicons, and subjected to size-exclusion chromatography as for the IgG.

SPR experiments

Experiments were performed on a ProteOn XPR36 instrument (Bio-Rad) using standard amine chemistry for coupling IgG to the sensor chip (GLH sensor chips; Bio-Rad). Ligand dilution series were prepared in ProteOn running buffer (PBS supplemented with 0.005% Tween-20 [Sigma]).

Neutrophil preparation

Blood neutrophils from healthy and AAV patient donors were obtained (Ethic Votum EA1/277/11, approved by the Ethics Commission of the Charité, Berlin, in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki) and purified as described previously (19). Briefly, neutrophils from healthy volunteers were isolated from heparinized whole blood by red blood cell sedimentation with 1% dextran, followed by Histopaque 1.083 (Sigma) density gradient centrifugation, and hypotonic erythrocyte lysis. Neutrophils were centrifuged and resuspended in Hank’s balanced salt solution with calcium and magnesium (Hank’s balanced salt solution+; Merck). Cell viability was determined by Trypan blue exclusion and exceeded 99%. PR3–ANCA IgG was prepared from the plasmapheresis fluid of a single AAV patient, a 29-year-old male with active PR3–ANCA granulomatosis with polyangiitis, with ear, nose, and throat, eye, lung, and crescentic glomerulonephritis disease manifestations. The use of residual material, such as plasmapheresis fluid, was covered by hospital regulations at admission with no requirement of informed consent.

Separation of CD177pos/mPR3high and CD177neg/mPR3low neutrophil subsets by magnetic beads

Neutrophil subsets were separated with magnetic-activated cell sorting (MACS) separation columns (Miltenyi Biotec). Isolated neutrophils were stained with monoclonal anti-PR3 (clone 43-8-3-1). MACS rat antimouse IgG1 beads were added, and cells were pipetted onto a MACS LD column, and the flowthrough containing the nonlabeled CD177neg/mPR3low neutrophils was collected. Columns were removed from the magnet to allow collection of the labeled CD177pos/mPR3high cells. The purity of the two separated subsets was assessed by flow cytometry using a FITC-labeled anti-CD177 IgG.

Membrane PR3 expression on neutrophils

Neutrophils were stimulated with 2 ng/ml tumor necrosis factor alpha (TNFα) (30 min, 37 °C; R&D Systems) to increase the amount of membrane PR3. Cells were washed and stained with monoclonal anti-PR3 (clone 81–3–3)-Alexa488-conjugated IgG (2.5 μg/ml; 20 min on ice). mPR3 expression was assessed by flow cytometry using a FACSCalibur instrument. Ten thousand events per sample were assayed. For blocking experiments, TNFα-primed neutrophils were incubated with 20 μg/ml anti-CD177 IgG or Fab (60 min, on ice). The capacity to block anti-PR3 IgG binding was tested by subsequent incubation with the Alexa488-conjugated anti-PR3 IgG.

Measurement of respiratory burst

Superoxide was measured using the assay of superoxide dismutase–inhibitable reduction of ferricytochrome c. Neutrophils were pretreated with 5 μg/ml cytochalasin B for 15 min on ice. Cells (0.75 × 10⁶/ml) were primed with 2 ng/ml TNFα for 15 min before stimulating antibodies (or Fabs) were
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added. The final concentration was 5 μg/ml for monoclonal antibodies or Fabs.

For superoxide blocking experiments, cells were incubated with 20 μg/ml or with indicated amounts of anti-C177 Fab during the TNFα priming, before stimulating monoclonal anti–PR3 (clone 43-8-3-1) or 75 μg/ml purified PR3–ANCA preparations were added.

Experiments were performed in 96-well plates at 37 °C for up to 45 min, and the absorbance of samples with and without 300 U/ml superoxide dismutase was measured at 550 nm using a microplate reader (Molecular Devices).

Flow cytometry Ann V/7–AAD staining

To monitor phosphatidylserine externalization and cell death, 10^6 neutrophils were washed in ice-cold PBS and resuspended in 200 μl ice-cold Ann V binding buffer (10 mM Hepes, pH 7.4, 140 mM NaCl, 2.5 mM CaCl₂) and incubated with FITC-Ann V (BD Biosciences; 1:100 dilution) for 15 min at room temperature protected from light. 7–AAD (Thermo Fisher Scientific; final 1 μg/ml) was then added. Analysis was performed within 1 h.

Statistical analyses

We used Prism 8.4.3 (GraphPad Software, Inc) and performed multiple t tests and one-way ANOVA with Tukey’s post hoc test. * indicates p < 0.05 and **p < 0.01.

Data availability

All data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this published article.


Funding and additional information—This work was funded by Else-Kröner-Fresenius Stiftung grant 2013_A73 (to R. K. and S. F. M.) and Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (project number: 246135856; to R. K.).

Conflict of interest—The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest with the contents of this article.

Abbreviations—The abbreviations used are: 7-AAD, 7-actinomycin D; ANCA, antineutrophil cytoplasmic autoantibody; Ann V, annexin V; FACS, fluorescence-activated cell sorting; IgG, immunoglobulin G; MACS, magnetic-activated cell sorting; mPR3, membrane-bound PR3; mPR3low, low amounts of mPR3; mPR3high, high amounts of mPR3; MWCO, molecular weight cutoff; PR3, proteinase 3; RU, resonance unit; SPR, surface plasmon resonance; TNFα, tumor necrosis factor alpha.

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