Journal of Neuroscience and Neurodevelopmental Disorders (JNDD)

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Review Paper

Neurons, and Narratives: A Contemporary Review of Temporal Lobe Epilepsy

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Citation: Richard L. Rogers Networks, Neurons, and Narratives: A Contemporary Review of Temporal Lobe Epilepsy V1(2),2025

Received date: September 29, 2025: **Accepted date**: October 01,2025: **Published date**: October 03, 2025
Keywords: Temporal lobe epilepsy, mesial temporal sclerosis, hippocampus, seizures, epilepsy surgery

Abstract

Temporal Lobe Epilepsy (TLE) is the most common form of focal epilepsy in adults and represents a significant neurological disorder characterized by recurrent, unprovoked seizures originating in the temporal lobe. It is a heterogeneous condition encompassing a wide spectrum of etiologies, clinical manifestations, neuroimaging features, and treatment responses. Despite substantial advances in neuroimaging, electrophysiology, and molecular neuroscience, TLE remains challenging to diagnose and manage, particularly in patients with drug-resistant epilepsy. This review synthesizes current knowledge on the epidemiology, neuroanatomy, pathophysiology, clinical features, diagnostic approaches, and therapeutic strategies for TLE, with particular emphasis on mesial temporal lobe epilepsy (MTLE). Emerging research directions, including network-based models, biomarkers, and novel therapies, are also discussed to provide a comprehensive and updated perspective.

Introduction

Epilepsy affects over 50 million individuals worldwide, making it one of the most prevalent chronic neurological disorders. Among its various forms, Temporal Lobe Epilepsy (TLE) is the most frequently encountered focal epilepsy, especially in adolescents and adults. TLE is characterized byseizures arising from the temporal lobe structures, which are critically involved in memory, emotion, and sensory processing. As a result, seizures often present with complex semiology and are frequently associated with cognitive and psychiatric comorbidities

Historically, TLE has played a pivotal role in advancing the understanding of epilepsy, particularly through surgical studies and neuropathological observations. The identification of hippocampal sclerosis as a hallmark of mesial temporal lobe epilepsy revolutionized concepts of epileptogenesis. However, contemporary research has shifted from a strictly focal lesion-based view to a distributed network disorder involving widespread cortical and subcortical regions. This review aims to provide an integrated overview of TLE, bridging classical concepts with modern advances.

Epidemiology and Classification.

TLE accounts for approximately 60–70% of focal epilepsies in adults. The incidence peaks in childhood and early adulthood, though onset can occur at any age. Risk factors include febrile seizures in early life, central nervous system infections, traumatic brain injury, stroke, and genetic predisposition.

Clinically, TLE is broadly classified into:

1. **Mesial Temporal Lobe Epilepsy (MTLE):** Originates from mesial structures such as the hippocampus, amygdala, and parahippocampal gyrus. It is commonly associated with hippocampal sclerosis.

2 **Lateral (Neocortical) Temporal Lobe Epilepsy:** Arises from the lateral temporal neocortex and is often linked to tumors, cortical dysplasia, or vascular malformations

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MTLE is the most prevalent and best-characterized subtype, frequently associated with drug resistance but also with favorable surgical outcomes when appropriately selected.

Neuroanatomy and Pathophysiology

The temporal lobe contains complex and highly interconnected structures involved in learning, memory, and emotion. The hippocampus, a central structure in MTLE, is particularly vulnerable to injury due to its excitatory circuitry and sensitivity to metabolic stress,

Hippocampal Sclerosis

Hippocampal sclerosis (HS) is characterized by selective neuronal loss, gliosis, and synaptic reorganization, particularly in the CA1, CA3, and dentate hilus regions. Mossy fiber sprouting, a pathological hallmark, leads to aberrant excitatory circuits that facilitate seizure generation and propagation.

Network Dysfunction

Modern concepts of TLE emphasize epilepsy as a disorder of neural networks rather than a single epileptogenic focus. Functional and structural imaging studies reveal altered connectivity between the temporal lobe and extratemporal regions, including the frontal lobe, thalamus, and limbic system. These network abnormalities may explain cognitive deficits and psychiatric comorbidities observed in TLE patients.

Molecular and Cellular Mechanisms

At the molecular level, TLE involves an imbalance between excitatory and inhibitory neurotransmission. Alterations in glutamate receptors, GABAergic interneurons, ion channels, and inflammatory pathways contribute to hyperexcitability. Neuroinflammation, blood–brain barrier dysfunction, and epigenetic changes are increasingly recognized as key contributors to epileptogenesis.

Clinical Manifestations

The clinical presentation of TLE is diverse and often stereotyped within individual patients. Seizures are typically focal onset and may progress to bilateral tonic–clonic seizures

Seizure Semiology
Common features include:

- **Auras:** Epigastric rising sensation, fear, déjà vu, jamais vu, or olfactory hallucinations.
- Impaired Awareness Seizures**:** Behavioral arrest, staring, automatisms such as lip-smacking or hand movements.
- **Postictal Symptoms:** Confusion, amnesia, headache, and fatigue.

Cognitive and Psychiatric Comorbidities

Memory impairment, particularly affecting episodic and verbal memory, is a hallmark of TLE. Psychiatric conditions such as depression, anxiety, and psychosis occur at higher rates than in the general population, reflecting shared neural substrates and network dysfunction

Diagnostic Evaluation

Accurate diagnosis of TLE requires an integrated approach combining clinical history, electrophysiology, and neuroimaging.

Electroencephalography (EEG)

Antiseizure medications (ASMs) are the first-line treatment. Commonly used drugs include carbamazepine, levetiracetam, lamotrigine, and valproate. However, approximately one-third of TLE patients develop drug-resistant epilepsy

Surgical Treatment

Epilepsy surgery is a well-established option for drug-resistant TLE, particularly MTLE. Anterior temporal lobectomy and Interictal EEG may show anterior temporal spikes or sharp waves, while ictal recordings help localize seizure onset. Prolonged video-EEG monitoring remains the gold standard for presurgical evaluation.

Neuroimaging

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is essential for identifying structural abnormalities such as hippocampal sclerosis, tumors, or cortical dysplasia. Advanced techniques, including high-resolution MRI, diffusion tensor imaging (DTI), and functional MRI (fMRI), provide insights into network alterations.

Neuropsychological Assessment

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Comprehensive neuropsychological testing evaluates cognitive function and lateralization of language and memory, playing a crucial role in surgical planning.

Management Strategies

Pharmacological Treatment

Epilepsy surgery is a well-established option for drug-resistant TLE, particularly MTLE. Anterior temporal lobectomy and selective amygdalohippocampectomy achieve long-term seizure freedom in 60–80% of carefully selected patients

Neuromodulation and Emerging Therapies

For patients unsuitable for resective surgery, neuromodulatory approaches such as vagus nerve stimulation, responsive neurostimulation, and deep brain For patients unsuitable for resective surgery, neuromodulatory approaches such as vagus nerve stimulation, responsive neurostimulation, and deep brain

Future Directions

Advances in connectomics, machine learning, and biomarker discovery are transforming the understanding of TLE. Personalized medicine approaches integrating genetic, molecular, and network-level data hold promise for improving diagnosis, predicting treatment response, and preventingepileptogenesis.

Conclusion

Temporal Lobe Epilepsy is a complex and multifaceted neurological disorder that extends beyond the temporal lobe to involve distributed brain networks. While significant progress has been made in elucidating its mechanisms and improving treatment outcomes, challenges remain, particularly in managing drug-resistant cases and addressing cognitive and psychiatric comorbidities. Continued interdisciplinary research is essential to translate emerging insights into more effective and personalized therapies

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