

1 **FGIN-1-27, an agonist at translocator protein 18 kDa (TSPO), has anti-anxiety and anti-panic**
2 **effects in non-mammalian models**

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1 FGIN-1-27 is an agonist at the translocator protein 18 kDa (TSPO), a cholesterol transporter that is
2 associated with neurosteroidogenesis. This protein has been identified as a peripheral binding site
3 for benzodiazepines; in anamniotes, however, a second TSPO isoform that is absent in amniotes has
4 been implicated in erythropoiesis. Functional conservation of the central benzodiazepine binding
5 site located in GABA_A receptors has been demonstrated in anamniotes and amniotes alike; however,
6 the same was not previously demonstrated for TSPO. FGIN-1-27 reduced anxiety-like behavior in
7 the zebrafish light/dark preference test which are comparable to diazepam with fewer sedative
8 effects. Similarly, FGIN-1-27 also reduced anxiety- and fear-like behaviors in the defense test
9 battery in wall lizards, again producing fewer sedative-like effects than diazepam; the
10 benzodiazepine was also unable to reduce fear-like behaviors in this species. These results A)
11 underline the functional conservation of TSPO in defensive behavior in anamniotes; B) strengthen
12 the proposal of using anamniote behavior as models in behavioral pharmacology; and C) suggest
13 TSPO/neurosteroidogenesis as a target in treating anxiety disorders.

14 Keywords: translocator protein 18 kDa; fear; anxiety; zebrafish; wall lizard; benzodiazepines

15

16 **1. Introduction**

17 The translocator protein 18 kDa (TSPO, mitochondrial benzodiazepine receptor, peripheral benzo-
18 diazepam receptor) was first identified as a peripheral binding site for diazepam, but later identified
19 as part of the mitochondrial cholesterol transport pathway that is associated with the regulation of
20 cellular proliferation, immunomodulation, porphyrin transport and heme biosynthesis, anion trans-
21 port, regulation of steroidogenesis, and apoptosis (Casellas et al. 2002). This transporter is highly
22 expressed in steroidogenic tissues; in the central nervous system, its expression is mainly restricted
23 to ependymal cells and glia, in which it is responsible for the local synthesis of neuroactive steroids
24 such as allopregnanolone (Papadopoulos et al. 2006). This latter neurosteroid, in its turn, positively
25 modulates GABA_A receptors, especially those involved in tonic inhibition (Smith et al. 2009;
26 Maguire et al. 2012). As such, TSPO has been proposed as a pharmacological target for the treat-
27 ment of neurological and psychiatric disorders associated with decreased GABAergic tone, such as
28 anxiety disorders (Romeo et al. 1993; de Mateos-Verchere et al. 1998; Kita et al. 2004; Costa et al.
29 2011; Matsuda et al. 2011; Nin et al. 2011; Pinna and Rasmusson 2012; Pinna and Rasmusson 2012;

1 Perna et al. 2014) and epilepsy (Ugale et al. 2004), as well as for the fine control of stress responses
2 (Gunn et al. 2011; Maguire et al. 2012; Maguire 2014). TSPO agonists have been demonstrated to
3 produce anti-anxiety and anti-conflict effects in rodents with both systemic (Kita et al. 2004; Costa
4 et al. 2011) and intra-hippocampal (Bitran et al. 2000) injections; these effects are blocked by
5 GABA_A receptor antagonists and/or 5 α -reductase blockers, implicating neurosteroidogenesis and
6 GABA_A receptors in these responses (Bitran et al. 2000). These effects are spared in adrenalectomized
7 and castrated animals, suggesting that they are not mediated by peripheral steroidogenesis,
8 but rather by the production of neurosteroids in the brain (Romeo et al. 1993). Nonetheless, octadecaneuropeptide,
9 a diazepam-binding inhibitor peptide which acts through both the central benzodiazepine receptor (CBR) and TSPO,
10 produces anxiety-like behavior in both rodents (de Mateos-Verchere et al. 1998) and fish (Matsuda et al. 2011).
11
12 TSPO is highly conserved, being present in Bacteria, Archaea and Eukarya domains (Fan and Papadopoulos 2013).
13 Anamniotes and invertebrates possess a single isoform, while amniotes possess two TSPO isoforms (Fan et al. 2009);
14 interestingly, while no functional divergence is predicted to appear between *tspo* (found in invertebrates and basal vertebrates)
15 and *tspo1* (found in amniotes), a functional divergence was detected in TSPO2 (Fan and Papadopoulos 2013). Some of the
16 neurobehavioral functions of this protein, on the other hand, seen to be conserved. In zebrafish, for example,
17 benzodiazepines have been shown to affect a plethora of anxiety-like behaviors, from bottom-dwelling (Bencan et al. 2009;
18 Egan et al. 2009) and dark preference (Maximino et al. 2010; Maximino et al. 2011) to shoal cohesion (Gebauer et al. 2011)
19 and cocaine withdrawal-induced anxiety (López-Patiño et al. 2008). Likewise, benzodiazepines decrease tonic immobility duration
20 and the following freezing and explosive behavior in a defensive behavior battery in the wall lizard *Tropidurus oreadicus*,
21 and also increase exploratory behavior in the same test (Maximino et al. 2014). In the separation stress paradigm,
22 benzodiazepines attenuate separation stress-induced distress vocalizations in chicks in the anxiety phase, but not in the
23 depression phase (Warnick et al. 2014).

1 2009). Thus, agonists at the CBR decrease fear- and anxiety-like behavior in both amniotes and
2 anamniotes. Moreover, some evidence regarding the neurosteroidogenesis pathway in behavioral
3 control has been suggested by the observation that allopregnanolone has an anticonvulsant effect in
4 zebrafish (Baxendale et al. 2012), and that chronic fluoxetine treatment upregulates the expression
5 of genes from the neurosteroidogenesis pathway in this species (Wong et al. 2013). These results
6 suggest that some downstream effectors of neurosteroidogenesis are conserved, although it is not
7 known whether the role of TSPO in behavioral control *per se* is conserved. A comparative approach
8 could untangle this question, especially if species at the base of the amniote and anamniote clades
9 are used. In this paper, we describe the behavioral effects of FGIN-1-27, a TSPO agonist, in ze-
10 brafish *Danio rerio* and wall lizards *Tropidurus oreadicus* and compare these responses with the ef-
11 fects of diazepam, an agonist at the CBR.

12

13 **2. Methods**

14 **2.1. Experiment 1: Effects of FGIN-1-27 and diazepam on dark preference in zebrafish**

15 *2.1.1. Animals and husbandry*

16 XX adult zebrafish from the *longfin* phenotype were acquired in a local aquarium shop and kept in
17 collective tanks at the laboratory for at least 2 weeks before experiments started. Conditions in the
18 maintenance tank were kept stable, as per recommendations in Lawrence (2007). While Brazilian
19 legislation and current guidelines do not regulate fish use in laboratory research, recommendations
20 in Piato and Rosemberg (2014) were followed to ensure ethical principles in animal care and
21 throughout experiments.

22

23 *2.1.2. Drug administration*

24 Diazepam was dissolved in 40% propylene glycol, 10% ethyl alcohol, 5% sodium benzoate, and
25 1.5% benzyl alcohol (Maximino et al. 2010). FGIN-1-27 was dissolved in 1% DMSO to which one

1 or two drops of Tween 80 was added before sonication into a fine suspension (Auta et al. 1993).
2 Drugs were diluted to their final concentrations and injected i.p. in a volume of 1 μ l/0.1 g b.w.
3 (Kinkel et al. 2010).

4

5 2.1.3. Scototaxis assay

6 The light/dark preference (scototaxis) assay was performed as described in Maximino et al. (2013).
7 Briefly, 30 min after injection animals were transferred individually to the central compartment of a
8 black and white tank (15 cm X 10 cm X 45 cm h X d X l) for a 3-min. acclimation period, after
9 which the doors which delimit this compartment were removed and the animal was allowed to
10 freely explore the apparatus for 15 min. While the whole experimental tank was illuminated from
11 above by an homogeneous light source, due to the reflectivity of the apparatus walls and floor aver-
12 age illumination (measured just above the water line) above the black compartment was 225 ± 64.2
13 (mean \pm S.D.) lux, while in the white compartment it was 307 ± 96.7 lux. The following variables
14 were recorded:

15 *time on the white compartment*: the time spent in the white half of the tank (percentage of the
16 trial);

17 *squares crossed*: the number of 10 cm² squares crossed by the animal in the white compart-
18 ment; *latency to white*: the time to first entry in the white compartment (s);

19 *erratic swimming*: the number of “erratic swimming” events, defined as a zig-zag, fast, unpre-
20 dictable course of swimming of short duration;

21 *freezing*: the proportional duration of freezing events (in % of time in the white compartment),
22 defined as complete cessation of movements with the exception of eye and operculae move-
23 ments;

24 *thigmotaxis*: the proportional duration of thigmotaxis events (in % of time in the white com-
25 partment), defined as swimming in a distance of 2 cm or less from the white compartment’s

1 walls;

2 *risk assessment*: the number of “risk assessment” events, defined as a fast (<1 s) entry in the
3 white compartment followed by re-entry in the black compartment, or as a partial entry in the
4 white compartment (i.e., the pectoral fin does not cross the midline);

5 Video records of the experiments were manually registered by two observers blind to treatment (in-
6 ter- observer reliability > 0.85) using X-Plo-Rat 2005 (<http://scotty.ffclrp.usp.br>).

7

8 **2.2. Experiment 2: Effects of FGIN-1-27 and diazepam on the defense test battery in *Tropidu-*** 9 ***rus oreadicus***

10 2.2.1. *Animals and husbandry*

11 120 adult wall lizards (*Tropidurus oreadicus*) of either sex, ranging from 61-96 mm in rostro-cloa-
12 cal length, were captured in Marabá, PA, Brazil, between February and March. The animals were
13 inspected for mites, which were removed with forceps before treatment with de-miting solution as
14 described by the manufacturer (Reptile Relief, Natural Chemistry, Norwalk, USA). All of the
15 lizards were treated with 50 mg/kg fenbendazole, p.o., and then housed according to recommenda-
16 tions for anoline lizards (Sanger et al. 2008) for at least 2 weeks before the experiments began. Ani-
17 mals were housed in groups of four in standard laboratory rat cages (42 cm length x 27.5 cm width
18 x 21 cm height) with mango tree sticks collected from the outdoors to provide perches. Before using
19 the sticks, they were sterilized for 15 min in an autoclave. To prevent escape, screen meshes were
20 inserted in the cage tops. The bottoms of the cages were covered with synthetic cage carpet (Repti
21 Cage Carpet CC-10, Zoo Med, Costa Mesa, USA) placed above a heater plate (Repti Therm U.T.H.
22 Under Tank RH-6, Zoo Med, Costa Mesa, USA) that kept the temperature above the carpet at an av-
23 erage of 28°C. The cages were misted with water twice daily, thus raising the humidity within each
24 cage to approximately 85% (Sanger et al. 2008). The animals had *ad libitum* access to drinking wa-
25 ter. The animals were fed three times weekly with commercial ration (Shrimp mix, Nutral, Monte

1 Mor, Brazil) and once per week with captured crickets.

2

3 2.2.2. Drug administration

4 FGIN-1-27 and diazepam were prepared as in Experiment 1 and injected intraperitoneally with a
5 volume of 0.5 ml of either vehicle or drug 30 min before behavioral tests.

6

7 2.2.3. Defense test battery

8 The defense test battery was applied as described in Maximino et al. (2014). Briefly, tonic immobil-
9 ity was induced by placing the animal on its back in the center of a 10 cm diameter circular open
10 field and applying pressure to the thorax and pelvis while restraining the limbs. When the lizard
11 ceased struggling, it was slowly released, and the time taken for it to resume an upright posture was
12 recorded (Hennig 1979). After the animal spontaneously ceased tonic immobility, The following be-
13 havioral endpoints were recorded after each of these manipulations:

14 *freezing*: the lack of limb, neck, or tongue movements for more than 5 s in an upright posi-
15 tion;

16 *circling*: a high-velocity escape attempt with a latency of less than 10 s after release, usually
17 leading to circling around the edges of the apparatus, and quantified as the number of com-
18 plete circles made near the walls;

19 *tongue-flicking*: repeatedly licking the air with the tongue;

20 *ventilatory frequency*: the average number of inspiratory responses per minute;

21 *total locomotion*: the number of 2 cm² squares crossed by normal locomotor responses (i.e.,
22 not concomitant to circling); can be superimposed to tongue-flicking.

23 These behavioral endpoints were manually recorded using EthoLog 2.2 (Ottoni 2000), and the fre-
24 quencies and duration were calculated.

25

1 2.3. Statistical analysis

2 The data were analyzed using two-way ANOVAs, with treatment and dose as between-subjects fac-
3 tors, followed by Tukey's HSD whenever appropriate; planned comparisons were between different
4 doses of a given drug and its vehicle and between same doses of both drugs. All statistical analyses
5 were made using R 3.1.3. Data are presented graphically as means \pm S.E.M.

7 **3. Results**

8 **3.1. Experiment 1**

9 Main effects of drug ($F_{1,107} = 91.877$, $p < 0.0001$) and dose ($F_{5,107} = 36.464$, $p < 0.0001$), as well as
10 an interaction effect ($F_{5,107} = 4.924$, $p = 0.000428$) were observed on time on white (Figure 1A);
11 post-hoc tests uncovered differences between all doses except the highest in relation to controls in
12 diazepam-treated animals ($p < 0.001$) and between all doses in relation to controls in FGIN-1-27-
13 treated animals ($p < 0.001$). Finally, differences were also observed between FGIN-1-27- and di-
14 azepam-treated animals at doses of 0.56 mg/kg ($p = 0.0012$), 1.2 mg/kg ($p < 0.0001$), and 2.4 mg/kg
15 ($p = 0.0002$).

16 Main effects of drug ($F_{1,107} = 17.9$, $p < 0.0001$) and dose ($F_{5,107} = 211.6$, $p < 0.0001$), as well as an
17 interaction effect ($F_{5,107} = 20.0$, $p < 0.0001$), were found for risk assessment (Figure 1B). Post-hoc
18 tests uncovered differences between vehicle-treated and diazepam-treated animals at all doses ($p <$
19 0.0001), and between vehicle-treated and FGIN-1-27-treated animals at all doses ($p < 0.0001$).
20 Moreover, differences between diazepam- and FGIN-1-27-treated animals were observed at 1.1
21 mg/kg ($p = 0.012$) and 2.3 mg/kg ($p < 0.0001$).

22 A main effect of dose ($F_{5,107} = 111.547$, $p < 0.0001$), but not drug ($F_{1,107} = 0.643$), was found for
23 thigmotaxis (Figure 1C); an interaction effect was also found ($F_{5,107} = 10.536$, $p < 0.0001$). Post-hoc
24 tests unveiled differences between vehicle-treated and diazepam-treated animals at doses above
25 0.28 mg/kg ($p < 0.01$), as well as between all FGIN-1-27 doses and vehicle-treated animals ($p <$

1 0.0001). Differences were also observed between diazepam- and FGIN-1-27-treated zebrafish at
2 doses of 0.14 mg/kg ($p = 0.0065$) and 1.1 mg/kg ($p = 0.044$).
3 Main effects of drug ($F_{1,107} = 89.134$, $p < 0.0001$) and dose ($F_{5,107} = 47.418$, $p < 0.0001$), as well as
4 an interaction effect ($F_{5,107} = 6.921$, $p < 0.0001$), were found for freezing (Figure 1D). Post-hoc tests
5 uncovered differences between vehicle-treated and diazepam-treated animals at all doses ($p <$
6 0.001), and between FGIN-1-27-treated and vehicle-treated animals at 0.28 mg/kg and higher doses
7 ($p < 0.001$). Differences were also found between diazepam- and FGIN-1-27-treated zebrafish at
8 doses of 0.14 mg/kg ($p = 0.03$), 1.1 mg/kg ($p < 0.0001$), and 2.3 mg/kg ($p < 0.0001$).
9 Main effects of drug ($F_{1,107} = 14.46$, $p < 0.0001$) and dose ($F_{5,107} = 42.67$, $p < 0.0001$), as well as an
10 interaction effect ($F_{5,107} = 26.31$, $p < 0.0001$), were found for erratic swimming (Figure 1E). Post-
11 tests uncovered no statistically significant differences between vehicle-treated and diazepam-treated
12 animals at any dose ($p > 0.05$), while FGIN-1-27-treated animals were significantly different be-
13 tween vehicle-treated animals at doses of 0.28 mg/kg ($p = 0.0001$), 1.1 mg/kg ($p < 0.001$) and 2.3
14 mg/kg ($p < 0.0001$). Finally, differences were observed between FGIN-1-27- and diazepam-treated
15 animals at 0.28 mg/kg ($p = 0.021$), 1.1 mg/kg ($p = 0.05$), and 2.3 mg/kg ($p < 0.0001$).
16 Finally, main effects of drug ($F_{1,107} = 9.297$, $p = 0.00289$) and dose ($F_{5,107} = 12.298$, $p < 0.0001$), as
17 well as an interaction effect ($F_{5,107} = 4.054$, $p = 0.00208$), was found for number of entries on the
18 white compartment (Figure 1F). Post-hoc tests uncovered differences between vehicle-treated and
19 diazepam-treated zebrafish at doses of 0.28 mg/kg and 0.57 mg/kg ($p < 0.01$) and vehicle-treated
20 and FGIN-1-27-treated zebrafish at the highest dose ($p = 0.003$); no differences were found between
21 diazepam- and FGIN-1-27-treated animals, however.

22

23 **3.2. Experiment 2**

24 Main effects of drug ($F_{1,108} = 248.5$, $p < 0.0001$) and dose ($F_{1,108} = 93.39$, $p < 0.0001$), as well as an
25 interaction effect ($F_{1,108} = 60.09$, $p < 0.0001$), were found for TI duration (Figure 2A). Post-hoc tests

1 found statistically significant differences between vehicle-treated and diazepam-treated lizards at
2 doses of 0.28-1.1 mg/kg ($p < 0.05$) and vehicle-treated and FGIN-1-27-treated lizards at all doses
3 except the higher ($p < 0.0001$). Differences between FGIN-1-27- and diazepam-treated lizards were
4 observed at all doses except the higher ($p < 0.0001$).

5 Main effects of drug ($F_{1,108} = 771.29$, $p < 0.0001$) and dose ($F_{5,108} = 59.58$, $p < 0.0001$), as well as an
6 interaction effect ($F_{5,108} = 66.98$, $p < 0.0001$), were found for circling behavior (Figure 2B). Vehicle-
7 treated animals differed from diazepam-treated animals at 0.14 mg/kg ($p = 0.019$), 0.57 mg/kg ($p <$
8 0.0001), and 1.1 mg/kg ($p = 0.003$); vehicle-treated lizards differed from FGIN-1-27-treated ani-
9 mals at all doses ($p < 0.0001$). Diazepam- and FGIN-1-27-treated animals differed at all doses ($p <$
10 0.0001).

11 Main effects of drug ($F_{1,108} = 291.58$, $p < 0.0001$) and dose ($F_{5,108} = 45.09$, $p < 0.0001$), as well as an
12 interaction effect ($F_{5,108} = 14.63$, $p < 0.0001$), were found for freezing (Figure 2C). Post-hoc tests
13 identified significant differences between vehicle- and diazepam-treated animals at 1.1 mg/kg ($p <$
14 0.0001) and between vehicle- and FGIN-1-27-treated animals at all doses ($p < 0.0001$). Differences
15 between diazepam- and FGIN-1-27-treated lizards were also found for all doses ($p < 0.0001$).

16 A drug main effect ($F_{1,108} = 1482.4$, $p < 0.0001$) and a dose main effect ($F_{5,108} = 110.18$, $p < 0.0001$),
17 as well as an interaction effect ($F_{5,108} = 86.33$, $p < 0.0001$), were observed for ventilatory frequency
18 (Figure 2D). Post-hoc tests uncovered differences between vehicle-treated and diazepam-treated an-
19 imals at 1.1 mg/kg ($p < 0.0001$), and between vehicle-treated and FGIN-1-27-treated animals at all
20 doses ($p < 0.0001$). Finally, statistically significant differences were found between diazepam- and
21 FGIN-1-27-treated animals at all doses ($p < 0.0001$).

22 Main effects of drug ($F_{1,108} = 38.4$, $p < 0.0001$) and dose ($F_{5,108} = 437.2$, $p < 0.0001$), as well as in-
23 teraction effect ($F_{5,108} = 3735$, $p < 0.0001$), were found for tongue-flicking (Figure 2E). Post-hoc
24 tests revealed significant differences between vehicle- and diazepam-treated lizards at doses of 1.1
25 and 2.3 mg/kg ($p < 0.0001$), and between vehicle- and FGIN-1-27-treated lizards at all doses except

1 the highest ($p < 0.0001$). Moreover, statistically significant differences between diazepam- and
2 FGIN-1-27-treated lizards at all doses ($p < 0.0001$).
3 Main effects of both drug ($F_{1, 108} = 87.41$, $p < 0.0001$) and dose ($F_{5, 108} = 36.46$, $p < 0.0001$), as well
4 as an interaction effect ($F_{5, 108} = 56.92$, $p < 0.0001$), were found for total locomotion (Figure 2F).
5 Significant differences were found between vehicle- and diazepam-treated lizards at 0.57 and 2.3
6 mg/kg ($p < 0.0003$) and vehicle- and FGIN-1-27-treated lizards at 1.1 and 2.3 mg/kg ($p < 0.002$).
7 Finally, statistically significant differences were also found between diazepam- and FGIN-1-27-
8 treated animals at 2.3 mg/kg ($p < 0.0001$).

9

10 **4. Discussion**

11 In the present work we demonstrated that the TSPO agonist FGIN-1-27 produced a dose-dependent
12 decrease in defensive behavior in both wall lizards and zebrafish. Specifically, in wall lizards FGIN-
13 1-27 decreased tonic immobility in the intermediate dose range (0.14-1.1 mg/kg); decreased post-TI
14 ventilatory frequency, freezing and circling at all doses; and increased exploratory behavior
15 (tongue-flicking) and decreased thigmotaxis at 0.14-1.1 mg/kg). Similarly, in zebrafish FGIN-1-27
16 decreased scototaxis, thigmotaxis, freezing and risk assessment at all doses, increasing erratic
17 swimming at 0.14 and 0.28 mg/kg. The highest dose (2.3 mg/kg) decreased locomotion in both
18 species, suggesting a sedative effect. Moreover, diazepam, a CBR and TSPO agonist, decreased TI
19 duration at the smaller doses and increased it at high doses, increased tongue-flicking and decreased
20 thigmotaxis at doses above 0.28 mg/kg; no effects were observed in post-TI behavior. In zebrafish,
21 diazepam produced an inverted-U effect on scototaxis and entries on white, monotonically decreasing
22 freezing, thigmotaxis and risk assessment.

23 In the lizard defense test battery, induction of TI produces a stereotypical behavioral pattern in
24 which is followed by either freezing or “explosive” circling behavior; after that, the animal emits
25 exploratory behavior, marked by thigmotaxis (“wall-hugging”) and tongue-flicking (Maximino et

1 al. 2014). This sequence resembles defensive behavior at increasing predatory imminence continua
2 (Fanselow and Lester 1988) – that is, defensive behavior in this test shifts from panic-like, circa-
3 strike behavior towards sustained risk assessment (tongue-flicking, thigmotaxis). Moreover, in a
4 previous experiment panicolytic drugs (alprazolam, imipramine) decreased TI duration, freezing
5 and circling, while diazepam (0.5 mg/kg) increased tongue-flicking and decreased thigmotaxis
6 (Maximino et al. 2014). In the present experiment, FGIN-1-27 produced a more wide range of ef-
7 fects than diazepam: the TSPO agonist affected both exploratory behavior (consistent with an anxi-
8 olytic-like effect), post-TI behavior (consistent with a panicolytic effect) and TI duration, which
9 could also represent a panicolytic-like effect; diazepam, on the other hand, only affected exploratory
10 behavior and had a hormetic (inverted-U) profile on TI duration.

11 A complementary profile was observed in the zebrafish scototaxis assay. Benzodiazepines have
12 been shown to produce an hormetic profile in several behavioral tests in this species (Bencan et al.
13 2009; Cachat et al. 2010; Sackerman et al. 2010; Vada et al. 2015). Previous experiments also
14 demonstrated that diazepam was anxiolytic at 1.25 mg/kg, but not 2.5 mg/kg, in the scototaxis assay
15 (Maximino et al., 2011); in addition to this observation, the present work also demonstrated effects
16 of diazepam on freezing, thigmotaxis and risk assessment. Importantly, FGIN-1-27 treatment also
17 produced anxiolytic-like effects, with locomotor-impairing effects at the highest dose.

18 Little is known about the role of TSPO in behavioral control in anamniotes. In goldfish *Carassius*
19 *auratus*, octadecaneuropeptide increased the latency to enter a white compartment in a light/dark
20 box, suggesting an anxiogenic-like effect (Matsuda et al. 2011). While octadecaneuropeptide is an
21 endozepine which acts as an agonist at TSPO (Papadopoulos et al. 1991), it also acts as an antago-
22 nist at the CBR (Ferrero et al. 1986); consistently with the hypothesis that the anxiogenic-like effect
23 of octadecaneuropeptide is mediated by the CBR, flumazenil, but not a metabotropic endozepine re-
24 ceptor antagonist, blocked the effects on goldfish scototaxis (Matsuda et al. 2011).

25 Overall, the present results suggest that drugs targeting the CBR and MBR exert anti-anxiety effects

1 in anamniotes, while drugs acting at the MBR also exert anti-panic effects. It is plausible that some
2 of the effects of diazepam were mediated by the MBR; further experiments are needed to untangle
3 the precise mechanisms. Thus, while the present results suggest a functional conservation of TSPO
4 that is concomitant to gene duplication, it is not known whether FGIN-1-27 (or even diazepam) pro-
5 duced its behavioral effects in lizards and zebrafish by acting on the (conserved) *tspo1* or whether
6 some effects are also mediated by *tspo*. Further experiments will clarify the issue. The present re-
7 sults also add to the mounting evidence that TSPO/MBR ligands could be used to treat fear disor-
8 ders, including panic disorder, in human populations; the degree of conservation suggest that anam-
9 niotes could be used as experimental models to study anti-panic drugs.

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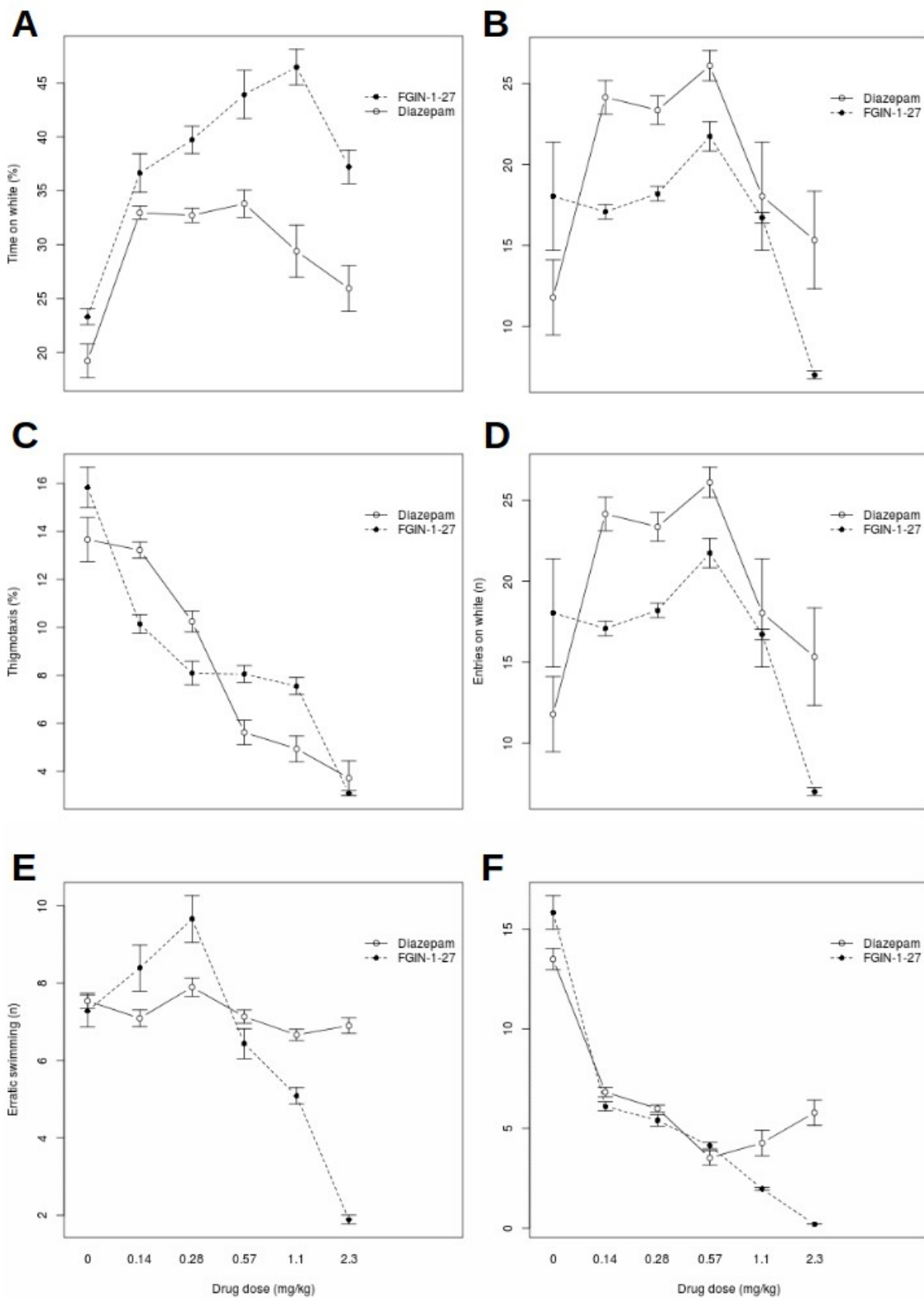
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1 **Figure captions**

- 2 **Figure 1** – Effects of FGIN-1-27 (filled circles) and diazepam (empty circles) on (A) scototaxis, (B)
3 risk assessment, (C) thigmotaxis, (D) freezing, (E) erratic swimming and (F) total locomotion in the
4 light/dark test in zebrafish (*Danio rerio*). Error bars represent to standard errors.

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- 1 **Figure 2** – Effects of FGIN-1-27 (filled circles) and diazepam (empty circles) on (A) tonic immo-
- 2 bility, (B) circling responses, (C) freezing, (D) ventilatory frequency, (E) tongue-flicking and (F) to-
- 3 tal locomotion on wall lizards *Tropidurus oreadicus*. Error bars represent to standard errors.

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