



Design of a stable human acid-β-glucosidase: towards improved Gaucher disease therapy and mutation classification

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Keywords

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Acid- β -glucosidase (GCase, EC3.2.1.45), the lysosomal enzyme which hydrolyzes the simple glycosphingolipid, glucosylceramide (GlcCer), is encoded by the GBA1 gene. Biallelic mutations in GBA1 cause the human inherited metabolic disorder, Gaucher disease (GD), in which GlcCer accumulates, while heterozygous GBA1 mutations are the highest genetic risk factor for Parkinson's disease (PD). Recombinant GCase (e.g., Cerezyme[®]) is produced for use in enzyme replacement therapy for GD and is largely successful in relieving disease symptoms, except for the neurological symptoms observed in a subset of patients. As a first step toward developing an alternative to the recombinant human enzymes used to treat GD, we applied the PROSS stability-design algorithm to generate GCase variants with enhanced stability. One of the designs, containing 55 mutations compared to wild-type human GCase, exhibits improved secretion and thermal stability. Furthermore, the design has higher enzymatic activity than the clinically used human enzyme when incorporated into an AAV vector, resulting in a larger decrease in the accumulation of lipid substrates in cultured cells. Based on stability-design calculations, we also developed a machine learning-based approach to distinguish benign from deleterious (i.e., disease-causing) *GBA1* mutations. This approach gave remarkably accurate predictions of the enzymatic activity of single-nucleotide polymorphisms in the *GBA1* gene that are not currently associated with GD or PD. This latter approach could be applied to other diseases to determine risk factors in patients carrying rare mutations.

Abbreviations

AAV, adeno-associated virus; ERT, enzyme replacement therapy; GCase, acid-β-glucosidase; GD, Gaucher disease; GlcCer, glucosylceramide; GlcSph, glucosylsphingosine; LSDs, lysosomal storage disorders; PD, Parkinson's disease; SNP, single-nucleotide polymorphism; SRT, substrate reduction therapy.

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Introduction

Gaucher disease (GD), one of the two most common lysosomal storage diseases (LSDs) [1,2], is caused by biallelic mutations in the *GBA1* gene (see Table S1 for a comprehensive list of all known *GBA1* missense mutations). *GBA1* encodes the lysosomal enzyme acid- β -glucosidase (GCase, EC3.2.1.45) [3] which hydrolyzes the simple glycosphingolipids, glucosylceramide (GlcCer), and glucosylsphingosine (GlcSph). Malfunction of GCase leads to intracellular accumulation of both lipids, primarily in the lysosomes of macrophages and monocytes [4]. GD is classified into three clinical subtypes. Type 1 is manifested by hepatosplenomegaly, anemia, thrombocytopenia, and bone disease, while GD types 2 and 3 cause severe neurological disease (nGD) [5].

Two approved treatments for GD are currently available, namely enzyme replacement therapy (ERT) and substrate reduction therapy (SRT). Patients treated by ERT receive periodic intravenous infusions of a recombinantly expressed GCase, of which Cerezyme[®] is the most widely used, while SRT uses inhibitors of GlcCer synthesis, thereby reducing its accumulation. However, neither ERT nor SRT can be currently used to treat nGD [6,7]. Similar to other neurological diseases, gene therapy offers an attractive option for the treatment of nGD. Gene delivery mediated by adeno-associated viruses (AAVs) [8] has the advantage of low immunogenicity, high efficiency, and the possibility of targeting specific tissues or cell types, including neurons [9,10]. AAV gene therapy is safe and efficient in mouse models of LSDs, including GD [11], and has been used in preclinical trials on human patients with LSDs (see Ref. [10] and references therein).

GCase comprises 497 amino acids and contains two disulfide bridges and five glycosylation sites, four of which are usually occupied [12]. Despite the success of ERT using recombinant GCase for the treatment of type 1 GD, no attempts have been made to optimize treatment strategies using, for instance, more stable forms of GCase or of other enzymes used in ERT in other LSDs. If such stabilized enzymes were available, they might remain active for longer times, reducing infusion frequency and enhancing therapeutic outcomes and economic benefit.

Due to the marginal stability of many proteins [13], protein engineering is frequently used to improve protein stability, although not, so far, for the enzymes used in ERT or in gene therapy for rare metabolic diseases. One approach to stabilize proteins is the use of computer-based algorithms, such as PROSS, which combine atomistic Rosetta design calculations and phylogenetic sequence analysis to design stable variants [14,15]. PROSS has been successfully applied to many proteins, including those that have several disulfide bonds and glycosylation sites [14,16–18]. PROSS designs often exhibit higher recombinant expression levels and increased thermal stability while maintaining activity.

Protein destabilization or loss of expression caused by missense mutations can lead to a range of human diseases [19], and the ability to be able to predict the pathogenicity of missense mutations is highly desirable. A number of in silico tools for predicting functional and structural consequences of missense mutations are available, with most using sequence and conservation-based methods, protein sequence and structure, or supervised learning methods [20]. Nevertheless, such predictions often disagree, raising questions about their reliability. By way of example, results obtained with seven available in silico algorithms using a dataset of 97 nonsynonymous single-nucleotide polymorphisms (nsSNPs) in GBA1 [21] suggested that 22 should result in GD. However, the limitations of this study can be appreciated since only six of the algorithms recognized L444P, and only three identified N370S as disease-causing mutations, even though they are the two most prominent mutations associated with GD. A more useful approach might be to train an algorithm based on mutations with known pathologies, that is, benign and disease-causing, such as was done successfully for the MLH1 variant in Lvnch syndrome [22]. For such an approach to be effective, a sufficient number of known mutations, both benign and diseasecausing, should be available.

In the present study, we use the PROSS algorithm to generate a more stable form of GCase. Notably, one of the GCase designs is secreted at a higher level, and upon transduction into neuroblastoma cells using an AAV vector, results in more effective clearance of GlcCer compared with WT GCase. Based on these results, we hypothesized that PROSS could enrich data from clinical studies to train an algorithm to predict the clinical severity of various mutations. We verified these predictions experimentally and by analysis of published clinical data. We conclude that the PROSSdesigned GCase may help improve the efficacy of ERT or of gene therapy (at least in the brain, which is an immune-privileged site). Furthermore, predictions of the clinical outcome of additional GBA1 mutations could be used for diagnostic purposes, with particular relevance to novel GBA1 mutations in Parkinson's disease (PD), in which GBA1 mutations are the highest genetic risk factor [23,24].

Results

A stabilized GCase design for recombinant expression

We used PROSS to design GCase variants based on its crystal structure (PDB: 3gxi [25]), while not permitting design calculations within the active site pocket. Designs dGCase1, dGCase2, and dGCase3 containing 35. 45. and 55 amino acid substitutions, respectively. were expressed in mammalian HEK293T cells, along with WT human GCase (plasmids are shown in Fig. 1). The proteins were purified from growth media by one-step affinity chromatography using the Twin-Strep tag. Designs were screened for enzymatic activity and secretion (Fig. 2A). In contrast to WT GCase, all three designs were secreted, and their enzymatic activity increased with the number of mutations. Additionally, dGCase3 exhibited activity when expressed and purified in Escherichia coli. By contrast, WT GCase did not display any enzymatic activity even though it could be expressed in E. coli (Fig. 2B). We concluded that increasing GCase stability led to correct protein folding independent of glycosylation (which does not occur in E. coli).

Design dGCase3 carries 55 amino acid mutations compared with WT GCase. The mutations are distributed across the entire protein, except for the active site which was restricted from the design calculations (Fig. 2C,E). To approximate the impact of the mutations on protein structure, ALPHAFOLD2 [26,27] was used to predict the structure of dGCase3. Alignment with the crystal structures of human GCase (PDB: 3gxi and logs) [25,28] revealed very close agreement (< 0.5 Å root mean square deviation; Fig. 3). This modeling suggests that no major structural rearrangements occur in dGCase3, in agreement with the fact that it retains catalytic activity.

Purified dGCase3 was assessed for *in vitro* enzyme activity and thermal stability and compared to purified recombinant GCase (r-GCase, purchased from Biotest) and to Cerezyme[®]. Cerezyme[®] and dGCase3 displayed very similar kinetic properties. By contrast, r-GCase exhibited an ~ 5-fold lower k_{cat}/K_M , mainly due to a lower reaction rate (k_{cat} ; Table 1). The melting temperature (T_m) of dGCase3 was 67.9 ± 0.7 °C, which is ~ 17 °C and ~ 12 °C higher than Cerezyme[®] and r-GCase, respectively (Table 1, Fig. 2D). dGCase3 exhibits almost the same K_M values as Cerezyme[®], confirming that the active site is intact despite the 55 designed mutations.

One of the designed mutations, N370D, which is present in all of the PROSS designs, impacts the same

position as one of the most common GD-causing mutations, N370S [29]. Whereas the clinical mutation to Ser results in low enzymatic activity, the Asp mutation maintains both expression and activity levels comparable to those of WT GCase (Fig. 4). This observation demonstrates that even positions associated with disease-causing mutations can be optimized using a judicious choice of mutation.

Expression of dGCase3 using AAV exhibits high GCase activity

Two therapeutic regimes are currently attracting significant interest for neurological forms of LSDs, namely the use of small compounds for SRT that cross the blood-brain barrier [30], and gene therapy using vectors injected directly into the brain [10]. Since the immune response is attenuated in the central nervous system [31], designed proteins could in principle be used in the brain with minimal risk of an immunological response. Therefore, human WT GCase and dGCase3 were cloned into an AAVrh10 (adeno-associated virus, serotype rh10) vector and used to transduce GBA^{-/-} neuroblastoma cells in culture.

Nondifferentiated SH-SY5Y GBA^{-/-} cells (Fig. 5) displayed increased GCase activity upon transduction with both vectors in a dose-dependent manner. The activity of cells transduced with AAV-dGCase3 was two-threefold higher than that of those transduced with AAV-WT GCase (Fig. 5A). The AAV-dGCase3transduced cells $[5 \times 10^5 \text{ yg per cell (viral genome per$ cell)] exhibited the same levels of GCase activity as SH-SY5Y GBA^{+/+} cells (Fig. 5A). Likewise, when SH-SY5Y $GBA^{-/-}$ cells were differentiated (to allow them to survive longer in culture) and transduced with 5×10^5 vg per cell of the AAV vectors, the AAVdGCase3 transduced cells exhibited significantly higher activity 12 and 15 days post-transduction than cells transduced with AAV-WT GCase (Fig. 5B). SH-SY5Y $GBA^{+/+}$ cells contained ~ 400 pmol·mg⁻¹ protein of GlcCer, with GlcCer levels elevated ~ 20-fold (~ 7000 $\text{pmol}\cdot\text{mg}^{-1}$ protein) in SH-SY5Y GBA^{-/-} cells. Fifteen days post-transduction, AAV-WT GCase transduced GBA^{-/-} cells showed reduction of GlcCer levels to ~950 pmol·mg⁻¹. An even more effective reduction was obtained upon transduction with AAVdGCase3 (~ 450 $\text{pmol}\cdot\text{mg}^{-1}$), decreasing GlcCer levels close to those of WT cells (Fig. 5C; Table 2 gives levels of individual GlcCer species with different N-acyl chain lengths). Similar results were obtained for the extent of reduction of GlcSph, with GlcSph levels ~ 125 and ~ 20 times lower following AAV-dGCase3 and AAV-WT GCase transduction compared with GBA^{-/-} cells

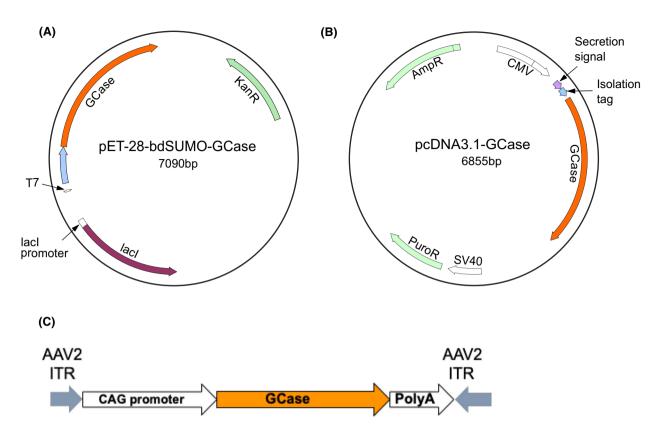


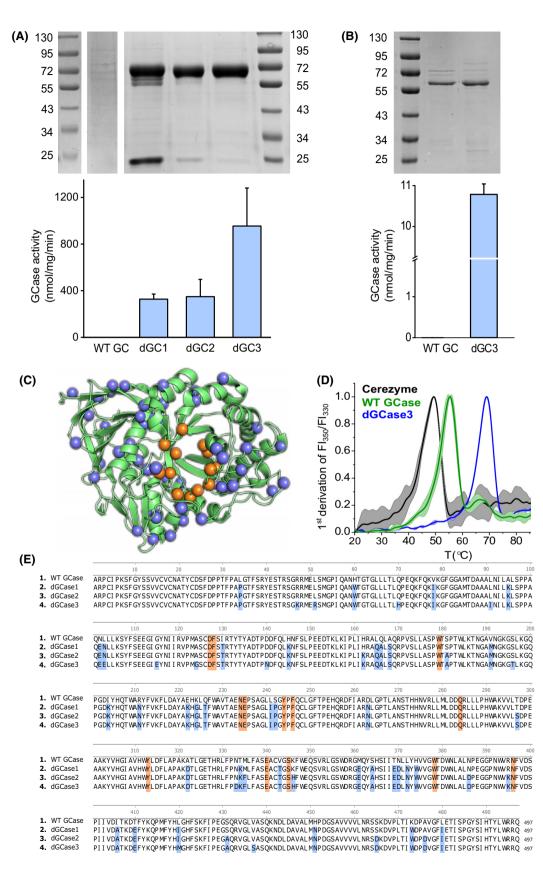
Fig. 1. Vectors used for GCase expression. Schematic representation of vectors used for expression of WT GCase and its PROSSdesigned variants. The GCase sequence is in *orange* and tags at the N terminus, which were used for protein isolation, in *blue*. (A) pET-28-bdSUMO was used for *E. coli* expression in which the protein was fused to N-terminal poly His14-SUMO (SUMO, *blue*). (B) A pcDNA3.1 vector was used for expression of GCase in HEK293T cells in which the R-PTP-S secretion signal (*purple*) was used to target the protein for secretion to the extracellular medium. An N-terminal isolation tag (TwinStrep, *blue*) was inserted into the vectors immediately following the secretion signal. The sizes of the vectors expressed as base pairs (bp) are shown. Promoters (T7, lacl, CMV, SV40, *white*) and antibiotic resistance sequences (kanamycin, KanR; ampicillin AmpR, puromycin PuroR, *green*) are also shown. (C) The WT human GCase and dGCase3 DNA sequences were cloned into AAV2-based recombinant genomes under the control of the CAG promoter.

(Fig. 5C, Table 2). Together, our results suggest that dGCase3 may be a suitable candidate for nGD gene therapy since it is more active in cell culture and clears more GlcCer than the WT enzyme, when using the same dose of AAV.

A machine learning classifier predicts the severity of *GBA1* mutations.

We postulated that the accuracy of the PROSS stability-design algorithm, and the large number of

Fig. 2. Characterization of PROSS-designed GCase variants. WT and PROSS-designed GCase variants were purified from (A) HEK 293T cells and (B) *E. coli.* Levels of expression and secretion are visualized on Coomassie-stained SDS/PAGE gels (*upper* panels). Mr markers (kDa) are shown. Enzyme activity was assayed using C6-NBD-GlcCer (*lower* panels). Data are means \pm SD from at least three independent experiments. (C) Structure of WT GCase [28] (*green*) with the positions of PROSS mutations shown as *blue* spheres; amino acid residues of the active site (C126, D127, F128, W179, N234, E235, Y244, P245, F246, D283, Q284, H311, Y313, E340, C342, G344, S345, W381, N382, F397, and V398) are depicted in *orange*. (D) Melting curves (T_m) for Cerezyme (*black*), dGCase3 (*blue*) and WT GCase (*r*-GCase, *green*) were measured by differential scanning fluorimetry. Derivation of the fluorescence intensity ratio was measured (Fl₃₃₀/Fl₃₅₀), with the peak corresponding to the T_m . Standard deviations are indicated as areas with lighter tones. (E) Amino acid sequences of PROSS-designed variants of GCase (dGCase) together with that of WT GCase. Mutations introduced by PROSS are highlighted in *blue*. Amino acid residues corresponding to the active site (and restricted from the PROSS mutagenesis) are shown in *orange*. Protein structure was created in PYMOL (Schrödinger, LLC, New york, NY, USA).



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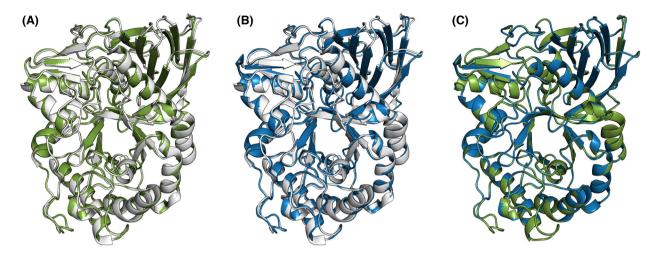


Fig. 3. Alignment of WT and dGCase3 structures. (A, B) Crystal structure of WT human GCase (*gray*, PDB: 3gxi) aligned with ALPHAFOLD2 structures of human GCase (A, *green*) and dGCase3 (B, *blue*). The alignment gave root mean square deviations (RMSDs) of 0.397 and 0.417 Å respectively. (C) Alignment of ALPHAFOLD2 structures of human GCase (*green*) and dGCase3 (*blue*), which yielded an RMSD of 0.152 Å. Protein structures were created in PYMOL (Schrödinger, LLC, New York, NY, USA).

	<i>К</i> м (тм)	$k_{\rm cat}$ (min ⁻¹)	$k_{\text{cat}}/K_{\text{M}} \text{ (min}^{-1} \cdot M^{-1} \text{)}$	T _m (°C)
dGCase3	0.90 ± 0.23	1340 ± 546	$1.49\pm0.41\times10^{6}$	67.9 ± 0.7
r-GCase	1.20 ± 0.39	337 ± 33	$0.29\pm0.06\times10^{6}$	55.1 ± 0.5
Cerezyme®	0.70 ± 0.28	1071 ± 26	$1.54 \pm 0.33 \times 10^{6}$	50.6 ± 2.2

Table 1. In vitro characterization of
dGCase3. Data were collected from at
least three independent experiments and
are means \pm SD.

stabilizing mutations that it predicts, could augment the limited clinical data on benign mutations and lead to improved discrimination of disease-causing mutations. As a striking example for the paucity of clinical data on benign mutations, only three missense mutations in GBA1 have been classified to date as benign likely benign (https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/ or variation/view/). The 226 GD-causing missense mutations (Table S1) and the 55 PROSS-designed mutations in dGCase3 (Table S2) were combined to train an algorithm to predict the clinical effect of unknown GBA1 SNPs (Table S3). The analysis is based on the premise that PROSS mutations are individually neutral or stabilizing and do not impact enzyme activity. Three parameters were calculated for each mutation: (a) the change in conservation score between the WT amino acid and the mutated amino acid ($\Delta PSSM$; based on the position-specific scoring matrix computed by PROSS); (b) the change in protein energy due to the mutation ($\Delta\Delta G$; also computed by PROSS); and (c) the exposure of the amino acid position to solvent (calculated by the Stride webserver). The best separation between mutations introduced by PROSS and the disease-causing mutations was obtained using $\Delta PSSM$, followed by $\Delta\Delta G$ (Fig. 6A). Solvent exposure did not show a significant separation between the GD-causing

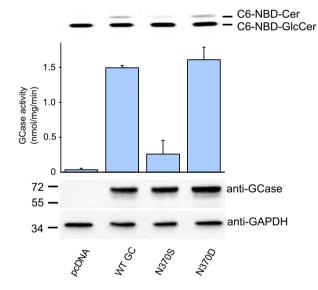
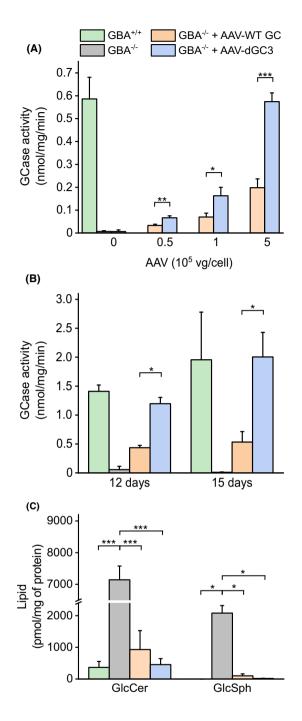
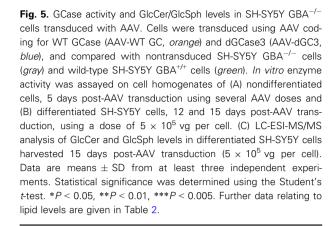


Fig. 4. Expression and activity of N370S and N370D. Activity of WT GCase (WT GC), N370S and N370D expressed in HEK293T GBA^{-/-} cells compared to activity in cells transfected with a control pcDNA vector. Activity was assayed using C6-NDB-GlcCer in cell homogenates. A representative TLC plate is shown, with the product (C6-NDB-Cer) and the substrate (C6-NDB-GlcCer) indicated. GCase expression was determined by western blotting using an anti-GCase antibody. Mr markers are shown. GAPDH served as a loading control. Data are means \pm SD, n = 3.



and PROSS mutations. Next, we used Δ PSSM and $\Delta\Delta G$ to train a linear support-vector machine to predict whether a particular *GBA1* mutation is likely benign or deleterious (Fig. 6B). Out of 281 mutations (226 GD-causing and 55 PROSS), only five mutations were misclassified (A476D, F216Y, H255Q, H451R, and S345F), with three of them very close to the separation line (more details about individual mutations are provided in Table S1).



A set of SNPs in GBA1 has been documented (Table S3), although none of them have been detected in GD patients to date. Using the trained PRAMP (PRoss-based Algorithm for Mutation Prediction) classifier, we analyzed this set and separated the SNPs into putatively deleterious and benign mutations (Fig. 6C). In addition, each SNP was assigned a score (PRAMP score), determined by its distance from the separation line, with benign and harmful SNPs assigned a positive and negative score, respectively. Twenty-eight clones of GCase, bearing individual SNPs spanning the PRAMP score range, were expressed in HEK293T GBA $^{-/-}$ cells, and their in vitro activity was determined (Fig. 6D, Table S3). A clear correlation between the PRAMP score and GCase activity was obtained, as seen by the Spearman coefficient of 0.8. Thus, even though GD can be caused by factors other than defective enzymatic activity (such as defective lysosomal trafficking [32]), the PRAMP score developed herein gives a remarkably good correlation with enzymatic activity.

Many other prediction tools have been developed to attempt to distinguish between disease-causing and benign mutations [20]. We compared the results of our algorithm to REVEL (https://sites.google.com/site/ revelgenomics/), a missense mutation classifier that is based on an ensemble of 13 individual in silico tools [33]. Precomputed REVEL scores, in a range of 0 to 1 with 1 being the most severe, for the same GBA1 SNP missense mutations also correlated with enzymatic activity (Fig. 6E), but with a somewhat lower Spearman coefficient (-0.7) than obtained for PRAMP. Together, these results demonstrate that the PRAMP algorithm can accurately classify missense mutations. The observation that our stability-based analysis is at least as powerful as the much more sophisticated scheme employed by REVEL, highlights the importance of stability and expression in understanding the effect of mutations in GBA1.

	GBA ^{+/+}	GBA⁻/-	GBA ^{-/-} + WT GCase	GBA ^{-/-} + dGCase3	GBA ^{+/+} versus GBA ^{-/-}	GBA ^{+/+} versus WT GC	GBA ^{+/+} versus GBA ^{-/-} + dGC3	GBA ^{-/-} + WT GC versus GBA ^{-/-}	GBA ^{-/-} + WT GC versus GBA ^{-/-} + dGC3	GBA ^{-/-} versus GBA ^{-/-} + dGC3
	Lipid levels (pmol·mg $^{-1}$)	ol·mg ⁻¹)			Statistical	Statistical significance (P values)	' values)			
Total GlcSph	0.90 ± 0.46	2082 ± 237	99.8 ± 61.3	16.6 ± 6.8	< 0.05	ns	ns	< 0.05	ns	< 0.05
Fotal GlcCer	366.6 ± 187.9	7142 ± 434	931.3 ± 595.5	454 ± 190	< 0.001	ns	ns	< 0.001	ns	< 0.001
d18.1/C14.0	1.44 ± 0.39	164.8 ± 16.3	40.4 ± 10.4	25.9 ± 5.0	< 0.01	ns	< 0.05	< 0.01	ns	< 0.01
d18.0/C14.0	0.03 ± 0.01	3.27 ± 0.33	0.78 ± 0.19	0.48 ± 0.09	< 0.05	ns	< 0.05	< 0.01	ns	< 0.05
d18.1/C16.0	53.4 ± 15.4	2818 ± 177	313 ± 116	149.3 ± 38.8	< 0.005	ns	ns	< 0.001	ns	< 0.005
d18.1/C18.1	0.09 ± 0.04	27.1 ± 2.4	0.98 ± 0.27	0.27 ± 0.04	< 0.01	ns	< 0.05	< 0.01	ns	< 0.01
d18.0/C18.1	0.14 ± 0.04	10.2 ± 0.5	1.13 ± 0.25	0.59 ± 0.11	< 0.005	ns	< 0.05	< 0.001	ns	< 0.005
d18.1/C18.0	40.8 ± 12.4	2610 ± 170	294 ± 67.4	163 ± 25.9	< 0.005	ns	< 0.05	< 0.005	ns	< 0.005
d18.1/C20.0	12.2 ± 3.7	267 ± 11.1	37.5 ± 13.8	19.4 ± 4.9	< 0.001	ns	ns	< 0.001	ns	< 0.001
d18.1/C22.0	69.9 ± 18.8	280 ± 39.8	56.1 ± 27.1	28.3 ± 10.4	< 0.05	ns	ns	< 0.05	ns	< 0.05
d18.1/C24.1	103 ± 35.1	740 ± 191	139 ± 82.6	43.9 ± 18.0	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
d18.1/C24.0	80.7 ± 22.2	198 ± 47.7	42.4 ± 23.9	19.0 ± 8.3	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
d18.1/C26.1	1.67 ± 0.59	8.01 ± 2.48	1.66 ± 1.08	0.60 ± 0.27	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
d18.0/C26.1	0.06 ± 0.02	0.41 ± 0.09	0.07 ± 0.05	0.03 ± 0.02	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
d18.1/C26.0	2.86 ± 0.62	18.6 ± 4.20	3.27 ± 1.53	2.55 ± 1.08	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns

Table 2. GlcCer and GlcSph levels after AAVrh10 treatment. Levels of GlcSph and GlcCer species with defined Nacyl chain lengths were quantified in differentiated SH-SY5Y cells. Cells Ċ C ċ C c 2 č ≘ 201 Ŕ Ļ 0 1 / r h 1 0 L

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Design of a stable human acid-β-glucosidase

Prediction of clinical phenotypes using the PRAMP score

Nearly 300 GD-causing mutations have been documented in *GBA1*, including ~ 230 missense mutations (Table S1 and [34]). Limited genotype–phenotype correlation is available, with a few exceptions. Thus, homozygosity for N370S always results in type 1 GD [35] and homozygosity for L444P invariably leads to nGD [36], although there is significant clinical variation even among patients homozygous for these well-characterized mutations. Predicting disease course is particularly problematic in compound heterozygotes.

We attempted to predict the clinical severity of known GD mutations using the PRAMP score. The scores of the GD-causing mutations (Table S1) have a median value of -2.49 with some as low as -7.5. As shown previously, mutations with lower scores have lower enzyme activity and likely correspond to mutations that cause a more severe form of the disease. Indeed, a clear trend of a decreased PRAMP score correlating with increased disease severity is observed (Fig. 7A, Table 3). In particular, homozygous mutations [34] causing type 1 GD have a significantly higher PRAMP score than GD type 2 (P < 0.01; Fig. 7A). $\Delta PSSM$ was the most important parameter for separating disease-causing from benign mutations (Fig. 6A). Even so, mild N370S and severe L444P mutations have the same $\Delta PSSM$ (7), and their distinct severity is reflected in $\Delta\Delta G$ values ($\Delta\Delta G_{(N370S)} = -11$, $\Delta\Delta G_{(1\,444P)} = 24$). Our atomistic calculations performed with PROSS are consistent with studies showing that GCase with an N370S mutation gives a stable protein with reduced enzyme activity [37], whereas the L444P mutation leads to protein structure destabilization which results in ER-assisted degradation [38,39].

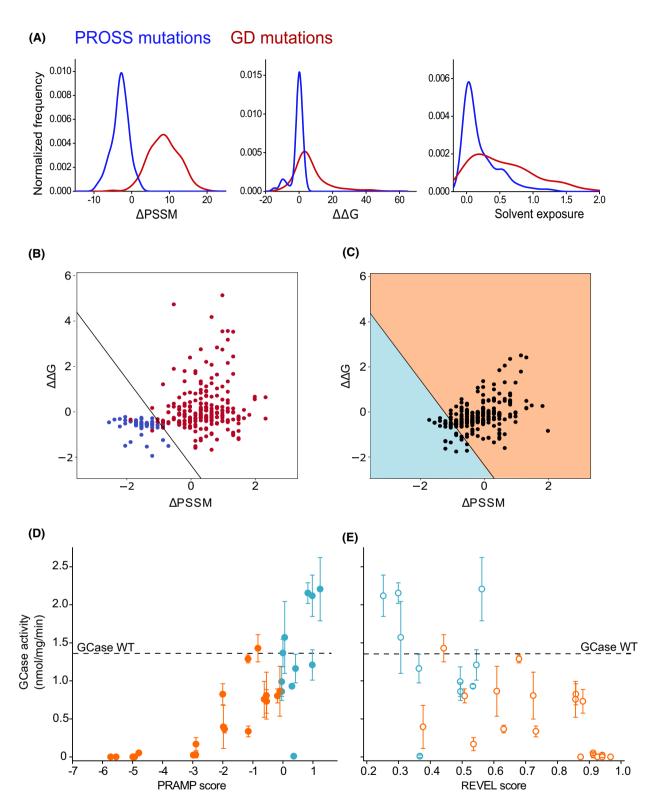
We next tested whether a similar approach could be used to predict the clinical severity exhibited by patients with different mutations in each allele, that is, compound heterozygotes. Normally, N370S in one allele, even if the second mutation is a more severe mutation (e.g., L444P), results in a disease closer to that observed with homozygous N370S than with homozygous L444P, suggesting that N370S can protect against the more severe (neurological) disease associated with L444P [36]. This being the case, a geometric rather than an arithmetic average was used to calculate the score of compound heterozygotes, since it is weighted in favor of the milder allele (lower score). PRAMP scores for compound heterozygous and the few homozygous mutations for which clinical data are available were taken from [40,41]. As for homozygous mutations, the PRAMP score for compound heterozygous

mutations also decreases with disease severity, yielding significant differences between mutations related to GD type 1 and GD type 2 (P < 0.005) and GD types 1 and 3 (P < 0.05; Fig. 7C). The same mutation sets were also assessed using REVEL (Fig. 7B,D). Although a trend of higher REVEL scores, that is, classified as more harmful, was observed for mutations related to more severe disease, the only significantly distinct REVEL scores were obtained for GD type 2 and GD type 1 for compound heterozygous mutations (P < 0.05). Moreover, a correlation between the age of disease onset and the mutation score was observed (Table 4) yielding Spearman coefficients of 0.94 and -0.77 for PRAMP and REVEL scores, respectively. Taken together, our results indicate that the clinical outcome of GBA1 mutations can be predicted to a large extent by the impact of the mutation on protein stability and expression. Comparison of the outcome of the PRAMP algorithm with the REVEL classifier showed similar trends, but better performance of our prediction algorithm documented by higher correlation coefficients and significantly distinct PRAMP scores between the individual GD types.

Discussion

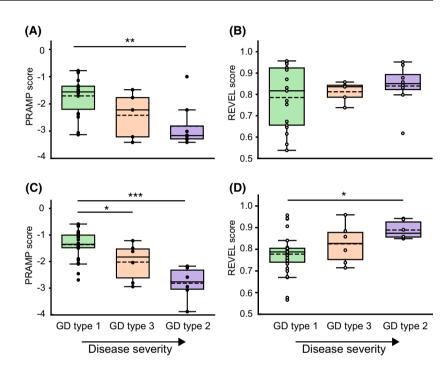
Our study makes two important contributions based on stability-design calculations. First, a GCase design comprising 55 mutations exhibits several potential advantages relative to the WT human enzyme for possible use in gene therapy since the design exhibits higher in vitro GCase activity and better performance upon AAV transduction in terms of enzymatic activity and GlcCer/ GlcSph clearance. Second, by assuming that all PROSSdesigned mutations are benign, we augmented clinical data to generate a classifier of the effect of mutations. The PRAMP classifier correctly predicted the functional characteristics of SNPs that have not been assigned disease status and demonstrated promise in predicting disease severity. Taken together, these results suggest that this simple predictor may provide a novel diagnostic tool, although clearly other factors, such as genetic and environmental factors, are also likely to play a role in disease severity.

In terms of gene therapy, dGCase variants could be expressed via viral vectors, which is an attractive approach for overcoming the neurological symptoms in nGD patients [10]. While the higher stability is likely to be of great advantage, the finding that dGCase3 has similar kinetic parameters to Cerezyme[®], along with its ability to clear GlcCer better than WT GCase, suggests that using the designed GCase may



indeed be of great value in gene therapy approaches. Vector dose-dependent immune responses and toxicity have been observed in several gene therapy trials. The optimization of transgene product levels and activity may permit reduction of the vector dose required to achieve therapeutic efficacy [42]. **Fig. 6.** SNP classification predicts functional outcome. Changes introduced into the GCase sequence by PROSS, together with GD-causing mutations, were used to construct a PRAMP algorithm to identify harmful and nonharmful mutations. (A) Separation of PROSS (*blue*) and GD (*red*) mutations according to one of the calculated parameters. Histograms of Δ PSSM, $\Delta\Delta G$, and solvent exposure fraction were calculated for each mutation. (B) Classification of the mutation training sets (PROSS, *blue*, and GD-causing, *red*) by PRAMP according to their Δ PSSM and $\Delta\Delta G$ scores (Δ PSSM and $\Delta\Delta G$ scores were normalized); the separation line is depicted in *black*. The *y*-axis is in Rosetta energy units. (C) Prediction of the algorithm using the SNP data (*black* dots; see Table S3). The separation line is depicted in black; the fields with potentially harmful and benign mutations are colored in *orange* and *blue*, respectively. The *y*-axis is in Rosetta energy units. (D, E) Enzymatic activity of WT GCase, together with that of the individual GCase point missense mutants expressed in HEK293T GBA^{-/-} cells. GCase activity was assayed on cell homogenates. Mutations with positive (benign) and negative (harmful) PRAMP scores are shown in *blue* and *orange*, respectively. The dashed lines indicate the level of enzyme activity of WT GCase. GCase activity was correlated with (D) PRAMP scores or to (E) REVEL scores. Values of the PRAMP score decrease with mutation severity whereas values of the REVEL score increase with disease severity. Data are means \pm SD, *n* = 3. Further details are given in Table S3.

Fig. 7. Correlation of the PRAMP score with GD types. Each mutation was assigned (A, C) a PRAMP score or (B, D) a REVEL score. (A, B) Homozygous GDcausing mutations together with their clinical classification were taken from Ref. [34]. (C, D) Compound heterozygous and several homozygous GD-causing mutations together with their clinical classification were taken from Ref. [41]. The PRAMP and REVEL scores of mutations are depicted according to which GD type they are associated with type 1 (green), type 2 (purple), and type 3 (orange). Means and medians are depicted by solid and dashed lines, respectively. Lists of individual mutations together with their scores are given in Tables S4 and S5. Statistical significance was calculated by ANOVA and post hoc Tukey's test, *P < 0.05, ***P* < 0.01, ****P* < 0.005.



Our results also suggest that stability design can be successfully applied to other proteins that cause LSDs. Although LSDs are individually rare, taken together they are found in ~ 1 : 5000 individuals [43], and most LSDs are caused by missense mutations, as in the case of GD. While our stability-based PRAMP classifier is attractive, other factors need to be considered when predicting disease severity, such as genetic background [44] and environmental factors [45]. For instance, patients homozygous for L444P present with a quite different clinical course depending on their genetic background [46], even though all have nGD. This suggests that the PRAMP score could be used to predict the type of GD, that is, type 1, 2, or 3, but may need to be combined with other factors in order to distinguish subtle differences in the clinical course of each type of disease in individual patients. One area that has not yet received attention is patients who are compound heterozygotes.

The PRAMP score predicted for compound heterozygotes in the current study gave a reasonable fit with the relatively limited clinical data available, supporting the possibility that the PRAMP score could be used to predict the clinical course of GD in compound heterozygotes. Such predictions could guide treatment regimes.

The ability to predict disease severity based on a classifier that distinguishes between stabilizing and disease-causing mutations not only paves the way to redefining genotype-phenotype correlations but also has exciting implications for understanding protein structure and function. This is exemplified in the mutations found at N370, with N370S the most common mutation leading to type 1 GD, whereas N370D is a stabilizing mutation identified by PROSS. Remarkably, 30 of the mutations in dGCase3 impact positions in which disease-causing mutations or predicted disease-causing SNPs have been identified. Thus,

	ΔPSSM	$\Delta\Delta G$	Solvent exposure	PRAMP score	REVEL score	Phenotype
T369M	1	0.91	0.35	-0.20	0.731	Mild GD, PD
E326K	1	1.32	0.53	-0.23	0.595	PD
R496H	2	5.41	0.35	-0.78	0.566	Mild
N370S	7	-10.95	0.04	-0.82	0.673	Mild
V394L	5	4.53	0.47	-1.47	0.851	Severe
D409H	4	7.92	0.27	-1.48	0.738	Severe
R463C ^a	9	3.20	0.74	-2.38	0.817	Mild
L444P	7	23.58	0.12	-3.41	0.858	Severe

^aThis mutation is usually classified as mild, but it has been found in several patients with type 3 GD [36,59].

Table 4. Correlation of PRAMP score with the age of onset of GD. Genotypes and the average age of onset (years) (from Ref. [40]) are shown along with the PRAMP and REVEL scores. Spearman coefficients are 0.94 and -0.77 for PRAMP and REVEL scores, respectively.

Genotype	Age of onset	PRAMP score	REVEL score
N370S/N370S	30	-0.82	0.673
N370S/other ^a	17	-1.43	0.770
N370S/L444P	19	-1.47	0.760
D409H/D409H	4–5	-1.48	0.738
L444P/other ^a	2–7	-2.91	0.869
L444P/L444P	1–3	-3.41	0.858

^aIn some clinical reports, the second mutation is not identified. In these cases, we used the median of the score of all GD-causing mutations (a value of -2.49 and 0.88 for PRAMP and REVEL scores, respectively).

PROSS stability-design calculations are sensitive enough to suggest mutations that stabilize the protein even at positions where other mutations lead to severe disease. Our results open the way to designing candidate proteins for improved enzyme replacement or gene therapy and suggest sensitive tools for diagnosing the pathological effects of SNPs.

Materials and methods

PROSS design

Stabilized GCase variants were designed by PROSS2 [47] using the PROSS web server (https://pross.weizmann.ac.il/ step/pross-terms/). Designs were generated based on the GCase crystal structure (PDB: 3gxi [25]). Mutations were manually curated to avoid the active site (C126, D127, F128, W179, N234, E235, Y244, P245, F246, D283, Q284, H311, Y313, E340, C342, G344, S345, W381, N382, F397, and V398) and known disease-causing mutations (Table S1); no GD-causing mutations appear in the set of PROSS mutations; none of the four glycosylation sites (N19, N59, N146, and N270) were altered by PROSS. The **Table 3.** Correlation of PRAMP score with the most common GD mutations. The most common GD-causing mutations are listed together with the three parameters calculated for each mutation. Mutations that are risk factors for PD are also indicated. Mutations are ordered according to the PRAMP score from the least harmful (lowest score) to the most harmful (highest score). REVEL scores are also shown. The reported clinical phenotype is given for each mutation.

set of PROSS mutations is given in Table S2. Δ PSSM, $\Delta\Delta G$, and solvent fraction exposure parameters are documented in Supplementary Dataset (10.17632/pkcjn539b5.1).

Reagents

Escherichia coli and human codon-optimized genes encoding GCase PROSS variants were obtained from IDT (Coralville, IA, USA). The affinity resins for protein isolation were purchased from the following: Ni2+ chelate chromatography from Adar Biotech (Rehovot, Israel) and Strep-Tactin[®]XT 4Flow high-capacity resin from IBA GmbH (Gottingen, Germany). Recombinantly expressed WT GCase (r-GCase; Cat. Nr. 7410-GHB-020) was purchased from R&D Systems (Minneapolis, MN, USA). The fluorescent substrate for the GCase activity assay N-[6-[(7-nitro-2-1,3-benzoxadiazol-4-yl) amino]hexanoyl]-D-glucosyl-\beta1-1'-sphingosine (C6-NBD-GlcCer) was obtained from Avanti Polar Lipids (Alabaster, AL, USA). The following antibodies were used for western blotting: anti-GCase (Cat. Nr. G4171, Sigma Aldrich, Darmstadt, Germany), anti-His (Cat. Nr. A7058, Sigma Aldrich), anti-StrepMAB (Cat. Nr. 2-1509-001, IBA GmbH) and anti-GAPDH (Cat. Nr. MAB374, Sigma Aldrich).

Cell culture

Protein expression was performed in the *E. coli* SHuffle T7 Express strain (New England BioLabs, Ipswich, MA, USA), grown in LB media containing Kanamycin (30 μ g·mL⁻¹). HEK 293T and SH-SY5Y cells were grown in Dulbecco's modified Eagle's medium supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum, 110 μ g·mL⁻¹ sodium pyruvate, 100 IU·mL⁻¹ penicillin, 100 μ g·mL⁻¹ streptomycin and nonessential amino acids in a humidified incubator at 37 °C with 5% CO₂.

Protein expression in E. coli

WT GCase and dGCase3 were cloned into a pET28bdSUMO [48] vector (Fig. 1A) containing an N-terminal His-tag for purification and expressed in *E. coli*. Cells were grown at 30 °C until OD₆₀₀ reached 0.6–0.8, followed by induction of protein expression (by 200 μ m IPTG) at 15 °C for ~ 18 h. Proteins were isolated from *E. coli* lysates using Ni²⁺ chelating chromatography followed by release from the column using SUMO protease [49]. Protein purity was assessed on 10% Tris-glycine SDS/PAGE gels stained with Coomassie blue. GCase variants were identified by western blotting using anti-His antibodies.

Protein expression in HEK293T cells

Genes coding for WT GCase and dGCase1, dGCase2, and dGCase3 were cloned into a pcDNA 3.1 vector, together with an N-terminal Twin-Strep isolation tag (Fig. 1B). Proteins were targeted extracellularly using the N-terminal R-PTP-S secretion signal (MGILPSPGMPALLSLVSLLSVLLMGCVA) [50]. For protein expression, HEK293T cells were grown in 10 cm culture dishes and transiently transfected using the polyethyleneimine reagent with 10 μ g of plasmid per dish (DNA : PEI ratio was 1 : 1.5 w/w). Growth media were collected 36–48-h post-transfection.

Purification of WT GCase and dGCase from the extracellular medium

GCase was isolated from the medium using a Strep-Tactin[®]XT 4Flow high-capacity resin. Medium was transferred to 250 mL tubes and centrifuged at 10 000 g (4 °C, 20 min) to remove detached and dead cells. The medium was then transferred into 50 mL Falcon tubes and 200 μL of affinity resin suspension in Tris buffer (150 mM NaCl/ 50 mM Tris, pH 7.4) was added. Tubes were placed on a rotator at 4 °C overnight. The tubes were then centrifuged (4000 g, 4 °C, 20 min) and the medium aspirated. The resin was washed with an excess of Tris buffer by three centrifugation steps (4000 g, 4 °C, 20 min). GCase was released from the Strep-TactinXT resin using five consecutive elution steps with 50 mM biotin. Biotin was dissolved in sodium citrate buffer (40 mM trisodium citrate, 15 mM disodium hydrogen citrate, 187 mM D-mannitol, and 0.1% (v/ v) mL Tween 80, pH 6.1). The eluted protein was stored in sodium citrate buffer. Protein purity was assessed on 10% Tris-glycine SDS/PAGE gels stained with Coomassie blue. GCase was identified by western blotting using anti-GCase and anti-StrepMAB antibodies. Protein preparations were assayed for enzymatic activity and subjected to differential scanning fluorimetry. The kinetic and spectroscopic data were compared with the corresponding data for Cerezyme® and for recombinant WT GCase (r-GCase).

Differential scanning fluorimetry

Differential scanning fluorimetry (DSF) was performed using a NanoDSF Prometheus NT.48 instrument (NanoTemper

Technologies GmbH, Munich, Germany). Samples were heated at 1 °C·min⁻¹ steps over a 20–95 °C temperature range. The fluorescence emission of tyrosine and tryptophan was recorded at 330 and 350 nm, respectively. Data were analyzed using a PR.THERMCONTROL v2.1.1 instrument (Nano-Temper Technologies GmbH). The melting temperature (T_m) was defined as the inflection point of the fluorescence intensity (FI) ratio curve, where R (FI) = FI_{350nm}/FI_{330nm}.

Enzyme activity

Enzymatic activity was determined using a fluorescently labeled substrate of GCase, C6-NBD-GlcCer, as described [51,52]. The assay was performed using 0.1 μ g of pure protein or 7 μ g of cell homogenate in a final volume of 20 μ L McIlvarine buffer, pH 4.2. The reaction was run at 37 °C for 5 min and terminated by the addition of 1.5 mL of chloroform-methanol (1 : 2, v/v) prior to lipid extraction.

For the kinetic study, the activity of purified GCase was determined using *p*-nitrophenyl- β -D-glucopyranoside [37]. An aliquot of the enzyme was incubated with 0.2–4 mm *p*-NP-Glc, pH 5.9, at 25 °C, for 60 min. The reaction was terminated by 50-fold dilution into 1 M glycine buffer, pH 10.0, and absorbance of the *p*-nitrophenol was measured at 405 nm using an Agilent Cary 3500 spectrophotometer (Agilent Technologies, Santa Clara, CA, USA). Data were analyzed using the Michaelis–Menten eq.

SH-SY5Y and HEK293T GBA^{-/-} cells

HEK293T $GBA^{-/-}$ and SH-SY5Y $GBA^{-/-}$ cells were produced by Crispr/Cas9 genome editing [53]. A guide sequence (CATAGCGGCTGAAGGTACCA) was chosen to optimize for both off- and on- targeting using the MIT CRISPR design tool [54], and the sgRNAdesigner Rule set 1 [55], respectively. The guide sequence was cloned into a pSpCas9(BB)-2A-GFP vector and transfected into cells. Isolation of clonal cell populations was performed 24 h after transfection by FACS sorting. Single cells were sorted using GFP fluorescence, into 96-well plates containing 100 μ L medium in each well. After 1–3 weeks, viable colonies were transferred to 24-well plates and collected for verification of *GBA1* knock-out by western blotting. Endogenous GCase activity and GlcCer levels were determined in cell homogenates (Fig. S1).

AAV vector preparation

Vectors were generated at the translational vector core (CPV) of the University Hospital of Nantes by packaging AAV2-based recombinant genomes containing DNA sequences encoding WT GCase or dGCase3 under the control of a ubiquitous CAG promoter (Fig. 1C) into AAVrh10 capsids using helper virus-free transfection of

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HEK293 cells. The vectors were purified using an optimized CsCl gradient-based purification protocol [56]. Viral protein purity and identity were verified by SDS/PAGE silver staining, and vector titers quantified by qPCR with primers targeting the flanking sequence of ITR2.

Transduction of SH-SY5Y cells using AAV

Nondifferentiated SH-SY5Y cells were seeded in 6-well plates (300 000 cells per well in 2 mL culture medium) (Day 1). On Day 2, 0.5 mL of medium was replaced by the same volume of transduction medium containing the vector at 0.5×10^5 , 1×10^5 , and 5×10^5 vg per cell. On Day 3, 0.5 mL of fresh cell culture medium was added. Cells were collected on Day 5 using trypsin/EDTA and pelleted by centrifugation (5 min, 1000 g, 4 °C). Pellets were used immediately or stored at -80 °C.

SH-SY5Y GBA^{+/+} and GBA^{-/-} cells were differentiated as follows [57]. Three hundred thousands cells were seeded in 6-well plates (35 mm diameter) precoated with poly-Llysine. The next day (Day 1), medium was replaced by low-FBS media (DMEM, 1% FBS, 110 µg·mL⁻¹ sodium pyruvate, 100 IU·mL⁻¹ penicillin, 100 μ g·mL⁻¹ streptomycin and nonessential amino acids) with 10 µM retinoic acid (RA) added just prior to use. On Day 2, the medium was replaced by fresh low-FBS medium containing 10 uM RA and AAV (5 \times 10⁵ vg per cell). On Day 5, the low-FBS medium was exchanged with Neurobasal medium (Neurobasal medium containing B-27 supplement, 20 mM KCl, 100 IU·mL⁻¹ penicillin, 100 µg·mL⁻¹ streptomycin, nonessential amino acids, 2 mM glutamine, 50 ng \cdot mL⁻¹ BDNF, 2 mM db-cAMP) with 10 µM RA. The medium was replaced every 3 days by fresh Neurobasal medium containing RA. Cells were harvested after 12 or 15 days.

Cell pellets were lysed by five freeze-thaw cycles in 150 μ L of McIlvaine buffer (41 mM Na₂HPO₄, 59 mM citric acid, pH 4.2) with a protease inhibitor cocktail (1 : 100) and DNase (1 : 200). Protein concentrations of cell homogenates were determined using the BCA reagent. Enzyme activity was assayed using C6-NBD-GlcCer.

Cell transfection using GCase missense mutants

Single-point missense mutations were introduced into the WT GCase sequence in pcDNA 3.1 plasmids. HEK 293T GBA^{-/-} cells were cultured in 6-well plates and transfected using the polyethyleneimine reagent using 2 μ g of plasmid per well. Cells were collected 36–48-h post-transfection. Enzymatic activity was measured as described in the previous section.

Lipidomic analysis

Cell homogenates were prepared as described in previous sections except that cell pellets were lysed in double-distilled water with a protease inhibitor cocktail (1 : 100). Quantitative analysis of sphingolipids in cell homogenates was performed by liquid chromatography-tandem mass spectrometry [58].

PRAMP algorithm

All mutations used are listed in Supplementary Dataset and Tables S1 (GD-causing), S2 (PROSS) and S3 (SNPs). A comprehensive list of GD-causing missense mutations was created via literature review. To generate the list of SNPs (that have not been detected in GD patients), variants of *GBA1* were downloaded from the NCBI Variation Viewer (https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/variation/view/) human genome version GRCh38.12. The list was filtered prior to download with the molecular consequence 'missense variant'. The list was manually annotated to ensure that all protein-coding changes were included in the dataset and duplicates or synonymous mutations had been removed. Mutations without documented clinical significance and with uncertain significance were chosen.

 Δ PSSM was calculated by subtracting the PSSM score of the mutated amino acid from that of human GCase. The PSSM table was extracted from the PROSS stability-design calculations, as were the $\Delta\Delta G$ calculations. The solvent exposure fraction was calculated using the sTRIDE webserver (http://webclu.bio.wzw.tum.de/stride/). All the parameters can be found in the Supplementary dataset (10.17632/ pkcjn539b5.1). The PRAMP algorithm was built by a custom-written Python script using LinearSVC function (scikit-learn).

REVEL scores were downloaded from the website: https://sites.google.com/site/revelgenomics/downloads and parsed manually to create a file with only the GBA locus for comparison to PRAMP.

The PRAMP score for compound heterozygous mutations was calculated as the negative geometric average of the two individual PRAMP scores, and the REVEL score for compound heterozygous was calculated as geometric average of the two individual REVEL scores. Statistical significance was evaluated either by the Student's *t*-test or by analysis of variance (ANOVA) followed by *post hoc* pairwise comparisons using the Tukey's honest significant difference test. Correlations were evaluated using the Spearman coefficient.

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Author contributions

JLS, IS, SJF, and AHF designed the research. SP, RK, YA, YP, TU, SA, OD, AT, and RT performed the biochemical experiments. OK, RL-S, and AG performed the computational work. MH and RL contributed new reagents. SP, YA, OK, RL-S, and SBD analyzed data. SP wrote the manuscript. AHF wrote the manuscript and obtained funding. All authors discussed data and edited the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

Yeda Research & Development, on behalf of the Weizmann Institute of Science, has applied for patent applications corresponding to PCT/IL2021/050357 on the acid- β -glucosidase designs, naming AHF, IS, JLS, SJF, AG, SP, YA, and OK as inventors. SJF and AG are named inventors on stability-design patents corresponding to PCT/IL2016/050812. MH and RL are employees and shareholders of Lysogene.

Peer review

The peer review history for this article is available at https://publons.com/publon/10.1111/febs.16758.

Data availability statement

The experimental data that support the findings of this study are included in this article and supplementary material (Fig. S1 and Tables S1–S5). The structural data used within this study are openly available in the wwPDB (PDB 10.2210/pdb3GXI/pdb). The data used for the construction of the PRAMP algorithm are openly available in Mendeley data at 10.17632/pkcjn539b5.1. The list of single-nucleotide polymorphism data is openly available at NCBI Variation

Viewer at https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/variation/ view/.

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Supporting information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Fig. S1. Characterization of HEK293T and SH-SY5Y $\mathrm{GBA}^{-/-}$ cells.

 Table S1. Comprehensive list of missense mutations

 which cause Gaucher disease.

Table S2. PROSS mutations and their PRAMP scores.**Table S3.** List of SNPs in GCase which have not beenshown to cause Gaucher disease.

Table S4. Homozygous GD mutations used to gener-ate Fig. 7A,B.

Table S5. Compound heterozygous and homozygous GD mutations used to generate Fig. 7C,D.