

Piezo2 integrates mechanical and thermal cues in vertebrate mechanoreceptors

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Edited by Joseph S. Takahashi, University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, Dallas, TX, and approved July 23, 2019 (received for review June 13, 2019)

Tactile information is detected by thermoreceptors and mechanoreceptors in the skin and integrated by the central nervous system to produce the perception of somatosensation. Here we investigate the mechanism by which thermal and mechanical stimuli begin to interact and report that it is achieved by the mechanotransduction apparatus in cutaneous mechanoreceptors. We show that moderate cold potentiates the conversion of mechanical force into excitatory current in all types of mechanoreceptors from mice and tactile-specialist birds. This effect is observed at the level of mechanosensitive Piezo2 channels and can be replicated in heterologous systems using Piezo2 orthologs from different species. The cold sensitivity of Piezo2 is dependent on its blade domains, which render the channel resistant to cold-induced perturbations of the physical properties of the plasma membrane and give rise to a different mechanism of mechanical activation than that of Piezo1. Our data reveal that Piezo2 is an evolutionarily conserved mediator of thermal-tactile integration in cutaneous mechanoreceptors.

Piezo2 | Piezo1 | mechanoreceptor | cold receptor | polymodal ion channel

The mechanically gated ion channel Piezo2 mediates the detection of touch by somatosensory neurons and Merkel cells. Defects in Piezo2 function lead to severe deficits in mechanosensation, proprioception, and joint development in mice and humans (1–10). As a membrane protein in cutaneous mechanoreceptors, Piezo2 encounters thermal fluctuations in its environment, which in warm-blooded animals are often colder than the temperature of the body. Observations in humans have shown that prolonged cold exposure leads to numbness, likely due to inhibition of the action potential-generating machinery, whereas mild temporary cooling sharpens tactile acuity and enhances the perception of object heaviness by mechanosensitive A β fibers (11–14). Many vertebrates, including tactile-foraging waterfowl, are able to use the sense of touch to find food in cold water, demonstrating preservation of tactile acuity upon temporary cooling (15–17). These observations suggest that thermal and mechanical cues interact at the level of peripheral mechanoreceptors, and further, that cold may directly potentiate the conversion of mechanical force into excitatory current via Piezo2.

Piezo1, the only known homolog of Piezo2, mediates the detection of mechanical force in various cell types inside the body, including interoceptive mechanoreceptors from the nodose ganglion and neurons in the central nervous system (CNS), where it does not encounter significant fluctuations in temperature (18–20). Piezo1 activation is thought to be triggered primarily by membrane tension (21–26). Such reliance on “force-from-lipid” for activation suggests that cold would inhibit Piezo1 due to a decrease in membrane fluidity and increase in bending stiffness. Conversely, Piezo2 is refractory to activation by membrane stretch (8, 27–29), suggesting that Piezo2 may be resistant to cold-induced perturbations of the physical properties of the plasma membrane due to a different mechanism of activation.

The goal of this study was to investigate whether thermal and mechanical stimuli are integrated at the level of peripheral mechanoreceptors. We found that cold increases the peak amplitude of

mechanically activated (MA) current in all mechanoreceptor subtypes from mice. Additionally, cold prolongs the time of MA current inactivation, leading to an overall potentiation of the amount of current entering the neuron upon mechanical stimulation. The effect is evolutionarily conserved, as similar cold-induced potentiation was also observed in mechanoreceptors from tactile-specialist birds. Cold also enhanced MA current through Piezo2 following its expression in various cell types, revealing the molecular basis for cold-induced potentiation of mechanosensitivity in a subset of mechanoreceptors. In contrast, cold inhibited MA current through Piezo1, supporting the idea that this homolog is acutely sensitive to changes in the physical properties of the plasma membrane. Similarly, stiffening the membrane with saturated fatty acids also inhibited Piezo1 but consistently failed to affect Piezo2. Swapping the membrane-embedded blade domains between Piezo2 and Piezo1 transposed the response of the 2 channels to cold or fatty acids, and thus their sensitivity to membrane stiffness. Together, these results reveal that somatosensory neurons can directly integrate thermal and mechanical stimuli via Piezo2, and that such integration is dependent on the blade domains of the channel.

Results

Cooling Potentiates MA Current in Mechanoreceptors from Different Species. Given the observation that mild temporary cooling sharpens tactile acuity (11–13), we sought to determine the effects

Significance

The detection of mechanical touch and temperature is essential for interaction with the physical world. Here, we report that cold potentiates the conversion of mechanical touch into excitatory ionic current in cutaneous mechanoreceptors from different vertebrate species. We show that this process is mediated by the mechanically gated ion channel Piezo2, the principal detector of touch in somatosensory neurons, and can be recapitulated by Piezo2 orthologs in various heterologous systems. We demonstrate that the blade domains are essential for cold-induced potentiation of Piezo2 activity and are sufficient to endow this property when transposed onto Piezo2 homolog Piezo1. Our findings provide mechanistic insights into thermal-tactile interaction in vertebrates at the level of somatosensory neurons.

Author contributions: W.Z., Y.A.N., E.O.G., and S.N.B. designed research; W.Z., Y.A.N., and E.O.G. performed research; W.Z., Y.A.N., E.O.G., and S.N.B. analyzed data; and W.Z., Y.A.N., E.O.G., and S.N.B. wrote the paper.

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

This article is a PNAS Direct Submission.

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Data deposition: The squirrel Piezo2 reported in this paper has been deposited in the GenBank database (accession no. [MK905889](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/nuclot/MK905889)).

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This article contains supporting information online at www.pnas.org/lookup/suppl/doi:10.1073/pnas.1910213116/-DCSupplemental.

of cold on mechanotransduction in somatosensory neurons. We recorded MA current in mouse dorsal root ganglion (DRG) neurons in response to mechanical indentation with a glass probe at 22 °C, a standard temperature for MA current recordings (30), followed by 12 °C, a temperature that engages the majority of cold receptors (31). We found that cooling from 22 °C to 12 °C enhanced the amount of current flowing through MA channels by slowing inactivation and increasing peak current amplitude. We observed this effect in each of the 3 major groups of somatosensory neurons: those with fast, intermediate, and slowly inactivating MA current (Fig. 1 *A–D* and *SI Appendix*, Fig. S1*A*). Together, the 3 groups encompass low-threshold mechanoreceptors, high-threshold mechanonociceptors, and proprioceptors (32).

We next asked whether cold-induced potentiation is evolutionarily conserved and whether it is present in mechanoreceptors from the trigeminal ganglion (TG), a cranial analog of the DRG that provides sensory innervation to the face in vertebrates. To do this, we analyzed neurons from the TG of Pekin duck (*Anas platyrhynchos domesticus*), a tactile-specialist bird (15). The largest neuronal group in duck TG are Piezo2-expressing low-threshold mechanoreceptors, which support the specialized tactile feeding apparatus in the bill (33–35). Like other vertebrates, the duck TG lacks proprioceptors. Similar to mouse DRG neurons, cooling from 22 °C to 12 °C slowed inactivation and increased the peak amplitude of MA current in each of the 3 groups of duck trigeminal mechanoreceptors (Fig. 1 *E–H*). Cooling failed to elicit MA current in mechanically insensitive neurons from either species (*SI Appendix*, Fig. S1 *B* and *C*). Collectively, these data show that cooling increases the amount of excitatory current in mechanoreceptors during mechanical stimulation. Further, because this integration of thermal and mechanical cues was observed in all types of mechanoreceptors from mammals and birds, the data demonstrate evolutionary conservation of the underlying molecular mechanisms.

Cooling Potentiates Piezo2-Mediated MA Current. The mechanically gated ion channel Piezo2 mediates fast inactivating MA current in low-threshold mechanoreceptors and proprioceptors from mouse DRG (1, 4, 36). To investigate whether Piezo2 channels mediate the effects of cold-induced potentiation of mechanical responses, we tested the effect of cold on Piezo2 expressed in ND7/23 cells, a DRG neuron-derived cell line with low levels of endogenous MA current (37) (*SI Appendix*, Fig. S2*A*). We found that cooling from 22 °C to 12 °C slowed the inactivation kinetics of MA current through Piezo2 and increased peak amplitude at negative membrane potentials, resulting in a dramatic increase in the total charge conducted by Piezo2 in response to mechanical stimulation. The effect was fully reversible upon rewarming to 22 °C (Fig. 2 *A* and *B* and *SI Appendix*, Fig. S2 *B* and *C*). We also observed a reversible cold-induced potentiation of mouse Piezo2 MA current in *Piezo1*-deficient neuroblastoma-derived N2A (N2A^{ΔP1}) and HEK293T (HEK293T^{ΔP1}) cells at positive and negative potentials (Fig. 2 *C* and *D* and *SI Appendix*, Fig. S2 *D–G*) (27, 38, 39). Furthermore, cold temperatures slowed MA current inactivation in HEK293T^{ΔP1} cells expressing Piezo2 orthologs cloned from Pekin duck, a tactile-specialist bird, and 13-lined ground squirrel (*Citellomys tridecemlineatus*), a rodent that exhibits a remarkable cold tolerance at the level of the somatosensory system (Fig. 2 *E–H* and *SI Appendix*, Fig. S2 *H–K*) (40). The similarity of these data to those from DRG and TG neurons suggests that cold-induced potentiation of fast MA current in somatosensory neurons is mediated by Piezo2 channels.

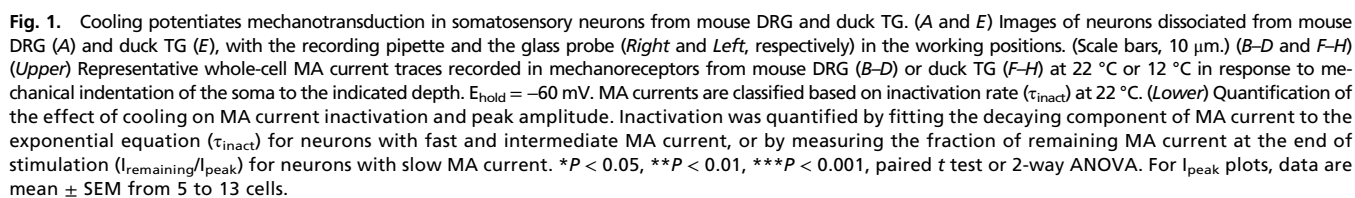
To obtain a more detailed picture of the effect of cooling on Piezo2, we recorded MA current in HEK293T^{ΔP1} cells expressing mouse Piezo2 at a broad range of temperatures from 37 °C to 9 °C. We found that Piezo2 inactivation has a sigmoid dependence on temperature, reaching a near-maximum at ~12 °C and a near-minimum at ~22 °C, whereas peak current amplitude

is temperature-independent (Fig. 2 *I* and *J*). Thus, the increase in Piezo2 MA current amplitude upon cooling requires the native environment of somatosensory neurons or the related ND7/23 cell line. It is possible that the neurons and ND7/23 cell express additional mechanotransducers or components of the mechanotransduction machinery, which may account for the potentiating effect of cold on MA current amplitude compared to HEK293 cells. Nevertheless, because slowing of current inactivation is independent of cell type, we can conclude that cold enhances the total amount of MA current flowing through Piezo2 channels from birds to mammals.

Cooling Inhibits Piezo1-Mediated MA Current. To examine whether the effect of cold on MA currents is specific to Piezo2, we tested its close homolog Piezo1, which is expressed in vagal sensory neurons, CNS neurons, and various other cell types in the body (18–20). We found that cooling from 22 °C to 12 °C slowed inactivation of mechanical indentation-evoked Piezo1 current in HEK293T^{ΔP1} cells at negative and positive potentials. However, in stark contrast to Piezo2, cold significantly suppressed Piezo1 peak current amplitude (Fig. 3 *A* and *B* and *SI Appendix*, Fig. S3). We observed a similar diminution of MA current amplitude when we stimulated Piezo1 by stretching the plasma membrane with a high-speed pressure clamp in the cell-attached configuration (Fig. 3 *C* and *D*). For both methods, inhibition was reversible upon rewarming to 22 °C. Sampling Piezo1 activity at a range of temperatures from 37 °C to 9 °C revealed that cooling slows inactivation and inhibits peak amplitude with a sigmoid dependence such that both parameters reach saturation at 12 °C (Fig. 3 *E* and *F*). Single-channel recordings of spontaneous Piezo1 activity under the basal tension of a cell-attached patch (41) showed that cooling from 22 °C to 12 °C decreases open probability and reduces single-channel conductance, whereas warming from 22 °C to 32 °C or 37 °C increases only conductance (Fig. 3 *G–J*). Thus, our data demonstrate that, in contrast to the potentiating effect on Piezo2, cooling inhibits mechanically evoked activity of Piezo1.

Membrane Stiffness Inhibits MA Currents through Piezo1 but Not Piezo2. Cooling exerts multiple effects on the cell, including an increase in structural order of plasma membrane lipids. As a result, a cooled membrane has decreased fluidity and increased bending stiffness (42). Qualitatively similar changes in the plasma membrane can be achieved at room temperature by incubating the cells with margaric acid (MarA), a C17 saturated fatty acid (43). To examine whether membrane stiffness underlies the differential effects of cooling on Piezo1 and Piezo2, we tested the mechanosensitivity of Piezo1 and Piezo2 expressed in HEK293T^{ΔP1} cells preincubated with 50 μM MarA. Consistent with an earlier report using N2A cells (43), we found that MarA inhibited the peak amplitude of MA current through Piezo1 without affecting inactivation (Fig. 4 *A–C*). Single-channel analysis revealed that inhibition stemmed from a decrease in Piezo1 open probability (Fig. 4 *D* and *E*). In agreement with the effect of cooling, MarA failed to diminish MA current produced by Piezo2 (Fig. 4 *F–H*). These results demonstrate that, unlike Piezo1, mechanical activation of Piezo2 is insensitive to changes in membrane stiffness, providing an explanation for the lack of an inhibitory effect of cold on peak amplitude of Piezo2 MA current.

The Blade Domains Determine Sensitivity to Cold and Membrane Stiffness. Structural studies have revealed that Piezo1 is composed of 3 monomers, each containing a blade domain on the N terminus and a pore-forming C-terminal domain (44–46). The blade domains are integrated into the plasma membrane such that they produce a cup-shaped structure with the pore in the center. The curved blades are thought to serve as essential channel elements that detect an increase in membrane tension to



different blade domains. To test our hypothesis, we measured MA currents at 12 °C, 22 °C, and 37 °C in HEK293T^{ΔP1} cells expressing Piezo1/2 chimeras in which the blade domains were

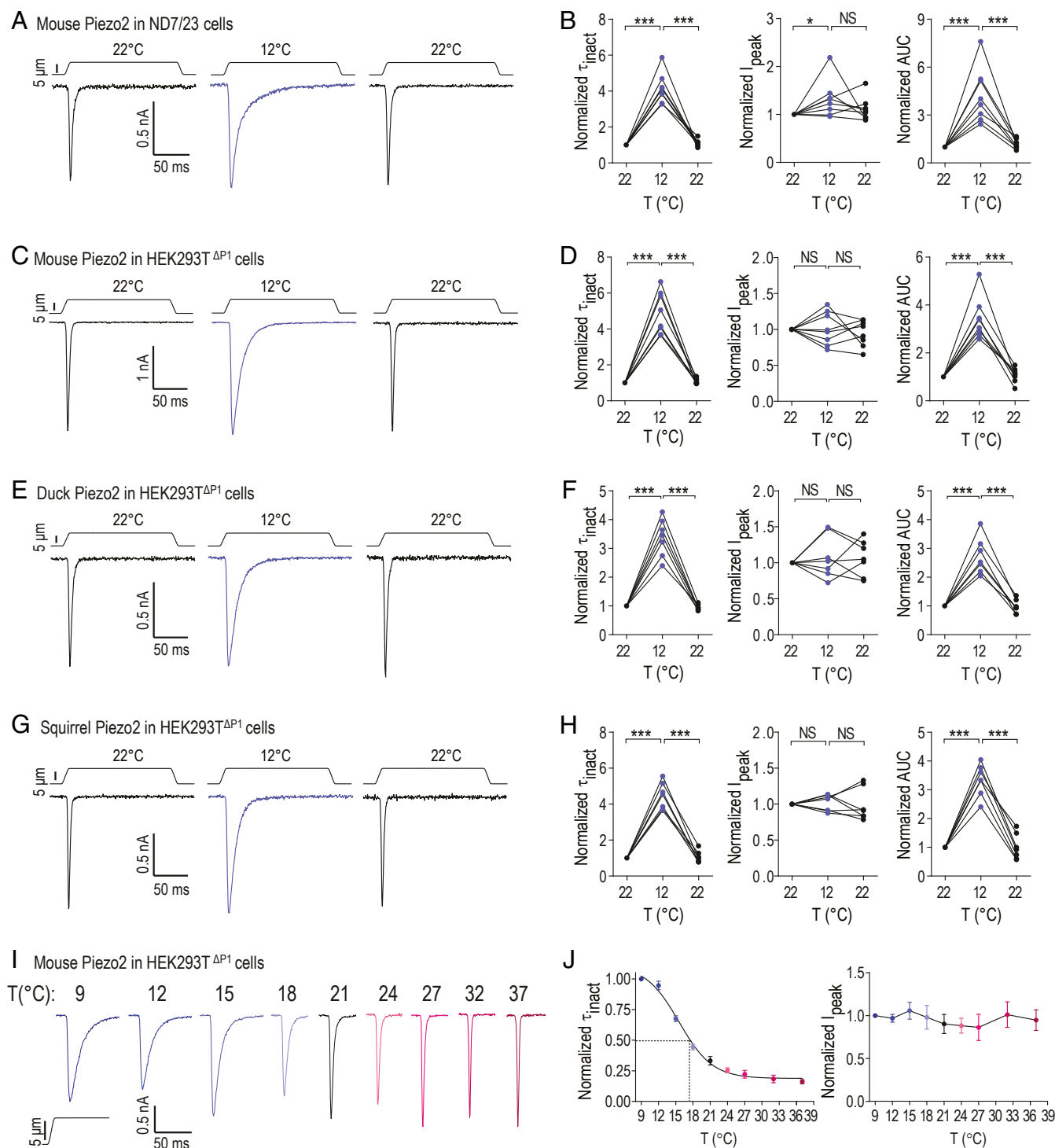


Fig. 2. Cooling potentiates Piezo2-mediated MA current. (A, C, E, and G) Representative whole-cell MA current traces consecutively recorded at indicated temperatures from mouse Piezo2 in ND7/23 (A), mouse Piezo2 in HEK293T^{ΔP1} (C), duck Piezo2 in HEK293T^{ΔP1} (E), and squirrel Piezo2 in HEK293T^{ΔP1} (G). $E_{\text{hold}} = -80$ mV. (B, D, F, and H) Quantification of the effect of temperature on MA current parameters recorded at -80 mV and normalized to initial values at 22 °C: MA current inactivation (τ_{inact} , Left), peak MA current amplitude (I_{peak} , Middle) and total amount of conducted charge estimated as area under the current curve (AUC, Right) recorded from mouse Piezo2 in ND7/23 (B), mouse Piezo2 (D), duck Piezo2 (F), or squirrel Piezo2 (H) in HEK293T^{ΔP1}. (I) Representative whole-cell MA current traces recorded from mouse Piezo2 in the same HEK293T^{ΔP1} cell at indicated temperatures during cooling from 37 °C to 9 °C. $E_{\text{hold}} = -80$ mV. (J) Quantification of the effect of cooling on mouse Piezo2 MA current τ_{inact} (Left) and I_{peak} (Right) in HEK293T^{ΔP1}. Data are mean $\pm$ SEM from 7 cells. NS, not significant, $P > 0.05$, $*P < 0.05$, $***P < 0.001$, paired t test.

swapped (27). We found that a chimera containing Piezo1 blades fused to the Piezo2 pore (P1^{blade}/P2^{pore}; Fig. 5A) responds to cooling and MarA like wild-type Piezo1. Cooling from 37 °C to

12 °C slowed P1^{blade}/P2^{pore} inactivation and significantly inhibited current amplitude (Fig. 5B and C). Pretreatment with MarA inhibited MA peak current amplitude in this chimera but did not

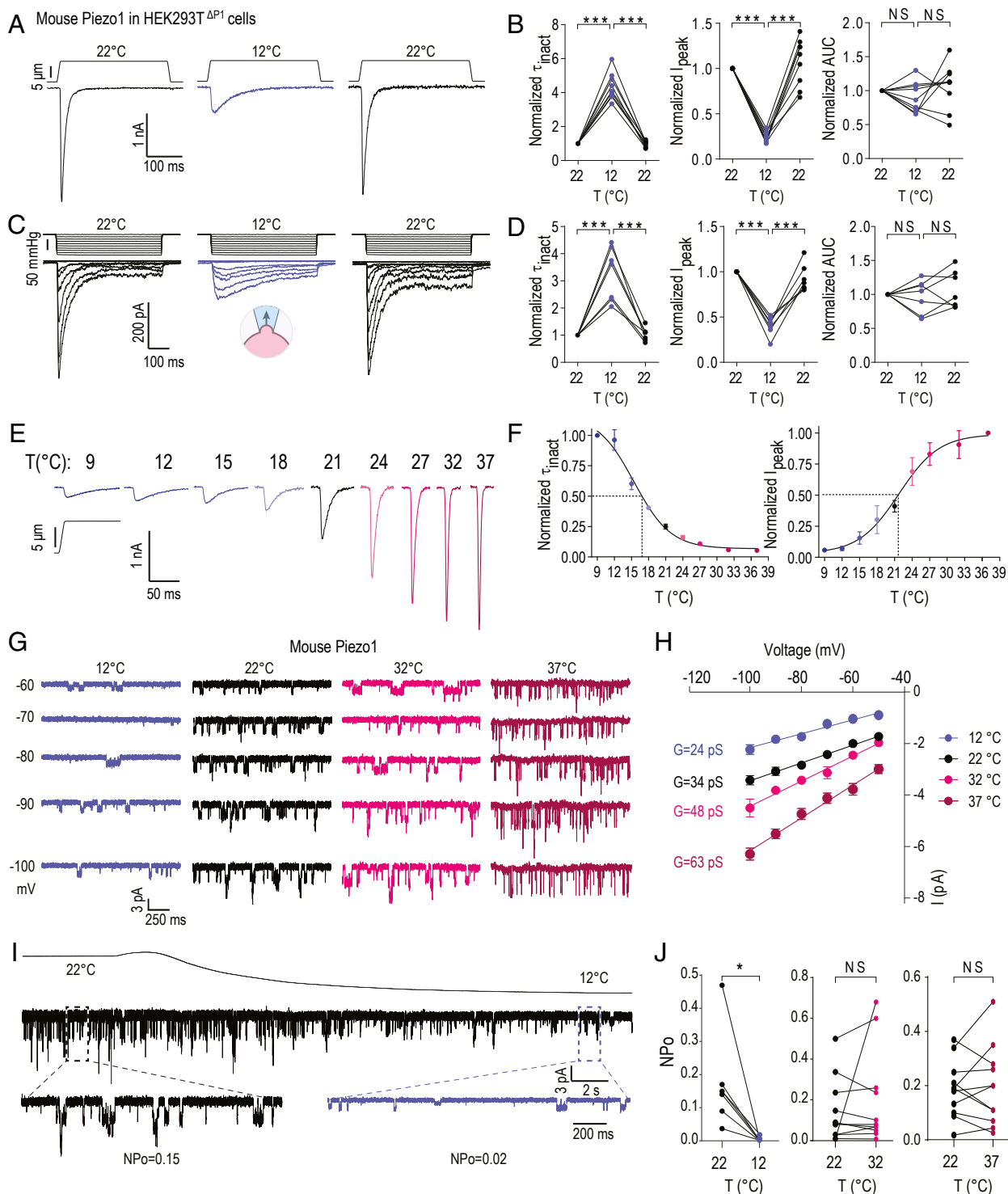


Fig. 3. Cooling inhibits Piezo1-mediated MA current. (A) Representative whole-cell MA current traces recorded at indicated temperatures in the same HEK293T^{ΔP1} cell expressing mouse Piezo1. $E_{hold} = -80$ mV. MA currents were elicited with the same indentation depth. (B) Normalized MA current τ_{inact} (Left), I_{peak} (Middle), and area under the current curve (AUC, Right) from A. NS, not significant, $P > 0.05$; *** $P < 0.001$, paired t test. (C) Representative cell-attached MA current traces at indicated temperatures in the same HEK293T^{ΔP1} cell expressing mouse Piezo1. $E_{hold} = -80$ mV. Currents are induced by negative pressures applied by high-speed pressure clamp in the recording electrode, as shown. (D) Normalized τ_{inact} , I_{peak} , or AUC of maximum MA current from (C). NS, not significant, $P > 0.05$; *** $P < 0.001$, paired t test. (E and F) Representative whole-cell MA current traces at temperatures ranging from 9 °C to 37 °C in the same HEK293T^{ΔP1} cell expressing mouse Piezo1 (E) and quantification of normalized MA current τ_{inact} and I_{peak} (F) ($n = 7$ cells). $E_{hold} = -80$ mV. (G) Representative single-channel recordings of mouse Piezo1 in HEK293T^{ΔP1} cells in cell-attached mode. Spontaneous Piezo1 openings were recorded at basal membrane tension in the cell-attached patch without application of additional pressure, at indicated temperatures and voltages. Downward deflections represent inward current. (H) Current-voltage relationships for single Piezo1 channel at indicated temperatures from (G) with single channel conductances: 12 °C, 24.8 ± 2.1 pS; 22 °C, 34.6 ± 1.3 pS; 32 °C, 48.7 ± 2.6 pS; 37 °C, 63.75 ± 3.4 pS (mean $\pm$ SEM, $n = 5$ cells for each temperature). (I) Representative mouse Piezo1 single-channel recording at -100 mV from the HEK293T^{ΔP1} cell with temperature cooled from 22 °C to 12 °C. Enlarged sections of the current trace are shown at 22 °C and 12 °C with corresponding open probabilities (NPo). (J) Quantification of the temperature effect on NPo of Piezo1 by cooling (Left) and warming (Right). NS, not significant, $P > 0.05$; * $P < 0.05$, paired t test. Data are mean $\pm$ SEM.

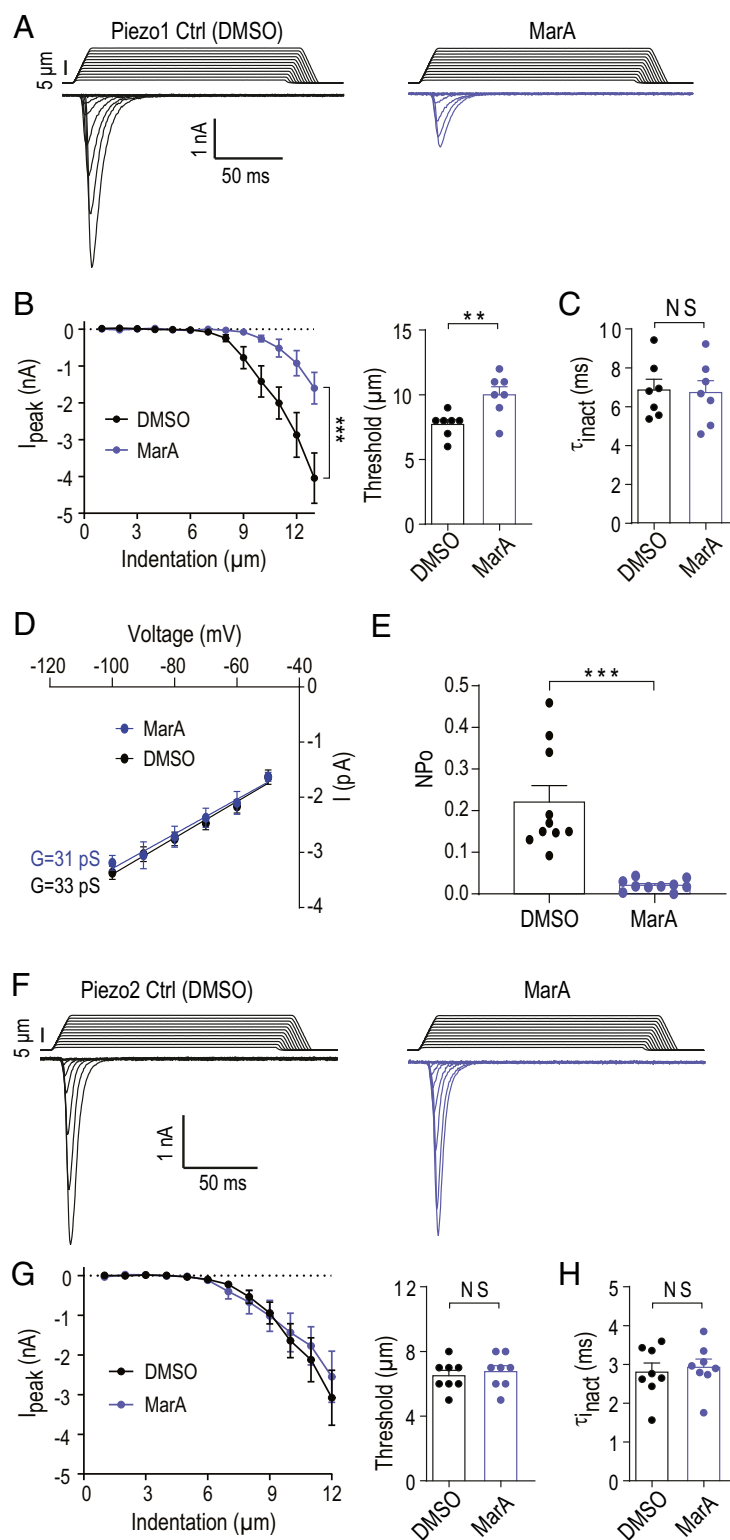


Fig. 4. Stiffening the plasma membrane inhibits mechanical activation of Piezo1 but not Piezo2. (A) Representative whole-cell MA current traces recorded at room temperature in HEK293T^{ΔP1} cells expressing mouse Piezo1. $E_{\text{hold}} = -80$ mV. Cells were treated with 50 μM margaric acid (MarA) or the same volume of DMSO for 18 to 24 h before current measurements. (B) Quantification of MA current I_{peak} and apparent activation threshold from A ($n = 7$ cells). (C) Quantification of MA current τ_{inact} from A. NS, not significant, $P > 0.05$, unpaired t test. (D) Current-voltage relationships of single Piezo1 channel from HEK293T^{ΔP1} cells treated with 50 μM MarA ($n = 3$ cells) or the same volume of DMSO ($n = 3$ cells). Estimated single-channel conductances: DMSO, 33.0 ± 2.7 pS; MarA, 31.4 ± 3.8 pS. (E) Quantification of Piezo1 open probability (NP_o) at -80 mV from HEK293T^{ΔP1} cells treated with 50 μM MarA or DMSO ($n = 10$ cells). (F) Representative whole-cell MA current traces at room temperature in HEK293T^{ΔP1} cells expressing mouse Piezo2. $E_{\text{hold}} = -80$ mV. Cells were treated with 50 μM MarA or DMSO. (G) Quantification of MA current I_{peak} and threshold from (F) ($n = 8$ cells). (H) Quantification of MA current τ_{inact} from (F). Data are mean $\pm$ SEM. NS, not significant, $P > 0.05$, $**P < 0.01$, $***P < 0.001$, unpaired t test or 2-way ANOVA.

Discussion

The integration of sensory modalities occurs within the CNS and results in cognitive awareness of our surroundings (49–52). The work reported here shows that, in addition to this central integration, thermal and mechanical stimuli begin to interact at the level of cutaneous mechanoreceptors. This conclusion is based on our observation that cooling increases the peak and sustained amplitude of MA current in somatosensory neurons from mouse DRG, leading to a large increase in the amount of depolarizing charge that enters the neuron in response to mechanical stimulation. Interestingly, cold potentiated MA current magnitude in all types of mouse mechanoreceptors, including those with fast, intermediate, and slow MA current. In rodents, fast MA current

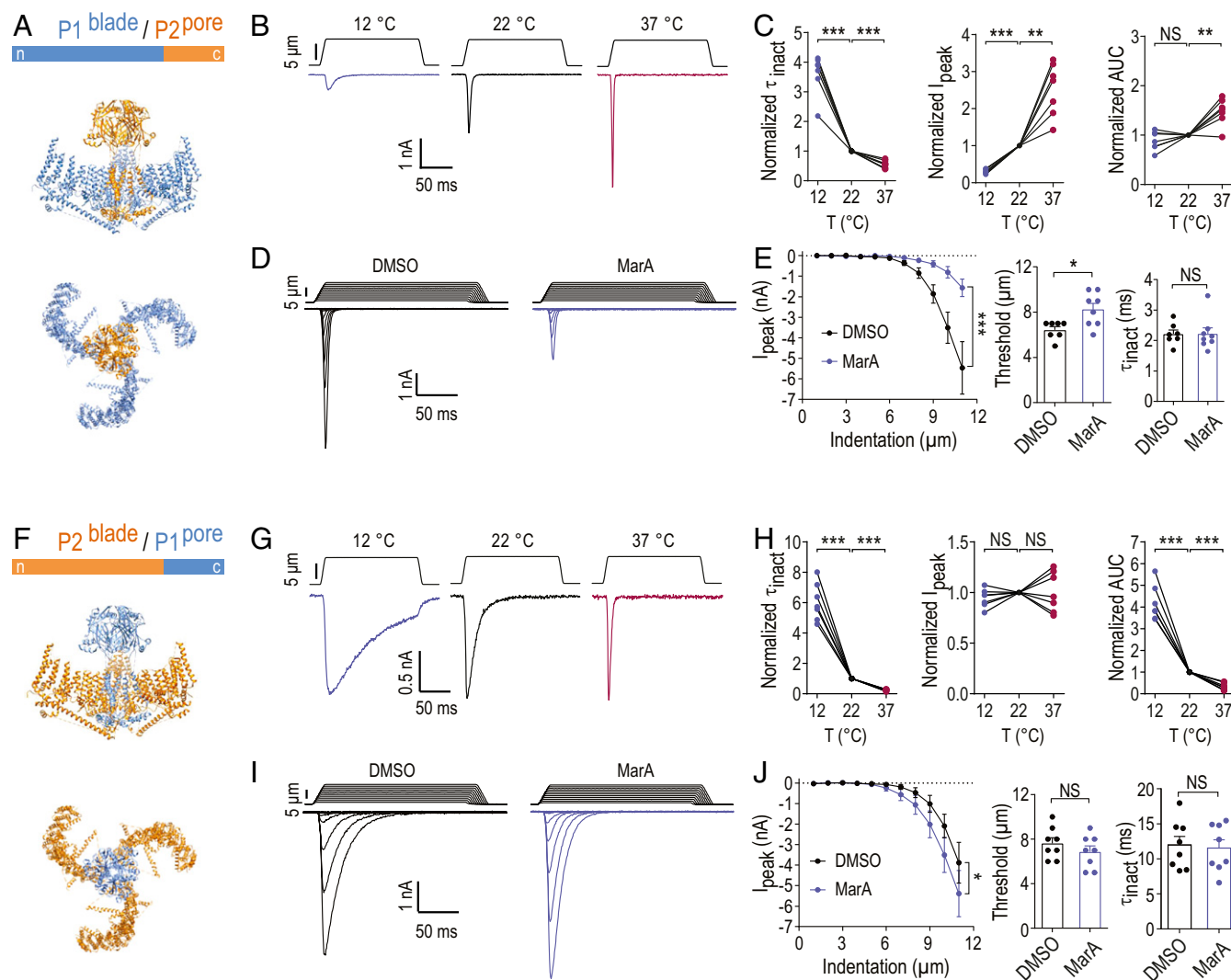


Fig. 5. Blade domains mediate sensitivity of Piezo channels to cold. (A) Illustrations of P1^{blade}/P2^{pore} chimera construct containing mouse Piezo1 blade domains (blue) and mouse Piezo2 pore domains (orange). (B and C) Representative whole-cell MA current traces in the same HEK293T^{ΔP1} cell expressing the P1^{blade}/P2^{pore} chimera construct (B) and normalized MA current τ_{inact} , I_{peak} , and area under the current curve, AUC (C). $E_{\text{hold}} = -80$ mV. NS, not significant, $P > 0.05$; *** $P < 0.01$, *** $P < 0.001$, paired t test. (D and E) Representative whole-cell MA current traces recorded at room temperature in HEK293T^{ΔP1} cells expressing P1^{blade}/P2^{pore} (D) and quantification of MA current I_{peak} , apparent activation threshold or τ_{inact} . $E_{\text{hold}} = -80$ mV. Cells were treated with 50 μM MarA ($n = 8$ cells) or DMSO ($n = 7$ cells) for 18 to 24 h before current measurements. NS, not significant, * $P < 0.05$, *** $P < 0.001$, 2-way ANOVA or unpaired t test. (F) Illustrations of P2^{blade}/P1^{pore} chimera construct containing mouse Piezo2 blade domains (orange) and mouse Piezo1 pore domains (blue). (G and H) Representative whole-cell MA current traces in the same HEK293T^{ΔP1} cell expressing the P2^{blade}/P1^{pore} chimera construct (G) and quantification of normalized MA current, τ_{inact} , I_{peak} , and AUC (H). $E_{\text{hold}} = -80$ mV. NS, not significant, $P > 0.05$; *** $P < 0.001$, paired t test. (I and J) Representative whole-cell MA current traces recorded at room temperature in HEK293T^{ΔP1} cells expressing P2^{blade}/P1^{pore} (I) and quantification of MA current I_{peak} , apparent activation threshold or τ_{inact} (J). $E_{\text{hold}} = -80$ mV. Cells were treated with 50 μM MarA ($n = 8$ cells) or DMSO ($n = 8$ cells). NS, not significant, $P > 0.05$; * $P < 0.05$, 2-way ANOVA or unpaired t test. Data are mean $\pm$ SEM.

is present in light touch receptors and proprioceptors, whereas intermediate and slow MA currents are mostly thought to define mechanical nociceptors (32).

We also detected a similar potentiation of mechanical responses in somatosensory neurons from the TG of tactile-foraging ducks. Like all vertebrates, the TG of tactile-foraging ducks is devoid of proprioceptors. However, in contrast to other vertebrates, including rodents and visually foraging birds, duck TG contains an unusually high proportion of light touch receptors that develop at the expense of nociceptors and thermoreceptors. This results in mechanosensory specialization in the bill toward tactile foraging (33–35). The commonality between the potentiating effects of cold on MA current in mouse and duck somatosensory ganglia strongly suggests that the peripheral integration of thermal and mechanical cues is an evolutionarily conserved property of vertebrate mechanoreceptors.

Fast MA current in mouse DRG neurons is mediated by Piezo2, whereas the molecular identity of intermediate and slow MA channels remains obscure (4, 36). We show that ectopic expression of mouse, squirrel, or duck Piezo2 orthologs in various heterologous systems recapitulates the potentiating effect of cold on fast MA current in neurons, providing a molecular basis for the observed effect in this mechanoreceptor subtype.

With the exception of physiological cold sensors, such as TRPM8 and some orthologs of TRPA1, a decrease in temperature generally inhibits ion channels, including those that generate action potentials (14, 53–56). We suggest that the preservation of Piezo2 function during cold stimuli may serve as a mechanism to support the functionality of mechanoreceptors upon cooling. This property would be important for the ability of warm-blooded animals to physically interact with objects that are often colder than the body, or for duck species to find food in cold water during their tactile-based dabbling behavior (15, 17). In humans, although prolonged cold exposure leads to numbness, mild temporary cooling potentiates mechanosensitivity. Indeed, a cold object is perceived as heavier than the same object at a neutral temperature. Cooling also potentiates tactile acuity in 2-point discrimination tests on various parts of the body. Such a thermotactile illusion, known as Weber's phenomenon, is attenuated upon partial blockade of A β fibers, suggesting a direct involvement of mechanoreceptors (11–13). Correspondingly, cooling induces a phasic discharge of slowly adapting A β mechanoreceptors in mammals and birds (16, 57, 58). In mice, the fast inactivating MA current in these slowly adapting mechanoreceptors is mediated by Piezo2 (4). In agreement with these findings, we have shown that cold enhances MA current through Piezo2 channels in neurons and cell lines, which explains at least some of the observed integration of thermal and tactile stimuli in mechanoreceptors.

Despite their significance for physiology and medicine, the mechanism by which Piezo channels activate in response to mechanical stimulation remains obscure. Piezo1 forms a unique propeller-like structure with a pore in the center and 3 curved blades that bestow a cup-like shape on the channel (44–46). The curved shape of the channel results in a convex membrane footprint, which is thought to be the source of energy for channel gating in response to changes in membrane stiffness and tension (26). Experimental evidence supports the idea that Piezo1 is primarily activated by membrane tension via the “force-from-lipid” mechanism (21–25, 48). Piezo2, on the other hand, is refractory to activation by membrane stretch, supporting the idea that it may activate via other mechanisms, such as “force-from-tether” (27–29, 59, 60). We have shown that stiffening the

plasma membrane with cold temperatures or saturated fatty acids inhibits activation of Piezo1 but fails to affect Piezo2, and that this difference is encoded by the blade domains. Thus, our data provide strong evidence for the notion that Piezo1 and Piezo2 activate by different mechanisms, despite sequence homology and functional similarities between the 2 channels. Specifically, in contrast to Piezo1, activation of Piezo2 does not appear to be directly linked to changes in physical properties of the plasma membrane. Our observations also predict that the unidentified mechanotransducers that mediate intermediate and slow MA current in mouse DRG should be activated via a mechanism similar to Piezo2.

Following activation, MA current produced by Piezo1 or Piezo2 quickly decays due to fast inactivation (61). Mutations that affect inactivation in either channel are linked to disease, and thus the timing of this process has physiological importance (9, 62–64). Inactivation is influenced by cellular factors and is thought to involve a hydrophobic gate formed primarily by the inner helices plus other regions including the extracellular cap (23, 61, 65–68). Whether inactivation is governed by changes in plasma membrane properties is unclear. We show that inactivation is slowed by cooling, but not membrane stiffening, in both Piezo1 and Piezo2. These observations raise the possibility that inactivation stems from conformational changes within the channels and is generally independent of the physical properties of the plasma membrane.

In conclusion, we have shown that cold potentiates MA current in all types of mechanoreceptors from different vertebrates. At least some of this effect is due to the potentiation of current flowing through mechanosensitive Piezo2 channels, whereas the rest is mediated by unidentified mechanotransducers, whose activity is also expected to be potentiated by cold. We show that cold sensitivity of Piezo2 is conveyed by its blade domains. The underlying mechanism is independent of the physical properties of the plasma membrane, revealing that Piezo2 is activated by a different mechanism to that of Piezo1. Together, our data reveal that Piezo2 mediates thermal–tactile integration in cutaneous mechanoreceptors from evolutionary divergent species.

Materials and Methods

Experiments with mice, squirrels, and Pekin duck embryos were approved by and performed in accordance with guidelines of Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee of Yale University (protocols 2018-11526 and 2018-11497). HEK293T^{ΔP1}, N2A^{ΔP1} (27, 38) and ND7/23 cells were cultured using standard procedures. Duck-Piezo2-pMO and Mouse-Piezo1-pMO were described previously (67). Squirrel Piezo2 was amplified from squirrel DRG cDNA and deposited into the GenBank database (accession no. MK905889). DRG neurons from 6- to 8-wk-old mice and TG neurons from embryonic day 22 to 24 duck embryos were acutely dissociated as previously described (34, 35). Electrophysiological recordings of MA currents from neurons and cell lines were performed at different temperatures in the whole-cell mode in response to indentation with a glass probe (35, 67, 69). For cell-attached experiments, mechanical stimuli were applied by negative pressure pulses using a high-speed pressure clamp system (70). For a detailed description, see *SI Appendix, Supplementary Methods*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS. We thank members of the S.N.B. and E.O.G. laboratories for their contributions throughout the project and Evan Anderson for comments on the manuscript. W.Z. was supported by fellowships from James Hudson Brown - Alexander B. Coxe and the Kavli Institute for Neuroscience. This study was partly funded by NIH grants 1R01NS091300-01A1 (to E.O.G.) and 1R01NS097547-01A1 (to S.N.B.), by NSF CAREER award 1453167 (to S.N.B.), and NSF grant 1923127 (to S.N.B.).

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Supplementary Information for

Piezo2 integrates mechanical and thermal cues in vertebrate mechanoreceptors

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This PDF file includes:

Supplementary Methods

Figures S1 to S3

Supplementary References

Supplementary Methods

Animals. Experiments with mice and Pekin duck embryos (*Anas platyrhynchos domesticus*) were approved by and performed in accordance with guidelines of Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee of Yale University (protocols 2018-11526 and 2018-11497). C57BL/6J mice were purchased from The Jackson Laboratory and maintained in Yale animal facilities. Fertilized duck eggs were purchased from Metzger Farms (Gonzales, CA) and incubated at 37°C as described previously (1).

cDNA constructs. The Mouse-Piezo2-Sport6 construct was kindly provided Ardem Patapoutian (Scripps Research Institute, CA) (2). Duck-Piezo2-pMO and Mouse-Piezo1-pMO were described previously (3). Squirrel-Piezo2-pcDNA3.1(+) was constructed as described below. Chimera constructs P1^{blade}/P2^{pore}, containing blade domains from mouse Piezo1 and pore domains from mouse Piezo2 (Piezo1 amino acids 1-2190; Piezo2 amino acids 2472-2822), and P2^{blade}/P1^{pore}, containing blade domains from mouse Piezo2 and pore domains from mouse Piezo1 (Piezo2 amino acids 1-2471; Piezo1 amino acids 2188-2547), were kind gifts from Gary Lewin (Max Delbrück Center for Molecular Medicine, Germany) (4).

Cell culture and transfection. HEK293T and N2A cells with genomic deletion of *PIEZO1* (HEK293T^{ΔP1} and N2A^{ΔP1}) were provided by Ardem Patapoutian (Scripps Research Institute) (5) and Gary Lewin (Max Delbrück Center for Molecular Medicine) (4). ND7/23 cells were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich (Cat# 92090903, St. Louis, MO). Cells were cultured in Dulbecco's modified Eagle's medium (DMEM) supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum (FBS) and 1% penicillin/streptomycin (ThermoFisher Scientific, Waltham, MA). 1 mM sodium pyruvate was included in the medium for N2A^{ΔP1} and 2 mM L-glutamine was added for ND7/23 cells. Transient

transfection was performed using Lipofectamine 3000 (ThermoFisher, Waltham, MA) for Piezo1 or Lipofectamine 2000 (ThermoFisher) for Piezo2 according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Squirrel Piezo2 cloning. Squirrel Piezo2 (MK905889) was amplified from squirrel DRG cDNA using primers (forward 5'-3': GAGATGGCCTCGGAAGTGG; reverse 5'-3': AAGGTTACATTACCCGCAG) and cloned into pcDNA3.1(+) vector. The cloned squirrel Piezo2 coding sequence was deposited into the GenBank database under the accession number MK905889 and the protein sequence was shown below:

```
MASEVVCGLVFRLLLPICLAVACAFRYNGLSFVYLIYLLLIPLFSEPTKATMQGHTGRLLKSLCFLSLSFLLHIIIF
HITLASLEAQHHITPGYNCSTWEKTFRQIGFESLKGADAGNGIRVFVPDGMFIASLTIWLVCRNIVQKPVTEEAQAQ
YNLEFENEELAAGEKADSEDALMDADADGDGAEGELEESAKLMFRRVASVASKLKEFIGNMITTAGKVVVTVLLGS
SGMMLPSLTSAVYFFVFLGLCTWWSWCRTFDPLLFSCLCVLLAIFTAGHLIGLYLYQFQFFQEAVPNDYYARLFGI
KSVIQTDCSSSTWKIVVNPELSWYHHANPILLVMMYYTLATLIRIWLQEPLVQDEKTEEDRSLVCSSNQRTAERKRN
LWYAAQYPTDERKLLSMTQDDYKPSDGLLVTVNGNPVDYHTIHPSLPLENGPAKTDLYSTPQYRWEPSSEDSTEKKEE
EEDEKEEFEEERSQEEKRSVKVHAMVSVFQFIMKQSYICALIAMMAWSITYHSWLTFFVLLIWSCALWMIRNRRKYAM
ISSPFMVVYANLLLVLQYIWSFELPEIKKVPGFLEKKEPGELASKILFTITFWLLLRQHLETEQKALQEKEALLSEVK
IGSQENEEKDEDLQDIQVEGEPKEKEEEEEEAQEEQDEDEDQDIMKVLGNLVVAMFIKYWIYVCGGMFFVVSFEGK
IVMYKIIYMVLFVFCVALYQVHYEWWRKILKYFWMSVVIYTMVLVIFITYQFENFPGWQNMGTGLKKEKLEDLGLK
QFTVAELFTRIFIPSTFLLVCILHLHYFHDRFLELTDLKSIPRKEDNTIYSHAKVNGRVYLIINRLAHPEGSLPDLA
MMHLTASLERPEGKKLAELVDEKTEGSPGKAKEGELGEGSEEP EEGEDEEEEESEEEEEMSDLRNKWHLVIDRLTVLF
LKSLEHFHKLQVFTWWILELHIKIVSSYIIWVSVEVSLFNVYFLISWAFALPYAKLRRVASSICTVWTCVIVVCK
MLYQLQTIKPEFSVNCSLPNENQTNIPQLDNKSLLYSAPIDPTEWVGLRKSSPLLVLRLNNLLMLAILAFEVTIY
RHQEYYRGRNNLTAPVSKTIFHDI TRMHLDDGLINCAKYFINYFFYKFGLET CFLMSVNVIGQRMDFYAMIHACWLI
AVLYRRRRKAIAEVWPKYCCFLACIITFYQYFICIGIPAPCRDYPWRFKGADFNDNIKWLYFPDFIVRPNPVFLVY
DFMLLL CASLQRQIFEDENKAAVRIMAGDNVEICMNLDAASFQHNVPVDFIHCRLSYLDMSKVIIFS YLFWFVLTII
FITGTTRISIFCMGYLVACFYFLLFGDLLLLKPIKSILRYWDWLIAYNVFVITMKNILSIGACGYIGTLVKKSCWLI
QAFSLACTVKGYTMPEDDASCRLPSGEAGIIWDSICFAFLLLQRRVFMSSYYFLHVVDIKASQILASRGAELFQATI
VKAVKARIEEEKRSMQDKRQMDRIKARQQKYKKGKERMLS LTQEAGEGQDVQNPPEEDDEREADKQKAKGKKKQWW
RPWVDHASMVRSGDYLLFETDSEEEEEELKKEDEGP PRKSAFQRAIGKFASAILALPKSVIKLPKTI LQYLIRAAK
FVYQAWITDPKTALRQRKEKKKSAREEQRRRKGSGEGAVEWEDREDEPVKKKSDGPDNIIKRIFNIIKFTWVLF
ATVDSFTTWLNSISREHIDISTVLRIERCMLTREIKKGNVPTRESIHMYYQNHIMNLSRESGLD TLDERPGAAPGAQ
TAHRMDSLDSHDSISSCYTEATMLFSRQSTLDDLDGPDVAVPKT SERARPRLRKMLSLDMSSSSADSGSLASSEPTQC
TMLYSRQGT TETIEEVEAEAEAEVVGVPPEPELELQPGDTQEEEEEEEEAEYDLGP EEASLTPEEEEC PQFSTDEG
DVEAPPSYSKAVSF EHL SFGSQDDSGGKNHMMVSPDDSR TDKLESSILPPLTHELTASELLLNKMFHDDELEESERF
YVGQPRFLLL FYAMYNTLVARSEMVCYFVII LNHMVSASMITLLLPI LI FLWAMLSVPRPSRRFWMMAIVYTEVAIV
VKYFFQFGFFPWKNVELYKDKPYHPPNII GVEKKEGYVLYDLIQLLALFFHRSILKCHGLWDEDDIVDGGDQEESD
DEPSFSHGRDSSDSLKSINLAASVESVHVTFPEQPTTIRRKRCGSSPQISPGSSFS SDRSKRGSTSTRNSSQKGSS
VLSIKQKSKRELYMEKLQEQLVKAKAFTIKKTLQIYVPIRQFFYDLIHPDYSAVTDVYVLMFLADTVDFIIIVFGFW
AFGKHSAAADITSSLS EDQVPGPFLVMVLIQFGTMVVDRALYLRKTVLGKVVVFQVILVFGIHFWMFFILPVVTERKF
SQNLVAQLWYFVKCVYFGLSAYQIRCGYPTRVLGNFLT KSYNYVNLFLFQGFRLVPFLT ELRAVMDVWVTD TTLSLS
SWICVEDIYAHIFILKCWRESEKRYPPRGQKKKKVVKYGMGMIIVLLICIVWFPLL FMSLIKS VAGVINQPLDVS
VTITLGGYQPIFTMSAQQS QLKVMDQTKFNKFMRTFSRDTGAMQFLENYEKEDITVAELEGNSNSLWTISPPSKQKM
ISELKDLSSSFVSFVSWSIQRNMSLGAKAEIATDKLSFPLQNSTRKNIANMIASNDPESSKTPVTIERIYPYVVKAP
SDSNSKPIKQLLSESNFMNITII LSRDNSTNSNSEWVNLNTGNRIYDQESQALELVVFNDKVSPPSLGFLAGYGIM
GLYASVVLVIGKFVREFFSGISHSIMFEELPNVDRILKLT DIFLVRETGELELEEDLYAKLIFLYRSPETMIKWTR
EKTN
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Dissociation of mouse DRG neurons and duck TG neurons. DRG neurons from adult mouse (6-8 weeks old) and TG neurons from embryonic duck (E22-24) were acutely dissociated as previously described (1, 6). Specifically, dissected mouse DRG and duck TG were chopped briefly with scissors in 500 μ l ice-cold HBSS and then dissociated by adding 500 μ l 2 mg/ml collagenase (Roche, Basel, Switzerland, dissolved in HBSS) to a final concentration of 1 mg/ml, with incubation for 15 min at 37 °C. The collagenase solution was then removed and neurons at the bottom of the tube were incubated with 500 μ l 0.25% trypsin-EDTA for 10 min at 37 °C. The trypsin was then removed and the residual trypsin was quenched by adding 750 μ l pre-warmed DMEM+ medium (DMEM supplemented with 10% FBS, 1% penicillin/streptomycin and 2 mM glutamine). Cells were triturated gently with plastic P1000 and P200 pipette tips and then collected with centrifuge at $100 \times g$ for 3 min. Next, cells were resuspended in DMEM+ medium and plated onto the Matrigel (BD Bioscience, Billerica, MA) -precoated coverslips in a 12-well cell-culture plate. 1 ml DMEM+ medium was added into each well following incubation at 37 °C in 5% CO₂ for 30-45 min. MA current measurements were then performed within 48 hours.

Patch-clamp electrophysiology. Whole-cell recordings of MA currents from heterologously expressed Piezo1 and Piezo2 were performed as described previously (3). The Piezo2 or Piezo1 constructs and pcDNA3-GFP plasmid were co-transfected into HEK293T ^{Δ P1}, N2A ^{Δ P1} or ND7/23 cells in a 20:1 ratio. 24-48 hours after transfection, cells were plated onto matrigel (BD Bioscience) -coated coverslips and were recorded within 24 hours after plating. To test the effect of Margarinic acid (MarA) (Sigma), cells were treated with 50 μ M MarA or the same volume of DMSO when plating. The external solution contained (in mM): 140 NaCl, 5 KCl, 10 HEPES, 2.5 CaCl₂, 1 MgCl₂, 10 glucose (pH 7.4 adjusted with NaOH). The internal solution consisted of (in mM): 133 CsCl, 5 EGTA, 1 CaCl₂, 1 MgCl₂, 10 HEPES, 4 Mg-ATP, 0.4 Na₂-GTP

(pH 7.3 adjusted with CsOH). Recording pipettes of borosilicate glass with 1.5 mm outer diameter (Warner Instruments, Hamden, CT) were pulled to a tip resistance of 1-3 M Ω using a micropipette puller (Sutter Instruments, Novato, CA, model P-1000) and were polished with a polisher (ALA Scientific Instruments, Farmingdale, NY) before use. Series resistance and membrane capacitance were compensated at 85%. Currents were recorded using a Multi-clamp 700-B patch-clamp amplifier and Digidata 1500 digitizer (Molecular Devices, Union City, CA), sampled at 20kHz using a 500 M Ω feedback resistor and low-pass filtered at 10 kHz through an internal Bessel filter. Data were acquired and analyzed using the pClamp 10 software (Axon Instruments, Union City, CA). Mechanical stimulation were applied using a blunt glass probe (tip diameter, 2-4 μ m) mounted on a pre-loaded Piezo actuator stack (Physik Instrumente, Karlsruhe, Germany) with the probe set to 30° from the horizontal plane (7). After break into the cell, the tip of the stimulation probe was positioned to just touch the cell membrane. The probe was then moved toward the cell at 1000 μ m/s in 1- μ m increments, held in position for 150 or 300 ms, retracted with the same speed. Cells were clamped at -80 mV during recordings, which were not corrected for liquid junction potential. The temperature of the external solution in the recording chamber was controlled by a bipolar temperature controller (Warner Instrument) and was constantly recorded with a thermal probe. Typically, the external solution was cooled from 22 °C to 12 °C or warmed up back to 22 °C within 30 s. The seal was maintained while changing the temperature. MA current recordings from dissociated mouse DRG or duck TG neurons were performed as previously described (1, 6) and were the same to those described above for cell lines, except that neurons were held at -60 mV (without liquid junction potential correction), the mechanical probe was advanced at 500 μ m/s and recording pipettes were filled with internal solution containing (in mM): 130 K-methanesulfonate, 20 KCl, 1 MgCl₂, 10 HEPES, 3 Na₂ATP, 0.06 Na₃GTP, 0.2 EGTA, pH 7.3 (pH

adjusted with KOH, final $[K^+] = 150.5 \text{ mM}$). To determine the MA current inactivation rate, the current decaying phase (between the peak point and the stimulus offset) was fitted to a single exponential function: $I = \Delta I * \exp(-t/\tau_{inact})$, where ΔI is the current amplitude from baseline to peak, t is the time span from the peak current to plateau, and τ_{inact} is the inactivation rate constant. The apparent MA current activation threshold was defined as the first indentation depth that elicit a peak current, typically at least 40 pA greater than background noise signal. The dependence of MA current amplitude and τ_{inact} on temperature were fitted to the sigmoid equations $Y = I_{min} + (I_{max} - I_{min}) / (1 + (T_{1/2}/T)^h)$ or $Y = \tau_{inact,min} + (\tau_{inact,max} - \tau_{inact,min}) / (1 + (T_{1/2}/T)^h)$, respectively, where $T_{1/2}$ is half-maximal effective temperature and h is the steepness of the curve.

Cell-attached recordings of Piezo1-elicited MA current in HEK293T^{ΔP1} cells were performed as described (3). Cells were prepared similarly to whole-cell recordings described above. The external solution contained (in mM): 140 KCl, 10 HEPES, 1 MgCl₂, 10 glucose, pH 7.3 (pH adjusted with KOH) and the internal solution was composed of (in mM): 130 NaCl, 5 KCl, 10 HEPES, 10 TEA-Cl, 1 CaCl₂, 1 MgCl₂, pH 7.3 (pH adjusted with NaOH). Recording patch pipettes of borosilicate glass were pulled and fire-polished to a tip resistance of 1-2 MΩ. Piezo1 stretch-activated current were acquired with pClamp 10 software and were recorded at a sampling frequency of 10 kHz with a 5 GΩ feedback resistor using a Multi-clamp 700-B patch-clamp amplifier and Digidata 1500 digitizer. Mechanical stimulations were performed by applying a family of 500 ms negative pressure pulses ($\Delta 10 \text{ mmHg}$ with 3 s between sweeps) using a high speed pressure clamp system (HSPC-1, ALA Scientific Instruments) (8). The membrane voltage inside the patch was clamped at -80 mV.

For single-channel recordings of Piezo1, HEK293T^{ΔP1} cells overexpressing Piezo1 were prepared as above. All single channel events were recorded in the cell-attached mode. While

applying a +10 mmHg pressure step (with HSPC) the pipette tip was immersed in the solution and after touching the cell the pressure was released until G Ω seal was formed. Bath solution contained (in mM): 140 KCl, 10 HEPES, 1 MgCl₂, 10 glucose, pH 7.3 (pH adjusted with KOH) and the pipette solution was composed of (in mM): 140 NaCl, 5 KCl, 10 HEPES, 1 EGTA, 1 MgCl₂, pH 7.4 (pH adjusted with NaOH). Single channel events are shown as down deflections at a given voltage (ΔV_{patch}) which represent inward current. Currents were sampled at 25 kHz and filtered at 1 kHz. For measuring Piezo1 NPo in MarA/DMSO treated cells: after pulling the glass pipette one of the paired electrodes was used in recordings with DMSO treatment and the other with MarA. The tip resistant range was 1-2 M Ω . Single channel data was analyzed using Clampfit 10.7. Mean single channel amplitudes were calculated by fitting the current-amplitude histograms with Gaussian curves at a given voltage. The unitary conductance values for Piezo1 single channel were obtained by fitting the slope to the current voltage relationship. Each NPo value was calculated from a 40 s period after applying 2 kHz Gaussian low-pass filter using Clampfit.

Quantification and statistical analysis. Data were analyzed and plotted using GraphPad Prism 7.01 (GraphPad Software Inc., La Jolla, CA) and expressed as means $\pm$ SEM. Statistical analyses were carried out using paired or unpaired t-tests when comparing two groups or two-way ANOVA for three or more groups, as specified in figure legends. Statistical tests were chosen based on sample size and normality of distribution. A probability value (P) of less than 0.05, 0.01, 0.001 was considered statistically significant and indicated by *, **, and ***, respectively.

Supplementary Figures

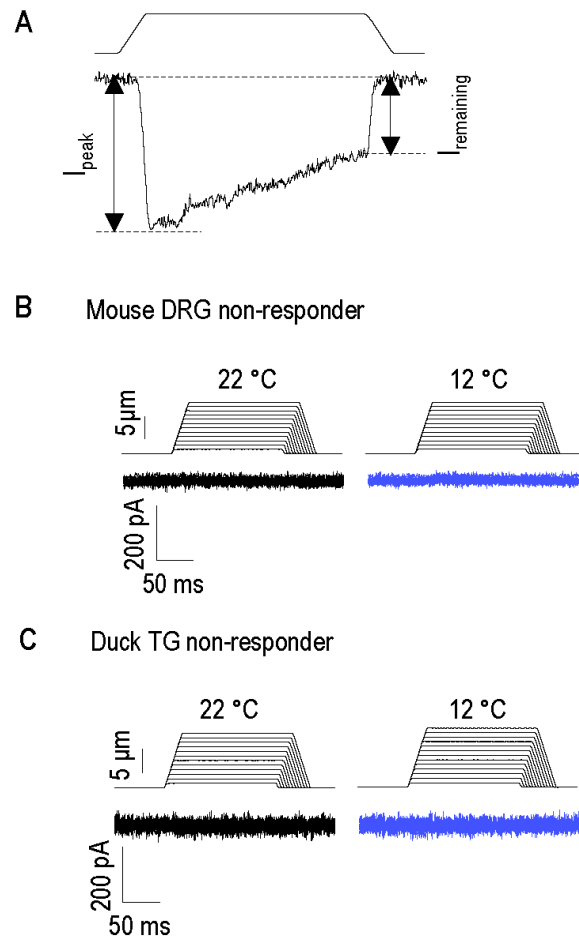


Fig. S1. Cooling does not elicit MA current from mechanically-insensitive neurons.

(A) An exemplar trace of slowly inactivating MA current in a mouse DRG neuron illustrating the measurement of fraction of remaining MA current at the end of stimulation ($I_{remaining}$) to peak (I_{peak}).

(B and C) Representative whole-cell MA current traces recorded from mechanically-insensitive neurons from mouse DRG (B, N = 5 cells) or duck TG (C, N = 3 cells) at 22 °C or 12 °C with indentation to the indicated depth. $E_{hold} = -60$ mV.

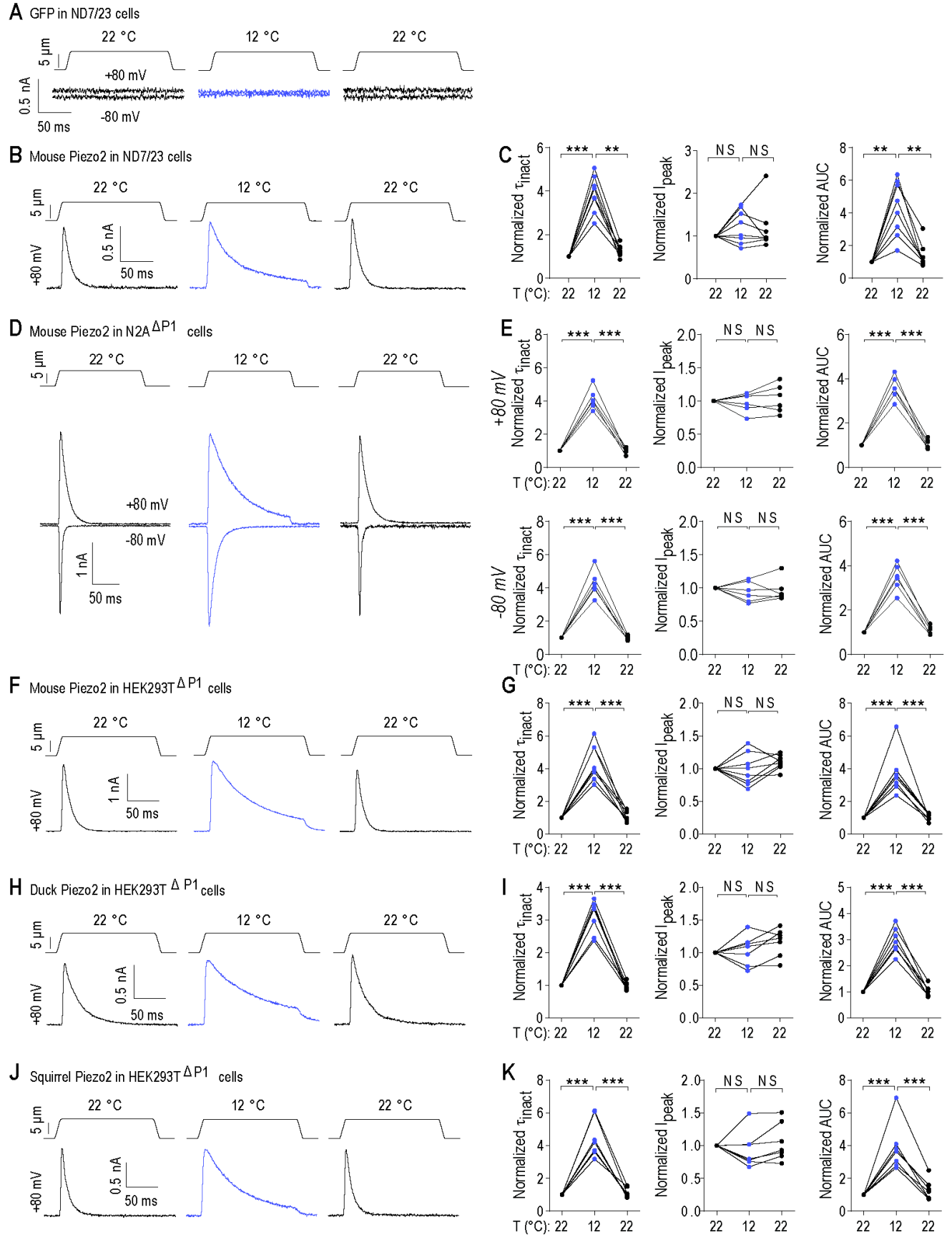


Fig. S2. Cooling potentiates Piezo2-mediated MA current.

(A) Representative whole-cell MA current traces recorded at -80 or +80 mV in the same ND7/23 cell expressing GFP (N = 7 cells).

(B and C) Representative whole-cell MA current traces recorded at +80 mV at indicated temperatures in the same ND7/23 cell expressing mouse Piezo2 (*B*) and quantification of normalized MA current τ_{inact} , I_{peak} , and area under current curve, AUC (*B*).

(D and E) Representative whole-cell MA current traces at +80 and -80 mV in the same N2A^{ΔP1} cell expressing mouse Piezo2 (*D*), and quantification of normalized MA current τ_{inact} , I_{peak} , and AUC at +80 mV (*E*, upper panel) and -80 mV (*E*, lower panel).

(F-K) Representative whole-cell MA current traces in HEK293T^{ΔP1} cells expressing either mouse Piezo2 (*F*), duck Piezo2 (*H*) or squirrel Piezo2 (*J*), and quantification of normalized MA current τ_{inact} , I_{peak} , and AUC (*G*, mPiezo2; *I*, duck Piezo2; *K*, squirrel Piezo2). $E_{\text{hold}} = +80$ mV.

NS, not significant, $P > 0.05$; ** $P < 0.01$, *** $P < 0.001$, paired t-test.

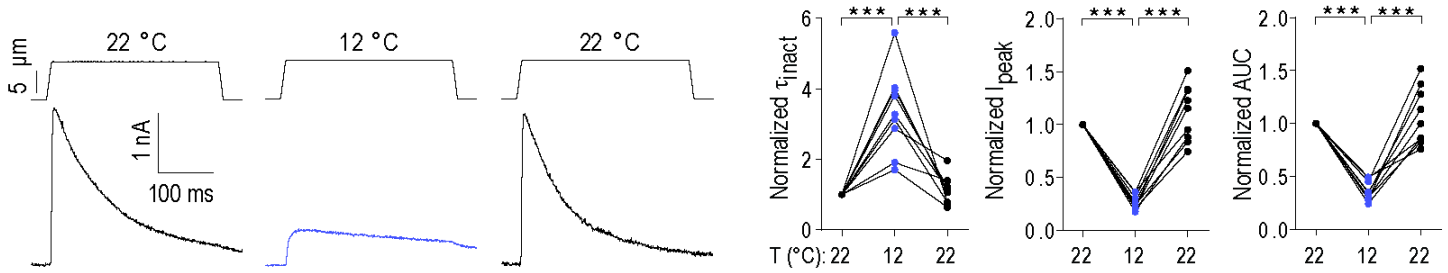


Fig. S3. Cooling inhibits Piezo1-mediated MA current.

Left panels, representative whole-cell MA current traces recorded at +80 mV and indicated temperatures in the same HEK293T ^{Δ P1} cell expressing mouse Piezo1; Right panels, normalized MA current τ_{inact} , I_{peak} , and AUC. ***P < 0.001, paired t-test.

Supplementary References

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