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1 **LC3B is Lipidated to Large Lipid Droplets During Prolonged**  
2 **Starvation for Noncanonical Autophagy**

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5

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20

21 **Summary.**

22 Lipid droplets (LDs) store lipids that can be utilized during times of scarcity via autophagic  
23 and lysosomal pathways, but how LDs and autophagosomes interact remained unclear.  
24 Here, we discovered that the E2 autophagic enzyme, ATG3, localizes to the surface of  
25 certain ultra-large LDs in differentiated murine 3T3-L1 adipocytes or Huh7 human liver cells  
26 undergoing prolonged starvation. Subsequently, ATG3 lipidates Microtubule-associated  
27 protein 1 light chain 3B (LC3B) to these LDs. In vitro, ATG3 could bind alone to purified and  
28 artificial LDs to mediate this lipidation reaction. We observed that LC3B-lipidated LDs were  
29 consistently in close proximity to collections of LC3B-membranes and were lacking Plin1.  
30 This phenotype is distinct from macrolipophagy but required autophagy, as it disappeared  
31 following ATG5 or Beclin1 knockout. Our data suggest that extended starvation triggers a  
32 noncanonical autophagy mechanism, similar to LC3B-associated phagocytosis, where the  
33 surface of large LDs serves as an LC3B lipidation platform for autophagic processes.

34

## 35 Introduction

36 Autophagy is a catabolic process that breaks down cellular components in response to  
37 various stimuli such as energy deprivation or cellular stresses<sup>1</sup>. A major autophagic pathway  
38 is macroautophagy, wherein an autophagosome, a double-vesicle membrane phagophore,  
39 isolates compounds from the cytosol and delivers them to lysosomes for degradation<sup>2,3</sup>. The  
40 formation of the autophagosome proceeds in multiple steps<sup>2,4,5</sup>: initiation and nucleation of a  
41 pre-autophagosomal structure (~ 100 nm)<sup>6</sup>, elongation of the membrane and encapsulation  
42 of cargos, closure of the double-vesicle (~ 0.5 - 1.5  $\mu$ m in size), i.e., the completed  
43 autophagosome<sup>7,8</sup>. These steps involve several autophagy (ATG) related enzymes and take  
44 place at specific endoplasmic reticulum (ER) sub-regions<sup>9,10</sup>.

45 The autophagosome maturation and the recognition of cargos require the lipidation of a  
46 ubiquitin-like protein ATG8 to phosphatidylethanolamine (PE) onto the double-membrane  
47<sup>11,12</sup>. In mammals, there are two ATG8 subfamilies, the microtubule-associated protein 1 light  
48 chain 3 A (also known as MAP1LC3)(LC3A), LC3B (the most ubiquitous) and LC3C, and the  
49 GABA type A receptor-associated protein (GABARAP) and GABARAP-like proteins,  
50 GABARAPL1 and GABARAPL2<sup>13</sup>. The lipidation reaction is assisted by the ATG16L1/ATG5-  
51 ATG12 complex<sup>14-16</sup>. ATG16 binds to the pre-autophagosomal structure through interactions  
52 with FIP200, WIPI2, and PI3P on the membrane. Membrane-bound ATG16 recruits ATG5-  
53 ATG12, which then recruits ATG3 onto the membrane, the E2 enzyme catalyzing ATG8  
54 lipidation<sup>17</sup>. Finally, ATG7, an E1 protein, activates and delivers ATG8 to ATG3, which  
55 lipidates it to PE onto the phagophore<sup>18</sup>.

56 Apart from its role in autophagosomes, LC3 proteins can also be attached to PE on single  
57 bilayer membranes in a noncanonical autophagic pathway termed LC3-associated  
58 phagocytosis<sup>19</sup>. This pathway breaks down large components or pathogens that are  
59 internalized through phagocytosis and involves the recruitment of lysosomes through the  
60 phagosome-lipidated LC3<sup>20</sup>. Unlike conventional autophagy, this noncanonical pathway  
61 does not generate autophagosomes and does not involve crucial autophagic enzymes like  
62 Atg9 or the ULK complex<sup>20</sup>. However, it still requires all the upstream lipidation machinery,  
63 including ATG16L1/ATG5-ATG12<sup>21</sup>. The existence of this pathway suggests that autophagic  
64 proteins may serve other purposes beyond autophagosome biology<sup>21</sup>. Interestingly, several  
65 autophagy proteins have been identified around lipid droplets (LDs), including Atg2, DFCP1,  
66 Atg14L, and possibly LC3<sup>22-27</sup>, implying functional crosstalk between autophagy and LDs  
67 that is yet to be fully understood<sup>28</sup>.

68 LDs are unique cellular organelles that have a neutral lipid core consisting mainly of  
69 triglycerides. They are surrounded by a phospholipid monolayer, which makes them  
70 structurally distinct from bilayer-bounded organelles<sup>29</sup>. While LDs primarily function in  
71 maintaining cellular energy balance, they also have non-metabolic functions such as protein  
72 quality control, gene expression, and development<sup>30</sup>. These functions are closely related to  
73 the proteins bound to their surface<sup>31</sup>. LDs are targeted by two major classes of proteins:  
74 soluble proteins that often have amphipathic helix motifs or lipid anchors, and monotopic  
75 membrane proteins that typically move from the ER to LDs via physical contiguities  
76<sup>31,32,36,55,57</sup>. Most autophagic proteins that target LDs are from the cytosol, with the exception  
77 of DFCP1, which comes from the ER<sup>23</sup>.

78 Autophagic proteins are involved in regulating both the biogenesis and catabolism of LDs  
79 <sup>25,33</sup>. LDs also regulate autophagy, by providing lipids for autophagosome biogenesis <sup>34,35,37–</sup>  
80 <sup>39</sup>. Furthermore, the adipose triglyceride lipase (ATGL), which acts on the LD surface, has an  
81 LC3 interacting motif (LIR) and its activity can modulate Sirtuin 1, an autophagy regulator  
82 <sup>40,41</sup>. During energy scarcities, LDs can undergo lipophagy <sup>42</sup>, a process where an LD is  
83 engulfed by an autophagosome that subsequently fuses with lysosomes. In the liver, ATGL  
84 hydrolyses triglycerides to reduce LD size to the point where they can fit into  
85 autophagosomes during energy depletion <sup>43</sup>. Smaller LDs, typically less than 1µm, are  
86 majorly found in autophagosomes or autolysosomes <sup>43,44</sup> and targeted by lipophagy. These  
87 findings suggest that depending on metabolic cues, autophagy, and LDs communicate  
88 through distinct channels.

89 In the present study, we report a noncanonical autophagy pathway that is activated in  
90 response to prolonged starvation. Specifically, we found that LC3B is ligated to LD  
91 phospholipids and localizes to a few large LDs, which can reach up to 25 µm in size in 3T3-  
92 L1 adipocytes, through the involvement of the minimal ATG3,7 machinery. Following this  
93 process, the lipidated LDs were always found in close apposition with LC3-positive  
94 autophagosomes/autolysosomes-like membranes, serving for degradation.

95

96 **Results.**

97 **Lipidated LC3B localizes to large LDs during long-term nutrient deprivation**

98 Adipocytes serve as the primary cells for storing lipids, and they contain micrometric LDs that  
99 are considerably larger than LDs degraded by lipophagy. We asked whether autophagy  
100 could degrade such large LDs and sought to study their interaction with autophagosomes  
101 during nutrient deprivation. LC3B is the most ubiquitous ATG8 protein in mammals<sup>45</sup> that  
102 marks autophagosomes, although it does not exclusively localize there. Differentiated murine  
103 3T3-L1 adipocytes were exposed to an eGFP-LC3B adenovirus and then cultured in Earle's  
104 balanced salts (EBSS) devoid of bovine serum albumin (BSA), a nutrient-deprived media, for  
105 a period of up to 72hs.

106

107 We found that LC3B was present around ultra-large LDs, which were tens of  $\mu\text{m}$  in size at  
108 24, 48, and 72hs (Figures 1A-1D and S1A). This phenomenon persisted even when BSA  
109 was added to the culture medium and rinsed, to remove released fatty acids during the  
110 starvation time (Figure S1B), suggesting that the localization of LC3B to the large LDs was  
111 not linked to de novo re-esterification of liberated fatty acids. When the cells were grown in  
112 DMEM or starved for two hours only, eGFP-LC3B localization to ultra-large LDs was rare.  
113 We found that in a few cases, the LC3B signal on the LDs could be colocalized with Plin1, a  
114 standard adipocyte LD surface marker (Figure S1C). However, the eGFP-LC3B signal on the  
115 LDs was often inhomogeneous, with both a uniform LC3B signal on the LD surface and  
116 another more intense accumulation of LC3B signal from structures adjacent or adhering to  
117 the LDs (Figures 1A and S1A).

118

119 During nutrient starvation, the percentage of cells exhibiting the LC3B-positive LD phenotype  
120 increased, with up to 20% of cells displaying this phenotype at 48 and 72 hours (Figure 1B).  
121 Concurrently, the number of large LC3B-positive LDs also increased with starvation,  
122 reaching up to 6% at 48 and 72hs (Figures 1C and 1D). Interestingly, LC3B seemed to  
123 specifically target the subset of larger LDs, as evidenced by the relative distribution to the  
124 size of LC3-positive LDs (Figures 1E and 1F). These observations were made with  
125 overexpressed eGFP-LC3B, but endogenous LC3B was also found around larger LDs,  
126 exclusively in EBSS and not in complete media (Figure 1G). In addition, we detected the  
127 presence of lipidated LC3B-II and a smaller amount of LC3B-I on purified LDs from starved  
128 conditions (Figure 1H).

129

130 In various cell lines, the process of lipophagy involves small LDs typically of 1  $\mu\text{m}$  or less in  
131 size<sup>42-44,46</sup>. However, here, LC3B-positive LDs were found to be as large as  $\sim 25\mu\text{m}$ .  
132 The size distribution of LD-negative and LD-positive LC3B structures was measured and  
133 analyzed (Figures 1I and 1J). The size distribution of LD-negative LC3 puncta was found to  
134 be narrow, with a distribution centered at 1.5  $\mu\text{m}$ , suggesting they were likely  
135 autophagosomes or autolysosomes. The size distribution of the LD-positive LC3B signal, on  
136 the other hand, showed a wider spread of 2-30 $\mu\text{m}$  (Figures 1J). Taken together, these  
137 findings suggest that the LC3B signal on the larger LDs might be distinct from LC3B on  
138 conventional autophagosomes.

139

140 To investigate whether LC3B preferentially localizes to the largest LDs in other cell lines, we  
141 also examined liver hepatoma 7 (Huh7) and HeLa cells that were treated with oleic acid (OA)  
142 for 24hs before being starved with EBSS for 48hs. While these cell lines were not capable of  
143 producing LDs as large as those found in adipocytes, the LDs that exhibited a visible LC3B

144 ring were mostly among the largest, measuring around 2  $\mu\text{m}$  and above (Figures S1D and  
145 S1E). Similar to the 3T3-L1 adipocytes, the frequency of this phenomenon increased in Huh7  
146 cells upon starvation (Figures S1F and S1G). Also, when we transfected in Huh7 cells the  
147 eGFP-LC3B G120A construct which cannot be lipidated<sup>47</sup>, we did not find the protein around  
148 LDs as compared to eGFP-LC3B (Figure S1H). This indicates that the LC3B signal around  
149 the LDs was the lipidated form of the protein.

150

151 Finally, to investigate whether other ATG8 proteins behave similarly to LC3B, we conducted  
152 experiments on 3T3-L1-differentiated cells and Huh7 cells. In 3T3-L1-differentiated cells, we  
153 used an antibody to detect endogenous GABARAPs, but no GABARAP ring around large  
154 LDs was observed, although the proteins were detected on smaller LDs (Figure S1I). We  
155 then delivered eGFP-plasmid constructs of GABARAP, GABARAPL1, LC3A, and LC3C to  
156 Huh7 cells, which are easier to transfect. In contrast to LC3B, none of these proteins were  
157 found in the largest LD subpopulation (Figures S1J and S1K).

158

159 Taken together, our results suggest that LC3B is recruited specifically to the surface of  
160 certain large LDs in cells that have been cultured in an EBSS starving medium for an  
161 extended period of time.

162

163 **LC3B localization to LDs is not a result of nearby autophagosomes but necessitates**  
164 **autophagy.**

165 We wanted to determine whether the LC3B signal on the large lipid droplets (LDs) was due  
166 to LC3B interacting with proteins on LDs or the close proximity of autophagosomes.

167

168 Proteins containing LC3B-interacting region (LIR) motifs could potentially recruit LC3B to the  
169 LD surface. ATGL, an enzyme that regulates lipophagy in mice livers, has an LIR motif<sup>40</sup>.  
170 We tested whether ATGL could recruit LC3B by overexpressing it in Huh7 cells, but  
171 observed no change in the LC3B LD-localization phenotype under nutrient starvation  
172 conditions (Figures S2A and S2B).

173

174 Plin1 is a major adipocyte LD protein marker that has LIR sequences on its C-terminal  
175 region, specifically YVPL and YSQL, which could theoretically recruit LC3B. To test this, we  
176 expressed mCherry-Plin1 in Huh7 cells that do not express Plin1<sup>48</sup>. During starvation, Plin1  
177 was present on all LDs, but the LC3B LD localization was unchanged as compared with the  
178 control, indicating that Plin1 did not mediate LC3B recruitment to LDs (Figure S2C).

179

180 We then investigated the possibility that the LC3B ring signals around the large LDs were  
181 due to LC3B interaction with P62-bound ubiquitinated LD proteins. P62 (also known as  
182 sequestosome-1) is an adaptor protein that binds to most ubiquitinated proteins or organelles  
183 targeted for degradation. To test this model, we virally co-transfected differentiated 3T3-L1  
184 adipocytes with eGFP-LC3 and RFP-P62 and induced 48h starvation. We found clear LC3B  
185 signals around LDs, but most were devoid of P62 (73% of cases; Figures 2A and 2B),  
186 especially larger ones. In the remaining 17%, we observed LC3 colocalizing with P62 more  
187 frequently on smaller LDs, although not completely (Figures 2A and 2B). Overexpression of  
188 mRFP-P62 did not increase the percentage of LDs or cells with LC3B-positive LDs (Figures  
189 S2D-S2F), and P62/LC3B colocalization sharply decreased on LDs compared with cytosolic  
190 puncta (Figures S2G-S2I). These observations suggest that different LC3B pools are present

191 on LDs and autophagosome structures and that the pool on LDs is not recruited to the large  
192 LDs by the aforementioned proteins (Figure 2C).

193 We next conducted experiments to investigate the impact of autophagy pathways on the  
194 localization of LC3B to LDs in 3T3-L1 adipocytes. To block autophagy, we targeted ATG5  
195 using an shRNA lentivirus and subjected the cells to starvation. The results showed a  
196 significant decrease in the percentage of cells with LC3B-positive large LDs compared to  
197 non-targeting shRNA transfected cells, indicating that ATG5 action is required for LC3B  
198 localization to large LDs (Figures 2C-2E).

199  
200 To further test this hypothesis, we treated the cells with Spautin-1 to degrade the Vps34 PI3  
201 kinase complex, which is essential for triggering autophagosome formation<sup>45,49</sup>. The  
202 percentage of cells with large LD-localized LC3B decreased slightly compared to ATG5  
203 knockdown, and western blot analysis confirmed a decrease in LC3B lipidation due to  
204 Spautin-1 (Figures 2F-2H). We also generated CRISPR-knockout ATG5 and Beclin1 Huh7  
205 cells, which lack autophagy. In these cells, large LDs with an LC3B signal were almost  
206 nonexistent (Figures S2J and S2K), indicating that autophagy is required or precedes LC3B  
207 localization to large LDs during long-term starvation. Note that ATG5 activity is required for  
208 LC3 lipidation for both autophagic and non-autophagic processes, meaning that the LC3B  
209 localization to larger LDs could be still autophagosome-independent.

210  
211 To enhance autophagy or autophagosome accumulation, we treated the adipocyte cells with  
212 rapamycin to inhibit mTOR or bafilomycin to block the fusion of autophagosomes with  
213 lysosomes. Rapamycin promoted LC3B localization to large LDs in the feeding state but did  
214 not significantly enhance the number of large LC3B-positive LDs or the fraction of cells  
215 displaying the phenotype (Figures S2L and S2M). In bafilomycin treatment, many  
216 autophagosomes accumulated, but the fraction of large LC3B-positive LDs per cell was also  
217 unchanged, and the percentage of cells with the phenotype even decreased (Figures 2I and  
218 S2N). These results suggest that further enhancing autophagy or autophagosome  
219 accumulation did not enhance the fraction of large LC3B-localized LDs in cells. Together, the  
220 data indicate that autophagy is required to trigger our observed phenotype and that  
221 increasing it further would not impact it. Furthermore, the LC3B signal around large LDs is  
222 distinct from autophagosomes.

223  
224 Finally, to better distinguish between the LC3B signal on autophagosomes and large LDs, we  
225 used the organelle swelling approach. We exposed starved Huh7 cells containing a large  
226 LC3B-positive LD to a hypotonic medium, which causes bilayer-bounded organelles to swell  
227 and become spherical, improving spatial resolution (Figure 2J)<sup>50-52</sup>. LDs do not swell in this  
228 process. If the hypotonicity is high enough, bilayer-bounded organelles can undergo burst  
229 and reseal cycles, or they may completely burst (Figure S2P)<sup>53,54</sup>.

230  
231 During the swelling process, the LC3B signal around the LD remained intact (Figure 2K, blue  
232 arrowhead, S2O), while the LC3B-positive membrane (autophagosome) near the LD swelled  
233 (Figure 2K, yellow arrowhead, S2O), became spherical (Figure 2K, yellow arrowhead 15min,  
234 S2O), and eventually burst (Figure 2K, yellow arrowhead, 20min). Other bilayer membrane  
235 compartments containing LDs also swelled and likely burst as well (Figure 2K, red  
236 arrowhead). These observations agree with our hypothesis that the LC3B on the surface of  
237 the large LD is distinct from that on autophagosomes, as the LC3B signal around the LD did  
238 not swell during the process.



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### **Long-term nutrient starvation induces ATG3 recruited to the lipid droplet surface**

Based on our above data, we hypothesized that LC3B could be directly ligated to the LD surface, as supported by the presence of LC3B-II in the LD fraction (Figure 1H). This hypothesis led to the prediction that ATG3, which catalyzes LC3B lipidation to PE, should also be present on LDs.

The presence of ATG3 on LDs was confirmed through Western blot analysis of LDs collected after 48 hours of starvation, which showed an enhanced ATG3 signal with LC3B-II (Figure S3A). Immunostaining of endogenous ATG3 and LC3B in differentiated 3T3-L1 adipocytes in DMEM or EBSS starvation medium further revealed ATG3 around LDs along with LC3B only during starvation (Figures 3A and S3B). The localization of ATG3 around LDs was not affected by treatment with 3-Methyladenine (3-MA) which blocks autophagosome formation via inhibiting the phosphatidylinositol 3-kinase (Figures 3B and S3C). We also detected endogenous ATG3 onto the surface of larger LDs together with eGFP-LC3B in differentiated 3T3-L1 adipocytes, or in Huh7 and HeLa cells that were initially fed with OA and then submitted to long-term starvation (Figure S3D).

To further study ATG3 LD localization, we proceeded by overexpression. Overexpressed eGFP-ATG3 or ATG3-DsRed in Huh7 cells showed clear recruitment of ATG3 to few larger LDs only during starvation (Figure 3D), with no recruitment observed in the fed state (Figure S3E and S3F). Co-transfection of ATG3-DsRed and eGFP-LC3B showed instances where few larger LDs recruited ATG3 but not LC3B. This result is a strong piece of evidence that the ATG3 signal on LDs did not come from autophagosomes, but instead through a direct recruitment of the protein to LDs (Figure 3D). In this particular experiment, it is possible that either LC3B had not yet undergone lipidation on the LD or that the catalytic activity of ATG3-DsRed was reduced, since the lipidation process is carried out by the C-terminal domain of ATG3<sup>17</sup>, tagged with DsRed in this case.

Inactivation of ATG3 through a specific ATG3 shRNA inhibited LC3B LD localization, as shown by the almost abolished LC3B LD localization in ATG3 shRNA-transfected 3T3-L1 and Huh7 cells maintained in EBSS for 48h (Figures 3E-3H and S3G-S3I). This data supported the requirement of ATG3 presence and activity for the localization of LC3B to LD's surface.

ATG3 binds to membranes via its N-terminal amphipathic helix<sup>12</sup>, a motif that is used by most cytosolic proteins to associate with LDs<sup>55</sup>. Mutating the lysine in position 11 to tryptophan, right at the interface between the hydrophobic and hydrophilic faces of the amphipathic helix, improves the membrane association of ATG3<sup>12</sup>. On the opposite, the valine 15-to-lysine mutation impedes binding<sup>12</sup>. We generated 3T3-L1 adipocyte cell lines stably expressing either WT, K11W, or V15K mouse ATG3, the endogenous ATG3 remaining in the background. Compared to WT ATG3, K11W increased significantly the phenotype, percentage of cells and fraction of LC3B-positive LDs, while the V15K mutation did not impact or even decreased it (Figures 3I and 3J). These data suggest the capacity of ATG3 to bind to LDs and lipidate LC3B.

### **ATG3 binds to artificial LDs**

286 To investigate the ability of ATG3 to associate with model LDs, we performed experiments  
287 using a buffer solution containing droplets made of triolein (Figure 4A) and purified ATG3-  
288 YFP. Our results indicated that ATG3 was recruited to the surface of the droplets, suggesting  
289 that it can associate itself with LDs. To further explore this interaction, we generated model  
290 LDs with different PC/PE ratios (10/0, 7/3, 5/5, and 3/7) and various phospholipid coverages  
291 ranging from 0.005% to 0.2% (w/w to triolein), mixed with Rhodamine-PE (Rh-PE) to report  
292 for the phospholipid density<sup>56</sup>: the higher the rhodamine signal, the higher the phospholipid  
293 density (Figure 4B). We then added ATG3-YFP to the artificial LDs. Our results showed that  
294 the protein binding level decreased with the phospholipid density (Figure 4C). For each  
295 PC/PE condition, we reported the relative amount of bound ATG3 as a function of the lipid  
296 coverage and estimated the concentration of phospholipids at which half of the maximum  
297 binding was reached, i.e., concentration  $C_{1/2}$  (Figures 4D and S4A). We found that increasing  
298 PE levels led to higher ATG3 binding to the artificial LDs (Figure 4D), indicating that ATG3  
299 associates more effectively with droplets enriched in PE, which generates more packing  
300 defects<sup>57</sup>. Floatation assays confirmed these results, as sonicated liposomes or droplets with  
301 various PC/PE ratios showed similar ATG3 binding patterns to both the liposomal bilayers  
302 and droplet monolayers (Figure 4E).

303  
304 We next used a tensiometer approach to characterize the adsorption of proteins to oil/water  
305 surfaces (Figure S4B)<sup>48,58</sup> and studied the binding of non-tagged ATG3. To do so, we  
306 generated a triolein/buffer surface and added purified ATG3. We found that ATG3 was  
307 recruited to the triolein/buffer interface, leading to a drop in surface tension from ~32mN/m  
308 (i.e., triolein/buffer-free interface) to an equilibrium value of ~18mN/m (i.e., protein-adsorbed  
309 interface) (Figure S4C). We then compressed the protein-adsorbed interface rapidly to lateral  
310 condense the protein layer, resulting in a decrease in surface tension due to the protein  
311 being laterally compressed and better masking the interface (Figure S4D). Over time,  
312 however, surface tension re-increased to a new equilibrium as ATG3 fell off from the  
313 interface, causing the protein monolayer to relax<sup>48,58</sup> (Figures S4E and S4F). When we  
314 repeated this experiment with PC/PE (1/1) initially decorating the interface, we observed a  
315 less remarkable ATG3 fall-off, suggesting that PC/PE might promote ATG3 retention to the  
316 droplet surface (Figures S4G and S4H).

317  
318 Finally, while the Atg16,5-12 complex is known to mediate ATG3 recruitment on bilayer  
319 membranes like the autophagosome<sup>4</sup>, our study shows that it is not required for ATG3's  
320 association with LDs. To further investigate the binding capacity of ATG3 on different lipid  
321 surfaces, we utilized the droplet-embedded vesicle (DEV) system, which incorporates a  
322 neutral lipid droplet into a giant bilayer vesicle (GUV) (Figure 4F)<sup>60</sup>, made of 7/3 PC/PE. Our  
323 experiments revealed that ATG3-YFP exclusively targets the model LD and not the bilayer  
324 (Figure 4G). This observation suggests that ATG3 cannot solely target a flat bilayer with a  
325 relevant PC/PE composition. Instead, ATG3 can bind to the model LD within the same  
326 system, (Figure 4G), verily due to the lower phospholipid density on LDs than on bilayers<sup>61</sup>.

327  
328 In summary, our findings suggest that ATG3 can alone bind to the surface of lipid droplets  
329 (LDs), likely by its N-terminal amphipathic helix, independently from the ATG5/12/16  
330 complex. The presence of PE, which is required for LC3B lipidation and promotes larger LDs  
331<sup>59</sup>, increases the binding of ATG3 to artificial LD surfaces.

332  
333 **ATG3 lipidates LC3 to LDs.**

334 We investigated whether ATG3 recruitment could drive LC3B lipidation to LDs in vitro. We  
335 purified LDs from the differentiated 3T3-L1 adipocytes and mixed them with a buffer solution  
336 containing ATG3, Atg7, Alexa488-LC3B, and ATP, or Alexa488-LC3B alone as a control. We  
337 incubated the sample at 37°C and observed in real-time that Alexa488-LC3B was localized  
338 to the LDs' surface only in the presence of the lipidation machinery (Figure 5A). We observed  
339 that after fully bleaching the LC3B signal on an LD, the signal re-increased but to a lesser  
340 extent, likely due to de novo-lipidation and the lack of a PE reservoir (Figures 5SA and S5B).  
341 We collected the samples and ran an SDS-PAGE gel, which showed an LC3B-II band  
342 corresponding to lipidation, only in the presence of the minimal ATG3 and Atg7 machinery  
343 (Figure 5B). These observations indicate that ATG3 lipidated LC3B to LDs.

344  
345 Since the purified LDs may contain other autophagic factors recruiting LC3B-II, we switched  
346 to artificial LDs to have full control over compositions. We made triolein-in-buffer droplets  
347 decorated by PC/PE (7/3). In the reaction chamber, we first introduced Atg7 and ATP only,  
348 but after 1 hour of incubation at 37°C, no signal of LC3B was observed around the droplets  
349 (Figure 5C and S5C). We then added ATG3 to the chamber and observed that Alexa488-  
350 LC3B was around the droplets (Figure 5C and S5C). We collected the artificial LDs, analyzed  
351 them with SDS-PAGE gel, and found LC3B-II only in the presence of the lipidation machinery  
352 (Figure 5D). This result shows that ATG3 mediated LC3B lipidation to the LDs.

353  
354 To study the impact of PC/PE on lipidation, we prepared artificial LDs made of PC/PE (7/3)  
355 with different monolayer phospholipid densities, as in Figure 4C, varied from 0.005% to 0.2%  
356 (w/w to triolein). We used Alexa647-LC3B and ATG3/ATG3-YFP (80/20) to correlate LC3B  
357 lipidation to ATG3 binding in the presence of Atg7 and ATP. We observed that only artificial  
358 LDs positive for ATG3 were LC3B-lipidated (Figure 5E and S5D). As shown in Figure 4B-4D,  
359 the binding of ATG3 to LDs decreased with an increase in phospholipid density. To  
360 investigate this relationship further, we used Rho-PE as a proxy for phospholipid density and  
361 analyzed the lipidated Alexa488-LC3B in the presence of ATG3, Atg7, and ATP. We found  
362 that the lipidated droplets had a lower Rh-DOPE signal (Figures 5F and 5G, and S5E),  
363 corresponding to a lower phospholipid density that facilitated ATG3 binding. These results  
364 indicate that ATG3 binding to LDs was required for LC3B lipidation and was improved by  
365 phospholipid packing defects on the LDs.

366  
367 Lastly, we investigated whether membrane-bound ATG3 can lipidate GABARAPL on artificial  
368 LDs, despite the absence of GABARAPs on the large LDs in the studied cell lines (Figures  
369 S1H and S1I). Through in vitro experiments using fluorescence imaging and SDS-PAGE gel  
370 analysis, we observed that ATG3 was able to lipidate of GABARAP1L to the surface of the  
371 artificial LDs (Figure S5F-S5I). These results suggest that regulatory factors in mammalian  
372 cells differentially control the delivery of ATG8 proteins to LD-bound ATG3.

373  
374 In conclusion, the findings from the reconstitution approaches suggest that ATG3 can bind to  
375 LDs with specific surface properties and subsequently lipidate Atg8 proteins to PE.

### 376 **Large LC3B-positive LDs exhibit tight contact with LC3B-containing membranes.**

377 The large LDs positive for LC3B were found to be consistently in contact with LC3B-positive  
378 membranes, in Figures 6A-B and S6A, as well as in Figures 1A and S1A-B. We surmise that  
379 LC3B on LDs enables interaction with LC3B-autophagosome-like structures.

381

382 To distinguish the LC3B signal on the two compartments, FRAP experiments were  
383 conducted on LC3B on the freestanding LD surface and the membrane region in contact  
384 (Figures 6C and S6B-S6E). The LC3B displayed a much faster recovery rate on the  
385 freestanding LD region than on the contact (Figures 6C and 6D, and S6B-S6E), indicating  
386 two different states of LC3B on the membrane and the LD. This suggests that LC3Bs, both  
387 on the LD and the membrane, are involved in the contact between the organelles, leading to  
388 slower diffusion. The LC3B molecules on the LD surface that are not involved in the contact  
389 would be in a state of free diffusion, in equilibrium with the LC3B molecules involved in the  
390 contact. Over time, this LC3B pool not involved in the contact can contribute to the contact.

391  
392 To test this hypothesis, we focused on an LC3B-positive LD that did not initially display a  
393 clear LC3B membrane around it, as depicted in Figure 6E-F. Over time, an LC3B-positive  
394 membrane appeared and was in contact with the LDs. The LC3B signal diminished in the  
395 freestanding LD region, while it was increasing significantly in the contact regions. This  
396 experiment provides evidence that autophagosome-like structures specifically target LC3B-  
397 positive LDs and that the LC3B-II located on the LD surface is involved in these interactions.  
398 These membrane structures may also recruit the LC3B-II pool from the LD surface to their  
399 own membrane.

400  
401 An in vitro approach was taken to further test our hypothesis. LC3B-positive bilayer vesicles,  
402 likely autophagosomes or nascent autophagosomes, were collected with micropipettes after  
403 the plasma membrane of starved and swollen Huh7 cells was aspirated and broken, as  
404 shown in Figure 2K. On the other hand, artificial LDs were prepared, either lipidated with  
405 LC3B, as in Figure 5C, or not, as a control (Figures 6G and 6H). The artificial LDs were  
406 brought into contact with the cell-derived LC3B vesicles for several minutes. The two  
407 compartments were then pulled apart to examine the interactions. An interaction was only  
408 observed in the case of the LC3B-lipidated LD (Figures 6G and 6H). Pulling the two objects  
409 apart led to the deformation of the vesicle into a tubule connecting it to the LC3B-lipidated  
410 droplet (Figure 6G), indicating the tethering of the two interfaces, as previously observed<sup>62</sup>,  
411 and, eventually, their subsequent merge and physical contiguity<sup>65</sup>.

412  
413 Collectively, the data obtained from in vitro and cellular studies suggest that LC3B located on  
414 the surface of LDs acts as a co-factor, attracting LC3B-positive intracellular membranes  
415 towards the LDs, and potentially being transferred to them.

#### 416 **Lysosomes are recruited to the membranes associated with LC3B-positive LDs.**

417 We investigated whether the interaction between lipid droplets (LDs) and autophagosome-  
418 like structures leads to degradation. To do this, we subjected 3T3-L1 adipocytes to a 48-hour  
419 incubation in EBSS and observed a faint surface signal of LC3B on large LDs (Figure 7A,  
420 S7A). This signal was likely the freely diffusive form of LC3B-II (Figure 6C). However, we did  
421 not observe lysotracker activity in the area of the LD where the LC3B-positive signal was  
422 detected, indicating that degradation was not occurring there. On the other hand, the LD  
423 region that was in contact with the LC3B-positive autophagosome-like membrane was  
424 lysotracker-positive, suggesting that degradation was occurring in this region of the LD. This  
425 mechanism is distinct from degradation processes involving LDs such as lipophagy<sup>43</sup> or  
426 lysosome-mediated LD degradation<sup>63</sup>.

428

429 To better visualize lysosomes, we transfected cells with LAMP1-mRFP and induced long-  
430 term starvation. We observed the lysosomal signal on LC3-positive LDs, some of which were  
431 at different stages of contact with autophagosome/lysosome (Figures 7B and 7C). One large  
432 LC3B-positive LD was locally interacting with an LC3B-membrane that was colocalizing with  
433 LAMP1, indicating that it was at a later stage of autophagosome/lysosome recruitment  
434 (Figures 7B and 7C, LD1). In contrast, another LC3B-positive LD at an earlier stage did not  
435 show the lysosomal signal (Figures 7B and 7C, LD3).

436  
437 We observed similar findings in Huh7 cells, where some large LC3B-positive LDs interacted  
438 partially with LC3-positive membranes that were LAMP1-positive (Figure 7D) or lysotracker-  
439 positive (Figures S7B and S7C). We found that the area of contact with the acidified  
440 membrane only modestly increased within a time course of 40 minutes (Figure S7C),  
441 suggesting that the full contact of the membrane with large LDs would take a much longer  
442 time if it would ever happen. Furthermore, we found that the LAMP1 signal only colocalized  
443 on the large LDs positive for LC3B and not LC3A or LC3C (Figure S7D). When we  
444 transfected Huh7 cells with LC3B-mCherry-eGFP and incubated them in EBSS for 24hs, we  
445 found that the larger LDs were specifically displaying the mCherry signal alone around them,  
446 indicating lysosomal-mediated turnover around this LD (Figure 7E).

447  
448 To determine whether lipids were being degraded from the few large LC3B-positive LDs,  
449 Bodipy-labeled fatty acids were fed to Huh7 cells or 3T3-L1 cells differentiated into  
450 adipocytes. Long-term nutrient starvation was induced to determine whether fatty acids were  
451 liberated by the LC3B-positive LDs. However, we failed to observe the fluorescent fatty acids  
452 transfer to the autolysosome-like membranes close to the LC3B-positive LDs (Figure S7E).  
453 Then, we examined Plin1, which is the major marker of LDs in 3T3-L1 adipocytes. We found  
454 that large LC3-positive LDs frequently lacked PLIN1 partially or totally (Figure 7F and S7F).  
455 This suggests that PLIN1 was degraded for or by LC3B lipidation to the large LDs and the  
456 subsequent autolysosome-like recruitment. This degradation could occur prior, during, or  
457 after LC3B lipidation to the LD. Yet, we observed instances where Atg3/LC3B and PLIN1  
458 were present on the same large LD, but the proteins were laterally excluding each other  
459 (Figure S7F and S7G). The finding suggests that the lipidation of LC3B triggers the removal  
460 of Plin1 from the LD (Figure 7E). This removal could have facilitated the LD's interaction with  
461 the autophagosome-like structures and their acidification, or the contact with the  
462 autophagosome-like structures could have excluded Plin1 from the contact, leading to its  
463 degradation.

464  
465 Taken together, our data support the existence of a pathway in which LC3B-positive LDs  
466 become in contact with LC3B-positive autophagosome-like structures that are then acidified  
467 to mediate local degradations.

468  
469

470 **Discussion.**

471 ATG3 bound more strongly to model LDs that exhibit larger phospholipid packing defects  
472 than bilayers<sup>61</sup>, as depicted in Figure 4. This probably explains that the recruitment of ATG3  
473 to bilayers in cells typically requires additional machinery, such as the ATG5-Atg12-Atg16  
474 complex. In vitro, the recruitment of ATG3 to LDs was enhanced by PE, which suggests that  
475 larger LDs may contain more PE<sup>59</sup>. During long-term nutrient starvation, the monolayer of  
476 large LDs may become enriched in specific lipids, such as PE, or remodeled, such as by the  
477 removal of proteins and phospholipids, to enable ATG3 binding and subsequent LC3B  
478 lipidation.

479  
480 Our findings suggest that there are at least two possible mechanisms underlying our  
481 observed phenotype. The first model suggests that prolonged starvation leads to the  
482 remodeling of the LD surface, allowing for LC3B lipidation to support the biogenesis of  
483 autophagosomes from LDs. Indeed, we consistently observed increasing amounts of LC3-  
484 membranes near LC3-lipidated LDs. Also, the LC3B-positive LDs represented a small  
485 fraction of LDs, despite they belonged to the larger LDs population, containing a significant  
486 amount of lipids. Finally, we did not observe clear evidence of lipid transfer from the LDs to  
487 the membranes. These observations raise questions about the occurrence of this  
488 mechanism for degrading only a few large LDs. The second model suggests that LC3-bound  
489 LDs recruit autophagosomes that ultimately lead to the degradation of the LDs. We observed  
490 that the LC3B-membranes surrounding LDs were acidified, which supports the idea of LC3B-  
491 positive LDs being degraded. However, because this mechanism is only triggered during  
492 prolonged starvation, it was difficult to timely capture the occurrence of the events to  
493 discriminate between these two models. Yet, it is possible that both models are correct and  
494 that both mechanisms occur simultaneously.

495  
496 It may not be surprising that both ATG3 and LC3B localize to LDs, as several autophagic  
497 proteins, including Atg2, Atg14, and DFCP1, have been found on LDs<sup>22-27</sup>. This suggests  
498 that autophagic processes can take place directly at the surface of LDs. Our data suggest  
499 that the LD surface may serve as a lipidation platform to support certain autophagic  
500 processes, such as autophagosome biogenesis and the local degradation of cellular  
501 components near the LD surface. It is tempting to speculate that during prolonged nutrient  
502 deprivation, canonical autophagic pathways may be overwhelmed, and autophagic  
503 processes may become more easily organized at the surface of some LDs to alleviate the  
504 system. Indeed, the process of LC3B lipidation and autophagosome biogenesis typically  
505 involves multiple steps and autophagic proteins before Atg3 can bind to nascent  
506 phagophores and lipidate LC3B. However, our findings suggest that prolonged starvation  
507 allows for direct binding of Atg3 to LDs and subsequent LC3B lipidation on the LD surface.  
508 This LD-lipidated LC3B may then be transferred to nearby autophagosomes, e.g. via  
509 monolayer-bilayer bridges formed between these two organelles. In this scenario, PE lipids  
510 could be supplied to the LDs from the ER, via lipid transfer proteins or ER-LD bridges, to  
511 support continuous LC3B lipidation on LDs in prolonged starvation. While our data show  
512 agreements with this model, further investigation is needed to confirm it fully.

513  
514 The catabolic pathways of LDs are interdependent, and several interactions have been  
515 shown between these pathways, as previously reported. For instance, lipolysis requires  
516 chaperone-mediated autophagy for the degradation of Plin2,3 to facilitate the access of  
517 ATGL to LDs<sup>65</sup>. ATGL interacts with LC3B and regulates Sirtuin 1 activity, which modulates

518 autophagy. Such an interaction couples lipolysis and lipophagy<sup>40,41</sup>. Ongoing lipolysis  
519 reduces the size of LDs until they can fit into autophagosomes and be degraded by  
520 lipophagy<sup>43</sup>. Finally, ATGL lipolytic activity is required for the delivery of tiny LDs directly  
521 from donor LDs to lysosomes<sup>63</sup>. Based on these findings, the localization of LC3B to large  
522 LDs in our case might cross-talk with other autophagic pathways, especially with autophagy  
523 (Figure 2). For example, classical autophagy may primarily act during starvation for a certain  
524 time, after which it triggers cues inducing the remodeling of large LDs' surface, allowing  
525 ATG3 binding and LC3B lipidation. In this model, blocking autophagy would prevent the  
526 release of the cues remodeling LDs, which could explain the reduction of LC3B localization  
527 to large LDs in ATG5 or Beclin1 KO.

528

529 Autophagosome-like structures fused with lysosomes while the large LDs were partially in  
530 contact with the LC3-positive membranes (Figure 7). This indicates that the mechanism  
531 mediating the degradation of the large LC3B-positive LDs is unique and is not lipophagy-  
532 related<sup>42,64</sup>. In murine 3T3-L1 adipocyte and human Huh7 cells, LC3B-positive membranes  
533 adhered to LC3B-positive LDs. Although Atg8 proteins may trans-dimerize<sup>62,66</sup>, it cannot be  
534 concluded yet from our study that LC3B trans-homodimerization was responsible for the  
535 docking of the autophagosome-like membranes to the LDs, and their possible hemifusion. At  
536 least, in vitro, our data showed that LC3B is an adaptor on LDs mediating the interaction with  
537 LC3B cell membranes (Figure 6). In the LC3B-associated phagocytosis pathway, LC3B  
538 lipidated to endosomes mediates interaction and fusion with lysosomes. Hence, it is highly  
539 plausible that LC3B lipidated to the large LDs mediates interaction and hemifusion of the LDs  
540 with the autolysosome-like membranes. In the case of lipophagy, which targets smaller LDs,  
541 other protein adaptors, such as Rab10<sup>46</sup> or spartin<sup>44</sup>, might govern the LD interaction with  
542 autophagosomes.

543

544 The mechanism by which LDs are delivered and degraded in the lumen of phospholipid  
545 bilayer vesicles is currently unknown. For example, a recent study proposes that lysosomes  
546 can pinch off small LDs from larger ones in hepatocytes<sup>63</sup> but how such a process happens  
547 is unknown. In the eventuality that the large LDs targeted by LC3B are destined for  
548 degradation, the acidified autophagosomes in contact with large LDs would likely mediate  
549 such degradation locally. This raises questions about how the monolayer of LDs interacts  
550 and delivers content to the lumen of a bilayer vesicle, as well as how LC3B could mediate  
551 such processes in our case. At this stage, we can only speculate that LC3B on LDs mediates  
552 the tethering and possibly the hemifusion of the LD with the autolysosome-like structures.  
553 This hemifusion would expose neutral lipids to the lumen of the autolysosomes. Alternatively,  
554 the autolysosome-like structures could locally deform the donor LD and pinch off small LDs  
555<sup>63</sup>. Protein degradation may also occur in this process, with proteins like PLIN1 potentially  
556 being delivered to the autolysosomes via mechanisms similar to chaperone-mediated  
557 degradation, at the autolysosome-like membrane and large LD contact. Further research is  
558 needed to fully understand the mechanisms involved in LD delivery and degradation within  
559 bilayer-bounded vesicles.

560

### 561 **Limitations of the study**

562 Despite multiple attempts using correlative electron microscopy, it was not possible to obtain  
563 a clear visualization of the membranes adjacent to the large LC3B-decorated LDs. A  
564 structural understanding of the interaction between LC3B-membranes and LC3-LDs would  
565 have been gained from such visualization.

566 The mechanism of ATG3 binding to LDs and its specificity towards larger LDs is currently  
567 unknown, and the physiological significance of this localization is not yet fully clear.

568 The relationship between our identified pathway and autophagy is not well defined, as both  
569 pathways depend on autophagic proteins, which makes it challenging to distinguish them  
570 from each other.

571 The precise function of LC3B on LDs is still unknown, and its role in tethering and possibly  
572 facilitating fusion is only speculated based on the previously identified capacity of Atg8  
573 proteins in trans-dimerization.

574

575

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583

## 584 **Author contributions**

585 The research was designed by MO, KBM, TM, and ART. MO and KBM performed all  
586 experiments, helped by AS. SN and NG prepared all proteins used in vitro. ART wrote the  
587 manuscript that was reviewed by all co-authors.

588

## 589 **Declaration of Interests**

590 The authors declare no competing interests.

591

## 592 **Inclusion and Diversity**

593 We support the inclusive, diverse, and equitable conduct of research.

594

595

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600



601 **Figure 1. LC3B is recruited to LDs during long-term nutrient deprivation**

- 602
- 603 A. Confocal imaging of eGFP-LC3B and LDs in differentiated 3T3-L1 adipocytes virally  
604 transfected with eGFP-LC3B. Cells were incubated in EBSS for the indicated time after  
605 transfection. Scale bar, 10  $\mu$ m.
- 606 B. Percentage of cells with eGFP-LC3B-positive LDs. Data were obtained from three  
607 independent experiments done as described in A. An ordinary one-way ANOVA test was  
608 used (\*\* P < 0.001, \*\*\* P<0.0001).
- 609 C. Percentage of eGFP-LC3B-positive LDs per cell. Data were obtained from three  
610 independent experiments done as described in A. An ordinary one-way ANOVA test was  
611 used (\*\*\* P<0.0001).
- 612 D. Diameter of eGFP-LC3B-positive LDs quantified from three independent experiments  
613 done as described in A. An ordinary one-way ANOVA test was used (\*\*\* P<0.0001).
- 614 E. Left: sector graph shows the size distribution of LDs in differentiated 3T3-L1 adipocytes,  
615 transfected with eGFP-LC3B and incubated in EBSS for 48hs. Three independent  
616 experiments n=10 cells were collapsed. The right sector graph shows the size distribution  
617 of eGFP-LC3B-positive LDs. Quantifications are from 4 independent experiments.
- 618 F. The relative fraction of eGFP-LC3B-positive LDs in a size range (i.e. per size distribution,  
619 normalization of E).
- 620 G. Immunofluorescence staining of LC3B and PLIN1 in differentiated 3T3-L1 adipocytes  
621 incubated in EBSS for 48hs.
- 622 H. Western blot of lysate and LDs fractions of cells treated as described in G.
- 623 I. Schematic representation of LC3B puncta with or without LD.
- 624 J. eGFP-LC3B puncta size distribution with or without LDs. The data were obtained from 10  
625 cells from three independent experiments.
- 626 See also Figure S1.

627

628 **Figure 2. LC3B is not recruited to LDs by known factors**

- 629
- 630 A. Confocal imaging of eGFP-LC3B, mRFP-P62 and LDs in differentiated 3T3-L1  
631 adipocytes. Cells were virally transfected with eGFP-LC3B and mRFP-P62 and incubated  
632 in EBSS for 48hs. Scale bar, 10  $\mu$ m (5  $\mu$ m in insets).
- 633 B. Schematic representation illustrating the recruitment of eGFP-LC3B alone or with mRFP-  
634 P62 on LDs. The percentage of LDs of each phenotype is written below the  
635 corresponding schematic representation. Quantifications are the average from three  
636 independent experiments.
- 637 C. Top: western blot of differentiated 3T3-L1 adipocytes virally co-transfected with eGFP-  
638 LC3B and with either ATG5 shRNA or non-targeting shRNA for 24h, and then incubated  
639 in EBSS for 24h. Bottom: quantification of ATG5 expression from three independent  
640 experiments Student's unpaired t-test is used (\*\*P<0,001).
- 641 D. Confocal imaging of LDs in differentiated 3T3-L1 adipocytes treated as described in C.  
642 Scale bar, 10  $\mu$ m (5  $\mu$ m in insets).
- 643 E. Top: Percentage of cells with eGFP-LC3B-positive LDs. Bottom, Percentage of eGFP-  
644 LC3B-positive LDs per cell. Quantifications are from three independent experiments.  
645 Student's unpaired t-test is used (\*\*\*P<0,0001, ns P>0,05)
- 646 F. Confocal imaging of eGFP-LC3B and LDs in differentiated 3T3-L1 adipocytes virally  
647 transfected with eGFP-LC3B and incubated in EBSS alone or EBSS containing Spautin-1  
648 for 48hs. Scale bar, 10  $\mu$ m (5  $\mu$ m in insets).

- 649 G. Left, percentage of cells with eGFP-LC3B-positive LDs. Right, Percentage of eGFP-  
 650 LC3B-positive LDs in the cell. Quantifications are from three independent experiments  
 651 done as described in F. Student's unpaired t-test is used (\*\*P<0,001, ns P>0,05).  
 652 H. Western blot of lysate and LD fractions of differentiated adipocytes incubated in EBSS  
 653 alone or EBSS containing Spautin-1 for 48hs.  
 654 I. Confocal imaging of eGFP-LC3B and LDs in differentiated 3T3-L1 adipocytes virally  
 655 transfected with eGFP-LC3B and incubated in EBSS alone or EBSS containing  
 656 bafilomycin A for 48hs. Scale bar, 10  $\mu\text{m}$  (5  $\mu\text{m}$  in insets). To Right, Up: percentage of  
 657 eGFP-LC3B-positive LDs in the cell. Down: Percentage of cells with eGFP-LC3B-positive  
 658 LDs. Quantifications are from three independent experiments. Student's unpaired t-test is  
 659 used (\* P<0,05, ns P>0,05).  
 660 J. Schematic representation of the impact of swelling of intracellular organelles by  
 661 incubating the cells with a hypotonic media.  
 662 K. Time-lapse imaging experiment performed on Huh7 cells that were transfected with  
 663 eGFP-LC3B and treated with oleic acid for 24hs, and then incubated in EBSS for 48 hs.  
 664 At time 0, a hypotonic media was added to induce cell swelling. Imaging was done at the  
 665 indicated times.  
 666 See also Figure S2.

667  
 668  
 669 **Figure 3. ATG3 is recruited to lipid droplets during long-term nutrient starvation**

- 670 A. Immunofluorescence staining of LC3B, ATG3, and LDs in differentiated 3T3-L1  
 671 adipocytes incubated in DMEM or EBSS for 48hs.  
 672 B. Immunofluorescence staining of ATG3 and LDs in differentiated 3T3-L1 adipocytes  
 673 incubated in EBSS containing 3MA for 48hs.  
 674 C. Percentage of ATG3-positive LDs per cell. Student's unpaired t-test is used (ns  
 675 P>0,05).  
 676 D. Confocal imaging of Huh7 cells co-transfected with eGFP-LC3B and ATG3-dsRED.  
 677 Cells were treated with OA to induce LDs and then incubated in EBSS for 48hs.  
 678 Scale bar, 10  $\mu\text{m}$  (5  $\mu\text{m}$  in insets).  
 679 E. Confocal imaging of LDs in differentiated 3T3-L1 adipocytes virally co-transfected  
 680 with eGFP-LC3B and an ATG3 shRNA or eGFP-LC3B and the non-targeting shRNA.  
 681 Cells were incubated in EBSS for 48hs after transfection. Scale bar, 10  $\mu\text{m}$  (5  $\mu\text{m}$  in  
 682 insets).  
 683 F. Western blot of cells treated as described in E.  
 684 G. The bar graph shows the quantification of ATG3 expression from three Western blots  
 685 of cells treated as described in E. Student's unpaired t-test is used (\*\* P<0,0001).  
 686 H. Right, percentage of cells with eGFP-LC3B-positive LDs. Left, percentage of eGFP-  
 687 LC3B-positive LDs per cell. Quantifications are from three independent experiments.  
 688 Student's unpaired t-test is used (\*\* P<0,0001).  
 689 I. Immunofluorescence staining of LC3B and PLIN1 in differentiated adipocytes stably  
 690 transfected with mATG3 WT, mATG3 K11W, or mATG3 V15K. Cells were incubated  
 691 in EBSS for 48hs then fixed and stained (LC3B in green, PLIN1 in magenta). Scale  
 692 bar, 10  $\mu\text{m}$  (5  $\mu\text{m}$  in insets).  
 693 J. Right, percentage of cells with LC3B-positive LDs. Left, percentage of LC3B-positive  
 694 LDs per cell. Quantifications are from three independent experiments. An ordinary  
 695 one-way ANOVA test was used (\*\* P<0,0001)  
 696 See also Figure S3.  
 697

698

699 **Figure 4. ATG3 better binds to model LDs enriched in PE**

- 700 A. Confocal imaging of triolein droplets before and after ATG3-YFP addition. Scale bare  
701 (100  $\mu\text{m}$ ).
- 702 B. Top: Schematic illustration of triolein-in-buffer droplets decorated by different  
703 phospholipid densities ((1/1) PC/PE), reported by rhodamine-PE (Rho-PE). Bottom:  
704 confocal imaging of triolein-in-buffer droplets with different phospholipid coverage,  
705 ranging from 0.005% to 0.2% (w/w to triolein) before and after ATG3 addition. Scale  
706 bare (100  $\mu\text{m}$ ). Line profiles show the intensity levels of ATG3-YFP and Rho-PE on  
707 droplets depicted in the inset.
- 708 C. ATG3-YFP recruitment to triolein droplets as a function of the phospholipid density,  
709 reported by Rho-PE. The concentration at half of maximum binding is depicted in the  
710 main figure. Concentration at half of maximum binding  $C_{1/2}$  is shown in red. The inset  
711 figure shows the different recruitment profiles of Atg3-YFP depending on the PC/PE  
712 ratio.
- 713 D. The characteristic concentration  $C_{1/2}$  of ATG3-YFP binding from experiments done as  
714 described in B for the indicated PC/PE ratio.
- 715 E. Western blot of untagged ATG3 recombinant protein bound to liposomes and artificial  
716 LDs in the top fraction of flotation assays.
- 717 F. Schematic representation of the droplet-embedded vesicle (DEV) system.
- 718 G. Confocal imaging of a DEV made of 7/3 PC/PE and incubated with ATG3-YFP. Scale  
719 bare (10  $\mu\text{m}$ ).
- 720 See also Figure S4.

721

722

723 **Figure 5. ATG3 lipidates LC3 to purified and artificial LDs**

- 724 A. Confocal imaging of purified adipocyte LDs in HKM buffer containing Alexa488-LC3B,  
725 in the presence or absence of the lipidation reaction components ATG7, ATG3, ATP.
- 726 B. LDs from the previous experiment are collected and analyzed using SDS-PAGE in a  
727 stained Coomassie blue.
- 728 C. Confocal imaging of triolein-in-buffer droplets decorated by PC/PE (7/3) incubated  
729 with Alexa488-LC3B, then ATG7 and ATP. No lipidation occurred. When ATG3 was  
730 subsequently added, lipidation occurred on the artificial LDs (arrows show examples).
- 731 D. Artificial LDs from the previous experiment are collected and analyzed using SDS-  
732 PAGE in a stained Coomassie blue.
- 733 E. Triolein-in-buffer droplets decorated with PC/PE at different monolayer phospholipid  
734 densities (based on Rho-PE signal) are imaged using confocal microscopy after  
735 being incubated with Alexa647-LC3B and Atg3/Atg3-YFP (80/20), ATP, and ATG7.
- 736 F. Confocal imaging of triolein-in-buffer droplets decorated by PC/PE (7/3) at different  
737 monolayer phospholipid densities varied from 0.005% to 0.2% (w/w to triolein). They  
738 are incubated with Alexa488-LC3B and Atg3 (80/20), ATP and ATG7.
- 739 G. Quantification of F. LC3B-Alexa488 lipidation to triolein droplets as a function of the  
740 phospholipid density.
- 741 See also Figure S5.

742

743 **Figure 6. LC3B-positive LDs exhibit interaction with organelles that also contain LC3B**

- 744 A. Confocal imaging of differentiated 3T3-L1 adipocytes virally transfected with eGFP-  
745 LC3B. Cells are incubated in EBSS for 48hs after transfection. Scale bar, 10  $\mu\text{m}$ .

- 746 B. Schematic illustration of eGFP-LC3B-positive LDs with or without eGFP-LC3B puncta  
747 associated. The fraction of each phenotype is indicated beneath each case.  
748 Quantifications are from three independent experiments.
- 749 C. FRAP analysis of eGFP-LC3B in differentiated 3T3-L1 adipocytes virally transfected  
750 with eGFP-LC3B and incubated in EBSS containing Spautin-1 for 48hs. The insets  
751 indicate the bleached region: red for the autophagosome area and green for the LD  
752 surface. Scale bar, 10  $\mu\text{m}$ .
- 753 D. Recovery kinetics of eGFP-LC3B in the different regions depicted in C. The signals  
754 were corrected for the bleach.
- 755 E. Confocal imaging of Huh7 cells virally transfected with eGFP-LC3B and treated with  
756 oleic acid for 24h and then incubated in EBSS for 24h. eGFP-LC3B positive LDs are  
757 shown at 0 and 60 minutes.
- 758 F. Time-lapse from confocal live imaging of Huh7 cells presented in E at the indicated times.  
759 The cyan arrowhead indicates the eGFP-LC3B-positive LD region and the yellow one an  
760 LC3B-positive membrane being recruited to the LD.
- 761 G. Top: Schematic representation of a purified eGFP-LC3B-bound membrane and an  
762 eGFP-LC3B-lipidated artificial LD (PE-Cy5 report for phospholipids decorating the  
763 artificial LD). Bottom, confocal imaging of eGFP-LC3B bound membrane extracted from  
764 Huh7 cells and an eGFP-LC3B-lipidated artificial LD, each captured by a micropipette  
765 and put in contact for 6 minutes. Afterward, the two objects are slowly pulled away from  
766 each other.
- 767 H. Top: Schematic representation of a purified eGFP-LC3B-bound membrane and an  
768 artificial LD solely decorated by phospholipids. Bottom, confocal imaging of eGFP-  
769 LC3B-bound membrane extracted from Huh7 cells and an artificial LD with the same lipid  
770 composition as in G. Both objects are captured by a micropipette and put in contact for 6  
771 minutes before they are slowly pulled away from each other.  
772 See also Figure S6.

773  
774 **Figure 7. LC3B-positive LDs interact with acidified autophagosome-like membranes**

- 775 A. Confocal imaging of eGFP-LC3B, lysotracker (blue) and LDs (LipidTox) in  
776 differentiated 3T3-L1 adipocytes virally transfected with eGFP-LC3B. Cells are  
777 incubated in EBSS for 48hs after transfection. Scale bar, 10  $\mu\text{m}$  (5  $\mu\text{m}$  in insets).  
778 Bottom panels are intensity profiles of the line drawn in each image.
- 779 B. Confocal imaging of eGFP-LC3B (green), LAMP1-mRFP (red) and LDs (LipidTox) in  
780 differentiated 3T3-L1 adipocytes virally transfected with eGFP-LC3B and LAMP1-  
781 mRFP, incubated in EBSS for 48hs. Example LDs at different stages of eGFP-LC3B  
782 and LAMP1-mRFP recruitment are numbered.
- 783 C. Relative intensity of eGFP-LC3B and LAMP1-mRFP on the different LDs.
- 784 D. Confocal imaging of eGFP-LC3B, LAMP1-mRFP and LDs in Huh7 virally transfected  
785 with eGFP-LC3B and LAMP1-mRFP, loaded with oleic acid for 24hs, and starved or  
786 not. Scale bar, 10  $\mu\text{m}$  (2  $\mu\text{m}$  in insets)
- 787 E. Confocal imaging of LC3B-mCherry-eGFP and LDs in Huh7 loaded with oleic acid for  
788 24h and then placed in EBSS for 24h. Scale bar, 10  $\mu\text{m}$  (5  $\mu\text{m}$  in insets).
- 789 F. Immunofluorescence staining of PLIN1 in differentiated 3T3-L1 adipocytes transfected  
790 with eGFP-LC3B and incubated in EBSS for 48hs.  
791 See also Figure S7.

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803 STAR Methods

804

805 **Lead contact**

806 Further information and requests for resources and reagents should be directed to and will  
807 be fulfilled by the lead contact, Abou Rachid Thiam (thiam@ens.fr).

808

809 **Materials availability**

810 This study did not generate new unique reagents.

811

812 **Data and code availability**

813 This paper does not report any original code. Any additional information required to  
814 reanalyze the data reported in this work paper is available from the Lead Contact upon  
815 request.

816

817

818 **EXPERIMENTAL MODEL AND SUBJECT DETAILS**

819 **Cell lines and culture conditions**

820 Human hepatocarcinoma cells Huh7, HeLa and 3T3-L1 mouse adipocytes cells were used in  
821 this study. HeLa and Huh7 cells were maintained in High Glucose with stabilized Glutamine  
822 and with Sodium Pyruvate Dulbecco's modified Eagle's Medium (DMEM) (Dutscher)  
823 supplemented with 10% heat-inactivated fetal bovine serum and 1% penicillin/streptomycin  
824 (GibcoBRL). This medium is named further as DMEM.

825 Preadipocytes 3T3-L1 were maintained in Dulbecco's modified DMEM High Glucose with  
826 stabilized Glutamine, with Sodium Pyruvate supplemented with 10% newborn calf serum  
827 Gibco and 1% penicillin/streptomycin (GibcoBRL).

828

829 **Adipocytes differentiation**

830 Confluent preadipocytes 3T3-L1 cells were incubated in a differentiation medium composed  
831 of DMEM containing 0.25  $\mu$ M dexamethasone, 10  $\mu$ g/ml insulin, and 0.5 mM 3-isobutyl-1-  
832 methylxanthine for 48h. The cell culture medium was changed to a post-differentiation  
833 medium composed of a growth medium containing 5  $\mu$ g/ml insulin and incubated in this  
834 medium for 48h then in a fresh growth media for 24h. The differentiated adipocytes were  
835 used for subsequent experiments. In Figure S7E, adipocytes were incubated with  
836 differentiation medium then cells were incubated with DMEM supplemented with 0,1%  
837 Bodipy 558/568 C12 (#D3835) in oleic acid at 200 $\mu$ M of OA conjugated to BSA for 48h.

838

839 **Oleic acid treatment**

840 When indicated, cells (60–70% confluence) were incubated for 24h with DMEM  
841 supplemented with 200  $\mu$ M oleic acid conjugated to bovine serum albumin (BSA) to induce  
842 LDs formation and accumulation.

843

844 **Cells transfection**

845 Cells were transfected with indicated plasmid using Polyethyleneimine HCl MAX  
846 (Polysciences) following the manufacturer's instructions.

847

848 **Virus-mediated gene transductions**

849 **Viral particles:**

850 The eGFP-LC3B adenovirus was kindly provided by Sharon Tooze (London Research  
851 Institute, UK) via Isabelle Dugail. It was amplified in QBI-HEK 293A cells and purified on a  
852 cesium chloride gradient.

853  
854 ATG3 shRNA (MISSION® shRNA Lentiviral Transduction Particles cat: SHCLNV-  
855 NM\_022488, Sigma Aldrich) and ATG5 shRNA (MISSION® shRNA Lentiviral Transduction  
856 Particles cat: SHCLNV-NM\_004849, Sigma Aldrich) were used for gene knockdown  
857 experiments. P62 RFP BacMam reagents (insect Baculovirus with a Mammalian promoter)  
858 were used in the Premo Autophagy Sensor p62 kit (Molecular Probes cat: P36241).

859  
860 Virus-mediated gene transductions were performed as follows: HeLa and Huh7 cells at 60-  
861 70% confluence, or differentiated adipocytes, were incubated with a culture medium  
862 containing the viral particles at an MOI of 10. After incubation at 37 °C for 16 h, the inoculum  
863 was removed, and the cells were washed three times with fresh medium and further  
864 maintained in the indicated culture medium.

865  
866 For transduction of p62, differentiated adipocytes were transduced with the Premo  
867 Autophagy Sensor p62 kit (Molecular Probes cat: P36241) at an MOI of 10. After 18 h, the  
868 cells were washed twice with DPBS and subjected to feeding and nutrient starvation  
869 conditions for the indicated time.

870  
871 **Recombinant lentivirus generation:**  
872 Lentivirus were generated by cotransfection of HEK T293 cells with the lentivirus vectors  
873 pCMV-VSV-G (Addgene plasmid # 8454), psPAX2 (Addgene plasmid # 1226) and one of the  
874 following plasmids: (pLVX +mATG3 wt, pLVX+ mATG3 K11W, pLVX+ mATG3 V15K,  
875 LAMP1-mRFP-FLAG (Addgene plasmid # 34611), LentiCRISPRv2-ATG5 (Addgene plasmid  
876 # 99573), LentiCRISPRv2-Beclin1 (Addgene plasmid # 99574)) using lipofectamine 2000  
877 reagent. After culture for 72 hr at 32°C, 5% CO<sub>2</sub>, the growth medium containing lentivirus  
878 was collected and virus were concentrated by centrifugation.

879  
880 **Stably transfected and knock-out cell lines generation:**  
881 Huh7 cells were transfected with shRNA Atg3 (h) Plasmid (Santa Cruz Biotech # Sc-72582-  
882 SH) for 48 hours, and then untransfected cells were removed by Puromycin dihydrochloride  
883 (Santa Cruz Biotech # Sc-108071) selection. Adipocytes 3T3L1 were incubated with mATG3  
884 WT or ATG3 K11W or ATG3 V15K recombinant virus for 48 hours. Untransfected cells were  
885 removed by Puromycin dihydrochloride (Santa Cruz Biotech # Sc-108071) selection. Huh7  
886 cells were incubated with ATG5 KO or Beclin1 KO recombinant virus for 48 hours.  
887 Untransfected cells were removed by Puromycin dihydrochloride (Santa Cruz Biotech # Sc-  
888 108071) selection. Monoclonal cell lines were generated, and protein expression was tested  
889 by Western Blot.

890  
891 **Method Details:**  
892 **Plasmids:**  
893 pDSRedC1+mATG3 , pDSRedN1+hATG3, pLVX +mATG3 wt, pLVX+ mATG3  
894 K11W, pLVX+ mATG3 V15K, pLenti-III-PGK+ GFP-GABARAP, pLenti-III-PGK+ pLenti-III-  
895 PGK+ GFP-GABARAPL1 , pLenti-III-PGK+ GFP-LC3B ( A120), pLVX-puro+EGFP-LC3B  
896 were gift from Thomas Melia lab, Department of Cell Biology, Yale University School of  
897 Medicine, New Haven, CT. FUGW ATG3 dsRED Expressing ATG3 C-terminal tagged

898 DsRED: ATG3 dsRED gene were amplified from pATG3dsRED and cloned in FUGW  
899 plasmid. FUGW ATG3 EGFP expressing N-terminal tagged ATG3: ATG3 gene were cloned  
900 into FUGW using In-Fusion HD Cloning kit.

901 .  
902 PLIN1 mCherry was a gift from Dr. Savage group. ATGL was gift from Carole Sztalryd,  
903 Department of Medicine, Division of Endocrinology, School of Medicine, University of  
904 Maryland, Baltimore, MD, USA; Geriatric Research, Education, and Clinical Center,  
905 Baltimore Veterans Affairs Health Care Center, Baltimore, MD, USA. LentiCRISPRv2-ATG5 ,  
906 LentiCRISPRv2-Beclin1 were a gift from Edward Campbell (Addgene plasmid # 99573 ;  
907 <http://n2t.net/addgene:99573> ; RRID:Addgene\_99573), (Addgene plasmid # 99574 ;  
908 <http://n2t.net/addgene:99574> ; RRID:Addgene\_99574)<sup>67</sup>. LAMP1-mRFP-FLAG was a gift  
909 from David Sabatini (Addgene plasmid # 34611 ; <http://n2t.net/addgene:34611> ;  
910 RRID:Addgene\_34611)<sup>68</sup>. pLAMP1-mCherry was a gift from Amy Palmer (Addgene plasmid #  
911 45147 ; <http://n2t.net/addgene:45147> ; RRID:Addgene\_45147)<sup>69</sup>. pDEST-CMV 3xFLAG-  
912 LC3A-GFP and pDEST-CMV 3xFLAG-LC3C-GFP were a gift from Robin Ketteler (Addgene  
913 plasmid # 123106 ; <http://n2t.net/addgene:123106> ; RRID:Addgene\_123106), Addgene  
914 plasmid # 123110 ; <http://n2t.net/addgene:123110> ; RRID:Addgene\_123110)<sup>70</sup>. psPAX2 was  
915 a gift from Didier Trono (Addgene plasmid # 12260; <http://n2t.net/addgene:12260>; RRID:  
916 Addgene\_12260). pCMV-VSV-G was a gift from Bob Weinberg (Addgene plasmid # 8454;  
917 <http://n2t.net/addgene:8454>; RRID: Addgene\_8454). pBABE-puro mCherry-EGFP-LC3B was  
918 a gift from Jayanta Debnath (Addgene plasmid # 22418 ; <http://n2t.net/addgene:22418> ;  
919 RRID:Addgene\_22418)<sup>71</sup>.

920

## 921 **Antibodies**

### 922 **Primary antibodies:**

923 Anti LC3B Rabbit and mouse anti body (abcam #ab48394, ab243506), Anti-GABARAP +  
924 GABARAPL1 + GABARAPL2 Rabbit monoclonal antibody (abcam # ab109364), Anti ATG3  
925 Rabbit monoclonal antibody (abcam # ab108251), Anti ATG3 Mouse monoclonal antibody  
926 (santacruz# c-393660), Anti-SQSTM1 / p62 Mouse monoclonal antibody ( abcam# ab56416),  
927 Rabbit monoclonal to APG5L/ATG5 (abcam# ab108327), Rabbit monoclonal to Beclin  
928 1 (abcam# **ab207612**), anti B-actin mouse monoclonal HPR conjugated anti body (Santa  
929 Cruz biotech # Sc-47778), anti GAPDH mouse monoclonal HPR conjugated anti body  
930 (ThermoFisher # MA5-15738-HPR).

---

### 931 **Secondary antibodies:**

932 anti-rabbit HPR conjugated (ThermoFisher # SA1-200), anti-mouse HPR conjugated  
933 (ThermoFisher # A16011), Anti Goat HPR conjugated (A15999 invitrogen), Donkey anti  
934 Goat DyLight 650 (ThermoFisher # SA5-10089), Donkey anti-Rabbit Alexa Fluor 568  
935 (Invitrogen # A10042), Donkey anti-Rabbit Alexa Fluor 488 (Invitrogen # A21206), Donkey  
936 anti-Mouse Alexa Fluor 568 (Invitrogen # A10037).

937

### 938 **Modulation of Autophagy**

939 To inhibit autophagy in nutrient starvation condition, 3-Methyladenine (3-MA) (Sigma Aldrich  
940 # SAE0107) was used at final concentration of 5  $\mu$ M. Chloroquine (Sigma Aldrich Cat:  
941 C6628) and Spautin-1 (Sigma Aldrich Cat: SML0440) at final concentration of 100  $\mu$ M and 10  
942  $\mu$ M respectively. Autophagy was induced using rapamycin at final concentration of 500nM.

943

### 944 **Lipid Droplets purification:**



945 Cells were washed twice with ice-cold PBS. Then, they were scraped into a homogenization  
946 buffer containing 10 mM Tris/HCl, 1 mM EGTA, 0.5 mM EDTA at pH 7.4, and Complete™  
947 protease inhibitors, and incubated on ice for 15 minutes. The resulting solution was loaded  
948 into a syringe and passed rapidly ten times through an 18G needle to mechanically disrupt  
949 the cells. Post-nuclear supernatants (PNS) were obtained by centrifugation at 1000 g for 10  
950 minutes. The PNS was mixed with an Iodixanol solution (OptiPrep cat: D1556 Sigma Aldrich)  
951 at 35% (w/w). 1 ml of this solution was loaded onto the bottom of a 3 ml centrifugation tube,  
952 and two successive layers of 850 µl of 20% (w/w) and 10% (w/w) of Iodixanol in the  
953 homogenization buffer were added. Then, one layer of 200 µl of homogenization buffer was  
954 added. The gradients were centrifuged for at least 16 hours at 175,000 rpm, and LDs were  
955 harvested from the top of the gradients.

956

### 957 **Immunoblot**

958 Cells were washed twice with ice-cold DPBS and lysed on ice using RIPA LYSIS BUFFER  
959 (Thermo Fisher cat:89900) containing protease inhibitors (complete ULTRA Cat:  
960 05892970001 Roche). High lipid-containing samples, such as the lysate of cells treated with  
961 oleic acid, differentiated adipocytes, and purified LDs, were delipidated to eliminate the high  
962 quantity of lipids that affect the separation of proteins by SDS PAGE. Briefly, 1 volume of  
963 TCA (100%W/V) was added to 4 volumes of the protein sample and incubated on ice for 10  
964 minutes. Samples were centrifuged at 14000 RPM for 10 minutes, and the supernatant was  
965 discarded. The pellet was washed twice with 200 µl of cold acetone and then dried. The  
966 dried pellet was resuspended in RIPA LYSIS BUFFER containing 1X NuPAGE LDS Sample  
967 Buffer (Thermo Fisher Cat: NP0007) and heated at 95°C for 7 minutes. The proteins were  
968 separated on SDS-PAGE and electro-transferred onto a nitrocellulose membrane. After  
969 transfer, the membrane was saturated in DPBS containing 0.1% Tween 20 and 5% milk.  
970 Primary antibodies were added overnight at 4 °C or for 2 h at room temperature depending  
971 on the antibody. The membranes were washed with DPBS containing 0.1% Tween and  
972 incubated for 1 h at room temperature with the appropriate HRP-conjugated secondary  
973 antibody. ECL plus kit (Thermo Scientific Cat: 32132) or Substrat chemiluminescent  
974 SuperSignal™ West Femto (Thermo Scientific Cat: 34095) was used for protein detection.  
975 Blot quantification was done using ImageJ software.

976

### 977 **Immunofluorescence staining:**

978 The cells were fixed with 4% paraformaldehyde for 20 minutes and grown on coverslips.  
979 Next, they were permeabilized with a permeabilizing buffer (PFS) containing saponin (Cat:  
980 10294440 Fisher Scientific) at a concentration of 0.025% m.v-1 and gelatin from cold water  
981 fish skin (Cat: G7041 Sigma) at a concentration of 0.7% m.v-1, for 20 minutes at 37°C. The  
982 primary antibody was added and incubated for 2 hours, followed by washing with PFS three  
983 times for 5 minutes. The coverslips were then incubated with the appropriate secondary  
984 antibodies or dye for 90 minutes and mounted using Prolong Gold (Cat: P36934, Invitrogen).

985

### 986 **Image acquisition and analysis**

987 Images were acquired with a Leica TCS SP5 AOBs tandem confocal microscope and ZEISS  
988 LSM 9 with Airyscan. For live imaging cells were grown in MatTek 3.5mm coverslip bottom  
989 dishes.

990 For colocalization analysis, images were treated with ImageJ software, and the 'Intensity  
991 Correlation Analysis' plug-in was used to generate Pearson's correlation coefficient (Rr)  
992 values which ranged from -1 (perfect exclusion) to +1 (perfect correlation).

993

994 **Protein expression & purification for human Atg8 homologs and ATG3.**

995 Human LC3B and GABARAPL1 (mammalian Atg8 homologs) were cloned into PGEX-2T  
996 GST and mouse ATG3 was cloned into PGEX-6p and then expressed and purified  
997 essentially as described in Motta et al bioRxiv 348730. In brief: To facilitate *in vitro* lipidation,  
998 each is expressed with a COOH-terminal truncation such that the protein sequence ends  
999 with the reactive glycine (G120 in LC3B and G116 in GABARAPL1). To facilitate dye-  
1000 labeling, LC3B and GABARAPL1 were mutated with Quik Change II Site-Directed  
1001 Mutagenesis Kit (Agilent Technologies) to include a cysteine immediately before the starting  
1002 methionine of the natural protein sequence. In this organization, there remain two additional  
1003 amino acids N-terminal to the cysteine which derive from the thrombin cleavage site used to  
1004 release GST.

1005

1006 LC3B, GABARAPL1 and ATG3 proteins were expressed in BL21-Gold (DE3) Competent  
1007 Cells (Agilent Technologies). Cells were cultured in 2L Luria Bertani Broth (LB) media with  
1008 1:1000 carbenicillin (50 mg/mL) and induced with IPTG (0.5 mM final). Cells were collected  
1009 by centrifugation and treated with EDTA-free protease inhibitor cocktail tablets in either  
1010 thrombin buffer (20 mM Tris pH 7.5, 100 mM NaCl, 5 mM MgCl<sub>2</sub>, 2 mM CaCl<sub>2</sub>, 0.2 mM  
1011 TCEP) for LC3B/GABARAPL1 or precision protease buffer (50 mM Tris pH 7.5, 150 mM  
1012 NaCl, 1 mM EDTA, 1 mM DTT) for ATG3. Cells were lysed via three passages through a cell  
1013 disrupter. To purify, lysate was incubated with glutathione beads for 3 hours at 4°C. Beads  
1014 were washed several times and then incubated with LC3B/GABARAP cutting buffer (10 uL  
1015 thrombin + 500 uL thrombin buffer + 0.2 mM TCEP + 500 uL beads) or ATG3 cutting buffer  
1016 (25 uL precision protease + 500 uL precision protease buffer + 1 mM DTT + 500 uL beads)  
1017 overnight. Purified proteins were stored in 20% glycerol at -80°C.

1018

1019 **Protein expression & purification for human ATG7.**

1020 Human ATG7 in pFastBac vector was from Sloan-Kettering (kind gift of X. Jiang) and was  
1021 expressed in baculovirus and purified via nickel beads as previously described<sup>12</sup>. The  
1022 plasmid was transformed into Bacmid DNA. SF9 cells were transfected via Cellfectin II and  
1023 grown for 72 hours. Cells were treated with EDTA-free protease inhibitor cocktail tablets in  
1024 lysis buffer (20 mM Tris pH 8, 500 mM NaCl, 20 mM Imidazole, 1 mM DTT, 10% glycerol),  
1025 sonicated with a Virsonic 600 (VirTis) microtip for 3 minutes in a 30 sec on, 30 sec off cycle  
1026 at speed 3.5, then centrifuged at 18000 rpm for 1 hour. Lysate was then incubated with 1 mL  
1027 Nickel resin (Ni-NTA Agarose) for 2 hours at 4°C, before washing beads with 20 mM Tris pH  
1028 8, 300 mM NaCl, 20 mM Imidazole, 1 mM DTT three times. To elute beads were washed  
1029 with 20 mM Tris pH 7.5, 300 mM NaCl, 500 mM Imidazole, 1 mM DTT. Purified proteins were  
1030 stored in 20% glycerol at -80°C.

1031

1032 **In vitro experiments.**

1033 Purified lipid droplets were obtained as described above. In vitro experiments were  
1034 performed in HKM buffer: 50 mM HEPES, 120 mM potassium acetate, and 1 mM MgCl<sub>2</sub> (in  
1035 Milli-Q water) at pH 7.4. For LC3 lipidation experiments on purified lipid droplets, 10 µL of the  
1036 recovered cellular LDs fractions was mixed with 200 µl of HKM and then injected in the  
1037 observation chamber. The protein machinery was next added to the mixture and imaging  
1038 was done for one to two hours at 37°C.

1039

1040 **Lipids and preparation of the Oil Phase.**

1041 Phospholipids (phosphatidylcholine (PC) and phosphatidylethanolamine (PE)) used for giant  
1042 unilamellar vesicles and artificial Lipid droplets formation were purchased from Avanti Polar  
1043 Lipids, Inc. Chloroform which was dissolving the lipids was evaporated under a stream of  
1044 argon; the dried lipids were subsequently re-solubilized to the desired concentration in the oil  
1045 phase triolein (TO) which was purchased from NuChek Prep (Elysian, MN). It was > 99%  
1046 pure and its interfacial tension at 25.0°C was  $32 \pm 1$  mN/m. Lipid concentrations ranging from  
1047 0.1 to 2 % w/w were tested for Atg3 binding experiments, all of which were above the critical  
1048 concentration for forming stable artificial droplets, i.e. no fusion between droplets. Rhodamin-  
1049 PE 1% w/w (final solution) was used to visualize the monolayers and bilayers interfaces.  
1050 Unless mentioned, in vitro experiments were performed in the following HKM buffer: 50 mM  
1051 Hepes, 120 mM Kacetate, and 1 mM MgCl<sub>2</sub> (in Milli-Q water) at pH 7.4.

1052

### 1053 **Giant Unilamellar Vesicles and Artificial Lipid Droplets Formation.**

1054 GUVs were prepared by electroformation. A mixture of DOPC and DOPE 70:30 in chloroform  
1055 at 0.5 mM was dried on an indium tin oxide (ITO)-coated glass plate. The lipid film was  
1056 desiccated for 1 h. The chamber was sealed with another ITO- coated glass plate. The lipids  
1057 were then rehydrated with a sucrose solution (275 mOsm). Electroformation is done using  
1058 100 Hz AC voltage at 1.0 to 1.4 V<sub>pp</sub> and maintained for at least 1 h. This low voltage was  
1059 used to avoid hydrolysis of water and dissolution of titanium ions glass plate. GUVs were  
1060 either stored in the chamber at 4°C overnight or directly collected with a Pasteur pipette.

1061 To prepare the artificial lipid droplets aLDs, 5  $\mu$ L of the lipid oil solution was added to 45  $\mu$ L  
1062 of HKM buffer. The mixture was sonicated. The diameter of the resulting droplets is a few  
1063 hundred nanometers. The aLDs were then injected in the observation chamber made with  
1064 two-glass coverslips assembled with 100 mm thick double-sided tape, pre-treated with 3 %  
1065 wt/v BSA, and washed three times with HKM buffer. Once the drops reached the top of the  
1066 chamber, the protein mixture was added to the buffer and observed for one to two hours at  
1067 37°C.

1068

### 1069 **Interfacial tension measurements.**

1070 Interfacial tension measurements were performed using a drop tensiometer device designed  
1071 by Teclis Instruments (Tracker, Teclis-IT Concept, France) to measure the interfacial tension  
1072 of oil–water interfaces. In our experiments, the pendant drop is the triolein lipid phase,  
1073 formed in the aqueous HKM buffer. The triolein–water interface stabilizes at  $\sim 32.0 \pm 1$  mN/m.  
1074 When indicated the lipid phase contains 0.005% of phospholipids and tension stabilized at 25  
1075 - 27 mN/m. Adsorption of Atg3 translated into a decrease in tension, as it masked the oil-  
1076 water interface. Throughout the adsorption kinetics to either a triolein–water or a  
1077 phospholipid-covered triolein–water interface, the drop area was maintained constant.

1078

1079 At the equilibrium tension, we submitted to the drop series of compressions and re-  
1080 expansions (by withdrawing the droplet volume at a speed of  $\sim 0,01$  mm<sup>3</sup>/s). The sudden  
1081 decrease in volume induced a decrease in drop surface area, resulting in a sudden  
1082 compression and abrupt decrease in tension. The oil drop was held at this reduced volume  
1083 for 5–10 min, with tension being recorded. Each surface tension experiment was determined  
1084 by this means; three measurements were performed for each lipid condition studied. All  
1085 experiments were conducted at  $25.0 \pm 0.2$ °C in a thermostated system.

1086

### 1087 **FRAP experiments.**

1088 For FRAP experiments, we bleached the signal on a collection of drops and monitored the  
1089 increase of signal during recovery. The background signal, for example, from the cytosol,  
1090 was removed from the recorded signal, which was at the end normalized by intrinsic  
1091 bleaching of nonbleached areas. We next used GraphPad Prism to fit the FRAP recovery  
1092 curves with a nonlinear regression and the exponential one-phase association model.  
1093

### 1094 **Protein Labelling.**

1095 Alexa Fluor488 or C5-maleimide (Alexa488) and Alexa Fluor647 were purchased from Life  
1096 Technologies. LC3-N-Cys and GABARAP1-N-Cys were labeled with Alexa Fluor488/647  
1097 C5-maleimide through the amino-terminal cysteine. LC3-N-Cys protein (100  $\mu$ M) was mixed  
1098 with 600  $\mu$ M TCEP. After 5 min of incubation at room temperature, the fluorescent dye (800  
1099  $\mu$ M) dissolved in DMSO was added. The mixture was protected from light and slowly mixed  
1100 at room temperature for 2 h or overnight at 4 °C. The labeled LC3 was then dialyzed to get  
1101 rid of free dye in order to reduce the background fluorescence in Tris-NaCl buffer (50 mM  
1102 trizma hydrochloride, 100 mM NaCl, at pH 7.6) overnight at 4 °C on the stirrer.  
1103

### 1104 **eGFP-LC3B bound membrane and eGFP-LC3B lipidated or not LD interaction (Figure 1105 6G ,H)**

1107 Artificial LDs (triolein/ 0,1% (Rhodamin-PE /PE 1% w/w)) in HKM buffer were incubated with  
1108 Alexa488-LC3B, ATG3, ATG7, and ATP at 37°C for 1h to induce Alexa488-LC3B lipidation to  
1109 LDs (Figure 6G). The same artificial LDs were incubated with Alexa488-LC3B only at 37°C  
1110 for 1h (no lipidation or recruitment of Alexa488-LC3B happened) (Figure 6H).

1111 Huh7 cells were transfected with eGFP LC3B and treated with oleic acid for 24h then  
1112 incubated in EBSS for 48 to induce autophagy. Then, hypotonic media was added to induce  
1113 cell swelling. Plasma membrane was ruptured by a micropipette. A free eGFP-LC3B bound  
1114 membrane was caught with a micropipette. Alexa488-LC3B Lipidated LD or not lipidated LD  
1115 was added and one LD was caught by micropipette and brought in contact with eGFP-LC3B  
1116 bound membrane and both were put in contact and pulled out slowly one from the other  
1117 under imaging.

1118 Micro-pipettes were made from capillaries with a micropipette puller (Sutter instrument model  
1119 P-2000).

1120 Micromanipulation was performed with a micromanipulator Eppendorf TransferMan 4r. The  
1121 micropipettes were incubated in a 5% BSA for 1 h prior to conducting experiments to prevent  
1122 droplet and membrane from adhering to the glass.

1123 Artificial LDs (triolein/ 0.1% (Rhodamin-PE/PE 1% w/w)) in HKM buffer were incubated with  
1124 Alexa488-LC3B, ATG3, ATG7, and ATP at 37°C for 1h to induce Alexa488-LC3B lipidation  
1125 on LDs (Figure 6G). The same artificial LDs were incubated with Alexa488-LC3B only at  
1126 37°C for 1h, but no lipidation or recruitment of Alexa488-LC3B occurred (Figure 6H).  
1127

1128 Huh7 cells were transfected with eGFP LC3B and treated with oleic acid for 24h, then  
1129 incubated in EBSS for 48h to induce autophagy. Next, hypotonic media was added to induce  
1130 cell swelling, and the plasma membrane was ruptured using a micropipette. A free eGFP-  
1131 LC3B bound membrane was caught with a micropipette. Alexa488-LC3B lipidated LD or not  
1132 lipidated LD was added, and one LD was caught by micropipette and brought opposite to  
1133 eGFP-LC3B bound membrane. Both were then put in contact and pulled out slowly from  
1134 each other under imaging.  
1135

1136 Micropipettes were made from capillaries using a micropipette puller (Sutter instrument  
1137 model P-2000). Micromanipulation was performed using a micromanipulator Eppendorf  
1138 TransferMan 4r. The micropipettes were incubated in 5% BSA for 1h before conducting  
1139 experiments to prevent droplets and membrane from adhering to the glass.

1140

1141 **Quantification and statistical analysis**

1142 Unpaired Student's t-tests or ordinary one-way ANOVA test (\*\* P<0.0001) were performed  
1143 and statistical significance was determined at \*P <0.05, \*\* P <0.001 and \*\*\*P < 0.0001.

1144 All values shown in the text and figures are mean ± SEM, from indicated n independent  
1145 experiments.

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