

胶质细胞连接蛋白在神经退行性疾病中的研究进展

元俊华, 苏一洵, 易陈菊

摘要 胶质细胞在维持中枢神经系统正常功能方面发挥重要作用,并在神经退行性疾病中发生活化,表现为细胞形态和功能改变,从而调控疾病进程。胶质细胞活化和细胞膜表面广泛表达的连接蛋白(Cx)的表达和功能变化密切相关。Cx可以形成半通道(HC)或者缝隙连接(GJ),分别介导细胞内外和细胞之间的小分子物质交换。在神经退行性疾病中,胶质细胞Cx表达和功能的变化可通过改变神经元的功能及存活影响神经退行性疾病的发展。本文主要概括胶质细胞Cx在神经退行性疾病发病过程中的研究进展,并探讨靶向Cx作为神经退行性疾病新的潜在治疗策略。

关键词 胶质细胞;连接蛋白;半通道;缝隙连接;神经退行性疾病

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胶质细胞是大脑中数量最多的细胞类型,在中枢神经系统(central nervous system, CNS)中和神经元相互作用,调控CNS的多种生理及病理过程^[1]。其中,星形胶质细胞(astrocyte)是构成血脑屏障的重要细胞类型^[2],可以形成突触,控制离子平衡、调节神经递质传递和清除^[3-6],还可以形成星形胶质网络,为神经元提供营养和支持,维持大脑稳态^[7]。少突胶质细胞(Oligodendrocyte)由少突胶质前体细胞(Oligodendrocyte precursor cells, OPC)分化产生,在CNS中形成髓鞘包裹轴突,其再生对损伤后的髓鞘修复至关重要^[8]。OPC还表达炎症因子受体,能够迁移至损伤部位来响应炎症应答,发挥免疫调节能力^[9,10]。小胶质细胞(Microglia)是CNS中的固有免疫细胞,生理情况下,小胶质细胞参与几种管家功能,包括维持突触(即清除、修剪或成熟)、神经发生、认知功能的调节和免疫监视^[11-13];在病理情况下,多种刺激分子能够诱导小胶质细胞释放细胞因子和趋化因子,触发固有免疫应答,损伤中枢神经系统^[14-16]。

连接蛋白(Connexin, Cx)是由四个 α -螺旋跨膜结构域和2个细胞外环构成的跨膜蛋白^[17]。相邻细胞膜上两个Cx六聚体组成的连接子(Connexon)偶联形成缝隙连接(gap junction, GJ),可以直接允许小分子物质、亲水分子和离子通过^[18]。连接子也可作为半通道(hemichannel, HC)开放,介导细胞内外小分子物质交换^[19]。近年研究也发现Cx可发挥调控细胞内信号通路激活与细胞迁移等新的非通道功能^[20,21]。Cx在大脑所有细胞类型中表达,如星形胶质细胞表达以Cx43和Cx30为主^[22],少突胶质细胞表达Cx29、Cx32和Cx47^[23],原代培养的小胶质细胞表达Cx36和Cx45^[24],Cx43表达和免疫反应性低,但是炎症因子处理的小胶质细胞Cx43的表达和免疫反应性显著升高^[25]。此外,胶质细胞中还表达两种泛连接蛋白(pannexin, Panx)—Panx1和

Panx2, Panx与Cx蛋白有相似的膜拓扑结构,但二者不具同源性。且已知Panx只能形成半通道^[26]。在大多生理情况下,Cx主要作为缝隙连接发挥作用;而病理情况下,细胞内Ca²⁺浓度变化、氧化应激、炎症因子等因素能够激活Cx半通道开放,介导胶质递质释放,损害神经元功能及影响神经元存活^[27-31]。

神经退行性疾病以神经元结构和功能的逐渐丧失为主要表现形式,常伴随着淀粉样蛋白沉积和大脑变性,是威胁人类健康的主要疾病^[32,33]。神经退行性疾病主要包括阿尔兹海默病(Alzheimer's disease, AD)、帕金森病(Parkinson's disease, PD)和亨廷顿舞蹈病(Huntington's disease, HD)、肌萎缩性侧索硬化症(Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, ALS)等^[34-37]。值得注意的是,目前针对神经退行性疾病经典发病机制研发的治疗策略无法有效地逆转或缓解疾病发展,因此针对疾病新机制的探索尤为重要。近年来,大量的研究证实神经退行性疾病中常伴随胶质细胞活化和胶质细胞Cx表达和功能变化,揭示了胶质细胞Cx在神经退行性疾病中的作用。因此,本文就胶质细胞Cx在神经退行性疾病中的研究进展进行综述,探讨靶向胶质细胞Cx是否可以作为神经退行性疾病新的治疗策略。

1 胶质细胞Cx在AD中的作用

AD以进行性记忆丧失、行为缺陷和显著的人格改变为主要临床特征,是痴呆的主要类型^[38]。淀粉样斑块沉积(amyloid- β plaques, A β)、神经原纤维缠结(Neurofibrillary tangles, NFTs)、神经元死亡和突触丢失是AD的主要病理特征^[39]。值得注意的是,胶质细胞活化常伴随A β 斑块出现,同时Cx的表达和功能也发生改变。AD患者大脑组织切片中发现A β 斑块附近的星形胶质细胞的Cx43和Cx30

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呈斑点状密集分布,活化的星形胶质细胞中 Cx43 和 Panx1 表达增加^[40,41]。此外,在大于 4 月龄的 APPswe/PS1dE9 (APP/PS1) 小鼠大脑皮质和海马 Aβ 斑块周围的星形胶质细胞 Cx43 和 Cx30 的免疫反应性随 Aβ 沉积增加而增强^[40]。相似的,在大于 6 月龄的 5xFAD 小鼠大脑皮质和丘脑 Aβ 斑块周围的星形胶质细胞 Cx43 免疫反应性也显著增强,尽管 Cx43 mRNA 表达明显降低^[42];另外,5xFAD 小鼠中 Aβ 斑块周围的星形胶质细胞 Cx30 免疫反应性增强,但是海马体 Cx30 蛋白总表达水平和同龄对照组小鼠相比没有明显变化^[42]。

大量研究证实 AD 中胶质细胞 Cx 半通道的异常开放可能导致神经元功能障碍。体外通过溴化乙啶 (ethidium bromide, EtBr) 摄入实验检测到 Aβ25-35 处理的星形胶质细胞、小胶质细胞和活体海马脑片 Cx43 表达增加, Cx43 半通道被激活,使 ATP 和谷氨酸释放到细胞外,导致神经元死亡^[43]。笔者也在 9 月龄 APP/PS1 小鼠活体脑片中 Aβ 斑块附近检测到星形胶质细胞活化和 Cx43 半通道异常开放,但是缝隙连接通讯没有发生改变。利用 Cx43 半通道阻断剂或条件性敲除星形胶质细胞 Cx43 可显著降低 APP/PS1 小鼠活体海马脑片星形胶质细胞胞内钙浓度 $[Ca^{2+}]$ 和胶质递质 (ATP、谷氨酸) 的释放,减轻了海马神经元损伤^[44]。这些研究揭示了 Cx 半通道可能是 AD 的潜在治疗靶点。并且,笔者在前期工作中发现波尔定碱 (Boldine) 能够通过血脑屏障,特异性抑制星形胶质细胞 Cx43 半通道活性而不改变缝隙连接功能,APP/PS1 小鼠长期口服波尔定碱可以降低星形胶质细胞 $[Ca^{2+}]$ 水平和 ATP/谷氨酸释放,缓解海马神经元损伤^[45]。此外,大麻素也可以抑制 Aβ 诱导的星形胶质细胞和活体脑片 Cx43 半通道活性和谷氨酸/ATP 的释放,降低神经元损伤^[46]。腹腔注射甘草次酸衍生物 INI-0602,一种新的 Cx 半通道阻断剂,能够更好地通过血脑屏障,可显著改善 APP/PS1 小鼠的认知功能^[47]。综上所述,AD 中 Aβ 斑块附近 Cx43 与 Cx30 表达上调,半通道开放增加,通过胶质递质的释放导致神经元退行性变,而抑制胶质细胞半通道可减少海马神经元损伤。然而,Cx 在 AD 病理中的表达与定位的调控机制尚不明确。半通道抑制剂是否可以挽救 AD 认知功能,仍需进一步研究。

2 胶质细胞 Cx 在 PD 中的作用

PD 以大脑纹状体和黑质中多巴胺能神经元 (dopaminergic neurons, DA neurons) 进行性丢失、突触核蛋白 (α-synuclein) 形成的路易小体 (Lewy bodies)、慢性神经炎症为主要病理特征^[48,49]。此外,PD 患者标本以及动物模型的黑质中也检测到星形胶质细胞活化^[50,51]。不同 PD 动物模型中均可观察到 Cx 表达与功能的变化。早期研究发现鱼藤酮 (Rotenone) 诱导 PD 大鼠模型中基底核 Cx43 总蛋白及丝氨酸磷酸化水平都升高,并在体外处理中增强星形胶质细胞缝隙连接通讯^[52]。而在 1-甲基-4-苯基-1,2,3,6-四氢吡啶 (1-methyl-4-phenyl-1,2,3,6-tetrahydropyridine, MPTP) 诱导的 PD 小鼠模型中,可观察到纹状体星形胶质细胞中 Cx43 和 Cx30 表达升高^[51],Cx43 半通道激活, $[Ca^{2+}]$ 水平增加^[53]。相似的,体外 α-synuclein 处理能够增强星形胶质细胞 Cx43 半通道和

Panx1 半通道开放,导致 $[Ca^{2+}]$ 升高,胶质递质释放,激活炎症通路,导致星形胶质细胞死亡^[54]。而另一方面,LPS 诱导的 PD 小鼠中脑总 Cx43 表达降低,但 Cx43 丝氨酸 368 磷酸化水平增加 2 倍^[55]。

Cx 的通道功能在 PD 中可能介导了多巴胺能神经元的死亡。腹腔注射 Cx43 半通道阻断剂 TAT-Gap19 可以抑制 MPTP 诱导的多巴胺能神经元死亡和小胶质细胞激活^[53]。同样的,在 LPS 诱导 PD 模型中,Cx43 通道抑制剂 Gap27 能降低多巴胺能神经元的丧失,恢复多巴胺及代谢物的水平,同时 Gap27 还能抑制 LPS 诱导的黑质小胶质细胞和星形胶质细胞活化,降低炎症因子水平^[55]。以上研究证实了靶向 Cx43 的通道功能是 PD 的潜在治疗靶点。然而,Cx 缝隙连接功能与半通道功能在 PD 中的作用还需进一步研究,并且,Cx 的非通道功能可能在 PD 中起到延缓疾病的作用:MPTP 模型小鼠中 Cx30 的敲除可能通过细胞内信号传导抑制星形胶质细胞的神经保护性激活,导致多巴胺神经元死亡增加^[51]。

3 胶质细胞 Cx 在其他退行性疾病中的作用

ALS 以 CNS 中运动神经元进行性丢失和进行性麻痹为主要病理特征,神经炎症、胶质细胞活化和错误折叠的蛋白质积累共同驱动了进行性运动神经元的丢失^[64]。ALS 患者脑脊液、运动皮质和脊髓、ALS 模型 SOD1^{G93A} 小鼠脊髓和 CTB-Sap 诱导的 ALS 小鼠脊髓中都检测到了星形胶质细胞 Cx43 和 GFAP 表达增加^[64-66]。另一种 ALS 模型 mSOD1-Tg 小鼠在发病前 Cx 的表达无明显差异,但到 18 周龄,脊髓前角星形胶质细胞 GFAP、Cx43、Cx30 和 AQP4 的免疫反应性明显增强。与之相反,20 周龄脊髓前角中少突胶质细胞 Cx47 和 Cx32 蛋白和 mRNA 水平都显著降低^[67]。此外,体外培养的 SOD1^{G93A} 小鼠星形胶质细胞 GFAP 和 Cx43 表达增加,并且伴随着缝隙连接和半通道功能增强^[65]。半通道阻断剂 Gap26 和 Gap19 可以保护运动神经元免于遭受 SOD1^{G93A} 小鼠星形胶质细胞的损害^[65]。Cx43 半通道阻断剂 Gap19 和托纳博沙 (tonabersat) 能够通过抑制 ATP 释放,降低运动神经元的死亡。特异性敲除星形胶质细胞 Cx43 的 SOD1^{G93A} 小鼠脊髓中胶质细胞活化受到抑制,疾病终末期颈髓运动神经元数量得到维持^[66]。INI-0602 可显著延长 SOD1^{G93A} 和 SOD1^{G37R} 小鼠寿命,缓解疾病症状,同时还能够减少 SOD1^{G93A} 小鼠脊髓中神经元损伤和胶质细胞活化^[47],以上研究提示靶向 Cx43 半通道或许是 ALS 的重要治疗策略。此外,SOD1^{G93A} 小鼠脊髓中也检测到了 Panx1 的表达增高,但是 Panx1 在 ALS 发展中的功能尚未阐明^[68]。

HD 是一种常染色体显性神经退行性疾病,具有运动、认知和精神障碍三联征^[69,70]。在正常人和 HD 患者的大脑苍白球中,Cx43 均匀分布在神经纤维,而尾状核中 Cx43 密度增加,集中在 HD 斑块处。此外,免疫染色检测到 HD 尾状核中 GFAP 表达显著升高,退行性神经元周围的星形胶质细胞高度活化,Cx43 表达增加^[71]。然而,近年来 Cx 半通道在 HD 中的作用研究相对较少,作用机制尚待发掘。

4 小结

胶质细胞Cx在神经退行性疾病中表达与功能有广泛的变化。在AD、PD和ALS中的研究证实,星形胶质细胞Cx43可作为半通道激活开放,通过胶质递质释放造成神经元退行性变;而Cx43半通道阻断剂可以有效抑制神经元损伤,减缓疾病进程^[43,53,67]。这些证据提示星形胶质细胞Cx的半通道功能是神经退行性疾病的潜在治疗靶点。并且,Cx的缝隙连接通道作用与非通道作用可能在疾病中发挥有益的作用。长期以来,临床上大多数用于治疗神经退行性疾病的药物是对症治疗,未能从根本上解决疾病进展的问题,以致神经退行性疾病至今仍无法达到令人满意的治疗效果。因此,对胶质细胞Cx在神经退行性疾病中作用机制的进一步综合研究将为靶向Cx治疗神经退行性疾病提供科学的理论依据。

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