

NRG1/ErbB4信号通路与焦虑障碍关联的研究进展

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【摘要】 焦虑障碍是患病率最高的精神疾病之一,严重影响人们正常的工作和生活。但其发病机制尚不明确,近年有研究发现脑内NRG1/ErbB4信号通路与焦虑障碍存在一定的关系,现对这一领域的国内外研究进行综述。

【关键词】 焦虑障碍; NRG1; ErbB4; 综述

Research progress on the relationship between NRG1/ErbB4 signaling pathway and anxiety disorder

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【Abstract】 Anxiety disorders are among the most prevalent mental diseases, which can seriously affect people's daily work and life. However, the pathogenesis is still unclear. In recent years, it has been found that there is a certain relationship between NRG1 / ErbB4 signaling pathway and anxiety disorders. This paper reviews the research in this field at home and abroad.

【Key words】 Anxiety disorders; NRG1; ErbB4; Review

焦虑障碍(anxiety disorders)是一组精神疾病的总称,包括广泛性焦虑障碍、惊恐障碍、恐惧症、社交焦虑障碍等,临床表现复杂,主要涉及精神性焦虑和躯体性焦虑两个症状群。在我国,焦虑障碍是精神疾病中患病率最高的疾病之一,其终生患病率为7.6%^[1],已成为影响人们身心健康和生活质量的重大问题。由于部分患者对于焦虑障碍的重视度不足,没有经过合理化的治疗,使疾病转变成慢性,加重患者的痛苦和社会负担^[2]。然而目前焦虑障碍的发病机制尚不明确,其诊断主要取决于自我报告的访谈式主观评估,缺乏可靠的客观生物学标记用于诊断和预后评估,因此探究焦虑障碍的潜在发病机制具有重要意义。

焦虑和恐惧是感知威胁刺激时正常的情绪反应,但对于焦虑障碍患者,这种反应会被放大和延长^[3],而焦虑和恐惧并非各自独立,它们常常并存,在神经机制上也表现出很大的重叠^[4]。研究表明,从识别潜在的威胁刺激到做出防御性反应的过程要经过脑神经网络进行调控,涉及杏仁核、终纹床核(the bed nucleus of the stria terminalis, BNST)、蓝斑核、中缝背核等区域^[5-6],而焦虑障碍患者以上脑区功能存在异常^[4]。近年研究发现神经调节蛋白1

(neuregulin 1, NRG1)及其下游受体酪氨酸蛋白激酶ErbB4(receptor tyrosine-protein kinase erbB-4, ErbB4)所组成的信号通路与焦虑障碍有关^[7]。既往关于NRG1/ErbB4信号通路与精神疾病的研究主要集中在精神分裂症^[8-9],在焦虑障碍上还处于起始阶段,现从NRG1/ErbB4信号通路对焦虑障碍的影响和可能的作用机制进行综述。

一、NRG1与ErbB4受体

1. NRG1: NRG是一个生长因子家族,由四种基因(NRG1~4)编码,并具有表皮生长因子(epidermal growth factor, EGF)样结构^[10]。目前对该家族的研究中,涉及NRG1最多。NRG1基因位于人类第8号染色体上^[11],研究表明,人类存在至少30种不同的NRG1异构体,每种异构体都包含一种EGF结构域,这种结构对于NRG1激活下游ErbB受体非常重要^[12]。根据氨基酸5'末端结构域的不同,NRG1可分为6种不同类型(I~VI)^[10],I型NRG1主要在胚胎发育的过程中表达,II型主要在神经发育后期表达,III型是感觉、运动神经元和轴突表达的重要因子,IV和V型在早期神经发育和新生儿期发挥重要作用,而VI型在体内含量并不丰富^[13-14]。除III型NRG1是跨膜型外,其余多数为膜结合型,它们首先

合成前体NRG1,通过酶促裂解释放出成熟的NRG1作为可溶性配体,进而与下游受体结合^[10]。

2. ErbB4: ErbB4是ErbB家族成员之一,其余成员包括ErbB1、ErbB2和ErbB3, ErbB酪氨酸蛋白激酶受体是NRG1下游信号^[10, 15],与NRG1结合后, ErbB受体构象发生改变,进而使其与其他ErbB受体的亲和力增高,结合形成同二聚体或异二聚体,通过这种方式激活蛋白激酶结构域,并将信号传到下游不同的路径^[16]。在ErbB受体家族中, ErbB2与配体结合的亲和力低,而ErbB3没有活性激酶结构域,只有ErbB4能与NRG1有效结合发挥生物活性功能^[10, 17]。

二、NRG1/ErbB4对焦虑相关神经通路的影响

杏仁核处理焦虑、恐惧情绪非常重要^[16]。杏仁核调节焦虑和恐惧有两个重要子区域——基底外侧杏仁核(basolateral amygdala, BLA)和中央杏仁核(central amygdala, CEA)^[18], BLA是皮质样结构,约由80%的谷氨酸能神经元和20%的 γ -氨基丁酸(Gamma aminobutyric acid, GABA)能神经元组成^[5], CEA是纹状体结构,由GABA能神经元组成^[19]。越来越多的证据表明,杏仁核既能介导焦虑,又具有抗焦虑功能,如Felix-Ortiz等^[20]的研究表明BLA到腹侧海马之间的通路激活能引起焦虑,而BLA投射CEA的通路激活具有抗焦虑作用^[21-22]。沿着这个思路,学者们对杏仁核功能机制进行深入研究,发现NRG1/ErbB4信号通路能调节杏仁核内GABA能神经元活动,进而调控焦虑^[16]。Bi等^[23]的动物实验显示,高焦虑的小鼠前额叶、海马、杏仁核等脑组织NRG1和ErbB4蛋白水平更低,阻断小鼠基底外侧杏仁核NRG1/ErbB4信号会使小鼠的焦虑行为增加,将NRG1蛋白注入高焦虑小鼠BLA内,焦虑行为明显减少,GABA能神经元功能增强。最近的两项动物实验也证明了上述观点,并且另外发现前扣带皮层和内侧缰核ErbB4表达异常也会导致小鼠出现异常焦虑行为^[24-25]。通过以上实验可以看出, NRG1/ErbB4可能影响BLA和BLA对下游通路的投射来调控焦虑,但NRG1/ErbB4信号并非局限于杏仁核,其在前扣带皮层和内侧缰核的作用机制还需要进一步探究。

另外一个与焦虑密切相关的脑区是BNST,它被认为是BLA和CEA投射的下游靶点^[26],刺激信号在此处中继后进一步投射到中脑和下丘脑等区域,对焦虑的调控至关重要^[22, 27]。研究表明,长期的焦虑和恐惧性条件刺激会诱导CEA生长抑素表达神经元突触强化,这一过程促进恐惧性记忆的产生^[28]。为了进一步探究CEA与其下游BNST之间

的潜在作用机制, Ahrens等^[26]利用CEA生长抑素表达神经元ErbB4基因突变的小鼠进行研究,发现ErbB4基因突变的小鼠表现出高焦虑行为,电生理研究显示小鼠脑组织CEA生长抑素表达神经元兴奋性突触增加,并且对BNST的抑制作用减弱。因此,以上实验说明NRG1/ErbB4对CEA和BNST之间正常的功能发挥起到了关键作用,进而减少焦虑行为。

三、NRG1/ErbB4调节焦虑相关神经递质

1. GABA: 从感受外部危险刺激到做出相应的防御反应的过程需要相对稳定的神经递质环境,长期慢性焦虑刺激或异常恐惧会导致局部神经递质紊乱^[29]。谷氨酸是杏仁核内主要的兴奋性神经递质,而GABA能抑制谷氨酸的传递^[5],与焦虑明显相关的杏仁核、BNST都含有大量GABA能神经元^[5, 26]。NRG1/ErbB4信号通路与GABA能神经元功能密切,尤其是ErbB4能促进GABA能神经元轴突和树突的发育,对GABA能神经元的功能发挥和损伤后再修复起到关键作用^[30-31]。目前的研究表明,基底外侧杏仁核中内源性NRG1/ErbB4能通过调节GABA的释放来调控焦虑行为,当给予高焦虑水平的小鼠外源性NRG1后,焦虑行为会随着GABA的释放增加而逐渐减少^[23, 32]。BNST中也具有相似的机制, Geng等^[33]进行的研究显示,阻断BNST中NRG1/ErbB4信号能使小鼠焦虑行为增加,并且在体外电生理研究中发现NRG1/ErbB4信号调节了突触前GABA的释放。以上研究结果表明, NRG1/ErbB4信号通过调节杏仁核与BNST中GABA的功能来调控焦虑,如果它的功能失衡就易产生焦虑。

2. 5-羟色胺(5-hydroxytryptamine, 5-HT): 5-HT是脑内广泛存在的一种神经递质,参与了焦虑的调节^[34]。脑内5-HT神经元主要分布在中缝背核(the dorsal raphe nucleus, DRN),中央杏仁核投射DRN内5-HT神经元的异常刺激能诱导焦虑行为^[6],此外, DRN投射BNST的异常刺激也可导致高水平焦虑,并增加恐惧反应^[22]。ErbB4受体也在5-HT神经元上表达^[35],为了探究其潜在的神经机制, Zhang等^[36]利用中缝背核5-HT神经元中ErbB4基因敲除的小鼠进行研究,观察到小鼠表现出焦虑行为增多,并在电生理实验中发现,产生这一结果的原因是5-HT神经元活动异常兴奋。Nishitani等^[37]进行的动物实验也证实了ErbB4在DRN内对5-HT的调控作用,由此证明DRN中5-HT神经元NRG1/ErbB4缺乏会引起5-HT分泌异常,进而导致焦虑。

3. 去甲肾上腺素(norepinephrine, NE): NE分泌异常对焦虑的作用是明确的^[29],在神经生物学水平上,杏仁核GABA和NE是兴奋性神经递质谷氨

酸的调节剂, GABA抑制谷氨酸传递, 而NE能抑制GABA的功能^[5]。脑内NE能神经元主要分布在蓝斑核, 释放NE广泛投射到皮层和皮层下区域^[38], 蓝斑核的异常刺激能诱发焦虑行为^[39]。但目前焦虑障碍领域缺少NRG1/ErbB4信号与NE神经元作用的直接研究, 由于ErbB4蛋白存在于许多NE能神经元外膜内^[38], 因此有学者推测NRG1/ErbB4可能参与了焦虑相关NE的调节^[5, 39], 所以其潜在神经机制还需要进一步去研究。

四、NRG1/ErbB4促进神经元损伤后再修复

如前所述, 杏仁核等区域的GABA神经元功能对焦虑的调节至关重要, 长期的恐怖性刺激如水淹、电击等会导致小鼠GABA神经突触减少^[40], 而NRG1/ErbB4信号通路能促进包括GABA能神经元在内的多种神经元损伤后再修复^[41-42]。研究表明, 中枢神经系统NRG1/ErbB4主要通过影响少突胶质细胞的发育和成熟来促进神经元突触再髓鞘化^[43]。髓鞘是包绕在神经细胞外表面的一层膜, 主要由少突胶质细胞构成, 髓鞘结构的完整性对神经电信号跳跃式快速传导非常重要^[44]。相关动物实验研究结果显示, NRG1和ErbB4水平在受损脑区恢复后可促进内源性少突胶质细胞的生成^[45], 这一过程首先是NRG1刺激少突胶质细胞前体细胞(oligodendrocyte precursor cell, OPC)增殖, 进而促进OPC向成熟的少突胶质细胞转变^[41, 45], 更重要的是, NRG1/ErbB4在促进细胞成熟的过程中也增加了少突胶质细胞的复杂程度, 对再髓鞘化过程具有重要作用^[10, 41]。目前人们对NRG1/ErbB4促进神经元损伤后再修复机制的认识还比较有限, 并且缺乏直接的证据证明NRG1/ErbB4能促进焦虑损伤的神经元修复, 因此未来在此领域需要更进一步的研究。

五、小结

现有证据表明NRG1/ErbB4信号通路异常可能在焦虑障碍的发病中有重要作用。但学者们对它的认识仍然存在很多局限, 包括NRG1/ErbB4是否直接作用于NE神经元, 以及如何促进少突胶质细胞的生成并启动再髓鞘化过程等, 所以需要进一步的实验来探究更深层次的机制。此外, 目前关于NRG1/ErbB4与焦虑障碍的研究均为动物实验, 尚不清楚它们在焦虑障碍人群中的表达水平, 因此在未来的研究中还需要完善NRG1/ErbB4在人群中的相关实验, 采用前瞻性研究方法探究其可靠的生物学标记, 为焦虑障碍的诊断和治疗提供新的思路。

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