

· 综述 ·

雌激素对外周血白细胞端粒长度的影响

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【摘要】 端粒随着每个细胞分裂而缩短, 白细胞端粒长度(LTL)和端粒酶在多种疾病中被广泛研究, 如心血管疾病及其相关代谢危险因素、神经系统疾病、恶性肿瘤等。端粒长度的变化可能由多种因素决定, 包括遗传和环境因素等。出生时, 男性和女性的端粒长度差异不明确, 而成年女性的端粒普遍比男性长, 这种性别差异可能与内源性雌激素暴露或激素替代治疗(HRT)之间存在关联。雌激素具有抗氧化、提高端粒酶活性的作用, 了解其相关性有助于探索以端粒-端粒酶系统为靶点治疗年龄相关性疾病的方法。

【关键词】 端粒; 雌激素; 性别

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Effect of estrogen on telomere length in peripheral blood leukocytes

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【Abstract】 Telomeres undergo attrition with each cell division. Leukocyte telomere length (LTL) and telomerase activity have been extensively investigated in a variety of diseases, such as cardiovascular disease and related metabolic risk factors, neurological disorders, and malignancies. Telomere length may be determined by various factors, including the genetic load and environmental factors. At birth, gender difference in the telomere length is not significant, but telomeres are longer in women than in men. This gender discrepancy is probably caused by the effects of endogenous estrogen exposure or hormone replacement treatment (HRT). Estrogen is known to be antioxidant and may increase telomerase activity; therefore, knowledge about the associate between estrogen and telomere length helps explore therapies targeting the telomere-telomerase system as promising treatment for age-related diseases.

【Key words】 telomeres; estrogen; gender

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端粒是位于真核细胞染色体末端的核蛋白结构, 人类端粒DNA的碱基序列为TTAGGG的多次重复。它覆盖并保护染色体末端, 防止染色体出现降解和端-端融合。端粒被认为是一项衰老相关的生物标志物, 随着每个细胞的分裂而缩短。当端粒缩短到一定长度, 最终导致细胞周期停滞从而进入细胞衰老或凋亡。遗传和环境因素都可以影响和调节端粒酶活性, 激素也是影响白细胞端粒长度(leukocyte telomere length, LTL)的一个重要因素, 包括皮质醇、儿茶酚胺、生长激素和性激素。端粒的缩短

可能在一定程度上与应激相关的皮质醇和儿茶酚胺的分泌增加有关^[1]。胰岛素样生长因子1(insulin like growth factor-1, IGF-1)和LTL均随年龄增长而减少, 低水平的IGF-1与炎症和衰老相关疾病(缺血性心脏病、充血性心力衰竭)有关^[2]。已有的研究显示, LTL可能因性别而异, 表现为女性的端粒更长^[3], 而且这种性别差异可能会在整个生命过程中扩大, 这意味着女性和男性的端粒损耗速率可能不同。雌激素是否是导致这种差异的关键机制呢? 已有多种假说来解释这种性别差异, 包括氧化损伤、影

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响维持端粒结构完整性的端粒酶和造血干细胞(hematopoietic stem cell, HSC)的不对称复制等。

1 LTL 及其损耗的性别差异

女性在出生时端粒平均长度可能就比男性长0.144 kb^[4],但并不是所有研究都支持这样的结果^[5]。双胞胎的研究发现更为有趣,同性双胞胎结果显示女婴LTL比男婴长,而异性双胞胎中男婴和女婴的LTL相似,可能与宫内发育过程的相互影响有关^[6]。在青春期前的儿童中,女童的平均LTL相对男童更长^[7]或无差异^[8],而青少年(13~18岁)和成人中女性平均LTL普遍长于男性^[9,10]。最近的一项荟萃分析显示,女性比男性拥有更长的端粒,并且随着年龄的增长而变得更加明显^[3],这或许与女性的LTL损耗速度比年龄相仿的男性慢有关。然而,另一项系统评价研究中,女性和男性的LTL平均损耗速率分别为20.3 bp/年和20.0 bp/年,绝对端粒丢失(男性:14.1 bp/年,女性:9.6 bp/年)和相对端粒丢失[男性:0.0036 t/(s·年),女性0.0181 t/(s·年)]也存在性别差异,但该研究并未按年龄段进行分层,且数据之间差异无统计学意义。

端粒的缩短在人的一生中并不是以恒定的速度变化,幼年时期缩短地较快、成年早期开始减慢,在老年进一步减缓^[11],但在超过69岁时,LTL的缩短显著加快^[10]。比较绝经前、围绝经期和绝经后女性的LTL损耗率发现,女性在绝经前损耗速率最快(约20 bp/年),绝经后损耗变慢(约15 bp/年)^[12]。女性在20~29岁和50~59岁年龄段LTL的下降出现低谷,而30~39岁和60~69岁年龄段的LTL损耗程度最小,男性的LTL损耗率则在20~79岁全年龄段中保持一致^[13]。唾液样本中端粒长度的性别差异仅在50岁以上的人群中显著,因为该年龄段端粒长度的缩短在女性中减慢^[14]。20~29岁和50~59岁年龄段是女性荷尔蒙变化的重要时期,因为这两个年龄段分别是分娩和绝经的年龄范围。根据生命史理论的假设,在生殖过程中使用的能量会减少组织维持所需的能量,因为生物体在任何给定时间所能调动的能量是有限的,组织维持能力较差会导致细胞降解和老化速度加快^[15],或许是女性端粒损耗随年龄段而变化的原因。

2 端粒与内源性雌激素

LTL与内源性雌激素暴露之间可能有潜在的关联。雌激素水平低的人群和绝经后女性的LTL明显短于雌激素水平高的人群^[13]。护士健康研究则

相反,雌激素浓度越高,端粒越短,并且相关性在乳腺癌病例中比对照组更为明显^[16];但是当排除随访第1年内确诊的病例时,LTL的负向趋势不再明显,表明疾病对结果存在潜在影响。乳腺癌组织中雌激素的局部浓度高于正常乳腺组织,可能会使外周血中雌激素浓度升高而影响检测结果。LTL也与内源性雌激素暴露时间的长短相关,女性的生育期(绝经年龄与初潮年龄之差)每增加1年,其LTL短于中位数的概率降低14%^[17]。绝经年龄也与女性寿命及死亡率有关,绝经年龄越大,女性生育后寿命越长,而绝经每晚1年,死亡率下降2.9%^[18]。选择同一家庭的姐妹进行研究,结果却显示较长的生育期及未绝经状态与较短的端粒有关^[19],这种相互矛盾的结果可能是由于该研究人群普遍存在乳腺癌家族史,从而对结果产生潜在影响。目前的证据尚不足以确定雌激素水平与LTL具体的定量关联程度,还需要进一步的大规模队列研究,在按性别和种族进一步分层后反复测量健康人群中不同年龄组的LTL,并得出可靠LTL范围,以便更全面地评估衰老过程中端粒的缩短。

3 端粒与外源性雌激素

雌激素的抗氧化性及其上调端粒酶的能力或许可以解释为什么女性端粒比同龄的男性更长。因此推测以激素替代治疗(hormone replacement treatment, HRT)形式使用外源性激素有助于缓解绝经后端粒的损耗。然而,支持这一假设的临床数据却很少,而且存在争议。其中多数研究认为LTL与HRT无关^[12, 20, 21],HRT引起的体内雌激素暴露的变化不会影响LTL的调节。其中一项小规模研究甚至发现,接受HRT至少1年的手术绝经女性的LTL与HRT使用时间呈负向关联^[17]。只有在绝经后接受HRT超过5年的女性中,其LTL比未接受过HRT的同龄女性更长^[22],提示绝经后长期接受HRT可能有减轻端粒损耗的作用。然而,现有大部分研究中只有少数参与者接受HRT,检测外源性雌激素对LTL损耗的影响的能力有限,这一争议性的结果仍需大规模的人群研究证实。

4 雌激素与LTL相关性的探索

雌激素作用的可能机制包括其降低氧化应激、减少炎症、刺激端粒酶活性、增强红细胞更新的能力。

氧化应激可能通过几种潜在途径导致端粒缩短:直接损害对氧化损伤敏感的富含G和T的端粒

序列^[23],且端粒DNA在损伤后修复单链断裂的效率低于基因组其他部分^[24];刺激促炎细胞因子生成,加速细胞更新和端粒缩短^[25];活性氧(reactive oxygenspecies,ROS)可降低端粒酶活性^[26]。此外,氧化应激与线粒体DNA损伤^[27]和线粒体功能障碍相关^[28],线粒体中过量的乙酰辅酶A增加烟酰胺腺嘌呤二核苷酸的生成,导致端粒损耗加重,受损的线粒体产生过多的ROS^[29],从而导致恶性循环。雌激素具有抗氧化特性,可减少氧化应激和减轻炎症反应^[30],动物实验中雌性大鼠的细胞抗氧化剂如锰超氧化物歧化酶和谷胱甘肽过氧化物酶的基础水平也以雌激素依赖的方式升高^[31]。相反,睾酮并未表现出抗氧化特性,其与氧化应激的易感性相关反而可能导致端粒损耗。然而,雄激素可在芳香化酶的作用下转化为雌激素^[32]。血清二氢睾酮和雌二醇水平与端粒长度呈正相关,且芳香化酶基因多态性与较低的雌二醇水平和较短的端粒相关,进一步表明这一途径与端粒长度调节有关^[33]。然而,这一解释不适用于达那唑治疗延长患有端粒疾病的LTL的机制,因为达那唑通常会降低血循环中的雌二醇浓度^[34]。

端粒酶是一种将端粒重复序列添加到染色体末端的逆转录酶。由于端粒酶催化亚单位的启动子中存在雌激素反应元件,雌激素可通过直接或间接上调端粒酶逆转录酶(telomerase reverse transcriptase,TERT)的启动子来激活端粒酶^[35],并且通过磷酸肌醇-3-激酶/蛋白激酶B^[36]和一氧化氮途径^[37]间接影响端粒酶激活,从而增强维持和保护端粒的能力,这一点已被多种人类细胞所证实。基因表达分析显示,雌激素缺乏会抑制小鼠体内肾上腺和卵巢的TERT基因和c-myc基因表达、端粒酶活性、端粒维持和细胞增殖^[38],提示端粒酶抑制和端粒缩短可能介导肾上腺细胞增殖停滞,从而导致生理条件下雌激素缺乏引起的衰老。

HSC产生包括白细胞和红细胞在内的血细胞亚型^[39],红细胞更新和HSC分裂都可能受到雌激素的调节。在小鼠体内,雌激素通过刺激HSC不对称复制和增加红细胞的破坏来增强红细胞的更新^[40]。因此,长期暴露于雌激素可能会通过提高HSC的复制率导致红细胞数量减少。随着HSC端粒在每一轮复制中的缩短,随后分化的血细胞端粒也会变短,白细胞和HSC的LTL高度相关性支持这一潜在机制^[41]。

5 端粒与疾病

LTL在心血管疾病、糖尿病、神经系统疾病和癌

症等疾病中被广泛研究。其相关性表现为LTL较长者发生心血管疾病和糖尿病的风险降低,且女性的发病率和患病率低于男性^[42-44]。LTL还可反映糖尿病患者的血糖状况,血糖控制较理想(HbA1c<7%)的糖尿病患者LTL更长^[45]。当患者血糖得到有效控制时,端粒的缩短甚至可以被逆转^[46]。有荟萃分析显示,膀胱癌、食道癌、胃癌、头颈癌、卵巢癌和肾癌与短端粒相关,子宫内膜癌、前列腺癌和皮肤癌则未发现与LTL有相关性,而LTL与非霍奇金淋巴瘤、乳腺癌、肺癌和结直肠癌之间关系尚不能确定^[47],表明端粒在不同的癌症中可能发挥不同的作用。帕金森病和阿尔茨海默症患者与LTL的联系尚无定论,一些研究认为患者的LTL与疾病状态相关^[48],而另一些研究并不支持^[49]。总之,数据表明,LTL并未与心血管疾病、糖尿病及部分癌症以外的其他领域存在普遍相关性及性别特异性。

6 展望

现有研究表明端粒损耗与衰老及多种疾病的发病机制有关。除年龄因素外,与雌激素暴露相关的性别差异也可能是其影响因素。近年来的研究进一步提示,雌激素替代治疗可缓解绝经后女性端粒损耗,改善其健康状况,但其效用与使用时间及绝经类型有关。因此,明确雌激素对端粒和端粒酶的影响机制,有助于提供糖尿病等年龄相关性疾病治疗和预防的新靶点。

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