

# 抑郁症的表观遗传学机制:涉及认知灵活性的证据<sup>\*</sup>

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**摘要** 抑郁症是全球高负担疾病,严重影响人们的职业功能、生活质量和幸福感。遗传和环境在抑郁症的易感中共同发挥作用,这可能是通过表观遗传学机制(如 DNA 甲基化)而最终影响基因表达来介导的。一方面,应激作为普遍而显著的环境因素可引起多种基因的甲基化改变而导致抑郁症,另一方面,神经心理学认知研究的证据支持认知异常尤其是认知灵活性异常在抑郁症病理机制中的核心作用。目前神经生物学研究也支持抑郁症表观遗传学机制涉及认知灵活性的调节异常,但缺乏直接而具体的证据。对此进行研究将进一步促进抑郁症的理解、诊断和治疗。

**关键词** 抑郁症;表观遗传学;应激;认知灵活性

中图分类号:R749.4 文献标识码:A 文章编号:1000-9760(2017)10-361-05

## Mechanism of epigenetics in depression: evidence for involvement of cognitive flexibility

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**Abstract:** As one most common mental disorder with high prevalence rate, depression accounts for an increasingly substantial proportion of the global burden of disease and has a devastating impact on occupational functioning, quality of life and well-being. In general, it is well admitted that genetic and environmental factors together play an important role in the vulnerability to depression. However, current data has showed that no specific gene(s) is/are responsible for depression. For the time being, the genes found for leading to MDD can not be well repeated at all. One reason for this may be that there exists great heterogeneity in the mechanisms underlying depression. On the other hand, another explanation for this in the context of gene-environment interaction is that depression may be more mediated by epigenetic mechanism (e.g., methylation of DNA) that can eventually influence gene expression. It has been suggested that stressors as common and significant environmental factors enable depression by recruiting abnormal methylation of many DNAs such as that of brain derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), 5-hydroxytryptamine transporter (5-HTT) and glucocorticoid receptor (GR) that are also associated with cognitive flexibility. One latest development in neurocognitive science including epigenetics shows that Rac1, a small G protein of Rho family GTPase, plays an important role in cognitive flexibility and that its expression is reduced in the nucleus accumbens (NAc, an area related to reward in brain) of stress-induced depressed animals and deceased patients with major depressive disorder. Overall, in view of the body of evidence from neuropsychological studies supporting that cognitive abnormality, esp. the impairment of cognitive flexibility, exert a central role in the episode, maintenance and treatment of depression, the epigenetic mechanism of depression may involve the abnormality of cognitive flexibility as psychological dimension. However, there is lack of special and direct research related to this area. So, in the future study one can hypothesize that abnormally increased hyper-methylation and reduced mRNA ex-

\* [基金项目]国家科技支撑计划(2015BAI13B02)

pression of Rac1 gene in addition to abnormal methylation and mRNA expression of BDNF gene, 5-HTT gene, GR gene and so on relating to abnormal cognitive flexibility in depression which may be considered as certain psychobiological marker(s). Conduction of this kind of research would further contribute to understanding of mechanisms and insight to the diagnosis and therapy for depression.

**Keywords:** Depression; Epigenetics; Stress; Cognitive flexibility

作为一种以显著而持久的心境低落为主要表现的情感疾病,抑郁症严重危害着人类的身心健康。据 WHO 预测,到 2030 年由抑郁症所致的疾病负担将飙升至第一位。因此,抑郁症的病因和机制一直都是研究的热点,对于其分类、诊断、治疗和干预具有重要的意义。尽管如此,抑郁症的病因与机制仍不清楚,目前广为人们接受的一个总的观点是:它需要以生物-心理-社会医学的模式来探索、研究和解释。那么,在此框架内,生物学因素与认知因素之间的相互影响又是通过什么样的“结点”来实现并进而导致抑郁症的发生呢?通过文献复习,基于一般的生物学基础,本文从表观遗传学与认知灵活性相互联系的角度出发,对这一问题进行了阐述。

## 1 抑郁症的表观遗传学机制:基因-环境相互作用的生物学基础

关于抑郁症的病因和机制,最普遍的观点认为遗传和环境因素在其易感性中共同发挥着作用<sup>[1]</sup>。一项荟萃分析显示:遗传在单相抑郁症中的贡献率只有中等大小的 37%,而个体所特有的环境因素的贡献率则高达 63%<sup>[2]</sup>。但也有研究显示,当考虑疾病的严重程度、复燃和早发性时,遗传度可增至 70%<sup>[3]</sup>。然而,关于抑郁症全基因组的关联研究,近来最大规模的一项纳入约 9500 个病例的荟萃分析却没有发现有意义的、特异性致病基因<sup>[4]</sup>。一方面,这固然提示抑郁症存在异质性和多基因遗传性,需要从庞大数量的样本中收集数据才有可能理解其分子机制;但另一方面,表观遗传学却可能从其他的角度为此提供重要的合理解释。

表观遗传学是指在 DNA 序列不改变的情况下由于其所在染色体的改变所导致的基因表达水平的变化,其核心部分是 DNA 甲基化。一般来说,甲基化和基因表达之间的关系呈负相关,即甲基化增加意味着基因表达的降低,反之亦然。动物和人类的研究发现,早期生活经历能够改变 DNA 的甲基化并影响基因表达和行为<sup>[5]</sup>,并且未来的生活经历也能够修饰这种表观遗传学<sup>[6]</sup>。因此,不难理

解,作为一种随年龄和经历而变化的动态分子标记,表观遗传学标记对于阐明抑郁症的复杂疾病发病机制<sup>[1]</sup>一直是近年来的研究热点,它为基因-环境相互作用提供了一种生物学基础,有助于人们以整合的观点来理解抑郁症的发病风险。

## 2 抑郁症的认知灵活性机制:基因-环境相互作用(表观遗传学)的可能心理学环节

有证据提示:在抑郁症中,介导遗传与环境(特别是应激性事件)共同作用的表观遗传学机制可能涉及认知功能这一心理学环节。一方面,基于认知理论的研究强调了负性认知在抑郁症病因及其维持中的作用,如注意和解释的选择性偏好促进负性情绪而成为心境障碍发生的心理学基础<sup>[7]</sup>;其中,除了认知的负性内容在抑郁症易感性中可能起着重要作用外,近来的解释模型研究同时强调了认知控制损害在抑郁症情绪调节中的重要因果作用<sup>[8]</sup>,而个体间认知控制方面的差异与思维反刍风格(即反复、被动且无助于问题解决地思索不良的事件)可能有关而参与抑郁症的病理机制,例如悲伤时倾向于思维反刍的个体较非思维反刍者可能会经历更长、更严重和更多次的临床抑郁发作<sup>[9]</sup>。因此,目前有观点认为,认知功能障碍/缺陷在抑郁症的发生、维持和治疗中起着重要的作用,甚至是其候选神经认知内表型<sup>[10]</sup>。另一方面,关于应激生活事件与抑郁症状之间的关联,有研究提示应激生活事件与抑郁症具有显著的因果关系<sup>[11]</sup>。而且,应激损害动物和人类个体的认知功能,包括早年应激对成年个体以及近期应激对个体认知能力的损害,而认知功能不良也会加重或参与应激相关负性情绪和行为反应的易感性<sup>[12]</sup>,以至于遭受童年期精神创伤的个体即使拥有更有利于脑源性营养因子(brain-derived neurotrophic factor, BDNF)表达的基因多态性(保护性因素),但如果在应付应激方面存在着不良认知,他(她)们仍然会在成年期出现更为严重的抑郁症状<sup>[13]</sup>。这两方面的数据提示认知功能异常参与遗传-应激相互作用(表观遗传学)的机制而介导抑郁症的发生和维

持;与此相一致,近来的一项荟萃分析表明,执行功能障碍更有可能是抑郁症的特质性标志<sup>[14]</sup>。

认知执行功能中一个非常重要的方面是认知灵活性,即规则或需求发生变化时,个体做出反应以改变或转换自己思维和注意的能力,或者说,认知灵活性作为一种能力是指环境中任务相关信息发生改变时而快速改变反应策略的能力。该技能受生物胺如多巴胺(dopamine, DA)、5-羟色胺(5-hydroxytryptamine, 5-HT)和去甲肾上腺素(noradrenaline, NE)以及乙酰胆碱(acetylcholine, ACh)的调节<sup>[15]</sup>,这与当前广泛使用的抗抑郁药物的药理学机制是一致的。因此,认知灵活性在抑郁症的认知心理学机制中可能具有重要的地位。实际上,较早的荟萃分析已表明抑郁症患者中最为一致的认知缺陷体现在认知抑制和灵活性方面<sup>[16]</sup>。随后的研究也证实认知灵活性缺陷或受损存在于抑郁症之中,而且,在其他临床症状缓解之后,这种认知灵活性障碍依然长期持续存在<sup>[17]</sup>。与此相一致,一些反映认知灵活性的指标的异常与抑郁症的高危因素相关联,如高思维反刍者相对于低思维反刍者在情境转换任务中不能有效地对当前无关任务进行过滤、在特定的任务选择方面存在缺陷而表现出操作无关任务的倾向<sup>[18]</sup>;慢性心理社会应激诱导人的前额叶功能连接异常,这种异常可预测注意情境转换能力的受损<sup>[19]</sup>。不仅如此,由于抑郁症的核心症状是抑郁心境和兴趣或愉快感的缺失,故作为认知灵活性的一个重要方面,奖赏-惩罚反转学习的异常对于抑郁症可能具有重要的意义,因其在相当的程度上将情感及其认知调节联系起来;其中更为复杂的反转学习即概率反转学习的紊乱之于抑郁症的意义可能更为重要,例如这种学习中少数的奖赏和惩罚反馈用来起误导作用,当抑郁症患者接收到起误导作用的负反馈时,他(她)们比健康个体更多地表现出反转学习,从而当具体行为和奖赏之间的关系不确定而需要认知灵活性时,个体不能做出特定的行为选择而难以更多地获得奖赏<sup>[10]</sup>。

### 3 抑郁症的表观遗传学机制:涉及认知灵活性的神经生物学证据

近年来的神经生物学包括遗传学方面的研究也支持认知功能特别是认知灵活性异常可能是抑郁症基因与环境相互作用即表观遗传学机制中的重要环节。从脑结构与功能连接来说,抑郁症涉及

前额叶皮质及眶额皮质的异常<sup>[20-21]</sup>,而这些脑区都与认知功能包括认知灵活性有密切的关系<sup>[22]</sup>。从目前抗抑郁剂治疗来说,其药物机制主要是通过阻滞5-HT、NE和DA的回吸收来增加中枢神经系统(CNS)中这些神经递质的突触间隙水平来达到治疗的作用,这些递质系统在认知灵活性中发挥着重要的作用,而与之代谢、合成有关的基因多态性(影响这些递质在CNS中的表达水平)也相应地调节认知灵活性<sup>[15]</sup>。就抑郁症表观遗传学研究进展来说,临床和动物学研究表明应激通过表观遗传学特别是基因的甲基化修饰来影响一些基因的表达如BDNF和糖皮质激素受体(glucocorticoid receptor, GR)的表达下降、5-HT转运体(serotonin transporter, 5-HTT)的表达增加而参与抑郁的发生,并且抗抑郁剂也通过改变表观遗传学的基因甲基化修饰而起到治疗作用<sup>[23-24]</sup>;同时,这些靶分子也都参与认知灵活性的损害,包括注意的情境转换以及反转或概率反转学习的损害等<sup>[15, 25-26]</sup>。

与上述的证据相平行,最近的神经科学研究进一步为抑郁症的心理和生物学易感性提供了可资候选的分子即小G蛋白Rac1机制,该分子机制同时参与认知灵活性。具体而言,在社会失败应激的抑郁动物模型和死亡的人类抑郁症患者中发现,其伏隔核(奖赏相关的脑区)内围绕Rac1基因启动子区的染色质处于压缩状态导致该脑区Rac1基因转录和表达的抑制<sup>[27]</sup>,而该脑区参与灵活性的反应选择、决策而促进奖赏的获取<sup>[28]</sup>。与此相一致,进一步有研究发现果蝇中相关脑区Rac1的激活和失活分别导致遗忘和不能遗忘,在包括反转学习的调控中发挥重要的作用<sup>[29]</sup>而参与认知灵活性调节。不仅如此,Brea等通过文献回顾了相关的研究结果(包括一些不一致的结果),将Rac1参与的主动遗忘过程归入到认知灵活性的决策过程;通过这一过程,个体能适应复杂多变的环境以降低错过获益的机会,即使因此而付出一些“痛苦”的代价<sup>[30]</sup>。与此相联系,抑郁症患者其奖赏/惩罚反转学习的异常可能使之在面临误导性负反馈的情况下,由于不能做出适切的决定而难以最大化获益<sup>[10]</sup>。因此,这种Rac1介导的认知灵活性可能通过调控概率奖赏-处罚反转学习以及与之有关的高级认知过程而参与抑郁症的病理机制。

### 4 小结与展望

综上所述,抑郁症、认知灵活性以及作为环境

因素普遍因子的应激涉及共同的生物学机制,包括从基因到效应分子的诸多调控环节。一般认为,抑郁症是遗传与环境共同作用的产物,其最终机制是通过表观遗传学(如基因甲基化)调节特定基因的表达而致病。神经心理学认知模型认为认知异常在抑郁症的发生、维持和治疗中起着重要作用,其中大量证据表明,认知灵活性受损或低下可能是抑郁症认知异常机制的核心。将此二者结合起来看,可以说抑郁症并没有绝对化的保护性基因,如近年来有研究表明,所谓的“保护性”基因多态性并不一定意味着更轻的抑郁和更好的认知,甚至会随着特定的成长背景而表现出相反的情况<sup>[13]</sup>。这支持抑郁症遗传-环境相互作用的表观遗传学机制涉及复杂的、整合性的认知灵活性调节;然而,基于目前的研究,进一步与认知灵活性联系起来的表观遗传学(特别是 DNA 甲基化)研究依然十分缺乏。因此,对于抑郁症的发生而言,在认知灵活性可能是介导遗传和环境共同作用的表观遗传学机制的一个重要环节这一框架内,有必要进一步研究 BDNF、5-HT 转运体、GR 和 Rac1 等效应分子及其 DNA 甲基化改变与认知灵活性之间的相互关系,这对于理解抑郁症的发生、发展和预后,同时促进其诊断和防治等诸多方面可能具有重要意义。

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(收稿日期 2017-07-13)

(本文编辑:石俊强)

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(收稿日期 2017-09-01)

(本文编辑:甘慧敏)