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母爱行为影响子代的表观遗传机制

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摘要: 生命早期社会环境会对人类个体身心健康产生持久的影响已久为人知, 然而要了解生命早期经历(包括来自母亲的关爱行为)与一生的认知和情绪健康之间的因果关系却只能借助于动物模型。文章综述了大鼠母爱行为对子代成年后应对应激的行为和繁育行为的影响及其表观遗传机制, 并就这一模型对于环境因素影响人类身心健康的研究所具有的意义进行了展望。

关键词: 母爱行为; 生命早期不良经历; 环境因素; 表观遗传学

Epigenetic mechanisms of the influence of maternal care on offspring development

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Abstract: It has been demonstrated that the social environment early in life has a long lasting effect on the physical and psychological health of the human body. However, understanding of the relationship between early life experiences, such as maternal care behavior, and life-long cognitive and emotional health can only rely on the studies on animal models. In this paper, we summarized the maternal care effects on both defensive responses to stress and reproductive behavior in rat, and explored the possible underlying epigenetic mechanisms for these effects. Based on this model, we further investigated the significance of such epigenetic effects on human mental health.

Keywords: maternal care; early life adversity; environmental programming; epigenetics

对人类的研究表明: 生命早期受到高质量的母爱关怀(Maternal care)会提高个体对情感性精神障碍(Affective disorder)的抵抗力^[1]; 而生命早期会影响母爱行为质和量的不良经历, 如家庭贫困、母亲滥用精神活性物质或罹患抑郁症等, 不仅增加个体对于精神疾患的易感性^[2~6], 还会提高个体晚年痴呆

的发生率^[7,8]。其中最有代表性的研究当属对公共机构收养的儿童进行的调查: 这些机构中的儿童因为幼年缺乏母爱, 所以成年后表现出更多的认知和情绪方面的缺陷, 但是这一情形却可因为儿童本人被其他家庭收养而有所改善^[9~11]。尽管存在上述研究, 我们认识母爱行为影响后代心理、行为的神经生物

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学机制却获益于对动物模型的研究。这类着眼于动物的研究为生命早期不良环境因素(包括不良母爱行为)永久性影响生命个体的内在机理提供了生物学的解读。本文对啮齿类母爱行为影响子代成年后应对应激的行为和自身繁育行为的相关研究及其表现遗传学机制进行了综述。

1 母爱行为影响后代的行为学和神经生物学

研究母爱行为影响后代行为学和神经生物学的模型之一是利用母爱行为的天然个体差异。人类和灵长类雌性的母爱行为均存在数量和质量上稳定的天然差异^[12~15]。啮齿类生产后表现出的母爱行为同样具有明显的个体差异,且具有与人类和灵长类同样的稳定性。产后一周,哺乳期大鼠和小鼠均会表现出高水平的对于仔鼠的看护/接触(Nursing/contact)行为,但是舔舐/理毛(Licking/grooming, LG)行为的频率在品系内和品系间却存在变异^[15,16]。研究表明:自发性高血压(Spontaneously hypertensive, SHR)品系大鼠和 Wistar Kyoto(WKY)品系大鼠(与 SHR 大鼠相匹配的同源大鼠,其血压正常)成年后代血压的表型与各自母亲 LG 行为的频率,以及搬运、料理仔鼠(Retrieval of pups, and nursing posture)的不同姿态有关^[17]。交叉养育实验结果表明 WKY 的表型传递给 SHR 生物学后代,而 SHR 的表型则传递给 WKY 生物学后代,说明母爱行为调节这两种品系血压的表型^[18]。同样,小鼠 Balb/c、C57BL/6 品系母爱行为的差异影响后代的应激反应^[19,20]。将 C57BL/6 的胚胎植入 Balb/c 孕鼠,出生后继续由 Balb/c 母鼠养育,这些后代发展出类同于 Balb/c 品系的特征:对新环境的探索行为减少(即焦虑情绪增加)^[19]。尽管我们不清楚这两个品系小鼠出生前子宫内环境是否存在差异,但 Balb/c 雌鼠比 C57BL/6 雌鼠产后所表现出的更少的 LG 行为,似乎更可能是其后代探索行为天生不同的原因^[19]。

Long Evans(LE)品系大鼠常被用于研究母亲 LG 行为的个体差异对后代基因表达、生理特点和行为模式的影响^[21]。产后第一周,哺乳期 LE 雌鼠对仔鼠的 LG 行为在频率上呈正态分布^[15,22]。因此通过选择 LG 行为频率低于一个标准差(低 LG)或者高于一个标准差(高 LG)的母鼠,就可以比较经历了 2~3 倍母爱行为差异的两组子代动物的表型。最初的研究证实 LG 水平与后代应激反应相关:成年后,高 LG

雌鼠的雄性后代与低 LG 雌鼠的雄性后代相比,在新环境中会有更多的探索行为,应激后血浆促肾上腺皮质激素(Adrenocorticotropin, ACTH)、皮质酮(Corticosterone)增幅不大,海马脑区中糖皮质激素受体(Glucocorticoid receptor, GR) mRNA 上调,下丘脑促肾上腺皮质激素释放激素(Corticosterone releasing hormone, CRH) mRNA 上调,杏仁核苯二氮卓受体密度增加^[23~26];与低 LG 母鼠后代相比,高 LG 母鼠的后代表现出更好的空间学习与记忆能力,海马中脑源性神经营养因子(Brain derived neurotrophic factor, BDNF) mRNA 上调,海马胆碱乙酰转移酶(Choline acetyltransferase)和突触囊泡蛋白(Synaptophysin)增加^[25]。母亲 LG 行为还会调控 γ -氨基丁酸(γ -aminobutyric acid, GABA)受体亚基的表达,从而影响苯二氮卓类药物的结合力^[27]。此外,高 LG 母鼠子代海马神经元存活增加、凋亡减少,这与成纤维生长因子(Fibroblast growth factor)的升高有关^[28,29]。母鼠 LG 行为也影响雄性后代应激时的多巴胺释放,还影响雌性后代受到奖赏时的多巴胺释放^[30,31]。

研究还发现母爱行为的自然变异会在代间传递:高 LG 母鼠的雌性后代表现出同样高水平的 LG 行为,而低 LG 母鼠的雌性后代则表现出同样的低 LG 行为^[15,32,33]。低 LG 母鼠的雌性后代受雌激素调节的催产素(Oxytocin)的受体的结合力下降;与此同时,与母爱行为相关的下丘脑区,如内侧视前区(Medial preoptic area, MPOA)中 c-fos 蛋白免疫活性下降^[15,34,35]——这些改变可能受 MPOA 区 α 雌激素受体(Estrogen receptor-alpha, ER α) mRNA 水平的调制^[22]。低 LG 母鼠的后代若由高 LG 母鼠抚养,其行为表现、基因表达类同于高 LG 母亲的生物学后代,反之亦然,这进一步证实雌性后代的 LG 行为表现与出生后所接受的来自母亲的照料水平有关,而不是由遗传或者出生前因素决定^[15,32]。

研究母爱行为影响后代的其他模型还有母婴分离(Maternal separation)和母爱剥夺(Maternal deprivation)。在啮齿类,每天数小时的母婴分离会导致子代探索行为减少,室旁核(Paraventricular nucleus, PVN)中 CRH mRNA 升高,应激时皮质酮升高而海马 GR mRNA 减少^[36~38],水迷宫测试中逃生潜伏期延长,海马突触囊泡蛋白水平下降,细胞凋亡增加等^[39]。此外,离乳前每天与母亲分离 5 h 的雌性后代,

对自己后代的LG行为减少^[33]。同样,出生后被完全剥夺母爱的仔鼠成年后表现出下丘脑-垂体-肾上腺(Hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal, HPA)轴活性的增高,探索行为的减少,自主活动增加,认知缺陷^[40~42],而雌性则表现出受雌激素调节的母爱行为的减少^[43]。

2 母爱行为影响子代的表观遗传机制

实验观察到在高水平LG母亲和低水平LG母亲子代之间海马GR mRNA的表达存在差异^[44],然而相应基因的DNA序列却无差异,这促使研究人员开始关注母爱行为引起子代基因表达差异的表观遗传机制。海马GR通过负反馈调控HPA轴对应激的反应,因此GR表达的增加会使应激反应减轻^[45,46]。对GR 1₇启动子区DNA甲基化水平的分析表明高LG水平与GR 1₇低甲基化有关,而GR 1₇低甲基化则与海马GR的高表达相关^[44]。对此区域甲基化模式的位点特异性分析表明神经生长因子诱导蛋白A(Nerve growth factor-inducible protein A, NGFI-A, 一种转录因子)在此区域结合位点的甲基化程度在高LG、低LG母鼠的后代也有差异,这导致在低LG母鼠后代的海马中,NGFI-A对此区域的结合减少。对GR 1₇启动子区DNA甲基化水平的时间序列分析表明,高LG、低LG后代的差异在出生后出现,并一直维持到成年^[44]。因此,成年后代基因表达和行为表现的差异,与产后1周所受到的母亲照料的质量有关,其机制则是DNA甲基化程度不同引起的基因表达的不同。

除了改变应激反应,母鼠LG行为还会影响雌性后代与MPOA中ER α 基因表达相关的产后行为^[15,22,32]。MPOA中ER α 时间序列分析表明两种后代雌性仔鼠ER α mRNA表达有差异,并且这种差异持续到成年,低LG水平会导致ER α 基因表达的长期抑制^[47]。对MPOA中ER α 启动子DNA甲基化的分析表明雌性后代中低LG行为的出现与ER α 启动子的高甲基化相关,而高LG行为的出现与ER α 启动子的低甲基化相关。这种差异性甲基化发生于ER α 启动子的多个区域,包括信号转导蛋白和转录激活物(Signal transducer and activator of transcription, STAT)Stat-5的一个结合位点。用Stat-5抗体进行ChIP测定表明低LG母亲的雌性后代ER α 启动子高甲基化,使Stat-5免疫活性下降,这说明ER α 的差

异性甲基化可以影响正常情况下增强基因表达的相关因子的结合^[48,49]。因此母爱行为通过调节诱发母爱行为相关基因的表达,进而调节母爱行为的代间传递。

进一步的实验表明脑室内给予促进去甲基化的组蛋白脱乙酰基酶抑制剂(Histone deacetylase inhibitor, HDACi)TSA,逆转了低LG母鼠后代成年后的表现,使低LG母鼠后代表现出更多的探索行为,减少了应激诱导的皮质酮水平,海马GR mRNA表达也上升,这些表现与高LG母亲的后代没有差异^[44,47]。脑室内TSA给药以GR 1₇启动子为特异靶点,从而降低此区域的DNA甲基化^[50]。与此相反的是,中枢给予促进甲基化的甲基供体甲硫氨酸(Methionine),会使高LG母鼠的成年后代焦虑水平提高,海马中NGFI-A对GR 1₇启动子的结合减少^[50]。上述实验说明两种后代的行为表现和基因表达可通过药物的干预来相互转换,也进一步证实母爱行为影响子代的表观遗传机制。

3 母爱行为影响脑内DNA甲基化的信号传导

用毛笔轻触或者通过母亲的LG行为给予触觉刺激均能使幼鼠海马GR表达增加^[26,51]。因此母鼠LG行为可能是通过触觉刺激影响仔鼠发育的。然而躯体刺激信号如何传导最终导致两种子代海马、内侧视前区细胞特定基因的表观遗传改变却是个有待解决的问题。体外研究表明5-HT₇受体偶联的cAMP激活引起NGFI-A上调,继而引起GR表达增加^[52~54]。因此,由母亲提供触觉刺激引起GR表达上调的效应能够被给予cAMP同类物所模拟,而被5-HT₇受体拮抗剂所阻断^[55]。新近的研究阐明了上述药物或行为干预的下游靶点NGFI-A的重要性^[56]:当同时给予NGFI-A反义引物,5-HT受体的激活不能引起海马GR表达的增加;尽管NGFI-A上调与由GR 1₇启动子低甲基化引起的GR表达增高有关,但如果NGFI-A在GR 1₇启动子区的结合位点发生突变,NGFI-A的效应也会被阻断。NGFI-A在去甲基化中的确切角色尚不清楚。上述发现说明母爱行为通过激活结合于甾体激素受体启动子区的特异性因子,诱发一系列级联反应,这一系列反应影响子代发育,并导致子代成年后基因表达和行为表现的稳定模式。这一级联反应模式可能同样适用于Stat-5与ER α

启动子的相互作用以及雌激素受体的基因表达,但是这方面的实验研究还未见报道。

以上数据初步展示了母爱行为修饰大脑某个特定基因的路径。另外,对大鼠高 LG 行为母亲和低 LG 行为母亲子代成年后 18 号染色体高密度表观遗传基因组学的分析揭示出两种子代的 18 号染色体存在 DNA 甲基化和组蛋白乙酰化的广泛差异;母亲的高 LG 行为导致子代一些区域的低甲基化、高乙酰化和另一些区域的高甲基化、低乙酰化——这或许可以解释为何 LG 行为不同的两种母亲子代成年后在基因表达上有明显的不同^[49],同时也说明母爱效应生物学机制的复杂性和广泛性。

4 对于人类的实证研究

科学上对于动物模型的研究终将回归于人群研究,有关研究小组对生命早期有不良生活事件经历的人是否具有相应的表观遗传标记进行了研究。他们首先检测了加拿大魁北克地区自杀成功者人群 rRNA 基因的启动子。蛋白质合成对于大脑建立新记忆、产生新突触十分重要,而 rRNA 是负责合成蛋白的细胞器核糖体的骨架,因此通过改变细胞中 rRNA 基因的活性即可控制细胞的蛋白质合成能力^[57]。另外, rRNA 基因与 RNA PolI 转录装置相关的活化部位未甲基化,而失活部位则表现为甲基化^[57]。童年经历虐待的自杀成功者 rRNA 基因呈现出高度的总甲基化,表达较少的 rRNA,这种甲基化的差异是海马特异性的,在小脑则没有被发现——但是自杀成功者与对照组 rRNA 基因的 DNA 序列却没有差异,因此 rRNA 表达的差异是由环境而不是遗传上的变异造成的^[58]。

另一项研究则比较了有童年受虐经历的自杀者和无童年受虐经历的自杀者 GR 外显子 1f 启动子区,这一基因与大鼠母爱行为所影响的 GR 同源。两组自杀者在 GR 外显子 1f 启动子区 DNA 甲基化程度存在差异,这种 DNA 甲基化程度的差异与 GR 基因的表达差异相关,并干扰转录因子 NGFI-A 与 GR 外显子 1f 启动子区的结合和影响 GR 启动子活性^[59]。这是第一个表明早期不良生活事件可能通过表观遗传机制影响人类大脑基因组的实证研究。

5 结 语

表观遗传学的研究认为表观遗传基因组是外界

环境(包括社会环境)与人类基因组相互作用的“界面”,它为环境因素影响基因表达提供了分子水平的解释。本文综述的啮齿类“母爱”行为影响其子代行为的系列研究提示生命早期的“社会环境”通过使一系列特异基因产生表观遗传标记持久性影响身心健康,而生命早期不良社会环境对精神健康的影响则可能是可逆的,即药物、认知和行为的干预均有可能改变表观遗传标记——这些方法均有可能激活脑内信号通路,改变相关基因的表观遗传修饰,从而达到治疗效果。

我们认为,理解社会环境对于人类表观遗传基因组的“修饰”,不仅可以产生精神医学的革命,而且会变革社会科学与人文科学;表观遗传学可以作为社会科学、人文科学与生命科学之间的纽带,使我们更好的理解人类的健康和行为。虽然说由环境因素编程的基因表达的分子机制研究才刚刚起步,但方兴未艾、意义深远。

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