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Nrf2通过调控巨噬细胞极化治疗溃疡性结肠炎的机制

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[摘要] 溃疡性结肠炎(ulcerative colitis, UC)是由多因素诱导, 致使肠道免疫细胞被异常激活并过量释放炎症因子, 反复损伤肠道黏膜的一种炎症性肠病。巨噬细胞作为肠道固有免疫细胞, 常通过维持M1/M2型巨噬细胞极化的平衡使炎症正常转归。而其极化的失衡会造成肠黏膜反复受损、炎症迁延不愈, 是引发UC的重要因素。核因子E2相关因子2(nuclear factor E2-related factor 2, Nrf2)作为抗氧化、抗炎的重要调节器, 常作为治疗自身免疫性疾病的靶点。Nrf2通过平衡巨噬细胞极化进而缓解肠道高氧化应激和炎症因子状态, 对防治UC具有重要意义。总结巨噬细胞极化失衡在UC病程中的作用机制及Nrf2的调节机制, 可为UC靶向治疗药物的开发提供参考。

[关键词] 溃疡性结肠炎; 氧化应激; 核因子E2相关因子2; 巨噬细胞极化

Mechanism of Nrf2 in the treatment of ulcerative colitis via regulating macrophage polarization

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ABSTRACT

Ulcerative colitis (UC) is an inflammatory bowel disease induced by multiple factors, which causes abnormal activation of intestinal immune cells and excessive release of antibodies and inflammatory factors, repeatedly damaging the intestinal mucosa. Macrophages, as innate intestinal immune cells, often maintain the balance of M1/M2 macrophages polarization to normalize the regression inflammation, and the imbalance of their polarization will cause repeated damage of intestinal mucosa and persistent inflammation, which is a main cause of UC. Nuclear factor E2-related factor 2 (Nrf2), as an important regulator of antioxidant and anti-inflammatory, is often used as a target for the

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treatment of autoimmune diseases. Nrf2 alleviates intestinal high oxidative stress and inflammatory factors by balancing macrophage polarization, which may be of great significance for the prevention and treatment of UC. Summarizing the mechanism of macrophage polarization imbalance on the course of UC and the possible regulatory mechanism of Nrf2 may provide basis for the development of UC targeted therapeutic drugs.

KEY WORDS ulcerative colitis; oxidative stress; nuclear factor E2-related factor 2; macrophage polarization

溃疡性结肠炎(ulcerative colitis, UC)是一种由多病因作用下,反复发作的自身免疫性疾病。组织病变主要局限于肠道中黏膜与黏膜下层,常累及直肠,并且以腹痛、腹泻及便血为主要症状^[1]。其发病率呈逐年上升趋势,不仅对结肠健康造成损害还会加重患者的经济负担。目前大多观点认为肠道内过度的免疫反应同UC联系紧密,如何对UC中失控的免疫状态进行调控,研制出相对应的靶向药物成为亟需解决的问题。巨噬细胞作为参与固有免疫的重要细胞群,其中M1/M2型巨噬细胞的极化对维持机体免疫稳态至关重要。在UC进程中,M1/M2型巨噬细胞极化的失衡加剧了肠道炎症^[2]。因此,对免疫细胞促炎、抗炎能力的合理调控可能是对免疫性疾病的潜在治疗靶点。核因子E2相关因子2(nuclear factor E2-related factor 2, Nrf2)具有抗氧化及抗炎作用,通过对抗氧化应激及减少炎症因子分泌可以抑制UC肠道中的过度免疫反应,进而减轻肠黏膜损伤、修复肠道屏障^[3]。本文以肠道免疫紊乱为切入点,思考巨噬细胞极化失衡以及UC之间的联系,探究UC中Nrf2调节巨噬细胞极化可能的作用机制,以期对UC的防治提供参考。

1 肠道免疫功能紊乱诱导UC发生

目前关于UC的发病机制尚不明确。肠道屏障的破坏对UC的发生、发展起到了推动作用。值得关注的是,肠道免疫紊乱是破坏肠道屏障的关键因素^[4]。肠道在食物、病原微生物及肠道共生细菌刺激下发挥免疫应答作用。免疫应答的本质是机体通过分泌抗体应对入侵的抗原,清除体内“非己”成分。其中,抗体作为介导免疫的重要分子具有识别及中和功能,在应对机体感染以及阻止肿瘤发展方面具有重要作用^[5]。正常情况下,肠道既要快速地应对病原微生物产生足量抗体,又要应对食物及肠道菌群防

止免疫过度^[6]。这种免疫应答平衡状态对肠道稳态具有促进作用。

免疫系统作为机体保护自身的一种防御性构成,其功能主要包括免疫防御、免疫监视及免疫自稳^[7]。其中,免疫自稳能维持机体内环境稳定,其通过建立免疫耐受,防止免疫系统破坏自体组织。然而,在化学治疗(以下简称“化疗”)、免疫抑制剂等影响下免疫耐受功能遭到破坏,免疫应答失衡会引起抗体的过量生成,进而诱导炎症发生^[8]。虽然炎症反应是免疫系统保护机体免受损害的重要手段,但过度的炎症易造成组织损伤。免疫系统的有序状态对治疗慢性炎症具有重要意义。

UC中肠道持续炎症状态是否同免疫紊乱相关,根本原因在于先天免疫细胞在炎症中所发挥的作用。肠道先天免疫细胞通过产生细胞因子和趋化因子、呈递抗原以促进抗体的分泌,从而激活免疫应答。在UC中,肠道内巨噬细胞以及UC特异性抗体明显增加,表明由于慢性炎症致使巨噬细胞被大量募集,推动生成过量抗体,导致肠道免疫系统紊乱^[9]。这意味着先天免疫细胞对维持肠道免疫系统的稳定至关重要。因此,合理调节肠道免疫系统紊乱对治疗UC具有推动作用。

2 巨噬细胞极化失衡是肠道免疫紊乱的驱动因素

UC作为一种非特异性疾病,表现为结肠炎症的慢性发展,这其中离不开免疫细胞的参与,而巨噬细胞不仅是肠道免疫防御的重要角色,还对肠道炎症具有驱动作用。近年来研究^[10]表明巨噬细胞极化平衡失调同免疫功能紊乱、组织损伤密切相关。

巨噬细胞由骨髓及血液中的单核细胞分化发育而来,其生理功能主要包括吞噬并杀灭细菌、引发适应性免疫应答等。在炎症微环境中,巨噬细胞受

微生物、细胞死亡以及炎症因子的刺激而被激活,而活化后其功能及形态会发生改变,称之为巨噬细胞极化,极化后常表现为相反的表现型状态:经典激活M1型和替代激活M2型^[10-11]。M1型巨噬细胞具有促炎作用,而M2型巨噬细胞被认为与炎症消退、促癌有关联,具有抗炎以及促进组织重构的能力^[12-15]。

M1/M2型巨噬细胞的功能差异性构成机体免疫的平衡,而这种平衡对炎症发生发展而言必不可少。在炎症进程中,M1型巨噬细胞作为引发炎症反应的重要因素,不仅会产生如白细胞介素(interleukin, IL)-1、IL-12以及肿瘤坏死因子- α (tumor necrosis factor- α , TNF- α)等炎症因子,还会释放如活性氧(reactive oxygen species, ROS)、一氧化氮等物质,进而损伤组织,引发炎症。此外,M1型巨噬细胞还具备高呈递抗原能力,以启动适应性免疫应答。相反,M2型巨噬细胞合成IL-10、转移生长因子 β (transforming growth factor- β , TGF- β)及纤维母细胞生长因子等促进免疫抑制反应并发挥组织修复功能。因此,炎症进程中M1/M2型巨噬细胞在功能上互相牵制,形成相对平衡,而在炎症转归及纠正免疫紊乱过程中这种平衡关系异常重要。

在UC进展期间,巨噬细胞表型向M1型转变且其数量及活性明显增加,同时IL-1、IL-12等炎症因子表达上升,而M2型巨噬细胞数量及IL-10、TGF- β 等抗炎因子随之减少^[16-18]。这表明当M1/M2型巨噬细胞免疫平衡失调后,M2型巨噬细胞的抗炎能力受到抑制,进而无法牵制M1型巨噬细胞,使肠道屏障无法正常修复,加重原有损伤。此外,UC中M1/M2型巨噬细胞比率的失衡,会增强机体原有抗原提呈能力,从而造成UC肠道内过度的免疫应答,加重炎症反应^[19]。综上,巨噬细胞极化平衡状态有助于维持正常肠道免疫稳态及防治UC。然而,常规炎症向慢性发展不仅取决于巨噬细胞极化失衡,还与组织内高氧化应激水平有关,Nrf2同二者联系密切^[20]。

3 Nrf2具有平衡巨噬细胞极化,治疗UC的作用

3.1 Nrf2在UC进程中的作用机制

Nrf2是CNC-bZIP转录因子家族中的重要角色,其实际分子量为110 kD^[21]。在正常情况下,Nrf2同Kelch样ECH相关蛋白1(Kelch-like ECH-associated protein 1, Keap1)形成结合体。当发生氧化应激时,Keap1失活同时Nrf2泛素化停止,Nrf2与Keap1解离并被磷酸化且入核,通过结合抗氧化反应元件

(antioxidant response element, ARE),增强机体抗氧化能力^[22]。

氧化应激同炎症联系紧密,其水平的提高会增加机体应对感染和相关炎症性疾病的易感性,加剧免疫应答进而影响先天免疫反应^[23]。Nrf2被认为是抗氧化反应的主要调控因素,因此Nrf2能介导细胞对氧化应激引起的炎症进行防御。此外,氧化应激诱发胃肠道黏膜疾病的本质是破坏黏膜上皮结构。近年研究^[24]表明靶向Nrf2能够促进黏膜上皮修复。这表明Nrf2不仅能预防氧化应激造成的损伤,还能促进组织修复。

肠道屏障功能以及结构的恢复是治疗UC的主要策略。黏液层、上皮细胞层及固有层免疫屏障不仅是肠道屏障的重要组成部分,还与Nrf2联系紧密^[25-26]。在UC进程中,Nrf2修复肠道屏障的机制如下。首先,黏液层作为肠道的第一道屏障,能够隔绝肠内容物与肠上皮细胞。作为黏液层的重要组成部分,黏蛋白2(mucin-2, MUC2)由肠杯状细胞合成产生^[21, 27-28]。在MUC2基因敲除的小鼠中,可观察到小鼠的结肠上皮不再被黏液覆盖,结肠黏膜上皮更易被损伤,从而推动UC的形成,这证明MUC2同UC密切相关。值得关注的是,MUC2的表达水平同Nrf2/Keap1信号通路有关,当下调Keap1和上调Nrf2的表达后,结肠黏膜中MUC2的表达得以恢复^[22, 29]。这意味着Nrf2能改善MUC2的异常变化,通过修复黏液层,进而治疗UC。其次,上皮细胞层由肠上皮细胞及紧密连接(tight junction, TJs)共同组成,TJs通过维持肠道屏障的稳定状态能阻止细菌及大分子物质的渗透。UC中结肠黏膜所释放的炎症因子会干扰TJ蛋白表达并破坏其结构。这其中包括闭合蛋白(occludin)、密封蛋白(claudin)、交界处黏着分子以及紧密连接蛋白(zonula occludens-1, ZO-1)^[30-31]。当Nrf2的表达上升时不仅能使肠黏膜中claudin-1、occludin和ZO-1的蛋白质水平恢复,还可减少上皮细胞的凋亡^[32]。这表明Nrf2通过维持TJs结构稳固了肠上皮细胞,进而能修复肠道屏障,减少肠道损伤。最后,UC作为自身免疫性疾病同固有层免疫屏障失衡密切相关,当病原微生物大量穿过上皮细胞层后,固有免疫细胞的过度活化状态会引发炎症并损伤组织。在UC影响下,核因子- κ B(nuclear factor- κ B, NF- κ B)信号通路激活,M1型巨噬细胞所分泌的TNF- α 、IL-1 β 除了能引发炎症反应,还能提高NF- κ B的活性^[33]。这说明活化后的巨噬细胞及NF- κ B通路能够放大炎症效应,而炎症反应的不断加强与扩大,必然会引起固有免疫细胞对免疫应答的过度参与,这会导致肠道免疫屏障失衡。而Nrf2对于NF-

κ B具有负调控作用^[34]。

此外, Nrf2能通过抑制脂多糖诱导的M1型巨噬细胞产生炎症因子^[20]。这意味着Nrf2能通过调控肠道固有免疫细胞, 缓和过度的免疫应答过程并维持固有免疫屏障的稳定, 从而减轻UC所导致的肠道炎症。以上证据表明, Nrf2能修复肠道屏障并通过调节黏蛋白水平、维持肠上皮细胞的稳定状态、调节固有免疫细胞的方式, 从而实现保护肠道, 减轻UC的炎症反应。

3.2 Nrf2调控巨噬细胞极化的机制

炎症作为一种保护机制, 免疫系统通过引发炎症反应来保护机体免受损害。但过度的炎症反应也会对机体造成潜在的伤害。持续的肠道炎症既是UC的主要特征, 又是损伤肠道黏膜的重要推力, 这离不开巨噬细胞的持续参与, 巨噬细胞极化失衡会使肠黏膜长时间处于高氧化应激以及过量炎症因子的环境中, 进而损伤肠组织。而Nrf2在多种慢性炎症中同巨噬细胞极化联系密切^[20]。

3.2.1 Nrf2平衡巨噬细胞极化治疗慢性炎症

M1型巨噬细胞能促进炎症发生, 而M2型巨噬细胞主要参与炎症消退。在慢性炎症中, 炎症微环境会导致M1/M2型巨噬细胞免疫功能失衡, 这种不平衡的状态对于慢性炎症的发展起推动作用。早期炎症反应中, M1型巨噬细胞所产生的炎症及趋化因子会在破坏肠上皮细胞的同时, 激活NF- κ B信号通路。NF- κ B不仅能上调M1型巨噬细胞分泌的炎症因子表达, 还能促进M1型巨噬细胞极化^[35-37]。当炎症呈慢性发展时, M1型巨噬细胞同NF- κ B的持续激活状态会进一步加重组织炎症程度, 使M1型巨噬细胞过度促炎。有趣的是, NF- κ B、巨噬细胞同Nrf2之间似乎存在微妙的联系。当Nrf2被敲除之后, 机体氧化应激水平增加, 而NF- κ B介导的M1型巨噬细胞的炎症因子表达也随之提高^[38-41]。这意味着在氧化应激环境中, NF- κ B可能更容易被激活, 而Nrf2不仅能抗氧化, 还能对NF- κ B进行负调控, 说明Nrf2能通过调节巨噬细胞与NF- κ B来抑制炎症的发生。在UC活动期患者的结肠黏膜中, M1/M2型巨噬细胞比率的增加会伴随着IL-10减少和TNF- α 的表达升高, IL-10不仅能抑制M1型巨噬细胞的促炎能力, 还能修复受损的肠道黏膜^[42-44]。这表明M2型巨噬细胞数量的增多, 不仅能对抗炎症, 还能促进肠道黏膜修复。血红素加氧酶-1(heme oxygenase, HO-1)作为一种重要的抗氧化以及抗炎基因, 受Nrf2的直接调控。而Nrf2/HO-1通路的激活状态, 有助于M2型巨噬细胞极化。HO-1被敲除后, 巨噬细胞的M2型极化进程

被逆转, 并且会加重由葡聚糖硫酸钠诱导的UC小鼠的结肠炎症状态^[45]。这说明Nrf2能对M2型巨噬细胞极化进行正向调控, 而M2型巨噬细胞极化又能有效地抑制炎症反应, 从而加强在UC中的抗炎能力。综上所述, Nrf2既能通过调控NF- κ B信号通路和抑制M1型巨噬细胞释放炎症因子阻止炎症, 又能通过促进M2型巨噬细胞极化达到保护及修复肠道黏膜的作用, 这意味着炎症中的Nrf2能通过调节巨噬细胞极化的不平衡状态, 恢复肠道抗炎及促炎的平衡, 并通过维持正常肠道免疫稳态, 缓解UC过度的免疫反应。

3.2.2 Nrf2抑制氧化应激

氧化应激是胃肠道黏膜病变中的重要因素, 脂质过氧化物(lipid hydroperoxide, LPO)及ROS会促进氧化应激的发生。花生四烯酸(polyunsaturated fatty acid, PUFAs)是细胞膜的重要组成成分。当细胞被破坏时, 因此而分解的PUFAs会经脂氧酶的催化生成LPO, 这些无法代谢的LPO会导致过量的Fe²⁺经芬顿反应生成ROS。其中, ROS会损害肠上皮细胞并破坏肠道屏障功能, 从而诱发肠道炎症。Nrf2/HO-1通路是抑制肠道ROS的重要手段^[46]。这其中Nrf2能直接调控HO-1, 当HO-1被抑制后ROS水平会不断提高。然而, 由此而形成的高氧化应激状态会提升巨噬细胞活性并促使其向M1型极化, 加重炎症反应^[47-48]。这说明高氧化应激状态可能是沟通炎症和激活巨噬细胞极化的桥梁。在UC中, 经酶促合成糖原(enzymatically synthesized glycogen, ESG)处理后的HO-1/Nrf2的蛋白质表达水平显著提高, 并且能降低肠道内M1型巨噬细胞所引发的炎症因子及ROS水平, 当Nrf2被敲除后, HO-1所介导的抗氧化作用被逆转, 氧化应激水平不降反增, 同时HO-1也丧失了对M1型巨噬细胞促炎的抑制作用, 加重了UC症状^[49]。这说明氧化应激既是引发炎症的独立诱因, 又增进了巨噬细胞的促炎能力。而Nrf2/HO-1通路的激活能在抗氧化应激的同时, 抑制M1型巨噬细胞的极化。

此外, 铁稳态失衡对ROS的生成亦有促进作用, 其中Nrf2、巨噬细胞同铁代谢过程联系密切。铁蛋白是细胞内主要的储铁蛋白, 而膜铁转运蛋白(ferroportin, FPN)则是细胞内输出铁的唯一调控蛋白, 二者共同参与了细胞内的铁代谢过程。在炎症反应中, M1型巨噬细胞中的重链铁蛋白(ferritin heavy chain, FTH)、轻链铁蛋白(ferritin light chain, FTL)的表达上升, 并伴随着更低的FPN表达, 说明M1型巨噬细胞具有更高的铁储存水平^[50]。而在UC中M1型巨噬细胞常呈现高水平表达, 这可能会使巨噬细胞成为芬顿反应中铁的主要来源, 从而使ROS

过量产生。在UC影响下,肠上皮细胞上的二价金属离子转运体(divalent metal transporter 1, DMT1)表达水平增加,使得肠黏膜细胞内 Fe^{2+} 水平显著升高^[51]。这提示M1型巨噬细胞及肠上皮细胞在UC中可能出现了铁过载。而铁死亡作为一种铁依赖性的细胞死亡形式^[52],通常由脂质过氧化产物以及细胞内铁过载所诱导,铁死亡有助于激活先天免疫反应,引发炎症。有研究^[53]显示M1型巨噬细胞的铁过载会诱导其发生铁死亡。在UC进程中,铁死亡的发生会使肠上皮细胞募集并激活M1型巨噬细胞^[54],这会推动更多的ROS生成,而氧化应激水平的激增不仅能引发更多的M1型巨噬细胞极化,还会引发UC肠道内铁死亡的大量发生,从而加重肠道炎症,损伤组织。幸运的是,Nrf2具有调控细胞内转铁蛋白受体(transferrin receptor, TfR)与转铁蛋白(transferrin, Tf)、FTL以及FTH的能力,从而能抑制肠黏膜上皮细胞的铁过载^[55-56]。另外Nrf2/HO-1通路的激活能减少肠道内ROS水平。Nrf2通过抑制铁过载及抗氧化应激能阻止铁死亡的发生,进而减轻UC炎症。以上证据说明Nrf2能减轻UC中肠黏膜氧化应激水平、调节M1型巨噬细胞的促炎作用,最终使细胞损伤及炎症症状得以缓解。

4 结语

Nrf2具有平衡巨噬细胞极化,治疗UC的作用。通过系统阐述Nrf2、巨噬细胞极化失衡同UC的联系后发现,肠道免疫功能紊乱会破坏肠道屏障引发UC,而巨噬细胞极化失衡势必会干扰机体促炎、抗炎的正常功能,从而诱发肠道异常免疫反应。因此实现M1/M2型巨噬细胞极化平衡对UC的防治则具有重要意义。Nrf2常作为治疗自身免疫性疾病的靶点,能对先天免疫反应进行调节,其通过减少氧化应激以及炎症因子的方式,能够缓和UC中过度的免疫反应,从而减轻肠道炎症,表明Nrf2是联系巨噬细胞极化与UC的黏合剂。然而在UC进程中,Nrf2是否是调控巨噬细胞极化平衡的唯一因素,仍需要进一步试验证实。而目前有关于靶向Nrf2治疗UC的药物研发仅停留在动物实验层面,在今后的临床试验研究中,学者可将Nrf2作为治疗UC的突破口,为UC的治疗提供新的思路与方法。

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