

• 综述 •

## 中医药调控神经血管单元及其标志物改善阿尔茨海默病的研究进展

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**[摘要]** 阿尔茨海默病(Alzheimer's disease, AD)是一种以进行性认知障碍为特征的神经退行性疾病,其发病机制十分复杂。近年来,脑血流减少、血脑屏障破坏等血管异常在AD早期被发现,提示血管因素在其发病中发挥着重要作用。神经血管单元(neurovascular unit, NVU)作为脑功能稳态的关键结构,其功能障碍已被认为是AD及血管性痴呆的共同病理基础之一,包括神经元、内皮细胞、周细胞、星形胶质细胞、小胶质细胞和基底膜等,其紊乱可导致认知损伤。中医药通过多靶点、多通路干预NVU功能,改善血脑屏障通透性,减轻神经炎症和氧化应激,有望成为治疗AD的重要手段。文章综述了中医药调控NVU及其标志物在AD早期诊断与治疗中的研究进展。

**[关键词]** 阿尔茨海默病;神经血管单元;生物标志物;中医药;综述

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## Research progress in improving Alzheimer's disease by regulating neurovascular units and their markers with traditional Chinese medicine

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**[Abstract]** Alzheimer's disease (AD) is a neurodegenerative disease characterized by progressive cognitive impairment, and its pathogenesis is very complex. In recent years, vascular abnormalities such as decreased cerebral blood flow and blood-brain barrier disruption have been found in the early stage of AD, suggesting that vascular factors play an important role in its pathogenesis. As a key structure of brain functional homeostasis, the dysfunction of the neurovascular unit (NVU), including neurons, endothelial cells, pericytes, astrocytes, microglia, and basement membrane, has been considered to be one of the common pathological bases of AD and vascular dementia. Its disorder can lead to cognitive impairment. Traditional Chinese medicine can intervene NVU function through multiple targets and pathways, improve the permeability of blood-brain barrier, reduce neuroinflammation and oxidative stress, and is expected to become an important means to treat AD. This article elaborates the research progress of NVU and its markers regulated by traditional Chinese medicine in the early diagnosis and treatment of AD.

**[Key words]** Alzheimer's disease; neurovascular unit; biomarkers; traditional Chinese medicine; review

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阿尔茨海默病(Alzheimer's disease, AD)是一种临床常见的神经退行性疾病,其病理变化包括β淀粉样蛋白(amyloid protein-β, Aβ)沉积和Tau蛋白过度磷酸化,进而导致神经原纤维缠结(neurofibrillary tangle, NFT)等异常变化。据统计,预计到2050年,全球老年痴呆患者总数将达到1.52亿,其中60%~

70%为AD患者<sup>[1]</sup>。随着全球人口老龄化的加剧,AD的发病率也不断上升,给患者及其家庭带来了严重负担,同时也对公共健康系统构成了巨大挑战。尽管近年来在病理机制和治疗手段方面取得了一些进展,但仍缺乏有效的早期诊断和治疗策略。

新近研究发现,神经血管单元(neurovascular unit, NVU)作为脑功能的整体性结构,具有维持血脑屏障(blood-brain barrier, BBB)的完整性,调节脑血流和减轻氧化应激等功能,已成为脑科学和脑重大疾病研究领域的热点之一<sup>[2]</sup>。据了解,中医药干预AD的基础研究已取得显著进展,通过调控NVU的功能,影响以上相关机制,能够减少A $\beta$ 的沉积和Tau蛋白的过度磷酸化,从而有助于促进AD患者的康复。因此,深入探讨中医药干预NVU以及其相关的生物标志物在AD中的作用,不仅有助于揭示AD的发病机制,还可能为疾病的早期诊断和治疗提供新的靶点和策略。

## 1 NVU概述

### 1.1 NVU的结构及其功能

NVU是中枢神经系统(central nervous system, CNS)的一个关键结构单元,主要由神经元、星形胶质细胞、血管内皮细胞、基底膜和周围的平滑肌细胞共同构成(图1)。神经元作为NVU的核心组成部分,主要通过突触连接形成复杂的神经网络,不仅参与学习、记忆和感知等功能,还负责信息传递和处理。星形胶质细胞是最主要、数量最多的神经胶质细胞,其通过足突与神经元和血管连接,确保细胞间的紧密联系,并在维持离子平衡、清除神经递质、支持神经元代谢等方面发挥着关键作用<sup>[3]</sup>。研究表明<sup>[4]</sup>,血管内皮细胞构成脑毛细血管的内壁,并通过紧密连接形成BBB,有利于调节脑组织的通透性,保护脑细胞免受有害物质的侵害,并维持脑内环境的稳定。基底膜覆盖于内皮细胞和星形胶质细胞外,是细胞外基质的一部分,提供结构支持并调节细胞间的信号传递,在维持BBB的完整性和功能中具有重要作用。以上各组成部分通过复杂的相互作用,共同维持着BBB的完整性、调节血流量及大脑生理活动,从而确保大脑内环境的稳态。

### 1.2 NVU相关的生物标志物

#### 1.2.1 紧密连接蛋白

AD患者常表现出紧密连接蛋白(如Claudin-5和Occludin)的结构损害,导致BBB的完整性受损,从而使有害物质和炎症因子进入大脑,加重神经元的损伤。其中,Claudin-5主要来源于血管内皮细

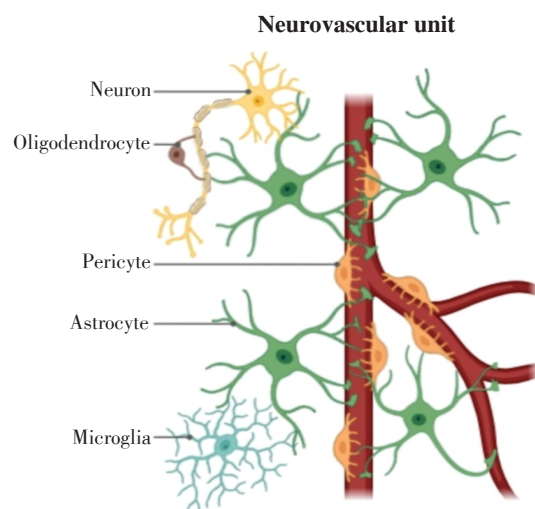


图1 NUV的组成及其相互作用

Figure 1 Composition and interaction of NVU

胞,是BBB中的一种关键紧密连接蛋白,发挥着维持细胞间屏障功能和支持组织结构等作用。Tachibana等<sup>[5]</sup>建立免疫测定系统,测量AD患者的Claudin-5水平。结果发现,随着年龄增长,Claudin-5蛋白水平逐渐下降,并存在年龄依赖性BBB变化,提示Claudin-5可能是AD诊断的潜在生物标志物。越来越多研究表明,Occludin作为另一个重要的紧密连接蛋白,能够影响紧密连接的结构和功能,调节BBB的通透性,这种机制对于保持脑组织稳态至关重要<sup>[6-7]</sup>。在AD的发生过程中,Occludin的表达和功能可能发生改变,从而导致BBB的完整性进一步破坏,最终加剧神经损伤和疾病进展<sup>[8]</sup>。因此,Occludin同样可以作为评估AD患者BBB功能损伤的重要生物标志物。

#### 1.2.2 A $\beta$

A $\beta$ 是淀粉样肽前体蛋白(amyloid precursor protein, APP)的水解产物,它作为一种微管相关蛋白,能够调节轴突微管的成束和稳定性,并通过一系列酶促反应在突触部位释放,最终影响AD患者的认知功能。越来越多的研究表明,A $\beta$ 的生成与清除失衡导致淀粉样蛋白的沉积和神经毒性A $\beta$ 寡聚体的形成<sup>[9]</sup>。A $\beta$ 42和A $\beta$ 40比例(A $\beta$ 42/40)无论在AD患者还是其他正常人群中,均可较好地地区分脑内A $\beta$ 病理状态,其诊断准确性随检测技术不同而有较大差异,基于质谱检测的血浆A $\beta$ 42/40鉴别A $\beta$ 病理的准确率可达82%~88%<sup>[10]</sup>。随着医疗技术发展,针对A $\beta$ 的免疫疗法和小分子药物(如乙酰胆碱、加兰他敏)等仍在研发,旨在通过降低A $\beta$ 的聚集和毒性来延缓AD患者的病程<sup>[11]</sup>。近年来,液体活检技术因

其无创性和动态监测能力,已成为AD诊断和疾病进展评估的重要手段<sup>[12]</sup>。研究发现,由Elecsys全自动平台检测的血浆A $\beta$ 42和A $\beta$ 40可用于判断大脑A $\beta$ 聚集情况<sup>[13]</sup>。由此可见,该技术将是一种有希望的AD诊断方法,

### 1.2.3 Tau蛋白

最新研究表明,血浆p-Tau181、p-Tau231及p-Tau217等不同位点磷酸化的Tau蛋白在AD早期诊断中具有良好的诊断效能,可作为临床应用的生物标志物<sup>[14-15]</sup>。研究发现,ELISA方法可以用来定量脑脊液(cerebrospinal fluid, CSF)中的Tau,这种方法是基于单克隆抗Tau抗体与多克隆抗Tau抗血清的夹心形式<sup>[16]</sup>。在一项横断面研究中,通过全自动化学发光平台测量CSF水平发现,血浆p-Tau181水平与认知能力下降的阶段呈正相关<sup>[17]</sup>。除此之外,超灵敏单分子免疫检测技术可用于p-Tau181检测,配合apoe基因筛查,能够实现AD早期筛查及辅助诊断,预测临床AD疾病进展,提供AD治疗指导和疗效评估<sup>[18]</sup>。其他研究发现,p-Tau217在A $\beta$ 病理沉积后明显增加,与临床病情进展和脑萎缩的关联性最强,可作为A $\beta$ 病理形成后疾病进展的标志<sup>[19-20]</sup>。通过比较血浆和CSF中p-Tau217、p-Tau181和p-Tau231在记忆诊所队列中的诊断准确性,结果发现,血浆p-Tau217在识别AD病理和临床表型方面具有更好的性能<sup>[21]</sup>。更有意义的是,与经典的A $\beta$ 和Tau标志物相比,p-Tau231可能先于以上标志物发生轻微变化,这对神经退行性疾病的鉴别诊断具有较高的灵敏度和特异度,可能有助于提高早期诊断的准确性<sup>[22]</sup>。综上所述,p-Tau在AD患者CSF中通常会显著升高,这些标志物能够反映脑内神经元损伤和疾病进展。

### 1.2.4 新型生物标志物

胶质纤维酸性蛋白(glial fibrillary acidic protein, GFAP)主要存在于星形胶质细胞中,已被国家药品监督管理局批准用于创伤性脑损伤患者的诊断<sup>[23-24]</sup>。此外,GFAP在一些临床应用中优于血浆A $\beta$ 42/40,对于AD和其他认知障碍相关疾病的诊断也具有较好的价值,提示其在AD预后和临床试验中监测靶向药物疗效方面的潜力<sup>[25]</sup>。Wang等<sup>[26]</sup>采用共定位和孟德尔随机化分析,发现半乳糖-3-O-硫酸转移酶2(galactose-3-O-sulfotransferase 2, GAL3ST2)、RNA聚合酶I亚基C(RNA polymerase I subunit C, POLR1C)和桥接整合因子1(bridging integrator 1, BIN1)3种蛋白质的遗传预测水平与高共定位的AD风险增加有关,被确定为AD的潜在治疗新靶点,值得进一步研

究。此外,神经免疫炎性标志物髓系细胞触发受体2(triggering receptor expressed on myeloid cells 2, TREM2)、微血管病变标志物血小板衍生生长因子受体 $\beta$ (platelet-derived growth factor receptor beta, PDGFRB)及突触功能障碍标志物神经颗粒素、突触体相关蛋白25(synaptosome-associated protein 25, SNAP25)等,从不同方面反映了AD的复杂病理生理改变,均可作为AD中NVU相关的生物标志物<sup>[27]</sup>。以上新型生物标志物的研究不仅有助于深入理解AD的病理机制,还能为早期干预提供新方向,尤其是在NVU功能损伤上。此外,血液核酸、外泌体标志物也是新的AD标志物研究方向。

## 2 NVU在AD发生发展中的作用

### 2.1 维持BBB的完整性

一项临床研究显示,A $\beta$ 斑块的沉积和Tau蛋白的异常磷酸化会导致AD患者BBB的破坏,加重脑损伤<sup>[28]</sup>。而NVU各成分在这一过程中发挥着至关重要的作用。内皮细胞通过表达Occludin、Claudin和ZO-1等紧密连接蛋白,形成BBB的核心结构,防止有害物质的通过<sup>[29]</sup>。Bernocchi等<sup>[30]</sup>研究发现,星形胶质细胞还可以通过分泌转化生长因子- $\beta$ (transforming growth factor beta, TGF- $\beta$ )、血管内皮生长因子(vascular endothelial growth factor, VEGF)调节内皮细胞的功能,增强BBB的完整性。除此之外,周细胞通过分泌血小板衍生生长因子(platelet-derived growth factor, PDGF)等帮助稳定内皮细胞,促进血管发育和功能维持<sup>[31]</sup>。由此可见,NVU通过精确的细胞间互动和信号调控,确保BBB的完整性和选择性通透,从而维持大脑内环境的稳态。

### 2.2 减轻神经炎症

神经炎症被认为是AD除A $\beta$ 异常沉积、Tau蛋白过度磷酸化而形成的NFT以外的第3个突出的病理性特征。研究表明,神经元和星形胶质细胞作为NVU的核心成分,其线粒体功能障碍会引发与A $\beta$ 和Tau相关的病理级联反应<sup>[32]</sup>。ADP-核糖基环化酶(CD38在神经元、星形胶质细胞和小胶质细胞中高度表达,其活化能够增强星形胶质细胞中线粒体的释放<sup>[33]</sup>。研究发现,在AD小鼠模型中,当星形胶质细胞的CD38表达上调后,健康线粒体从星形胶质细胞向神经元的转移能力显著增强,从而减轻了神经炎症,降低了氧化应激水平,并减少了A $\beta$ 的积累<sup>[34]</sup>,这提示CD38可能在AD的病理进程中扮演重要调节角色,为神经炎症的干预提供了潜在靶点。

### 2.3 减少细胞凋亡

在AD的病理进程中,氧化应激、钙超载等刺激会导致线粒体膜电位丧失,促使细胞色素C释放到细胞质中,从而激活半胱天冬酶(caspase)-9和caspase-3,最终启动细胞凋亡。研究发现,通过抑制内质网应激,上调抗凋亡因子B细胞淋巴瘤-2基因(B-cell lymphoma, Bcl-2)蛋白水平,下调Bcl-2关联X蛋白(Bcl-2 associated X protein, Bax)和caspase-3的表达,可以有效降低A $\beta$ 诱导的神经元凋亡,从而改善AD的认知功能<sup>[35]</sup>。水通道蛋白-4(aquaporin 4, AQP4)主要分布在星形胶质细胞周围,呈去极化分布状态。另一项研究发现,通过调节星形胶质细胞表型极化及AQP4极化分布,能够促进脑内A $\beta$ 和p-Tau蛋白的清除,从而减少神经元损伤与凋亡,改善AD模型的行为学表现<sup>[36]</sup>。

### 2.4 调控血管发育和完整性

NVU通过神经-血管耦合机制调节脑血流,以满足神经元对氧气和能量代谢的需求,是维持大脑稳态的重要基础。在AD中,神经-血管耦合紊乱导致脑血流调节功能异常,进一步加剧了脑组织缺血、缺氧和代谢失衡的病理过程。越来越多的研究表明,星形胶质细胞能够分泌多种血管生成相关因子,包括VEGF、碱性成纤维细胞生长因子(basic fibroblast growth factor, bFGF)和PDGF等。这些因子通过与血管内皮细胞上的特异性受体结合,促进内皮细胞的增殖、迁移以及新生血管的形成,已被证实是大脑血管系统的关键调节者<sup>[37]</sup>。然而,在AD病理环境下,这些因子的表达和功能可能受到异常调控,导致血管生成紊乱、BBB受损及微循环障碍的加剧。因此,深入探究星形胶质细胞与血管生成因子的交互机制,可能为开发以恢复脑血流和修复NVU为靶点的治疗策略奠定理论基础。

## 3 中医药调控NVU及其生物标志物在AD中的作用研究

### 3.1 中药复方

中医药在AD的防治中以其多靶点、多层次的调节作用显示出独特优势,尤其是在调控NVU功能方面具有重要潜力。研究表明,糖原合成酶激酶-3 $\beta$ (glycogen synthase kinase-3 beta, GSK-3 $\beta$ )是调节Tau蛋白磷酸化的关键激酶,与AD病理变化密切相关<sup>[38]</sup>。Wu等<sup>[39]</sup>通过使用远志汤治疗AD小鼠模型,发现其不仅降低了 $\beta$ -分泌酶1(beta-secretase 1, BACE1)和A $\beta$ 水平,还下调了GSK-3 $\beta$ 及其磷酸化的

表达,进而减少Tau蛋白磷酸化,改善小鼠的空间定向和记忆能力。环磷酸腺苷效应元件结合蛋白(cyclic-AMP response binding protein, CREB)是一种与基因转录调控密切相关的蛋白质,其功能依赖于GSK-3 $\beta$ 的磷酸化状态,在学习与记忆过程中发挥重要作用<sup>[40-41]</sup>。研究显示,补肾化痰益智方可以通过GSK-3 $\beta$ /CREB信号通路,抑制Tau蛋白过度磷酸化,从而减少NFT的形成,显著改善大鼠的学习与记忆障碍<sup>[42]</sup>。另一项研究发现,当归芍药散可以减少Tau的异常磷酸化并调节环磷酸腺苷(cyclic adenosine monophosphate, cAMP)/蛋白激酶A(protein kinase A, PKA)/CREB通路以改善AD小鼠的认知和细胞凋亡<sup>[43]</sup>。此外,Liao等<sup>[44]</sup>实验表明,补肾益智方可通过改善线粒体功能,缓解脑内神经炎症、氧化应激及细胞凋亡,从而有效改善AD模型大鼠的神经行为功能。一项临床研究发现,华佗再造丸具有活血化瘀及化痰通络的作用,能够提高AD患者的认知功能,缓解患者学习记忆力及行为活动能力减退<sup>[45]</sup>。这些研究进一步验证了中医药在调控AD核心病理机制中的潜在优势,尤其是在减轻神经毒性、改善突触功能和增强认知行为方面,提供了重要的理论依据和临床应用价值。

### 3.2 中药单体

人参皂甙Rb1作为人参的主要活性成分,广泛应用于改善学习和记忆相关的疾病。研究表明,人参皂甙Rb1能够保护AD模型中的细胞免受A $\beta$ 的侵害,减轻细胞毒性,并通过降低活性氧的生成、抑制脂质过氧化以及减少细胞凋亡,发挥神经保护作用<sup>[46]</sup>。甘草素是从甘草中提取的一种黄酮类化合物。生物碱类川芎嗪是川芎的主要活性成分,川芎嗪能够显著减少A $\beta$ 的沉积和Tau蛋白的磷酸化,同时改善线粒体功能,减少氧化应激<sup>[47]</sup>。石菖蒲又称“剑草”,具有改善认知障碍、抗抑郁等作用,其活性成分山柰酚通过减弱氧化应激、炎症反应以及减少A $\beta$ 诱导的神经毒性,调节胆碱能系统,发挥改善AD的作用<sup>[48]</sup>。一项多中心、开放标签、前瞻性的临床研究发现,银杏叶提取物对重度神经认知障碍患者具有良好的安全性<sup>[49]</sup>。在轻度认知障碍中,AD和其他神经退行性疾病的前驱阶段,炎症、氧化应激和代谢变化的联合表现是神经毒性和神经退行性变的常见途径。另一项研究表明,银杏叶通过干预上述病理机制,刺激海马体中的神经发生,增加神经可塑性,并抑制A $\beta$ 聚集和毒性<sup>[50]</sup>。这些研究表明,中医药活性成分通过多途径对AD的防治具有

重要潜力,能够缓解病理改变并改善认知功能。

### 3.3 中医针刺疗法

针刺疗法已被证明能够显著下调AD患者血清中Aβ1-42水平,有助于缓解神经炎症反应、减轻氧化应激并保护神经元,这些机制共同促进大脑功能的恢复,改善认知状态并延缓AD的发展<sup>[51]</sup>。值得注意的是,海马区域在空间学习和记忆过程中扮演着重要角色,针刺已被证明可有效改善海马的组织形态学和功能。最近研究表明,通过电针百会穴和肾俞穴治疗AD大鼠,可以有效减少海马CA1区Aβ和Tau蛋白的沉积,降低促炎因子肿瘤坏死因子(tumor necrosis factor, TNF)-α和白介素(interleukin, IL)-1β

的表达,减轻该区域的炎症反应,从而改善大鼠的学习和记忆功能<sup>[52]</sup>。在AD的病理过程中,凋亡蛋白Bcl-2与Bax的比例通常下降。Huang等<sup>[53]</sup>研究发现,针刺百会穴、大椎穴和双侧足三里可以有效上调Bcl-2的表达,并抑制Bax的表达。同时减轻海马CA1区域的神经元受损,从而改善AD大鼠的记忆能力。

综上所述,中医药能够在多个方面调控NVU(表1),但是中医药多成分、多靶点的特点使其作用机制复杂且难以明确。例如,中药复方可能同时作用于NVU的多个组成部分(如神经元、血管内皮细胞、星形胶质细胞等),但其具体分子机制尚未完全阐明。此外,中药成分在体内的代谢过程及其对

表1 中医药调控NVU治疗AD的作用机制

Table 1 The mechanisms of NVU regulated by traditional Chinese medicine in the treatment of AD

Methods of intervention	Influencing factors	Mechanisms of action
Traditional Chinese medicine compound		
Polygala soup <sup>[39]</sup>	Levels of GSK-3β and Aβ	Down-regulate the expression of GSK-3β and its phosphorylation, thereby reducing Tau protein phosphorylation and improving spatial orientation and memory ability of AD mice
Bushen Huatan Yizhi decoction <sup>[43]</sup>	Phosphorylated Tau protein	Inhibition of Tau protein hyperphosphorylation can reduce the formation of NFT and significantly improve learning and memory impairment in rats
Ditan soup <sup>[54]</sup>	Phosphorylated Tau protein	Reduce the hyperphosphorylation of Tau protein in the brain of AD mice, reduce Tau aggregation, and reduce neuronal apoptosis
Peony herb and licorice soup <sup>[55]</sup>	Microglial polarization	Reduce the aggregation of Aβ and the production of reactive oxygen species, promote the growth of neurites, regulate the polarization of microglia, and inhibit the expression of TNF-α, IL-6 and other inflammatory factors
Traditional Chinese medicine monomer		
Ginsenoside Rb1 <sup>[46]</sup>	Aβ level	Reduce inflammation and apoptosis stimulated by Aβ
Chuanshaozine <sup>[47]</sup>	Phosphorylation levels of Aβ and Tau	Chuanshaozine could significantly reduce the deposition of Aβ and the phosphorylation level of Tau protein, improve mitochondrial function, and reduce oxidative stress
Kaempferol <sup>[48]</sup>	Aβ level	Reduce oxidative stress, inflammatory response and neurotoxicity induced by Aβ, regulate cholinergic system, and play a role in the improvement of AD
Isoglycyrrhizin <sup>[56]</sup>	Neuronal structure and function; Tau protein	Inhibit the hyperphosphorylation of Tau protein and reduce Tau aggregation and fibrosis
Ginseng peptide <sup>[57]</sup>	Oxidative stress	Inhibit the aggregation of Aβ1-42 and alleviate oxidative stress and neuronal injury induced by Aβ1-42
Acupuncture therapy		
Electroacupuncture <sup>[46]</sup>	Aβ level	Reduce the level of Aβ1-42 effectively
Electroacupuncture <sup>[52]</sup>	Deposition of Aβ and Tau	Reduce the deposition of Aβ and Tau protein in the hippocampal CA1 region, reduce the expression of pro-inflammatory factors TNF-α and IL-1β
Acupuncture needle <sup>[53]</sup>	Apoptosis protein level	Up-regulate the expression of Bcl-2 and inhibit the expression of Bax, alleviate neuronal damage in the hippocampal CA1 region
Electroacupuncture <sup>[58]</sup>	Aβ level	Reduce the generation of Aβ plaques and promote the expression of hippocampal myelin-related proteins
Acupuncture needle <sup>[59]</sup>	Microglia and astrocyte	Promote the release of anti-inflammatory factors from microglia and reduce the expression of IL-1β and IL-6

NVU标志物的动态调控机制仍需深入研究。因此,基础研究应深入探讨针灸治疗AD的分子机制,临床方面更应开展大规模、多中心、随机对照试验,并且通过多学科交叉合作和技术创新,为临床治疗AD提供更加有力的理论依据。

#### 4 总结与展望

AD是一种复杂的神经退行性疾病,其发生发展与NVU的功能障碍密切相关。中医药通过多靶点、多通路调控NVU及其关键标志物,在改善BBB通透性、减少神经炎症、抑制A $\beta$ 和Tau蛋白病理、调控小胶质细胞极化等方面发挥重要作用。然而,当前研究仍存在作用机制不明晰、靶点解析不足及临床转化有限等问题。未来应结合多组学技术(转录组、蛋白组、代谢组)解析中医药调控NVU的分子机制,并构建系统生物学模型,揭示关键靶点及信号通路。此外,中西医结合策略可优化NVU靶向治疗方案,提高治疗效果,减少药物不良反应。同时,需开展大规模、多中心的随机对照临床研究,利用影像学 and 生物标志物检测量化中医药对NVU的保护作用,提高临床证据水平,确保中医药调控NVU标志物的疗效和安全性,为其广泛应用提供科学依据。

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