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超声脑成像和经颅超声治疗技术在脑损伤康复中的应用

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摘要 超声作为诊断和治疗的工具在临床上有着广泛的应用。随着技术发展,新算法和高灵敏度超声换能器的研发在一定程度上弥补了颅骨对超声波的衰减,实现了超声在脑科学领域的应用。超声技术具有无创、安全、便携、低成本及无辐射的优势,在脑损伤检测和康复治疗中具有良好的前景。经颅多普勒超声(TCD)、功能超声成像(fUS)和超声定位显微镜(ULM)等超声脑成像技术分别通过信号叠加或利用微泡的空化效应来提高信噪比,在脑血管造影中达到比CT和MRI更高的分辨率,能够获取脑血管的实时图像、量化脑血流动力学参数,还可以结合脑电图同时记录全脑血流和神经元电活动变化,对脑血管病发生后神经血管功能进行多维度评估。在超声治疗方面,经颅聚焦超声能够无创性穿透颅骨精确聚焦于大脑皮层或深层脑组织。高强度聚焦超声(HIFU)和低强度聚焦超声(LIFU)分别利用超声的热效应和机械效应起到组织消融、血脑屏障开放、药物靶向输送、辅助溶栓和神经调控的作用,可应用于脑肿瘤、脑外伤、脑卒中、帕金森病、阿尔茨海默病、癫痫和抑郁症等多种神经系统疾病和精神疾病的治疗。目前,超声脑成像技术和经颅超声治疗技术尚处于发展阶段,未来还需进一步解决颅骨衰减效应、实现3D成像、建立神经调控超声参数标

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准、屏蔽听觉副作用等问题,同时开展更多临床研究为超声脑成像和无创性经颅超声治疗技术在脑损伤疾病的诊断和康复治疗的应用方面提供强有力的支持。

关键词 超声脑成像;经颅超声;脑损伤;神经康复;神经调控

超声是目前临床医学中应用最广泛的技术之一,可用于腹部实质性脏器、泌尿系统、心脏、甲状腺、乳腺、妇科、产科、颈部血管和淋巴结等相关疾病的辅助诊断。由于颅骨对超声波入射能量的衰减作用,曾一度限制了超声在脑科学领域的应用。近年来,超声技术不断突破,已经取得了新的进展。超声脑成像技术包括经颅多普勒超声(transcranial doppler, TCD)、功能超声成像(functional ultrasound, fUS)和超声定位显微镜(ultrasound localization microscopy, ULM)等,能以高分辨率对脑血管进行成像、量化血流动力学参数,在脑血管病的诊断中发挥重要作用。经颅超声治疗技术根据超声强度可分为高强度聚焦超声(high intensity focused ultrasound, HIFU)和低强度聚焦超声(low intensity focused ultrasound, LIFU),通过组织消融、血脑屏障开放、药物靶向输送、辅助溶栓和神经调控作用治疗脑肿瘤、脑血管病和神经退行性疾病等脑部疾病^[1]。本研究主要介绍超声脑成像和经颅超声治疗技术在脑损伤康复中的应用。

1 超声脑成像技术在脑损伤康复中的应用

计算机断层扫描(computed tomography, CT)和磁共振成像(magnetic resonance imaging, MRI)是目前临床上最常用的脑成像技术。然而,CT使用X射线可能增加癌症发病风险^[2];MRI比CT具有更高的分辨率,但存在仪器庞大、扫描时间长、检查成本高、无法实时监测等缺点^[3]。超声成像作为一种无创、安全、便携、低成本及无辐射的实时成像技术,在脑血管造影中的分辨率可达微米级^[4],比CT和MRI更高。TCD、fUS和ULM等超声脑成像技术在脑损伤检测和辅助诊断中具有较好的应用前景。

1.1 TCD在脑损伤康复中的应用

TCD利用颞骨和枕骨作为声学窗口来采集脑血流动力学信息,其高灵敏度换能器能够感应脑血管中血流变化引起的脉冲多普勒频移,并以多普勒频谱显示大脑前动脉、中动脉和后动脉的血流图像,评估脑血管的血流速度、血流方向和血管壁弹性^[5],可对脑卒中、颅内动脉狭窄和闭塞、脑血管痉挛、大脑深部小动脉瘤等脑血管疾病进行辅助诊断^[6]。便携式TCD可在床旁对颅内压实施动态监测,结合脑电图可对癫痫发作期间和脑梗死后血管

再通的微血流变化和神经元电活动进行多模态监测^[7],为制定康复治疗方案和判断预后提供量化数据。

超声频率较高将引起严重的声波衰减和失真,而较低的频率会导致成像分辨率低。因此,TCD通常使用1.5~2.5 MHz超声频率实现成像分辨率和穿透深度的平衡^[8],在临床康复实践中需根据具体的检测要求选择合适频率的探头。

1.2 fUS在脑损伤康复中的应用

传统多普勒超声通过信号叠加提高信噪比,但扫描速度尚不足以监测神经血管耦合引起的细微波流变化。超快超声成像每秒可以生成数千张图像,以高达20 kHz帧速率记录脑血管在毫秒内发生的瞬时变化^[9],由此发展而来的fUS对血流速度>10 mm/s的大血管和血流速度0.1~1 mm/s的微血管脑血容量变化都很敏感^[10]。通过fUS可以监测脑梗死发病和溶栓治疗后2 h脑血容量快速而微小的变化,对脑血流再灌注区域进行精准定位和标准化测量,相当于MRI在24 h内观测到的组织学病变体积^[10],使fUS可在发病和治疗早期对脑梗死的预后进行预测。此外,fUS能够基于神经血管耦合机制探究神经元激活与毛细血管反应的相关性,受到气味刺激的小鼠嗅球神经元树突中Ca²⁺浓度与发生功能性充血的周围毛细血管内红细胞速度呈线性关系^[11],使fUS具有对神经元活动进行定量评估的潜在用途。

fUS与脑电图相结合可以同时记录全脑的实时血流变化和神经元电活动数据^[12],并通过全脑3D成像反映出与静息态功能磁共振成像(functional magnetic resonance imaging, fMRI)相似的大脑功能连接变化^[13],且具有比fMRI更高的时间分辨率和空间分辨率^[14]。有研究显示,在非人灵长类动物模型颅骨内植入小型超声换能器记录后顶叶皮层在运动规划期的活动,并通过机器学习算法预测其眼球运动和上肢运动意图的准确率高达78%和89%^[15],使fUS在运动想象疗法和脑机接口方面的应用成为可能。

由于颅骨的存在使fUS的高频超声波发生衰减和畸变,目前有关fUS的研究大多会对动物模型进行开颅手术、颅骨减薄手术或使用声学透明颅窗^[12]。已有临床研究将fUS应用于开颅手术和以新生儿前

窗作为颅窗进行检测^[16-17]。

1.3 ULM在脑损伤康复中的应用

为了将fUS应用到颅骨完整的动物和人类中,研究人员通过静脉注射微泡造影剂增强脑血流信号以补偿颅骨衰减。ULM是利用微泡产生非线性回波的稀疏性通过逐帧定位和叠加实现脑血管精确成像的超分辨率成像技术^[18],能够描绘直径 $< 10 \mu\text{m}$ 、血流速度低至 1 mm/s 的微小血管^[10]。使用分辨率 $8 \mu\text{m}$ 的ULM对大鼠进行经颅全脑成像检查,对较大血管(直径 $> 100 \mu\text{m}$)可在 10 s 内完成扫描, 3 min 内完成整个脑血管网绘制^[19]。

超声设备具有成本低、便携性好和安全性高的优点,ULM能以超高分辨率对全脑微血管和血流进行快速重建和测量,对于脑卒中、脑血管闭塞、阿尔茨海默病(Alzheimer's disease, AD)等神经血管疾病的诊断具有重要意义。

2 经颅超声治疗技术在脑损伤康复中的应用

超声波能够无创地穿透颅骨,精准聚焦在大脑的特定区域,将声能传输至脑组织中。HIFU产生的作用为组织消融,使靶细胞发生热坏死;LIFU的治疗作用主要体现在打开血脑屏障、药物靶向输送和神经调控等,超声干预期间不发生组织损伤。

2.1 HIFU在脑损伤康复中的应用

超声热消融术是以HIFU精确聚焦于脑组织,产生 $50 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ 以上高温使细胞发生不可逆的热凝变性^[20]。热消融不仅对肿瘤实质进行局灶性破坏,还可以减少瘤体周围的血管增生。传统HIFU治疗胶质母细胞瘤需进行颅骨切除术为超声治疗提供声学骨窗,而不切除颅骨亦可有效消融复发性间变性星形细胞瘤,术后6个月随访显示肿瘤体积缩小、周围水肿减少^[21],证实了无创性热消融术的疗效。以丘脑为靶点的热消融术已被批准用于治疗原发性震颤和以震颤为主要表现的帕金森病,也有研究尝试将其应用于慢性疼痛、精神疾病和癫痫的治疗^[22]。

超声波穿透颅骨时会产生热量,因此HIFU通常使用带有冷却系统的传感器以免发生热损伤^[20]。颅骨过热也限制了HIFU只能聚焦于大脑的中心区域,无法作用于颅底或后颅窝^[23]。

2.2 LIFU在脑损伤康复中的应用

2.2.1 药物靶向输送 血脑屏障(blood-brain barrier, BBB)是保护中枢神经系统免受化学物质损伤的重要屏障,也是阻断化疗药和神经递质等药物进入脑内的主要障碍^[24]。微泡介导的LIFU利用超声波的空化效应使BBB选择性打开,微泡可以降低诱导空化所需的声能,从而减少损伤周围组织的可能

性,同时扩大BBB开口,增强药物扩散^[25]。LIFU可将促红细胞生成素输送到脑缺血损伤区,通过提高血管通透性、促进缺血区神经元恢复、减少脑梗死体积来发挥神经保护作用^[26],并可将神经营养因子输送至大脑,促进脑白质修复和神经功能恢复,延缓AD、帕金森病等神经退行性疾病的发展^[25]。LIFU在适当的超声学参数下打开BBB已被证实是安全的,经过数十秒至数分钟LIFU干预的BBB可在数小时内保持通透性,从而延长药物治疗时间、提高治疗效果。

2.2.2 超声辅助溶栓 目前急性缺血性脑卒中治疗主要为发病 $3\sim 4.5 \text{ h}$ 内静脉注射组织型纤溶酶原激活剂(tissue plasminogen activator, tPA)行溶栓治疗^[27],但由于就医不及时,只有7%患者符合时间窗可以进行tPA治疗^[28]。LIFU辅助溶栓利用超声波的机械振动和空化效应增强tPA向血栓渗透、加速血栓溶解,可以有效改善血流灌注、显著减少脑梗死灶体积,并在不引起出血的情况下改善神经功能^[29]。LIFU联合微泡造影剂产生的稳定空化效应能够降低颅内出血风险,提高溶栓安全性,同时增强超声辅助溶栓的效果^[30]。但超声辅助溶栓的局限性在于颅骨对超声信号的衰减以及仍需静脉注射tPA。

有研究将经颅超声应用于出血性脑卒中治疗,MRI引导HIFU产生的声热可以溶解凝血块,且不会造成额外的脑损伤、BBB分解或热坏死,仅周围组织温度略有升高^[31]。目前这种技术尚处于临床前阶段,未来还需进一步优化超声参数、评估出血风险以及对周围脑实质的潜在影响。

2.2.3 超声神经调控 非侵入性神经调控技术是脑损伤后功能康复的重要工具。目前临床应用最广泛的经颅磁刺激(transcranial magnetic stimulation, TMS)和经颅直流电刺激(transcranial direct current stimulation, tDCS)分别通过电磁感应和直流电调节大脑兴奋性以改善脑功能,但这2种技术均无法以高空间精度来定位。经颅聚焦超声刺激(transcranial focused ultrasound stimulation, tFUS)能够以毫米级的高空间分辨率无创性穿透完整的颅骨,向大脑深处组织传输低强度超声波来调节神经活动。低频($< 2.5 \text{ MHz}$)tFUS刺激深度较深,可以聚焦于丘脑、海马、杏仁核等深部脑组织;使用更高频率(5 MHz)tFUS可以提高其空间分辨率,在动物大脑中的聚焦直径 $< 1 \text{ mm}$ 。

短时tFUS可以短暂改变神经元兴奋性和大脑网络连接,而多周期tFUS可以诱导长期神经可塑性

改变、产生持续神经调节效应^[32],对脑卒中、AD、癫痫、帕金森病等神经系统疾病具有潜在的治疗作用。

2.2.3.1 tFUS对脑缺血的神经保护作用 tFUS可能为缺血性脑卒中提供一种新的预防和治疗方法。tFUS预处理能够减少大脑中动脉阻塞诱导的脑缺血损伤,抑制细胞凋亡和脑源性神经营养因子(brain-derived neurotrophic factor, BDNF)表达下调,减轻神经功能障碍,并有效预防脑缺血再灌注损伤^[33]。

对于已经发生的脑缺血损伤,持续的低频tFUS干预也可以减少脑梗死体积,改善神经功能缺损评分和神经行为学测试评分,并通过促进内源性小胶质细胞M2型极化,调节炎症因子白细胞介素(interleukin, IL)-4、IL-10表达水平以抑制炎症反应^[34]。tFUS还可以改善急性脑缺血损伤期间发生的BBB功能障碍,减少血管源性水肿和神经元凋亡^[35],促进神经血管生成和突触重塑,从而发挥神经保护作用,且tFUS干预介入时间越早,获得的神经保护作用越大^[36]。

2.2.3.2 tFUS对认知障碍的治疗作用 大脑神经网络 γ 振荡在注意力、学习和记忆等认知活动中起到重要作用,tFUS刺激可以显著增加 γ 振荡功率^[37],诱导促炎型小胶质细胞向抗炎型转化,并通过激活内皮型一氧化氮合酶和神经营养因子的表达,减少前边缘皮层和海马体Iba-1阳性的小胶质细胞、 β -淀粉样斑块来治疗血管性痴呆和AD引起的认知障碍^[38]。

有研究显示,AD患者经过2~4周tFUS治疗,神经心理评分显著提高,fMRI显示记忆相关网络连接增强,认知功能改善可持续3个月^[39]。此外,tFUS可以提高BDNF和葡萄糖代谢水平,促进海马体血管内皮生长因子诱导的血管生成,减少脑皮质萎缩^[40],表明tFUS不仅能促进AD患者认知恢复,也可适用于治疗其他神经退行性疾病。

鉴于BDNF在抑郁症发病机制中具有重要作用,而tFUS可以促进大鼠海马体BDNF表达,逆转核心抑郁症表型,改善抑郁症大鼠的探索行为和快感缺乏,因此具有抗抑郁药样作用^[41]。

2.2.3.3 tFUS对癫痫和震颤的抑制作用 目前难治性癫痫的治疗以侵入性为主,包括癫痫病灶切除术、深部脑刺激、迷走神经电刺激和反应性神经电刺激,而tFUS可能成为治疗癫痫的无创性替代疗法。脑电图监测显示,tFUS能够特异性降低 θ 节律相对功率,延长癫痫发作潜伏期和缩短癫痫发作持

续时间,并通过激活 γ -氨基丁酸能神经元抑制大脑皮层和海马的神经元兴奋性^[42],有效减少癫痫发作频率。

tFUS可能通过其抗神经炎症作用成为治疗帕金森病的新方法。tFUS能够抑制小胶质细胞和星形胶质细胞激活引起的炎症反应,降低1-甲基-4-苯基-1,2,3,6-四氢吡啶诱导的多巴胺能神经元毒性,改善细胞内氧化应激和线粒体功能障碍,降低运动皮层和丘脑底核神经元 β 振荡功率,明显减弱 β 波与高 γ 波和纹波之间相位振幅耦合强度^[43],从而抑制震颤,提高帕金森病小鼠的运动和平衡功能,且tFUS持续时间越长,治疗效果越好。

与TMS相似,tFUS也具有增强和抑制神经元兴奋性的双相调节作用,其效应取决于超声参数,包括声强、频率、脉冲重复频率和超声持续时间^[44]。tFUS聚焦直径小、穿透深度深的优势能较好地弥补TMS和tDCS的不足,在脑损伤疾病的康复治疗中有一定的应用价值。tFUS安全性主要取决于由声辐射力或声空化引起的机械效应,该效应可能会破坏正常的细胞结构,并导致靶组织周围毛细血管出血^[5]。在动物和人类中已分别验证了在一定超声参数范围内tFUS不会造成脑组织损伤,除了听觉副作用和皮肤刺激以外,未见严重不良反应^[45-46]。

3 小结

超声波可以无创性地穿透颅骨,基于机械效应或热效应实现脑成像、组织消融、药物靶向输送、溶栓和神经调控等作用。目前超声脑成像和经颅超声治疗技术尚处于发展阶段,研究以动物模型为主,临床应用有限。虽然部分基础和临床研究证实,低强度聚焦超声在药物靶向输送和神经调控的有效性,但相关机制尚未明确。未来还需进一步解决颅骨衰减效应、实现3D成像、建立神经调控超声参数标准、屏蔽听觉副作用等问题,也需要开展更多临床研究为超声脑成像和无创性经颅超声治疗技术在脑损伤疾病的诊断和康复治疗的应用提供强有力的支持。

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Applications of Ultrasonic Brain Imaging and Transcranial Ultrasound Therapy in Brain Injury Rehabilitation

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ABSTRACT Ultrasound was widely used in clinical practice as a tool for diagnosis and treatment. With the development of technology, the research and development of new algorithms and high-sensitivity ultrasound transducers have made up for the attenuation of ultrasound in the skull to a certain extent, and realized the application of ultrasound in the field of brain science. The advantages of ultrasound technology are non-invasive, safe, portable, low-cost and radiation-free, which has a great potential in the detection and rehabilitation of brain injury. Ultrasonic brain imaging techniques such as transcranial doppler (TCD), functional ultrasound imaging (fUS) and ultrasound localization microscopy (ULM) improve the signal to noise ratio by signal superposition or the cavitation effect of microbubbles, and achieve a higher resolution than CT and MRI in cerebral angiography. These ultrasound brain imaging techniques can obtain real-time images of brain tissue structures and quantify cerebral hemodynamic parameters. It can also be combined with EEG to simultaneously record the changes of the cerebral blood flow and neural activities, so as to conduct multi-dimensional evaluation of the neurovascular function after the occurrence of cerebrovascular disease. In terms of ultrasound treatment, transcranial focused ultrasound can penetrate the skull noninvasively and focus accurately on the cortex or deep brain tissues. High intensity focused ultrasound (HIFU) and low intensity focused ultrasound (LIFU) use the thermal and mechanical effects respectively to perform tissue ablation, blood-brain barrier opening, drug targeted delivery, ultrasound-assisted catheter-directed thrombolysis and neuromodulation, and can be applied to the treatment of brain tumors, brain trauma, stroke, Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, epilepsy, depression and other neurological diseases and mental diseases. At present, ultrasound brain imaging and therapeutic transcranial ultrasound are still in development. In the future, it is necessary to make further efforts to solve the problems such as cranial attenuation effect, 3D imaging development, establishment of the standard parameters on ultrasound neuromodulation and the reduction of the side effects in hearing. Meanwhile, more clinical researches will be conducted to provide strong support for the applications of ultrasound brain imaging and non-invasive transcranial ultrasound treatment in the diagnosis and rehabilitation of brain injury diseases.

KEY WORDS ultrasonic brain imaging; transcranial ultrasound; brain injury; neurorehabilitation; neuromodulation

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