Study on the Correlation Between the Genetics of Circadian Rhythms and Neurodegenerative Diseases

Yueci Yin*

Life Science, Westdale Secondary School, Hamilton, Ontario, ON L8S 1A5, Canada

Abstract: In the context of global population aging, the increasing incidence of neurodegenerative diseases presents a serious challenge to healthcare systems worldwide. This article meticulously reviews the genetic links between circadian rhythms and neurodegenerative diseases, revealing their complex interactions and potential implications for disease management and prevention. The foundational mechanisms of circadian rhythms, the roles of related genes, and the genetic basis of neurodegenerative diseases are explored. The relationship between circadian rhythm gene variations and neurodegenerative diseases is thoroughly discussed, and the risks posed by disruptions in the Circadian Rhythms are elucidated. Understanding the influence of circadian rhythms on neurodegenerative diseases may provide new directions for the development of therapeutic strategies, marking a step towards alleviating the burden of these diseases.

1. Introduction

Neurodegenerative diseases, such as Alzheimer's, and circadian rhythms—Circadian Rhythms—play crucial roles in human health and quality of life. Circadian rhythms regulate many aspects of our lives, including sleep, diet, and activity patterns, while neurodegenerative diseases have profound impacts on these areas. However, despite significant advancements in our understanding of these two domains in recent years, the interplay and mutual influence between them haven't received adequate scientific attention.

In recent years, some scientific literature has begun exploring the connection between these two fields. For instance, Musiek et al proposed a potential relationship between circadian rhythms and Alzheimer's disease in their research[1]. Leng et al further elucidated the potential role of circadian regulation in the development of neurodegenerative diseases[2]. Moreover, other studies have found that dysregulation of circadian rhythms might accelerate the progress of neurodegenerative diseases [3-4]. Simultaneously, research suggests that the impact of circadian rhythms on neuronal functions might be a key factor in the development of neurodegenerative diseases[5].However, despite these studies indicating a possible connection between circadian rhythms and neurodegenerative diseases, the precise understanding of this relationship and its implications for treatment methods remains unclear. Therefore, the primary objective of this paper is to further explore the correlation between circadian rhythm genes and neurodegenerative diseases, and attempt to understand how circadian dysregulation impacts the development and progression of neurodegenerative diseases.

This paper is organized as follows: Section 2 discusses the genetic basis of circadian rhythms, including basic mechanisms, related genes, and the interaction with neurological functions. Section 3 investigates the genetic basis of neurodegenerative diseases, detailing the basic mechanisms, role of related genes, and the relationship between genetics and neurological diseases. Section 4 explores the association of circadian rhythm genes with neurodegenerative diseases, examining gene variations, the risk due to Circadian Rhythms disruptions, and potential mechanisms. This study aims to provide new perspectives for understanding and treating these disorders.

2. Genetic Basis of Circadian Rhythms

2.1. The Basic Mechanism of the circadian rhythms

The circadian rhythms is an internal system of time perception that self-regulates in organisms over a period of approximately 24 hours. This invisible conductor not only regulates the rhythm of sleep and wakefulness but also affects various systems in the body, such as digestion, immunity, metabolism, and neuropsychological functions. This rhythm is of great significance to the survival of organisms. For example, it helps animals find food at the right time, avoid nocturnal predators, or reproduce at the appropriate time. The operation of the Circadian Rhythms involves a series of complex molecular processes, including the expression and inhibition of certain specific genes. The activities of these genes produce periodic protein levels, driving the cyclical operation of the Circadian Rhythms. When the sun rises, light information

*Ccorresponding author's e-mail: yueciyin158@gmail.com

is transmitted to the brain through the retina, initiating a series of nerve conduction and changes in gene expression. This process is like starting a timer that tells the organism: a new day has begun. Then, at different time points during the day, the body's Circadian Rhythms genes express in different modes, guiding the body into different physiological states. For instance, in the morning, due to the activation of Circadian Rhythms genes, the body's cortisol level will rise, putting the body into a wakeful and active state. And at night, another group of genes will be activated, guiding the body into a state of rest and repair. This is why we feel energetic in the morning and tired at night, longing for rest. This process is closely connected with the environmental illumination, temperature and other factors, but even without these external signals, the Circadian Rhythms can maintain a cycle of approximately 24 hours, which is why it is called "intrinsic."

However, the Circadian Rhythms is not a fixed system. It can be regulated by external factors to adapt to environmental changes. For example, after a long-distance trip across time zones, people will experience the so-called "jet lag." This is because the Circadian Rhythms needs some time to adjust to the new day and night rhythm. This process is like resetting a clock, requiring a period of adaptation and adjustment. In addition, some lifestyle habits, such as diet, exercise, and the physiological state of the organism, such as age, disease status, can all affect the operation of the Circadian Rhythms.

2.2. The Role of Circadian Rhythm-related Genes

The circadian rhythms, or the Circadian Rhythms, rely on several key genes, such as "Clock", "Bmal1", "Per", and "Cry". The proteins produced by these genes interact to form a complex signaling network, controlling the ticking of the Circadian Rhythms. These genes are closely connected with our daily life and lifestyle, influencing our physiological state and health. Just like a symphony, in the morning, the "Clock" and "Bmal1" genes begin to be active. The proteins they encode form a complex, acting as the conductor of the symphony, marking the beginning of the biological day. Then, this complex regulates the expression of other genes, such as "Per" and "Cry". The proteins encoded by "Per" and "Cry" accumulate as the day progresses and form another complex, which inhibits the activity of the "Clock" and "Bmal1" genes, like the ending part of the music, marking the end of the biological day. This mechanism forms a negative feedback loop, ensuring the rhythmic operation of our Circadian Rhythms.

In addition, the rhythm of these Circadian Rhythms genes also affects our daily activities and habits. For instance, light exposure influences the expression of these genes, thereby affecting the rhythm of the Circadian Rhythms. This is why using electronic devices late into the night can lead to difficulty falling asleep. At the same time, the rhythm of these genes also influences our eating habits. When the rhythm of these genes is misaligned, as in shift workers or people who frequently travel across time zones, it may lead to changes in appetite and metabolism, potentially resulting in health issues like obesity or diabetes. Below, we analyze the functions of these genes and their encoded proteins through a table 1:

Table 1. The functions of some genes and their encoded proteins.

Gene	Encoded Protein	Function
Clock	CLOCK protein	Forms a complex with BMAL1 protein, initiating the Circadian Rhythms
Bmal1	BMAL1 protein	Forms a complex with CLOCK protein, initiating the Circadian Rhythms
Per	PER protein	Accumulates and forms a complex with CRY protein, inhibiting the activity of the CLOCK/BMAL1 complex
Cry	CRY protein	Accumulates and forms a complex with PER protein, inhibiting the activity of the CLOCK/BMAL1 complex

In summary, understanding and maintaining the normal rhythm of Circadian Rhythms genes is crucial for maintaining health, preventing diseases, and improving the quality of life.

2.3. The Interaction between Circadian Rhythms and Neurological Functions

Circadian Rhythms, by regulating the activity of genes, exert significant impacts on our neural functions. These effects include the regulation of our sleep-wake cycles, memory, mood, and cognitive functions. The following analysis further reveals these effects through a series of genes and their corresponding encoded proteins. Circadian Rhythms directly impact our sleep-wake cycles. Research indicates that the CRY protein, encoded by the Cry gene, plays a key role in the sleep-wake cycle. When the activity of the Cry gene changes, it may cause alterations in our sleep patterns, affecting sleep quality and duration, and might even lead to insomnia or other sleep disorders. Simultaneously, Circadian Rhythms also influence our memory and learning capabilities. The Clock gene and its encoded CLOCK protein play a vital role in memory formation and retention. When the activity of the Clock gene is inhibited, it can have detrimental effects on memory formation and retention. Additionally, Circadian Rhythms correlate with our mood and cognitive functions. The Per gene and its encoded PER protein play a crucial role in regulating our mood, including mood fluctuations and symptoms of depression. On the other hand, the Bmal1 gene and its encoded BMAL1 protein directly impact our cognitive functions, including our attention, decision-making ability, and problem-solving skills. As shown in Table 2, these genes and their encoded proteins play diverse roles in neural functions:

Table 2. Genes and Their Impact on Neural Function.

Gene	Encoded Protein	Impact on Neural Function
Cry	CRY protein	Influences sleep-wake cycle, possibly leading to sleep disorders
Clock	CLOCK protein	Influences memory formation and retention
Per	PER protein	Affects mood, such as mood fluctuations and symptoms of depression
Bmal1	BMAL1 protein	Impacts cognitive functions, such as attention, decision-making ability, and problem-solving skills

In summary, circadian rhythm genes, by regulating the activity of their encoded proteins, have profound impacts on our neural functions. When the rhythm of the Circadian Rhythms is disrupted, it could affect our sleep, memory, mood, and cognitive functions, further influencing our quality of life. Therefore, maintaining a normal circadian rhythm is crucial for preserving neural function and overall health.

3. Genetic Basis of Neurodegenerative Diseases

3.1. Basic Mechanisms of Neurodegenerative Diseases

Neurodegenerative diseases, including Alzheimer's disease (AD), Parkinson's disease (PD), and Huntington's disease (HD), are a group of diseases caused by damage or death of neurons. The occurrence and development of these diseases are closely related to genetic foundations. Genetic studies have found that mutations or expression changes in certain genes can lead to the loss of function or death of neurons, resulting in corresponding neurodegenerative diseases [6]. Among these genes, mutations in APOE, APP, PSEN1, and PSEN2 are related to the occurrence of Alzheimer's disease, while mutations in LRRK2, SNCA, PARK2, and PINK1 are related to the occurrence of Parkinson's disease, and mutations in the HTT gene can cause Huntington's disease. These gene mutations usually result in the loss of function or overactivity of the corresponding proteins, thereby affecting the normal function of neurons. The following table 3 lists these genes, the proteins they encode, and their roles in the corresponding diseases:

Table 3. Genes, Encoded Proteins, and Their Roles in Neurodegenerative Disorders.

Gene	Protein Encoded	Disease	Role
APOE	Apolipoprotein E	Alzheimer's Disease	Involved in the transport of lipid molecules
APP	Amyloid precursor protein	Alzheimer's Disease	Generates β-amyloid protein, leading to neurofibrillary tangles
PSEN1/2	Presenilin 1/2	Alzheimer's Disease	Involved in the formation of γ-secretase complex, affecting the generation of β-amyloid protein
LRRK2	Leucine-rich repeat kinase 2	Parkinson's Disease	Regulates various signaling pathways, maintaining normal neuronal function
SNCA	α-synuclein	Parkinson's Disease	Regulates neurotransmitter release in the synapses
PARK2	Parkin	Parkinson's Disease	Involved in the degradation of harmful proteins within the cell
PINK1	PTEN-induced putative kinase 1	Parkinson's Disease	Regulates Parkin activity, participating in mitochondrial quality control
HTT	Huntingtin	Huntington's Disease	Involved in the development and survival of neurons

The impact of these gene mutations is not limited to a single neuron but affects the entire neural network, leading to a comprehensive decline in neural function. Understanding the role of these genes in neurodegenerative diseases helps us discover new treatment strategies, such as developing drugs that can correct these gene mutations or using gene editing technology to repair these mutated genes. However, the occurrence of these diseases is not only caused by gene mutations, and the influence of environmental factors and lifestyle cannot be ignored. Therefore, comprehensive research on genetics and environmental factors is vital for clarifying the pathogenesis of neurodegenerative diseases and developing effective treatments.

3.2. The Role of Genes Related to Neurodegenerative Diseases

Neurodegenerative diseases, particularly Alzheimer's disease, are closely associated with specific genetic mutations and expressions. The four genes APOE, APP, PSEN1, and PSEN2 are notably important in Alzheimer's disease. APOE encodes apolipoprotein E, which is involved in the transport of lipid molecules. Its ε4 allele is considered the most important genetic risk factor for Alzheimer's disease. The Amyloid Precursor Protein

(APP), encoded by the APP gene, can produce β-amyloid protein. The excessive accumulation of this protein leads to neurofibrillary tangles, thereby affecting the normal function of neurons. The proteins encoded by the PSEN1 and PSEN2 genes participate in the formation of the γ-secretase complex, affecting the production of β-amyloid protein.

These genetic mutations affect not only individual neurons but also the entire neural network, leading to comprehensive deterioration in neural function. However, it's important to understand that the occurrence of Alzheimer's disease is not solely caused by these genetic mutations. The influence of environmental factors and lifestyle habits cannot be overlooked. For instance, long-term mental stress, unhealthy dietary habits, and a lack of physical exercise can all increase the risk of Alzheimer's disease.

In-depth research on these disease-related genes is crucial for revealing the etiology and pathogenesis of neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's, as well as for developing effective treatment strategies. For example, scientists are attempting to develop drugs that can correct these genetic mutations or use gene editing technology to repair these mutated genes. However, it's also important to note that the prevention and treatment of diseases like Alzheimer's is not merely a biological issue. It requires a comprehensive consideration of various factors, including social, psychological, and lifestyle aspects.

3.3. The Relationship between Genetics and Neurological Diseases

Genetics play a key role in revealing the pathogenesis of neurodegenerative diseases, especially Alzheimer's disease. Observational research and genetic analysis of Alzheimer's disease have unveiled important genetic markers, providing deep insights into the genetic basis of the disease. For example, research on familial Alzheimer's disease reveals the role of mutations in genes such as APP, PSEN1, and PSEN2, which can lead to premature production and accumulation of beta-amyloid protein[7]. Meanwhile, the presence of the APOE ε4 allele has been widely recognized as a significant genetic risk factor for late-onset Alzheimer's disease[8]. However, a genetic perspective cannot fully explain all cases of Alzheimer's disease. Many people with Alzheimer's disease do not have apparent genetic risk factors, indicating that environmental factors and lifestyle also play a crucial role in the development of the disease[9]. For instance, certain lifestyle factors, such as unhealthy eating habits and lack of exercise, have been found to be closely linked to the risk of Alzheimer's disease.

The research and advancement in genetics provide us with a new perspective to understand the complexity of Alzheimer's disease, and also offer the possibility to develop effective prevention and treatment strategies. By understanding genetic risk factors, we can create more precise interventions, such as drug therapies or gene therapies targeting specific gene mutations. Simultaneously, we need to consider the interaction between genetic and environmental factors, and how they collectively influence the risk of Alzheimer's disease. In this context, genetics provides us with a powerful tool to more comprehensively understand and address Alzheimer's disease, a complex neurodegenerative disease.

4. The Association of Circadian Rhythm Genes with Neurodegenerative Diseases

4.1. Circadian Rhythm Gene Variations and Neurodegenerative Diseases

In recent years, researchers have found a close association between variations in circadian rhythm genes and neurodegenerative diseases, particularly Alzheimer's disease. The Circadian Rhythm is a natural mechanism within organisms that regulates various physiological processes such as sleep, wakefulness, appetite, and hormone secretion. In this system, a set of specific genes, known as circadian rhythm genes, play a central role. However, when these genes mutate, they can disrupt the circadian rhythm, subsequently affecting the normal functioning of the nervous system. Taking Alzheimer's disease as an example, many studies have found that patients with Alzheimer's often experience disruptions in their Circadian Rhythms, manifesting as reversed day and night cycles, sleep disorders, and other symptoms. The emergence of these symptoms may be partially attributed to mutations in circadian rhythm genes. For instance, some research has discovered that the PER2 gene, a crucial circadian rhythm gene, often mutates in patients with Alzheimer's, which may accelerate the progression of neurodegeneration[10].

In addition, mutations in circadian rhythm genes could potentially affect the metabolism of beta-amyloid, a major pathological hallmark of Alzheimer's disease. Some studies have found that a normal circadian rhythm can help regulate the clearance of beta-amyloid, while a disrupted rhythm may lead to the accumulation of beta-amyloid, further exacerbating the condition of Alzheimer's disease. However, although the association between circadian rhythm gene variations and Alzheimer's disease is becoming increasingly apparent, we still need more research to fully understand the complex relationship between the two. For example, we need to explore other potential circadian rhythm genes and how they interact with environmental factors and lifestyle factors to influence the risk of Alzheimer's disease. At the same time, we need to develop treatments for circadian rhythm disruptions to improve the quality of life for patients with Alzheimer's disease, and potentially halt or delay the progression of the disease.

4.2. The Risk of Neurodegenerative Diseases due to Disruptions in the Circadian Rhythms

Circadian rhythm disorder is a common physiological phenomenon, and recent research increasingly reveals its

potential impact on the risk of neurodegenerative diseases (Leng et al., 2019). Circadian rhythm disorder may weaken the self-repair and regeneration ability of neurons, directly affecting neuron health. By disrupting the life cycle of neurons, it accelerates the aging and death of neurons, thus increasing the risk of neurodegenerative diseases. At the same time, circadian rhythm disorder may trigger an inflammatory response in the body, further damaging neurons. The increase of inflammatory factors can trigger neuron inflammation and death, aggravating the course of neurodegenerative diseases. In addition, circadian rhythm disorder may also affect the blood supply to the brain, reducing the ability of neurons to obtain oxygen and nutrients. Such inadequate blood supply may lead to neuron hypoxia and malnutrition, further increasing the risk of neurodegenerative diseases. Sleep is a key factor in maintaining the circadian rhythm, and circadian rhythm disorder often affects the quality and duration of sleep. Long-term sleep deficiency and poor sleep quality have been proven to increase the risk of neurodegenerative diseases. More importantly, circadian rhythm disorder can change individual lifestyle habits, such as diet and exercise, which are known risk factors for neurodegenerative diseases. For example, circadian rhythm disorder may lead to nocturnal eating and weight gain, thereby increasing the risk of neurodegenerative diseases. Therefore, the importance of maintaining a normal circadian rhythm for the prevention of neurodegenerative diseases is self-evident. Maintaining good lifestyle habits, such as regular sleep and a balanced diet, to maintain our circadian rhythm is an effective way to prevent neurodegenerative diseases.

4.3. Potential Mechanisms and Pathways

Circadian rhythm, a crucial physiological process within all living organisms, governs our sleep-wake cycle, body temperature, hormone secretion, and more. However, when this rhythm is disrupted, it may lead to a series of health issues, including neurodegenerative diseases. Insufficient or poor-quality sleep could potentially exacerbate the accumulation of β-amyloid proteins in the brain, which is one of the key characteristics of Alzheimer's disease. Simultaneously, dysregulation of circadian rhythm may trigger neuroinflammation and oxidative stress, both of which are believed to promote the development of neurodegenerative diseases. Thus, theoretically, by maintaining a normal circadian rhythm, we might be able to reduce the risk of neurodegenerative diseases, or at least slow their progression. For those already diagnosed with neurodegenerative diseases, improving sleep quality and regularity may also help alleviate their symptoms.

Nonetheless, although scientific research has revealed potential links between circadian rhythm and neurodegenerative diseases, we still need further studies to clarify these relationships and parse out the specific biological mechanisms involved. Moreover, we must recognize that circadian rhythm might be just one of many factors affecting the risk of neurodegenerative diseases. The onset of diseases like Alzheimer's is a multifactorial result, involving genetics, environment, lifestyle, and more. Hence, we cannot rely solely on adjusting circadian rhythm to prevent or treat neurodegenerative diseases. However, maintaining good daily routines, getting sufficient sleep, and eating healthily undoubtedly serve as important health measures in our lives. These practices can help us maintain overall health and lower the risk of neurodegenerative diseases.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the intricate interplay between our circadian rhythm and neurodegenerative diseases underlines the complexity of these conditions and the numerous factors that can influence their development. The intricate genetic underpinnings, from the genes that govern our Circadian Rhythms to those implicated in neurodegenerative diseases, highlight the multifactorial nature of these disorders. Understanding these relationships not only provides us with a clearer picture of how these diseases could potentially be managed or even prevented but also underscores the importance of maintaining our natural rhythms for overall health. However, we must also bear in mind that circadian rhythms are just one piece of a much larger puzzle. While there is potential for interventions targeting circadian rhythm disruptions to have a positive impact on neurodegenerative disease progression, we must continue to explore all avenues of research. As we deepen our understanding of these mechanisms, it is our hope that we can develop more effective strategies for the prevention, management, and treatment of these debilitating conditions. Indeed, every stride we make in our understanding brings us one step closer to winning the fight against neurodegenerative diseases.

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