

· 综述 ·

Research progresses of multimodal ultrasound technology for evaluating vulnerability of carotid atherosclerotic plaque

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[Abstract] Different pathologic features of vulnerable plaques may display heterogeneous ultrasonic performances during the formatting or developing procedures. Combined application of multimodal ultrasound technology is efficient for evaluating plaque components and assessing the vulnerability of plaques through analyzing various ultrasonic manifestations, having unique advantages and development potential for predicting the risk of ischemic stroke, guiding early clinical intervention, evaluating the efficacy and prognosis and so on. The research progresses of multimodal ultrasound technology for assessing the vulnerability of carotid atherosclerotic plaques were reviewed in this article.

[Keywords] carotid artery diseases; atherosclerotic plaque; ultrasonography; multimodal imaging

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多模态超声技术评估颈动脉粥样硬化斑块易损性研究进展

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[摘要] 易损斑块的不同病理特征可致其在形成和发展过程中的超声表现具有异质性。联合应用多模态超声技术可通过多种超声表现分析斑块内成分、评估其易损性,在预测缺血性卒中风险、指导临床早期干预及评估疗效和预后等方面具有独特优势及发展潜力。本文就多模态超声技术评估颈动脉粥样硬化斑块易损性的研究进展进行综述。

[关键词] 颈动脉疾病; 动脉粥样硬化斑块; 超声检查; 多模态成像

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缺血性脑卒中是全球范围内致成年人残疾或死亡的主要病因,且约 15% 与颈动脉粥样硬化斑块进行性生长及斑块破裂密切相关^[1]。易损斑块指易发生破裂、有血栓形成倾向的不稳定斑块。早期识别易损斑块有助于及时干预并降低脑缺血事件发生率。

超声为目前诊断和评估易损斑块的首选影像学检查^[2],但颈动脉斑块常因成分及形态不同而使其超声表现呈现异质性,致常规超声的鉴别诊断受限;联合应

用多模态超声技术获取更为全面的信息有助于评估颈动脉斑块易损性^[3-4]。本文对多模态超声技术评估颈动脉粥样硬化斑块易损性的研究进展进行综述。

1 病理特征

目前认为易损斑块的主要病理特征包括富含脂质的坏死核 (lipid-rich necrotic core, LRNC) 及整体伴炎症细胞浸润;距坏死核心最近处纤维帽厚度 $< 65 \mu\text{m}$, 纤维帽平均厚度 $< 200 \mu\text{m}$, 或存在明显破裂;斑块内表

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面见明显溃疡;斑块内见新生血管及出血(intraplaque hemorrhage, IPH)^[5]。不同病理特征可致易损斑块在形成和发展过程中的超声表现出现异质性。

2 多模态超声技术识别易损斑块特征

2.1 LRNC 动脉硬化斑块内单核细胞吞噬低密度脂蛋白颗粒转化为泡沫细胞并可相互聚集,促使LRNC形成并增大;LRNC过大、局部张力集中可致覆盖其表面的纤维帽破裂^[6]。

常规超声发现斑块内存在低回声区时,难以区分LRNC与IPH或血栓形成,使其难以用于直接评估LRNC。研究^[7]表明,颈动脉内-中膜厚度(intima-media thickness, IMT)较厚时,斑块内脂质核心较大、IPH较多,且以IMT诊断易损斑块的效能优于其他常规超声表现,提示可通过测量颈动脉IMT间接评估斑块易损性。利用三维超声后处理技术可自动获取斑块灰阶中位数(grayscale-median, GSM),斑块内脂质成分的GSM多低于纤维及钙化^[8],使基于三维超声获取GSM、进而分析识别LRNC、评估斑块易损性成为可能^[9]。

斑块内的脂质成分通常偏软,而钙化则偏硬。超声弹性成像可提供斑块的弹性力学信息,以之估测斑块弹性模量能反映颈动脉斑块硬度,进而分析斑块成分、评估易损性;且剪切波弹性成像的可靠性高于应变弹性成像^[10]。剪切波弹性成像相关研究^[11-12]结果显示,LRNC、IPH及血栓形成等均与易损斑块的弹性模量相关。

血管内超声将无创超声技术与有创导管技术相结合,可实时观察血管壁结构,揭示斑块成分、尤其LRNC^[13-14],评估斑块易损性;其中,相比传统血管内超声,利用后处理技术实现的虚拟组织学血管内超声评价LRNC效果更好^[15]。

2.2 炎性细胞浸润 颈动脉粥样硬化斑块继续发展可伴血管内皮损伤,炎症细胞黏附、聚集于受损血管内皮,可诱导形成易损斑块或加快其发展;斑块内炎性浸润较重时易出现斑块纤维帽破裂及血栓形成。

超声造影(contrast-enhanced ultrasound, CEUS)是目前动态检测易损斑块最有价值的影像学手段之一^[16]。注射造影剂后,CEUS模式下,斑块呈不同程度增强且可持续>6 min,即存在晚期增强;有学者^[17]认为这可能与单核细胞吞噬微泡或微泡通过整合素及补体黏附于受损血管内皮有关,反映斑块内炎性细胞浸润。OWEN等^[18]分析37例颈动脉斑块的CEUS表现,

发现于GSM较低斑块内可检测到延迟期长时间留存的微泡,提示CEUS可用于评估斑块易损性。吕一飞等^[19]发现,在CEUS显示晚期增强较为明显的斑块中,血管生成、基质降解及炎性化学标志物水平亦明显增高,推测晚期增强可作为易损斑块的表现之一。

斑块内炎性细胞浸润还可引起血管内皮表面黏附分子高水平表达,故血管内皮表面特异性黏附分子[如血管细胞黏附分子-1(vascular cell adhesion molecule-1, VCAM-1)]可作为评价斑块内炎性细胞浸润程度的理想靶点^[20],或通过靶向造影剂实时动态分析活体斑块内的炎症程度。

2.3 薄纤维帽和表面溃疡 纤维帽是可将LRNC与动脉管腔分隔开的纤维结缔组织,持续炎症降解细胞外基质可促使纤维帽变薄或纤维帽破裂,引发斑块表面溃疡,为缺血性脑卒中的独立危险因素。

超声背向散射积分技术可通过分析声学密度定量评估机体结构和成分变化。研究^[21]报道,各种颈动脉斑块中,纤维帽较薄者的超声背向散射积分值低于较厚者、易损斑块的超声背向散射积分值低于稳定斑块,提示可通过超声背向散射积分值无创检测纤维帽厚度、识别易损斑块。此外,LI等^[22]发现应变弹性成像图显示斑块表面弹性模量不均匀分布与易损斑块纤维帽变薄相关。

CDFI也可显示颈动脉粥样硬化斑块的表面溃疡,表现为斑块明显凹陷伴凹陷内彩色涡流征象,其诊断特异度较高(97.95%)但敏感度较差(仅35.7%)^[23]。

研究^[24]发现,与常规超声相比,三维超声显示斑块表面溃疡更为有效且可重复性更好;三维超声显示颈动脉粥样硬化斑块表面溃疡且溃疡体积 $\geq 5 \text{ mm}^3$ 预示发生缺血性脑卒中事件的风险较高^[25],故以三维超声检测斑块表面溃疡有助于进行风险分层。此外,三维超声还可多角度观察颈动脉粥样硬化斑块的立体特征、自动测量斑块总体积,而后者或可预测卒中、短暂性脑缺血发作及心肌梗死等心脑血管事件^[26]。

CEUS在识别斑块表面溃疡方面具有较高的敏感度、特异度和可重复性。RAFAILIDIS等^[27]以CEUS评估斑块表面溃疡,发现其与作为金标准的CT血管成像结果的一致性良好;JAIN等^[28]将CDFI及CEUS与病理所见进行对比,发现CEUS识别斑块表面溃疡的敏感度、特异度及准确率均优于CDFI。

2.4 斑块内新生血管和IPH 斑块内新生血管主要来自动脉外膜滋养血管,其内皮细胞尚未成熟,在缺

氧、炎症等刺激下易发生破裂及渗漏而致 IPH, 增加缺血性脑卒中风险。

CEUS 模式下造影剂微泡主要分布于斑块上游肩部, 与病理学所示新生血管形成特点相符^[29]。SCHINKEL 等^[30]发现颈动脉粥样斑块内新生血管密度与 CEUS 显示斑块内增强程度呈正相关。

超微血管成像 (superb microvascular imaging, SMI) 可不使用造影剂而检测低速血流信号并消除杂波, 对易损斑块内新生血管的检出率较高^[31], 有望成为有效评估斑块内新生血管的无创影像学方法之一。SMI 于斑块内检测出明显微血流信号是可用于预测 IPH 的重要影像学表现^[32]。

3 小结

多模态超声技术可动态观察动脉管壁结构, 通过颈动脉粥样硬化斑块超声表现分析斑块内成分、评估其易损性, 在预测缺血性脑卒中风险、指导临床早期干预、评估疗效和预后等方面具有独特优势及发展潜力, 但亦无法克服操作者依赖性及其他超声技术固有局限性。深度学习等人工智能算法或可提供帮助^[33]。

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