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褪黑素与绵羊的季节性生殖

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摘要:绵羊是一种短光照型生殖动物,具有明显的生殖季节性。人们普遍认为,绵羊生殖周期与环境光周期的同步变化是 通过褪黑素作用于下丘脑-垂体-性腺轴系统来实现的。近年来的不少研究结果表明,绵羊对光周期的感受性还受褪黑素 受体的调控。现从生态学(光周期的生殖效应)、神经内分泌学和分子生物学(褪黑素受体)等领域的研究进展出发,对褪 黑素调控绵羊自然季节性生殖的作用及机制进行系统综述。

关键词:绵羊;季节性生殖;褪黑素;褪黑素受体;光周期

Melatonin and seasonal reproduction in sheep

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Abstract: Sheep, beginning its breeding season in the autumn, is considered to be a short-day breeder. It is generally postulated that the pineal hormone melatonin synchronizes ovine reproductive cycle with environmental photoperiod through neuroendocrine changes in the hypothalamo-pituitary-gonadal axis. A lot of recent studies demonstrated that melatonin receptor was involved in the photoperiodism. This paper, based on the research progress in ecology, neuroendocrinology and molecular biology, reviews the regulative effect and mechanism of melatonin in the natural seasonal reproduction of sheep.

Key words: sheep; seasonal reproduction; melatonin; melatonin receptor; photoperiod

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经过长期进化,居住在季节性变化环境中的哺乳动物都形成一个共同的生殖策略,那就是将生殖季节 限定在一个适宜的时期,以确保母体正常分娩、泌乳丰富,并使后代能够顺利地生长和发育。因此,大多数 哺乳动物的生殖具有明显的季节性。目前普遍认为,光周期是协调哺乳动物季节性生殖与环境条件同步变 化的主要环境因子,而松果腺分泌的褪黑素(Melatonin)则在这个光周期感受过程中,处于神经内分泌调控 系统的中枢位置[1-2]。同大多数哺乳动物一样,绵羊生殖周期与环境光周期的同步变化是通过褪黑素作用 于下丘脑-垂体-性腺轴系统来实现的[3]。然而,给定一种环境光周期或内源褪黑素节律,在一年的某些季节 会显示出极其重要的作用,但在另一些季节则会被动物体内器官所忽视,这种差异可能与某些特定部位的 褪黑素受体数量发生改变有关[4.5]。本文主要从生态学(光周期的生殖效应)、神经内分泌学和分子生物学 (褪黑素受体)等领域,即从整体、细胞和分子水平等多个层次上的研究进展出发,对褪黑素调控绵羊季节 性生殖的作用及机制进行系统综述,旨为开展深入研究打下基础。

1 生态学研究

根据繁殖与光照长短的关系,可将动物分成"长光照动物"和"短光照动物"两大类群。绵羊的生殖季节 多在秋冬两季,此时环境光周期正在逐步缩短。由于短光照刺激但长光照抑制其生殖活动,因此传统上将 绵羊划成"短光照型生殖动物"[6](Short-day breeder)。目前普遍认为,光周期是影响绵羊季节性生殖的主 要环境因子[7.8]。虽然营养、温度以及社会因素等也会协同调节绵羊生殖周期的季节性变化,但生态学的相

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关研究主要集中在光周期的生殖效应上。

1.1 光周期对成年绵羊生殖活动的影响

Woodfill 等^[9]证实,启动雌羊秋季生殖活动的主要光周期线索是春夏季的长光照。O'Callaghan 等^[10]认为,夏至后的光周期缩短或短光照有助于维持生殖季节在秋冬发生的完整进程。Sweeney 等^[7]进一步指出,自然光周期条件下,夏至前的光周期延长和夏至后的光周期缩短共同协调雌羊在秋季进入生殖季节。但将绵羊置于光周期稳定的环境中时,生殖状态的改变仍长期存在^[11],从而表明绵羊的生殖周期受内源性节律调控。

不少证据表明,生殖季节的开始并不是因为秋季的短光照(或光周期缩短)激活所致,而是因为对以前起抑制作用的长光周期形成不应性(Photorefractoriness)的缘故^[12,13]。同样,生殖季节终止于晚冬,也并非长光照(或光周期延长)的抑制作用,而是缘于对以前曾起促进作用的短光照失去了反应性^[14]。光周期的作用似乎是引导内源性生殖节律在适当的时间进入(或终止)生殖活跃期^[9]。Malpaux 和 Karsch^[15]指出,春夏两季的长光照可起着协调内源节律的作用,从而使绵羊在秋季自发启动生殖活性。目前,各国学者普遍认为,内源性节律与环境光周期形成动态匹配,从而导致绵羊在每年的特定时间分别形成规则的性腺活跃期和静止期^[8]。

1.2 光周期对小羊性腺发育的影响

紧随着生殖季节之后,母羊在晚冬或早春产仔。小羊出生后 $25\sim35$ 周(秋季)进入青春期。小羊在出生后的发育过程中所经历的光周期会深刻影响其开始进入生殖周期的年龄。Yellon 和 Foster [16]指出,春季出生的小羊可利用夏季的一部分光照来确定秋季(短光照)时进入青春期的时间。Foster 等[17]进一步证实,在出生后第 $18\sim23$ 周时进行长光照,对维持其自然状态下的第 30 周龄进入青春期是必需的。

2 神经内分泌学研究

目前普遍认为,同其他哺乳动物一样,绵羊生殖周期与环境光周期的同步变化是通过褪黑素作用于下 丘脑(LHRH 和 β-内啡肽)-垂体(FSH/LH)-性腺(性类固醇激素)内分泌轴系统来实现的。

褪黑素,学名 N-乙酰-5-甲氧色胺,主要由脑部松果腺在夜间合成与分泌,其分泌时程的长短反映着环境光周期的变化情况。诸多研究表明,褪黑素可通过下丘脑-垂体系统,影响垂体前叶激素的分泌,从而改变性腺发育进程,形成对光周期变化的生殖反应[18-19]。外源褪黑素引入绵羊体内的结果证实,褪黑素可提供模仿短光照作用的刺激信号[20]。

2.1 下丘脑

Lincoln 和 Maeda^[21]、Malpaux 等^[22]证实,褪黑素可通过下丘脑的中间底侧部(Mediobasal hypothalamus,MBH)或邻近部位来调节光周期对生殖的影响。将褪黑素微胶囊埋植于下丘脑的 MBH,可导致血清中卵泡刺激素(Follicle-stimulating hormone,FSH)和β内啡肽水平升高^[23],血浆黄体生成素(Luteinizing hormone,LH)分泌增加^[22]。

在生殖周期的大部分阶段,促性腺激素释放激素(Luteinizing hormone-releasing hormone,LHRH)呈脉冲式分泌,其频率和幅度随着发育时期不同而变化。在排卵前 LH 分泌峰开始出现时,LHRH 分泌伴随出现强有力的增加,形成 LHRH 分泌峰^[24]。LHRH 自下丘脑释放后,通过垂体门脉系统到达垂体前叶,与 GtH(促性腺激素,Gonadotropin)细胞膜上的特异性受体结合,诱导一系列胞内过程,最终影响 GtH 分泌和排卵^[25]。不少研究证实,β-内啡肽抑制 LH 分泌。排卵前 LH 峰的可能形成过程如下^[26]:动情前期,下丘脑 β-内啡肽分泌增加,抑制 LHRH 分泌,导致可释放的 LHRH 贮存水平升高;动情期时,随着 β 内啡肽释放的减少,下丘脑去甲肾上腺素活性表达水平增加,从而刺激积累的 LHRH 释放;LHRH 分泌的显著增加启动排卵前的 LH 分泌峰。

2.2 垂体

Hileman 等^[27]通过损伤垂体前叶区来观察雌羊生殖活动的变化。结果表明,垂体前叶是参与调控季节性生殖的重**两神经灾据**。将褪黑素微胶囊埋植于垂体,Lincoln^[28]发现,只有埋植于垂体结节部(Pars tuberalis,PT)的褪黑素处理影响光周期诱导的 FSH 和 PRL(Prolactin,催乳素)分泌。由此推论,褪黑素至少可

通过 PT 来调节光周期对季节性生殖的诱导作用。Lincoln 和 Clarke^[29]对 HPD(Hypothalamo-pituitary disconnection,手术切断下丘脑与垂体的联系)雄羊的研究结果表明,褪黑素可部分作用于垂体(而独立于下丘脑之外)来调控 PRL 分泌。1996 年,Lincoln 提出"双位点假说"^[30]加以解释,认为褪黑素主要作用于下丘脑来调节 GtH 分泌,作用于垂体来调节 PRL 分泌。

虽然胎体位于子宫,并不直接暴露于光周期变化的环境中,但其血浆 PRL 水平也呈现出与环境光周期相关的变化[31]。由于 PRL 不能越过胎盘屏障,因此上述结果暗示了胎体的下丘脑-垂体轴对环境光周期改变的敏感性。母体褪黑素可穿越胎盘进入胎羊血液中[32],影响胎羊的激素变化。母体切除松果腺后,胎羊 PRL 浓度升高[33],但注射褪黑素可导致胎羊 PRL 水平下降[34]。同样,如果母体在妊娠的最后阶段处于长光照条件,新生羊羔的血浆 PRL 水平较高,如处于短光照环境,则羊羔的 PRL 浓度较低[35]。手术切断垂体与下丘脑的联系(HPD),并不改变垂体泌乳细胞的形态和分布[36],但不管外界光周期如何,HPD 胎羊的 PRL 水平较正常组低。Houghton 等[37]推测是由于失去下丘脑 PRL 释放因子或胎盘信号的刺激作用所致。

青春期之后的成年生活中,绵羊卵巢一直在进行着卵泡发生过程。但数百万卵泡中只有少数能生长至排卵时的大小,而能发生排卵的则更少。一般认为卵泡发生过程约需 6 个月,其中绝大部分时间用来从原初卵泡生长至 $2\sim2.5 \,\mathrm{mm}$ (直径)大小,此期生长可独立于 GtH 刺激,也不涉及雌二醇的显著分泌 [38]。但当直径超过 $2\mathrm{mm}$ [39]或 $2.5 \,\mathrm{mm}$ [38]时,其进一步的生长以及最后的成熟与排卵,都必须得到 GtH 的持续支持。

现在已经知道,卵巢性类固醇激素对 LHRH 的合成和分泌可起着正或负的反馈调节作用^[40]。在排卵前期,雌二醇和孕酮是对 LHRH 分泌产生显著调节作用的两个性腺因子。卵泡期的早期,血清雌二醇水平逐渐升高,导致 LHRH 脉冲大小降低,最终对 LHRH 分泌产生全面的抑制作用^[41];然而在卵泡期后期,持续处于高水平的雌二醇环境最终刺激 LHRH 分泌峰的形成^[42]。Kalra^[43]指出,内源性鸦片肽及其受体在卵巢激素信号与 LHRH 和 LH 分泌之间起着中介的作用。Sannella 和 Petersen^[44]进一步证实,内源性鸦片肽抑制 LHRH 神经元活性,逃离这种抑制作用是雌二醇诱导 LHRH 和 LH 分泌峰的重要前提。黄体期,高浓度的孕酮抑制 LHRH 分泌频率,进而抑制 LH 分泌^[45]。随着黄体的消逝,孕酮水平降低,LHRH 分泌增加,诱导 LH 分泌^[23];卵泡期 LH 水平的升高,导致雌二醇分泌增加,启动 LHRH 分泌峰,进而诱导 LH 分泌峰的出现和排卵^[42]。

3 分子生物学(褪黑素受体)研究

在系统发育过程中,低等脊椎动物(包括鱼类、两栖类、爬行类和鸟类)通常在脑区内广泛分布有褪黑素结合位点,但高等脊椎动物脑区则呈减少趋势。目前普遍认为,松果腺褪黑素通过与 G-蛋白相偶连的特异性受体来对靶组织产生生理作用[5]。

3.1 褪黑素受体

3.2 褪黑素受体的分布

在一些哺乳动物中,褪黑素可通过作用于下丘脑视交叉上核(Suprachiasmatic nucleus, SCN)来调节 LHRH 神经元的活动。但在绵羊的 SCN 没有检测到褪黑素受体的存在^[48,49]。Lincoln 和 Clarke^[29]证实,PT 细胞中的褪黑素受体至少可参与调节褪黑素的部分(光周期模仿)作用,并推测可能是褪黑素调节绵羊季节性生殖的**声素/使用据**点。Helliwell 等^[50]对绵羊的外周组织(包括脾、甲状旁腺、甲状腺、卵巢、子宫、肺、肝、肾、心、骨骼肌、皮肤以及肾上腺)进行了放射自显影研究,结果只在肾上腺皮质和脾脏可观察到特异性

结合情况。怀孕30d时,胎羊的甲状腺也检测到褪黑素结合位点的存在[51],但成年绵羊甲状腺中特异性结合消失[50],可见褪黑素对甲状腺的作用可能与个体发育有关。虽然有研究表明一些鸟类的性腺组织存在褪黑素受体,但在绵羊中还没有类似的报道。

不少实验证实,褪黑素受体可位于哺乳动物多种组织的细胞核中,从而表明褪黑素可能参与细胞核功能。譬如大白鼠中,视网膜样 Z 受体 β 是褪黑素的一种核内受体,褪黑素可与其结合,并使之活化 [52]。在绵羊中,还未见有关核内受体研究的报道。

3.3 褪黑素受体的节律性变化

虽然对褪黑素受体调节的分子机制至今还不清楚,但不少研究者在多种动物的一些组织中已揭示出 褪黑素受体数量的变化情况。绝大部分实验是通过放射自显影或放射受体分析,并得到一个共同的结论: 褪黑素受体数量呈日周期性变化,但与血液中褪黑素水平变化成负相关。大体而言,夜间血清褪黑素水平较高,可下调褪黑素结合位点;而白天,松果腺褪黑素停止分泌或分泌极少,结合位点数量又会恢复[58]。

Piketty 和 Pelletier^[54]发现绵羊的垂体结节部/正中隆起中褪黑素受体数量存在日周期性节律变化,最大值出现在白天结束与夜间开始,最低值发生在夜间结束之时,日中值和午夜值则处在中间水平;但亲和力(Kd值)没有显著性日变化。Barrett等^[55]证实,褪黑素可抑制绵羊 PT 细胞中 Mel_{1a}mRNA 的合成和积累,并推测可能与褪黑素抑制 cAMP 合成^[56]有关。然而,褪黑素并不完全消除 Mel_{1a}mRNA 水平^[55],因此可以认为褪黑素可能只是影响转录效率,而不是启动转录过程。总体而言,影响褪黑素受体表达的主要因素有个体发育时期、褪黑素(同源性调节作用)、日节律以及性类固醇激素^[53]。

离体培养绵羊 PT 细胞时,用生理剂量或药理剂量的褪黑素处理可导致¹²⁵ I-MEL 结合量减少一半^[57,58], Morgan 等^[58]还发现,随着褪黑素处理时间延长,PT 细胞出现脱敏现象(对褪黑素的敏感性降低)。因此,当环境光周期从长光照向短光照转变时,绵羊体内褪黑素分泌信号的时程延长,PT 细胞可能出现重复而积累的脱敏现象。可以设想,如果光照时间的缩短持续下去,就会形成一个对褪黑素反应很低的状态,进而出现不应期。因此推测,动物处于不应期时,褪黑素受体数量降低,而且受体对褪黑素敏感性下降。

4 结语

目前普遍认为,光周期作为主要的环境因子,协同褪黑素及其受体的内源性节律变化,诱导绵羊在秋冬季产仔,从而形成明显的生殖季节性。在光周期感受过程中,松果腺分泌的褪黑素是整个神经内分泌调控系统的中枢。褪黑素,一方面通过调控下丘脑-垂体-性腺轴上相关激素的内分泌变化,影响绵羊的生殖活性,另一方面又受褪黑素受体的钳制,只有在相互匹配时才能发挥其重要的生殖功能。当前,褪黑素的生殖作用是生殖生物学研究的一个热点。笔者赞同褪黑素及其受体有望成为解释哺乳动物季节性生殖的关键性内源调节因子,故而呼吁我国学者要深入开展相关的理论和应用性基础研究。

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