

· 基础研究 ·

不同训练方式对脊髓损伤大鼠运动功能及神经肌肉形态学的影响

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【摘要】目的 观察不同训练方式对脊髓损伤大鼠功能恢复的影响。**方法** 成年雌性 SD 大鼠 45 只, 设正常组大鼠 6 只, 其余 39 只大鼠进行脊髓损伤模型制作(采用改良 Allen'S 撞击法制作 T₉ 不完全性脊髓损伤模型), 剔除造模后死亡的 9 只大鼠, 余下 30 只脊髓损伤大鼠随机分成 7 d 对照组、35 d 对照组、减重平板组、游泳组和转笼组 5 组, 每组 6 只大鼠。其中减重平板组、游泳组和转笼组损伤后第 8 天开始运动训练, 30 min/d, 共 4 周。于不同时间点采用斜板试验、改良 Tarlov 评分、BBB 评分对各组进行运动功能评定。损伤后 35 d, 通过光镜和电镜观察脊髓及腓肠肌形态变化, 计算肌纤维横截面积和直径大小。**结果** ①减重平板组和游泳组在训练后各时间点的运动功能评分较 7 d 对照组和 35 d 对照组均显著增加($P < 0.05$), 且 2 组间差异无统计学意义($P > 0.05$); 转笼组与 7 d 对照组和 35 d 对照组比较, 差异无统计学意义($P > 0.05$)。②光镜及电镜观察显示, 减重平板组经过 4 周的训练, 损伤部位脊髓水肿消退明显, 细胞空泡变性明显减轻, 神经元和胶质细胞形态趋于完整, 神经纤维增生也较明显, 改善情况较其他各组更为显著。③减重平板组肌肉横截面积和直径分别为 $(55.34 \pm 14.46) \mu\text{m}^2$ 和 $(8.32 \pm 0.99) \mu\text{m}$, 接近正常组的 $(55.49 \pm 13.84) \mu\text{m}^2$ 和 $(8.37 \pm 1.13) \mu\text{m}$ ($P > 0.05$), 游泳组肌肉横截面积和直径分别为 $(46.05 \pm 8.50) \mu\text{m}^2$ 和 $(7.68 \pm 0.76) \mu\text{m}$, 与对照 35 d 组的 $(36.16 \pm 12.84) \mu\text{m}^2$ 和 $(6.62 \pm 1.33) \mu\text{m}$ 比较, 差异有统计学意义($P < 0.05$), 但转笼组的肌肉横截面积和直径 [$(39.83 \pm 8.35) \mu\text{m}^2$ 和 $(7.19 \pm 0.68) \mu\text{m}$] 与 35 d 对照组比较, 差异无统计学意义($P > 0.05$)。**结论** 3 种训练方式均能不同程度地促进脊髓损伤大鼠运动功能及神经肌肉功能的恢复, 减重平板训练和游泳训练效果优于转笼训练。

【关键词】 脊髓损伤; 运动功能; 运动训练; 大鼠

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【Abstract】Objective To investigate the effects of three different motor training regimens on motor function improvement after spinal cord injury (SCI) in rats. **Methods** Forty-five healthy, adult Sprague-Dawley rats (female), weight 260-300 g, were included. Six rats were selected as the normal group. A model of incomplete SCI at the T₉ level was induced in the others using a modification of Allen's method. Nine rats died after the injury and were excluded. The other 30 rats were randomly divided into 5 groups: a 7 d control group, a 35 d control group, a body-weight-supported-treadmill-training (BWSTT) group, a swimming training group and a wheel running group, with 6 rats in each group. The three training groups began exercising at the 8th day post surgery, 30 min per day, 5 days a week for 4 weeks. Locomotor function was evaluated by inclined plane tests, modified Tarlov scores, and the Basso-Beattie-Bresnahan (BBB) scale before the operation and on the 1st, 7th, 14th, 21st, 28th, and 35th day post surgery. Histomorphological changes of the T₉ level spinal cord and the gastrocnemius muscle were observed with light microscopy and electron microscopy, and the cross sectional areas and diameters of the gastrocnemius muscle fibers were calculated. **Results** ①In the BWSTT group and the swimming training group, locomotor function scores increased significantly at all time points compared with the two control groups. There was no significant difference in rehabilitative effect between the BWSTT group and the swimming training group. But compared with both control groups, improvement in the wheel running group was not significant. ②After 4 weeks of training, histomorphological

DOI:10.3760/cma.j.issn.0254-1424.2011.010.002

基金项目:国家自然科学基金资助(81000853)

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observation of the injured T₉ spinal cord tissue and gastrocnemius muscle fibers showed that the improvement in the BWSTT group was the most significant. The edema of the injured T₉ level spinal cord tissue had decreased, cell vascular degeneration had lessened, the morphology of the neurons and glial cells tended to perfect recovery and nerve fibers had proliferated significantly. ③Comparing the cross sectional areas and diameters of gastrocnemius muscle fibers showed that the improved amyotrophy in the BWSTT group was the most significant. The average cross sectional area ($55.34 \pm 14.46 \mu\text{m}^2$) and diameter ($8.32 \pm 0.99 \mu\text{m}$) were close to the normal group ($55.49 \pm 13.84 \mu\text{m}^2$ and $8.37 \pm 1.13 \mu\text{m}$). The swimming training group also had great improvement ($46.05 \pm 8.50 \mu\text{m}^2$ and $7.68 \pm 0.76 \mu\text{m}$) compared with the 35 d control group, while improvement in the wheel running group was not significant.

Conclusions All three motor training regimens can improve locomotor and neurologic function, but the effects of BWSTT and swimming are better than that of wheel running.

【Key words】 Spinal cord injury; Motor function; Exercise training; Rats

脊髓损伤(spinal cord injury, SCI)是造成残疾的重要原因,改善和促进运动功能恢复是SCI患者康复治疗的首要目标。虽然大量实验研究表明运动训练可以促进SCI后运动功能恢复,但由于实验中采用的运动训练方式各异,难以阐明运动训练方式对SCI功能恢复的影响差异。本实验观察3种常用运动训练方式对SCI后运动及神经肌肉功能的影响,旨在为SCI实验研究提供参考依据。

材料与方法

一、实验动物及分组

成年雌性 Sprague-Dawley(SD)大鼠45只,体重260~300 g,购于上海斯莱克实验动物有限责任公司[许可证号SCXK(沪)2003-0003]。随机选取6只大鼠作为正常组,其余39只大鼠进行SCI模型制作,剔除造模后死亡的9只大鼠,余下30只SCI大鼠随机分为5组,每组6只大鼠,7 d对照组、35 d对照组、减重平板组、游泳组和转笼组。其中正常组,7 d对照组和35 d对照组不做运动训练;减重平板组,游泳组和转笼组损伤后第8天开始运动训练。

二、实验方法

1. 模型制备:10%水合氯醛(300 mg/kg 体重)腹腔麻醉大鼠后,切除T₈椎板,暴露脊髓,根据改良Allen's重锤打击法的原理^[1-3],采用Model I型脊椎冲击损伤仪(由美国新泽西州立大学神经科学联合中心实验室提供)制作大鼠不完全性SCI模型。术后连续3 d肌注青霉素1 ml(20万U)预防感染,给予人工挤压膀胱帮助排尿,每日2次,至形成反射性排尿为止。

2. 运动训练:减重平板组、游泳组和转笼组损伤后第8天开始运动训练。3个训练组训练时间一致^[4-5]:每次10 min,每日3次,每周连续训练5 d,共训练4周。减重平板训练采用专用跑步机及自制的减重装置,跑台速度为0.8 km/h,减重量为体重的20%~40%(随时间逐渐减少减重量,第1周减重

40%,第2周减重35%,第3周减重30%,第4周减重20%)。游泳训练^[6]采用的游泳池长75 cm,宽50 cm,高45 cm,水深35 cm。水温保持在33℃~36℃。转笼训练采用长30 cm、直径60 cm的圆形网状滚筒,一端有手摇柄,训练时转速为5 r/min。

3. 运动功能评定:分别于损伤前、损伤后1 d、7 d、14 d、21 d、28 d和35 d对每组大鼠进行运动功能评定。评定项目^[2-3]包括斜板试验^[7]、改良Tarlov评分^[8]和Basso-Beattie-Bresnahan(BBB)评分^[9-10]。斜板试验主要反映大鼠后肢肌力的恢复程度,取大鼠在斜板上停留5 s期间的最大角度为功能值;改良Tarlov评分及BBB评分主要反映大鼠后肢的运动功能,按照后肢的关节活动情况、负重情况、步态的协调性、爪位及尾巴的活动等进行评分。改良Tarlov评分有0~5六个等级,BBB评分有0~21级,共22级,每级1分。得分越高,表明运动功能越好。

4. 光镜取材及切片制备:7 d对照组在术后第7天取材,其余各组均在第35天取材。用4%多聚甲醛磷酸缓冲液心脏灌注^[2-3,11],取损伤节段脊髓及任意一侧腓肠肌。常规脱水、石蜡包埋、连续切片,切片厚度4 μm 。从每只大鼠的脊髓及肌肉切片中各随机抽取5张,作苏木精-伊红染色(hematoxylin-eosin staining, HE)染色,在光镜下观察形态学改变并拍照。

5. 电镜取材:用4%多聚甲醛磷酸缓冲液灌注^[3],固定1 h,取T₉节段脊髓,用4%戊二醛磷酸缓冲液继续固定24 h,再用1%锇酸后固定10 min,按电镜常规处理标本,半薄切片定位后,超薄切片,透射电镜观察并拍照。

6. 图像分析:采用Image-Pro Plus 5.0软件进行图像分析,计算每张切片的肌纤维横截面积和直径。

三、统计学分析

实验数据用SPSS 16.0软件分析,样本均数用($\bar{x} \pm s$)表示。多组均数比较用单因素方差分析,等级资料采用非参数检验。统计图用Excel 2007绘制。

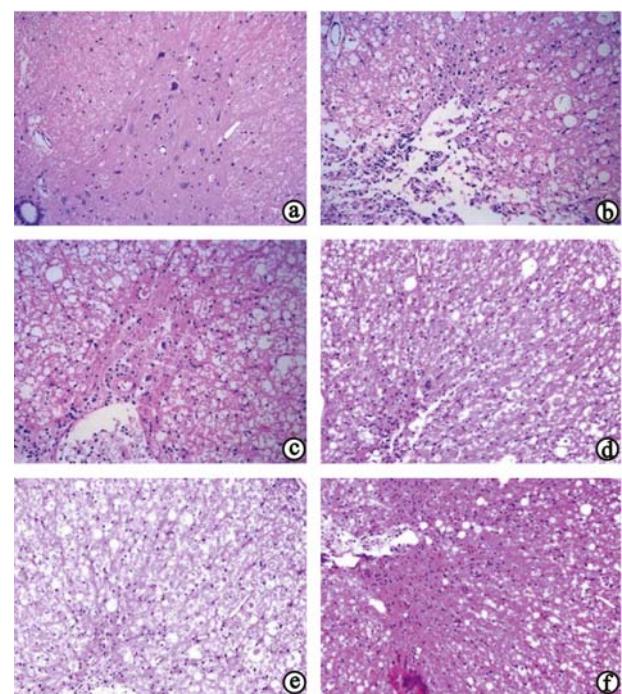
结 果

一、运动功能评定结果

减重平板组和游泳组在训练后各时间点的运动功能评分较 7 d 对照组和 35 d 对照组均显著增加($P < 0.05$)，且 2 组间差异无统计学意义($P > 0.05$)；转笼组与 7 d 对照组和 35 d 对照组比较，差异无统计学意义($P > 0.05$)。详见表 1~3。

二、形态学观察结果

1. 脊髓光镜结果：正常组脊髓(图 1a)结构完整，神经元形态正常，分布均匀，胶质细胞没有明显增生。7 d 对照组(图 1b)神经元明显变性、坏死，损伤处有少量出血，较多的炎细胞浸润，大量组织细胞反应和空泡，并有少量的神经纤维增生及新生血管。35 d 对照组未做运动训练，结果仍可见明显的损伤：神经元及胶质细胞空泡变性程度较重，胶质细胞增生明显(图 1c)。运动训练后，减重平板组(图 1d)和游泳组(图 1e)与对照组相比改善较明显，神经元及神经胶质细胞空泡变性程度稍轻，胶质细胞增生不太明显，神经纤维增生较明显。而转笼组(图 1f)与对照组相比形态相似，改善不明显。详见图 1。



注：a 为正常组，b 为 7 d 对照组，c 为 35 d 对照组，d 为减重平板组，e 为游泳组，f 为转笼组

图 1 各组大鼠损伤部位(T₉)脊髓前角的形态变化(HE 染色， $\times 200$)

表 1 各组不同时间点 BBB 评分结果(分, $\bar{x} \pm s$)

分 组	只数	损伤前	损伤后					
			1 d	7 d	14 d	21 d	28 d	35 d
35 d 对照组	6	21.0 ± 0.0	0.0 ± 0.0	2.3 ± 1.8	8.3 ± 1.6 ^b	10.0 ± 1.4 ^{bc}	12.8 ± 0.7 ^{bc}	14.1 ± 0.9 ^{bc}
减重平板组	6	21.0 ± 0.0	0.0 ± 0.0	3.8 ± 2.4	12.0 ± 2.7 ^{ad}	13.6 ± 2.6 ^{ad}	16.6 ± 2.5 ^{ad}	17.6 ± 2.3 ^{ad}
游泳组	6	21.0 ± 0.0	0.0 ± 0.0	3.3 ± 1.2	10.1 ± 2.3 ^b	13.6 ± 2.3 ^{ad}	16.6 ± 1.9 ^{ad}	17.1 ± 2.3 ^{ad}
转笼组	6	21.0 ± 0.0	0.0 ± 0.0	3.0 ± 1.2	8.6 ± 2.0 ^b	10.5 ± 1.6 ^{bc}	13.5 ± 0.8 ^{bc}	14.3 ± 1.0 ^{bc}

注：与 35 d 对照组同时段比较，^a $P < 0.05$ ；与减重平板组同时段比较，^b $P < 0.05$ ；与游泳组同时段比较，^c $P < 0.05$ ；与转笼组同时段比较，^d $P < 0.05$

表 2 各组不同时间点斜板试验角度结果(度, $\bar{x} \pm s$)

分 组	只数	损伤前	损伤后					
			1 d	7 d	14 d	21 d	28 d	35 d
35 d 对照组	6	42.5 ± 2.7	15.8 ± 2.0	21.6 ± 4.0	22.5 ± 2.7 ^{bc}	25.8 ± 5.8 ^{bed}	27.5 ± 4.1 ^{bed}	30.0 ± 4.4 ^{bed}
减重平板组	6	42.5 ± 2.7	17.5 ± 2.7	21.6 ± 4.0	34.1 ± 8.0 ^{ad}	32.5 ± 5.2 ^a	39.1 ± 3.7 ^a	42.5 ± 2.7 ^a
游泳组	6	43.3 ± 2.5	16.6 ± 2.5	20.0 ± 3.1	32.5 ± 4.1 ^{ad}	35.0 ± 4.4 ^a	38.3 ± 4.0 ^a	39.1 ± 3.7 ^a
转笼组	6	43.3 ± 2.5	18.3 ± 2.5	19.1 ± 3.7	28.3 ± 4.0 ^{bc}	35.0 ± 3.1 ^a	39.1 ± 3.7 ^a	42.5 ± 2.7 ^a

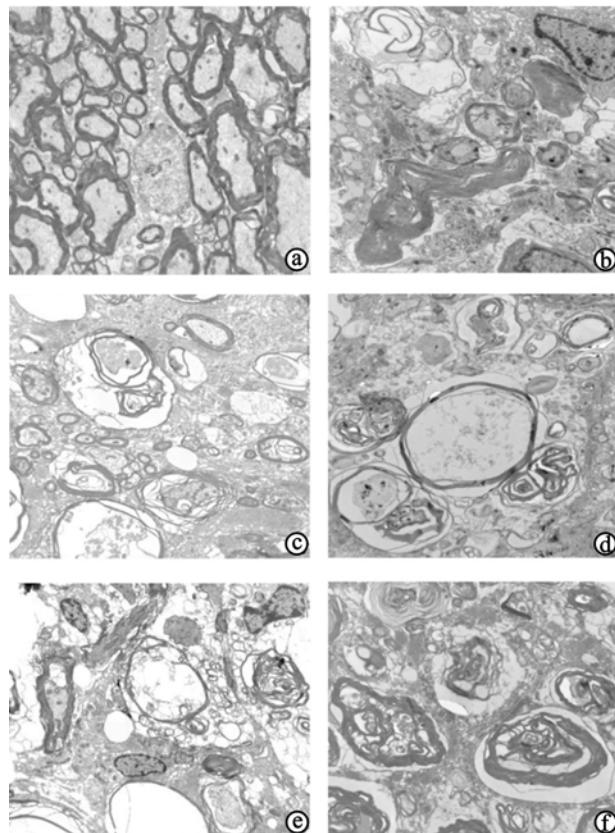
注：与 35 d 对照组同时段比较，^a $P < 0.05$ ；与减重平板组同时段比较，^b $P < 0.05$ ；与游泳组同时段比较，^c $P < 0.05$ ；与转笼组同时段比较，^d $P < 0.05$

表 3 各组不同时间点改良 Tarlov 评分结果(分, $\bar{x} \pm s$)

分 组	只数	损伤前	损伤后					
			1 d	7 d	14 d	21 d	28 d	35 d
35 d 对照组	6	5.0 ± 0.0	0.0 ± 0.0	0.8 ± 0.4	1.6 ± 0.8 ^{bc}	2.5 ± 0.8 ^{bc}	2.5 ± 0.8 ^{bc}	2.6 ± 0.8 ^{bc}
减重平板组	6	5.0 ± 0.0	0.0 ± 0.0	1.5 ± 0.5	2.8 ± 0.9 ^{ad}	3.5 ± 0.5 ^{ad}	3.6 ± 0.5 ^{ad}	3.6 ± 0.5 ^{ad}
游泳组	6	5.0 ± 0.0	0.0 ± 0.0	1.0 ± 0.0	2.3 ± 0.8 ^{ab}	3.5 ± 0.5 ^{ad}	3.5 ± 0.5 ^{ad}	3.6 ± 0.5 ^{ad}
转笼组	6	5.0 ± 0.0	0.0 ± 0.0	1.0 ± 0.0	2.5 ± 0.5 ^{ab}	2.8 ± 0.4 ^{bc}	3.0 ± 0.0 ^{bc}	3.0 ± 0.0 ^{bc}

注：与 35 d 对照组同时段比较，^a $P < 0.05$ ；与减重平板组同时段比较，^b $P < 0.05$ ；与游泳组同时段比较，^c $P < 0.05$ ；与转笼组同时段比较，^d $P < 0.05$

2. 脊髓电镜结果: 正常组髓鞘(图 2a)排列规律整齐, 结构致密, 轴索均匀一致, 核仁清晰; 7 d 对照组(图 2b)髓鞘严重松散、断裂, 轴索与髓鞘间出现明显空隙(髓鞘分离现象); 35 d 对照组(图 2c)髓鞘形态较前完整, 但较薄, 髓鞘分离现象依然比较明显。运动训练后, 减重平板组(图 2d)改善较明显, 可见髓鞘完整, 轴索均匀, 髓鞘下及神经纤维周围基质中少见空泡; 游泳组(图 2e)髓鞘结构较对照组完整, 但比较薄, 髓鞘下及神经纤维周围基质中空泡较多; 转笼组(图 2f), 与对照组相比变化不大, 髓鞘分离现象依然很严重, 周围基质空泡较多。详见图 2。

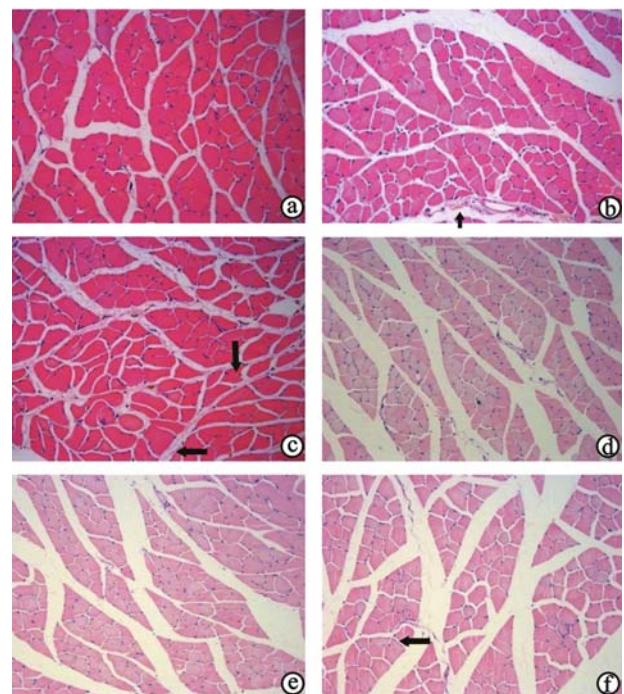


注: a 为正常组, b 为 7 d 对照组, c 为 35 d 对照组, d 为减重平板组, e 为游泳组, f 为转笼组

图 2 各组大鼠脊髓损伤部位的髓鞘形态变化($\times 8000$)

3. 肢肠肌纤维形态: 正常组肌纤维(图 3a)为圆柱形合体性多核巨细胞, 横断面呈钝角多面形。7 d 对照组(图 3b)可见失神经支配的肌萎缩, 呈小群性分布。萎缩的肌纤维横截面呈尖角的细条状(箭头所指)。35 d 对照组(图 3c)小群性萎缩仍然存在, 萎缩部位邻近的部分肌纤维呈代偿性肥大(箭头所指)。运动训练后, 减重平板组(图 3d)肌纤维萎缩情况已不太明显, 结构基本正常。游泳组(图 3e)萎缩情况也不太明显, 结构基本正常。但转笼组(图 3f)与 35 d 对照组相似, 仍存在部分肌纤维的萎缩, 可见萎缩邻近部分肌纤维

代偿性肥大(箭头所指)。



注: a 为正常组, b 为 7 d 对照组, c 为 35 d 对照组, d 为减重平板组, e 为游泳组, f 为转笼组

图 3 各组大鼠腓肠肌的形态变化(HE 染色, $\times 200$)

4. 肌纤维横截面积和直径: 减重平板组肌肉横截面积和直径分别为 $(55.34 \pm 14.46) \mu\text{m}^2$ 和 $(8.32 \pm 0.99) \mu\text{m}$, 接近正常组的 $(55.49 \pm 13.84) \mu\text{m}^2$ 和 $(8.37 \pm 1.13) \mu\text{m}$ ($P > 0.05$), 游泳组肌肉横截面积和直径分别为 $(46.05 \pm 8.50) \mu\text{m}^2$ 和 $(7.68 \pm 0.76) \mu\text{m}$, 与 35 d 对照组的 $(36.16 \pm 12.84) \mu\text{m}^2$ 和 $(6.62 \pm 1.33) \mu\text{m}$ 比较, 差异有统计学意义 ($P < 0.05$), 但转笼组的肌肉横截面积和直径 [$(39.83 \pm 8.35) \mu\text{m}^2$ 和 $(7.19 \pm 0.68) \mu\text{m}$] 与 35 d 对照组比较, 差异无统计学意义 ($P > 0.05$)。详见表 4。

表 4 肌纤维横截面积和直径 ($\bar{x} \pm s$)

分组	只数	肌纤维横截面积 (μm^2)	肌纤维直径 (μm)
7 d 对照组	6	$34.75 \pm 13.19^{\text{cf}}$	$6.61 \pm 1.52^{\text{cdf}}$
35 d 对照组	6	$36.16 \pm 12.84^{\text{cf}}$	$6.62 \pm 1.33^{\text{cdf}}$
减重平板组	6	$55.34 \pm 14.46^{\text{abde}}$	$8.32 \pm 0.99^{\text{abe}}$
游泳组	6	$46.05 \pm 8.50^{\text{cf}}$	$7.68 \pm 0.76^{\text{abe}}$
转笼组	6	$39.83 \pm 8.35^{\text{cf}}$	$7.19 \pm 0.68^{\text{cdf}}$
正常组	6	$55.49 \pm 13.84^{\text{abde}}$	$8.37 \pm 1.13^{\text{abe}}$

注: 与 7 d 对照组比较,^a $P < 0.05$; 与 35 d 对照组比较,^b $P < 0.05$; 与减重平板组比较,^c $P < 0.05$; 与游泳组比较,^d $P < 0.05$; 与转笼组比较,^e $P < 0.05$; 与正常组比较,^f $P < 0.05$

讨 论

运动训练是促进 SCI 后功能恢复的重要措施, 动物实验是研究运动训练对 SCI 功能恢复机制的重要手

段。虽有文献报道不同训练方式均能在一定程度上促进实验动物功能恢复,但对其明确的生物学效应及机制尚不清楚,而且不同训练方式对运动及神经功能恢复的差异也尚不清楚。本实验主要从运动功能和形态学两方面比较动物实验中常用的 3 种训练方式的差异,为 SCI 大鼠选择一种较适宜的运动训练方式,并为后期深入的机制研究提供帮助。

减重平板训练是常用步行训练方式。临床和实验研究均表明该训练能促进 SCI 后运动功能的恢复^[2,3]。本实验也显示,减重平板组 SCI 大鼠自 14 d 时运动功能恢复明显增加,到第 28 天达到平台。与游泳组和转笼组比较,减重平板组运动功能改善最明显。这与 Karen 等^[12]实验结果一致,他们比较了减重平板训练、游泳训练和站立训练三种方式,结果也显示减重平板训练效果最明显。可能的机制是减重平板训练促进脊髓内神经营养因子-3(NT-3) 及脑源性神经生长因子(BDNF) 的表达、释放^[13],抑制 γ 氨基丁酸等中枢性抑制类递质的表达、释放,从而增强脊髓的可塑性,促进神经元回路的重组^[14-15]。游泳也是 SCI 动物常用的一种训练方式。水的浮力提供一种天然的体重支撑作用,不需借助专门的减重系统。Rebecca 等^[16]的研究表明,游泳中皮肤反馈对水中和地面上的运动能力都有加强作用。本实验结果也显示游泳训练对 SCI 大鼠运动功能恢复有很大作用。但 David 等^[17]的实验表明,游泳并不能改善肌力,最终实验动物都遗留了持续的功能缺失,他们认为,游泳训练可能是运动再训练的一种特殊任务模式。另外在大鼠的游泳训练中,呼吸道感染的发生率较高^[18],且在训练初期 SCI 大鼠耐力较差时,存在溺死的危险。本实验过程中,有 2 例 SCI 大鼠在训练初期溺死,说明游泳训练对 SCI 大鼠而言,存在一定风险。自发性跑转笼是一种主动运动,无需外界刺激。有研究表明这种运动方式可促进神经元轴突再生^[19],诱导海马神经元再生^[20],促进 BDNF 生成增多^[21],对动物的心理健康有益^[22],也可以减轻 SCI 后年龄相关性缺陷^[23]等。但这种运动模式难以进行较大强度的运动,训练次数及间歇时间等参数不易控制,不能得到客观的量化指标。本实验采用手动轴转动笼子的方法,保持一定的转速控制,实际上包含被动运动的成分。但本实验控制了训练组数、次数及间歇时间等参数,便于量化和比较。结果显示转笼训练效果不佳,与对照组相比运动功能恢复无明显差异。这与 Erschbamer 等^[24]的实验相符,他们证明转笼训练可能对脑外伤或脑血管病引起的中枢性损伤作用较大,但对 SCI 大鼠的训练效果不佳。也可能因为强制性训练对功能恢复作用较快,而转笼的促进作用较慢,在较短的实验观察期内,没有明显的功能改善。

本实验损伤部位的脊髓形态学观察显示减重平板组和游泳组改善较明显,而转笼组与对照组形态相似,改善不明显。与本课题组前期^[3,25]研究结果相似。可能的机制是减重平板训练可以诱导皮质脊髓束的功能重塑^[26],促进轴突的侧芽生成^[27]等。减重平板组肌纤维的横截面积和直径接近正常值,游泳组肌肉萎缩也有一定程度的改善,而转笼组与对照组差异无统计学意义。这与运动功能改善情况一致,提示大鼠脊髓损伤后运动功能恢复与神经肌肉功能恢复的同步性。

综上所述,从 SCI 大鼠损伤后运动功能、神经肌肉功能恢复及安全性等方面综合考虑,减重平板运动可能更适合作为 SCI 大鼠的运动训练方式。但训练方案中的运动强度、运动时间及运动频率等具体参数的设定尚需要后续实验进一步研究。

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(修回日期:2011-09-10)

(本文编辑:阮仕衡)

· 外刊摘要 ·

Thermal intervention for balance after stroke

Despite rehabilitation, over 50% of patients who have sustained a moderate to severe stroke remain impaired in their ability to walk after hospital discharge. Previous studies have demonstrated that repetitive sensory stimulation and mass motor practice facilitate neuroplasticity and cortical reorganization. Additionally, previous studies have found that thermal stimulation facilitates recovery of motor function in the upper limb after acute stroke. This study assessed the efficacy of thermal stimulation for the recovery of balance and motor function of the lower limb after moderate to severe stroke.

This study recruited 35 patients within four weeks of the onset of a first-ever stroke. All participants received standard rehabilitation, including 40 minutes of physical and occupational therapies once per day, five days per week, for six weeks. The experimental group received 48 minutes of treatment with alternating hot (75°C) and cold (0°C) packs, placed over the region of the calf or foot. Outcome measures were obtained at baseline and after four and six weeks, using the Modified Ashworth Scale, the Modified Motor Assessment Scale, and the Fugl-Meyer Scale for the Lower Extremity. The Medical Research Council Scale for the Lower Extremity was used to measure the strength of the paretic hip flexors, knee extensors and ankle dorsiflexors.

A total of 33 patients were included in the analysis. No adverse effects were reported after six weeks of therapy. The average values of the Fugl-Meyer Assessment Scale for the Lower Extremity, the Medical Research Council Scale for the Lower Extremity, the Modified Motor Assessment Scale, the Berg Balance Scale and the Functional Ambulation Classification Scale were all better for the thermal group than for the control group ($P < 0.05$ for all comparisons). After six weeks, the thermal group also produced more walkers.

Conclusion: This study found that thermal stimulation may enhance lower extremity motor recovery in patients with moderate to severe stroke.

(摘自:Chen JC, Lin CH, Wei YC, et al. Facilitation of motor and balance recovery by thermal intervention for the paretic lower limb of acute stroke: a single-blind randomized clinical trial. *Clinical Rehab*, 2011, 25: 823-832.)