

# 低强度脉冲超声作用于膝骨关节炎炎症相关信号通路的研究进展

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**摘要** 膝骨关节炎(KOA)是一种包含关节软骨、滑膜、软骨下骨以及关节周围韧带肌肉等组织结构发生病理性改变的退行性全关节疾病。KOA的发病与关节软骨的代谢失衡及细胞因子的启动有关,特别是白细胞介素-1 $\beta$ (IL-1 $\beta$ )和肿瘤坏死因子- $\alpha$ (TNF- $\alpha$ )的高表达。其出现于KOA的多条致病信号通路中,调控KOA的细胞内活动,在软骨细胞破坏、细胞外基质减少、软骨重塑异常、软骨下骨化和滑膜炎等病理过程中扮演重要的角色。低强度脉冲超声(LIPUS)作为一种无创安全的物理治疗手段,其本质上是一种强度较低的机械能,通过其空化效应等物理刺激可以使其效应细胞产生一系列理化反应。LIPUS在KOA的临床应用中疗效确切,可通过调节IL-1 $\beta$ 和TNF- $\alpha$ 等炎症相关信号通路的活性而达到消炎止痛、促进软骨修复的作用。其治疗机制包括:① LIPUS可通过增强滑膜中巨噬细胞的自噬途径及抑制核苷酸结合寡聚化结构域样受体蛋白3(NLRP3)炎症小体通路使巨噬细胞产生IL-1 $\beta$ 减少,减轻炎症反应;也可通过经典无翅型MMTV整合位点家族蛋白(Wnt)/ $\beta$ -连环蛋白信号通路作用于滑膜中的成纤维细胞从而抑制滑膜纤维化。② LIPUS通过抑制IL-1 $\beta$ 诱导的核因子活化B细胞 $\kappa$ 轻链增强子(NF- $\kappa$ B)信号通路及调控丝裂原活化蛋白激酶(MAPKs)信号通路来促进软骨细胞生成细胞外基质,调节软骨细胞代谢,保护软骨。③ LIPUS通过激活细胞外信号调节激酶1/2(ERK1/2)和磷脂酰肌醇3-激酶-蛋白激酶B(PI3K-Akt)信号通路促进间充质干细胞增殖分化,也可通过整合素-雷帕霉素靶蛋白(mTOR)信号通路来促进间充质干细胞产生转化生长因子 $\beta$ 1(TGF- $\beta$ 1)以促进软骨形成。最新研究还发现LIPUS通过自噬途径促进间充质干细胞的迁移和外泌体释放来修复软骨,为未来LIPUS的联合治疗方向提供新思路。通过对LIPUS作用于KOA炎症相关信号通路的研究进展进行综述,为LIPUS的临床研究及联合治疗方案提供理论依据。

**关键词** 膝骨关节炎;低强度脉冲超声;炎症;信号通路;滑膜细胞;软骨细胞;间充质干细胞

膝骨关节炎(knee osteoarthritis, KOA)是一种由多因素引起的以软骨侵蚀、滑膜炎、软骨下骨增厚及骨赘形成为病理改变,涉及关节及关节周围组织结构病变的全关节疾病。危险因素包括年龄、性别、肥胖、创伤和代谢等<sup>[1-3]</sup>。KOA在我国的致残率约为53%,是第三大致残疾病<sup>[4]</sup>。其发病主要涉及

关节软骨的合成和分解代谢的失衡,细胞因子的启动与其密切相关。研究显示,骨关节炎病理改变涉及软骨细胞、破骨细胞、成骨细胞、滑膜中的成纤维细胞和单核细胞等多种细胞类型<sup>[5]</sup>。关节软骨损伤后白细胞介素-1 $\beta$ (interleukin-1 $\beta$ , IL-1 $\beta$ )、IL-6和肿瘤坏死因子- $\alpha$ (tumor necrosis factor- $\alpha$ , TNF- $\alpha$ )

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高表达,其中IL-1 $\beta$ 和TNF- $\alpha$ 是促进炎症发展及诱导软骨下骨破坏的关键细胞因子,其出现于KOA的多条致病信号通路中,调控KOA的细胞内活动,在软骨细胞破坏、细胞外基质减少、软骨重塑异常、软骨下骨化和滑膜炎等病理过程中扮演重要的角色<sup>[5-6]</sup>。目前临床不断寻求药物或非药物治疗方法来调控软骨代谢或阻断促炎因子的表达,以期促进软骨修复或抑制软骨破坏<sup>[7-8]</sup>。国内外指南均提倡针对KOA以非药物治疗为首选,包括患者教育、运动治疗及物理治疗等<sup>[9-10]</sup>。超声治疗作为一种无创安全的物理治疗手段,在KOA的治疗上已经有60多年的历史<sup>[11]</sup>,研究较多且疗效较好的强度为0.02~1 W/cm<sup>2</sup>、频率为1~3 MHz的低强度脉冲超声(low-intensity pulsed ultrasound, LIPUS)。LIPUS作用于KOA具有减轻关节炎症、缓解疼痛、促进软骨再生和保护软骨的作用<sup>[12-13]</sup>。通过对LIPUS作用于KOA炎症相关信号通路的研究进展进行综述,可以为LIPUS的临床应用寻找最佳干预方案。

## 1 LIPUS的作用机制

LIPUS是一种机械波,其声能可通过介质传播到组织间和细胞内,在组织细胞内产生微气泡和微射流,引起分子间的振动和碰撞,产生非热效应和热效应,从而使组织细胞产生一系列生物效应。其中非热效应主要包括空化效应、声流和机械刺激等<sup>[14]</sup>。而关节组织对机械刺激非常敏感,适度的机械刺激可调节关节的稳态,维持软骨的正常代谢<sup>[15]</sup>。既往研究发现,LIPUS通过非热效应在治疗骨折和骨不连等方面具有良好的疗效<sup>[16-17]</sup>,另外LIPUS在控制炎症和促进软组织修复等方面也具有良好作用<sup>[18-19]</sup>。与其他强度的治疗性超声相比,LIPUS具有最小的热效应,且能将声能定向传递到靶组织中,在生物信号传递上具有优越性<sup>[14]</sup>。利用LIPUS这一特性,可以调控膝关节中细胞的信号通路,改变细胞的理化性质,促进细胞新陈代谢,控制膝关节的炎症。

## 2 LIPUS对膝关节炎症作用的信号通路研究

近年来LIPUS已广泛应用于KOA的临床治疗,LIPUS与药物或其他治疗方法联合应用对KOA的疼痛、膝关节功能改善、炎症控制和关节软骨修复等方面具有明显的治疗优势。高明霞等<sup>[20]</sup>应用LIPUS联合药物干预KOA患者6周后,与单独应用药物组对比,在视觉模拟评分(visual analogue scale,

VAS)、西安大略和麦克马斯特大学骨关节炎指数(Western Ontario and McMaster Universities Osteoarthritis Index, WOMAC)及Lysholm膝关节评分(Lysholm knee score scale, LKSS)方面改善更明显,且差异有统计学意义( $P<0.05$ )。亦有针对KOA患者的临床研究将口服药物与LIPUS联合使用,相较单独口服双氯芬酸钠组患者血清组织金属蛋白酶抑制因子-2(tissue inhibitor of metalloproteinases-2, TIMP-2)的生成增加而关节软骨基质金属蛋白酶-13(matrix metalloproteinase-13, MMP-13)的表达减少更显著,显示LIPUS对软骨修复有积极作用<sup>[21]</sup>。除了运用量表与血清学检测作为评估疗效的手段外,通过影像学MRI检测,也能观察到超声联合药物对关节软骨的修复作用,从不同角度揭示了药物联合超声治疗KOA的机制<sup>[22]</sup>。此外,非药物联合治疗的临床应用也逐渐兴起,如王广等<sup>[23]</sup>运用本体感觉联合LIPUS与单纯本体感觉训练治疗KOA患者12周,通过比较其VAS、WOMAC及跌倒效能量表评分(modified fall efficacy scale, MFES),结果显示前者改善更明显,差异具有统计学意义( $P<0.05$ ),表明LIPUS在各类联合治疗中对KOA的抗炎作用。KOA的发病和治疗机制并不依赖于单个细胞因子,相同的信号通路可以被不同的细胞因子激活。在LIPUS对KOA炎症相关信号通路作用机制的研究中,基础研究主要包括对滑膜细胞、软骨细胞和间充质干细胞(mesenchymal stem cells, MSCs)的作用等方面,其成果值得临床研究借鉴,以期针对KOA的不同发病机制选择适合的治疗参数和作用靶点,并联合不同药物,最终提高临床疗效。

### 2.1 LIPUS对滑膜细胞作用

随着人体衰老,膝关节软骨中裂解的细胞外基质片段(如多糖和蛋白聚糖)被释放到关节腔中,激活滑膜细胞(主要包括巨噬细胞、成纤维细胞、树突样滑膜细胞和内皮细胞等<sup>[24]</sup>)上的Toll样受体(Toll-like receptors, TLRs)、晚期糖基化终产物受体(receptor for advanced glycation end products, RAGE),以及滑膜细胞内的核苷酸结合寡聚化结构域样受体蛋白3(nucleotide-binding oligomerization domain-like receptor and pyrin domain-containing protein 3, NLRP3)炎症小体,进一步级联激活以核因子活化B细胞 $\kappa$ 轻链增强子(nuclear factor kappa-light-chain-enhancer of activated B cells, NF- $\kappa$ B)信号通路和丝裂原活化蛋白激酶(mitogen-activated protein kinases, MAPKs)信号通路为主要途径的细胞内途径,产生

炎症介质如 IL-1 $\beta$ 、IL-6 和 TNF- $\alpha$  并释放入滑液中<sup>[25]</sup>,介导滑膜无菌性炎症的产生。目前研究发现,LIPUS具有抗炎的作用,LIPUS可能通过干预滑膜细胞上的NLRP3炎症小体通路及自噬通路发挥抗炎作用<sup>[26-27]</sup>。2020年的1项研究应用脂多糖-三磷酸腺苷处理滑膜巨噬细胞,促使巨噬细胞分泌的IL-1 $\beta$ 显著增加,模拟膝关节炎的炎症过程<sup>[28]</sup>,然后进行LIPUS的治疗,发现巨噬细胞膜中释放出的NLRP3炎症小体信号通路中的关键酶——半胱氨酸天冬氨酸蛋白酶1(Caspase 1)裂解受到抑制,进一步抑制前体IL-1 $\beta$ 的加工<sup>[29]</sup>,从而使成熟IL-1 $\beta$ 减少。除了抑制NLRP3炎症小体信号通路中Caspase 1外,这项研究还发现LIPUS可以通过促进丙酮酸激酶(pyruvate kinase muscle,PKM)的自噬来抑制滑膜组织中IL-1 $\beta$ ,或通过增强PKM和整合体1的结合,进而促进溶酶体等自噬小体降解PKM,抑

制成成熟IL-1 $\beta$ 的产生,最终发挥抗炎作用<sup>[28]</sup>。见图1。另一方面,IL-1 $\beta$ 等炎症因子的刺激同时也导致成纤维细胞的增生和滑膜的纤维化。LIAO等<sup>[30]</sup>发现LIPUS可通过抑制从OA患者滑膜中分离出的成纤维细胞上的经典无翅型MMTV整合位点家族蛋白(wingless-type MMTV integration site family, Wnt)/ $\beta$ -连环蛋白信号通路,从而抑制成纤维细胞的增殖及减少滑膜纤维化。Wnt/ $\beta$ -连环蛋白信号通路作为典型的Wnt信号通路,是KOA的炎症相关通路,存在于关节的滑膜和软骨中,参与KOA的病理过程<sup>[31]</sup>。此研究表明,LIPUS可通过经典Wnt信号通路来抑制成纤维细胞增殖。以上研究阐述了LIPUS可能通过NLRP3炎症小体通路、自噬通路和经典Wnt信号通路,来分别影响滑膜中巨噬细胞和成纤维细胞的细胞活动,达到控制炎症的效果。见图2。

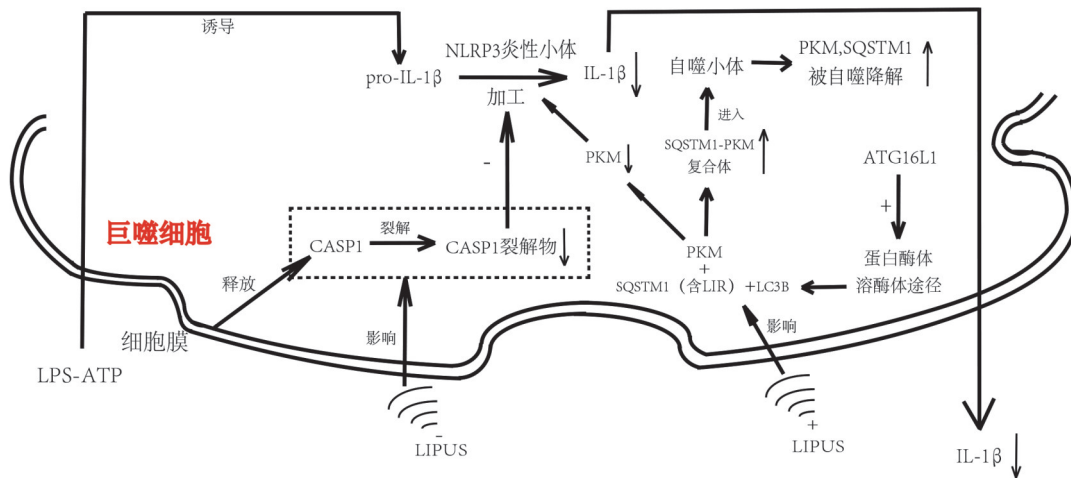


图1 LIPUS通过干预滑膜细胞上的NLRP3炎症小体通路及自噬通路发挥抗炎作用

Figure 1 LIPUS exerts anti-inflammatory effects by interfering with the NLRP3 inflammatory vesicle pathway and autophagic pathway on synovial cells

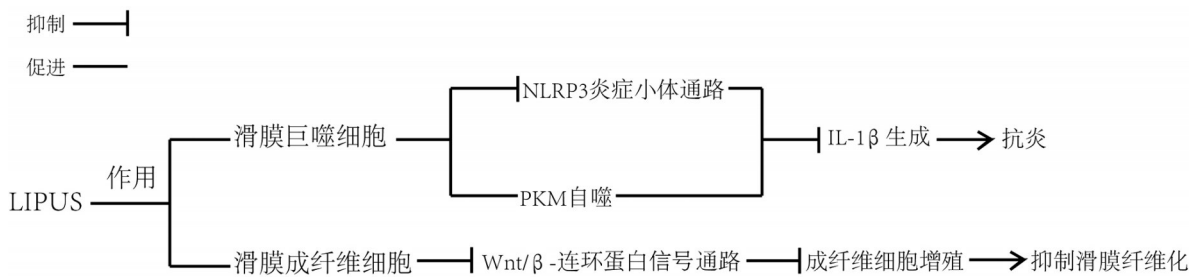


图2 LIPUS对滑膜细胞的作用

Figure 2 Action of LIPUS on synovial cells

## 2.2 LIPUS对软骨细胞作用

随着KOA的进展,大量炎症因子进入滑液后刺

激软骨细胞,通过NF- $\kappa$ B及MAPKs等多种信号通路,产生如基质金属蛋白酶和聚集蛋白聚糖酶等软

骨降解产物,介导软骨细胞的破坏<sup>[31-33]</sup>。LIPUS通过抑制NF- $\kappa$ B通路而阻断软骨细胞的破坏过程。UDDIN等<sup>[34]</sup>发现,LIPUS的机械刺激作用可以激活人软骨细胞上的整合素及牵张活化通道,使得IL-1 $\beta$ 诱导的细胞质内NF- $\kappa$ B的蛋白质磷酸化被抑制,通过抑制核转录,降低了细胞中MMP-13和聚集蛋白聚糖酶-5 mRNA的表达,从而减少软骨细胞MMP-13和聚集蛋白聚糖酶-5的生成,使II型胶原蛋白(collagen type II, Col II)降解减缓,同时增加细胞外基质的合成,抑制软骨分解代谢,刺激软骨分化,最终起到保护软骨的作用。除此之外,LIPUS还可作用于软骨中的MAPK通路。MAPK是一类广泛存在于真核细胞中的丝氨酸/苏氨酸蛋白激酶。MAPK中与KOA发病相关的酶主要有细胞外信号调节激酶(extracellular regulated protein kinases, ERK)、p38丝裂原活化蛋白激酶(p38 mitogen-activated protein kinase, p38 MAPK)和Jun氨基末端激酶<sup>[17]</sup>。有学者提出LIPUS可能是通过促进细胞内Ca<sup>2+</sup>内流来产生上述作用,LIPUS产生的机械刺激激活瞬时受体电位香草素受体4型通道蛋白(TRPV4),这种通过机械应力激活的钙通道,使Ca<sup>2+</sup>向细胞内流,进一步激活p38 MAPK通路及ERK1/2通路<sup>[35]</sup>。以上2种信号通路共同促进CCN家族蛋白2/结缔组织生长因子(CCN family 2/connective tissue growth factor, CCN2/CTGF)的产生。CCN2是LIPUS作用于软骨细胞产生效应所需要的物质<sup>[36]</sup>,可促进软骨细胞中Col II a1和Acan基因的表达(产物为Col II和聚集蛋白聚糖),起到增加细胞外基质的作用。SEKINO等<sup>[37]</sup>也发现LIPUS可以使小鼠软骨细胞内ERK1/2的活性和聚集蛋白聚糖的合成增加,MMP-13的表达降低,增强软骨细胞分化和细胞外基质合成,最终促进软骨的合成。沈士浩等<sup>[38]</sup>则从不同角度揭示了LIPUS对软骨细胞的作用,该团队提出LIPUS可能通过激活兔软骨细胞中整合素-黏着斑激酶(focal adhesion kinase, FAK)-MAPK通路来减轻KOA对软骨的破坏。在LIPUS机械刺激的作用下,整合素被激活,进一步激活FAK,调控下游的MAPK水平,使ERK1/2、p38磷酸化水平下降,最终促进Col II的合成及减少MMP-13的产生来保护软骨。这些结果说明LIPUS的机械刺激通过直接作用于软骨细胞上不同的靶点,对软骨细胞中2种主要信号

通路产生不同的作用,来抑制软骨降解产物的产生,抑制软骨分解,促进软骨合成,调控软骨代谢过程,延缓膝关节炎的进展。

### 2.3 LIPUS诱导MSCs再生软骨

除以上对滑膜及软骨的治疗机制外,近年来LIPUS的研究热点逐渐趋于其对MSCs的影响<sup>[39-40]</sup>。LIPUS还可通过影响MSCs的增殖、分化及迁移来达到修复软骨的目的。MSCs是多能干细胞,广泛分布于滑膜、骨髓和骨骼肌等组织中,可增殖分化为多种细胞,如成骨细胞、基质细胞、软骨细胞等,其迁移到受损软骨组织中,具有修复软骨的作用,在治疗KOA方面有巨大的潜力<sup>[41]</sup>。LING等<sup>[42]</sup>和CHEN等<sup>[43]</sup>研究指出,LIPUS通过激活磷脂酰肌醇3-激酶(phosphoinositide 3 kinase, PI3K)-蛋白激酶B(protein kinase B, Akt)信号通路和ERK1/2信号通路,促进人羊膜间充质干细胞的细胞增殖周期进入周期蛋白合成时期,从而上调细胞周期蛋白的表达,诱导MSCs的增殖。XIA等<sup>[44]</sup>观察到LIPUS的机械刺激可使添加了转化生长因子- $\beta$ 1(transforming growth factor-beta 1, TGF- $\beta$ 1)的体外培养的大鼠骨髓MSCs中的Col II和聚集蛋白聚糖的基因表达增加而使Col I的基因表达降低,促进MSCs分化形成软骨细胞,修复软骨。这个过程可能是通过促进骨髓MSCs中的整合素-雷帕霉素的机制靶点(mammalian target of rapamycin, mTOR)信号通路来实现的。1项大鼠体内外研究给出了更加新颖的观点,即LIPUS可通过调节自噬来促进骨髓来源的MSCs外泌体释放<sup>[45]</sup>,进一步增加Col II等细胞外基质以保护软骨,此类外泌体也可通过抑制由IL-1 $\beta$ 激活的NF- $\kappa$ B途径修复软骨<sup>[46]</sup>。因此LIPUS除了直接抑制软骨破坏外,还可促进注射至关节腔的骨髓MSCs分泌的外泌体修复软骨。另外,LIPUS的机械应力可激活MSCs中的自噬通路并使其发生迁移,且此过程可被自噬抑制剂所抑制,但对自噬通路的激活过程及如何引起MSCs的迁移并未具体阐明<sup>[47]</sup>。未来还需更多研究阐述LIPUS在MSCs迁移中的作用。近年的研究发现LIPUS通过多种经典的信号通路,在MSCs的增殖、分化、迁移及其生物活性物质的产生、作用等方面产生效应,介导膝关节软骨代谢的调控,减缓KOA的发展。见图3。

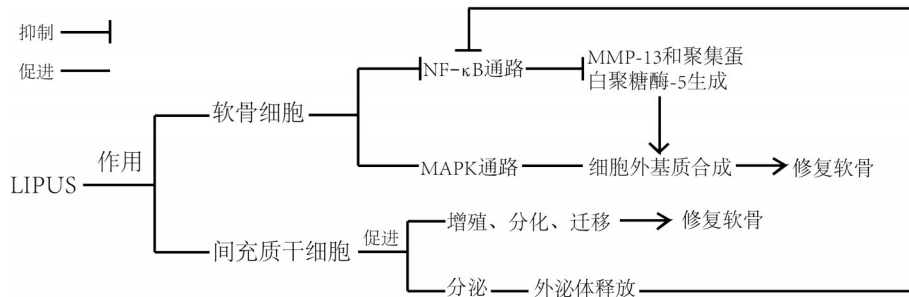


图3 LIPUS对软骨的作用

Figure 3 Effect of LIPUS on cartilage

### 3 讨论

综上所述, LIPUS主要通过影响自噬、Wnt/ $\beta$ -连环蛋白、MAPKs、NF- $\kappa$ B、PI3K-Akt和整联蛋白-mTOR等信号通路对膝关节中的滑膜细胞、软骨细胞及骨髓间充质干细胞的细胞活动起积极作用。LIPUS可通过增强巨噬细胞的自噬途径及抑制NLRP3炎症小体通路使巨噬细胞产生的IL-1 $\beta$ 减少,减轻炎症反应。也可通过机械刺激抑制IL-1 $\beta$ 诱导的NF- $\kappa$ B途径及激活MAPK通路,来调节软骨的分泌代谢,促进软骨细胞生成细胞外基质,保护软骨。在骨髓间充质干细胞方面, LIPUS激活ERK1/2和PI3K-Akt信号通路促进MSCs增殖分化,也通过整联蛋白-mTOR信号通路来促进MSCs产生TGF- $\beta$ 1,促进软骨形成。另一方面, LIPUS还可促进MSCs分泌外泌体,通过抑制IL-1 $\beta$ 诱导的NF- $\kappa$ B途径改变软骨代谢,间接保护软骨。最近研究也发现LIPUS通过激活自噬来促进MSCs的迁移。通过对LIPUS在KOA炎症相关信号通路上不同作用途径的探索,有利于实现LIPUS更精准的治疗。此外,干细胞新技术治疗骨关节炎疾病的临床试验已陆续开始在国内开展<sup>[10]</sup>,未来应进一步寻找LIPUS对膝关节内其他细胞或物质的影响通路,或进一步探究通过LIPUS的物理刺激让干细胞定向分化为软骨细胞并诱导其迁移修复受损软骨的可行性,为临床研究及联合治疗方案提供理论依据。

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## Progress in Study of Low-Intensity Pulsed Ultrasound Acting on Inflammation-Related Signaling Pathways in Knee Osteoarthritis

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**ABSTRACT** Knee osteoarthritis (KOA) is a degenerative total joint disease involving pathological changes in the cartilage, synovium, subchondral bone, and periarticular ligaments and muscles of the joint. The onset of KOA is associated with the metabolic imbalance of articular cartilage and the activation of cytokines, especially the high expression of interleukin-1 $\beta$  (IL-1 $\beta$ ) and tumor necrosis factor- $\alpha$  (TNF- $\alpha$ ). They appear in multiple pathogenic signaling pathways of KOA, regulate the intracellular activity of KOA and play an important role in pathological processes such as chondrocyte destruction, extracellular matrix reduction, abnormal cartilage remodeling, subchondral ossification, and synovial inflammation. Low-intensity pulsed ultrasound (LIPUS), as a non-invasive and safe physiotherapy therapy, is essentially a low intensity mechanical energy, which can produce a series of physicochemical effects on cells through physical stimulation such as cavitation effect. LIPUS is effective in the treating KOA, achieving anti-inflammatory and analgesic effects and promoting cartilage repair by modulating the activity of inflammation-related signaling pathways such as IL-1 $\beta$  and TNF- $\alpha$ . The therapeutic mechanisms reviewed as following: 1) LIPUS can reduce the inflammatory response by enhancing the autophagic pathway of macrophages in the synovial membrane and inhibiting the nucleotide-binding oligomerization domain-like receptor protein 3 (NLRP3) inflammatory vesicle pathway to reduce IL-1 $\beta$  production by macrophages; it can also act through the classical wingless MMTV integration site family protein (Wnt)/ $\beta$ -linked protein signaling pathway on fibroblasts in the synovial membrane to inhibit synovial fibrosis. 2) LIPUS promotes chondrocyte production of extracellular matrix, regulates chondrocyte metabolism, and protects cartilage by inhibiting IL-1 $\beta$  -induced nuclear factor-activated B-cell  $\kappa$  light chain enhancer (NF- $\kappa$ B) signaling pathway and regulating mitogen-activated protein kinases (MAPKs) signaling pathway. 3) LIPUS protects cartilage by activating extracellular signal-regulated kinase 1/2 (ERK1/2) and phosphatidylinositol 3-kinase-protein kinase B (PI3K–Akt) signaling pathways to promote MSCs proliferation and differentiation, and also promotes transforming growth factor-beta1 (TGF- $\beta$ 1) production by MSCs through the integral protein-target of rapamycin (mTOR) signaling pathway to promote cartilage formation. The latest study also found that LIPUS promotes the migration and exosome release of MSCs for cartilage repair through the autophagic pathway, providing new ideas for the future direction of LIPUS combination therapy. This article provides a theoretical basis for clinical studies and combination treatment options for LIPUS by reviewing the research progress on the role of LIPUS in KOA inflammation-related signaling pathways.

**KEY WORDS** knee osteoarthritis; low-intensity pulsed ultrasound; inflammation; signaling pathway; synovial cell; chondrocytes; mesenchymal stem cell

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