

# FOXF2基因在肿瘤中的研究进展

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## 摘 要

叉头盒蛋白F2 (FOXF2)是叉头/有翼螺旋家族的转录因子, 参与正常的胚胎发育并调节多器官的发育和功能。最近的研究揭示了FOXF2在肿瘤中的发展和转移中起着抑制肿瘤增殖、迁移和侵袭的作用, 但对其确切的潜在作用机制知之甚少。本文对FOXF2在肿瘤发生和发展中的功能和调控机制进行综述。

## 关键词

FOXF2, 转录因子, 转移, 肿瘤

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# Research Progress on FOXF2 Gene in Tumors

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## Abstract

Forkhead box protein F2 (FOXF2), a transcription factor of the forkhead/winged-helix family, is required for mesenchymal lineage specification and organ development during normal embryogenesis. Recent studies have revealed that FOXF2 plays a novel role in the development and metastasis of tumors, but very little is known about its exact potential mechanisms. This review summarizes the function and regulatory mechanisms of FOXF2 in tumorigenesis and progression.

## Keywords

FOXF2, Transcription Factor, Metastasis, Tumor

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## 1. 引言

FOX 基因最初是在果蝇中进行随机诱变筛选后克隆出的一类叉头基因(Forkhead), 其功能对胚胎正常发育和组织分化中起至关重要的作用[1]。人类 FOX 基因家族目前有 19 个亚族, 由 200 个成员组成, 命名从 FOXA1 至 FOXS1。FOX 基因家族主要编码蛋白为生物进化上的转录因子[2], 其功能涵盖通过与特定的 DNA 序列(启动子或增强子)结合来控制 DNA 向信使 RNA 的遗传信息的转录速率, 充当下游基因精细调控的激活物和阻遏物, 同时 FOX 蛋白负责胚胎发育各个阶段基因的表达的微调以及体内的监测保护, 另外还作为多种网络的活性调节剂参与其他生物功能诸如细胞衰老、细胞周期进展、DNA 损伤反应、免疫应答以及细胞代谢等[3] [4]。最近越来越多的研究证实 FOX 基因家族的成员 FOXF2 与肿瘤的发生及转移具有相关性, 并且在多水平、多层次上调控肿瘤的发生发展, 包括 DNA 水平、RNA 水平、蛋白表达水平和蛋白质的相互作用, 同时参与多种信号通路。因此, FOXF2 作为一种转录因子可能成为肿瘤治疗的有效标志物和治疗的有效靶点。

## 2. FOX 基因家族与 FOXF2 结构

FOX 家族是具有高保真 DNA 区域和组织特异性表达特点的基因家族, 叉头框为含有约 100 个氨基酸的 DNA 结合域, 具有高度的保守性, 因其核心部分含有  $\alpha$  螺旋排列和  $\beta$  链故被称为翼状螺旋蛋白。FOX 蛋白通过其叉头结构域将基因组 DNA 作为单体结合, 以转录调节其靶基因。FOX 蛋白的生物学功能主要在胚胎的形成及发育和调控细胞的生长分化中有着重要的作用, 如果其下游蛋白的异常表达可能会导致胚胎的发育不良, 发育畸形以及肿瘤的发生。Pierrou [5] 在 1994 年最早发现 FOXF2, 如图该基因位于人类染色体 6p25.3 [6] [7] [8], 编码同族 FOXF2 转录因子, 其结构具有 1 个 DNA 结合结构域和两种 DNA 激活结构域分别为: 1 个 AD1 激活结构域和 2 个 AD2 激活结构域。FOXF2 在邻近上皮细胞的间充质细胞中表达, 并且在胚胎发生和组织发育过程中具有组织特异性, 基因表达模式中, 调节细胞外基质合成和上皮-间充质相互作用已经被证实是在肿瘤的发展、侵袭和转移过程中发挥重要作用。

## 3. FOXF2 与肿瘤相关特征和功能

FOXF2 作为一种重要的叉头转录因子, 其编码蛋白通常在间质细胞中表达, 通过增加纤维的运动来促进间质细胞的转移。FOXF2 对于多个基因的表达及不同信号通路都有重要的调节作用。

### 3.1. FOXF2 与 Wnt 信号通路

Wnt 信号通路在调节细胞周期和监测正常以及恶性上皮细胞增殖等过程中扮演着关键的角色, Wnt 通路主要包含三种模式, 其中 Wnt/ $\beta$ -catenin 途径是 Wnt 信号通路的经典途径之一, 在肿瘤的发生发展中起重要作用[9] [10]。在 Wnt 信号通路激活后, Anxin-GSK-3 $\beta$ - $\beta$ -catenin 蛋白复合物被降解, 释放出  $\beta$ -catenin,  $\beta$ -catenin 是经典途径的关键细胞质和细胞核介质, 可以促进细胞增殖和分化[11]。LEF1 是该信号通路中

另外一个关键的转录因子[12], LEF1/ $\beta$ -catenin 转录因子复合物的形成是 Wnt 通路下游靶基因转录的前提[13], 其复合物形成与否主要取决于  $\beta$ -catenin 水平的调节。在不改变  $\beta$ -catenin mRNA 表达的情况下, FOXF2 大大降低了  $\beta$ -catenin 的水平, 从而抑制了  $\beta$ -catenin 诱导的 Wnt 信号通路[14]。在 Wnt 信号通路未被激活的情况下,  $\beta$ -catenin 通过与 GSK-3 $\beta$  继续组成磷酸化复合物, 最终被蛋白酶体泛素化并降解[15]。以上研究表明 FOXF2 通过降低  $\beta$ -catenin 水平抑制 Wnt 通路, 同时 FOXF2 以 GSK-3 $\beta$  非依赖性方式通过蛋白-蛋白酶体途径促进  $\beta$ -catenin 降解。研究人员还发现一种新的 FOXF2-IRF2BPL- $\beta$ -catenin 信号转导轴抑制胃癌中的 Wnt 信号传导活性。FOXF2 转录结合并上调泛素 E3 连接酶 IRF2BPL, 其反过来与  $\beta$ -catenin 相互作用对其进行泛素化和降解。FOXF2 的这些作用有助于抑制 Wnt 信号传导活性以抑制肿瘤细胞生长。

Nik 等人[16]研究发现 FOXF2 在成纤维细胞中的表达与 Wnt 信号传导的抑制相关, 成纤维细胞可诱导激活原始低克隆形成肿瘤细胞中的 Wnt 通路的活性和干性, 从而预防腺瘤的形成。因此, FOXF2 正在成为抗癌药物潜在重要的新靶点。

### 3.2. FOXF2 与 EMT

在正常生理情况下, 上皮间充质转化(EMT)是上皮细胞逐渐获得间充质细胞表型的过程, 该过程受到多种信号通路和转录因子的调控并最终获得间充质的特征, 病理情况下发生则会导致上皮细胞失去上皮属性如黏附性、紧密连接蛋白和失去极性, 并获得间充质细胞的特征其中包括: 运动性、侵袭性和细胞凋亡的抗性[17] [18] [19]。在肿瘤的发生发展过程中, EMT 导致上皮细胞间失去上皮属性, 而获得了间质属性, 表现为细胞间黏附作用的丧失、细胞骨架的异常重构, 继而导致肿瘤细胞的增殖和转移[20]。

FOXF2 的上调刺激 E-cadherin 表达并抑制 Vimentin 和 Snail 表达。E-cadherin, Vimentin 和 Snail 是三种与 EMT 相关的基因。E-cadherin 是一种分布在上皮细胞侧交界处的跨膜糖蛋白, 是介导细胞连接的分子基础[21]。细胞膜表面 E-cadherin 的减少破坏了细胞间连接, 从而导致肿瘤细胞的侵袭和转移能力增强[22]。FOXF2 介导 E-cadherin 的转录下调并因此破坏细胞-细胞粘附。TWIST1 被认为是 EMT 的关键调节因子, 其过表达能够触发 EMT 表型和肿瘤转移[23], Wang 等研究者[24]确定 TWIST1 是 FOXF2 的转录靶标, 同时受到 FOXF2 的负调控, 并介导 FOXF2 调节诱导细胞的上皮-间质转化。

### 3.3. FOXF2 与 microRNA182

微小 RNA (miRNA)属于一类高度保守、内源表达的单链小非编码 RNA (ncRNA)分子, 其长度大约为 22 nt [25] [26]。它们通过碱基配对方式与靶 mRNA 的 3'非翻译区(3'UTR)内的特定互补位点结合而负调节基因表达, 导致 mRNA 降解或翻译受到抑制。每个 miRNA 可以有效调节和协调多个细胞过程, 包括细胞增殖、凋亡、分化、侵袭、转移和血管生成[27]。miRNA 主要通过调节靶基因起到癌基因或肿瘤抑制基因的作用参与肿瘤进程[28] [29]。越来越多的证据突出 miR-182 在癌症进展和患者生存中的调节作用, 目前已发现 miR-182 异常过表达会促进乳腺癌、卵巢癌、前列腺癌、黑色素瘤、胶质瘤和结直肠癌的肿瘤发生[30]-[36]。

Zhang [36]研究确定了 miR-182 和 FOXF2 之间存在调节关联, 使用荧光素酶报告基因测定证实 miR-182 与 FOXF2 mRNA 的 3'非翻译区(3'UTR)存在直接结合。另外在 miR-182 敲低细胞中观察到 FOXF2 表达升高, Yu [37]为了进一步探究, 在计算机软件上预测到位于 485~491 (U1)和 688~695 (U2)的 FOXF2 是 miR-182 的潜在靶区域, 实验 qRT-PCR 和蛋白质印迹显示, 与对照组相比 miR-182 模拟物转染的人乳腺癌细胞系 MCF7 细胞中 FOXF2 表达显著降低, 因此 FOXF2 被鉴定为 miR-182 的直接靶标, 因此可以推测 miR-182 可能通过靶向下调 FOXF2 促进肿瘤细胞增殖和侵袭。Wang 等人[38]采用相同的方法验证了在卵巢癌(OC)中 FOXF2 是作为 miR-182 的直接靶标, 在研究中发现 miR-182-5p 通过直接靶向卵巢癌

细胞中 FOXF2 的 3'UTR 而负调节 FOXF2 表达, FOXF2 表达显著降低, 并与卵巢癌组织中 miR-182-5p 表达呈负相关。Zhang 和 Kundu [39] [40] 分别在乳腺癌(BC)最具侵袭性的三阴性乳腺癌(TNBC)亚型和肺癌中同样验证了以上的结果。

### 3.4. FOXF2 与 MAZ

MYC 相关锌指蛋白(MAZ)是一个转录因子位于染色体 16p11.2, 编码 2.7 kb 的 mRNA, 翻译蛋白分子量约为 60 kd。研究表明, MAZ 在基因转录中起重要作用, 如反式激活致癌基因 c-MYC、HRAS、PDPN 和血管内皮生长因子(VEGF)的表达[41] [42] [43] [44] [45], 并反式抑制某些癌基因 p53、Sp4 和内皮细胞一氧化氮合成酶(eNOS) [46] [47]。最近的研究表明, MAZ 的失调表达与各种肿瘤的进展密切相关, MAZ 在胰腺癌, 肝癌, 乳腺癌、前列腺癌和脂肪瘤中高度表达[48] [49] [50] [51] [52]。

MAZ 是具有 C2H2 型锌指蛋白的转录因子, MAZ 与富含 GC 的顺式元件结合以调节靶基因的表达[53], 已知 FOXF2 启动子区域富含 GC 的顺式元件且含有多个候选 MAZ 结合元件, 这些表明 MAZ 可能与 FOXF2 启动子在特定区域特异性结合, 因此 FOXF2 被确定为 MAZ 的转录目标。由于 MAZ 和 FOXF2 均有抑制乳腺癌细胞的侵袭性, 推测 MAZ 可能激活乳腺癌细胞中 FOXF2 的表达, Yu [54] 通过调节 FOXF2 确定了 MAZ 在乳腺癌增殖和进展中的功能, 在 BLBC 细胞的 EMT 过程中通过检测细胞特异性类型的方式发现 MAZ-FOXF2-TWIST1 轴, 验证了 MAZ 与 FOXF2 在肿瘤中的相关性。

进一步生存分析后发现 MAZ mRNA 水平与 FOXF2 mRNA 水平的组合, 可以作为检测乳腺癌患者的预后标志物。MAZ-FOXF2 轴在调节癌症发生和进展中反映出多功能转录因子的多效性, 有助于癌症的诊断和治疗。

## 4. FOXF2 在不同肿瘤发生、发展中的作用

### 4.1. FOXF2 与乳腺癌

乳腺肿瘤在多个方面表现出显著的异质性[55] [56], 多项研究已经将乳腺癌分为至少五种亚型, 其中包括正常乳腺样型、管腔 A 型、管腔 B 型、HER2 阳性型和基底样/三阴性型(BLBC/TNBC) [57] [58]。Lo [59] 近些年发现 FOXF2 可以对乳腺癌的不同分子亚型发挥不同的功能作用。在管腔型、HER2 阳性型乳腺癌中采用表观遗传机制沉默 FOXF2 表达, 在 DNA 甲基转移酶的介导下, 使含有 CpG 岛的 FOXF2 启动子发生 DNA 甲基化是沉默 FOXF2 表达的关键机制, 此外还有组蛋白去乙酰化和受多种 miRNA 靶向调控如 miRNA-182、miRNA-200、miRNA-301 等众多表观遗传机制[37] [39] [60] [61] [62]。FOXF2 的沉默会导致 CDK2-Rb-E2F 信号轴的阻断, 触发 G1 期停滞, 诱导细胞凋亡, 抑制肿瘤形成。因此, FOXF2 在这两种亚型乳腺癌中作为肿瘤抑制剂发挥作用, 严格控制 DNA 复制调节并限制细胞生长防止肿瘤形成。相比之下, FOXF2 在基底样乳腺癌中表现为过度表达, 且 FOXF2 在调节 DNA 复制中的肿瘤抑制功能在基底样乳腺癌中丧失, 同时通过研究证实了 FOXF2 是以组织环境依赖性方式驱动 EMT 和肿瘤转移进展的致癌激活剂。

Feng [63] 等人对 305 例原发性乳腺癌组织中的 FOXF2 mRNA 水平进行了 RT-qPCR 分析, 发现原发性乳腺癌中 FOXF2 mRNA 水平与乳腺肿瘤进展呈负相关, 包括肿瘤大小, 转移淋巴结数量和临床分期。此外, FOXF2 敲低促进 BLBC/TNBC 细胞在体外和体内的转移能力, 进一步发现 FOXF2 缺乏激活 EMT 并同时抑制 BLBC/TNBC 细胞的增殖[64]。因此, 他们认为 FOXF2 作为 EMT 的抑制剂抑制两种 EMT 转录因子 TWIST1 和 FOXC2 的表达和 BLBC/TNBC 细胞中增殖的启动子起作用[64] [65] [66]。基于这些发现, 可以假设 FOXF2 是 BLBC/TNBC 中的 EMT 抑制转录因子, 其敲除后通过激活 TWIST1 和 FOXC2 的转录促进 BLBC/TNBC 细胞的转移能力, 从而增强 EMT 程序[67] [68] [69]。我们可以发现在 Lo 和 Feng



的研究中存在着差异性的结果引起了 FOXF2 在乳腺癌中具体作用的争议, 其中可能的原因是实验方法的不同所导致的[70], 可通过构建乳腺癌小鼠模型继续验证假说, 此争议仍有待商榷和进一步的探讨。

## 4.2. FOXF2 与肝癌

Shi X 等人[71]研究证实从组织蛋白水平到 mRNA 水平上, 肝癌组织中 FOXF2 的表达明显低于癌旁组织且存在显著差异, 并且其表达水平与 HCC 患者的总体存活率和无复发存活率密切相关。进一步发现 RNAi 介导的 MHCC-97H 肝癌细胞系中 FOXF2 基因的沉默显著促进细胞增殖和抗凋亡能力。Dou 等人[72]重点研究了 FOXF2 缺陷与早期肝癌转移之间相关性的潜在机制, 发现 HCC 细胞中的 FOXF2 缺乏使 E-cadherin 得到增加而 Vimentin 却减少, 并重新激活 Wnt 通路, 从而促进肿瘤细胞增殖。FOXF2 的下调不仅提升 HCC 细胞迁移和侵袭的能力, 而且促进 HCC 细胞的增殖和裸鼠皮下肿瘤的生长, FOXF2 缺陷诱导 Huh7 细胞的间质-上皮细胞转化(EMT)进程, 这可能与促进循环肿瘤细胞的定植和转移有关。总之, 以上结果表明 FOXF2 可能在 HCC 进展中起重要作用。

## 4.3. FOXF2 与宫颈癌

$\beta$ -catenin 是一种多功能蛋白, 具有介导细胞粘附和信号转导的双重活性[73][74], 细胞核中  $\beta$ -catenin 的积累是肿瘤进展的重要标志[75][76]。如先前研究所示, c-Myc, CyclinD1, MMP9 和 Lgr5 参与肿瘤的发展过程, 其过表达对肿瘤的发展具有显著的促进作用[77][78]。Zhang 等人[79][80]通过研究发现 FOXF2 的过表达降低了细胞核中  $\beta$ -catenin 的表达水平, 同时 FOXF2 的上调显著抑制宫颈癌 HeLa 细胞在体外的增殖, 迁移和侵袭以及体内的生长。另外, 过表达的 FOXF2 促进 E-cadherin 的表达, 并抑制 Vimentin 和 Snail 的表达以及靶基因在细胞核中的 Wnt 信号通路(包括 c-Myc, CyclinD1, MMP9 和 Lgr5)。基于这些发现, FOXF2 可能通过调节 Wnt 信号通路抑制 HeLa 细胞的增殖、迁移和侵袭, 从而抑制宫颈癌的发展, 这可能是宫颈癌诊断和治疗的潜在靶点。

## 4.4. FOXF2 与胃癌

异常的 DNA 甲基化已是公认的胃癌标志[19], 通过识别被 DNA 启动子甲基化抑制的抑癌基因会为研究胃癌的分子发病机制提供新的见解。Higashimori 等人[81]通过研究发现, 使用启动子甲基化序列对胃癌中高甲基化候选物的全基因组进行筛选, 发现 FOXF2 基因的启动子在胃癌细胞系中优先甲基化, 因为 FOXF2 主要在人的胃肠道中表达[82], 所以与正常胃组织相比, 胃癌细胞系中的 FOXF2 启动子甲基化水平显著升高, 同时使用去甲基化剂二甲苯(5-Aza)和组蛋白去乙酰化酶抑制剂(TSA)治疗可恢复所有胃癌细胞系中的 FOXF2 表达。

进一步探究在动物水平上 FOXF2 的过表达可抑制在肿瘤发生过程中体内外裸鼠的胃癌细胞生长, 而 FOXF2 的敲低则促进其胃癌细胞生长。推测 FOXF2 抑制胃癌细胞生长是通过抑制 G1-S 细胞周期转变和诱导细胞凋亡来介导的进而达到 FOXF2 抑制胃癌的迁移和侵袭能力。另有研究发现[83], 通过测定 FOXF2mRNA 表达水平发现胃轻瘫患者平滑肌组织中 FOXF2 的表达降低。随后从小鼠胃平滑肌中敲除 FOXF2 基因, 导致胃液排空延迟, 在 FOXF2 敲除小鼠的胃肌层中检测到平滑肌收缩蛋白, 核转录因子(SRF)和心肌素的表达降低。由此得知 FOXF2 的表达下降可能导致胃轻瘫患者胃排空受损, 导致胃液滞留, 进而引起胃黏膜表面发生一系列的病理变化促使胃癌的发生。因此, FOXF2 是胃癌发生中的关键肿瘤抑制因子, 是有助于诊断和治疗该疾病的潜在生物标志物。

## 4.5. FOXF2 与前列腺癌

van der Heul [84]最早通过定量逆转录聚合酶链反应分析 12 种不同的 FOX 基因, 最初发现 FOXF2

在正常前列腺区域表现为高表达,而在前列腺癌中表达降低。进一步探究 FOXF2 的表达谱验证了 FOXF2 在前列腺区域中良性和恶性的差异表达同时表明其在上皮细胞向间充质细胞转变中起作用。他们还证实了 FOXF2 的失调引起的前列腺基质变化可导致多种肿瘤相关分泌因子的上调或下调,如金属硫蛋白家族基因(MTs),锌离子结合内肽酶(MMPs),TGF- $\beta$ 3 和 CXCL12,这将创造出有利于肿瘤生长的微环境[85] [86] [87]。

另有部分研究发现[88] [89],与正常前列腺组织和细胞系相比,前列腺癌组织和细胞系中 miR-182-5p 表达显著更高,miR-182-5p 可能是前列腺癌中的致癌基因,因为 microRNA 主要通过调节其他靶基因的表达发挥其作用,FOXF2 可以抑制前列腺癌细胞系中细胞的侵袭和迁移,并最终证实其潜在的靶基因是 FOXF2。

综上所述,随着 FOXF2 研究的深入,越来越多的证据表明 FOXF2 在肿瘤中发挥着多种功能,同时 FOXF2 与不同肿瘤间存在着密切的相关性。因此从多维度探索 FOXF2 基因功能,寻找肿瘤的治疗靶点,对肿瘤的预防和防治具有重大的临床意义。首先在与肿瘤相关的特征和功能中,FOXF2 能够通过降低  $\beta$ -catenin 的水平,从而阻断  $\beta$ -catenin 诱导的 Wnt 信号通路;FOXF2 上调刺激 E-cadherin 表达并抑制 Vimentin 和 Snail 表达触发 EMT 过程;FOXF2 被鉴定为 miR-182 的直接靶标,miR-182 可能通过靶向下调 FOXF2 促进肿瘤细胞增殖和侵袭;MAZ 可能与 FOXF2 启动子在特定区域特异性结合达到共同抑制肿瘤细胞的侵袭性。另外在肿瘤疾病的发生发展过程中,FOXF2 也扮演着不同的角色,令人意外的是 FOXF2 在乳腺癌的不同分子亚型中分别表现为促癌或抑癌作用,而在肝癌、宫颈癌、胃癌、前列腺癌中表现为抑癌作用,这说明了 FOXF2 通过参与多条与肿瘤疾病相关的重要信号通路,调控肿瘤的增殖、分化和侵袭。目前国内外对于 FOXF2 基因在肿瘤中的作用机制研究相对较少,且在不同水平上的分子调控机制尚不明确,因此十分有必要深入研究 FOXF2 基因,为探讨人类肿瘤的病因、诊断、治疗及预后提供新的理论依据。

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