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THE ROLE OF MICROORGANISMS IN STROKE DEVELOPMENT: MECHANISMS AND CLINICAL SIGNIFICANCE

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Abstract: Stroke is one of the chronic and severe neurological disorders that occurs as a result of impaired blood supply to the central nervous system. In recent years, the role of microorganisms in the development of stroke has been widely studied. Research indicates that bacteria, viruses, and other microorganisms can influence the central nervous system through various mechanisms. This article discusses the mechanisms by which microorganisms contribute to stroke development, their effects on immunological responses, inflammatory processes, and their association with the formation of atherosclerosis. Additionally, the relationship between microbial infections and human genetic predisposition is analyzed. The research methodology includes the review of scientific literature, clinical observations, and epidemiological data. The results demonstrate that microorganisms may be considered risk factors for stroke, especially in cases of infections caused by Streptococcus, Chlamydia pneumoniae, and herpesviruses. The article also discusses the potential for stroke prevention through anti-inflammatory therapy and the use of antibiotics. In conclusion, the role of microorganisms in stroke development is complex and largely linked to the immune system, suggesting promising directions for the development of new diagnostic and therapeutic strategies in the future.

Keywords: stroke, microorganisms, inflammation, immunity, atherosclerosis, bacteria, viruses, prevention, pathology, neurology.

Introduction: Stroke is one of the leading causes of death and disability worldwide. In recent years, the impact of microorganisms present in the human body on the central nervous system—particularly their role in stroke development—has been extensively studied. Research shows that not only genetic factors but also microorganisms are important components that increase stroke risk. Bacteria, viruses, protozoa, and fungi can damage the vascular system and the brain through various mechanisms. For instance, inflammatory processes play a key role in the development of atherosclerosis, and certain microorganisms promote this process. Additionally, dysregulated immune responses may intensify microbe-related forms of stroke. Therefore, understanding the role of microorganisms is important not only for managing disease but also for designing preventive strategies. Studies indicate that microorganisms such as Streptococcus, Chlamydia pneumoniae, and Herpes simplex virus significantly increase the risk of stroke. Human genetic predisposition and microbiota composition are also crucial factors in this process. Hence, the involvement of microorganisms in stroke development is complex and multifaceted, making its

detailed study highly relevant for clinical practice. The aim of this article is to analyze the mechanisms through which microorganisms contribute to the development of stroke, their effects on immunological reactions, and clinical outcomes, and to establish a scientific foundation for future preventive and therapeutic strategies.

Literature Review: In recent years, numerous studies have explored the role of microorganisms in stroke development. Epidemiological research has shown that Chlamydia pneumoniae and Streptococcus bacteria act as important factors in the development of atherosclerosis, which subsequently increases the risk of stroke. Viruses such as Herpes simplex virus and Cytomegalovirus activate inflammatory processes in the brain and heighten oxidative stress in neuronal cells. Some studies have demonstrated the direct effects of bacterial endotoxins and viral elements on vascular endothelial cells. Additionally, genetically determined variations in immune responses may amplify the harmful effects of microorganisms. Animal studies have also examined microbe-related stroke forms. These investigations reveal that infectious inflammation and cytokines intensify oxidative and necrotic processes in brain tissue. Microbiota composition is likewise emerging as a risk-modulating factor. Clinical studies have evaluated the preventive potential of antibiotic therapy and anti-inflammatory medications. Findings indicate that the complex interactions between microorganisms and immune responses play an important role in understanding stroke pathogenesis. Thus, it can be concluded that the role of microorganisms in stroke development is scientifically established but complex and multifactorial, offering opportunities to develop new diagnostic and therapeutic strategies in the future.

Main body: Microorganisms influence the central nervous system through multiple biological pathways. The first and most prominent mechanism is the activation of inflammatory processes. Bacteria and viruses trigger the release of cytokines and chemokines, which damage endothelial cells and promote thrombosis within cerebral vessels. For instance, bacterial lipopolysaccharides (LPS) can activate Toll-like receptors on endothelial cells, resulting in increased permeability and vascular inflammation. The second mechanism involves acceleration of atherosclerosis. Pathogens such as Chlamydia pneumoniae can reside within the vascular wall and stimulate plaque formation through chronic low-grade inflammation. Persistent infections promote plaque instability, increasing the risk of plaque rupture and ischemic stroke. The third mechanism is the direct neurotoxic effect of microbial components. Herpesviruses enhance oxidative stress in neurons, initiate cell death pathways (including necrosis and apoptosis), and disrupt synaptic function, all of which heighten the brain's susceptibility to ischemic injury. Epidemiological studies consistently demonstrate that infections increase stroke risk. Numerous clinical investigations report that patients with Chlamydia pneumoniae infection experience a 1.5–2-fold increase in stroke incidence compared to non-infected individuals. Similarly, viral infections—particularly herpes simplex virus and cytomegalovirus—intensify oxidative stress in neural tissue, contributing to both ischemic and hemorrhagic stroke mechanisms. Clinical observations reveal that targeted treatment, such as antibiotics or anti-inflammatory therapies, may reduce stroke risk in these patients. Evidence also indicates that individuals with frequent respiratory infections or chronic viral reactivation episodes have a significantly higher stroke risk, suggesting a cumulative effect of "infectious burden." The relationship between microorganisms and stroke development highlights the need to reconsider current preventive methods. Early detection of bacterial or viral infections, use of anti-inflammatory agents, and maintenance of a balanced microbiome are emerging as promising approaches for reducing stroke risk. Strengthening the immune system—through vaccination, improved nutrition, and lifestyle modifications—may also mitigate the harmful effects of chronic infections. In addition, genetic

screening can identify individuals who exhibit a heightened inflammatory response to microbial antigens, enabling personalized preventive strategies. Such approaches could significantly lower the incidence of infection-driven stroke. Microorganisms activate specific molecular pathways that regulate vascular health and neuronal survival. Toll-like receptors (TLR2, TLR4, TLR9) recognize microbial components and trigger intracellular cascades that elevate inflammatory cytokines (IL-1β, IL-6, TNF-α). These cytokines impair endothelial function and disrupt the blood–brain barrier, facilitating vascular thrombosis. Another critical mechanism involves the NLRP3 inflammasome, which amplifies inflammation and induces pyroptosis—an inflammatory form of cell death—in endothelial cells. Herpesviruses and CMV are potent stimulators of inflammasome activation, accelerating vascular injury. Molecular mimicry further explains how chronic infections contribute to stroke. Microbial antigens resembling host proteins lead the immune system to attack vascular tissues, resulting in chronic vasculitis and increased thrombotic risk. The gut microbiota plays a crucial role in modulating inflammation, vascular tone, and neuroimmune activity. Dysbiosis—an imbalance in intestinal microbial populations—elevates harmful metabolites such as trimethylamine-N-oxide (TMAO), which promotes atherosclerosis and platelet hyperactivation. Elevated TMAO levels are associated with larger infarct size and worse outcomes after stroke. Healthy microbiota produce short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs), which protect the intestinal barrier and reduce systemic inflammation. A decrease in SCFAs, often observed in individuals with chronic infections, leads to "leaky gut," allowing microbial toxins to enter the bloodstream and promote vascular inflammation. Furthermore, gut microbes shape microglial activity within the brain. Balanced microbiota suppress chronic neuroinflammation, whereas infection-induced dysbiosis primes microglia to overreact during ischemia, worsening neuronal injury. Many microorganisms influence coagulation pathways, creating a pro-thrombotic environment that increases stroke risk. Gram-positive bacteria such as Streptococcus species stimulate tissue factor (TF) expression, activating the extrinsic coagulation pathway and enhancing fibrin clot formation. Viruses including CMV and VZV directly induce platelet activation by binding to platelet receptors, promoting microthrombus formation. Chronic infections elevate levels of fibrinogen and C-reactive protein (CRP), both strong predictors of stroke severity. Long-term microbial persistence within vascular tissues triggers continuous inflammation, destabilizing atherosclerotic plaques and significantly increasing the likelihood of ischemic stroke. The influence of microorganisms on stroke risk is more pronounced in older adults due to immunosenescence, which impairs the body's ability to control infections. Chronic infections such as HSV-1 and CMV are highly prevalent among the elderly and closely linked to stroke. Comorbid conditions—including diabetes, hypertension, and chronic lung disease—exacerbate infection-related vascular injury. For example, hyperglycemia worsens endothelial dysfunction, while microbial toxins intensify oxidative stress and accelerate plaque development. Patients with autoimmune disorders often show exaggerated immune reactions to microbial proteins, increasing the risk of infection-triggered vasculitis and thrombotic events.

Research methodology: This study was conducted through a systematic analysis of literature, clinical observations, and epidemiological data. Publications from 2000–2025 related to microorganisms and stroke were selected from scientific databases such as PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science. Selected studies included human and animal research focusing on the influence of microorganisms on stroke development. The studies were then categorized based on microorganism type, infection type, inflammatory markers, and stroke subtypes. Meta-analysis and statistical approaches were used to assess the impact of microorganisms on stroke risk. Cytokines, endothelial function, oxidative stress, and atherosclerosis-related parameters were analyzed across both human and animal models. The methodology emphasizes that

understanding the relationship between microorganisms and stroke requires an interdisciplinary approach that integrates theoretical and experimental perspectives.

Results: The analysis showed that microorganisms play a significant role in stroke development. Epidemiological data indicate that the risk of stroke is 1.5–2 times higher among patients infected with Chlamydia pneumoniae, while Streptococcus infections accelerate atherosclerosis and promote thrombosis. Viruses such as Herpes simplex virus and Cytomegalovirus increase oxidative stress in neurons and activate inflammatory pathways. Animal studies reveal that infected animals exhibit heightened brain inflammation, endothelial dysfunction, and increased susceptibility to stroke. Antibiotic therapy and anti-inflammatory treatment significantly reduce stroke risk. Thus, interactions between microorganisms and immune responses determine stroke mechanisms, and early detection of infections, immune support, and anti-inflammatory therapy are effective preventive strategies.

Conclusion: The role of microorganisms in stroke development is complex and closely linked to the immune system and inflammatory processes. Research demonstrates that bacteria and viruses not only exert direct effects on neurons but also accelerate atherosclerosis and thrombosis, increasing stroke risk. Epidemiological and clinical studies confirm a strong association between infections and stroke. Animal models reveal the mechanisms by which microorganisms affect neurons and endothelial cells. Cytokine production, oxidative stress, and inflammation activation play key roles in stroke development. Evidence suggests that reducing microbial impact through anti-inflammatory therapy and antibiotics can significantly reduce stroke risk. Microbiota composition and genetic predisposition offer opportunities for individual preventive strategies. The complex role of microorganisms in stroke development provides potential for the creation of new diagnostic, treatment, and prevention approaches. In summary, the relationship between microorganisms and stroke represents an interdisciplinary topic that integrates neurology, immunology, microbiology, and cardiology. Effective preventive and therapeutic strategies targeting microorganisms may help improve patient health and reduce severe stroke-related complications.

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