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Commentary

The Hallmarks of Aging Revisited: New Insights from Cellular Stress Pathways

Helena Simovic*

Department of Cellular Biology, Arcturus University of Life Sciences, Zagreb, Croatia

DESCRIPTION

This article revisits the classical hallmarks of aging and highlights new findings surrounding cellular stress responses that influence longevity. In 2013, scientists outlined nine "hallmarks of aging," a framework that has since shaped global research on longevity. These hallmarks ranging from genomic instability to altered intercellular communication have guided aging research for more than a decade. Today, modern insights into cellular stress response pathways are expanding this frame work, article provides an in-depth re-examination of the classical hallmarks of aging through the lens of newly emerging cellular stress research.

It reviews the nine foundational hallmarks genomic instability, telomere attrition, epigenetic alterations, loss of proteostasis, deregulated nutrient sensing, mitochondrial dysfunction, cellular senescence, stem cell exhaustion and altered intercellular communication while detailing how modern biology is reshaping this framework.

The description emphasizes how recent findings in stress response pathways, such as the Integrated Stress Response (ISR), Heat Shock Response (HSR), autophagy regulation and metabolic sensing circuits, have expanded our understanding of what drives aging at the molecular and systemic levels. It also highlights how these pathways simultaneously protect the organism in youth but can contribute to degeneration when chronically activated in later life. Finally, the article explores how this updated perspective is stimulating new therapeutic research, including senolytics, autophagy activators, metabolic modulators and interventions targeting protein homeostasis.

The original hallmarks of aging can be grouped into three major categories:

Primary hallmarks

These involve fundamental cellular damage:

- Genomic instability
- Telomere attrition
- Epigenetic alterations
- Loss of proteostasis

Antagonistic hallmarks

These reflect responses to stress that become harmful when dysregulated:

- Mitochondrial dysfunction
- Cellular senescence
- Deregulated nutrient sensing

Integrative hallmarks

These influence the decline of tissues and systems:

- Stem cell exhaustion
- Altered intercellular communication

This framework has been invaluable for understanding how aging manifests across various levels of biological organization.

Emerging new hallmarks: The stress response perspective

Recent research suggests that the way cells perceive and respond to stress may be a central driver of aging. Key pathways under investigation include:

Integrated Stress Response (ISR): The ISR regulates protein synthesis during cellular stress. Chronic activation of this pathway contributes to neurodegeneration and metabolic dysfunction. Modulating ISR activity has shown promise in extending lifespan in experimental models.

Autophagy enhancement: Autophagy the process of recycling damaged cellular components declines with age. New studies indicate that sustained autophagy may be essential to healthy aging and pharmacological activation of autophagy shows strong longevity potential.

Heat Shock Response (HSR): The decline of HSR reduces cells' ability to repair damaged proteins. Enhancing heat shock

Correspondence to: Helena Simovic, Department of Cellular Biology, Arcturus University of Life Sciences, Zagreb, Croatia, E-mail: h.simovic@arcturusuni.cr

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factor-1 activity improves protein quality control and extends lifespan in multiple model organisms.

Senescence as a stress-induced fate

Cellular senescence, once thought of as simply a response to DNA damage, is now recognized as a complex stress-induced state. Senescent cells release pro-inflammatory molecules collectively known as the Senescence-Associated Secretory Phenotype (SASP). Over time, SASP contributes to tissue dysfunction, chronic inflammation and age-related diseases.

Senolytic drugs compounds that selectively eliminate senescent cells have emerged as one of the most promising therapeutic avenues. Early trials in humans indicate reduced inflammatory markers and improved physical performance.

Metabolic stress and nutrient sensing

Nutrient sensing pathways including mTOR, AMPK, sirtuins and insulin signalling play pivotal roles in aging. A balanced interplay between anabolic and catabolic signaling is essential for cellular health.

Caloric restriction, intermittent fasting and specific dietary patterns appear to modulate these pathways, enhancing metabolic flexibility and promoting longevity across species.

CONCLUSION

The classical hallmarks of aging remain a robust framework, but emerging insights into stress response pathways are expanding our understanding of why organisms age. As we continue integrating new discoveries, a more comprehensive model of aging is taking shape one that could ultimately drive interventions promoting longer, healthier lives. These adaptive systems function optimally in youth, enabling organisms to survive environmental challenges, maintain cellular homeostasis and repair damage efficiently. Yet with age, these same pathways can become dysregulated, leading to chronic inflammation, metabolic rigidity, senescent cell accumulation and a decline in regenerative potential. By revisiting the hallmarks of aging through this expanded lens, scientists are beginning to appreciate that aging is a dynamic tension between damage and response an interplay shaped by genes, environment and the cumulative history of stress exposure.