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Deciphering the Structural Basis of RNA-Protein Interactions in Gene Expression Regulation: Mechanistic Insights and Biomedical Implications

Isabella Lucia Hernandez, Charlie Robert Shaw, Nora May Foster, Benjamin Ryan Davis, Emily Isabella King

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ABSTRACT
RNA-protein interactions (RPIs) play a critical role in gene expression regulation, influencing processes such as transcription, splicing, translation, and mRNA stability. The structural basis of these interactions provides insights into their functional significance in cellular homeostasis and disease states. This review explores the molecular mechanisms underlying RPIs, focusing on RNA-binding domains, post-transcriptional modifications, and the impact of structural dynamics. Additionally, we discuss recent advancements in computational and experimental methodologies for characterizing RPIs, along with their implications in disease pathogenesis and therapeutic interventions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Gene expression regulation is a highly coordinated process involving various molecular players, among which RPIs are central. These interactions govern multiple cellular processes, including RNA processing, transport, and degradation. Understanding the structural basis of RPIs is crucial for elucidating their functional consequences and developing targeted therapeutics for diseases linked to dysregulated RNA-protein complexes.

2. Structural Components of RNA-Protein Interactions

RPIs are mediated through specific RNA-binding proteins (RBPs) that recognize and bind RNA motifs via distinct RNA-binding domains (RBDs). Common RBDs include the RNA recognition motif (RRM), KH domain, zinc finger domains, and DEAD-box helicases. Structural analyses using X-ray crystallography and cryo-electron microscopy have revealed how these domains contribute to specificity and affinity in RPIs.

Table 1 summarizes key RBDs and their target RNA motifs.

RNA-Binding Domain	Structure	Target RNA Motif	Function
RRM	Beta-sheet scaffold	AU-rich elements	Splicing, stability
KH Domain	Alpha-beta fold	Poly-U tracts	Translation regulation
Zinc Finger	C2H2 motif	Stem-loop structures	RNA transport

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DEAD-box	Helical	Unstructured RNA	RNA helicase activity

3. Post-Transcriptional Modifications Influencing RNA-Protein Interactions

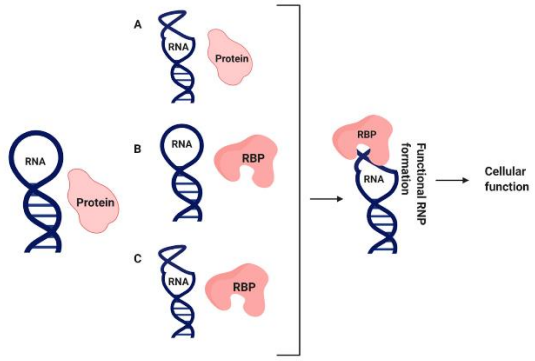

Fig.**Post-Transcriptional Modifications Influencing RNA-Protein Interactions**

Post-transcriptional modifications such as N6-methyladenosine (m6A), pseudouridylation, and 2′-O-methylation modulate RNA structure and its interaction with proteins. These modifications alter binding affinity, stability, and function of RNA-protein complexes, impacting gene expression dynamics.

4. Computational and Experimental Approaches for Studying RNA-Protein Interactions

Advancements in high-throughput techniques such as CLIP-seq, RIP-seq, and ChIRP-MS, along with AI-driven computational tools, have enhanced our understanding of RPIs. Integrative structural biology approaches combining molecular docking and cryo-EM have further refined interaction models.

5. Implications in Disease Pathogenesis and Therapeutic Strategies

Dysregulation of RPIs is implicated in neurodegenerative diseases, cancer, and viral infections. For instance, aberrant interactions of TDP-43 and FUS proteins with RNA contribute to ALS pathology. Targeting RPIs with small molecules or antisense oligonucleotides represents a promising therapeutic avenue.

Table 2 outlines diseases associated with dysfunctional RPIs.

Disease	Dysregulated RBP	Consequence
ALS	TDP-43	Aberrant RNA splicing
Cancer	HuR	Increased oncogene stability
Viral Infections	NS1 (Influenza)	Inhibition of host mRNA processing

6. CONCLUSION

Understanding the structural basis of RNA-protein interactions (RPIs) is essential for deciphering gene expression regulation and advancing therapeutic strategies. RPIs play a pivotal role in various cellular processes, including RNA stability, translation, and post-transcriptional modifications. Structural studies using techniques such as X-ray crystallography, cryo-electron microscopy, and NMR spectroscopy have provided valuable insights into the molecular dynamics of RPIs.Integrating structural data with functional analyses can reveal novel regulatory mechanisms governing RNA biology. Advances in computational modeling and high-throughput sequencing further enhance our ability to predict and manipulate RPIs for therapeutic applications. Targeting RPIs holds immense potential for developing RNA-based therapeutics for conditions like cancer, neurodegenerative diseases, and viral infections.Future research should focus on refining structural prediction models, exploring RNA-targeted drug discovery, and identifying new regulatory elements in RPIs. Unraveling these interactions will pave the way for innovative precision medicine approaches.

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