WORLD JOURNAL OF PHARMACEUTICAL RESEARCH
Coden USA: WJPRAP Impact Factor 8.63
Volume 15, Issue 7, 248-277. Review Article ISSN 2277–7105

MOLECULAR MECHANISMS AND EMERGING BIOMARKERS IN ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE: IMPLICATIONS FOR PRECISION THERAPEUTICS

Miruthula U. V.*, Swetha G.T., Bharathi S.

India.

Article Received on 05 March 2026,
Article Revised on 26 March 2026,
Article Published on 01 April 2026,

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19325954

***Corresponding Author**
Miruthula U. V.
India.

How to cite this Article: Miruthula U. V.*, Swetha G.T., Bharathi S. (2026). Molecular Mechanisms And Emerging Biomarkers In Alzheimer's Disease: Implications For Precision Therapeutics. World Journal of Pharmaceutical Research, 15(7), 248–277.

ABSTRACT

Background: Alzheimer's disease (AD) is a progressive neurodegenerative disorder characterized by cognitive decline, neuronal loss, and accumulation of amyloid-β and tau pathology. Despite rapid advances in biomarker discovery and therapeutics, AD remains a major global health challenge with no curative treatment. **Objective:** This review synthesizes contemporary evidence on the molecular mechanisms, genetic and epigenetic regulators, biomarker advancements, and emerging precision-medicine strategies in AD, highlighting gaps that remain barriers to effective disease modification. **Content:** Recent research has refined our understanding of AD as a multifactorial disorder driven by converging pathways including amyloid-β aggregation, tau hyperphosphorylation, oxidative stress, neuroinflammation, and synaptic dysfunction. Genetic determinants—particularly *APOE ε4*, *APP*, *PSEN1/2* variants—interact with epigenomic alterations such as DNA methylation drift, histone modifications, and dysregulated non-coding RNAs, collectively accelerating neurodegeneration. Advances in fluid biomarkers (CSF Aβ42, p-tau181, NfL), blood-based assays, and molecular neuroimaging (amyloid-PET, tau-PET) now enable earlier and more accurate diagnosis. Omics-driven studies have identified novel molecular signatures and therapeutic targets, including pathways regulating lipid metabolism, microglial activation, and APOE4 structure–function dynamics. Emerging interventions—such as gene editing, APOE4 structural correction, and anti-amyloid immunotherapies—show promise but require rigorous

validation. **Conclusion:** AD pathophysiology reflects complex interactions between genetic liability, molecular dysregulation, and modifiable environmental factors. While current therapies provide symptomatic relief, advances in biomarkers and genome-guided therapeutics move the field closer to earlier detection and precision-based interventions.

KEYWORDS: Alzheimer's disease; biomarkers; APOE4; epigenetics; precision medicine.

INTRODUCTION

Alzheimer's disease (AD) is the most prevalent cause of dementia globally and is characterized by progressive decline in memory, cognition, and functional independence.[1] As populations age, the prevalence of AD is projected to exceed 150 million cases by 2050, posing immense social, economic, and healthcare challenges.[2] Despite decades of research, AD remains without a curative therapy, largely due to its complex, multifactorial pathobiology.

Historically conceptualized through the amyloid cascade hypothesis, AD pathology includes extracellular amyloid-β (Aβ) deposition and intracellular neurofibrillary tangles composed of hyperphosphorylated tau.[3] However, contemporary evidence demonstrates that AD results from the convergence of multiple processes, including synaptic dysfunction, neuroinflammation, mitochondrial impairment, microglial dysregulation, lipid metabolism abnormalities, and vascular pathology.[4,5] These interacting mechanisms begin decades before symptoms appear, indicating a long presymptomatic phase in which early detection and intervention may be most effective.[6]

Genetics plays a substantial role in shaping disease susceptibility and progression. Mutations in *APP*, *PSEN1*, and *PSEN2* cause early-onset familial AD, while the *APOE ε4* allele remains the strongest genetic risk factor for late-onset AD, influencing Aβ aggregation, tau pathology, lipid homeostasis, and microglial activation.[7,8] In parallel, emerging research highlights the importance of epigenetic alterations—such as DNA methylation shifts, histone modifications, and non-coding RNA dysregulation—in mediating gene–environment interactions that accelerate neurodegeneration.[9]

Technological advances, including genomics, transcriptomics, proteomics, metabolomics, and epigenomics, have transformed understanding of AD as a systems-level disorder rather than a single-pathway disease.[10] These multi-omics approaches have revealed novel

molecular signatures, disease subtypes, and therapeutic targets, offering new opportunities for precision-medicine strategies.

Simultaneously, major progress has been made in diagnostic biomarkers. Cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) Aβ42, total tau, and phosphorylated tau (p-tau181/p-tau217), alongside blood-based markers such as plasma p-tau and neurofilament light chain (NfL), now provide highly accurate detection of underlying AD pathology.[11] Molecular imaging tools—including amyloid PET and tau PET—enable visualization of pathology in vivo and improve diagnostic certainty, even in early or atypical presentations.[12] Updated 2023–2024 diagnostic frameworks emphasize biological ("A/T/N") classification over clinical criteria, marking a paradigm shift toward biomarker-defined AD.[13]

Therapeutically, recent FDA approvals of anti-amyloid monoclonal antibodies such as lecanemab and donanemab represent significant milestones, though questions remain regarding long-term efficacy, amyloid-related imaging abnormalities (ARIA), and applicability across diverse populations.[14,15] The limited benefit of single-target therapies underscores the need for multi-modal, mechanism-based strategies that integrate molecular heterogeneity, genetic risk, and disease stage.

Given the rapid expansion of evidence across molecular mechanisms, biomarkers, genetics, and emerging therapeutics, a comprehensive synthesis is essential. This review integrates contemporary insights from multi-omics research, epigenetic regulation, APOE4 biology, and precision-medicine approaches, aiming to clarify evolving concepts in AD pathogenesis and highlight future directions for early detection and disease-modifying interventions.

PATHOGENESIS

Alzheimer's disease (AD) pathogenesis is multifactorial and results from the interaction of amyloid, tau, neuroinflammatory, metabolic, vascular, and genetic mechanisms that evolve over decades before clinical symptoms appear.[16] Traditionally dominated by the amyloid cascade hypothesis, current evidence supports a broader "network failure" model in which multiple parallel and convergent biological pathways contribute to synaptic dysfunction and neurodegeneration.[17]

1. Amyloid-β Accumulation

The overproduction or impaired clearance of amyloid-β (Aβ), particularly the aggregation-

prone Aβ42 isoform, remains an early and central event in AD pathology.[18] Aβ oligomers disrupt synaptic signaling, alter neurotransmitter release, impair long-term potentiation, and trigger microglial activation.[19] Impaired glymphatic clearance and age-related vascular dysfunction further promote cerebral amyloid angiopathy and parenchymal deposition.[20]

2. Tau Hyperphosphorylation and Neurofibrillary Tangles

Hyperphosphorylated tau dissociates from microtubules, leading to cytoskeletal instability and formation of intracellular neurofibrillary tangles.[21] Tau pathology correlates more strongly with cognitive decline than amyloid burden and spreads trans-synaptically in a prion-like manner.[22] Recent findings highlight that Aβ pathology accelerates tau misfolding and propagation through microglial and astrocytic inflammatory pathways.[23]

3. Neuroinflammation and Microglial Dysregulation

Chronic neuroinflammation is now recognized as a driver—not merely a consequence—of AD.[24] Microglia shift toward a disease-associated phenotype characterized by impaired phagocytosis, excessive cytokine release, and metabolic dysfunction. Genetic variants in microglial receptors (*TREM2*, *CD33*) significantly modify risk and influence the inflammatory milieu.[25] Astrocytic reactivity contributes to synaptic loss through glutamate dysregulation and release of inflammatory mediators.[26]

4. Mitochondrial and Metabolic Dysfunction

Mitochondrial impairment reduces neuronal ATP production, increases reactive oxygen species (ROS), and sensitizes neurons to excitotoxicity.[27] Disrupted lipid metabolism—especially in APOE4 carriers—affects membrane integrity, synaptic function, and Aβ trafficking.[28] Impaired insulin signaling ("brain insulin resistance") is increasingly considered a metabolic hallmark of AD.[29]

5. Vascular and Glymphatic Pathways

Cerebrovascular dysfunction contributes significantly to AD pathogenesis. Blood–brain barrier breakdown, impaired cerebral perfusion, and reduced clearance through perivascular pathways synergize with amyloid and tau pathology.[30] The glymphatic system, which facilitates interstitial waste removal during sleep, becomes less efficient with aging and APOE4 genotype, promoting Aβ accumulation.[31]

6. Genetic and Epigenetic Mechanisms

Genetic factors shape vulnerability to AD, with the *APOE ε4* allele exerting profound effects on amyloid aggregation, tau phosphorylation, lipid transport, and microglial activation.[7] Epigenetic alterations—including DNA methylation drift, histone acetylation changes, and dysregulated microRNAs—modulate transcriptional networks that control synaptic function, inflammation, and neuronal resilience.[9] These mechanisms mediate the effects of environmental exposures, lifestyle factors, and aging, making AD a quintessential gene–environment interaction disorder.

7. Integrated Multi-System Model

Modern multi-omics studies support an integrated model of AD pathogenesis involving early amyloid accumulation, inflammation-driven tau propagation, mitochondrial failure, synaptic collapse, and progressive neuronal loss.[10] Rather than a linear cascade, AD pathophysiology reflects a complex interplay of upstream triggers and downstream feedback loops that differ across individuals. This heterogeneity underscores the need for personalized and biomarker-driven therapeutic approaches.

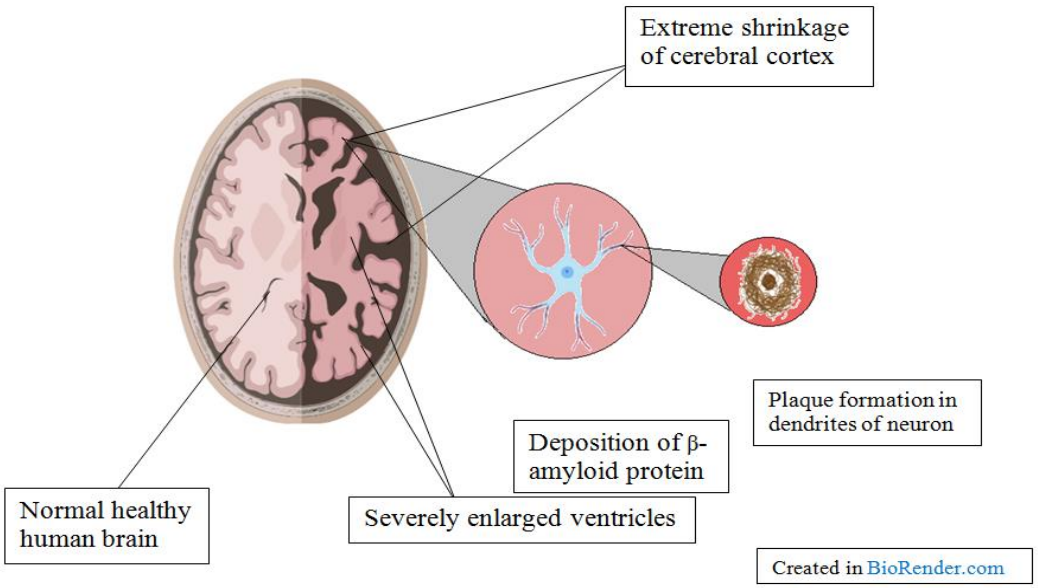

Fig. 1: Pathophysiology of alzheimer's disease.

DIAGNOSTIC MARKERS

Early and accurate diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease (AD) has advanced significantly with the shift from symptom-based assessment toward a biological definition of disease. Modern frameworks emphasize the **A/T/N classification**, which categorizes individuals based on

amyloid (A), tau (T), and neurodegeneration (N) biomarkers, enabling detection in preclinical, prodromal, and symptomatic stages.[32]

1. Cerebrospinal Fluid (CSF) Biomarkers

CSF biomarkers remain among the most validated diagnostic tools for AD.

- **Reduced Aβ42 or Aβ42/Aβ40 ratio** reflects amyloid deposition.[33]
- **Elevated total tau (t-tau)** indicates neuronal injury.
- **Phosphorylated tau isoforms (p-tau181, p-tau217)** show high specificity for tau pathology and differentiate AD from non-AD dementias.[34]

Recent studies highlight **p-tau217** as the most accurate fluid biomarker to date, outperforming p-tau181 in early diagnostic sensitivity and differential diagnosis.[35]

2. Blood-Based Biomarkers

Blood biomarkers have transformed clinical practice due to their accessibility, cost-effectiveness, and strong correlation with CSF/PET measures.

a) Plasma Phosphorylated Tau (p-tau181, p-tau217, p-tau231)

These markers reliably detect AD pathology, predict conversion from mild cognitive impairment (MCI) to AD, and correlate with tau-PET signals.[36] **Plasma p-tau217** is emerging as the leading candidate for large-scale screening and early detection.[37]

b) Neurofilament Light Chain (NfL)

NfL reflects **axonal degeneration** and is elevated in both AD and other neurodegenerative diseases. Though not AD-specific, it is valuable for tracking disease severity and progression.[38]

c) Aβ42/40 Ratio

Plasma Aβ assays using mass spectrometry show improved reliability and correlate with amyloid-PET findings, making them promising for preclinical detection.[39]

3. Neuroimaging Biomarkers

a) Amyloid PET

Radiotracers such as **18F-florbetapir, 18F-florbetaben, and 18F-flutemetamol** enable in vivo visualization of fibrillar amyloid plaques.[40] Amyloid PET becomes positive decades before symptoms, making it a crucial tool for early detection and clinical trial screening.

b) Tau PET

Tau-specific tracers such as **18F-flortaucipir** map neurofibrillary tangle distribution with high specificity. Tau PET correlates strongly with cognitive decline and disease staging, often outperforming amyloid markers in predicting progression.[41]

c) Structural MRI

MRI demonstrates characteristic patterns of atrophy including:

- Medial temporal lobe
- Hippocampus
- Entorhinal cortex
- Posterior cingulate regions

These changes correspond to Braak staging and support diagnosis, although they appear later in the disease course.[42]

d) FDG-PET

FDG-PET detects **regional hypometabolism** in temporoparietal regions and posterior cingulate cortex. While not disease-specific, FDG-PET enhances diagnostic accuracy, especially in atypical presentations.[43]

4. Electroencephalography (EEG) & Functional Markers

Advanced EEG and MEG metrics reveal network dysconnectivity, slowed oscillations, and synaptic dysfunction characteristic of early AD. These tools are increasingly used in clinical trials as functional biomarkers.[44]

5. Emerging Biomarkers

Recent advancements include:

a) Synaptic Markers

- **Neurogranin**, a postsynaptic protein, reflects synaptic dysfunction and correlates with disease progression.[45]

b) Inflammatory Markers

- **sTREM2**, GFAP (glial fibrillary acidic protein), and complement components indicate microglial and astrocytic activation.[46]
- Plasma **GFAP**, in particular, shows strong correlation with amyloid positivity and may serve as an early-stage biomarker.[47]

c) Multi-Omic Marker Panels

Proteomic, metabolomic, and lipidomic signatures improve predictive accuracy when integrated with genetic risk (APOE genotype) and neuroimaging findings.[48]

6. Diagnostic Frameworks

The **2023–2024 NIA-AA update** redefines AD as a biological construct, emphasizing biomarker confirmation even in asymptomatic individuals.[13] This represents a shift toward early intervention strategies, facilitating preventive therapy and precision-medicine approaches.

OMICS TECHNOLOGY IN ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Omics technologies have transformed Alzheimer's disease (AD) research by enabling comprehensive, systems-level analysis of genomic, transcriptomic, proteomic, metabolomic, and epigenomic alterations that drive disease onset and progression. These integrative approaches reveal molecular signatures, pathogenic networks, and therapeutic targets that are not apparent through traditional single-pathway studies.[49]

1. Genomics

Genome-wide association studies (GWAS) and whole-genome sequencing have identified more than 70 genetic loci associated with AD, expanding the understanding of disease mechanisms beyond *APP*, *PSEN1*, *PSEN2*, and *APOE*.[50] Novel risk variants implicate pathways involving lipid metabolism, immune regulation, endosomal trafficking, and synaptic function.[51] Multi-ancestry genomic datasets published between 2021–2024 have revealed additional variants in microglial and astrocytic regulatory genes, further emphasizing innate immune involvement in AD.[52]

2. Transcriptomics

Bulk RNA sequencing and single-cell RNA sequencing (scRNA-seq) have revealed cell-type–specific transcriptional changes in AD brains. scRNA-seq studies show distinct populations of disease-associated microglia (DAM) and reactive astrocytes, characterized by upregulation of inflammatory genes, complement pathways, and phagocytic markers.[53] Transcriptomic shifts in neurons include downregulation of synaptic signaling, metabolic pathways, and mitochondrial genes, correlating with cognitive decline.[54]

Spatial transcriptomics has further demonstrated region-specific vulnerability—especially in

the hippocampus and entorhinal cortex—and uncovered molecular gradients linking amyloid burden, tau spread, and glial activation.[55]

3. Proteomics

Advances in mass spectrometry–based proteomics have identified thousands of dysregulated proteins in AD, representing synaptic proteins, complement components, metabolic enzymes, and cytoskeletal elements.[56] Large-scale proteomic maps reveal that:

- Early AD is dominated by immune activation and synaptic remodeling.
- Late-stage AD shows marked cytoskeletal disruption, mitochondrial failure, and loss of neuronal proteostasis.[57]

Proteomic profiling of CSF and plasma has improved biomarker discovery, including identification of p-tau217, GFAP, and NfL as highly informative diagnostic indicators.[36,47]

4. Metabolomics & Lipidomics

Metabolomic studies demonstrate disruptions in amino acid metabolism, oxidative stress pathways, sphingolipids, and phosphatidylcholine species in AD.[58] Lipidomics highlights altered cholesterol transport and lipid droplet accumulation—changes strongly influenced by APOE4 genotype.[59] These metabolic derangements contribute to impaired neurotransmission, synaptic vulnerability, and mitochondrial dysfunction.

Metabolomic markers, such as reductions in docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), elevations in ceramides, and changes in bile acid profiles, have shown potential for early disease prediction.[60]

5. Epigenomics

Epigenomic profiling indicates widespread DNA methylation changes in AD, especially at genes regulating immune activation, neuronal plasticity, and lipid metabolism.[9] Altered histone acetylation and methylation patterns correlate with transcriptional dysregulation and cognitive impairment. Dysregulated non-coding RNAs—including microRNAs and long non-coding RNAs—modulate APP processing, tau phosphorylation, and synaptic signaling.[61]

These epigenetic signatures provide mechanistic links between environmental risk factors (diet, stress, inflammation) and genetic predisposition.

6. Multi-Omics Integration

Integration of genomics, transcriptomics, proteomics, metabolomics, and epigenomics has revealed molecular subtypes of AD, including inflammatory-dominant, synaptic-dominant, and metabolic-dominant phenotypes (62). Multi-omics networks consistently highlight the convergence of:

- Microglial immune pathways
- Tau propagation modules
- Lipid metabolism abnormalities
- Mitochondrial energy failure
- Synaptic vulnerability

These integrative analyses support the emerging concept of AD as a systemic, multi-network disease rather than a purely amyloid-driven disorder.[63]

7. Clinical and Therapeutic Implications

Omics technologies provide actionable insights into:

- Early detection using multi-marker biomarker panels
- Mechanistic classification for precision-medicine trials
- Identification of modifiable metabolic and inflammatory pathways
- Novel therapeutic targets (e.g., microglial checkpoints, lipid enzymes, epigenetic modifiers)

Current multi-omic datasets are being incorporated into machine learning models to predict disease onset, therapeutic response, and rate of progression, marking a major shift toward individualized AD care.[64]

GENE MODIFICATIONS IN ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Genetic modifications, including rare pathogenic mutations and common susceptibility variants, are central determinants of Alzheimer's disease (AD) risk, phenotype, and age of onset. While early-onset familial AD arises from autosomal dominant mutations, late-onset AD is shaped by a complex interplay of polygenic risk and gene–environment interactions.[65]

1. APP, PSEN1, and PSEN2 Mutations

Autosomal dominant mutations in the **amyloid precursor protein (APP)** and the γ-secretase complex genes **PSEN1** and **PSEN2** result in early-onset familial AD, typically before age 60.

- **APP mutations** increase Aβ42 production or enhance oligomerization.
- **PSEN1 and PSEN2 mutations** elevate the Aβ42/Aβ40 ratio through altered γ-secretase activity.

Recent structural studies show that PSEN1 mutations induce conformational changes that impair γ-secretase substrate processing, accelerating amyloidogenic cleavage.[66]

2. APOE Gene Modifications

The **APOE ε4** allele remains the strongest genetic risk factor for late-onset AD.

- AP0E4 carriers show earlier amyloid accumulation, enhanced tau pathology, disrupted lipid metabolism, and increased neuroinflammation.[7]
- Structural analyses demonstrate domain interaction instability in APOE4, leading to altered receptor binding and impaired lipid transport.[67]

Gene-editing experiments using CRISPR now demonstrate that modifying APOE4 structure to resemble APOE3 reduces amyloid burden and neuronal toxicity in vitro.[68]

3. Rare Variants in TREM2, SORL1, ABCA7

Multiple rare variants substantially modify AD risk by disrupting pathways related to immunity, lipid transport, and endosomal trafficking:

a) TREM2

Variants such as R47H increase AD risk 2–4-fold by impairing microglial phagocytosis and response to amyloid plaques.[69]

b) SORL1

Loss-of-function variants in **SORL1**, a regulator of APP trafficking, lead to increased amyloidogenic processing. SORL1 mutations can cause an AD phenotype comparable to APP/PSEN mutations.[70]

c) ABCA7

Variants reduce lipid efflux and microglial clearance of Aβ. 2023 GWAS meta-analyses highlighted ABCA7 as a major risk gene across diverse populations.[52]

4. Polygenic Risk and Gene–Gene Interactions

AD heritability is influenced by hundreds of common variants with small individual effects. Polygenic risk scores (PRS) integrating genomic data have shown strong predictive value for conversion from mild cognitive impairment to AD, particularly in younger APOE4

carriers.[71]

Gene–gene interactions, such as APOE–TREM2 and APOE–CLU pathways, amplify inflammatory and lipid metabolic disturbances, highlighting AD as a network-level genetic disorder.[72]

5. Somatic Mutations and Mosaicism

Somatic mutations accumulate in neurons with aging.

- **Single-cell sequencing** has revealed somatic copy number variations and DNA repair defects in AD brains.[73]
- **Oxidative-stress–** induced DNA damage may accelerate somatic mutation load, impairing neuronal function and synaptic resilience.

These findings support a role for genomic instability as an emerging pathogenic mechanism in sporadic AD.

6. Gene Modifications as Therapeutic Targets

Advances in gene-editing technologies have opened new avenues for therapy:

a) CRISPR/Cas9 Editing

Used to correct APP/PSEN mutations and convert APOE4 to APOE3-like structures.[68]

b) Antisense Oligonucleotides (ASOs)

Being developed to reduce expression of pathogenic alleles such as APP or tau.[74]

c) RNA-targeted therapies

siRNA and microRNA mimics aim to modulate pathways involving inflammation, APP processing, and lipid metabolism.

Gene-based interventions hold promise for disease modification, but require precise targeting to avoid off-target effects and ensure long-term safety.

GENE REGULATIONS IN ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Gene regulation plays a crucial role in shaping Alzheimer's disease (AD) pathobiology by controlling the expression, splicing, and functional activity of genes involved in amyloid processing, tau phosphorylation, neuroinflammation, lipid metabolism, oxidative stress, and synaptic function.[75] Altered regulation arises from both genetic susceptibility and environmental exposures, resulting in transcriptional and post-transcriptional imbalances that contribute to disease progression.

1. Transcriptional Regulation

Genome-wide transcriptomic studies reveal broad downregulation of neuronal and synaptic genes, accompanied by upregulation of inflammatory and stress-response pathways.[53] Transcription factors such as **REST**, **NF-κB**, and **PU.1** are key regulators:

- **REST,** normally protective against aging-related stress, is reduced in AD neurons, increasing vulnerability to oxidative damag.[76]
- **NF-κB** activation in microglia and astrocytes drives production of cytokines and complement proteins, amplifying neuroinflammation.[24]
- **PU.1** orchestrates microglial gene expression and controls TREM2, CD33, and other AD-risk genes implicated in amyloid clearance,[25]

2. Post-Transcriptional Regulation

Non-coding RNAs—including microRNAs (miRNAs), long non-coding RNAs (lncRNAs), and circular RNAs (circRNAs)—modulate key AD pathways.

- miR-29 and miR-107 regulate **BACE1**, influencing amyloid production. Their suppression in AD increases amyloidogenic processing.[61]
- lncRNAs such as **BACE1-AS** stabilize BACE1 mRNA, promoting Aβ generation.
- circRNAs modulate synaptic plasticity genes and are increasingly recognized as regulators of neuronal resilience.

3. RNA Splicing and RNA-Binding Proteins

Splicing dysregulation affects tau isoforms, microglial activation pathways, and metabolic genes. Abnormal function of RNA-binding proteins such as **TDP-43** and **hnRNPs** disrupts RNA stability and processing, contributing to neurodegeneration.[77]

4. Gene Regulatory Networks

Multi-omic integration demonstrates that gene regulation in AD operates through modular networks rather than isolated genes. These networks connect amyloid, tau, immune, synaptic, and metabolic pathways and are significantly influenced by the APOE genotype.[62]

5. Therapeutic Potential

Regulation-focused therapeutic approaches include:

- **CRISPR-based transcriptional modulation** targeting APP, APOE4, or inflammatory genes.

- **ASOs and RNA-silencing tools** to reduce BACE1, tau, or pro-inflammatory mediators.[74]
- **Epigenetic drugs** modulating chromatin accessibility or histone acetylation.

Targeting regulatory pathways offers a promising avenue for disease modification but requires precise delivery systems and long-term safety evaluation.

APOE4: STRUCTURAL, MOLECULAR, AND PATHOPHYSIOLOGICAL MECHANISMS IN ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

The **APOE ε4 allele** is the strongest genetic determinant of late-onset Alzheimer's disease (AD), increasing risk up to threefold in heterozygotes and over twelvefold in homozygotes.[78] APOE4 influences nearly every hallmark of AD, including amyloid accumulation, tau pathology, synaptic dysfunction, lipid dysregulation, neuroinflammation, and blood–brain barrier (BBB) breakdown. Its effects arise from both structural differences in the protein and downstream cellular consequences.[67]

1. Structural Biology and Pathogenicity

APOE4 differs from APOE3 by a single amino acid substitution (C112R), producing a **domain–domain interaction** that destabilizes the protein's tertiary structure.[67] This structural instability leads to:

- Impaired lipid binding
- Altered receptor interactions (LDLR, LRP1)
- Increased proteolytic fragmentation
- Enhanced propensity for toxic intracellular accumulation

Recent cryo-EM and modeling studies confirm that APOE4 adopts a more compact, unstable conformation that disrupts normal lipid transport within neurons and glia.[79]

2. Amyloid Pathology

APOE4 accelerates amyloidogenesis through multiple mechanisms:

- Enhances aggregation and deposition of Aβ
- Reduces Aβ clearance by impairing microglial and astrocytic uptake
- Decreases LRP1-mediated transport of Aβ across the BBB[80]
- PET and CSF biomarker studies show APOE4 carriers accumulate amyloid **10–15 years earlier** than non-carriers.[29]

3. Tau Hyperphosphorylation and Spread

APOE4 exacerbates tau-mediated neurotoxicity independent of amyloid:

- Promotes tau phosphorylation via kinase dysregulation
- Increases tau seeding and propagation across neural circuits
- Intensifies neuroinflammation-driven tau pathology

Tau PET imaging demonstrates a **synergistic effect** between APOE4 and tau burden in driving cortical atrophy and cognitive decline.[81]

4. Lipid Metabolism and Mitochondrial Dysfunction

APOE4 disrupts lipid homeostasis, particularly cholesterol and phospholipid transport:

- Impaired recycling of neuronal membrane lipids
- Altered synaptic vesicle formation
- Reduced mitochondrial lipid supply → energy deficits

Lipidomic studies show APOE4 carriers have diminished DHA, elevated ceramides, and reduced HDL-like lipid particles in the CNS (59). These changes impair synaptic plasticity and accelerate neurodegeneration.

5. Microglial Activation and Neuroinflammation

APOE4 shifts microglia toward a **pro-inflammatory state**, reducing their ability to phagocytose amyloid while increasing cytokine release[69]

- Overactivation of TREM2–DAP12 signaling
- Increased NF-κB activity
- Elevated complement system components

APOE4 also promotes astrocyte reactivity, further contributing to synaptic loss and neuronal injury.

6. Blood–Brain Barrier Breakdown

APOE4 carriers demonstrate increased BBB permeability due to:

- Pericyte degeneration
- Reduced expression of tight-junction proteins
- Heightened inflammatory responses within the neurovascular unit

Recent MRI studies confirm APOE4-specific vascular injury precedes cognitive impairment, suggesting vascular dysfunction is an early APOE4-driven pathway.[82]

7. Therapeutic Targeting of APOE4

Several therapeutic strategies are emerging:

a) APOE4 Structure Correctors

Small molecules that convert APOE4 into an APOE3-like structure show promise in reducing toxicity.[67]

b) APOE4 Gene Editing

CRISPR-based conversion of APOE4→APOE3 reduces amyloid burden in preclinical models.[68]

c) APOE Mimetic Peptides

Peptides that mimic the lipid-binding domain enhance cholesterol transport and improve synaptic stability.

d) APOE-modulating Immunotherapies

APOE-targeting antibodies aim to enhance clearance of APOE–Aβ complexes.

APOE4 remains one of the most druggable genetic targets in AD, with multiple clinical trials underway.

EPIGENOMIC FACTORS IN ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Epigenomic dysregulation is a major contributor to Alzheimer's disease (AD) pathophysiology, linking genetic susceptibility with environmental exposures such as aging, diet, stress, immune activation, and metabolic imbalance.[9] Epigenetic modifications—including DNA methylation, histone modifications, chromatin remodeling, and non-coding RNA regulation—modulate gene expression without altering the underlying DNA sequence, thereby shaping neuronal resilience, synaptic integrity, and immune responses throughout disease progression.

1. DNA Methylation

Genome-wide methylation analyses consistently demonstrate differential methylation at genes involved in amyloid processing, inflammation, lipid metabolism, and synaptic plasticity.[83]

Key findings include:

- **Hypomethylation of APP and BACE1 regulatory regions**, enhancing amyloidogenic processing.

- **Hypermethylation of neuroprotective genes**, including *BDNF*, leading to impaired synaptic maintenance.
- **Altered methylation in microglial pathways** (e.g., TREM2, CD33), contributing to exaggerated immune activation.

Longitudinal studies show that methylation drift increases with age, and accelerated epigenetic aging is strongly correlated with early cognitive decline.[84]

2. Histone Modifications

Histone acetylation and methylation dynamically regulate chromatin accessibility. AD brains exhibit:

- **Reduced histone H4K12 acetylation** → impaired learning-associated gene expression.
- **Elevated HDAC (histone deacetylase) activity**, particularly HDAC2, which suppresses synaptic gene transcription.
- **Disrupted H3K27 methylation**, associated with increased neuronal vulnerability.

  Preclinical studies indicate that **HDAC inhibitors** restore synaptic plasticity and memory, highlighting histone regulation as a promising therapeutic avenue.[61]

3. Chromatin Remodeling and 3D Genome Architecture

Alterations in chromatin structure disrupt enhancer–promoter interactions, particularly in neuronal and microglial gene networks.[85]

Hi-C and ATAC-seq studies reveal

- Loss of chromatin accessibility at synaptic and metabolic genes
- Increased accessibility at inflammatory and stress-response genes
- Reorganization of chromatin loops surrounding the APOE/TOMM40 and BIN1 loci

  These changes contribute to transcriptional reprogramming that precedes overt neurodegeneration.

4. Non-Coding RNAs (miRNAs, lncRNAs, circRNAs)

Non-coding RNAs act as fine-tuners of gene expression:

MicroRNAs (miRNAs)

- miR-29, miR-132, and miR-212 regulate APP, BACE1, and tau-related kinases.
- miR-146a and miR-155 promote microglial activation and neuroinflammation (61).

Long Non-Coding RNAs (lncRNAs)

- **BACE1-AS** stabilizes BACE1 mRNA, increasing Aβ production.
- **NEAT1** promotes neuroinflammatory transcriptional programs.

Circular RNAs (circRNAs)

Upregulated circRNAs in AD modulate synaptic and metabolic pathways through miRNA sequestration, influencing neuronal homeostasis.

5. Therapeutic Implications

Epigenetic mechanisms represent promising therapeutic targets:

- **HDAC inhibitors** improve synaptic function and memory in preclinical models.
- **DNMT inhibitors** may normalize aberrant methylation patterns.
- **miRNA-based therapeutics** (mimics and antagomirs) aim to regulate APP processing, tau phosphorylation, and microglial activation.
- **CRISPR-based epigenome editing** allows precise modulation of BACE1, APOE4, and inflammatory gene expression.[74]

Epigenetic therapies offer the potential for personalized, reversible modulation of pathogenic pathways, but require careful optimization for precision and safety.

TREATMENT OF ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Current treatment strategies for Alzheimer's disease (AD) encompass symptomatic therapies, disease-modifying agents targeting amyloid and tau pathology, immunotherapies, neuromodulation, and lifestyle-based interventions. Although therapeutic advancements have accelerated over the past decade, most available treatments yield modest clinical benefit, emphasizing the need for multi-target, personalized approaches.[86]

1. Symptomatic Therapies

a) Cholinesterase Inhibitors

Drugs such as **donepezil**, **rivastigmine**, and **galantamine** enhance cholinergic neurotransmission by inhibiting acetylcholinesterase.

Benefits Include

- Modest improvement in cognitive performance
- Stabilization of daily functioning
- Reduction in neuropsychiatric symptoms

However, gastrointestinal side effects and limited long-term efficacy remain concerns (87).

b) NMDA Receptor Antagonists

Memantine, an NMDA receptor blocker, reduces excitotoxicity and is typically prescribed in moderate to severe AD. Its combination with cholinesterase inhibitors provides additive benefits in select patients.[88]

2. Anti-Amyloid Disease-Modifying Therapies

A major breakthrough in AD therapy has been the development of monoclonal antibodies targeting amyloid-β (Aβ). FDA-approved and investigational antibodies include:

a) Lecanemab

Approved in 2023, it selectively targets protofibrillar Aβ.

Clinical trials demonstrate

- Significant reduction in amyloid burden
- **27% slowing** of cognitive decline in early-stage AD[89]

b) Donanemab

Targets pyroglutamate-modified Aβ and has shown rapid plaque clearance with **35% slowing** of decline in early AD.[90]

c) Aducanumab

While its approval remains controversial, it reduces amyloid deposition but with inconsistent cognitive benefit.

Risks

Amyloid-related imaging abnormalities (ARIA), including edema and microhemorrhages, occur more frequently in **APOE4 carriers**, requiring cautious patient selection.[81]

3. Anti-Tau Therapies

Emerging therapies target tau phosphorylation, aggregation, and propagation:

- **Anti-tau monoclonal antibodies** (e.g., gosuranemab, semorinemab)
- **Tau kinase inhibitors** targeting CDK5 and GSK3β
- **ASOs** reducing total tau expression[74]

Although early trials show mixed results, tau-targeted strategies remain central because tau burden correlates strongly with neurodegeneration.

4. Anti-Inflammatory and Microglial-Modulating Therapies

Given the significant role of neuroinflammation:

- **TREM2 agonist antibodies** aim to enhance microglial phagocytic activity.
- **CSF1R inhibitors** regulate microglial proliferation.
- **NLRP3 inflammasome inhibitors** reduce pro-inflammatory cytokine release.

These therapies target early immune dysfunction observed in preclinical AD.[90]

5. Metabolic and Mitochondrial Therapies

Since bioenergetic deficits are prominent in AD:

- **Insulin-sensitizing agents** (metformin, intranasal insulin) target glucose dysregulation.
- **Ketogenic therapies** improve neuronal ATP production.
- **Mitochondrial enhancers** (MitoQ, nicotinamide riboside) are under investigation.[58]

6. Multimodal and Lifestyle-Based Approaches

Lifestyle interventions exert measurable cognitive benefits, especially in early AD:

- Aerobic exercise
- Mediterranean and MIND diets
- Cognitive training
- Vascular risk control (BP, lipids, diabetes)

The **FINGER trial** demonstrated that multidomain lifestyle interventions slow cognitive decline, supporting non-pharmacological strategies as essential components of AD management.[91]

7. Future Directions

Next-generation therapies focus on:

- **APOE4 structural correction**
- **CRISPR gene editing** targeting amyloid, tau, and inflammatory pathways
- **Polypharmacy algorithms** informed by biomarkers and multi-omic profiling

The future of AD treatment will rely heavily on precision medicine, combining genetic risk, biomarker status, and personalized therapeutic selection.

THERAPEUTIC DRAWBACKS AND LIMITATIONS IN ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Despite major advances in Alzheimer's disease (AD) therapeutics—including amyloid-targeting antibodies, tau modulators, and neuroinflammatory interventions—significant limitations persist. These drawbacks arise from incomplete understanding of disease

heterogeneity, modest clinical efficacy, safety concerns, biomarker dependency, and the challenges of treating a multifactorial neurodegenerative disorder.[86]

1. Limited Clinical Efficacy and Modest Cognitive Benefit

Most disease-modifying therapies (DMTs) yield only **moderate slowing of decline** rather than meaningful functional recovery.

For example:

- Lecanemab slows decline by ~27%[89]
- Donanemab by ~35%[90]
- Aducanumab shows inconsistent outcomes across trials

These modest effects may not translate into substantial real-world functional improvement, especially in advanced disease.

2. Stage-Specific Response and Restricted Eligibility

DMTs are effective **only in early symptomatic stages**, requiring:

- Confirmed amyloid pathology,
- MMSE ≥20,
- Absence of significant cerebrovascular comorbidities,
- APOE genotype assessment due to ARIA risk.[81]

Thus, **a majority of patients**, who present at mild-to-moderate stages, remain ineligible for therapy.

3. Safety Concerns: ARIA and Vascular Complications

Amyloid-targeting antibodies are associated with **amyloid-related imaging abnormalities (ARIA)**, including:

- ARIA-E: vasogenic edema
- ARIA-H: microhemorrhages

APOE4 carriers demonstrate significantly higher ARIA incidence (up to **3×**), necessitating frequent MRI monitoring and dose adjustments.[81]

This increases cost, limits accessibility, and reduces patient tolerance.

Targeting one pathway produces **partial effects**, which explains why monotherapies often fail to produce robust outcomes.[62]

5. Lack of Effective Tau Therapies

Although tau pathology correlates more strongly with neurodegeneration than amyloid:

- Anti-tau antibodies have shown limited benefit
- Kinase inhibitors have off-target toxicity
- Tau ASOs reduce tau but clinical translation is ongoing[74]

Thus, **tau-directed therapies lag behind amyloid therapies** in clinical maturity.

6. High Economic and Logistical Burden

Monoclonal antibodies have significant practical constraints:

- High cost of drug and infusion
- Regular MRI monitoring
- Requirement for biomarker confirmation
- Need for infusion centers and trained specialists

This creates global inequity in access and limits real-world feasibility.[92]

7. Challenges in Biomarker-Guided Precision Medicine

While biomarkers (p-tau217, GFAP, amyloid PET, plasma Aβ42/40) are improving diagnostic accuracy, barriers remain:

- High cost of PET imaging
- Limited availability of CSF testing
- Variability in plasma biomarker assays
- Lack of universal biomarker cutoffs across populations.[38]

These gaps restrict widespread adoption of precision-medicine approaches.

8. Slow Translation From Preclinical to Clinical Success

Many agents that performed well in animal and in vitro models—especially anti-inflammatory, metabolic, and epigenetic therapies—failed in Phase II/III human trials due to species differences, late-stage enrollment, and disease complexity.[93]

GENOMIC APPROACHES IN ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Genomic technologies have transformed the understanding, diagnosis, and treatment of Alzheimer's disease (AD). Modern approaches—including genome sequencing, polygenic risk profiling, CRISPR-based editing, and multi-omic integration—enable early detection, personalized risk stratification, and targeted therapeutics. These strategies provide a blueprint for precision medicine, moving beyond traditional clinical classifications.[52]

1. Whole-Genome and Whole-Exome Sequencing (WGS/WES)

WGS/WES have identified pathogenic mutations (*APP*, *PSEN1*, *PSEN2*) and dozens of rare, high-impact variants (*TREM2*, *SORL1*, *ABCA7*) that contribute to AD risk.

Key insights include

- Identification of novel microglial regulatory variants
- Discovery of ancestry-specific risk alleles
- Mapping of structural variants linked to immune dysfunction[50,70]

Sequencing is now used clinically in early-onset AD evaluation and increasingly in research for sporadic AD subtyping.

2. Polygenic Risk Scores (PRS)

PRS integrate the effects of hundreds of small-effect alleles across the genome. Applications include:

- Predicting AD risk decades before symptom onset
- Identifying high-risk APOE4 carriers
- Forecasting conversion from mild cognitive impairment to AD[71]

Recent multi-ancestry PRS models significantly improve accuracy compared with traditional European-only dataset.[52]

3. CRISPR/Cas9 Gene Editing

CRISPR-based technologies hold transformative potential:

a) APOE4→APOE3 Conversion

Editing APOE4 to APOE3-like sequences reduces amyloid accumulation and neuronal toxicity in models.[68]

b) Correction of APP/PSEN Mutations

CRISPR disruption of mutant alleles reduces pathogenic Aβ42 production.

c) CRISPR Interference (CRISPRi)

Used to suppress pathogenic gene expression, including BACE1 and tau-related kinases.

d) CRISPR Activation (CRISPRa)

Upregulates neuroprotective genes (e.g., *SORL1*, synaptic plasticity regulators).

While promising, challenges include delivery into the human brain, off-target effects, and

long-term safety.[94]

4. Antisense Oligonucleotides (ASOs) and RNA Therapies

ASOs modulate gene expression at the RNA level:

- Tau-targeting ASOs reduce total tau burden
- BACE1 ASOs lower amyloidogenic processing[74]

RNA-based therapies (siRNA, miRNA mimics, antagomirs) enable precise targeting of inflammatory and metabolic pathways disrupted in AD.

5. Single-Cell Genomics & Spatial Genomics

Single-cell RNA-seq and ATAC-seq provide unparalleled resolution of cellular diversity:

- Identification of disease-associated microglia (DAM) and astrocyte subtypes
- Mapping neuronal vulnerability gradients
- Uncovering region-specific gene regulation[53,55]

Spatial transcriptomics further links molecular signatures to anatomical progression of

CONCLUSION

Alzheimer's disease (AD) is a multifactorial neurodegenerative disorder arising from the convergence of genetic susceptibility, epigenomic dysregulation, proteomic alterations, metabolic imbalance, and environmental influences. Advances in molecular biology, multi-omics technologies, and biomarker discovery have greatly expanded the understanding of the pathways that drive amyloid aggregation, tau propagation, neuroinflammation, synaptic dysfunction, and neuronal loss. These insights highlight AD as a systems-level disorder rather than a single-pathway disease, underscoring the need for integrative and personalized therapeutic strategies.

The emergence of blood-based biomarkers, refined neuroimaging criteria, and multi-omics integrative platforms has transformed AD diagnosis and offers unprecedented opportunities for early detection and stage-specific intervention. Meanwhile, disease-modifying therapies—especially amyloid- and tau-targeting agents—represent meaningful progress, although their benefits remain modest and limited to early disease stages. Challenges persist, including variable therapeutic response, ARIA-related safety concerns, high economic burden, and the inherent complexity of treating a network-level disease.

Genomic approaches, including CRISPR editing, polygenic risk profiling, and RNA-based

therapeutics, hold significant promise for precision medicine, particularly for genetically vulnerable individuals such as APOE4 carriers. Likewise, epigenomic interventions and multi-target metabolic and immune modulators are emerging as critical components of future treatment frameworks. Collectively, these developments signal a shift toward personalized, mechanism-driven, and combination-based therapies that address the diverse molecular drivers of AD.

Ultimately, the integration of genomics, transcriptomics, proteomics, metabolomics, and advanced biomarker platforms will be essential for redefining AD diagnosis, improving prognostic accuracy, and tailoring therapeutic interventions. Continued collaboration across clinical, molecular, computational, and translational disciplines is crucial to translate these advances into meaningful patient outcomes. While significant challenges remain, the accelerating pace of discovery offers renewed momentum toward achieving effective disease modification and, ultimately, prevention of Alzheimer's disease.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors declare that no specific funding was received for this work. The authors also thank their institution for providing the necessary academic resources for preparing this manuscript.

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