

1 Fluid shear stress promotes osteoblast proliferation and suppresses mitochondrial-  
2 mediated osteoblast apoptosis through the miR-214-3p-ATF4 signaling axis  
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8 Kun Zhang<sup>1,2†</sup>, Xuening Liu<sup>1,2†</sup>, Yuchen Tang<sup>1,2†</sup>, Zhongcheng Liu<sup>1,2</sup>, Qiong, Yi<sup>1,2</sup>, Lifu  
9 Wang<sup>1,2</sup>, Bin Geng<sup>1,2\*</sup>, Yayi Xia<sup>1,2\*</sup>  
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19 1. Department of Orthopaedics, Lanzhou University Second Hospital, Lanzhou  
20 Gansu, 730000, China

21 2. Orthopaedics Key Laboratory of Gansu Province, Lanzhou Gansu, 730000, China  
22

23 Address: No. 82 Cuiyingmen, Chengguan District, Lanzhou City, Gansu Province,  
24 China  
25  
26  
27

28 \* Co-corresponding Author: Yayi Xia, xiayy@lzu.edu.cn, Tel: +86-13893123864,  
29 Fax: +86-931-8942460

30 \* Co-corresponding Author: Bin Geng, [cxxx@qq.com](mailto:cxxx@qq.com), Tel: +86-18394531090, Fax:  
31 +86-931-8942460

32 † these authors contribute equally to this work  
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44 **Abstract:** MicroRNAs (miRNAs) play vital roles in bone metabolism and participate in the

1 mechanically induced bone alterations. The underlying molecular mechanisms by which fluid shear  
2 stress (FSS) regulate the proliferative and apoptotic phenotypic changes of osteoblasts remain  
3 elusive. The study aimed to investigate the regulatory effects of FSS on osteoblast proliferative and  
4 apoptotic phenotypes and the roles of miR-214-3p-ATF4 (activating transcription factor 4) signaling  
5 axis in the mechanomodulation processes. FSS promoted the proliferative activity of osteoblasts  
6 and suppressed mitochondrial-mediated osteoblast apoptosis. FSS decreased miR-214-3p  
7 expression and increased ATF4 expression in MC3T3-E1 osteoblasts. MiR-214-3p inhibited  
8 osteoblast proliferative activity and promoted mitochondrial-mediated osteoblast apoptosis.  
9 Overexpression of miR-214-3p attenuated FSS-enhanced osteoblast proliferation and FSS-  
10 suppressed mitochondrial-mediated osteoblast apoptosis. We validated that ATF4 acted as a target  
11 gene of miR-214-3p. Moreover, miR-214-3p regulated osteoblast proliferation and apoptosis  
12 through targeting ATF4. Taken together, our study proved that FSS could suppress mitochondrial-  
13 mediated osteoblast apoptosis and promote osteoblast proliferation through the miR-214-3p-ATF4  
14 signaling axis.

15 **Keywords:** fluid shear stress, miR-214-3p, activating transcription factor 4, osteoblast, proliferation,  
16 apoptosis

## 17 18 **Introduction**

19  
20 Although bone forming cells and meniscus fibrochondrocytes could sense and respond to  
21 mechanical forces, the underlying molecular mechanisms by which bone forming cells converted  
22 extracellular mechanical stimuli to intracellular biological signals were poorly understood [1, 2].  
23 Macroscopic forces such as muscle strain, blood pressure, lymphatic drainage and body movements  
24 could generate microcosmic fluid flow inside the lacunar-canalicular system called fluid shear stress  
25 (FSS) that was critical to maintain the skeletal health [3, 4], and FSS modulated the phenotypic  
26 changes of bone forming cells [1, 5, 6]. Microcosmic forces applied on osteoblasts included FSS,  
27 strain, membrane stretching induced by hypoosmotic solution, pressure and extracellular matrix  
28 stiffness [7, 8], which could be simulated by different kinds of apparatuses [9-13]. Physiological  
29 (beneficial) and superphysiological (harmful) mechanical stimulation both modulated the  
30 metabolism of bone tissue and cells and influenced the balance of osteogenesis and  
31 osteoclastogenesis [14]. Physiological (beneficial) mechanical forces were vital for osteogenesis  
32 and bone formation and promoted fracture healing and osteointegration between the implant and  
33 surrounding bone [14-17].

34 MicroRNAs(miRNAs) are small noncoding RNAs that participated in diverse biological  
35 activities such as the differentiation, proliferation, apoptosis and senescence of bone cells and the  
36 development and canceration of bone tissue [18, 19]. The homeostasis of endogenous miRNAs was  
37 critical to these biological activities of bone forming cells and skeletal development [20-22].  
38 Mechanosensitive miRNAs could sense and respond to mechanical stimulation by influencing their  
39 downstream target genes, which modulated bone metabolism through osteogenic and  
40 osteoclastogenic signaling pathways [19, 23-32]. MiR-214 belonging to the former family of small,  
41 highly conservative noncoding RNA and its downstream targets played roles in the diverse  
42 biological activities such as osteogenesis and osteoclastogenesis [18, 19, 27, 33-39]. Immature miR-  
43 214 could be cleaved into mature miR-214-3p and miR-214-5p, and the expression levels of miR-  
44 214 (including miR-214-3p and miR-214-5p) could significantly influence osteogenesis and bone

1 formation. Moreover, the dysregulation of miR-214 and its upstream and downstream targets  
2 participated in the onset and development of osteonecrosis of femoral head, postmenopausal  
3 osteoporosis and disuse osteoporosis [33, 34, 40-49].

4 This study aimed to investigate the influence of FSS on the miR-214-3p expression and confirm  
5 the regulatory effects of FSS on the proliferative and apoptotic phenotypes of MC3T3-E1  
6 osteoblasts. Online publicly available algorithms including TargetScan and miRWalk were used to  
7 identify the miR-214-3p binding sites for activating transcription factor 4 (ATF4). We hypothesized  
8 that miR-214-3p-ATF4 signaling axis, if present, contributed to the modulatory effects of FSS on  
9 the proliferative and apoptotic phenotypes of MC3T3-E1 osteoblasts.

## 11 **Materials and methods**

### 13 *Cell culture and cell transfection*

14 The  $\alpha$ -MEM with 10% FBS was prepared to feed MC3T3-E1 cells. The DMEM with 10% FBS  
15 was prepared to feed HEK 293T cells. The incubated environment was 37°C and 5% CO<sub>2</sub>.  
16 Lipofectamine 2000 (Invitrogen, USA) was used to transfect MC3T3-E1 cells with miR-214-3p  
17 mimic or inhibitor and control groups (RiboBio, China). The transfection concentration of miR-  
18 214-3p mimic or control group was 50 nM, the transfection concentration of miR-214-3p inhibitor  
19 or control group was 100 nM. Lipofectamine 2000 (Invitrogen, USA) was used to transfect MC3T3-  
20 E1 cells with ATF4 overexpression vector or siRNA-ATF4 and control groups (GenePharma, China).  
21 The transfection concentration of siRNA-ATF4 was 100 nM, and the transfection concentration of  
22 pcDNA3.1-ATF4 plasmid vector was 250 ng/ $\mu$ l.

### 24 *FSS experiment*

25 We applied FSS experiments on MC3T3-E1 cells according to our previous study [50].  
26 MC3T3-E1 osteoblasts were seeded on 20x50 mm cover slips. When cellular density were nearly  
27 80% confluence, MC3T3-E1 osteoblasts were loaded under 12 dyn/cm<sup>2</sup> FSS for 0, 30, 60 or 90 min,  
28 or MC3T3-E1 osteoblasts were incubated under 0, 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18 dyn/cm<sup>2</sup> for 60min.

### 30 *Luciferase reporter assay*

31 HEK 293T cells with few endogenous miRNA were chosen to conduct transfection  
32 experiments. We purchased the reporter vector that contained the wild-type 3'UTR of murine ATF4  
33 and the reporter vector that contained the mutant 3'UTR of murine ATF4 from GenePharma  
34 (Shanghai, China). Lipofectamine 2000 (Invitrogen, USA) was used to co-transfect HEK 293T cells  
35 with the 3'UTR reporter vector of ATF4 WT or ATF4 MUT and miR-214-3p mimic. Finally, HEK  
36 293T cells were harvested for the luciferase reporter assay.

### 38 *qRT-PCR analysis*

39 The cells were harvested to obtain total RNA by TRIzol extracting method. To obtain the cDNA,  
40 we first used reverse transcription kit to reverse the mRNA. For the cDNA synthesis of miRNA, a  
41 specific reverse transcription kit was utilized. Then, SYBR fluorescence reagent was utilized to  
42 conduct qRT-PCR on a Roche LC96 instrument. GAPDH and U6 were used for normalization. The  
43 primers are detailed in Table 1.

44 Table 1. Sequences of the primers for qRT-PCR

Name	Sequence(5'-3')
mmu-miR-214-3p	ACAGCAGGCACAGACAGGCAGT
mmu-ATF4-F	CCTGAACAGCGAAGTGTGG
mmu-ATF4-R	TGGAGAACCCATGAGGTTCAA
mmu-GAPDH-F	TGTGTCCGTCGTGGATCTGA
mmu-GAPDH-R	TTGCTGTTGAAGTCGCAGGAG
U-6-F	CTCGCTTCGGCAGCACA
U-6-R	AACGCTTCACGAATTTGCGT

1

2 *EdU labeling assay*

3 The proliferative activity of MC3T3-E1 osteoblasts was assessed by using the EdU staining kit  
4 (RiboBio, China). First, cells were fed and cultured in  $\alpha$ -MEM medium (10%FBS) containing 50  
5  $\mu$ M EdU working fluid for 4h. 4% paraformaldehyde for fixation (15min) and 0.5% Triton X-100  
6 for permeation (15 min). After that, the cells were probed with working fluid for 30 min. Finally,  
7 hoechst 33342 was used to treat the cells for 30 min.

8

9 *Mitochondrial Membrane Potential Assay*

10 The JC-1 fluorescence probe (Yeasen, China) was used to measure the level of mitochondrial  
11 membrane potential ( $\Delta\Psi$ m) and detect early apoptosis detection through the analysis of fluorescence  
12 microscopic imaging. After experimental treatments, JC-1 probe was used to load MC3T3-E1 cells  
13 in the dark environment. After loading with JC-1 at 37 °C for 20 min, JC-1 staining buffer was used  
14 to wash the cells three times and the pictures were get from the cells. ImageJ software was used to  
15 measure the average fluorescence intensity. A decreased red/green fluorescence intensity means the  
16 decreased ratio of the JC-1 aggregate to the monomer, which suggested the loss of  $\Delta\Psi$ m and  
17 normal mitochondrial activity.

18

19 *Western blot analysis*

20 MC3T3-E1 cells were harvested by using RIPA buffer. Lysate samples were then centrifuged  
21 at 12000 rpm for 15 min, and the supernatants were collected. And the loading buffer was added in  
22 the supernatants. Protein samples were loaded and the gel electrophoresis was conducted and protein  
23 samples were transferred onto PVDF bands. After blocking with quick blocking buffer, the bands  
24 were incubated with primary antibodies including ATF4 (1:1000, Affinity, USA), (PCNA; 1:1000,  
25 Abcam, USA), CDK4 (1:2000, Abcam, USA), CDK6 (1:2000, Affinity, USA), Cyclin D1 (1:10,000,  
26 Abcam, USA), Bax (1:1000, Affinity, USA), Bim (1:1000, Affinity, USA), cleaved caspase-3  
27 (1:1000, Abcam, USA) and  $\beta$ -actin (1:1000, Abcam, USA) overnight at 4°C. Then, the bands were  
28 probed with secondary antibodies (1:1500, Affinity, USA) were applied for 2h. Finally, the protein  
29 bands were observed on ECL system (BioRad, USA).

30

31 *Immunofluorescence*

32 After experimental treatments, 4% paraformaldehyde for fixation and 0.1% Triton X-100 for  
33 permeation. Then, 10% normal goat serum was used to block the cells for 60 min, and the cells were  
34 probed with primary antibody ATF4 (1:100, Affinity, USA) overnight at 4°C. After treating with  
35 green fluorescence secondary antibody (1:300, ProteinTech) and subsequently staining with DAPI.  
36 We got the needed pictures through manipulating the fluorescence microscope.

1

## 2 *Statistical analysis*

3 All statistical analyses were performed using graphpad prism 8.0.1 software. All data are  
4 presented as the mean  $\pm$  SD of at least three independent experiments. Statistical significance was  
5 analyzed using a two-tailed t test or a oneway ANOVA. p-values  $< 0.05$  were considered statistically  
6 significant.

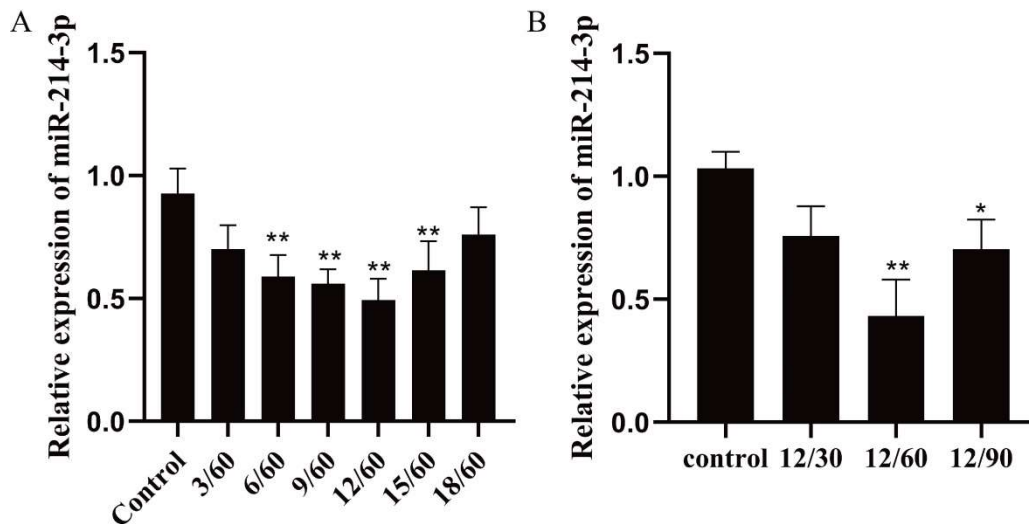
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## 8 **Results**

9

### 10 *FSS decreases the expression level of endogenous miR-214-3p*

11 To explore the effects of FSS on the expression levels of miR-214-3p in MC3T3-E1 cells, FSS  
12 was applied on MC3T3-E1 cells and the cDNA of miRNA was obtained for qRT-PCR. After  
13 different FSS experiments, the qRT-PCR analysis showed 60 min of 12dyn/cm<sup>2</sup> FSS significantly  
14 decreased the expression of miR-214-3p (Fig 1).



15

16 **Fig 1.** FSS decreases the intracellular content of endogenous miR-214-3p. Detecting intracellular  
17 miR-214-3p expression levels in MC3T3-E1 cells responding to FSS (12 dyn/cm<sup>2</sup>) for different  
18 times or treated under different scales of FSS (dyn/cm<sup>2</sup>) for 60min. Data are shown as the mean  
19  $\pm$ SD. (\*p  $< 0.05$ , \*\*p  $< 0.01$ )

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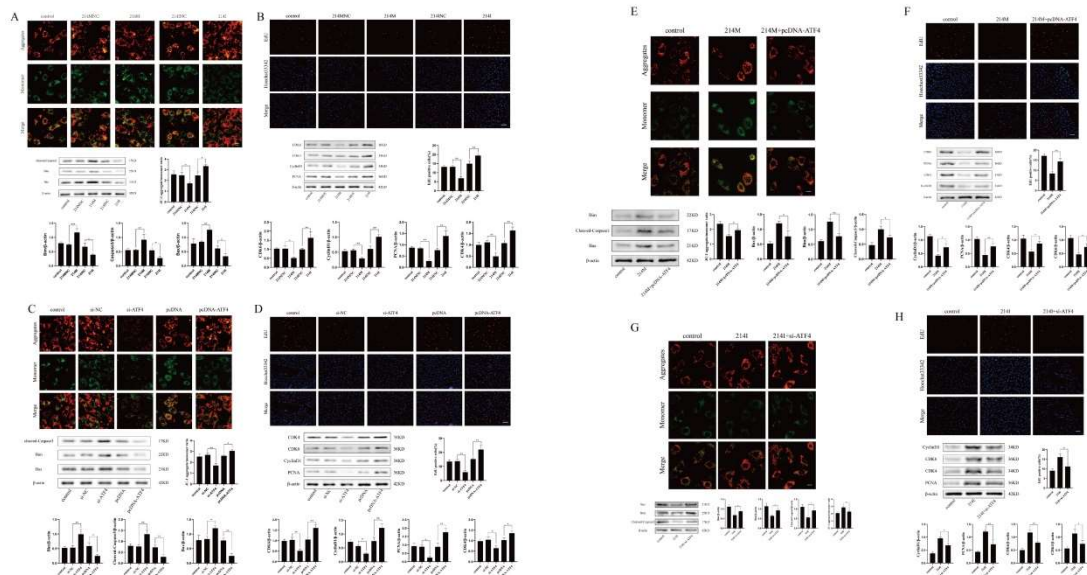
### 21 *The miR-214-3p-ATF4 signaling axis participated in regulating the proliferative activity of* 22 *osteoblasts and mitochondrial-mediated osteoblast apoptosis*

23 To investigate the influence of miR-214-3p on the apoptotic and proliferative phenotypes of  
24 osteoblasts, we respectively increased and decreased the intracellular content of miR-214-3p in  
25 MC3T3-E1 osteoblasts by transfection with miR-214-3p mimic and miR-214-3p inhibitor. After  
26 transfection with miR-214-3p mimic, the protein expression of Bax, Bim and caspase3 was  
27 increased and the level of  $\Delta\Psi_m$  was decreased (Fig 2(A)). Moreover, transfection with miR-214-3p  
28 mimic suppressed the protein expression of CDK4, CDK6, PCNA and CyclinD1 and decreased the  
29 number of EdU-positive cells (Fig 2(B)). Moreover, inhibition of miR-214-3p had opposite effects  
30 in MC3T3-E1 osteoblasts (Fig 2(A) and Fig 2(B)). Taken together, miR-214-3p impaired  
31 mitochondrial activities and promoted osteoblast apoptosis, meanwhile, miR-214-3p inhibited

1 osteoblast proliferation.

2 To explore the effects of ATF4 on the apoptosis and proliferation of MC3T3-E1 cells, the gene  
3 expression of ATF4 was respectively overexpressed and downregulated in MC3T3-E1 osteoblasts  
4 by transfection with the overexpression vector (pcDNA 3.1-ATF4) and the RNA interference  
5 (siRNA-ATF4). After transfection with the siRNA-ATF4, the protein expression of Bax, Bim and  
6 caspase3 was increased and the level of ( $\Delta\Psi_m$ ) was decreased (Fig 2(C)). Moreover, transfection  
7 with the siRNA-ATF4 suppressed the protein expression of CDK6, PCNA, CyclinD1 (Fig 2(D)).  
8 Moreover, transfection with pcDNA 3.1-ATF4 had opposite effects on the apoptosis and  
9 proliferation of MC3T3-E1 cells. These results suggested that ATF4 protected and maintained  
10 normal mitochondrial activities and inhibited apoptosis, meanwhile, ATF4 was critical for osteoblast  
11 proliferative activity and promoted osteoblast proliferation.

12 We constructed co-transfection groups to conform whether miR-214-3p influenced the  
13 proliferative and apoptotic phenotypes of MC3T3-E1 cells through its target ATF4 or not. Western  
14 blot analysis showed that upregulation of ATF4 partially reversed the effects of miR-214-3p-mimic  
15 on the protein expression of Bax, Bim and cleaved-caspase3(Fig 2(E)). JC-1 staining assays showed  
16 that upregulation of ATF4 attenuated the effects of miR-214-3p-mimic on  $\Delta\Psi_m$  (Fig 2(E)).  
17 Upregulation of ATF4 miR-214-3p partially reverse mimic-induced downregulation of CDK4,  
18 CDK6, PCNA and CyclinD1 and attenuated miR-214-3p mimic-induced suppression of osteoblast  
19 proliferation (Fig 2(F)). Western blot analysis showed that knock-down of ATF4 partially reversed  
20 the effects of miR-214-3p inhibitor on the protein expression of Bax, Bim and cleaved-caspase3  
21 (Fig 2(G)). JC-1 staining assays showed that knock-down of ATF4 attenuated the effects of miR-  
22 214-3p inhibitor on  $\Delta\Psi_m$  (Fig 2(G)). Western blot analysis showed that knock-down of ATF4  
23 partially reversed the effects of miR-214-3p inhibitor on the protein expression of CDK4, CDK6,  
24 PCNA and CyclinD1 (Fig 2(H)). EdU staining assays showed that knock-down of ATF4 attenuated  
25 the effects of miR-214-3p inhibitor on the proliferative activity of osteoblasts (Fig 2(H)).



26

27 **Fig 2.** MiR-214-3p compromises the proliferative activity of osteoblasts and promotes  
28 mitochondrial-mediated osteoblast apoptosis (A, B). ATF4 enhances the proliferative activity of  
29 osteoblasts and suppresses osteoblast apoptosis (C, D). Upregulation of ATF4 partially reverses the  
30 regulatory effects of miR-214-3p mimic on the proliferative activity of osteoblasts and

1 mitochondrial-mediated osteoblast apoptosis (E, F). Knock-down of ATF4 partially reverses miR-  
2 214-3p inhibitor-induced suppression of osteoblast apoptosis and promotion of osteoblast  
3 proliferation (G, H). Treating MC3T3-E1 cells with miR-214-3p mimic, miR-214-3p inhibitor and  
4 negative controls (A, B). Treating MC3T3-E1 cells with pcDNA 3.1-ATF4, siRNA-ATF4 and  
5 negative controls. (C, D). Western blot analysis of Bax, Bim and caspase-3 and analysis of  $\Delta\Psi_m$  by  
6 measuring the aggregate(red)/monomer(green) fluorescence intensity ratio in MC3T3-E1 cells  
7 (Scale bar = 10  $\mu\text{m}$  (A/C/E/G)). Western blot analysis of CDK4, CDK6, PCNA and CyclinD1 and  
8 EdU staining of MC3T3-E1 cells (Scale bar = 50  $\mu\text{m}$ (B/D/F/H)). Data are shown as the mean  $\pm$ SD.  
9 (\*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01)

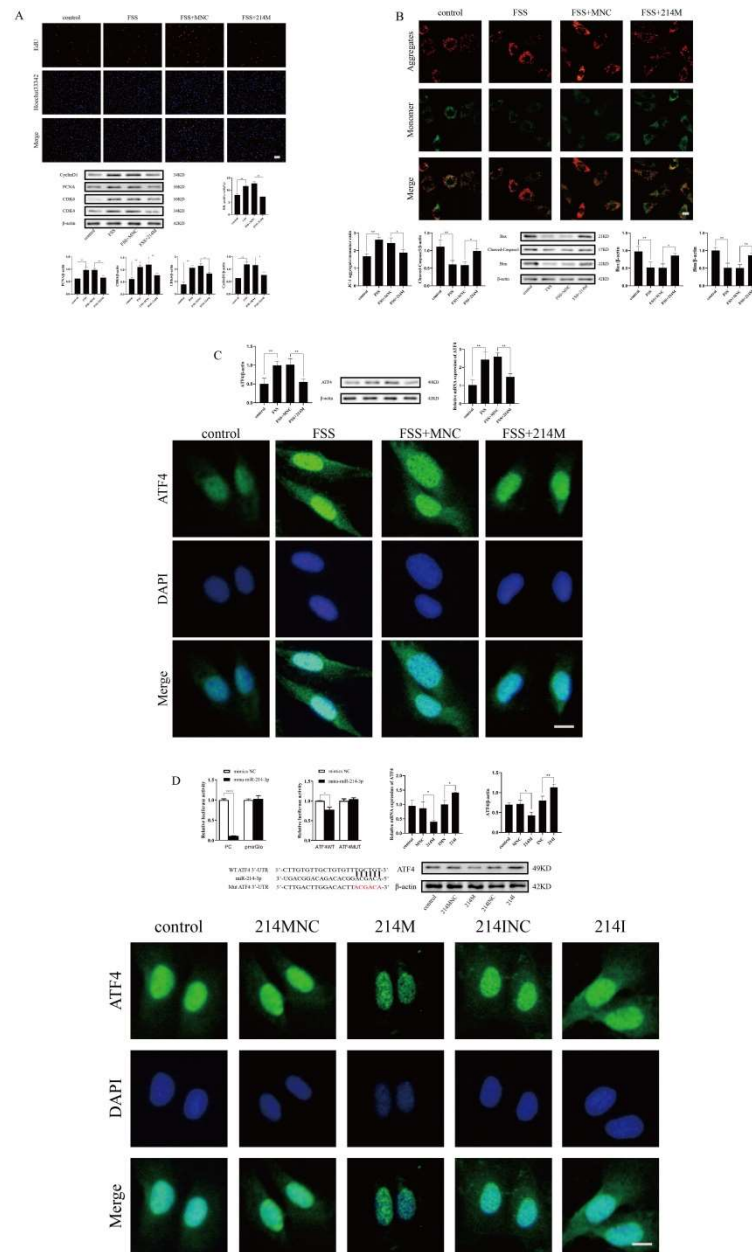
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11 *FSS promoted osteoblast proliferation and suppressed mitochondrial-mediated osteoblast apoptosis*  
12 *through the miR-214-3p-ATF4 signaling axis*

13

14 Our former FSS-related studies have indicated that FSS could enhance the proliferative activity  
15 of osteoblasts and suppress osteoblast apoptosis [50-54]. We investigated whether miR-214-3p  
16 participated in the modulatory effects of FSS on the proliferative and apoptotic phenotypes of  
17 MC3T3-E1 osteoblasts. Therefore, MC3T3-E1 osteoblasts were treated with miR-214-3p mimic  
18 and its negative control before loading 12 dyn/cm<sup>2</sup> FSS for 1 h. Overexpression of miR-214-3p  
19 partially attenuated FSS-induced upregulation of CDK4, CDK6, PCNA and CyclinD1 (Fig 3(A))  
20 and FSS-induced downregulation of Bax, Bim and cleaved-caspase3 (Fig 3(B)). Moreover,  
21 upregulation of miR-214-3p partially attenuated FSS-induced increased number of EdU-positive  
22 cells (Fig 3(A)) and FSS-induced increased level of  $\Delta\Psi_m$  (Fig 3(B)). These results indicated that  
23 transfection with miR-214-3p mimic partially reversed FSS-enhanced proliferative activity of  
24 osteoblasts and FSS-suppressed mitochondrial-mediated osteoblast apoptosis.

25 To unveil the underlying mechanism in the modulatory effects of miR-214-3p on osteoblast  
26 proliferation and osteoblast apoptosis, we used TargetScan and miRWalk to predict the potential  
27 target of miR-214-3p. Based on these analysis, we chosen ATF4, an important actor in osteoblast  
28 proliferation, differentiation and apoptosis [55-57], as the potential target gene of miR-214-3p to  
29 verify their relationship. The results of dual-luciferase reporter assays showed that miR-214-3p  
30 mimic decreased ATF4 3'UTR WT luciferase reporter activity, but not ATF4 3'UTR MUT reporter  
31 activity (Fig 3(D)). And western blot analysis, qRT-PCR analysis and immunofluorescence  
32 experimental results all proven that miR-214-3p mimic and inhibitor respectively downregulated  
33 and upregulated ATF4 expression (Fig 3(D)). Moreover, FSS promoted the mRNA and protein  
34 expression of ATF4 in MC3T3-E1 osteoblasts compared with the control group (Fig 3(C)).  
35 Transfection with miR-214-3p mimic attenuated FSS-induced upregulation of ATF4 (Fig 3(C)).



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2

3 **Fig 3.** Transfection with miR-214-3p mimic partially reverses FSS-enhanced osteoblast  
 4 proliferation and FSS-induced repression of osteoblast apoptosis (A, B). Upregulation of miR-214-  
 5 3p attenuates FSS-induced upregulation of ATF4. ATF4 acts as a target of miR-214-3p (C). ATF4  
 6 acts as a target of miR-214-3p (D). Western blot analysis of Bax, Bim and caspase-3 and analysis  
 7 of  $\Delta\Psi_m$  by measuring the aggregate(red)/monomer(green) fluorescence intensity ratio in MC3T3-  
 8 E1 cells (Scale bar = 10  $\mu\text{m}$ (B)). Western blot analysis of CDK4, CDK6, PCNA and CyclinD1 and  
 9 EdU staining of MC3T3-E1 cells (Scale bar = 50  $\mu\text{m}$ (A)). Immunofluorescence of ATF4 (Scale bar  
 10 = 10 $\mu\text{m}$  (C/D)). Data are shown as the mean  $\pm$ SD. (\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ )

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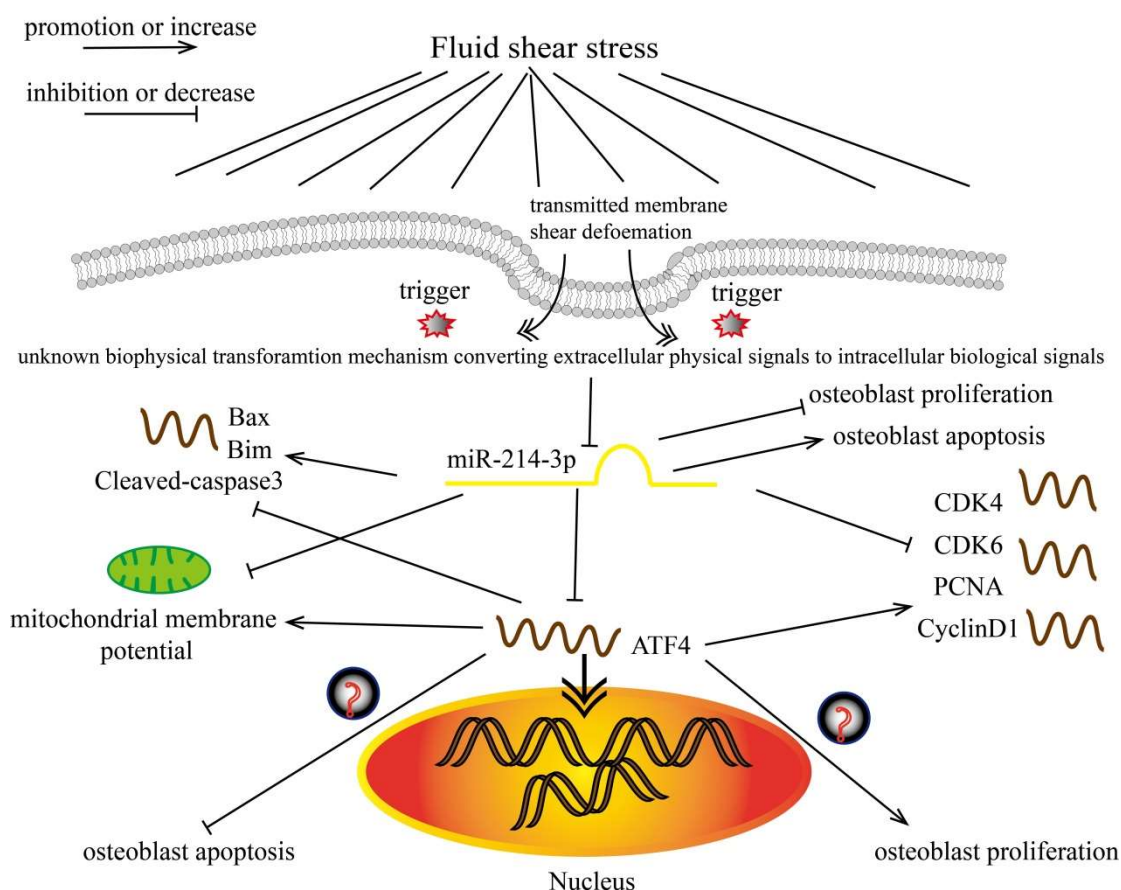
## 12 Discussion

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14 Mechanosensitive miRNAs could sense and respond to mechanical stimulation by influencing  
 15 their downstream target genes, which modulated bone metabolism through osteogenic and



1 osteoclastogenic signaling pathways [19, 23-32]. Just as shown in Fig 4, the present study  
 2 demonstrated that: First, FSS downregulated miR-214-3p expression, enhanced the proliferative  
 3 activity of osteoblasts and suppressed mitochondrial-mediated osteoblast apoptosis. Second, miR-  
 4 214-3p compromised the proliferative activity of osteoblasts and promoted osteoblast apoptosis.  
 5 Upregulation of miR-214-3p attenuated the regulatory effects of FSS on the proliferative activity of  
 6 osteoblasts and mitochondrial-mediated osteoblast apoptosis. Third, ATF4 acted as a target of miR-  
 7 214-3p and miR-214-3p participated in FSS-induced modulation of osteoblast through targeting  
 8 ATF4.



9  
 10 Fig 4. The molecular mechanisms mediated by the miR-214-3p-ATF4 signaling axis and phenotypic  
 11 changes in osteoblasts responding to FSS.

12 Physiological (beneficial) mechanical stimulation such as FSS resulted in increased  
 13 osteogenesis and decreased osteoclastogenesis [14]. FSS maintained the normal metabolism of bone  
 14 forming cells [14]. Our previous studies confirmed FSS enhanced the proliferative activity of  
 15 osteoblasts and attenuated TNF- $\alpha$ -induced osteoblast apoptosis [50, 51]. As an important actor in  
 16 musculoskeletal system [24, 58], the disbalance of endogenous miR-214-3p was correlated with  
 17 osteoblast proliferation, osteogenic differentiation and osteonecrosis and the mechanosensitivity of  
 18 miR-214-3p is involved with mechanically induced bone alterations [24, 34, 59]. MiR-214-3p  
 19 inhibited osteoblast activity and suppressed bone formation [19]. The expression of miR-214-3p  
 20 was decreased in exercised mice and in osteoblasts exposed to mechanical strain and transfection  
 21 with miR-214-3p mimic attenuated mechanical strain-enhanced osteogenesis in osteoblasts [27].  
 22 Knock-down or overexpression of some mechanosensitive miRNAs could attenuate or deteriorate  
 23 physiopathological phenotypic changes of osteoblasts responding to FSS [60, 61], which proven

1 mechanical stimulation could modulate bone metabolism through influencing the expression of  
2 mechanosensitive miRNAs. After treating with 12dyn/cm<sup>2</sup> FSS for 1 h, the content of endogenous  
3 miR-214-3p was decreased in osteoblasts. Moreover, we found that upregulation of miR-214-3p  
4 compromised the proliferative activity of osteoblast and deteriorated programmed osteoblast death.  
5 And upregulation of miR-214-3p extended the proliferative period of osteoblasts and impaired the  
6 homeostasis of  $\Delta\Psi_m$ . The maintenance of  $\Delta\Psi_m$  is vital for mitochondrial health and the decreased  
7 (impaired)  $\Delta\Psi_m$  could trigger mitochondrial-mediated apoptosis. Knock-down of miR-214-3p  
8 exerted opposite effects. Based on our previous studies, therefore, we hypothesized that the altered  
9 expression levels of mechanosensitive miR-214-3p may participate in proliferative and apoptotic  
10 phenotypic changes of osteoblasts responding to FSS. Based on our experimental results, we proven  
11 that FSS enhanced the proliferative activity of osteoblasts and suppressed mitochondrial-mediated  
12 osteoblast apoptosis through decreasing miR-214-3p expression.

13 Acting as important post-transcriptional regulators, intracellular miRNAs can directly target  
14 sites of mRNAs of numerous signals to influence the biological activities of signaling pathways [62].  
15 MiR-214-3p directly targeted ATF4 to compromise the proliferative activity of osteoblasts [19]. We  
16 validated that ATF4 acted as a target gene of miR-214-3p. Therefore, it was valuable to investigate  
17 the modulatory effects of ATF4 on the proliferative activity of osteoblasts and mitochondrial-  
18 mediated osteoblast apoptosis. The study confirmed that ATF4 was vital for the anabolic actions of  
19 PTH on the skeleton [56]. Knock-down of ATF4 significantly impaired the proliferative activity of  
20 primary bone marrow stromal cells and calvarial osteoblasts [55]. Consistent to these reports, we  
21 confirmed that knock-down of ATF4 suppressed osteoblast proliferative activity and induced  
22 mitochondrial dysfunction in osteoblasts, and overexpression of ATF4 had opposite effects. The  
23 modulatory effects of miR-214-3p on the proliferative activity of osteoblasts and mitochondrial-  
24 mediated osteoblast apoptosis probably be achieved through targeting ATF4. Therefore, we  
25 constructed co-transfection groups to verify if miR-214-3p exerted above effects through targeting  
26 ATF4. Upregulation of miR-214-3p impaired the proliferative activity of osteoblasts and promoted  
27 osteoblast apoptosis through decreasing the expression of ATF4, downregulation of miR-214-3p  
28 enhanced the proliferative activity of osteoblasts and suppressed mitochondrial-mediated osteoblast  
29 apoptosis through increasing the expression of ATF4, which suggested the miR-214-3p-ATF4  
30 signaling axis participated in regulating the proliferative and apoptotic phenotypes of osteoblasts.  
31 Our former experimental results have proven that FSS enhanced the proliferative activity of  
32 osteoblasts and repressed mitochondrial-mediated osteoblast apoptosis through downregulating  
33 miR-214-3p expression. Taken together, we hypothesized that FSS could exerted above effects  
34 through miR-214-3p targeting ATF4. Considering that transfection with miR-214-3p mimic  
35 attenuated FSS-induced downregulation of ATF4, we concluded that FSS enhanced the proliferative  
36 activity of osteoblasts and suppressed mitochondrial-mediated osteoblast apoptosis through the  
37 miR-214-3p-ATF4 signaling axis.

38 In summary, the present study has proven the physiological (beneficial) FSS enhances the  
39 proliferative activity of osteoblasts and protects osteoblasts against mitochondrial-mediated  
40 apoptosis, which provides theoretical basement for mechanotherapy of osteopenia. Based on the  
41 phenomenon of mechanically induced bone formation and microgravity-induced bone loss,  
42 therefore, it is valuable to explore the potential molecular mechanisms in the mechanically induced  
43 bone anabolism or catabolism, which may sharpen insights into the field of mechnaotherapy and  
44 provide more possible therapeutic targets for curing delayed fracture healing, osteoporosis and

1 aseptic implant loosening.

2

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9

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11 paper; Bin Geng supervised the framework of the article. Kun Zhang, Xuening Liu, Yuchen Tang,  
12 Lifu Wang, Qiong Yi and Zhongcheng Liu collected and analyzed the data. All authors read and  
13 approved the final version of the manuscript. Kun Zhang was the first author of this article. Kun  
14 Zhang, Xuening Liu and Yuchen Tang contributed equally to this work. Bin Geng and Yayi Xia were  
15 co-corresponding authors.

16

17 **Conflicts of interest:** The authors have no conflicting interests.

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