

The Main Molecular Mechanisms and Key Signaling Pathways of Ferroptosis

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Since ferroptosis was first described in 2012, it has attracted considerable attention in the medical community as an emerging mode of cell death driven by iron-dependent lipid peroxidation, distinct from apoptosis, necrosis, and autophagy. This unique cell death mode is regulated by multiple pathways, including the classical System Xc–glutathione peroxidase 4 (GPX4) and ferroptosis suppressor protein 1 (FSP1)–CoQ10 systems, as well as lipid metabolism, mitochondrial metabolism, cholesterol metabolism, sex hormone metabolism, and other auxiliary pathways. Notably, the cholesterol biosynthesis pathway exhibits bidirectional regulation—7-dehydrocholesterol (7-DHC) acts as a “sacrificial antioxidant” to inhibit ferroptosis, whereas elevated cholesterol levels promote it. Sex hormones regulate MBOAT1/2 to remodel membrane phospholipids and reduce ferroptosis susceptibility. Key signaling pathways, such as P53/SLC7A11, Nrf2-Keap1, and Hippo-YAP/TAZ, further fine-tune ferroptosis through iron homeostasis and redox balance regulation. Crosstalk exists between ferroptosis and other cell death modalities: copper chelators sensitize cells to ferroptosis, while lipid peroxidation products activate pyroptosis via the NLRP3 inflammasome. Novel inhibitors, including JKE-1674 (FSP1-targeted) and SRS11-92 (lipid radical scavenger), show improved pharmacokinetics and tissue specificity, while nanoparticle-based delivery systems enhance targeting efficacy. Multiple cancer cells are highly susceptible to ferroptosis, and ferroptosis is implicated in neurodegenerative diseases, ischemia-reperfusion injury, and metabolic disorders. This review systematically summarizes the molecular mechanisms, regulatory networks, novel modulators, and clinical translation progress of ferroptosis, highlighting its potential as a therapeutic target for various diseases and providing insights for future research and clinical application.

Keywords: ferroptosis; reactive oxygen species; cholesterol metabolism; cell death cross-talk; clinical translation; tissue specificity

What Is Ferroptosis?

Ferroptosis is a form of cell death driven by iron-dependent lipid peroxidation, distinct from apoptosis, necrosis, and autophagy in terms of morphology, biochemistry, and genetics [1,2]. Oxidative stress is a central component of ferroptosis, characterized by an imbalance between intracellular antioxidants and free radicals. This imbalance triggers a cascade of lipid reactions in the cell membrane, involving complex mechanisms such as reactive oxygen species (ROS) production and dysfunction of defense systems, including glutathione peroxidase 4 (GPX4) and ferroptosis suppressor protein 1 (FSP1, formerly known as flavoprotein apoptosis-inducing factor mitochondria-associated 2, AIFM2) [3,4].

Mechanism of Induction of Ferroptosis

Ferroptosis is initiated by excessive ROS production, which overwhelms cellular antioxidant defenses and triggers lipid peroxidation.

Generation of ROS

Mitochondria

Mitochondria are the “energy factories” of cells and major sources of ROS [5]. During electron transport chain (ETC) - mediated energy production, free radicals are generated and mostly exist as ROS (H_2O_2 , $HO\cdot$, $O_2\cdot^-$) [6,7]. The production rate of ROS is closely related to mitochondrial membrane potential ($\Delta\psi_m$) and ETC complex activity [8]. Mitochondrial enzymes such as aconitase and pyruvate dehydrogenase also contribute to ROS production [9]. In cancer cells, mitochondrial mutations create a “vicious cycle” of ROS overproduction, genomic instability, and cancer progression [10,11].

Fenton Reaction

As a key trace element, iron plays an indispensable role in human metabolism (Fig. 1). The total iron content in the human body is approximately 3–5 g, with an estimated daily loss of 1–2 mg through sweat, excretion, and shedding

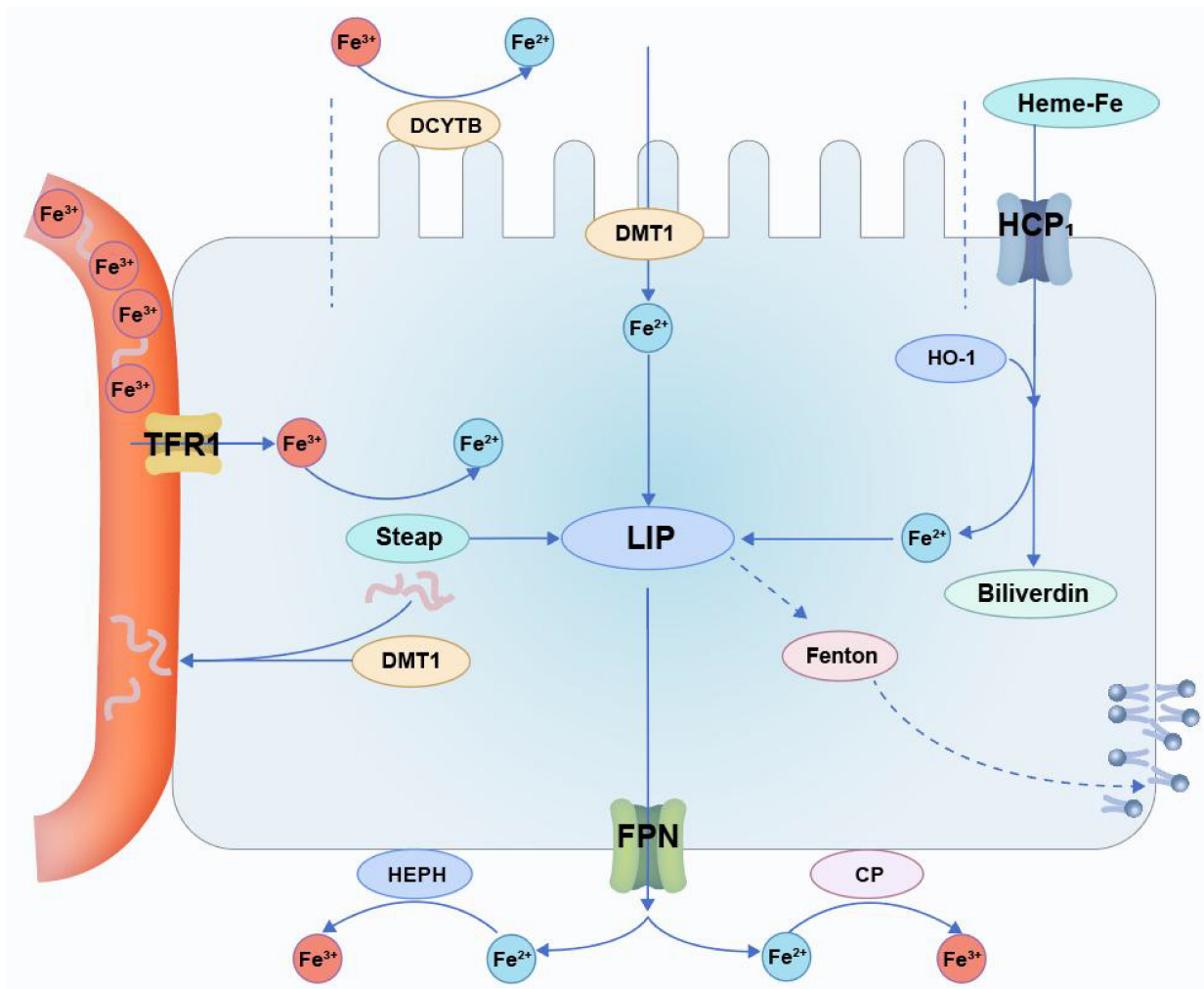


Fig. 1. Iron metabolism. All figures were created using Adobe Illustrator (Adobe Inc., San Jose, CA, USA). DCYTB, Duodenal cytochrome b; HCP1, Heme carrier protein 1; DMT1, Divalent metal transporter 1; HO-1, Heme oxygenase 1; TFR1, Transferrin receptor 1; LIP, Labile iron pool; FPN, Ferroportin; CP, Ceruloplasmin.

of intestinal epithelial cells. Iron metabolism is a dynamic and complex process involving the absorption, storage, utilization, and excretion of iron. Iron is absorbed through two pathways [12–14]. Heme iron (Fe²⁺) in food can be transferred directly to intestinal epithelial cells via heme carrier protein 1 (HCP1), after which heme oxygenase 1 (HO-1) releases Fe and catabolizes heme into biliverdin. Fe³⁺, which cannot be directly absorbed in humans, needs to be reduced to Fe²⁺ by the ferric reductase Cybrd1 (also known as DcytB) before being transported into the cell by divalent metal transfer protein 1 (DMT1, SLC11A2) [15–18]. After Fe²⁺ is taken up, it is translocated into the cytoplasmic lysate and may be released through HO-1 [19]. Intracellular iron can be bound to ferritin for storage [20,21]. Iron export from enterocytes into the circulation requires FPN, the only known iron efflux protein, together with iron oxidase. Iron oxidases contain Hephaestin (HEPH) and ceruloplasmin (Cp), which oxidize Fe²⁺ to Fe³⁺ [22,23]. In plasma, Fe³⁺ combines with transferrin (Tf), a glycoprotein that al-

lows iron to remain soluble for transportation in the blood [24]. Cellular iron uptake occurs as Tf binds to TfR1 on the surface of macrophages and is brought in through endocytosis. STEAP proteins facilitate the reduction of Fe³⁺ to Fe²⁺ and promote the release of iron from Tf, after which the iron is re-transported out of the cell to form a cycle via DMT1 [25]. It is noteworthy that some cells also express another transferrin receptor, TfR2, but TfR2 is considered to be a mode of transferrin regulation, as TfR2 has a much lower affinity for transferrin than TfR1 [26–28]. Iron taken up by the cell forms the labile iron pool (LIP); a portion is bound by ferritin for storage, while another fraction enters the mitochondria for heme synthesis via MFRN [29]. In conditions of LIP overload, iron-mediated Fenton reactions convert hydrogen peroxide into hydroxyl radicals, which then induce lipid peroxidation [30], which in turn triggers ferroptosis [31].

Lipid Peroxidation Process

By incorporating PUFAs into membrane phospholipids, ACSL4 and LPCAT3 enable ROS to trigger widespread membrane disintegration during ferroptosis [32], while MUFAs offer structural resistance and may support repair mechanisms, possibly in coordination with sex hormones [33,34].

Lipid peroxidation arises through two mechanisms: non-enzymatic spontaneous oxidation and enzyme-mediated oxidation [35–38] (Fig. 2). In non-enzymatic spontaneous oxidation, the reaction begins when $\bullet\text{OH}$ attacks the bis-allylic hydrogen of PUFA-PL in the bilayer, resulting in a carbon-centered radical ($\text{L}\cdot$) that reacts with molecular oxygen to produce $\text{LOO}\cdot$. The lipid peroxy radical will further react with the unsaturated fatty acid (LH) to form lipid peroxides (LOOH) and new lipid radicals ($\text{L}\cdot$). The new lipid-free radicals will rejoin the peroxidation reaction, resulting in the accumulation of secondary products and disruption of membrane integrity, ultimately leading to the breakdown of organelle membranes and cell membranes [39–42]. Enzyme-mediated oxidation requires the interaction of lipoxygenase (LOX) and phosphatidylethanolamine-binding protein 1 (PEBP1). LOX directly connects to PUFA and catalyzes the formation of lipid peroxy radicals (LOOH), which are involved in ferroptosis [43]. The human genome encodes six LOX genes, which may contribute to ferroptosis in different cell types. The oxidation of free PUFAs is primarily catalyzed by LOX, though its mechanism of action on membrane phospholipids is not well defined. Fleming MD *et al.* [44] discovered that PEBP1 stably binds to 15-LOX, enabling 15-LOX to oxidize PE-associated PUFAs and produce 15-hydroperoxyeicosatetraenoic acid-phosphatidylethanolamine 15-HpETE-PE, thereby triggering ferroptosis.

Protective Mechanisms of Ferroptosis

A variety of protective mechanisms exist throughout the ferroptosis process, the two most prominent being the mitigation of iron overload and the enhancement of antioxidant capacity.

Reducing Ferroptosis by Relieving Iron Overloads

Ferroptosis is closely related to intracellular iron overload, and iron overload can be reduced by regulating cellular iron metabolism, which in turn reduces the occurrence of ferroptosis. Liver is an important organ in the systemic regulation of iron metabolism, and it is the main site of hepcidin production [45,46]. Hepcidin regulates iron homeostasis by inhibiting iron release from duodenal intestinal epithelial cells, macrophages and hepatocytes [47,48]. On one hand, hepcidin can inhibit cellular iron efflux by binding and sequestering FPN [49]. On the other hand, it can also induce conformational changes in FPN, which can lead

to its ubiquitylation and to endocytosis and degradation of the ubiquitylated FPN [50,51]. Nemeth E *et al.* [51] suggested that hepcidin exhibits various mechanisms of action related to its own concentration: at high plasma concentration, hepcidin mainly combines with FPN and inhibits iron release. When the concentration of hepcidin decreases significantly, it predominantly induces the endocytosis and degradation of FPN [48]. Iron and hepcidin constitute a classical negative feedback regulatory system. When plasma iron concentration rises, the concentration of hepcidin decreases, and vice versa. Meanwhile, hepcidin is also regulated by other biological factors, among which erythropoietin and IL-6 are the most well-defined. Armitage AE *et al.* [52] considered erythropoietin as a key erythropoietic factor mediating the decreased secretion of hepcidin. IL-6, on the other hand, has been suggested to increase the production of hepcidin through the STAT-3 signaling pathway [53,54]. Rayatpour A *et al.* [55] experimentally demonstrated that ATV (Atorvastatin Calcium) mediated hepcidin secretion via the SMAD7/hepcidin pathway to attenuate ferroptosis in ischemia-reperfusion cardiomyocytes.

There are other ways to deal with intracellular iron overload. Iron chelators, deferoxamine and deferiprone, can both help reduce cellular iron levels. Deferiprone chelates with almost all iron, including iron pools in cells, and transferrin in plasma [56]. Guo Z *et al.* [57] have found that topical treatment with deferiprone attenuates lysophosphatidylcholine-induced demyelinating lesions of the optic nerve. Desferrioxamine is slightly more specific in that it mainly removes iron from ferritin and hemosiderin without affecting iron bound to transferrin or hemoglobin [58]. Zhou Y *et al.* [59] found that deferoxamine injections reduced the concentration of iron in the joint cavity, which in turn reduced the risk of osteoarthritis. Yang C *et al.* [60] demonstrated that DFO-mediated inhibition of ferroptosis attenuated radiation-induced fibrosis. Additional drugs, including deferasirox and curcumin, are gradually supported by corresponding experiments for their roles in regulating iron and ferroptosis [61–63].

Reduces Ferroptosis by Increasing Antioxidant Capacity

GPX4

We first focus on the System Xc- and GPX4 systems. System Xc- is a heterodimeric cystine/glutamate counter-transporter protein on cells, consisting of two core components: SLC7A11 and SLC3A2. This amino acid counter-transporter protein maintains the intracellular reducing environment by importing cystine and exporting glutamate. System Xc- facilitates the conversion of cystine to cysteine by thioredoxin (TXNRD1), which is then converted to glutathione (GSH) by glutamate cysteine synthetase and glutathione synthetase (GCL). Glutathione has its own oxidized form called oxidized glutathione (GSSG). By the

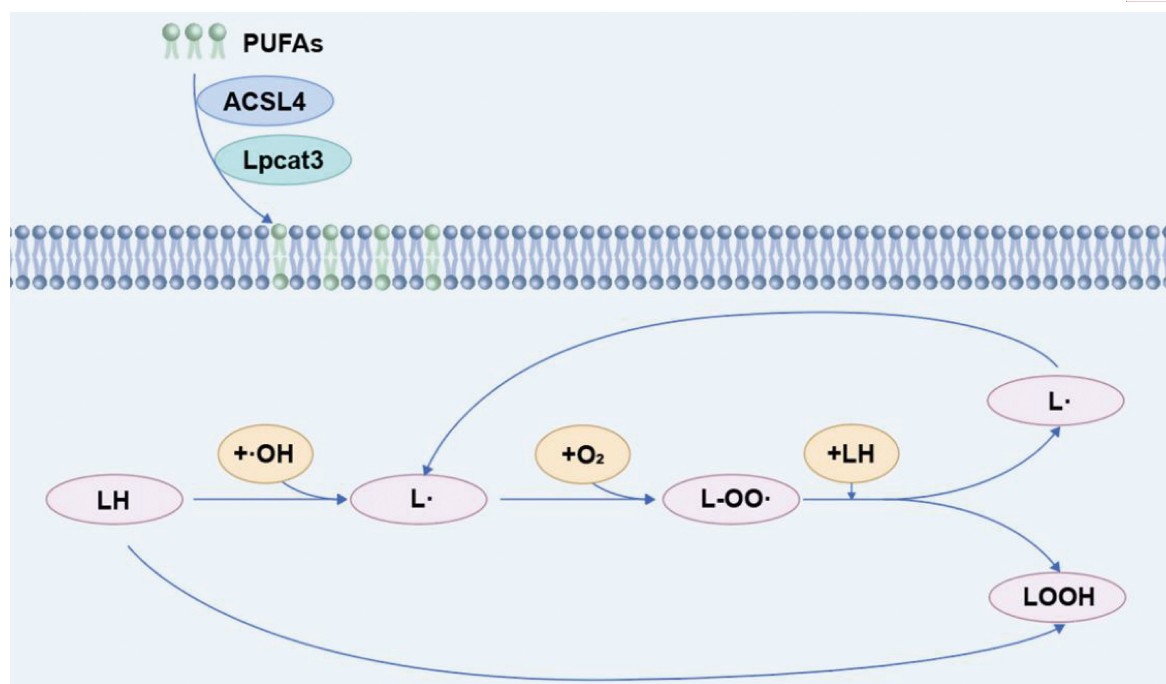


Fig. 2. Lipid peroxidation process. All figures were created using Adobe Illustrator (Adobe Inc., San Jose, CA, USA).

consumption of ATP, GSSG can be converted to GSH, which can also be converted to GSSG by GPX4. Reduced GSH acts as a cofactor for GPX enzymes in converting lipid hydroperoxides to lipid alcohols on phospholipids, thereby limiting intracellular peroxidation levels [64,65]. It is also noteworthy that cystine can be converted from methionine via the transsulfuration pathway and its direct extracellular uptake by System Xc⁻, thus bypassing the need for cystine input via the cystine/glutamate antitransporter system [66]. These cells are resistant to ferroptosis induced by System Xc⁻ inhibitors. In the transsulfuration pathway, methionine is converted to S-adenosylmethionine by methionine adenosyltransferase, then to S-adenosylhomocysteine by methyltransferase, which then generates homocysteine. Homocysteine is either remethylated to methionine by methyltetrahydrofolate or irreversibly converted to cysteine by the transsulfuration pathway, which has its own regulatory enzymes called pyridoxal-phosphate-dependent enzymes—cystathionine- β -synthase (adding homocysteine) enzyme and cysteine- γ -cleaving enzyme. A complete System Xc⁻ with GPX4 system is shown below (Fig. 3).

FSP1

FSP1, previously designated flavoprotein AIFM2, localizes primarily to the periphery of lipid droplets and the plasma membrane [67,68] (Fig. 4). It inhibits ferroptosis through three distinct glutathione-independent pathways [69,70]. First, FSP1 converts CoQ10 to its reduced form CoQ10H₂, a lipophilic antioxidant that traps free radicals to prevent lipid peroxidation and indirectly regenerates α -

tocopherol. Second, it functions as a vitamin K reductase, participating in the atypical redox pathway of vitamin K to maintain VKH₂ (reduced vitamin K), which also acts as an antioxidant. Third, FSP1 promotes ESCRT-III-dependent membrane repair—ESCRT-III complexes mediate the repair of ferroptosis-induced plasma membrane damage, with CHMP5 and CHMP6 serving as key subunits [71,72]. Targeting FSP1 downregulates CHMP5/6 expression at the plasma membrane, abrogating this repair mechanism [73].

DHODH

Dihydroorotate dehydrogenase (DHODH), an iron-containing mitochondrial enzyme and rate-limiting step in *de novo* pyrimidine synthesis, inhibits ferroptosis by regenerating CoQ10H₂ while catalyzing the oxidation of dihydroorotic acid (DHO) to orotate (OA) [74]. A “see-saw” relationship exists between DHODH and GPX4: DHODH inhibitors induce ferroptosis in GPX4-low cells and enhance the sensitivity of GPX4-high cells to ferroptosis inducers [75]. GPX4 inhibition enhances pyrimidine metabolic flux via DHODH upregulation, while exogenous DHO suppresses GPX4 inhibitor-induced ferroptosis. Additionally, DHODH depletion reduces intracellular pyrimidines, slowing ribonucleotide reductase (RNR)-mediated conversion of NTPs to dNTPs. Inhibiting RNR increases GSH levels and enhances GPX4-mediated peroxidation resistance [76,77].

GTPCH-BH4-NOS

Tetrahydrobiopterin (BH4), a potent free radical scavenger, protects lipids from peroxidation and regulates ni-

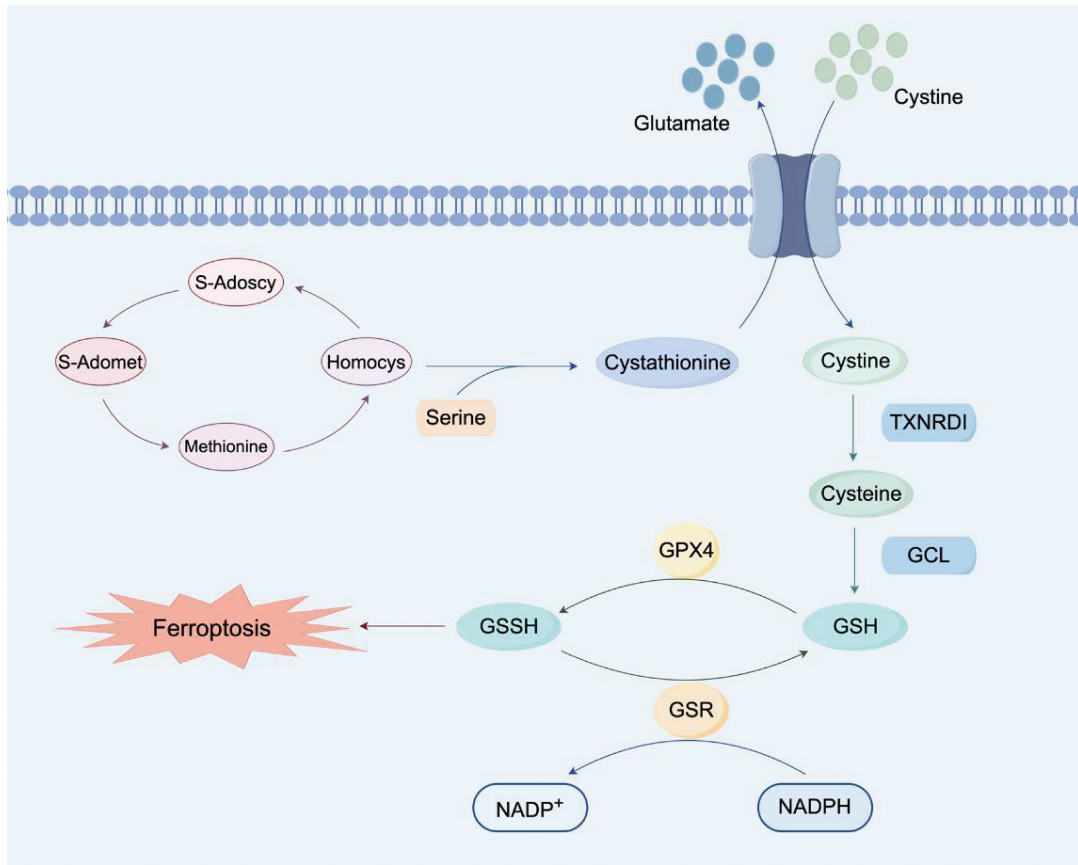


Fig. 3. System Xc- and GPX4 systems. All figures were created using Adobe Illustrator (Adobe Inc., San Jose, CA, USA). GPX4, glutathione peroxidase 4.

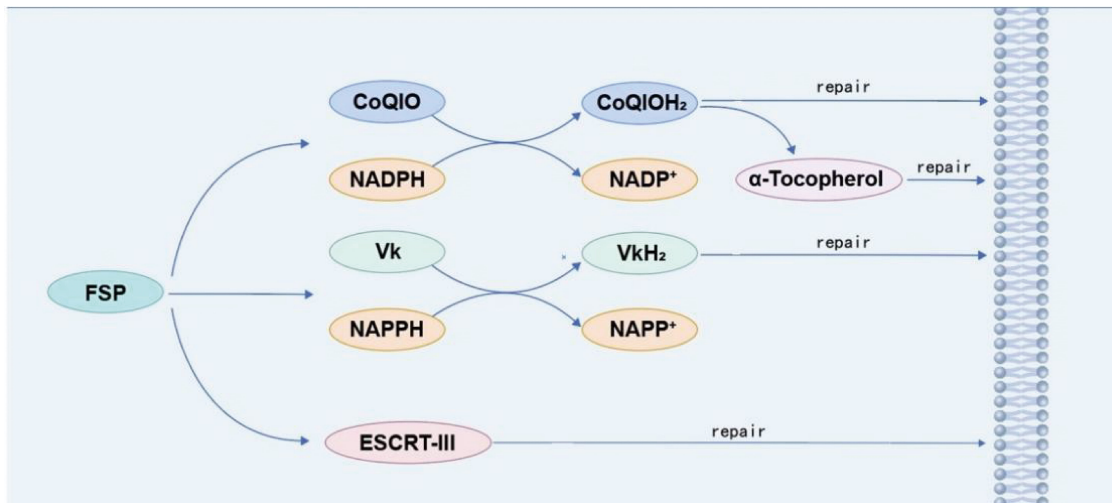


Fig. 4. FSP1 and its associated membrane repair systems. All figures were created using Adobe Illustrator (Adobe Inc., San Jose, CA, USA). FSP1, ferroptosis suppressor protein 1.

tric oxide synthase (NOS) function [78,79]. BH4 is synthesized via *de novo* (rate-limiting enzyme: GTP cyclohydrolase, GTPCH) and remedial pathways (dihydrofolate reductase, DHFR, regenerates BH4 from oxidized BH2) [80,81]. GTPCH expression is upregulated in response to oxidative stress-derived H₂O₂, increasing BH4 levels to mitigate

ROS accumulation [82]. As a NOS cofactor, BH4 stabilizes NOS structure and regulates its catalytic activity [83,84]. Under BH4 deficiency, NOS produces ROS instead of NO [85], and the resulting ROS further oxidizes BH4 to BH2, forming a vicious cycle of oxidative stress [86] (Fig. 5).

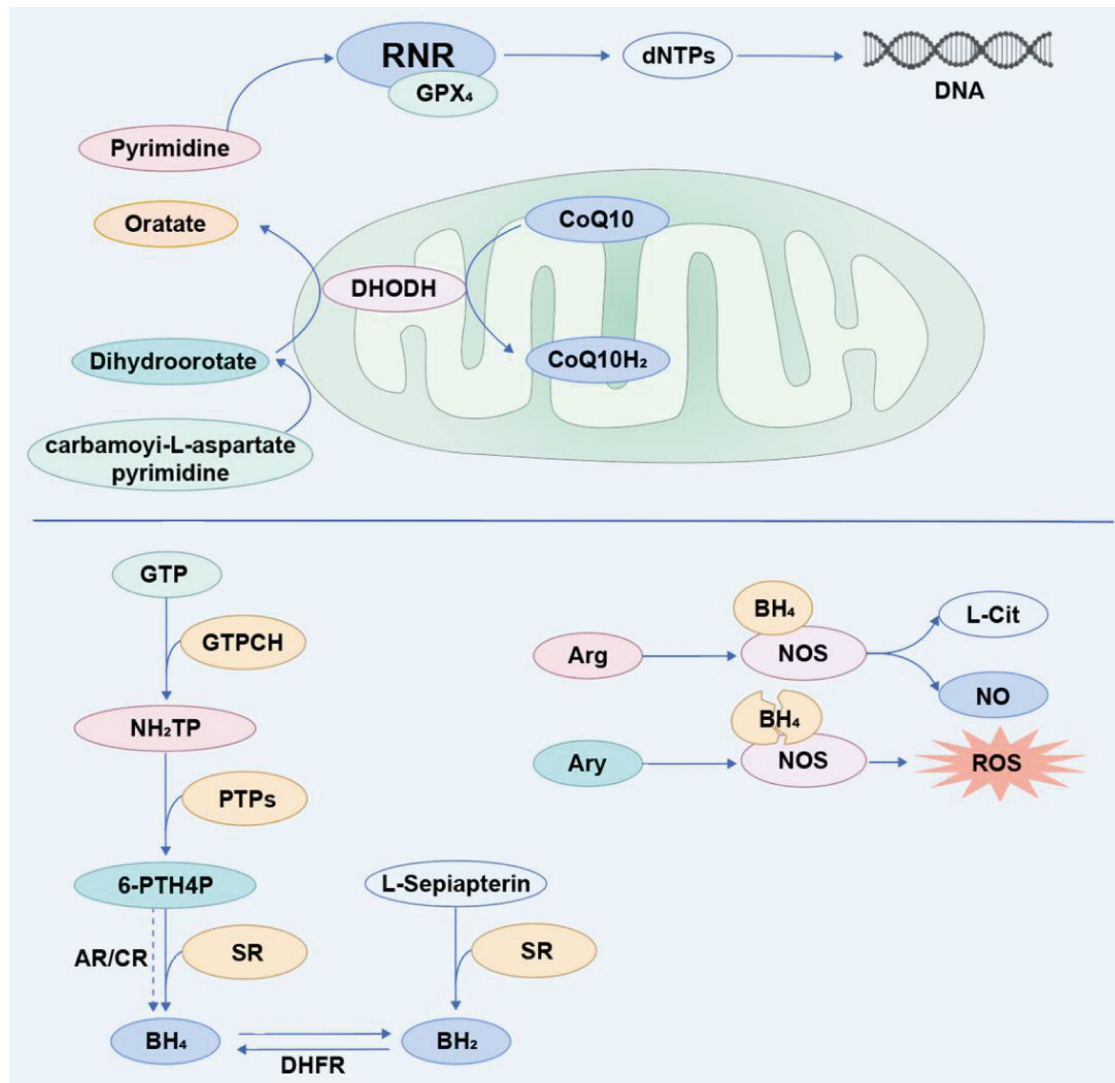


Fig. 5. DHODH and BH₄ systems. All figures were created using Adobe Illustrator (Adobe Inc., San Jose, CA, USA). DHODH, Dihydroorotate dehydrogenase; BH₄, Tetrahydrobiopterin.

Cholesterol Pathways

Metabolites of the cholesterol biosynthesis pathway regulate cellular sensitivity to ferroptosis. A preliminary cellular screening showed that Hashimoto sterols (Desmo), cholesterol (CH), and 7-dehydrocholesterol (7-DHC) significantly inhibited RSL3-induced lipid peroxidation and ferroptosis, with 7-DHC being the strongest protective effect [87,88]. 7-DHC is the most easily oxidized substance known, approximately 200 times more so than cholesterol [89]. Additional mechanistic studies of CH and Desmo have concluded that the upregulation of squalene and CoQ10 via sterol-linked SQLE degradation may enhance cellular resistance to iron-mediated oxidative damage [90]. A possible model is shown below. Cells constitutively express cytosqualene and CoQ10 at basal levels to neutralize low-level lipid peroxidation and avert ferroptosis [91]. The stability is vulnerable to multiple stimuli, any of which can initiate ferroptosis. Cellular overabundance

of CH and Desmo triggers accelerated turnover of SQLE, thus preventing the conversion from squalene to cholesterol and relatively increasing CoQ10 production [92]. 7-DHC works via a distinct mechanism. CH and Desmo gradually lost activity over time, with Desmo retaining about 50% inhibition after 9 hours of washing [93]. In contrast, 7-DHC almost entirely inhibited iron prolapse after 24 hours, indicating differences in the mechanism of action or metabolic stability [94]. A study has suggested that 7-DHC functions as a free radical trapping agent, protecting cells against ferroptosis [95]. 7-DHC is more like a “sacrificial molecule” in that the presence of an extra double bond in the B ring makes 7-DHC structurally flatter than cholesterol, which increases the interaction with the fatty acid side chains of phospholipids, depleting ROS by self-oxidation and thus protecting normal membrane phospholipids [96]. In summary, metabolites of the cholesterol biosynthesis pathway exhibit a complex, bidirectional role in regulating cellular

sensitivity to ferroptosis. While certain intermediates protect against ferroptosis, the end product, cholesterol, can exert pro-ferroptotic effects under specific conditions [97]. The anti-ferroptotic effects of 7-DHC and Desmo are attributed to their potent antioxidant properties; 7-DHC functions as a “sacrificial molecule” that scavenges free radicals due to its high oxidation, while Desmo and CH can promote the degradation of squalene monooxygenase (SQLE), leading to the accumulation of squalene and CoQ10, both of which possess antioxidant properties [98]. In contrast, cholesterol itself can promote ferroptosis, as high levels of cholesterol can increase membrane rigidity and alter the distribution of PUFAs, making them more susceptible to peroxidation [99]. Furthermore, cholesterol can be oxidized to form oxysterols, such as 7-ketocholesterol, which are potent inducers of oxidative stress and can increase cellular susceptibility to ferroptosis [100]. This dual role highlights the importance of the cholesterol metabolic flux and the specific intermediates involved, rather than the pathway as a whole, in determining ferroptosis sensitivity.

Sex Hormone Pathway

MBOAT1 and MBOAT2 are independent of GPX4 and FSP1, and exert inhibitory functions in ferroptosis through remodeling cell membrane phospholipids [101]. The action of MBOAT1/2 involves transferring monounsaturated fatty acids (MUFA) to lysophosphatidylethanolamine (lyso-PE), which increases cellular PE-MUFA and decreases PE-PUFA, thus reducing the risk of oxidation by the ROS cascade [102,103]. The transcriptional upregulation of MBOAT1 and MBOAT2 is mediated by estrogen receptor (ER) and androgen receptor (AR), respectively [104].

Critical Signaling Pathways

The scope of ferroptosis is extensive, with different signaling systems governing each of the molecules involved. Here, we briefly discuss several well-established regulators.

P53/SLC7A11

P53 is a well-known tumor suppressor locus that mediates cellular life processes such as cell cycle arrest, senescence and apoptosis. However, it has been found that the P53 protein achieves its diverse cellular outcomes by acting as a DNA-binding transcription factor that selectively regulates the expression of certain P53 transcriptional target genes. Even acetylation-deficient p53, which loses its ability to regulate the cell cycle, among other things, retains its tumor suppressor function and its ability to regulate the expression of metabolic targets [105]. It has been reported that p53 binds to the p53-responsive element in the SLC7A11 promoter, leading to reduced expression and increased sensitivity of cancer cells to ferroptosis inducers like erastin

[106]. Yang Y *et al.* [107] also inhibited P53 acetylation and restored SLC7A11 expression via STAT6, which ultimately reduced ferroptosis-associated lung injury. Nakamura T *et al.*'s [108] research also revealed that Gankyrin suppresses ferroptosis in TNBC by degrading p53. These findings suggest that p53 acts as an independent regulator that reduces the efficiency of the GPX4 system by inhibiting SLC7A11 expression, thereby promoting ferroptosis.

The effects of p53 on ferroptosis are not limited to those described above. FDXR, a mitochondrial flavoprotein, mediates electron flow from NADPH to FDX1 and FDX2, and subsequently to cytochrome P450, which is used for steroidogenesis as well as the synthesis of the Fe-S clusters and heme A synthesis [109]. FDXR is a target protein of P53. p53 induces the transcription of FDXR, which in turn can regulate the expression of P53 through a feedback mechanism [110]. This result suggests that P53 can also perturb iron homeostasis via FDXR, but the exact mechanism requires further investigation. In addition, P53 also regulates non-coding RNAs to induce ferroptosis, including miRNAs and lncRNAs. Meanwhile, various non-coding RNAs have been shown to negatively regulate p53 [111–113].

However, evidence also suggests that p53 can suppress ferroptosis in cells. Schade DS *et al.* [114] identified that the interaction between p53 and DPPP4 leads to NOX1 dissociation, thereby reducing lipid peroxidation and ferroptosis. Freitas FP *et al.* [115] found that p21 mediates p53 activity to inhibit cystine deprivation-induced ferroptosis in HT-1080 cells. Previous studies have suggested that the relationship between p53 and ferroptosis is intricate and warrants further elucidation.

The nRF2 Antioxidant Pathway

Nuclear factor-erythroid factor 2-related factor 2 (NFE2L2/NRF2) acts as a pivotal regulator of cellular redox equilibrium and exogenous detoxification [116,117]. It regulates ROS homeostasis in three different pathways [118]: metal metabolism, intermediary metabolism, and GSH metabolism. NRF2 plays an important role in metal metabolism, especially iron metabolism. The iron transporter protein, SLC40A1 (FPN), and the iron storage protein, ferritin, are both regulated by NRF2 [119,120]. Anandhan A *et al.* [121] demonstrated, using HERC2/VAMP8 double knockout cells, that NRF2 regulates ferritin synthesis and degradation via the HECT and RLD domains, with HERC2, VAMP8, and NCOA4 serving as key components. These proteins influence the intracellular LIP and the susceptibility of cancer cells to ferroptosis [122]. Nrf2 is also associated with the regeneration of NADPH, which is an important electron donor in redox reactions [123]. Finally, glutathione synthase (GSS), SLC7A11 and other important proteins in the GSH cycle are all modulated by NRF2 [124,125].

In cells, Nrf2 acts through the Keap1/Nrf2/ARE pathway. Keap1 and Nrf2 are bound in the cytoplasm and remain inactive. Under basal conditions, Nrf2 is ubiquitinated and degraded. In response to a specific stimulus, the Keap1-Nrf2 binding will be destabilized. Nrf2 will be released and translocated to the nucleus, where it binds to the ARE. It will subsequently trigger the transcription of downstream genes, followed by the production of proteins that induce antioxidant enzymes such as heme oxygenase 1 (HO-1), quinone oxidoreductase 1 (NQO1), superoxide dismutase (SOD), glutathione peroxidase (GPX), and catalase (CAT) [126].

Hippo-YAP/TAZ Pathway

The Hippo-YAP/TAZ pathway is a key regulator of tissue growth found in *Drosophila melanogaster*. YAP/TAZ is a well-characterized transcriptional effector of Hippo signaling involved in a variety of physiopathological processes, including tumorigenesis and tissue regeneration [127]. Recently, these two effectors have also been found to be associated with ferroptosis [128]. In both renal and ovarian cancers, TAZ is overexpressed. Knockdown of TAZ confers resistance to ferroptosis, whereas TAZ overexpression increases cellular susceptibility to ferroptosis [129]. The study by Yang WH *et al.* [130] indicated that TAZ modulates ferroptosis via the epithelial membrane protein 1 (EMP1)-NADPH oxidase 4 (NOX4) axis in renal cancer and angiopoietin-like 4 (ANGPTL4)-NADPH oxidase 2 (NOX2) axis in ovarian cancer. YAP upregulation can promote ferroptosis by upregulating multiple iron death regulators (e.g., ASCL4 and ferritin) [131]. However, the underlying mechanisms of YAP/TAZ signaling in ferroptosis are unclear and necessitate additional research.

Crosstalk Between Ferroptosis and Other Cell Death Modalities

The intricate interplay between ferroptosis and other forms of regulated cell death, such as cuproptosis and pyroptosis, has emerged as a critical area of research, revealing complex regulatory networks that challenge the traditional view of these pathways as independent entities. Grasping these interactions is essential for developing effective therapeutic strategies, as targeting one form of cell death may inadvertently modulate others, leading to unexpected outcomes.

Ferroptosis and Cuproptosis

Cuproptosis is a copper-dependent form of cell death characterized by the aggregation of lipoylated proteins in the tricarboxylic acid (TCA) cycle and the loss of iron-sulfur cluster proteins [132]. This process is initiated when excess copper binds to lipoylated components of the pyruvate dehydrogenase (PDH) complex, leading to protein aggregation and proteotoxic stress [133,134]. While distinct, ferroptosis and cuproptosis share a common reliance on

transition metals, achieving a delicate balance within the cell. Recent studies have identified a potential antagonistic relationship between these two pathways. For instance, the depletion of intracellular copper using copper chelators, such as tetrathiomolybdate (TTM), can increase cellular susceptibility to ferroptosis inducers like erastin and RSL3 [135]. The sensitization suggests that copper may compete with iron for binding sites on enzymes critical for lipid peroxidation, such as lipoxygenases (LOXs) and cytochrome P450 oxidoreductases (POR) [136]. Alternatively, copper may modulate the activity of these enzymes through allosteric regulation or by affecting their expression levels [137]. Copper is also a cofactor for superoxide dismutase 1 (SOD1), which converts superoxide to hydrogen peroxide, a precursor for hydroxyl radical generation via the Fenton reaction [138,139]. Thus, copper depletion may reduce SOD1 activity, decreasing ROS production and potentially protecting against ferroptosis, although the net effect appears to be context-dependent. Conversely, the induction of ferroptosis may influence copper homeostasis. Lipid peroxidation products generated during ferroptosis can alter the expression and activity of copper transporters, such as copper transporter 1 (CTR1) and ATP7A/B, which regulate copper uptake and efflux, respectively [140,141]. Additionally, the oxidative stress associated with ferroptosis may affect the redox state of copper, shifting it between Cu⁺ and Cu²⁺, which have different biological activities [142,143]. However, the precise mechanisms by which ferroptosis impacts copper metabolism and whether this contributes to cuproptosis induction remain to be fully elucidated.

Ferroptosis and Pyroptosis

This inflammatory cell death, pyroptosis, is mediated by gasdermin proteins that create pores in the plasma membrane, resulting in cell lysis and the release of pro-inflammatory cytokines [121]. Accumulating evidence suggests extensive crosstalk between ferroptosis and pyroptosis, particularly in the context of sterile inflammation and tissue damage. Ferroptosis leads to lipid peroxidation, resulting in products like 4-hydroxynonenal (4-HNE) and malondialdehyde (MDA), which can activate the NLRP3 inflammasome, a key component of the pyroptosis pathway [144,145]. Lipid peroxidation-generated DAMPs are identified by PRRs, which trigger the assembly of the NLRP3 inflammasome complex [146]. The activation causes the cleavage of pro-caspase-1 into active caspase-1, which then processes pro-IL-1 β and pro-IL-18 into mature forms and cleaves gasdermin D (GSDMD) to produce the N-terminal fragment (GSDMD-NT) [147]. The GSDMD-NT fragment oligomerizes and inserts into the plasma membrane, forming pores that enable the release of IL-1 β , IL-18, and other inflammatory mediators [148]. This synergistic effect amplifies cellular damage and inflammation, which is particularly relevant in the context of ischemia-reperfusion in-

jury, neurodegenerative diseases, and acute kidney injury [149]. For example, in myocardial infarction, ferroptosis-induced lipid peroxidation in cardiomyocytes can trigger pyroptosis, thereby exacerbating myocardial damage and promoting adverse cardiac remodeling [150]. Similarly, in Alzheimer's disease, ferroptosis in neurons may lead to the release of DAMPs that activate microglial NLRP3 inflammasomes, contributing to neuroinflammation and disease progression [151]. Furthermore, certain ferroptosis inducers have been shown to trigger both lipid peroxidation and GSDMD activation, highlighting the interconnected nature of these cell death pathways. For instance, erastin treatment not only induces ferroptosis but also promotes GSDMD cleavage and IL-1 β release in macrophages, suggesting that ferroptosis can directly engage the pyroptosis machinery [152]. This crosstalk may involve the activation of caspase-1 or other proteases that can process both GSDMD and proteins involved in ferroptosis execution [153].

Novel Ferroptosis Inhibitors

Beyond the classical inhibitors like Ferrostatin-1 and Liproxstatin-1, recent research has identified novel compounds with potent anti-ferroptosis activity, offering improved pharmacokinetic properties and distinct mechanisms of action. JKE-1674 is a highly potent and metabolically stable inhibitor of ferroptosis that targets the FSP1-CoQ10 pathway [154]. Unlike Ferrostatin-1 and Liproxstatin-1, which primarily act as radical-trapping antioxidants, JKE-1674 inhibits FSP1, an oxidoreductase that uses NAD(P)H to regenerate reduced CoQ10 and suppress lipid peroxidation [155]. JKE-1674 exhibits excellent oral bioavailability and brain penetration, making it a promising candidate for the treatment of neurodegenerative diseases such as Parkinson's disease and Alzheimer's disease, where ferroptosis plays a critical role [156]. In preclinical models, JKE-1674 has shown significant neuroprotective effects without apparent toxicity [157]. SRS11-92 is a novel compound that inhibits ferroptosis by directly scavenging lipid radicals, offering a distinct mechanism of action from traditional inhibitors. SRS11-92 is a lipophilic antioxidant that localizes to cellular membranes, where it efficiently quenches lipid peroxy radicals and terminates the chain reaction of lipid peroxidation [158]. Unlike Ferrostatin-1, which requires metabolic activation to exert its antioxidant effects, SRS11-92 is active in its parent form, providing rapid protection against ferroptosis. Additionally, SRS11-92 has been shown to protect against ischemia-reperfusion injury in the heart and kidney, suggesting its potential therapeutic utility in acute organ damage [159]. Nanoparticle-based inhibitors represent an innovative approach to overcome the limitations of conventional ferroptosis inhibitors, such as poor solubility, short half-life, and lack of tissue specificity. Engineered nanoparticles, such as those loaded with curcumin [160], resveratrol [161], or other antioxi-

dants [162], have been developed to target specific tissues (e.g., the brain), thereby enhancing the bioavailability and efficacy of ferroptosis inhibitors. For example, liposomes decorated with transferrin receptor-targeting ligands can selectively deliver ferroptosis inhibitors to cancer cells that overexpress transferrin receptors, minimizing off-target effects [163]. Similarly, nanoparticles that respond to the acidic tumor microenvironment or specific enzymes can release their payload in a controlled manner, improving therapeutic efficacy [164]. These nanocarriers can also be designed to co-deliver multiple agents, such as a ferroptosis inducer and an immunomodulator, to achieve synergistic anti-tumor effects [165,166]. Other emerging inhibitors include iFSP1, a specific inhibitor of FSP1 that has shown potent anti-ferroptosis activity *in vitro* and *in vivo* [167], and DHODH inhibitors that target the dihydroorotate dehydrogenase pathway, which has been implicated in ferroptosis resistance [168]. These novel compounds expand the therapeutic arsenal for targeting ferroptosis in various pathological conditions and provide valuable tools for dissecting the molecular mechanisms of this cell death pathway. The following tables present the classification, names, and underlying mechanism of action of common ferroptosis inducers and inhibitors (Table 1, Ref. [169–190]); Table 2, Ref. [23,61,191–203]).

Clinical Translation and Challenges of Ferroptosis Modulators

Clinical Progress

Cancer: Sorafenib (System Xc- inhibitor) is approved for renal cell carcinoma and hepatocellular carcinoma, inducing ferroptosis in tumors with high ACSL4 expression [204,205]. Phase I/II trials of erastin analogs (e.g., imidazole ketone erastin) in lymphoma show tumor growth inhibition [172]. A combination of ferroptosis inducers with immune checkpoint inhibitors enhances anti-tumor immunity [206].

Neurodegenerative diseases: Deferiprone (phase II trial) reduces iron accumulation in patients with Parkinson's disease, improving motor function [207]. Liproxstatin-1 derivatives capable of crossing the blood-brain barrier are currently in preclinical development for the treatment of Alzheimer's disease [208].

Ischemia-reperfusion injury: SRS11-92 reduces myocardial infarction size in animal models, and clinical trials of nanoparticle-delivered ferroptosis inhibitors for acute kidney injury are ongoing [209,210].

Challenges and Solutions

Pharmacokinetic issues: First-generation inhibitors (e.g., Ferrostatin-1) have poor solubility and short half-life. Structural optimization (e.g., Liproxstatin-1 derivatives) and nanoparticle delivery improve stability and tissue targeting [210,211].

Table 1. Ferroptosis inducers.

	Ferroptosis inducers		Reference
1 Suppression of Sys Xc	Erastin	Inhibits cystine absorption	[169–172]
	Auranofin	Inhibit thioredoxin reductase activity	[173,174]
	Acetaminophen	Deplete intracellular glutathione	[175]
	L-Buthionine-Sulfoximine	Inhibit intracellular glutathione formation	[176,177]
	Sulfasalazine	Inhibits cystine absorption	[178]
2 Degradation of GPX4	RSL3, ML162, ML210	Competition for the active site of bound GPX4	[179–181]
	FIN56	Induction of GPX4 degradation	[182,183]
	Cisplatin	Inactivates GPX4	[184]
3 Consumption of CoQ10	iFSP1	Inhibition of FSP1 activity	[185,186]
4 Induction of lipid peroxidation	Artemisinin, artesunate	Induction of ferritin autophagy and release of unstable iron	[187,188]
	Lapatinib	Catalyzing the generation of LIP-ROS	[189]
	FINO2	ferrous oxide	[190]

GPX4, glutathione peroxidase 4; CoQ10, Coenzyme Q10; iFSP1, Inhibitor of ferroptosis suppressor protein 1; FINO2, Ferroptosis inducer 2; RSL3, Ras-selective lethal 3; ML162, Molecular Libraries Small Molecule Repository 162; FSP1, ferroptosis suppressor protein 1; LIP, labile iron pool; ROS, reactive oxygen species.

Table 2. Ferroptosis inhibitors.

	Ferroptosis inhibitors		Reference
1 Iron chelators	deferrioxamine		[23]
	deferiprone	Reduction of unstable iron in cells and	[23,191]
	Deferasirox	inhibition of the Fenton reaction	[192]
	Curcumin		[61,193]
2 Antioxidant	Ferrostain-1	Scavenges ROS and reduces unstable iron in cells	[194]
	Liproxstain-1	Clears ROS, activates Nrf2 pathway, restores GPX4 levels	[195,196]
	Trolox	Inhibits lipid peroxidation	[197]
	XJB-5-131	Targeting mitochondria to scavenge ROS	[198]
3 LOX inhibitors	Zileuton	Inhibition of 5-LOX	[199]
	PD146176	Inhibition of 15-LOX	[200]
	Scutellarin	Inhibition of 12/15-LOX	[201]
4 ACSL4 inhibitor	Troglitazone	Inhibition of ACSL4 function blocks PUFA activation and phosphorylation processes	[202]
	Rosiglitazone and Pioglitazone		
5 Nitrogen oxide	TEMPO	Blocking the Fenton reaction	[203]

Nrf2, Nuclear factor-erythroid 2-related factor 2; LOX, lipoxygenase; ACSL4, Acyl-CoA synthetase long-chain family member 4.

Safety concerns: Long-term use of iron chelators causes anemia; broad-spectrum antioxidants disrupt normal redox signaling. Low-dose combination therapies reduce toxicity [207,212].

Tissue specificity: Transferrin receptor-targeted liposomes deliver inhibitors to cancer cells, minimizing off-target effects [169].

The Role of Ferroptosis in Disease

Organ and Cell Type Specificity of Ferroptosis

The susceptibility to ferroptosis is not uniform across all cell types and organs, a phenomenon that is crucial for understanding its physiological and pathological roles. This specificity is governed by the differential expression

of key regulatory molecules, including those involved in iron metabolism, lipid composition, and antioxidant defense systems [213]. For instance, many cancer cells exhibit a heightened sensitivity to ferroptosis due to their altered metabolism, characterized by high levels of polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs) in their membranes, increased iron demand to support rapid proliferation, and elevated basal levels of ROS [214,215]. Furthermore, mutations in tumor suppressors can directly or indirectly increase the cellular susceptibility to ferroptosis by downregulating SLC7A11 or promoting iron accumulation, making it a promising therapeutic target [216]. In contrast, neurons' susceptibility to ferroptosis is linked to their intense oxygen dependence, rich lipid content [217,218], and relatively low expression of antioxidant defense systems like GPX4, a piv-

Table 3. Key Ferroptosis Regulatory Targets, Therapeutic Strategies and Clinical Progress in Major Diseases.

Disease type	Key regulatory targets	Therapeutic strategy	Clinical progress
Cancer	SLC7A11, GPX4, ACSL4	Induce ferroptosis (erastin, RSL3)	Sorafenib approved; erastin analogs in phase II
Neurodegenerative Diseases	FSP1, BH4, iron chelators	Inhibit ferroptosis (deferiprone, JKE-1674)	Deferiprone phase II (Parkinson's)
Ischemia-Reperfusion Injury	LOX, NOX4, GPX4	Inhibit ferroptosis (SRS11-92, Liproxstatin-1)	Nanoparticle inhibitors in preclinical trials
Metabolic Disorders (NASH, Diabetes)	DHODH, cholesterol metabolism	Modulate ferroptosis (curcumin, statins)	Preclinical efficacy demonstrated

BH4, Tetrahydrobiopterin; NOX4, NADPH oxidase 4; NASH, non-alcoholic steatohepatitis; DHODH, Dihydroorotate dehydrogenase.

otal factor that drives the pathological processes in diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's [219]. Similarly, the kidney and heart are highly sensitive to ferroptosis, especially in the context of ischemia-reperfusion injury, where the sudden restoration of blood flow leads to a burst of ROS and iron overload, triggering ferroptosis in tubular epithelial cells and cardiomyocytes [220]. Conversely, hepatocytes possess robust antioxidant systems, but these can be overwhelmed in conditions such as drug-induced liver injury or non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH), where lipid peroxidation plays a central role [221,222]. Understanding the molecular basis for this organ- and cell type-specific ferroptosis, such as the roles of lipid-metabolizing enzymes like ACSL4 and LPCAT3, is essential for developing targeted therapies that can induce ferroptosis in cancer cells while protecting healthy tissues [223], or, conversely, inhibit ferroptosis in vulnerable organs during disease.

Comparative Analysis of Therapeutic Targets Across Diseases

Ferroptosis features disease-specific regulatory patterns and molecular targets, which underpins the development of tailored therapeutic strategies. Variations in ferroptosis susceptibility across cancer, neurodegenerative diseases, ischemia-reperfusion injury and metabolic disorders are associated with each disease's unique cellular metabolism, tissue microenvironment and expression of ferroptosis-related regulators. Accordingly, core therapeutic targets and intervention strategies for ferroptosis modulation exhibit distinct disease specificity, with clinical research progress differing based on translation difficulty, drug development maturity and pathological complexity. Table 3 summarizes the key regulatory targets, therapeutic strategies and clinical progress of ferroptosis modulation in major diseases, intuitively reflecting the link between disease characteristics and ferroptosis-based therapeutic design. Cross-disease comparison of these targets also informs ferroptosis modulator repurposing and pan-disease strategy development, while highlighting the need to consider tissue and cell target specificity to avoid off-target effects in clinical practice.

Ferroptosis in Specific Diseases

Cancer: P53 and BAP1 promote ferroptosis by inhibiting SLC7A11 expression [224,225]. FH-deficient renal cancer cells exhibit heightened sensitivity to ferroptosis inducers [226].

Neurodegenerative diseases: $A\beta$ (Alzheimer's) and α -synuclein (Parkinson's) induce iron accumulation and ferroptosis [227,228]. Ferroptosis inhibitors reduce neuronal loss in animal models [229,230].

Ischemia-reperfusion injury: Restoring blood flow triggers iron overload and ROS burst, inducing ferroptosis in cardiomyocytes and renal tubular epithelial cells [231,232]. Liproxstatin-1 reduces infarct size [233].

Metabolic disorders: NASH hepatocytes undergo ferroptosis due to lipid accumulation [234]. Diabetes-related hyperglycemia promotes ferroptosis via advanced glycation end products [235].

Conclusion

This review provides a comprehensive overview of the molecular mechanisms, regulatory networks, and clinical applications of ferroptosis. Core induction mechanisms involve ROS generation (mitochondria, Fenton reaction) and lipid peroxidation, while protective systems include classical pathways, such as System Xc-GPX4, FSP1-CoQ10, as well as auxiliary pathways involving cholesterol, sex hormone metabolism. Key signaling pathways and crosstalk with other forms of cell death further refine ferroptosis regulation. Novel modulators and delivery systems are being explored to overcome challenges in clinical translation. Ferroptosis exhibits disease- and cell type-specific regulatory features, and targeted therapies show promise in cancer, neurodegenerative diseases, and ischemia-reperfusion injury. Future research should focus on clarifying cell type-specific regulatory mechanisms, optimizing clinical trial design, and developing disease-specific ferroptosis modulators to bridge the gap between preclinical research and clinical utility.

Availability of Data and Materials

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Author Contributions

RHL, LLS, SZN and LCS designed the research study. YM, XM and RHL performed the research. HW, YS and LLS analyzed the literature. SZN and LCS drafted this article. All authors contributed to important editorial changes in the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript. All authors have participated sufficiently in the work and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

Not applicable.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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