Influence of a new method of sterilization on the morphology and physical properties of extracted human teeth

Daylana Pacheco da SILVAa,*, Urias Silva VASCONCELOSb, Valdimar da Silva VALENTEb, Gregório Antônio Soares MARTINSb, Carmem Dolores Vilarinho Soares de MOURAb

aUNICAMP – Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Faculdade de Odontologia de Piracicaba, Piracicaba, SP, Brasil
bUFPI – Universidade Federal do Piauí, Faculdade de Odontologia, Departamento de Odontologia Restauradora, Teresina, PI, Brasil

Abstract

Introduction: Sterilization methods adopted in Human Teeth Bank can promote structural changes in enamel and dentin. Thus, the ideal method should combine the antimicrobial efficacy and preservation of the substrate biomechanical properties. Aim: Evaluated the morphology and physical properties of enamel and dentin of extracted human teeth, after being submitted to different sterilization methods. Method: Sixteen extracted third molars were sectioned in the following tooth regions: mesio-distal, vestibular-lingual and at the cement enamel junction. Forty specimens were selected according to values of microhardness and roughness initials, and distributed in four experimental groups (n = 10/group): Group 1 = Autoclave 121 °C (30 minutes); Group 2 = 2.5% hypochlorite of soda (07 days); Group 3 = 5.25% Hypochlorite of soda (07 days); Group 4 = Acetic Acid 30% (7 days). After sterilization, the microhardness, roughness and morphology of enamel and dentin were evaluated. Data were analyzed by paired t-test, Wilcoxon, Kruskal-Wallis and Analysis of Variance. A significance level of 5% was adopted. Result: All sterilization methods altered the microhardness and roughness of the dentine (p < 0.05). Regardless to enamel, the microhardness was affected only by Autoclave and 2.5% Sodium hypochlorite treatment (p < 0.05). A large aperture of the enamel pores and dentinal tubules was verified in the micrographs. Conclusion: The sterilization methods adopted altered the morphology and/or physical properties of enamel and dentin.

Descriptors: Dental enamel; hardness; sterilization; dentin.
INTRODUCTION

Human Teeth Bank (HTB) is a nonprofit institution that stores, maintains and donates extracted human teeth, respecting ethical, legal and biosafety standards. Teeth manipulation can provide a risk of contamination for dentists, academics and researchers due to the presence of blood pathogens from pulp and periodontal tissues.

Previous studies highlight some methods of human teeth disinfection, such as immersion in formalin, sodium hypochlorite, glutaraldehyde or autoclave. Related to teeth sterilization, other studies point out ethylene oxide, and gamma radiation use. However, their efficacy can be altered and depends on the time of exposure, temperature, pressure, number of microorganisms and type of organic material that surrounds the teeth.

Sterilization methods adopted in HTB can promote structural changes in enamel and dentin. Thus, the ideal method should combine the antimicrobial efficacy and preservation of the substrate biomechanical properties, such as surface microhardness, coloration, mineral composition, microleakage, bond strength and dentin permeability. Therefore, the choice of method should be careful in order to provide less variability in the studies and greater reliability of the results.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention considers that extracted teeth used for scientific and didactic purposes should be autoclaved or disinfected with sodium hypochlorite or other germicidal solutions. However, these methods modify or remove the enamel protein matrix. Considering these criteria, the most recommended method would be gamma radiation, despite of its complex and expensive process.

Additionally, since an ideal method for tooth sterilization has not been well established, acetic acid solution has been investigated as an available, simple, low toxicity and cheaper antimicrobial agent. However, there are few studies evaluating the effects of this substance on the enamel and dentin properties.

Therefore, this in vitro study evaluated the morphology and physical properties of enamel and dentin, after being submitted to sterilization methods. The hypothesis tested was that sterilization methods would not influence the morphology and physical properties of extracted human teeth.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

This in vitro study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Piauí (UFPI) – nº 1.872.436, in accordance with the World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki.

Specimens Preparation

Sixteen third molars, newly extracted from patients aged 18-25 years, were selected. Teeth were acquired from the UFPI’s HTB, and stored in distilled water at 4 °C. After cleaning, the absence of defects in the enamel development, carious lesions and pre-existing fractures were verified.

The coronary portion was sectioned mesio-distal, vestibular-lingual/palatine, and at cement enamel junction (CEJ). A double-face diamond steel disc (KG Sorensen, Barueri, SP, Brazil) was used and 64 specimens containing enamel and dentin were obtained. The inner surface was polished with silicon carbide sandpaper (#400, #600 and #1200) containing deionized water for 5 minutes. After each sandpaper changing, the blocks were placed on ultrasound (Branson 1210 – Odontobrás, Ribeirão Preto, SP) for 5 minutes. This procedure was performed to prevent interference of sandpaper grains in the dental surface smoothness. Ultra-polishing was performed with SUPRA felt disc (Arotec S/A Ind. e Com., Cotia, SP) and aqueous diamond suspension (Arotec S/A Ind. e Com., Cotia, SP) with 1μm abrasive particles.

Microhardness and Surface Roughness Analyses

After finishing and polishing the blocks, values of initial microhardness (KHN) of enamel and dentin were determined. It was used a Knoop hardness tester (Future-Tech FM hardness tester, FM-ARS 900 software) at 50 g static load for enamel and 5 g for dentin, both for 5 seconds. Indentations were performed at 150 μm below the surface, 150 μm above the dentin and between these two distances. To perform microhardness in dentin, the specimens were left at room temperature for 30 minutes in order to minimize the interference of dehydration during measurement. Indentations were done 150 μm after dentin beginning, 150 μm above its terminus and between these two distances. KHN in enamel, dentin or extracted teeth used for scientific and didactic purposes should be autoclaved or disinfected with sodium hypochlorite or other germicidal solutions. However, these methods modify or remove the enamel protein matrix. Considering these criteria, the most recommended method would be gamma radiation, despite of its complex and expensive process.

Additionally, since an ideal method for tooth sterilization has not been well established, acetic acid solution has been investigated as an available, simple, low toxicity and cheaper antimicrobial agent. However, there are few studies evaluating the effects of this substance on the enamel and dentin properties.

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Scanning Electron Microscopy Analysis (SEM)

A morphological analysis was performed on enamel and dentin treated with different methods of sterilization (n = 4), and without treatment (n = 1). The specimens were washed with distilled water, gradually dehydrated with ethanol in the following concentrations: 25% (20 min), 50% (20 min), 75% (20 min), 95% (30 min), 98.93% (60 min), 100% (60 min). Then, specimens were fixed with hexamethyldisilazane (10 min). After 24 hours at room temperature, the specimens were metallized with gold (Bal-Tec SDC 050 Sputtercoater, Balzers, Liechtenstein), and visualized at 7,500x of magnification (JSM 5600LV, Jeol, Tokyo, Japan).
Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using the statistical program SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 20.0, specific for Windows. The assumptions of equality of variances and normal distribution of errors were checked by Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Paired t-test was used to compare normal data from the same group, otherwise the Wilcoxon test was adopted. For analyses among groups with normal values, it was used Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) followed by post hoc Tukey test. Kruskal-Wallis test was used for the others. The significance level was set at 5%.

RESULT

KHN₁ and KHN₂ analyses showed that the Autoclave and 2.5% Sodium hypochlorite methods significantly decreased enamel microhardness (p < 0.05). Regarding dentin, all treatments significantly altered its surface (p < 0.05). Additionally, it was not possible to calculate the microhardness values of the specimens treated with acetic acid, due to the high demineralization caused in enamel and dentin (Table 1). Related to the Ra₁ and Ra₂ means, a significant difference (p < 0.05) was observed in all treated groups (Table 2).

Table 1. Mean microhardness of enamel and dentin, along with the standard deviations, before and after treatment

| Dental tissues | Experimental groups | KHN₁ ± σ | KHN₂ ± σ | p     |
|----------------|---------------------|----------|----------|-------|
| Enamel         | G1                  | 292.28 ± 19.58 | 269.22 ± 20.84 | 0.005**|
|                | G2                  | 292.57 ± 13.23 | 266.74 ± 16.83 | 0.005**|
|                | G3                  | 289.74 ± 19.96 | 266.55 ± 18.00 | 0.985* |
|                | G4                  | -         | -         | -     |
| Dentin         | G1                  | 48.61 ± 3.43  | 45.42 ± 3.36  | 0.009* |
|                | G2                  | 47.65 ± 4.45  | 19.42 ± 2.03  | 0.000* |
|                | G3                  | 46.12 ± 4.67  | 20.5 ± 2.32   | 0.000* |
|                | G4                  | -         | -         | -     |

p<0.05 is statistically significant; *Value of p (paired t-test); ** p-value (Wilcoxon's test); σ = standard deviation; KHN = superficial Knoop microhardness before treatment; KHN₁ = superficial Knoop microhardness after treatment; G1 = Autoclave; G2 = 2.5% Sodium hypochlorite; G3 = 5% Sodium Hypochlorite; G4 = 30% Acetic Acid.

Table 2. Means of total roughness of the specimen, accompanied by standard deviations, before and after treatment

| Groups | Ra₁ ± σ | Ra₂ ± σ | p   |
|--------|---------|---------|-----|
| G1     | 0.095 ± 0.125 | 0.143 ± 0.035 | 0.000 |
| G2     | 0.097 ± 0.12 | 0.174 ± 0.059 | 0.002 |
| G3     | 0.095 ± 0.14 | 0.167 ± 0.042 | 0.000 |
| G4     | 0.095 ± 0.13 | 0.463 ± 0.121 | 0.000 |

p<0.05 is statistically significant for the paired t-test; σ = standard deviation; Ra₁ = total roughness of the specimen before treatment; Ra₂ = total roughness of the specimen after treatment; G1 = Autoclave; G2 = 2.5% Sodium hypochlorite; G3 = 5% Sodium Hypochlorite; G4 = 30% Acetic Acid.

DISCUSSION

The sterilization methods adopted in this experiment altered the physical and morphological properties of the enamel and dentin, thus the null hypothesis of this study was rejected.

The sterilization methods should eliminate all pathogens present in extracted human teeth to avoid the risk of contamination. The sterilization methods used in this research demonstrated efficacy in previous studies. Besides microbiological factor, the maintenance of the morphology and structural integrity of the enamel and dentin should be considered when sterilization methods are chosen. However, there is no consensus in the literature about the ideal method that preserves physical and structural properties of dental tissues. In order to observe higher alterations in the substrate, roughness and microhardness data were obtained from the specimens, since these values determine mineral loss or gain. To reduce possible bias, both analyses were performed in the same specimen and in standardized moments. The results of this study indicated that Autoclave and 2.5% Sodium hypochlorite decreased KHN of enamel, while all treatments affected KHN in dentin. The effect caused by Autoclave was observed in previous studies. Parsell et al. explain this effect by the presence of under pressure heat, which is able to break ionic bonds between collagen and hydroxyapatite, leading to denaturation of the organic matrix. However, there is still no agreement among the authors about the effect of this method on dental substrate. Moreover, Patil, Uppin showed that microhardness values changed similarly when 2.5% and 5% hypochlorite concentrations were used.

Another study pointed out that this solution was able to weaken the dental substrate, besides changing the microhardness according to its concentration and time of action. Regarding Sodium hypochlorite concentration and its effect on the substrate,
Figure 1. Scanning Electron Microscopy of enamel and human dentin submitted to different methods of sterilization and control group. (a) Untreated dental enamel (Control); (b) Untreated dental dentin (Control); (c) Enamel treated with autoclave; (d) Dentin treated with autoclave; (e) Enamel treated with Sodium Hypochlorite 2.5%; (f) Dentin treated with 2.5% Sodium Hypochlorite; (g) Enamel treated with 5% Sodium Hypochlorite; (h) Dentin treated with 5% Sodium Hypochlorite; (i) Enamel treated with 30% Acetic Acid; (j) Dentin treated with 30% Acetic Acid. Increase of 7,500 X.
it was observed that only 2.5% Sodium hypochlorite caused KHN change. This fact might be explained by the natural instability of this solution, and interference of time, light, exposure to air and high temperatures, changing the solution of the solution.21

Previous studies also have used acetic acid for disinfection of extracted human teeth, due to discussions about the toxicity of chlorine and other disinfectants. This substance is not commonly used in dentistry, but is considered an alternative disinfectant for teeth, acrylic resins and toothbrushes. In addition, the inclusion of this substance in this study was due to its availability, low cost and low toxicity.

In the evaluation of the roughness, all the methods used were able to alter teeth properties, as previously showed in the literature. Compared to other methods, acetic acid produced the most significant increase due to its acidic character and demineralizing effect on the substrate.

SEM analysis showed that all sterilization methods increased enamel pores and dentinal tubules, indicating a greater permeability of these tissues. However, these results were different from those found by Pashley et al., besides did not observe changes in the permeability and adhesive strength of dentin.

Therefore, it is suggested that all sterilization methods evaluated in this study provided changes in the physical and morphological properties of enamel and dentin. Furthermore, it is recommended that extracted human teeth used in research should be stored in purified water until selection of the sterilization method. Thus, the researcher must choose the method that best fits its research objectives, in order to achieve reliable results and eliminate study bias.

CONCLUSION

Despite the limitations of this in vitro study, our findings suggest that sterilization methods can alter the morphology and/or physical properties of enamel and dentin.

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CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

Daylana Pacheco da Silva, Departamento de Odontologia Restauradora, Faculdade de Odontologia de Piracicaba, UNICAMP – Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Av. Limeira, 901, Aretão, 13414-903 Piracicaba – SP, Brasil, e-mail: daylanapachecos@gmail.com

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