A Tensionable Method for Subscapularis Repair after Shoulder Arthroplasty

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A simplifiable method for subscapularis repair technique for TSA has recently been developed that uses suture tape with only 3 holes in the proximal humerus, 2 passes through the subscapularis tendon, and 2 knots. This technique uses suture tape and prefashioned racking hitches to create a transosseous equivalent repair that can be tensioned to remove slack in the construct (Tendon Compression Bridge [TCB]; Arthrex, Inc., Naples, FL, USA). Although the technique is appealing from an efficiency standpoint, further study is needed to compare it with a traditional technique. The purpose of this study was therefore to compare the biomechanical properties of the TCB repair vs. a traditional LTO repair using 4 high-strength sutures.

Materials and methods

Six fresh frozen cadaveric matched pairs of shoulder specimens without evidence of previous surgery were used to evaluate 2 types of LTO repairs. The mean age of the specimens was 58.3 ± 8.2 years. All cadavers were male. Cadavers were randomized to receive 2 repairs with equal distribution (3 left and 3 right for each repair).

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The hypothesis was that there would be no difference between the 2 constructs.

Methods: LTO repairs were performed on 6 matched, paired cadaveric shoulders after placement of an uncremented humeral stem. The LTO in group 1 was repaired with 4 high-strength #2 sutures, each passed individu-ally through the subscapularis tendon. The LTO in group 2 was repaired with 2 suture tape loops with a preplaced racking hitch knot and 2 passes through the subscapularis tendon. All sutures were passed around the humeral stem before passing through the subscapularis tendon. The specimens then underwent cyclic displacement and load-to-failure testing.

Results: Load to failure was 209.6 ± 71.2 N in group 1 compared with 502.8 ± 168.6 N in group 2 (P = .018). There was no difference in displacement between the 2 groups. All failures in group 1 occurred by knot slippage. The mode of failure in group 2 was tendon tearing in 5 of 6 cases.

Conclusion: A simplified LTO repair with suture tape and compression bridge and a preplaced half racking knot achieves favorable biomechanical properties in a technically efficient manner that may be useful clinically.

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Keywords: shoulder arthroplasty, lesser tuberosity osteotomy, subscapularis management, glenohumeral arthritis, racking hitch knot, biomechanical technical efficiency

Level of evidence: Basic Science Study Biomechanics

Background: This study compared the biomechanical properties of a new lesser tuberosity (LTO) repair with a tensionable construct with suture tape and preplaced racking hitches vs. a traditional LTO repair using 4 high-strength sutures. The hypothesis was that there would be no difference between the 2 constructs.

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The overlying skin and deltoid were removed. The rotator cuff was inspected and confirmed to be intact in all specimens. The rotator interval was opened, and the biceps was tenotomized at the level of the glenoid. The entire rotator cuff was elevated off the scapula from medial to lateral, preserving the muscle. The scapula was removed. The humeral shaft was osteotomized 15 cm distal to the articular surface just above the elbow and then potted in standard epoxy for subsequent testing.

A fleck LTO was performed with the use of a 2-mm oscillating saw blade and a curved osteotome. The goal was to create an osteotomy that was approximately 2.5 cm² in the coronal plane and 5 mm thick. The humeral head was osteotomized with an anatomic cut made to match native inclination and retroversion. The humeral canal was then broached for placement of an uncemented short stem humeral prosthesis (Univers Apex; Arthrex, Inc.) according to the manufacturer’s recommendations. The size of the humeral stem was kept consistent between the respective matched pairs. The humerus was then prepared for repair of the LTO as subsequently described. The final stem was implanted after suture placement.

Traditional #2 suture repair

Before placement of the humeral stem, 4 holes were created with a 2-mm drill bit in the bicipital groove spanning from the superior to inferior aspects of the LTO. Two holes were created in the metaphysis just medial to the LTO. Four high-strength #2 FiberWire sutures (Arthrex, Inc.) were passed from lateral to medial by entering the bicipital groove, creating loops within which the humeral stem would be placed, and exiting medially. The inferior 2 sutures exited through the medial metaphyseal holes, and the 2 superior sutures exited below the collar of the humeral stem.

The 4 suture limbs were then passed through the subscapularis just medial to the LTO, evenly spaced, using 1 pass for each construct. The LTO was reduced to its anatomic position by placing a simple #2 suture between the superior subscapularis and anterior supraspinatus tendon at the lateral aspect of the rotator interval. Slack was manually removed from the construct, and each suture was then tied to its corresponding limb with a 6-throw surgeon’s knot (Fig. 1).

Figure 1 Schematic of the traditional lesser tuberosity repair with 4 sutures passed around a humeral stem.

Figure 2 (A) A suture tape prefashioned with a half racking suture on the end is passed from lateral to medial through the inferior 2 holes, and (B) a separate suture is passed through the superior hole.
Before placement of the humeral stem, 2 holes were created with a 2-mm drill bit in the bicipital groove at the superior and inferior aspects of the LTO. One hole was created in the metaphysis just medial to the LTO. The TCB suture tape constructs were then passed from lateral to medial by entering the bicipital groove, passing around the humeral stem, and exiting medially (Fig. 2). The inferior suture tape construct exited the medial metaphyseal hole, and the superior suture tape construct exited below the collar of the humeral stem. Each suture tape construct has a prefashioned racking hitch that was positioned to rest in the bicipital groove. The 2 medial ends of the suture are wedged together on a needle to facilitate suture passage.

The 2 suture tapes constructs were then passed through the subscapularis just medial to the LTO, evenly spaced, using 1 pass for each construct. The needle was removed from each construct to leave 2 superior and 2 inferior limbs (Fig. 3). The LTO was reduced to its anatomic position by placing a simple #2 suture between the superior subscapularis and anterior supraspinatus tendon at the lateral aspect of the rotator interval. Then, 1 of the superior limbs and 1 of the inferior limbs were shuttled through the superior racking hitch knot (Fig. 4). The suture limbs were passed through a tensioner to remove slack and to tension the repair (Fig. 5). Tensioning was done...
under visual inspection. The repair was locked with 2 half hitches. The process was then repeated for the inferior racking half hitch using the remaining 2 suture limbs (Fig. 6).

Biomechanical testing

The potted humeral shafts were mounted on a hydraulic testing system (Instron, Canton, MA, USA). The shoulders for testing were at 45° of glenohumeral abduction in neutral rotation with the line of pull 135° to the axis of the humerus to allow the subscapularis repair to be stressed in line with its axis.4,12 The free subscapularis muscle was clamped with a cyro-jaw. Carbon dioxide was applied to the subscapularis muscle to freeze the muscle in position.

Each specimen was cycled at a rate of 1 Hz from 10 to 100 N for 500 cycles and then pulled to failure at 33 mm/s. We chose 500 cycles based on previous biomechanical studies examining the subscapularis in TSA.3,8 Displacement was recorded using video tracking. Markers were placed on each side of the repair, cycling was video recorded, and then displacement was digitally calculated. Displacement of the LTO was measured at time 0 and after 500 cycles. Ultimate load to failure and the mechanism of failure was recorded for each construct. Displacement was recorded with video tracking. The stiffness of each construct at the LTO-bone junction was calculated as the slope of the linear region of the each sample’s load vs. displacement.

Statistical analysis

Descriptive statistics are reported as mean ± standard deviation for each group. A Student t test was used to compare values, with significance set at 0.05.

Results

The results of each specimen are summarized in Tables I and II. The difference in mean cyclic displacement between group 1 (1.2 ± 1.0 mm) and group 2 (1.1 ± 1.2 mm) was not significant (P = .804). Stiffness in group 2 (70.8 ± 19.8 N/mm) trended toward being higher compared with group 1 (48.4 ± 18.9 N/mm, P = .072; Table III).

Load to failure was 209.6 ± 71.2 N in group 1 compared with 502.8 ± 168.6 N in group 2 (P = .018). All failures in group 1 occurred by knot slippage. The mode of failure in group 2 was tendon tearing in 5 of 6 cases and suture slippage in 1.

Discussion

This study evaluated a new subscapularis repair for TSA. The results confirm the study hypothesis that a suture tape repair with a preplaced racking hitch is at least equivalent to a traditional repair. This suture tape repair may be useful given its simplification compared with traditional repairs.

Multiple reports have documented poor healing after subscapularis tenotomy during TSA.5,10 More recent reports have noted improved healing and function with an LTO or subscapularis peel approach.1,7,13 Based on these studies, tendon-to-bone (eg, peel) or

| Specimen | Load to failure (N) | Stiffness (N/mm) | Displacement (mm) | Mode of failure |
|----------|---------------------|------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1        | 406.9               | 0.11             |                   | Suture slippage |
| 2        | 226.6               | 0.88             |                   | Suture slippage |
| 3        | 344.1               | 2.39             |                   | Suture slippage |
| 4        | 227.8               | 2.19             |                   | Suture slippage |
| 5        | 267.9               | 1.64             |                   | Suture slippage |
| 6        | 270.5               | 0.10             |                   | Suture slippage |
| Mean     | 290.6               | 70.8             | 1.2               |                 |
| Standard deviation | 71.2               | 19.8             | 1.0               |                 |
bone-to-bone (eg, LTO) healing have become a popular technique for subscapularis management after TSA.

In the current study, load to failure was higher with the new suture tape repair compared with four #2 sutures passed around the stem. In addition, it is important to note the mode of failure was different between the repair techniques. In the #2 suture group, all failures occurred by suture slippage. In contrast, the mode of failure with the suture tape repair was tendon tearing in 5 of 6 cases. Thus, the weak link in the latter repair was transferred to the tendon. This is likely due to the unique mode of fixation with the racking hitch knot. Kelly et al previously demonstrated that a racking hitch knot has lower suture slippage (elongation) than a conventional knot, and the findings from our study support that conclusion.

Several previous biomechanical studies have evaluated subscapularis repair in TSA. Ponce et al compared a LTO with sutures passed around the stem vs. a stem-based peel repair using the same humeral stem. Similarly, Fishman et al reported a load to failure of 375 N using 4 #2 sutures passed around the stem as well as an additional titanium cable.

Lederman et al compared an LTO repair with #5 sutures passed around the stem vs. a stem-based peel repair using the same humeral stem and protocol used in the current study. They reported a mean load to failure of 612 N, with a mean displacement of 2.2 mm after 500 cycles in the LTO group and 683 N and 2.9 mm in the peel group. Their results for the 4 suture repair are more similar to Giuseffi et al, who also used #2 suture and reported mean load to failure of 447 N for an LTO repair with sutures passed around the humeral stem. Similarly, Fishman et al reported a load to failure of 375 N using 4 #2 sutures passed around the stem as well as an additional titanium cable.

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