Role of Magnetic Resonance Imaging in Temporomandibular Joint Ankylosis - An Evaluative Study

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Abstract

Introduction: Temporomandibular joint (TMJ) ankylosis is a pathologic condition where the mandible is fused to the fossa by bony or fibrotic tissues. Haemorrhage is one of the major complications during TMJ surgery especially in ankyloses due to altered anatomy. The aim of the study was to analyse the proximity of the vasculature to the TMJ region in TMJ ankylosis patients using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI).

Materials and Methods: Noncontrast-enhanced MRI images of seven patients were assessed. The distance between maxillary artery and neck of condyle/ankylotic mass was measured using coronal sections and distance between the internal carotid artery (ICA), internal jugular vein (IJV) and medial edge of condyle/bony mass were measured using axial sections. Results: The mean distance of internal maxillary artery (IMA) to medial edge of ankylosic mass was 1 ± 0.57 mm and 2 ± 1.2 mm-left and right condylar regions respectively (range: 0–4 mm). The mean distance from lateral aspect of ankylosic mass to IMA was 8.2 ± 1.4 mm and 8.7 ± 2.8 mm–right and left condylar regions respectively (range: 3–11 mm). The mean distance from medial edge of condyle to ICA was 18.8 ± 1.3 mm and 18.2 ± 1.1 mm-right and left condylar regions respectively (range: 17 mm–20 mm). The mean distance from the medial edge of condyle to IJV was 16.4 ± 1.1 mm and 14.5 ± 2.9 mm-right and left condylar regions (range: 11 mm–19 mm).

Discussion: These measurements were used as a guide to plan the steps during surgery in order to minimise the intraoperative haemorrhagic complications. Hence, MRI may be considered as a valuable tool in assessing the juxtaposition of vascular bed to TMJ region, though contrast MRI and a larger sample is needed to standardise.

Keywords: Internal carotid artery, internal jugular vein, internal maxillary artery, magnetic resonance imaging, proximity

In this study, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) was done to understand the vascular bed in TMJ ankylosis patients operated for the first time as well as for re-ankylosis.

Earlier studies by El-Hakim and Metwalli[13] has demonstrated the distance between the internal carotid artery (ICA), internal jugular vein (IJV), the maxillary artery and the medial pole of the mandibular condyle to be decreased on the ankylotic side when compared to the normal side. El-Hakim et al.[13] have shown that the maxillary artery was inside the ankylotic mass.

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Access this article online

Quick Response Code: 
Website: https://journals.lww.com/aoms/
DOI: 10.4103/ams.ams_77_22

Received: 26-03-2022 Last Revised: 18-06-2022
Accepted: 22-06-2022 Published: 16-08-2022

How to cite this article: Prasad C, Deepa M, Triveni P, Arunkumar K. Role of magnetic resonance imaging in temporomandibular joint ankylosis - An evaluative study. Ann Maxillofac Surg 2022;12:39-45.
sometimes or the distance between the maxillary artery and the medial pole of the condyle is less on the ankylosic side than on the normal side.

It was also shown that the ankylosed mass appeared fused to the base of the skull and there is extensive bone formation, especially from the medial aspect of the condyle to the extent that the ankylosic mass is in close relationship with the vital structures at the base of the skull such as the pterygoid plates, carotid and jugular foramina and foramen spinosum and that normal joint anatomy could not be defined from the radiograph.[14]

Clinical and radiographic studies of the vascularity of ankylosic and re-ankylosic patients are very few in the literature. This study was done on seven patients over a period of 3 years who attended outpatient department at the Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery. In addition to traditional diagnostic methods like X-ray, computed tomography (CT), MRI was taken to thoroughly analyse the vascular changes to guide us during surgery.

Aim
The aim of the study was to assess the proximity of the major vascular structures to the TMJ region in TMJ ankylosis patients using MRI.

Materials and Methods
MRI scans of seven cases of TMJ ankylosis operated in the Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, over 3 years were assessed. T1 and T2 weighted noncontrast-enhanced MRI images of 3 mm slice thickness were taken. There were four female and three male patients in the age range of 16–47 years. Five out of seven were bilateral and two were unilateral TMJ ankylosis cases. Two out of seven were re-ankylosis both of which were bilateral and the remaining five were primary ankylosis. Totally 12 TMJs were analysed.

Ethical committee clearance reference number: 4/IERB/2021.

Inclusion criteria
Patients with unilateral or bilateral TMJ ankylosis (primary or recurrent)-Sawhney’s classification-Type I, II, III and IV.[15,16]

Exclusion criteria
- Patients with ferromagnetic metallic implants
- Medical devices like cardiac pacemakers
- Cochlear implants
- Cerebral aneurysm clips
- Ferrous foreign objects in the eye, metal sutures, plates and screws, wire mesh
- MRI contrast poses a risk of allergic reaction to the dye in patients who are allergic or sensitive to medications, contrast dye, iodine or shellfish. It may have an effect on asthma, anaemia, hypotension and sickle cell disease
- Patients who do not give consent for MRI
- Contrast agents are avoided in patients who are pregnant or breast feeding.[17]

Methods
Axial, coronal and sagittal MRI sections were taken.

The distance between the maxillary artery and the neck of condyle/ankylotic mass was measured (in millimeters) using coronal sections of MRI scans which prominently showed the ankylosic mass and the maxillary artery [Figures 1 and 2].

The distance between the carotid canal ICA (Point I), jugular foramen IJV (Point J) and medial edge of the condyle/bony mass (Point E) were measured (in millimeters) using axial sections of the MRI scans which prominently showed the ankylosic mass and the carotid canal and jugular foramen [Figures 3 and 4].

The axial sections in which the ankylosic mass was diffuse and condyle margins could not be exactly identified, the condyle was considered to be in the horizontal line (EF) drawn from just in front of the ear (Point F) towards medially till the medial edge of the bony mass (Point E) [Figures 3 and 4].

The following points were considered for measuring the proximity of internal maxillary artery (IMA) [Figures 1 and 2]. Point A-The outermost soft tissue margin (Skin), Point B-The lateral most point on the outer edge of the IMA, Point C-The most prominent point on the medial edge of the inferior end of the ankylosic mass, Point D-The most prominent point on the lateral edge of the inferior end of the ankylosic mass.

The following points were considered for measuring the proximity of the ICA and IJV [Figures 3 and 4]. Point E-The most prominent point on the medial edge of the condyle or the bony mass, Point F-Point just in front of the ear on the outermost soft tissue margin. Horizontal line EF-drawn from just in front of the ear (Point F) towards medially till the most prominent point on the medial edge of the bony mass (Point E), Point I-The most anterolateral point on the outer edge of the carotid canal, Point J-The most anterolateral point on the outer edge of the jugular foramen.

The following distances were measured (in millimeters) for finding the proximity of IMA [Figure 2]. Distance AB-From the outermost soft tissue margin-Skin (Point A) to the lateral most point on the outer edge of the IMA (Point B). Distance CB-From the most prominent point on the medial edge of the inferior end of the ankylosic mass (Point C) to the lateral most point on the outer edge of the IMA (Point B). Distance DB-From the most prominent point on the lateral edge of the inferior end of the ankylosic mass (Point D) to the lateral most point on the outer edge of the IMA (Point B).

The following distances were measured (in millimeters) for finding the proximity of the ICA and IJV respectively [Figures 3 and 4]. Distance EI-The distance from the most prominent point on the medial edge of the condyle or the bony mass (Point E) to the most anterolateral point on the outer edge of the carotid canal (Point I). Distance EJ-The distance from the most prominent point on the medial edge of the condyle or
the bony mass (Point E) to the most anterolateral point on the outer edge of the jugular foramen (Point J) [Figures 3 and 4].

**RESULTS**

The results of the study showed that the maximum and the minimum distances from the skin to the lateral most point of the internal maxillary artery (DISTANCE AB) were 27 mm and 16 mm with a mean of (21.6 ± SD4.15 mm - Right side) and (23.7 ± SD2.05 mm - Left side) (Table 1A and 1B and Chart 1a). The minimum distance of the IMA and the medial edge of the inferior end of the ankylotic mass (Distance CB) was 0 mm and the maximum distance was just 4 mm and an average of (1 ± standard deviation [SD] 0.57 mm on the left side) and (2 ± SD 1.2 mm on the right side) [Table 1A and 1B and Chart 1b].

The minimum distance from the lateral aspect of the inferior end of the ankylotic mass to the IMA (Distance DB) was just 3 mm and maximum being 11 mm. The average value was found to be (8.2 ± SD 1.4 mm on the right side) and (8.7 ± SD 2.8 mm on the left side) [Table 1A and 1B and Chart 1c].

The maximum and minimum distances [Table 1B] from the medial edge of the condyle to the ICA (Distance EI) were 20 mm and 17 mm respectively with a mean of (18.8 ± SD 1.3 mm on the right side) and (18.2 ± SD 1.1 mm

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**Figure 1:** Coronal section of MRI with markings for condyle (CON-orange arrow) and internal maxillary artery (marked in RED) appears as a flow void medial to the condyle. Point B (Yellow dot). MRI: Magnetic resonance imaging.

**Figure 2:** Coronal section of MRI Showing- B/L TMJ ankylosis-Right side and Left side Condyles (CON-Orange arrow). Point B, Distance AB-Blue line, Distance CB-Pink line and Distance DB-Yellow line, TMJ: Temporomandibular joint, MRI: Magnetic resonance imaging.

**Figure 3:** Axial section of MRI with markings for ICA Carotid canal (marked in deep red) and Jugular foramen (IJV) (marked in green), Point I and Point J. ICA: Internal carotid artery, IJV: Internal jugular vein, MRI: Magnetic resonance imaging.

**Figure 4:** Axial section of MRI showing position of condyle (orange line-a horizontal line EF drawn from a point just in front of the ear (Point F), Distance EI-deep red line, Distance EJ - green line. MRI: Magnetic resonance imaging.
on the left side) [Table 1A and Chart 2a] and maximum and minimum distances [Table 1B] from the medial edge of the condyle to the IJV (Distance EJ) were 19 mm and 11 mm respectively with a mean of (16.4 ± SD1.1 mm on the right side) and (14.5 ± SD 2.9 mm on the left side) [Table 1A and Chart 2b].

**Discussion**

The management goal in TMJ ankylosis is to increase the patient’s mandibular function, correct associated facial deformity, decrease pain, and prevent reankylosis.[1]

Multiple surgical modalities have been proposed to manage TMJ ankylosis including gap arthroplasty, interpositional arthroplasty, and total joint reconstruction. Autogenous tissues such as ear cartilage, temporalis muscle flap, dermis, fat, and bone, have been used after gap arthroplasty.[18,19]

The most common management is gap arthroplasty with or without interposition graft. The most common complication is intraoperative haemorrhage due to injury to the adjacent vasculature.[20]

Haemorrhagic complications of TMJ surgeries may be intracranial/extracranial.[20-23,26-28]

Extracranial complications are likely to involve superficial temporal vessels, maxillary artery, middle meningeal artery and ICA.

Intracranial complications involve extradural haemorrhage due to rupture of the middle meningeal artery and are life-threatening.[20-23,26-28]

MRI provides images about muscles, vessels, nerves within the TMJ and masticator spaces which may be a useful guide to plan surgical approaches to the TMJ region due to the closeness of myriad vital structures within this limited space often complicating operative procedures.[17,24,29]

In our study osseous structures display clear hypointense signals on MRI and are differentiated from the adjacent soft tissue, allowing preoperative measurements to be made between bony anatomical landmarks.

The vascular structures near the TMJ appear hyperintense in the gradient echo T1 sequences with fat suppression and

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**Table 1A: Descriptive statistics**

| Variable | Side | Mean       | SD       | SEM       |
|----------|------|------------|----------|-----------|
| AB       | Right| 21.6000    | 4.15933  | 1.86011   |
|          | Left | 23.7143    | 2.05866  | 0.77810   |
| CB       | Right| 2.0000     | 1.22474  | 0.54772   |
|          | Left | 1.0000     | 0.57735  | 0.21822   |
| DB       | Right| 8.2000     | 4.8324   | 0.66332   |
|          | Left | 8.7143     | 2.87021  | 1.08484   |
| EI       | Right| 18.8000    | 1.30384  | 0.58310   |
|          | Left | 18.2857    | 1.11270  | 0.42056   |
| EJ       | Right| 16.4000    | 1.14018  | 0.50990   |
|          | Left | 14.5714    | 2.99205  | 1.13089   |

SD: Standard deviation, SEM: Standard error mean,

**Table 1B: Distances measured in each case**

| Cases                     | IMA (coronal sections) [Figure 1, 2] (mm) | ICA (axial sections) [Figure 3, 4] Distance EI (mm) | IJV (axial sections) [Figure 3, 4] Distance EJ (mm) |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Distance (mm)             | Right                                     | Left                                                | Right                                             | Left                                             |
| 24/female Bilateral TMJ   | AB                                        | 20                                                  | 18                                                | 17                                               | 12                                               |
| ankylosis (re-ankylosis)  | CB                                        | 2                                                   | 1                                                 |                                                   |                                                  |
| 29/male Bilateral TMJ     | AB 16 (minimum)                           | 20                                                  |                                                   | 16                                               | 11 (minimum)                                    |
| ankylosis (re-ankylosis)  | CB 4 (maximum)                            | 0 (minimum)                                         | 3 (minimum)                                       |                                                   |                                                  |
| 16/female Unilateral left | AB -                                      | 24                                                  | -                                                 | 17 (minimum)                                    | -                                                | 13                                               |
| TMJ ankylosis (primary)   | CB -                                      | 2                                                   |                                                   |                                                   |                                                  |                                                  |
| 17/male Unilateral left   | AB -                                      | 25                                                  | -                                                 | 19                                               | -                                                | 14                                               |
| TMJ ankylosis (primary)   | CB -                                      | 1                                                   |                                                   |                                                   |                                                  |                                                  |
| 47/female Bilateral TMJ   | AB 24                                    | 22                                                  | 19                                                | 17                                               | 18                                               | 15                                               |
| ankylosis (primary)       | CB                                            | 1                                                   |                                                   |                                                   |                                                  |                                                  |
| 17/male Bilateral TMJ     | AB 27 (maximum)                           | 25                                                  | 20                                                | 19                                               | 16                                               | 18                                               |
| ankylosis (primary)       | CB                                            | 2                                                   |                                                   |                                                   |                                                  |                                                  |
| 40/female Bilateral TMJ   | AB 21                                    | 24                                                  |                                                   | 17                                               | 18                                               | 15                                               |
| ankylosis (primary)       | CB                                            | 1                                                   |                                                   |                                                   |                                                  |                                                  |

1TMJ: Temporomandibular joint, IMA: Internal maxillary artery, ICA: Internal carotid artery, IJV: Internal jugular vein
hypointense in a T1 weighted scan and hyperintense in a T2 weighted MRI scan. On coronal slices, the maxillary vessels appeared as flow voids on the medial side of the condyle and in the inferior region of the lateral pterygoid muscle. A flow void indicates a signal loss caused by rapid blood flow and hence act as natural contrasts and are a clinical focus of attention in the diagnosis of vascular abnormalities [Figures 1 and 2].

On a noncontrast CT scan, the vessels may appear as a radiolucency traversing the radiopaque ankylotic mass suggesting the presence of the vessel within the mass. On a CT angiogram with contrast, it appears as a hypointense structure adjacent to the osseous structures. There are methods like CT angiography which can serve as an useful diagnostic aid that can help in super selective embolisation or modify the surgical plan based on the anatomy especially in patients who had undergone previous interventions due to which the anatomy of vasculature might have altered and obliterated nascent anatomic boundaries. Although CT angiography is an useful adjunct for managing haemorrhage during ankylotic release, it poses a well recognised risk of an allergic reaction to the dye or acute kidney injury from the volume of contrast administered.

In our study, it was found that the maximum and minimum distances [Table 1B] from the medial edge of the condyle to the ICA (Distance EI) was 20 mm and 17 mm respectively with a mean of (18.8 ± SD 1.3 mm on the right side) and (18.2 ± SD 1.1 mm on the left side) [Table 1A and Chart 2a] and maximum and minimum distances [Table 1B] from the medial edge of the condyle to the IJV (Distance EJ) was 19 mm and 11 mm respectively with a mean of (16.4 ± SD 1.1 mm on the right side) and (16.7 ± SD 1.2 mm on the left side) [Table 1A and Chart 2b].

In cases where the ankylotic mass is attached to the base of the skull, there is a risk of bleeding from the carotid arteries during ankylotic release due to base of skull fracture. In our study, it was found that the maximum and minimum distances [Table 1B] from the medial edge of the condyle to the ICA (Distance EI) was 20 mm and 17 mm respectively with a mean of (18.8 ± SD 1.3 mm on the right side) and (18.2 ± SD 1.1 mm on the left side) [Table 1A and Chart 1a] and maximum and minimum distances [Table 1B] from the medial edge of the condyle to the IJV (Distance EJ) was 19 mm and 11 mm respectively with a mean of (16.4 ± SD 1.1 mm on the right side) and (16.7 ± SD 1.2 mm on the left side) [Table 1A and Chart 1b].
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Advantage of this study
The intra and inter-individual variations and closeness of osseous and vascular structures should be considered preoperatively when planning a surgery. Preoperative visualisation is useful when any vascular or bony aberrant anatomy is suspected during treatment planning as their identification would be difficult intraoperatively. These values convey a high risk of intraoperative haemorrhage and the need for careful manipulation of the surgical site in such cases thus suggesting preoperative MRI in TMJ ankylosis cases as a valuable tool in assessing the vascular proximity to the TMJ to prevent the dreaded complication of massive haemorrhage.

Our understanding of the nature of the vascular bed helped us to plan the surgical steps preoperatively which eventually reduced the haemorrhagic complications. The major drawback was the technique sensitivity in identifying the potential and prime source of haemorrhage [Figure 6]. In our study, out of 12 TMJs in seven patients assessed, none of them had haemorrhagic complications intraoperatively and postoperatively which may be attributed to the preoperative assessment of the proximity of vascular structures to the ankylosis mass using MRI.

Conclusion
This study of preoperative MRI in understanding the vascular bed in TMJ ankylosis has served as an important preoperative guidance in determining the proximity of the potential sources of bleeding to the TMJ region, which was found to be in close proximity or within the ankylosic mass-IMA approximately 0–4 mm medially and 3–11 mm laterally, ICA-17–20 mm and IJV 11–19 mm from the ankylosic mass. A preoperative MRI would persuade the surgeon to carefully explore the surgical site, avoid massive haemorrhage which would incur otherwise and thus reduce operating time. Hence, MRI is suggested as a valuable presurgical guiding tool in assessing the juxtaposition of the vascular bed to the TMJ region, though contrast MRI coupled with a larger sample is needed to standardize.

Acknowledgement
Dr. Cyril (Public Health Dentist) - For Technical Support and Statistics, Bernard Institute of Radiology - Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.

Declaration of patient consent
The authors certify that they have obtained all appropriate patient consent forms. In the form, the patient(s) has/have given his/her/their consent for his/her/their images and other clinical information to be reported in the journal. The patients understand that their names and initials will not be published and due efforts will be made to conceal their identity, but anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

Financial support and sponsorship
Nil.

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