Comparison of Outcomes Postoperation between Straight Leg Raising Test Negative and Positive Patients Who Underwent Percutaneous Transforaminal Endoscopic Discectomy for Lumbar Disc Herniation

CURRENT STATUS: POSTED

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DOI:
| SUBJECT AREAS | Orthopedics |
|---------------|-------------|
| KEYWORDS      | *Percutaneous Transforaminal Endoscopic Discectomy (PTED)*; *Lumbar Disc Herniation (LDH)*; *Straight leg raising (SLR)*; *Clinical Efficacy*; *Related Factors* |
Abstract

Background: Percutaneous Transforaminal Endoscopic Discectomy is used increasingly in patients with Lumbar Disc Herniation. There is little knowledge on the related factors including SLR test influencing the operation. Therefore, we designed this prospective study to explore the relevant factors influencing postoperative effect of PTED surgery.

Methods: Consecutive patients with LDH who came to our hospital from August 2015 to September 2016 and received PTED surgery. 4 kinds of scales including VAS (lumbar/leg), ODI and JOA were measured and reassessed at 1 day, 3 months, 6 months, 12 months and 36 months after the PTED to assess their surgical outcomes.

Results: All the patients had successful surgery. ODI and VAS (lumbar/leg) decreased in all patients and groups. And there was a statistically significant difference in each postoperative follow-up compared with that before surgery in every visit. In addition, the increase of JOA in postoperation was statistically significant compared with that before surgery. And, there is statistically significant difference between the three subpopulations (patients with SLR Positive (0°-30°), SLR Positive (31°-60°) and SLR Negative (61°-) in the changes of the scores of VAS(leg), ODI and JOA. However, there is no statistically significant difference between the three subpopulations (patients with SLR Positive (0°-30°), SLR Positive (31°-60°) and SLR Negative (61°--RRB- in the changes of the score of VAS(lumbar).

Conclusions: PTED showed great effect on treating patients with lumbar disc herniation. And the main scale score such as VAS(leg). ODI and JOA showed that there is a statistically significant difference between the three subpopulations treated by PTED. Patients with SLR negative may get greater benefit from PTED.

Background

Lumbar disc herniation(LDH) is one of the most common disorders whose prevalence is about 77.8% [1]. LDH is mainly due to compression of nerve by the nucleus pulposus, annulus fibrosis and cartilage plate, especially the nucleus purposes. After the degenerative changes of lumbar vertebra in different degrees, the intervertebral disc annulus fibrosis is broken under the action of external factors, and
the nucleus pulposus enters the posterior vertebral canal, which then leads to the stimulation or compression of the nerve roots of the adjacent spinal cord. Then a series of clinical symptoms such as lumbar pain, numbness and pain in one lower limb or both lower limbs are produced.

Traditional open lumbar microdiscectomy (OLM) is considered the gold standard of LDH treatment for its good efficacy in long-term follow-up [2, 3]. In recent years, minimally invasive techniques have developed rapidly and minimally invasive discectomy (MID) has been gradually applied in lumbar intervertebral disc herniation which is more minimally invasive and conducive to postoperative rehabilitation compared with open surgery [4]. Novel MID procedures have many Potential advantages over standard Microdiscectomy or open discectomy (MD/OD) including less blood loss, less postoperative pain, shorter hospitalisation and earlier return to work [5].

Straight leg raising (SLR) test is a common valuable examination method, which can reflect the severity of lumbar disc herniation and the degree of nerve root compression to some extent [6]. Jonsson’s research showed that a SLR test has a strong correlation with various parameters of pain degree. And positive postoperative SLR test was associated with inferior outcome [7]. However, there are few studies on the related factors including SLR test influencing the operation, and there are few reports on which type of patients will benefit more from this kind of operation. Therefore, we designed this prospective study to explore the relevant factors influencing postoperative effect of PTED surgery, so as to provide a reference for clinical diagnosis and treatment. In this study, we collected preoperative and postoperative the Visual Analogue Scale (VAS) score, Oswestry Disability Index and Japanese Orthopaedic Association score (JOA) of patients and analyzed the relationship between these scores and SLR to find the influence of SLR on postoperative clinical results. It provides reference for clinical selection of surgical indications and contraindication.

Methods

Patients and follow-up

Methods: According to the strict inclusion and exclusion criteria, we selected 118 consecutive patients with LDH who came to our hospital from August 2015 to September 2016 and received PTED surgery. Only 96 of these patients had complete data and were followed up for three years. Their surgical
outcomes were assessed using VAS(lumbar/leg). ODI and JOA. And patients completed these assessments one day before surgery. 4 kinds of scales including VAS(lumbar/leg), ODI and JOA were measured and reassessed at 1 day, 3 months, 6 months, 12 months and 36 months after the PTED. Our initial hypothesis was that the differences in 4 scaled score between patients between SLR positive and negative was statistically significant. The operation was performed by two doctors who have more than 10 years of spinal neurosurgery experience and has received professional training in spinal endoscopy.

Inclusion criteria: 1. Patients with pain in the lower back with unilateral or bilateral lower limb radiating pain and/or acid trapped numbness; 2. The physical signs and symptoms of patients are consistent with those of physical examination, and they are positioned at the same responsibility segment; 3. The X-ray computed tomography(CT). Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and other imaging examinations confirmed that the responsible segment was consistent with the symptoms and signs, showing the compression of nerve root or dural sac by the herniation disc of a single segment. 4. Someone who has been on regular conservative treatment (medication, rehabilitation) for 8 weeks is not effective or worse; 5. The follow-up time of postoperative follow up was 36 months, and the follow-up data were complete.

Exclusion criteria: 1. Lower lumbar and lower limb pain with no apparent cause; 2. Multilevel cervical disc herniation; 3. The responsibility segment is associated with prominent posterior or lateral protrusion deformities, extensive calcification of the intervertebral disc, and loss of intervertebral height; 4. The responsible section had been interventional, posterior excision and other surgical treatment; 5. There is spinal tuberculosis, infection, tumor and so on; 6. The diagnosis was lumbar spinal stenosis, lumbar instability or spondylolisthesis; 7. There are cardiopulmonary diseases, coagulopathy, mental diseases and other surgical contraindications.

Surgical Techniques

After the success of the anesthesia, patients were in the prone position. We choose at 8 to 10 cm away from the spine puncture, puncture Angle of 10 ° for L2/3 and L3/4, and at 8 to 10 cm away from the spine puncture, puncture Angle of 30 ° for L4/5 and L5 /S1 (Figure 1-A, B). Conventional
disinfection cloths were applied with 0.125 percent lidocaine for infiltration anesthesia (Figure 1-C). Then the puncture needle enters the intervertebral disc directly through the Kambin triangle of the intervertebral foramen under fluoroscopy (YESS approach), or 1.5 mm kirschmann wire is positioned on the ventral side of the superior articular process and slides into the vertebral canal via Kambin triangle through the intervertebral foramen (TESSYS approach). Intervertebral disc staining and angiography was performed with methylene blue and iodohydrin. After the positive and lateral fluoroscopy was confirmed to be correct, the skin was cut with the guide needle as the center for 8mm, and the working sleeve was placed after gradual expansion (the casing diameter is 8.3mm, and the working casing can only be inserted after the expansion and forming of the lower intervertebral hole through trephine). Positive and lateral fluoroscopy was performed to determine the position of intervertebral space and puncture (Figure 1-D, E), and the yellow ligament and other tissues around the intervertebral foramen were gradually cleared to determine the position of nerve roots, dural sac or intervertebral disc. According to these tissue structures, further microscopical localization was performed to ensure surgical safety. After the location of the protruded nucleus pulposus was clearly identified, degenerative nucleus pulposus tissues (Figure 1-F, G) that pressed on nerves were removed, spinal canal and nerve root alignment areas were carefully explored, residual nucleus pulposus tissues in the disc and spinal canal were cleared, and dural sac and nerve root decompression were thoroughly observed. 0.9% sodium chloride solution was repeatedly washed in the operation area, and then the working channel was removed, and the incision was sutured. A representative case is shown in Figure 1.

Statistical Analyses

The statistical analysis of this study was performed with the statistical package SPSS, version 23.00 (SPSS Inc, Chicago, Illinois). Data is shown as meaning ±standard deviation(SD). Then independent t-test, Mann-Whitney U test, Chi-square test, and Fisher’s exact test were used to compare the differences of clinical and radiological outcomes. P values < 0.05 were accepted as statistically significant.

Results
This study involved 96 patients who underwent PETD surgery between August 2015 to September 2016 including 61(63.5%) males and 35(36.5%) females. With respect to LDH sections, 2(10.5%) was presented at L3-L4, 5(26.3 %) at L4-L5 and 12(63.2%) at L5-S1 among SLR Positive\(0^\circ-30^\circ\) patients; 1(2.0%) was presented at L3-L4, 25(49.0%) at L4-L5 and 25(49.0%) at L5-S1 among SLR Positive\(0^\circ-30^\circ\) patients and 2(7.7%) was presented at L3-L4, 13(50.0%) at L4-L5 and 11(42.3%) at L5-S1 among SLR negative patients (Table 1). Of 96 patients, 72 patients were SLR positive, and 24 patients were SLR negative. BMI is 21.78±6.30 for patients with SLR Positive\(0^\circ-30^\circ\), 24.06±3.27 for patients with SLR Positive\(31^\circ-60^\circ\) and 23.61±3.26 with SLR negative. And there is no statistically significant difference between BMI and SLR. All the surgeries were successful, and none of the patients went to open surgery. In addition, there is no statistically significant difference between the three subpopulations (SLR Positive (0°–30°), SLR Positive (31°–60°) and SLR Negative (61°-)), which is crucial because the three groups being compared have similar starting characteristics (Table 2 and Figure 2).

Ninety-six of the 118 patients were included in the follow-up. The remaining 22 patients were excluded due to follow-up failure, 2 for 1 month, 6 at 6 months, 5 for 12 months and 9 at 36 months. Therefore, the 3-year follow-up rate accounted for 83.36%. To evaluate the postoperative efficacy, internationally recognized ODI index, JOA score, and VAS score was used to evaluate the postoperative efficacy of patients who were followed up for 3 years. All patients showed significant improvement after surgery. ODI and VAS (lumbar/leg) decreased in all patients and groups, and there was a statistically significant difference in each postoperative follow-up compared with that before surgery (Figure 3, * P < 0.05). Moreover, the increase of JOA after operation was statistically significant compared with that before the operation (Figure 3, * P < 0.05).

In terms of graphic characterization, VAS and ODI score at 1 day, 3, 6, 12 and 36 months after surgery were significantly lower than those before surgery, with statistically significant differences in both the SLR positive and SLR negative. Moreover, the changes of VAS (leg), ODI and JOA scores among patients with SLR negative were significantly higher in each 2 phase than that among patients with SLR positive, and the difference was statistically significant (Figure 4A–4D; Table 3). And changes
of VAS (leg), ODI and JOA scores at 1 day, 3, 6, 12 and 36 months postoperation compared with those before surgery showed statistically significant differences among SLR Positive (0°–30°), SLR Positive (31°–60°) and SLR Negative (61°-). However, changes of VAS (lumbar) at 1 day, 3, 6, 12 and 36 months postoperation compared with those before surgery showed no statistically significant differences among SLR Positive (0°–30°), SLR Positive (31°–60°) and SLR Negative (61°-) (Figure 4A–4D; Table 3).

Discussion

PTED is considered as a secure and effective method for the treatment of soft disc herniation. The advantages of this technology include the preservation of the posterior disc structure which has less impact on the stability of the spine and the effectiveness similar to that of traditional open discectomy[8, 9]. In recent years, PTED has undergone significant technological evolution and the indications of PTED are also expanding[10–12]. There several randomized controlled studies have demonstrated that the new method showed great effectiveness in the treatment of LDH which is consistent with our study[8, 13, 14]. While PTED brings great benefits to most patients, a small number of them have poor outcomes or complications[15, 16]. Therefore, we need further research to explore the best indications for PTED so as to bring the greatest benefit to patients with LDH.

SLR test serves as a valuable common examination method, which can reflect the severity of lumbar disc herniation and the degree of nerve root compression to some extent[6]. Jonsson’s research showed that the SLR test has a strong correlation with various parameters of pain degree. And positive postoperative SLR test was associated with inferior outcome[7]. However, there are few studies on whether SLR test could influence the operation, and there are few reports on which type of patients will benefit more from this kind of operation. Therefore, we designed this research to compare the prognostic differences between patients with SLR positive and negative who have LDH after PTED surgery. Our study showed that patients with PTED had a very good prognosis after surgery, and patients with very severe cases could take care of themselves and gradually return to a normal life after surgery. This is similar to most reports on the efficacy of PTED procedure[17, 18]. There was no statistically significant difference in preoperative VAS(lumbar/leg). JOA, ODI, etc. among
three groups we selected, ensuring that the comparison was reliable and valuable. It is assumed that this is of great significance for postoperative recovery of patients. And the changes of VAS(lumbar/leg), JOA and ODI are greater in patients with SLR negative than those in patients with SLR positive. This may show that SLR negative patients had more benefits from the operation, although there was a statistically significant difference among the three groups in the main scaled scores. In brief, PTED as a novel technique showed an excellent effect in the treatment of LDH. And there is a study performed by Hyeun that has shown that PTED works well for all types of lumbar disc herniation, including extremely difficult cases[18]. Overall, there was statistically significant difference in postoperative changes among SLR Positive (0°–30°), SLR Positive (31°–60°) and SLR Negative (61°-). Therefore, there is an obvious difference in the effect of PTED surgery between patients with SLR positive and SLR negative.

Surgery-induced instability is a common consequence of OLM which may occur as much as to 22% after OLM[19]. Instability of the spine results from the removal of small lumbar muscles attached to the lamina and the removal of the facet joints. Patients with PTED have less possibility of instability because these structures are preserved in this kind of surgery. A short-term retrospective study performed by Lee demonstrated that no patients in the PELD group developed instability, but 3.4% of patients who underwent OLM developed instability on final follow-up[20].

PTED has incomparable advantages over other technologies, only resecting part of the superior articular process bone and most structures preserved so as not to damage the biomechanical structure of the spine, local anesthesia, small incision, less bleeding, short operation time and early ground access[21–23]. And there are three systematic reviews that suggest that PELD seems to be a safe and effective LDH intervention with similar clinical efficacy compared with traditional open microdiscectomy[24–26].

This study has several limitations. For design reasons, there is no suitable control group, because the purpose of this study is not to emphasize the possible advantages of PTED over other surgeries, but to show the improvement of patients after receiving this surgery and the relationship with SLR. In addition, for many reasons, some patients lost follow-up and did not complete the study.
While there have been many studies of PTED for LDH, none have looked at differences in improvement and postoperative recovery in the terms of SLR. According to our findings, PTED seems to be a safe and effective technique. Patients with SLR negative may have good outcomes according to VAS(leg). ODI and JOA. In a word, there was significant difference among the three groups. All in all, these have important clinical impact. But whether SLR plays a role in the outcome requires large, multicenter, randomized, controlled studies. This study laid the foundation for a multicenter randomized controlled study.

Conclusions
PTED showed great effect on treating patients with lumbar disc herniation. And the main scale score such as VAS(leg). ODI and JOA showed that there is a statistically significant difference between the three subpopulations treated by PTED. Patients with SLR negative may get greater benefit from PTED.

Abbreviations
PETD: Percutaneous Transforaminal Endoscopic Discectomy; LDH: Lumbar disc herniation; OLM: Traditional open lumbar microdiscectomy; MID: minimally invasive discectomy; SLR: Straight leg raising; VAS: the Visual Analogue Scale; ODI: Oswestry Disability Index; JOA: Japanese Orthopaedic Association score)

Declarations

Acknowledgements
We would like to thank the National Natural Science Foundation of China for making this research possible.

Competing interests
There is no financial/personal interest or belief that could affect our objectivity. The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors’ contribution
Conception and Design: FLW, HRG, PCZ, JXQ. Data analysis and interpretation: FLW, HRG, CPZ, YFY, SQ, QYG. Manuscript preparation: FLW, HRG, CPZ, SKG.

Manuscript editing: FLW, HRG, WGX, CPZ, JXQ. Manuscript review: FLW, HRG, CPZ, JXQ. Final approval
of the version submitted: FLW, HRG, CPZ, YFY, SQ, QYG, SKG, WGX, CPZ, JXQ. All authors have read and approved the manuscript.

Funding

This study was supported by National Natural Science Foundation of China (No. 81871818). The funding body had no role in the design of the study, data collection, analysis, and interpretation and in writing the manuscript.

Availability of data and materials

The datasets generated and/or analysed during the current study are not publicly available due to the need to protect individual privacy but are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable, as all data was received completely anonymous. According to national regulations, it is not necessary to conduct ethical approval.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

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Tables

**Table 1.** Demographic and baseline characteristics

| SLR               | Count (n(%)) | BMI (Mean±SD) | L3-L4(%) | L4-L5(%) |
|-------------------|--------------|---------------|----------|----------|
| Positive 0°-30°   | 19 (21%)     | 21.78±6.30    | 2 (10.5%)| 5 (26.3%)|
| Positive 31°-60°  | 51 (54%)     | 24.06±3.27    | 1 (2.0%) | 25 (49.0%)|
| Negative 61°-      | 26 (25%)     | 23.61±3.26    | 2 (7.7%) | 13 (50.0%)|

\[X^2, p=0.464\]

\[X^2, p=0.492\]

SLR : Straight leg raising test ; *Statistically significant (P < 0.05)

**Table 2** Preoperative estimation of mean values of VAS, ODI and JOA for patients between SLR positive and negative (mean±SD).

| SLR               | Preoperative VAS lumbar | Preoperative VAS leg | Preoperative ODI  | Preoperative JOA |
|-------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Total             | 4.09±3.16               | 7.06±2.40            | 58.08±20.47       | 11.84±4.3 |
| Positive 0°-30°   | 3.69±2.52               | 6.47±1.78            | 49.34±17.62       | 13.53±2.9 |
| Positive 31°-60°  | 4.00±3.38               | 7.14±2.46            | 59.02±19.77       | 11.57±4.6 |
| Negative 61°-      | 4.58±3.19               | 7.35±2.68            | 62.60±22.48       | 11.15±5.1 |

\[X^2 , p=0.614\]

\[X^2 , p=0.114\]

\[X^2, p=0.065\]

\[X^2, p=0.004\]

SLR: Straight leg raising test; VAS: visual analog scale; ODI: Oswestry Disability Index; JOA: Japanese Orthopedic Association; *Statistically significant (P < 0.05)

**Table 3** Comparison of change of mean values for all chronological phases (2 phases each time) for
patients between SLR positive and negative (mean±SD).

| SLR     | Pre-op to 1d | Pre-op to 3 mo | Pre-op to 6 mo | Pre-op to 12 mo | P     |
|---------|--------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|-------|
| VAS(lumbar) |              |                |                |                 |       |
| Positive 0°-30° | 2.42±2.27  | 2.21±2.70       | 2.42±2.63       | 2.68±2.60       | 2     |
| Positive 31°-60° | 3.04±3.12  | 3.22±3.13       | 3.33±3.14       | 3.41±3.16       | 3     |
| Negative(61°-) | 3.73±3.21  | 3.81±3.25       | 3.85±3.17       | 3.88±3.03       | 3     |
|          | 0.403        | 0.372           | 0.385           | 0.498           |       |
| VAS(leg) |              |                |                |                 |       |
| Positive 0°-30° | 4.89±1.73  | 5.11±1.29       | 5.37±1.46       | 5.32±1.53       | 5     |
| Positive 31°-60° | 5.84±2.49  | 6.10±2.47       | 6.25±2.46       | 6.51±2.39       | 6     |
| Negative(61°-) | 6.69±2.60  | 6.77±2.57       | 6.80±2.59       | 6.73±2.44       | 6     |
|          | 0.012*       | 0.006*          | 0.020*          | 0.010*          |       |
| ODI     |              |                |                |                 |       |
| Positive 0°-30° | 24.77±13.76 | 30.96±14.97    | 36.19±13.55    | 39.02±16.55    | 44    |
| Positive 31°-60° | 39.99±21.19 | 47.09±19.45    | 50.55±19.66    | 53.28±19.19    | 56    |
| Negative(61°-) | 46.13±20.37 | 50.55±21.41    | 54.08±20.79    | 56.20±21.91    | 58    |
|          | 0.002*       | 0.001*          | 0.002*          | 0.008*          |       |
| JOA     |              |                |                |                 |       |
| Positive 0°-30° | 8.42±3.25  | 9.11±3.11       | 10.21±2.66      | 11.15±2.32      | 1     |
| Positive 31°-60° | 11.08±4.94 | 11.98±4.71      | 13.04±4.71      | 14.12±4.60      | 1     |
| Negative(61°-) | 12.65±4.72 | 12.73±5.20      | 13.46±4.93      | 13.92±5.03      | 1     |
|          | 0.006*       | 0.012*          | 0.010*          | 0.010*          |       |

VAS: visual analog scale; ODI: Oswestry Disability Index; JOA: Japanese Orthopedic Association; SLR: Straight leg raising test;

*Statistically significant (P < 0.05)

Figures
Figure 1

A representative case. (A) Puncture positioning; (B) Skin marking; (C) Local infiltration anesthesia; (D) Positive perspective puncture position; (E) Lateral perspective of the placement position; (F) Lumbar 4/5 disc removal; (G) Bone mass and intervertebral disc mass were removed.
Figure 2

(A-D) The relationship between SLR and the VAS(lumbar/leg), ODI and JOA scores.
Figure 3

(A) The VAS(lumbar/leg), ODI and JOA scores in total samples, preoperatively, at 1 day, 3, 6, 12, 36 months postoperatively. Abbreviations: VAS, The Visual Analogue Scale score; ODI, OSWESTRY Disability Index; JOA, Japanese Orthopaedic Association score.
Figure 4

(A) The VAS(lumbar) scores at 1 day, 3, 6, 12, 36 months postoperatively, related to SLR; (B) The VAS(leg) scores at 1 day, 3, 6, 12, 36 months postoperatively, related to SLR; (C) The ODI scores at 1 day, 3, 6, 12, 36 months postoperatively, related to SLR; (D) The JOA scores at 1 day, 3, 6, 12, 36 months postoperatively, related to SLR; Abbreviations: VAS, The Visual Analogue Scale score; ODI, OSWESTRY Disability Index; JOA, Japanese Orthopaedic Association score.

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