ABSTRACT

Objective: to compare the performance of customized 3D printed guides versus standard commercial guides for the repair of rupture of the posterior root of the internal meniscus.

Methods: a prospective observational study was made of 6 patients subjected to arthroscopic repair of the posterior root of the internal meniscus of the knee. The patients were divided into two groups, with a standard commercial guide being used in one group and the customized 3D printed guide in the other.

Results: there were no significant differences in surgery time between the two groups (p > 0.05). The mean time was 65 minutes in the standard guide group (standard deviation –SD–: 8) versus 63 minutes in the customized guide group (SD: 10). The 3D printed guides adapted on both supports to the bone surface of the tibia and were precise in conducting the guide needles towards the planned position. There were no problems derived from friction between the metal of the needles and the bore of the customized guide, and handling was ergonomically satisfactory for the surgeon.

Conclusions: the preliminary findings of this study warrant the viability of the design and manufacture of customized 3D printed guides for the repair of rupture of the posterior root of the internal meniscus, which allowed precise preparation of the tibial tunnels. Their use did not shorten the surgery time versus the conventional guides, though they allowed correct adaptation to the patient anatomy, and handling was ergonomically satisfactory for the surgeon.

Original

Customized 3D printed guides for the repair of rupture of the posterior root of the internal meniscus. Preliminary outcomes

C. Martín-Hernández¹, A. Roche-Albero¹, M. Lizcano-Palomares¹, M. Durán-Serrano¹, S. Lairla García², A.F. Laclériga-Giménez¹

¹ Department of Orthopaedic Surgery and Traumatology. Hospital Universitario Miguel Servet. Instituto de Investigación Sanitaria (IIS) de Aragón. Zaragoza (Spain)
² Instituto de Investigación en Ortopedia Avanzada (Younext). Huesca (Spain)

Correspondence:
Dr. Carlos Martín-Hernández
E-mail: cmartinh@salud.aragon.es

ABSTRACT

Guías personalizadas impresas en 3D para la reparación de las roturas de la raíz posterior del menisco interno. Resultados preliminares

Objetivo: comparar la funcionalidad de las guías personalizadas impresas en 3D versus las guías estándares comerciales al realizar la reparación de las roturas de la raíz posterior del menisco interno.

Métodos: estudio prospectivo observacional en el que se incluyen 6 pacientes intervenidos arthroscópicamente de una reparación de la raíz posterior del menisco interno de la rodilla, divididos en 2 grupos. En uno de ellos se empleó una guía comercial estandarizada y en el otro la guía personalizada impresa en 3D.

Resultados: no hubo diferencias significativas en el tiempo quirúrgico entre ambos grupos (p > 0.05). La media fue de 65 minutos en el grupo estándar (desviación estándar –DE–: 8) y de 63 minutos en el grupo de guías personalizadas (DE: 10). Las guías impresas en 3D se adaptaron en ambos apoyos a la superficie ósea de la tibia y mostraron precisión en la conducción de las agujas guía hacia la posición prevista. No hubo problemas derivados del rozamiento del metal de las agujas con el alma de la guía personalizada y el manejo resultó ergonómicamente satisfactorio para el cirujano.

Conclusiones: de los resultados preliminares obtenidos en este estudio, se puede concluir la viabilidad del diseño y la fabricación de guías personalizadas impresas en 3D para la reparación de las roturas de la raíz posterior del menisco interno, que permitieron...
**Level of evidence:** level 2. Prospective cohort study.
**Clinical relevance:** The use of 3D printed guides allows customized surgery for reinsertion of the posterior root of the internal meniscus.

**Key words:** Additive manufacture. Patient-specific surgical guide. Medical 3D printing. Rupture of the posterior root of the meniscus.

**Introduction**

Rupture of the posterior root of the meniscus is defined as avulsion, with or without a bone fragment, or radial rupture at a location up to 1 cm from its insertion\(^1\). Described in 1991 by Pagnani et al.,\(^2\) two presentations have been established based on the underlying etiology: acute traumatic deinsertion affecting the ligament through which the meniscus inserts in the tibia (infrequent and typical of young patients); and degenerative deinsertion (more common) that appears in the context of arthrotic lesions and affects a portion of the meniscus located at a greater distance from the insertion, thereby leaving a posterior stump\(^3\).

Mechanically, these lesions give rise to an alteration similar to total meniscectomy\(^4\), and are also a potential cause of instability of the knee, with rapid progression towards osteoarthrosis of the affected compartment. Their repair restores the load-transmitting function of the meniscus\(^5\). Although conservative management and partial meniscectomy have been used with good short-term clinical outcomes\(^6\), repair and reinsertion of the root in its original location is currently the technique of choice.

The method of repair may differ slightly depending on the tear pattern of the root. The surgical reinsertion techniques are divided into two large groups: repair using transosseous sutures and repair using anchorages with suture. The transosseous techniques involve the passing of sutures through the root of the meniscus, recovering them through tunnels drilled in the proximal tibia, followed by knotting them over a post, button or bone bridge on the anterior surface of the tibia\(^7\). Different configurations with different biomechanical properties have been proposed. However, the two simple sutures option has resulted in less displacement of the root and greater rigidity than more complex configurations\(^8\). With regard to the tunnels, single or double tunnel techniques have been described - the latter seeking to better reproduce the anatomical footprint\(^9\).

The transosseous suture techniques require guides for preparing the tibial tunnels through which to reinsert the root. A number of low profile guides are available on the market that are adapted to the laterality of the knee (right or left) and to the meniscus (internal or external). Despite such adaptation, they allow variation of the tunnel angle, but not of the morphology of the intraarticular arm of each of them - a fact that may generate conflicts with the anatomy of certain patients with narrow grooves or prominent spines.

Three-dimensional (3D) printing has been used in knee surgery for the design of customized guides for osteotomy\(^10\) and arthroplasty\(^11\), and even for anatomical positioning of the femoral tunnel in anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) reconstruction surgery\(^12\). However, we have found no mention of application to surgery of the meniscus in the literature.

The present study compares the surgery time, reliability and facility of use of customized 3D printed guides for the repair - using transosseous tunnels - of rupture of the posterior root of the meniscus, adapted to the anatomical characteristics of each patient, versus the standard guides, with the working hypothesis that the former are at least as reliable and ergonomic as the latter, and result in comparatively shorter surgery times.

**Material and methods**

A prospective observational study was made of 6 patients consecutively operated upon during the year 2020 in our centre to repair the posterior root of the internal meniscus (type 1 and 2 rupture according to the classification of LaPrade\(^13\)) divided into two groups of three patients each. All the patients were operated upon by the same surgeon, and were assigned on an alternating basis to one group or the other. The double tunnel suture guide from Smith & Nephew (Smith & Nephew, Inc., Massachusetts, USA) was used in one group, and the customized 3D printed guide in the other. All patients had been previously diagnosed based on the magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) findings and complied with the indications for transtibial
arthroscopic repair (normal axis knee, normal cartilage or with Outerbridge grade I or II lesions and Kellgren-Lawrence grade 0-II lesions). As exclusion criteria, we rejected those patients with associated ligamentous or chondral lesions requiring combined repair procedures.

There were two right knees and one left knee in both groups. In the standard guides group, the mean age was 41 years, with a standard deviation (SD) of three years; all of them were men. In the customized guides group, the mean age was 38 years, with a SD of 5 years; there were two men and one woman. There were no significant differences in age or side of the lesion between the groups.

The study was approved by the Autonomous Clinical Research Ethics Committee, and written informed consent was obtained from all the patients.

Manufacture of the guides was based on virtual reconstruction of the joint using the MITK (Medical Imaging Interaction Toolkit) free access software for the development of medical image processing applications, developed by the Medical and Biological Informatics (MBI) Division of the German Cancer Research Center. As image source, we used the DICOM (Digital Imaging and Communication On Medicine) files corresponding to 1-mm transverse, sagittal and coronal sections of the scan of each patient, obtained with a high-field (1.5 T) Siemens MRI system.

Using Rhinoceros®, Rhino 6 (TLM, Inc.), each guide was designed on a generic basis, followed by adaptation to the virtual reconstruction of the knee of each patient, with an entry point in the anteromedial cortical layer of the tibia located medial to the anterior tibial tuberosity (ATT), adapted to the bone relief, and two exit points in the insertion zone of the posterior horn of the internal meniscus (Figure 1). Each guide housed two 3-mm bores for the creation of two parallel tunnels (Figure 2). The tunnel angle was 60° in all cases, with variation in each case of the morphology of the intraarticular portion of the guide in order to fully adapt it to the anatomy and avoid impacting against the tibial spines or medial femoral condyle.

The virtual image of each knee was printed to create a 3D biological replicate of the joint using a Zortrax® M200 3D printer with high-impact polystyrene (HIPS) as material. Each guide was manufactured using polyamide (a heat-sterilisable material) and an HP® Jet Fusion 4210 printer (Figure 3). The biological replicates allowed virtual surgeries to check the guides for accuracy (Figure 4).

The surgical technique was carried out placing the patient in supine decubitus, following intradural regional an-
aesthesia, with the knee free on the operating table, a lateral stop and the induction of ischemia using a pneumatic cuff.

Standard anteromedial and anterolateral portals were used. Once the rupture was identified, the bed of the meniscal root was prepared with an arthroscopic drill, removing the cartilage and leaving a freshened bone base. Using the corresponding guides (Figure 5), two 2.8-mm tunnels were made for passing two number 2 FiberStick® sutures (Arthrex, Inc., Naples, Florida, USA) through one of them. After suturing the meniscus with two simple stitches using a FirstPass® suture passer (Smith & Nephew, Inc., Massachusetts, USA), they were recovered through the other tunnel and knotted onto themselves at the anterior cortical layer of the tibia.

With regard to the statistical analysis, the Student t-test for independent data was used for the comparison of means.

Results

Reinsertion of the meniscal root was achieved in all cases. There were no significant differences in surgery time between the two groups (p > 0.05). The mean surgery time was 65 minutes in the standard guide group (SD: 8) versus 63 minutes in the customised guide group (SD: 10).

One of the patients in the standard guide group required modification of the perforation secondary to intraarticular exit of the Kirschner wire in a position different from that planned, due to positioning difficulties caused by the existence of a narrow intercondylar groove and prominent spines. The 3D printed guides adapted on both supports to the bone surface of the tibia and were precise in conducting the guide needles towards the planned position (Figures 6 and 7). There were no problems derived from friction between the metal of the needles and the bore of the customized guide, and handling was ergonomically satisfactory for the surgeon.

Figure 4. Printing of the biological replicate allows virtual surgery for assessing the position of the tunnels.

Figure 5. Adaptation of the guide in the surgical field.

Figure 6. View from the anterolateral portal of the intraarticular positioning of the guide and the intraarticular exit of the tunnels at the footprint of the posterior root of the internal meniscus of a right knee.
Customised 3D printed guides for the repair [...]
tion time. Further studies are needed to determine whether production based on MRI scans of lesser resolution or with a fewer number of imaging acquisitions is feasible.

After sterilisation, these surgical guides can be used intraoperatively in any hospital and may reduce the instruments purchasing costs in those cases where the manufacturers do not supply such instruments along with their implants. On the other hand, these guides not only allow adaptation to the anatomy of the patient but also facilitate ergonomic modifications adaptable to each particular surgeon. Likewise, they weigh less than metal instruments\(^{29}\).

The limitations of this preliminary study include a small number of patients, which results in low statistical power, and the fact that no evaluation was made of other printers or printable materials capable of improving the accessibility or cost of manufacturing the guides. Lastly, no cost/benefit analysis of the customised guides was made.

**Conclusions**

This study has demonstrated the viability of the design and manufacture of customized 3D printed guides for the repair of rupture of the posterior root of the internal meniscus, allowing precise preparation of the tibial tunnels.

Their use did not shorten the surgery time versus the conventional guides, though they allowed correct adaptation to the patient anatomy, and handling was ergonomically satisfactory for the surgeon.

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**Ethical responsibilities**

**Conflicts of interest.** The authors state that they have no conflicts of interest.

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**Protection of people and animals.** The authors declare that this research has not involved studies in humans or in animals.

**Data confidentiality.** The authors declare that the protocols of their centre referred to the publication of patient information have been followed, and that all the patients included in the study have received sufficient information and have given written informed consent to participation in the study.

**Right to privacy and informed consent.** The authors declare that no patient data appear in this article.

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