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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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Simplified stress analysis on the temporomandibular joint in Class III patients with and without mandibular asymmetry using a rigid body spring model

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Structured Abstract

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Objective – Aim of this study was to investigate the differences in stress on the temporomandibular joint (TMJ) between Class III patients with and without mandibular asymmetry using a rigid body spring model (RBSM).

Design – Menton (Me), the centre point of occlusal force on the line that connected the bilateral buccal cusps of the second molars and the most lateral, superior and medial points of the condyle were plotted on frontal cephalograms, and stress on the condyles was calculated with the 2-dimensional RBSM program of FORTRAN.

Setting and Sample Population – Eighty Japanese patients with diagnosed mandibular prognathism were divided into two groups, a symmetry group and asymmetry group on the basis of the Mx-Md midline position.

Outcome measure – The degree (force partition) of the resultant force, the direction (angulation) and displacement (X, Y) of each condyle were calculated. The horizontal displacement vector (u), the vertical displacement vector (v) and rotation angle (θ) of the mandibular body at Menton were also calculated.

Results – There were significant differences between the deviated and non-deviated sides of both groups regarding resultant force (symmetry group: $p = 0.0372$, asymmetry group: $p = 0.0054$), X (symmetry group: $p < 0.0001$, asymmetry group: $p = 0.0001$) and Y (symmetry group: $p = 0.0354$, asymmetry group: $p = 0.0043$). For angulation, there was a significant difference between the deviated and non-deviated sides in the asymmetry group ($p = 0.0095$).

Conclusion – The results of this study suggest that difference in stress angulation on the condyles could be associated with asymmetry in mandibular prognathism.

Key words: asymmetry; Class III; rigid body spring model; stress; temporomandibular joint

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Introduction

An association between temporomandibular joint (TMJ) dysfunction and mandibular asymmetry has been suggested. Nickerson and Moystad (1), Talents et al. (2) and Katzberg et al. (3) have all shown that degenerative joint disease might be associated with unilateral mandibular asymmetry. A study of 100 patients with mandibular asymmetry by Schellhas et al. (4)

suggested that disc displacement, internal derangement, or degenerative joint disease could be major causes of mild and moderate mandibular asymmetry. Various studies have investigated occlusal disharmony as a predisposing factor of TMJ internal derangement. Occlusal instability, midline discrepancy, right-left differences in molar relationship and inclination of the frontal occlusal plane have been considered to be important occlusal characteristics in patients with TMJ disorders (5, 6). Differences in heights of the right and left rami have also been suggested as important skeletal problems associated with TMJ pathology (7, 8). A similar tendency has been recognized in mandibular prognathism with asymmetry (9), although the incidence of TMJ dysfunction in mandibular prognathism is lower than mandibular retrognathism (10).

Most studies agree that the external and internal morphology of a given bone or joint in an adult are determined by the biomechanical loads placed upon them during growth. Stresses on the TMJ are considered to be important for maintaining normal structure and function of the TMJ (11–13). Stress analysis could elucidate the relation between mandibular asymmetry and the difference in bilateral TMJ structure.

Several theoretical approaches have been used in an attempt to understand various aspects of TMJ biomechanics (14–20). Finite element models (FEM) of the TMJ have been developed to simulate condylar motion or stress change. However, a reliable FEM model requires input of the material properties, which is currently not available. Therefore, a stress distribution analysis method using a rigid body spring model (RBSM) is to be preferred. We have investigated stress on the TMJ using lateral cephalograms and sagittal tomography with RBSM (21–23). However, frontal cephalograms are used frequently in asymmetry patients and therefore a RBSM program using frontal cephalograms is to be preferred. The purpose of this study was to investigate the differences in stress on the TMJ between Class III patients with and without mandibular asymmetry using RBSM for frontal cephalogram.

Patients and Methods

Patients

The 80 Japanese adults (22 males and 59 females) in this study were presented with jaw deformities diagnosed as mandibular prognathism with or without asymmetry, and mandibular prognathism with bimaxillary asymmetry. The age ranged from 15 to 39 years, with a mean age of 23.7 years (SD: 5.5 years).

Frontal cephalometric analysis

All patients had lateral and frontal cephalograms. The cephalograms were analyzed using appropriate computer software (Cephalometric A to Z; Yasunaga Labo Com, Fukui, Japan). All patients were diagnosed as skeletal Class III from the cephalometric measurements. On the frontal cephalogram, the angle between the ANS and Menton line and the line perpendicular to the bilateral zygomatic frontal suture line was defined as the Mx-Md midline angle. A positive value of this Mx-Md midline angle represents mandibular deviation to the left and a negative value represents mandibular deviation to the right. The Mx-Md midline angles of all cases were then given a positive value so that all consecutive measurements could be attributed to either the deviated or the non-deviated side (9). The subjects were divided into symmetry and an asymmetry group according to the Mx-Md midline. Asymmetry was diagnosed when the Mx-Md midline angle was $>3°$. Occlusal cant was defined as the angle between bilateral zygomatic frontal suture line and the line between the most lateral mid-points of the bilateral upper first molar crown.

Determination of occlusal force centre

A pressure-sensitive system was used in this study (Fig. 1). The system consisted of a pressure-sensitive sheet (Dental Prescale; Fuji Photo Film Co., Tokyo, Japan) and its analyzing apparatus (Dental Occlusion Pressuregraph FPD-705; Fuji Photo Film Co.) that was connected with a personal computer. Data on the reproducibility and the method of calibration were earlier (24–27). Each patient was seated with the head in natural head position, looking forward. The pressure-sensitive sheet was placed between the maxillary and mandibular teeth and the patient was instructed to bite as forcefully as possible for about 3 s. The sheet was read and analyzed by the Dental Occlusion Pressuregraph and the results were input into the computer and visualized on the display screen. The occlusal force centre was determined on the basis of the occlusal

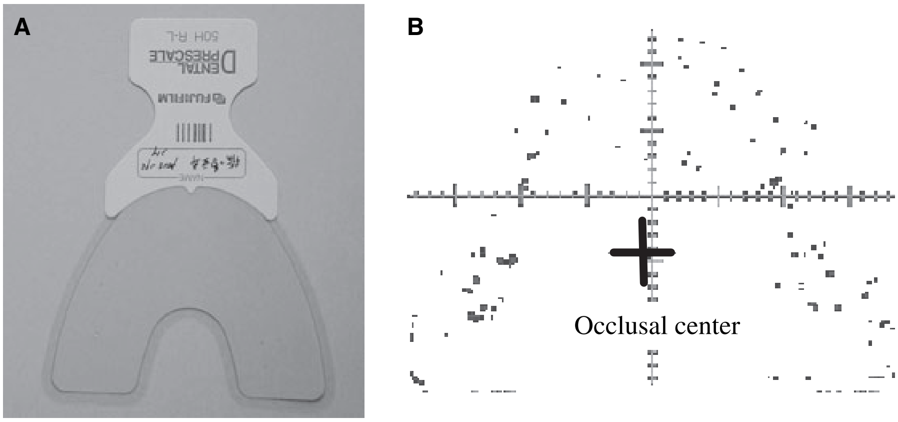

Fig. 1. (A) Pressure sensitive sheet. (B) Results of occlusal force distribution.

balance in this system. Because for the RBSM the assumption was required that the direction of the maximum occlusal force was perpendicular to the occlusal plane on the frontal cephalogram, realistic vertical direction of the resultant occlusal force from the pressure sensitive system was not necessary.

Input data for calculations

The most lateral point of the buccal cusp of the lower second molar (Mn7), Menton, and the most medial, superior and lateral points on both condyles were plotted on the frontal cephalogram. Only the value for the *x* coordinate of the occlusal force centre was input on the occlusal plane (the line between right Mn7 and left Mn7). The mandibular two-dimensional RBSM using the frontal cephalometric data was analyzed with the FORTRAN program according to the method previously reported (21–23). The calculation was performed according to our previous report as follows**.**

RBSM using frontal cephalogram

The RBSM model was based on a frontal cephalogram of each subject. The entire mandible could be considered as a single rigid element. A rigid displacement field was assumed in the mandible for the displacement (Fig. 2).

In case of the numerical model for the TMJ, the integral points for calculating the contact stress are defined along the contours of the uppermost face of the condyle (Fig. 3). As this portion has a relatively smooth surface, only a vertical spring is fitted on each integral point, assuming that the surface bears the vertical surface force (or in other words, contact pressure only), and does not bear the shearing force. Figure 4 shows the assumed spring along the contours of the uppermost face of the condyle. The glenoid fossa was assumed to be a rigid element, and the displacement of this rigid element was set to 0 so it might be treated as a supported element.

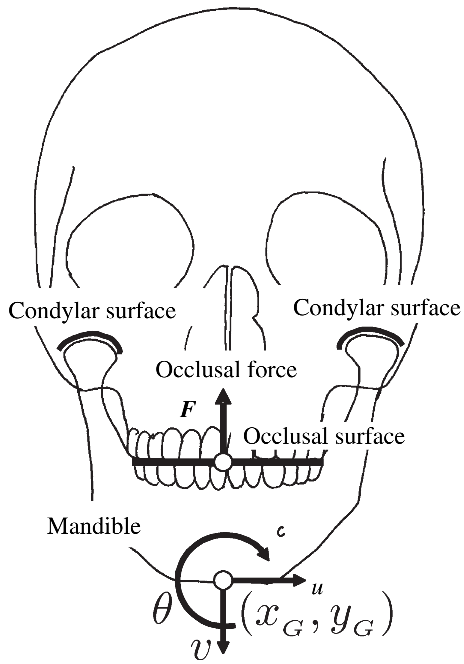

Fig. 2. RBSM numerical model. RBSM, rigid body spring model.

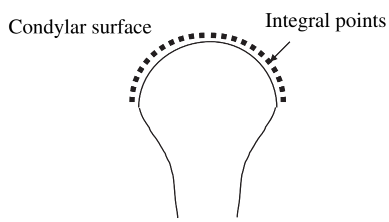

Fig. 3. Integral points on the condylar surface.

The occlusal force and its action position were determined using the pressure-sensitive system shown

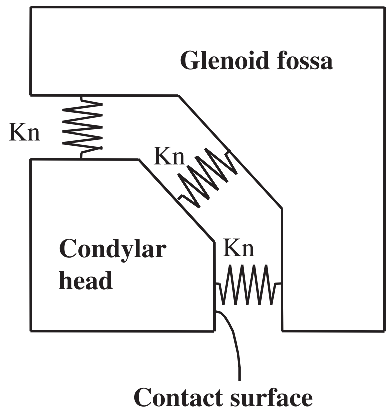

Fig. 4. Spring model between the condylar surface and glenoid fossa. Kn shows spring coefficient in the calculation.

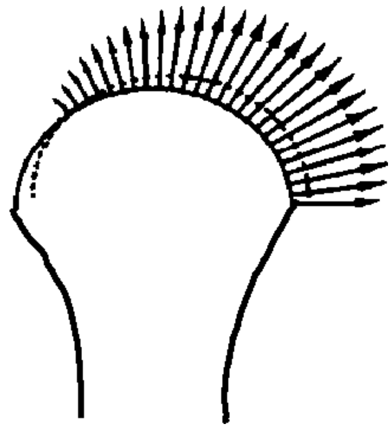

Fig. 5. Contact pressure distribution.

in Fig. 1. Only compressive force was transmitted in a contact surface. Redistribution of negative contact pressure was calculated, according to the following procedure: First, the contact pressure generated on integral points relative to the initially given muscular force was obtained; second, if a negative contact pressure was found on some integral points, it was temporarily removed and a constraint force was added to keep the balance; third, as this constraint force did not actually exist, a force equal to this force was added in reverse direction.

The second and third steps were repeated until the negative contact pressure reduced to a negligible value. Then, the contact pressure distribution without negative contact force could be obtained as shown in Fig. 5.

Finally, as output data, the degree (force partition) of the resultant force, the direction (angulation) and the displacement (X, Y) of each condyle (Fig. 6), the horizontal displacement vector (u), the vertical displacement vector (v) and rotation angle (θ) of the mandibular body at Me were calculated. The analysis was based on the definition that a stable condylar position was one in which stress was distributed equally over the condylar surface. When the final calculation was completed and contact pressure distributed equally over the condylar surface, any slight mandibular displacement might be disregarded. The displacement from vectors in the initial mandibular position to vectors in the final mandibular position after the calculations could be presented by conversion calculations from the displacement vector. This means that the higher the displacement vector, the less clinically stable the mandible and TMJ.

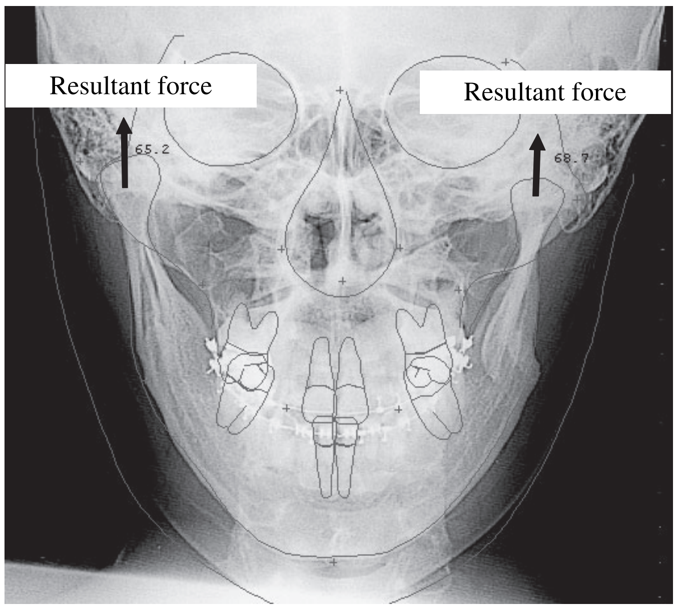

Fig. 6. Resultant forces. Arrows show the degree and angulation of resultant force on the condyles.

Statistical analysis

Data were compared between groups by non-paired t-test and between deviation and non-deviation side by paired t-test using the Stat View™ version 4.5 software program (Abacus Concepts, Inc., Berkeley, CA, USA). Differences were considered significant at $p < 0.05$.

Results

There was a significant difference between the symmetry and asymmetry group regarding the Mx-Md midline ($p < 0.0001$), however, there was no significant difference regarding the occlusal cant. In vertical displacement, there were significant differences between the groups ($p = 0.0035$). In the *X*-component on the deviated and non-deviated side, the asymmetry group showed a higher value than the symmetry group (deviated side: $p = 0.0014$; non-deviated side: $p = 0.0024$). However, there were no significant differences between the groups regarding degree and angulation of resultant force and *Y* component on both sides. There were significant differences between the deviated and non-deviated side regarding resultant force (symmetry group: $p = 0.0372$; asymmetry group: $p = 0.0054$), *X*-component (symmetry group: $p < 0.0001$; asymmetry group: $p = 0.0001$) and *Y*-component (symmetry group: $p = 0.0354$; asymmetry group: $p = 0.0043$) in both groups. For angulation, there was no significant difference between both sides in the symmetry group, however, there was a significant difference between the deviated and non-deviated side in the asymmetry group ($p = 0.0095$) (Tables 1–3).

Discussion

Finite element models of the TMJ have been developed to simulate condylar motion or stress change (12–20). FEM is suitable for calculating stress within elements, while the RBSM is used for calculating the surface force between elements. In the RBSM, it is assumed that the treated material consists of rigid bodies. Therefore, its limitation is that it is difficult to calculate stress within complicated elements, such as material with extreme elasticity. However, the RBSM has been used to analyze stress on the knee, hip and wrist in the field of orthopaedic surgery (28, 29). This model was also employed in this study because many individual images had to be analyzed to provide a more comprehensive biomechanical description of the loading and the results had to be suitable for statistical analysis. Finally, the amount of data collected was rather large and a simple analysis was required.

From the results of FEM, Buranastidporn et al. (30) concluded that the symptomatic sides were significantly related to the degree of inclination of the frontal occlusal plane and increasing its angulation resulted in a decrease in symptoms on the ipsilateral side and an increase on the contralateral side. In these asymmetrical-mandibular models, both TMJs were fixed at the same position and remained symmetrical in shape. Ten asymmetric models were created with the frontal occlusal and frontal mandibular planes inclined by 1–10° in 1° increments ascending to the left side. However, in fact, in other studies a significant difference in TMJ morphology between the deviated and non-deviated sides in asymmetry cases was found (21, 31). Thus, TMJ morphological adaptation might occur in asymmetry patients. Even if many material properties on the basis of previous data was considered in the calculation process using FEM, the lack of data on the realistic TMJ outline and occlusal force in individual patients could decrease the validity of the results.

On the other hand, our previous study using RBSM on sagittal tomography demonstrated that TMJ stress was associated with TMJ morphology in Class III patients regardless of their status of asymmetry. In the asymmetry group, stress angulation was significantly higher on the deviated than on the non-deviated side. There was also a significant correlation between disc position and stress angulation. In the asymmetry group, regression analysis indicated a significant correlation between the difference in stress angulation

Table 1. **Results of parameters and frontal cephalometric analysis**

		(u)	(v)	(θ) (°)	Mx-Md Midline (°)	Occlusal cant (°)
Symmetry group	Mean	–0.0007	0.0107	0.0000	1.5473	–0.5765
	SD	0.0047	0.0013	0.0000	1.3753	2.1074
Asymmetry group	Mean	–0.0015	0.0117	0.0000	6.8570	–2.5080
	SD	0.0064	0.0016	0.0000	3.5046	2.5800
	p-value	0.5380	0.0035	0.0669	<0.0001	0.6206

RBSM, rigid body spring model.

(u): horizontal displacement, (v): vertical displacement, (θ): rotational displacement (in °). These show the displacement of the mandibular body at Menton. (u,v) have no unit, because these were coordinate values in the RBSM calculation. Mx-Md midline and occlusal cant are frontal cephalometric measurements that show the facial asymmetry.

***Table 2.* Results of the RBSM analysis on the deviated and non-deviated side**

		Degree of resultant force	Angulation of resultant force (°)	*X* component	*Y* component
Deviated side					
Symmetry group	Mean	0.5317	−1.3774	−0.0137	0.5309
	SD	0.0908	2.9148	0.0264	0.0908
Asymmetry group	Mean	0.5682	10.9476	0.0138	0.5661
	SD	0.1438	38.3450	0.0455	0.1442
	p-value	0.1795	0.5170	0.0014	0.1952
Non-deviated side					
Symmetry group	Mean	0.4699	2.4372	0.0207	0.4684
	SD	0.0905	4.1511	0.0313	0.0907
Asymmetry group	Mean	0.4344	6.0741	0.0506	0.4286
	SD	0.1430	8.0671	0.0517	0.1423
	p-value	0.1881	0.5546	0.0024	0.1400

RBSM, rigid body spring model.
The degree, angulation of the resultant force, horizontal displacement (*X*) and vertical displacement (*Y*) of each condyle were calculated. When the occlusal force is 1, the degree of resultant force shows relative value so that this could not have unit. (*X,Y*) have no unit, because these were coordinate values in the RBSM calculation.

***Table 3.* Comparisons between the deviated side and non-deviated side (these were intragroup comparisons)**

Deviated side vs. non-deviated side		Degree of resultant force	Angulation of resultant force (°)	*X* component	*Y* component
Symmetry group	*p*-value	0.0372*	0.2846	<0.0001*	0.0354*
Asymmetry group	*p*-value	0.0054*	0.0095*	0.0001*	0.0043*

*Shows significant difference by paired *t*-test at $p < 0.05$.

(between deviated and non-deviated side) and the degree of asymmetry (measured by the angle of asymmetry). These results proved that TMJ morphological adaptation was strongly associated with occlusion and skeletal morphology (25).

When the frontal occlusal plane increased in FEM using frontal cephalograms, on the ipsilateral side the distribution showed a marked shift in direction, and the medial portions were loaded the least, with the stress on the lateral part increasing gradually. For the contralateral disc, the medial borders were additionally loaded. The mean stress values on the ipsilateral (shifted) disc were smaller than those in the standard model and those on the contralateral side (30). In contrast, in this study using RBSM, the resultant force on the deviated side was larger than that on the non-deviated side in both groups. However, as group division was determined by Mx-Md Midline, there was no significant difference in occlusal cant (frontal occlusal plane) between the symmetry and asymmetry groups. Furthermore, the subjects in this study had mandibular prognathia with and without asymmetry. Apart from the difference between RBSM and FEM, these factors might also have affected the results making them different from those of the previous report. There was a significant difference in stress angulation between the deviated and non-deviated side in the asymmetry group. Although there was no significant difference in stress angulation between both sides in the symmetry group, that on the deviated side was significantly larger than that on the non-deviated side. Furthermore, although stress angulation on the bilateral condyles tended to incline to the opposite side in the symmetry group, the angulations tended to incline to the same (deviated) side in the asymmetry group. This tendency of stress angulation might promote mandibular asymmetry. Vertical displacement in the asymmetry group was larger than that in the symmetry group. This result suggested that a symmetrical mandible was more stable as an element in the vertical dimension of the asymmetry group. On the other hand, the *X*-component of the symmetry group was significantly smaller than that of the asymmetry group. This could imply that both condyles in the symmetry group were more dynamically stable than those in the asymmetry group in the horizontal dimension.

In conclusion, this study using RBSM on frontal cephalograms suggests that the difference in stress angulation on bilateral condyles can be associated with mandibular prognathism with asymmetry. Furthermore, the values of the direction (angulation) and the degree (force partition) of the resultant force on each condyle, and the displacement (*X*, *Y*) of each condyle can be useful to determine the most suitable condylar position.

Clinical relevance

For patients with a mandibular asymmetry a dynamical simulation including a stress analysis of the condyles might be helpful in diagnosis and treatment planning.

The development of a RBSM analysis for frontal cephalograms made it possible to simulate the stress on the TMJ. The RBSM suggested that a difference in stress direction on the condyles might be associated with mandibular prognathism with asymmetry.

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