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MR Imaging in Patients with Intracranial Aneurysm Clips

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Four patients with intracranial aneurysm clips made from a variety of alloys were studied without incidence by MR imaging at field strengths ranging from 0.35 to 0.6 T. Knowledge of the type of alloy used in the manufacturing of an aneurysm clip is important in determining whether the clip will or will not deflect in a magnetic field. Ferromagnetic clips show deflection and torque in a magnetic field and have the potential to dislodge from the aneurysm. Nonferromagnetic or weakly ferromagnetic aneurysm clips such as the Sugita (Elgiloy), Yasargil (316 LVM stainless steel), Heifetz (Elgiloy), Yasargil (Phynox), and Vari-Angle McFadden (MP35N) do not deflect or deflect weakly in the magnetic field and therefore would not be expected to dislodge during MR.

The option of imaging many patients with intracranial aneurysm clips with MR extends the usefulness of the technique to a previously excluded population.

The presence of an intracranial aneurysm clip has come to represent an absolute contraindication to the use of MR imaging [1–4]. This is related to the potential risk for the creation of forces and torques by the magnetic field that might be sufficient to create dislodgment of an aneurysm clip with subsequent injury to the patient [5]. Neurosurgeons currently can choose from a wide variety of aneurysm clips. Knowing the specific type of aneurysm clip used in a given patient gives metallurgic information about the type of alloy used in the manufacture of the clip and hence allows its characterization from a ferromagnetic standpoint [5, 6]. This knowledge can be used to predict whether a patient with an aneurysm clip can or cannot be imaged safely with MR.

Materials and Methods

The MR studies and records of four patients with intracranial aneurysm clips examined at different centers were reviewed. MR units included a Diasonics 0.35-T, a Picker Vista 0.5-T, and a Technicare 0.6-T scanner. Spin-echo pulse sequences were used. T1-weighted images were obtained with 500–800/20–40/2–4 (TR/TE/excitations). T2-weighted images were obtained with 1.5–2.5/60–80. The four patients were 35, 35, 58, and 74 years old (mean age, 50 years).

Two patients required MR of the spine, one to exclude a posttraumatic syringomyelia and the other to confirm and further characterize an intramedullary cystic mass suggested earlier on postmyelographic CT. A third patient had symptoms suggesting possible intracranial mass effect. CT was nondiagnostic because of an aneurysm-clip-related artifact. Therefore, MR was requested. In the fourth case MR was requested as a baseline postoperative study.

In two patients, MR was performed knowing that the clips were nonferromagnetic. In the patient with a suspected posttraumatic syrinx the neurosurgeon knew that the Vari-Angle McFadden aneurysm clip used was nonferromagnetic on the basis of the studies of Dujovny et al. [6]. In the patient with suspected intracranial mass effect a clip identical to that used in the patient’s aneurysm clipping was tested for deflection at the portal of a Diasonics 0.35-T magnet according to the technique described by New et al. [5] and was shown to be nondeflecting. The patient with an intramedullary cystic mass in the thoracic cord was erroneously thought to have a nonferromagnetic clip. Confirmatory tests were not done.
Results

Three patients with nonferromagnetic aneurysm clips and one patient with a ferromagnetic aneurysm clip were scanned without incident. None of the patients were aware of sensations such as tugging or pulling. No patient had symptoms to suggest clip dislodgment.

The information gained from MR was useful in patient management. In case 1, a posttraumatic syrinx was excluded and myelomalacia of the cervical cord was diagnosed (Fig. 1). In case 2, MR excluded a mass lesion; further patient evaluation was considered unnecessary (Fig. 2). In case 3, examination of the brain was nondiagnostic because of an extensive ferromagnetic artifact (Fig. 3). Nevertheless, evaluation of the thoracic cord revealed a cystic neoplasm. Because of the large distance between the ferromagnetic clip and the lower thoracic spinal cord, the area of primary clinical concern, no artifacts were observed here. MR in case 4 provided a post-surgical baseline.

Case Reports

Case 1

A 35-year-old man had sudden onset of severe headache. A left-sided posterior communicating artery aneurysm was demonstrated...
angio graphically. The aneurysm was clipped with a Vari-Angle McFadden clip. Nine months later, the patient was rendered quadriplegic after a motorcycle accident. His sensory level stabilized at the C6 level; however, 4 months later the sensory level ascended to C5. A posttraumatic syringomyelia was suspected. MR was ordered 2 months after surgery to serve as a baseline examination. This was performed without incident on a Technicare 0.6-T MR unit.

**Discussion**

To our knowledge the four cases described represent the first reported examples of patients studied by MR who had intracranial aneurysm clips. While previously the radiologic literature has regarded the presence of an intracranial aneurysm clip as a contraindication to the use of MR [1-4], no awareness of unusual sensations or adverse effects was noted at field strengths of 0.35-0.6 T; Dujovny similarly noted no adverse effects at 1.5 T (M. Dujovny, personal communication). The MR risk in patients with aneurysm clips can be eliminated by selecting patients for MR who have aneurysm clips known to be insufficiently ferromagnetic to be deflected or torqued at the static field strength to be used [5, 6].

In a systematic study designed to assess the ferromagnetic properties of aneurysm and hemostatic clips, New et al. [5] found that longitudinal forces and torques were exerted on 16 of 21 clips tested. These forces and torques were potentially capable of causing clip dislodgment and subsequent hemorrhage from a clipped aneurysm or injury to adjacent structures. The risk of dislodgment was proportional to the degree of ferromagnetism of the clip. Clips made of alloys containing 10-14% nickel appeared to be free of notable ferromagnetism by virtue of nickel's ability to stabilize iron in a form that reduces the magnetic susceptibility of stainless steel [5]. The "nonferromagnetic" clips studied in this report had nickel contents of 13.5-35% (see Table 1).

"Cold working" refers to the cutting or shaping of a material in the absence of heat. Although a stainless steel may be nonmagnetic, significant ferromagnetic domains can be induced within the steel during cold working [5]. This creates a
potential hazard to the MR imaging of patients with aneurysm clips. Teitelbaum et al. [9] demonstrated that 316 L stainless steel, which in bulk form is nonmagnetic, acquires weak ferromagnetic domains during the cold working required to create the unique and complex shapes of intravascular filters, stents, and coils. In an in vitro canine model, magnetic forces and torque did not cause filter dislodgment at 1.5 T.

Aneurysm clips are made from a variety of stainless steels and proprietary alloys. The most desirable form of steel is an austenitic type [10] containing in excess of 10% nickel for stabilization at ambient temperatures, while chromium in excess of 14% is added for corrosion resistance. New et al. [5] noted that 10–14% nickel-containing clips were without sufficient ferromagnetism to induce hazard. Aneurysm clips can be evaluated for ferromagnetism by measuring their torque, deflection, and imaging artifacts. Truly nonferromagnetic clips will lack deflection and torque when tested by the technique of New et al. A Yasargil clip made from 316 LVM stainless steel and containing 13.5% nickel typifies the austenitic aneurysm clip variety, although it is weakly ferromagnetic [5, 8, 9]. At 1.5 T, a 316 LVM stainless steel ligament clip did orient weakly, but this small interaction is believed to be relatively safe [8]. The testing of clips for ferromagnetism by the New et al. technique represents an empirical and qualitative assessment of force. This is the method described in the literature and conclusions are field-strength-related. Nonaustenitic alloys such as 301 stainless steel, 17-7PH, and 405SS are significantly ferromagnetic.

Some newer alloys used in aneurysm clip manufacturing are cobalt-based and by definition are not steels since they contain little or no iron [10]. They include the Vari-Angle McFadden clip made of MP35N and the Sugita and Heifetz clips made of Eigeloy, which are nonferromagnetic and do not show deflection when tested in a magnetic field (Table 1). These cobalt alloys are stronger and more elastic than austenitic stainless steels.

In cases 1, 2, and 4 the aneurysm clips were either known or proved to be not notably ferromagnetic, while in case 3 a ferromagnetic Heifetz clip (17-7PH) placed in 1974 was thought to be nonferromagnetic. Fortunately, the MR procedure in case 3 was uneventful, presumably due to local tissue fixation adjacent to the aneurysm clip.

**TABLE 1: Composition of Some Commonly Used Aneurysm Clips**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Magnetic Properties: Clip</th>
<th>Alloy</th>
<th>Composition (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non- or weakly ferromagnetic:</td>
<td>Elgiloy</td>
<td>Cr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugita, Heifetz Elgiloy</td>
<td>316 LVM stainless steel</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yasargil</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vari-Angle McFadden</td>
<td>MP35N</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferromagnetic:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sundt-Kees, McFadden, Drake, Mayfield Kapp</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>16-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heifetz (PRE-1984), Vari-Angle Micro, Vari-Angle Spring, Pivot, Sundt-Kees Multi-Angle</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scoville-Lewis</td>
<td>17-7PH stainless steel</td>
<td>16-17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note.—Modified from New et al. [5], Dujovny et al. [7], and Brown et al. [8]. A dash (–) reflects an absence of the material in the clip.
The magnitude of eddy current formation is determined by the rate of change of the magnetic field, the composition and resistance of the metal, as well as the size and shape of the device [14]. Magnetic susceptibility and eddy currents both result in local field inhomogeneities, a "final common pathway" whose individual contributions toward image artifacts currently are not separable.

In case 3 (Fig. 3) a much larger image-degrading artifact was seen. This was related to the presence of a ferromagnetic Heifetz aneurysm clip (17–7PH) within the imaged volume. Ferromagnetic alloys have far greater magnetic susceptibility effects than paramagnetic alloys do. This greater magnetic susceptibility effect of ferromagnetic alloys creates more field inhomogeneity and much greater image distortion compared with paramagnetic alloys [14].

MR evaluation of patients with intracranial aneurysm clips is requested often by neurosurgeons, and recent articles in their literature document the lack of deflection of nonferromagnetic aneurysm clips in the magnetic field [6]. The neurosurgeon may be able to provide specific information to characterize the aneurysm clip used, or that information may be available from the surgery report. Plain skull films are not reliable for the characterization of aneurysm clips. This is exemplified by the currently available Heifetz Elgiloy clips, which are nonferromagnetic. Before 1984 the Heifetz clips were manufactured from the ferromagnetic 17–7PH alloy. On plain skull films the external features of these Heifetz clip varieties are identical. Therefore, no assumption regarding the magnetic properties of a Heifetz aneurysm clip can be made on the basis of screening skull radiographs.

While it is not our intent to minimize the potential hazards of MR in patients with ferromagnetic aneurysm clips, the complete exclusion of all patients with aneurysm clips from study by MR appears to be unnecessary. Several criteria should be met in patient selection: (1) the aneurysm clip is known or verified to be not substantially ferromagnetic, (2) MR is believed to be the imaging procedure of choice, and (3) no other contraindications to MR exist. Although our cases were concerned with MR applications to the brain and spinal cord, body applications for MR are numerous and expanding. The options of both CNS and body imaging with MR in patients with nonferromagnetic or weakly ferromagnetic aneurysm clips extend the usefulness of the technique to a previously excluded population.

In view of the wide availability of a variety of nonferromagnetic aneurysm clips, their use in neurosurgery should be encouraged. In addition to their demonstrated MR compatibility, these alloys are more corrosion-resistant than ferromagnetic alloys. The use of MR in patients known to have nonferromagnetic or weakly ferromagnetic aneurysm clips is not contraindicated.

REFERENCES