International Journal of Medical Science and Clinical Research
Online-ISSN: 2664-7761; Print ISSN: 2664-7753
Received: 02-09-2020; Accepted: 17-09-2020; Published: 03-10-2020
www.journalofmedical.com
Volume 2; Issue 4; 2020; Page No. 01-04

An in vitro study on use of Er: YAG Laser in Endodontics

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Abstract
Aim: The present study was conducted to assess the effects of Er: YAG laser irradiation on root canals in vitro.
Materials and Methods: 200 extracted human teeth were endodontically processed and subsequently irradiated at different settings using an Er:YAG laser imitating in vivo irradiation procedures. The teeth were then subdivided into three groups and subjected to bacteriological evaluations, scanning electron microscopy, and temperature measurements.
Results: The bacteriological evaluation revealed a decisive bactericidal effect of the Er:YAG laser in the root canal. The bactericidal effect was dependent on the applied output power and specific for the different species of bacteria investigated. Scanning electron microscopy showed discrete removal of dentine from the root canal walls. The temperature rise during irradiation was moderate when standardized power settings were used.
Conclusion: The investigations indicate that the Er:YAG laser is a suitable tool for the elimination of bacteria in root canals under in vitro conditions.

Keywords: Bacteria, Endodontics, Er:YAG Lasers

Introduction
Since the early eighties, laser systems have gained in importance in the field of endodontology. Several authors have studied the impact of these lasers on the root canal and the surrounding dentin. The CO2-laser has been used in surgery for quite a long period of time. Zakariasen *et al.* [1] showed for the first time that this wavelength can also be applied in endodontology with a good bactericidal effect. Moritz *et al.* [2] achieved a protective coating of dentin tubuli using the CO2-laser on root canal surfaces. Due to the fact that the emitted long wave infrared radiation (10,600 nm) can be transmitted into the root canal exclusively by the use of a rigid hollow waveguide, the canal lumen must be prepared generously and the laser can be used only in straight root canals. The disinfecting capabilities of this laser have been investigated in a number of in vitro studies, mostly on experimentally infected root canals [3–12].
The low wavelength leads to both a satisfying removal of hard tissues and a bactericidal effect with only limited thermal side effects. The demands on technical resources are tremendous and therefore the utilization of the XeCl-excimerlaser is primarily restricted to basic research. The most widely used laser in endodontics, the Nd:YAG laser, emits at 1,064 nm. Due to the wavelength in the near infrared range flexible conductors can be used for the application in narrow and bent root canals. This laser yields a bactericidal effect not only on root canal surfaces but also in the deeper layers of dentin.
Several studies by White *et al.* [13] and Rooney *et al.* [14] prove the high bactericidal effect of the Nd:YAG laser. The diode laser is comparable to the Nd:YAG laser in terms of effectiveness. It emits at a wavelength of 810 nm and possesses comparable bactericidal capabilities as shown by Moritz *et al.* [15]. For the removal of dental hard tissue the Er:YAG laser provides the most suitable wavelength. Emitting at 2,940 nm this laser acts through photoablation since its wavelength correlates closely with the absorption maximum of hydroxyapatite. When irradiated, water contained in the dental hard tissue evaporates instantaneously and thereby ablates the surrounding tissue with only minimal thermal side effects. This has been demonstrated in various studies by Hibst and Keller [16–17].
Previously the application of the Er:YAG laser was limited to rigid delivery systems in non-contact mode. The development of superior light-conductive materials distinctly broadened the spectrum of this laser's possibilities. Even teeth with narrow or bent root canals can easily be treated. Hibst *et al.* [18] described the use of the Er:YAG laser in endodontics.
The present study examines the bactericidal, morphological, and thermal effects of the Er:YAG laser when used as an addition in root canal treatment. In order to evaluate the antimicrobial effect of the laser, bacteriological in vitro experiments with six different species were performed. Morphological alterations on dentinal surfaces were recorded by use of a scanning electron microscope (SEM) and the thermal effects caused by laser irradiation were measured by an infrared camera on the root surface.

Materials and Methods
For all in vitro experiments an Er:YAG laser (KaVo Key II, KaVo Biberach, Germany) was used. This laser emits a pulsed infrared radiation at a wavelength of 2,940 nm, with a peak radiation energy of 400 mJ and a maximum repetition rate of

15 pps. Light guidance was performed by a flexible optical fiber and a handpiece specially developed for endodontics and surgical applications. The handpiece provides exchangeable plane fiber tips with a diameter of 400 mm, which can be inserted into the endodontically prepared root canal. The average laser power emitted at the fiber tip was measured by a wattmeter (FieldMaster, Coherent, Inc., Auburn, CA) before each irradiation to ensure stable and standardized power outputs. First 200 extracted human teeth with one root were endodontically prepared. The teeth were stored in physiologic saline solution after the extraction. Subsequently trepanation and orthograde enlargement of the root canal to ISO 70 was performed. The prepared teeth were assigned to the three different experimental groups and treated accordingly.

Bacteriologic Tests

The teeth used for these examinations, were autoclaved at 134^0C for 5 minutes, to eradicate the preexistent bacterial flora. Each tooth was inoculated with a single strain of diverse aerobic and anaerobic bacteria. Clinical isolates of Enterococcus faecalis, Prevotella buccae, Peptostreptococcus micros, and Porphyromonas assacharolyticus were used in addition to the international reference strains Escherichia coli ATCC25922 and Bacteroides fragilis ATCC 25825.

To inoculate the teeth 10 ml of a bacterial suspension with a bacterial count of approximately 10^8 CFU/ml was filled into the root canal. To get a bacterial suspension with approximately 10^8 CFU/ml 5 ml of a Muller–Hinton broth were inoculated with E. coli or E. faecalis and incubated overnight.

Glucose broth was used. After inoculation with anaerobic bacteria the broth was incubated up to 72 hours. The inoculated teeth were sealed with wax, and then placed into sterile microcentifuge tubes containing 100 ml of a physiological saline solution. After an incubation period of 4 hours at 358C under aerobic and anaerobic conditions, the teeth were taken out of the Eppendorf tubes and the wax seal was removed.

Now, laser irradiation was performed in the root canal. For each strain the following experimental proceeding was applied: Thirty samples were prepared. Three groups of ten samples each underwent laser treatment at a setting of 80, 180, and 250 mJ (as indicated at the display of the laser unit) and with an actual power output of 0.5, 1, and 1.3 W, measured directly at the end of the fiber tip. The pulse rate was the same for all groups (15 Hz). Each sample was treated with one lasing cycle, which comprised of five irradiations of 5 seconds duration with 20 seconds break in between. For irradiation the optical tip was inserted as far as the apex. Then the laser was activated and the root canal was continuously radiated from apical to coronal in slow, circling movements. By means of this procedure the irradiation of the entire root canal could be ensured.

Additionally, in each group one sample was excluded from laser irradiation and thus served as a control group. Immediately after the laser treatment the root canal was rinsed with 1 ml of a physiological saline solution, and the eluate was collected in a microcentrifuge tube. Finally, the bacterial count was determined.

Scanning Electron Microscope For this experiment 12 extracted teeth with one root were used. Irradiation was performed in steps of 0.5, 1, and 1.3 W, corresponding to 120, 180, and 250 mJ at 15 Hz, for 5×5 seconds. Afterwards the teeth were cut longitudinally to expose the root canal and examinations by SEM with 150 and 2,000 enlargement were performed. A JEOL 330A (Jeol, Inc., Tokyo, Japan) SEM was utilized. The specimens underwent drying and gold sputtering prior to the SEM procedure.

Temperature Measurements In order to measure the temperature rise during laser radiation measurements were performed on ten extracted human teeth with one root by using an infrared camera. First the root canals were dried with conventional paper tips (ROEKO, Langenau, Germany) imitating in vivo endodontic procedures and then the teeth were attached to silicon-based fixtures at a distance of 30 cm to the camera. Laser irradiation was done five times for 5 seconds with breaks of 20 seconds in-between analogous to the procedures mentioned above. The highest value observed in each measurement was used for the calculation of the mean temperature rise for the three power settings.

Results

Table 1 shows the results of the bacteriologic tests. Samples are rated by colony count (CFU/ml) and radiation power (log). Samples with a bacterial count below the detection limit were regarded as eradicated. The results of the control samples showed colony counts of about 106 CFU/ml, demonstrating a decrease of 2 log steps through the inoculation and incubation process. Laser radiation at 1 W yielded a bacterial reduction by 4 log steps, corresponding to 99.99% reduction in every species but E. faecalis. However, at an output power of 0.5 W only Prevotella buccae could be eradicated completely. E. faecalis could not be eradiacted even when using 1.3 W.

At low magnification, Er:YAG laser treated root canals showed the typical surface structure resulting from photoablation. Temperature measurements showed an average rise in temperature at the root surface of 2.6 0.328C, at a laser setting of 0.5 W, 15 Hz. When the power setting was increased to 1 W, a mean temperature rise of 3.1 0.288C was observed.

Table 1: Bacterial Count: For Each Power Setting the Number of Specimens With the According Range of CFU/ml is Indicated

CFU/ml	0.5 W	1 W	1.3 W	Control
Escherichia coli Eradication				
10^3	7	10	10	3
10^4	2			
10^5	1			
10^6				

Bacteroides fragilis Eradication 10^3 10^4 10^5 10^6	 7 2 1	10	10	3
Prevotella buccae Eradication 10^3 10^4 10^5 10^6	10	10	10	3
Peptostreptococcus micros Eradication 10^3 10^4 10^5 10^6	 8 2	10	10	 1 2
Porphyromonas asacharolyticus Eradication 10^3 10^4 10^5 10^6	 9 1	10	10	 2 1
Enterococcus faecalis Eradication 10^3 10^4 10^5 10^6	 2 8	 6 4	 6 4	3

Discussion

Successful endodontology relies to a great extent on complete cleaning of the root canal. Infected dentin and pulpal tissue can endanger therapy outcome. Conventional root canal treatment aims at the removal of the infected pulp and dentin layers by using mechanical techniques and bactericidal irrigants. Several studies indicate that these techniques are only partly successful. By using lasers better results can be achieved[19-22].

Studies by Kouchi *et al.* [23] show that bacteria colonize the periluminal dentin up to a depth of 1,100 mm. Chemical disinfectants penetrate only 100 mm into the dentin, as indicated by Berutti *et al.* [24]. In addition, bent root canals or side-branches can be obstacles in the conventional root canal treatment.

In the present study, a conventional endodontic treatment regimen was augmented by the use of the Er:YAG laser. The aim was to evaluate the effectiveness of the 2,940 nm wavelength in endodontology.

Even at the lowest power setting (0.5 W) a distinct reduction in bacterial counts could be observed, although bacterial reduction below 10^2 CFU/ml could not be achieved in all the samples. Specimens irradiated at 1 W did not show bacterial growth at all with the exception of E. faecalis. This species could not be eradicated even when exposed to 1.3 W of laser irradiation. Therefore irradiation settings of more than 1 W are not necessary to eradicate most of the endodontic bacterial species.

This investigation indicates that under in vitro conditions, the Er:YAG laser shows a similar bactericidal effect compared to other laser systems used in root canal treatment. These systems (Nd:YAG and diode laser) yielded a bacterial reduction by three to four log steps in vitro as well as in vivo[7,15].

The Er:YAG laser differs distinctly from other laser systems regarding the effect on the root canal wall, as can be seen in the present SEM investigation. The Er:YAG laser is capable of removing infected dentinal surfaces and the ubiquitous smear layer present after all forms of mechanical root canal preparation. The orifices of the dentinal tubules are exposed facilitating a tight-fitting root canal filling, which is indispensable for a successful endodontic treatment.

However, due to the study design, only limited information is available about the bactericidal effects of the Er:YAG laser in the deep layers of dentin. The same holds true for the evaluation of the interactions of laser and bacteria and the mechanisms of action (like thermal, drying, shock waves, and cavitation effects).

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