

Progresses of ultrashort echo time and zero echo time MRI for evaluating knee osteoarthritis

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[Abstract] Ultrashort echo time (UTE) and zero echo time (ZTE) MRI can effectively display and qualitatively, quantitatively evaluate short T2 structures such as cartilage, ligament and cortical bone, being of great significance for early clinical intervention of knee osteoarthritis and one-stop high-resolution imaging of soft tissue and bone. The principles and clinical application progresses of UTE and ZTE MR imaging for evaluating knee osteoarthritis were reviewed in this article.

[Keywords] osteoarthritis, knee; magnetic resonance imaging; echo time

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超短回波时间和零回波时间 MRI 评估膝关节炎进展

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[摘 要] 超短回波时间(UTE)和零回波时间(ZTE)MRI 可有效显示并定性、定量评估软骨、韧带及骨皮质等短 T2 结构,对于临床早期诊断膝关节炎有重要意义,由此有望实现软组织及骨骼一站式高分辨成像。本文就 UTE 和 ZTE MR 成像原理及其临床评估膝关节炎应用进展进行综述。

[关键词] 骨关节炎, 膝; 磁共振成像; 回波时间

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随着人口老龄化加剧,骨关节炎(osteoarthritis, OA)发病率呈逐年上升趋势,其中膝关节炎致残率较高,我国膝关节炎致残率居世界第 2 位^[1]。关节镜是评估膝关节病变的常用侵入性手段,但无法观察病变内部改变,而 OA 早期非侵入性评估关节软骨及半月板损伤对于诊断及进行临床决策具有重要意义。MRI 是诊断关节疾病的有效手段,但膝关节复杂的解剖结构给早期诊断带来诸多困难。超短回波时间(ultrashort echo time, UTE)和零回波时间(zero echo time, ZTE)MRI 具有分辨率高、信噪比高、扫描

速度快等优势,已用于评估多种骨关节异常,如膝关节 OA 小骨赘^[2]、腰椎骨皮质异常和骨赘^[3-4]、骶髂关节^[5]及强直性脊柱炎骨质侵蚀^[6]。本文就 UTE 和 ZTE MR 成像原理及其临床评估膝关节炎应用进展进行综述。

1 UTE、ZTE MR 成像原理

半月板、韧带及钙化软骨等属于短 T2 结构,氢质子含量较低且被束缚于大分子结构中而难以被感应线圈采集,信号衰减易被周围脂肪、肌肉等高 T2 信号组织掩盖,导致利用传统 MRI 难以对其解剖及功能改变

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进行评估。骨组织“类 CT 对比”MR 技术,如 UTE、ZTE、T1 加权梯度回波及磁敏感加权成像等,评价上述结构具有与 CT 相似的诊断性能^[7-8]。行 UTE 成像时,施加半射脉冲或短矩形硬脉冲后,于高静磁场中经梯度磁场编码的氢质子发生共振,射频结束后其回波时间(echo time, TE)是常规 MR 成像的 1/50~1/20 (<100 μs),此时立即采集自由感应衰减信号并以多种填充轨迹(径向、螺旋或锥形)由中心向外填充 k 空间可在信号衰减前显示低 T2 信号组织^[9]。ZTE 技术是 UTE 技术的拓展,通过同步射频激发并搭载接近于零的 TE,基于 MR 设备的特殊硬件和处理系统可实现快速静音成像及各向同性 3D 采集^[10],以消除图像中的 T2 权重,所获图像以质子密度加权为主,可精准显示骨骼皮质结构,产生类似 CT 的组织对比度,且其分辨率略高于 CT,在“类 CT 对比”MR 技术中应用最为广泛^[11]。本院典型案例见图 1。

2 UTE、ZTE MRI 评估膝关节炎

2.1 OCJ

OCJ 是由关节软骨深部非钙化软骨、钙化软骨和软骨下骨板形成的复合功能单位,可作为滑膜关节间隙和软骨下骨之间的功能屏障。OA 相关软骨异常可能源于深层软骨、继而波及表层结构,在此过程中,OCJ 厚度变薄、屏障功能被破坏而致软骨下骨暴露是 OA 发病的关键环节^[12]。

利用 UTE MRI 能评估软骨钙化层的成分特征及关节软骨退变程度。钙化软骨层(1~3.3 ms)与软骨下骨(<1 ms)的 T2 弛豫时间均较短,常规 MRI 难以与骨皮质区分^[13]。UTE 和 ZTE MRI 可识别未钙化的软骨层和钙化软骨层(即骨界面以上的线性高信号),显示 OA 患者 OCJ 处高信号局限性减弱、钙化软骨线样高信号消失或变宽,甚至可在常规 MRI 出现异常之前检出钙化软骨和 OCJ 异常^[14]。钙化软骨中的 T2* 值范围为 1.0~3.3 ms, T1ρ 值范围为 2.2~4.6

ms^[15],故 UTE T2* WI 可定量评估钙化软骨胶原含量和分布,利用 T1ρ 图像可评估蛋白聚糖含量。MACKAY 等^[16]报道,UTE MRI 可观察 OA 早期病理改变,其中,健康年轻受试者胫骨内外侧线状高信号出现率高于中年膝痛患者,而膝痛患者胫骨平台 OCJ 浅层软骨 T2 值增加。CHU 等^[17]利用 UTE MRI 观察 Outerbridge 1、2 级前交叉韧带(anterior cruciate ligament, ACL)损伤患者,发现其股骨后内侧髌软骨 UTE T2* 值分别较对照组升高 43% 及 46%,ACL 重建术后 2 年,其 UTE T2* 值趋于正常,提示 UTE MRI 可用于识别钙化软骨损伤并监测治疗效果。LOMBARDI 等^[3]发现,随膝关节软骨由深至浅, T1、T1ρ 和 T2* 值逐渐增加,而大分子质子分数(macromolecular fraction, MMF)逐渐减少;软骨退变等级与 T1、T1ρ 和 T2* 值呈正相关,与 MMF 呈负相关。UTE MRI 可否用于监测膝关节快速退变及其他关节病变有待进一步探索。

2.2 半月板

半月板完整性受损是导致膝关节 OA 进展的重要因素。ACL 损伤常伴随半月板挤压性损伤,使半月板减震及负荷能力下降、胫骨软骨暴露,进而增加 OA 患病风险。半月板 UTE 和 ZTE 成像包括 T1 ρ、T2* 和用于计算 MMF 的 UTE 磁化转移(magnetization transfer, MT)成像。KIM 等^[18]对 ZTE 序列加以优化,并与常规序列相结合,结果显示可有效提高对于膝关节紊乱及半月板损伤的检出率。既往研究^[19]发现,健康人半月板 T1ρ 值低于 ACL 损伤患者,而退变及撕裂的半月板 T2* 值高于正常半月板。WANG 等^[20]指出,部分急性 ACL 损伤关节镜检查可为阴性,但其半月板 T1ρ 和 T2* 值仍显著增加,而 T1ρ/T2 比值与 OA 评分呈负相关,与全膝关节 MRI 积分呈正相关。UTE MRI 有助于鉴别 ACL 损伤并监测治疗效果,还可识别隐匿性、亚临床半月板损

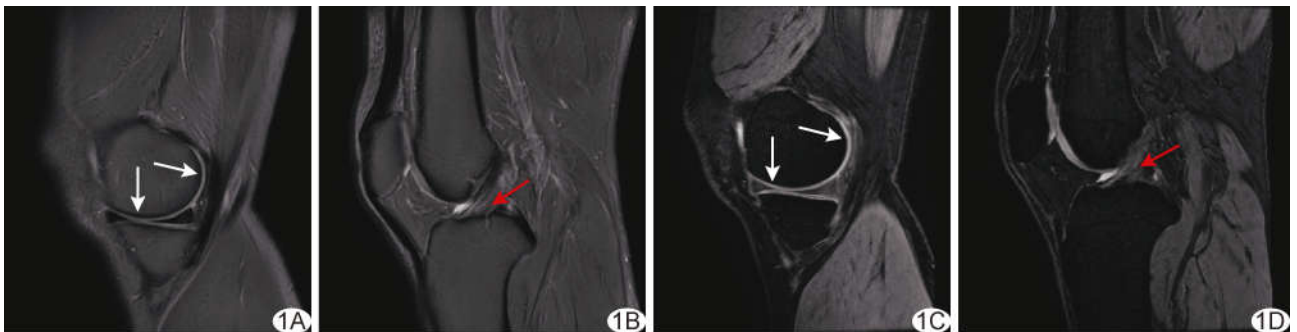


图 1 健康受试者,男,48 岁 A、B. 脂肪抑制质子密度成像示内侧半月板骨软骨连接(osteochondral junction, OCJ)呈低信号(白箭,A),前交叉韧带显示欠佳(红箭,B); C、D. UTE T2 加权脂肪抑制序列见内侧半月板 OCJ 呈高信号(白箭,C),前交叉韧带呈束状结构(红箭,D)

伤及退变,但半月板中的蛋白聚糖浓度略低于透明关节软骨,导致临床实践中 UTE 及 ZTE T1 ρ 用于定量评估半月板的数量远逊于软骨。JERBAN 等^[21]报道,UTE T1 ρ 值还可作为检测半月板在负重条件下应变能力的影像学标识;利用 UTE-MT 成像可进一步对比观察年轻和老年膝关节离体标本半月板及关节软骨负荷情况与 MMF 的关系。此外,MMF 可检测半月板大分子基质密度,具有无创检测膝关节功能及应变能力的潜力^[22]。尽管这些技术尚未广泛用于 OA 患者,但 UTE 和 ZTE 技术有望成为临床检测半月板早期退化并指导治疗的有力工具。

2.3 软骨钙沉积 软骨钙沉着病又称焦磷酸钙晶体沉积病 (calcium pyrophosphate deposition disease, CPPD),在欧美国家成年人群中的患病率约为 4%~7%,目前对其发病机制尚不明了^[23]。既往研究^[24]发现含钙结晶沉积与半月板及软骨退变加重有关,观察含钙结晶沉积数量可能有助于评估关节退变进程及其恶变风险。X 线和 CT 对于检测关节软骨和半月板钙化较为敏感,而 MR、即便超高场强 MR 诊断特异性较低。利用梯度回波和双回波稳态 UTE MRI 能可视化半月板钙化,其中,CPPD 表现为半月板内多发点状暗区,软骨钙化表现为透明软骨高信号背景下的环状或不定形低信号区。GERMANN 等^[25]研究显示,以 7.0T MR 机行三维双回波稳态序列扫描检测 CPPD 较 3.0T MR 设备更为敏感。FINKENSTAEDT 等^[26]以 UTE 成像检测离体半月板,发现 CPPD 晶体沉积几乎仅分布于半月板中央无血管区,所造成的硬性压痕较正常半月板明显增多。

2.4 含铁血黄素沉积 滑膜和髌下脂肪垫可分泌多种促炎性因子调节软骨蛋白含量^[27],在血友病和非血友病含铁血黄素性滑膜炎中,反复关节内出血导致含铁血黄素沉积、促炎因子释放,引发滑膜及关节软骨破坏。含铁血黄素沉积可能是软骨丢失和 OA 前兆。UTE 定量磁化图谱可用于评估血友病患者膝/踝关节内含铁血黄素^[28]并显示含铁血黄素区域性沉积;在髌下脂肪垫撞击症患者也可见含铁血黄素沉积^[29]。未来 UTE 定量磁化图谱技术将可用于评估 OA 或高 OA 风险患者。

3 小结及展望

UTE 和 ZTE MRI 能获得高分辨率、高对比度的“类 CT 对比”图像,是评估膝关节炎早期改变的重要手段,可有效显示传统 MRI 无法检出的短 T2 结构并进行定性、定量评估,进而识别亚临床损伤,促进早期

干预和治疗。“类 CT 对比”MR 技术有望改变临床诊断思路,实现软组织和骨骼一站式高分辨成像;与卷积神经网络、深度学习技术相结合,可用于规划手术及导航,进一步扩大其应用范围。

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