



Operative Arthroscopy Seems to Have Better Results in Terms of Mouth Opening for the Treatment of TMJ Internal Derangement

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Letter to Editor

In a published paper by Al-Moraissi in 2015, the author performed a meta-analysis of the literature concerning the clinical outcomes of three surgical methods for treating Internal Derangement (ID) of the Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ), including Arthroscopic Lysis and Lavage (ALL), Arthroscopic Surgery (AS) and Open Surgery (OS) [1]. Regarding comparison of AS (also called operative arthroscopy, OA) versus ALL, the authors reported in their abstract and conclusion sections that “ALL provides greater improvement in Maximal Interincisal Opening (MIO) and comparable pain reduction when compared to AS”. When specifically dealing with mandibular function evaluated by MIO, this statement is completely contrary to their observed results, in which they clearly stated that “there was a significant difference in favor of patients treated by AS with regard to improvement in MIO”. This asseveration was also confirmed in the forest plot of figure 6, in which they analyzed ALL vs. AS for ID of the TMJ in terms of MIO in millimeters, showing some advantage for AS over ALL in terms of mouth opening. Trying to go deeper into this idea, in the discussion section the author stated that “concerning AS vs. ALL, there was a significant improvement in joint movement for patients managed with AS (P=0.0001)”. I want to sincerely congratulate the author for his exhaustive work in performing this meta-analysis, but also to alert about this discrepancy that may mislead the reader if only the abstract or conclusion sections are read in a glance.

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Received Date: 12 Mar 2020

Accepted Date: 26 Mar 2020

Published Date: 01 Apr 2020

Citation:

González-García R. Operative Arthroscopy Seems to Have Better Results in Terms of Mouth Opening for the Treatment of TMJ Internal Derangement. *Ann Plast Reconstr Surg.* 2020; 4(1): 1052.

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Several arthroscopic techniques for the management of TMJ ID has been reported, from the simplest ALL to the more complex AS/OA. In most of cases ALL is performed by a single-puncture in the fossa puncture site together with an outflow needle placed anteriorly until a continuous irrigation with lactated Ringer's solution is obtained. Here, lysis of adhesions is directly performed with the arthroscope by means of sweeping maneuvers [2]. When performing the more advanced and complex AS/OA, second and/or third cannulas (“working cannulas”) are inserted by triangulation technique, as described by McCain, to allow the introduction of instrumentation into the joint to perform several procedures, such as: 1) anterior release of the disc by myotomy of the upper belly of the pterygoid muscle; 2) electrocoagulation (electrocautery or radiofrequency) of areas of synovitis, fibrillation (adherences, pseudo walls), and also over the swelled bilaminar zone (electrocoagulation of the posterior ligament); 3) functional suture discopexy or disc rigid fixation with resorbable pins; 4) motor debridement; and 5) removal of loose bodies or clots; among others [3]. All these procedures can be complemented by subiniovial infiltration of corticoids or plate rich plasma, and intraluminal instillation of hyaluronic acid.

The advantage of performing meta-analyses is the possibility to get new information that may be absent from individual clinical series, such as those studied here, in which significant good results in terms of pain reduction and mandibular function were observed for both ALL and OA [5,6]. As it is concluded from this meta-analysis, with the caution of studies with a moderate risk of bias being included and also because of the scarce number of available studies, we should have to focus our attention on the finding that AS/OA may be great value when treating patients with ID and restricted mandibular motion as better results in terms of MIO should be expected over ALL [1]. More controlled clinical trials should be desirable in order to explore these specific findings. Also, since the learning curve for TMJ arthroscopy is long and even more for AS/OA, training programs for residents have to stress the importance of minimally-invasive techniques for treating TMJ disease due to their proven effectiveness (Figure 1 and 2).

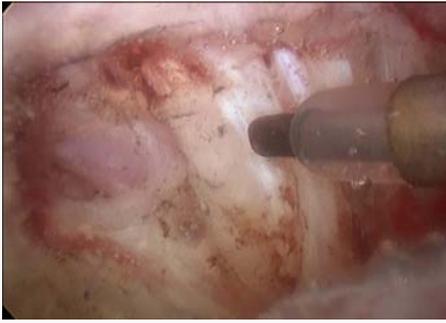


Figure 1: Disc anterior release by myotomy of the lateral pterygoid muscle using a radiofrequency probe.



Figure 2: Electrocautery of synovitis of the retrodiscal tissues of the posterior ligament using a radiofrequency probe.

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