

Intrapelvic Protrusion of the Fractured Ceramic Liner Through the Acetabular Shell Case Report

Kırılmış Seramik Liner'in Asetabular Destek İçinden Pelvis İçi Protrüzyonu Olgu Sunumu

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SUMMARY

We present a 48-year-old woman who had a failed previous ceramic-on-ceramic total hip arthroplasty performed for early coxartrosis secondary to acetabular dysplasia. She had fracture and protrusion of the ceramic liner through the titanium acetabular shell without any apparent trauma, possibly due to mistakes during the implantation of the ceramic liner into the metal shell at the initial operation. She was revised with allograft, reinforcement ring, all-polyethylene cup and reinforced stainless-steel femoral head. We think that a layer of polyethylene may be used for elimination of liner impingement with screw heads and for stress absorption, particularly at the time of head implantation.

Key words: *Uncemented acetabular component, Catastrophic wear, Hip arthroplasty, Alumina ceramics, Metallosis.*

ÖZET

Asetabular displazi sonucu erken koksartroz gelişimi nedeniyle seramik-seramik total kalça protezi uygulanmış olan 48-yaşında bir kadın hastamızda gelişen protez kırılmasını sunmak istedik. Herhangi bir travma olmadan seramik linerde kırılma ve titanyum asetabular destek aşınması saptandı. Metal desteğe seramik liner takılması sırasında yapılan teknik hata sonucu kırılmanın olduğu düşünüldü. Desteğin tespiti amacıyla kullanılan vidaların yanlış açıda uygulanması bu tip kırılmalara yol açabilir. Biz, polietilen bir ara tabakanın bu hataları engellemek amacıyla kullanılabileceğini düşünmekteyiz.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Semensiz Asetabular Kısım, Aşınma, Kalça Eklem Protezi, Alumina Seramik, Metallosiz*

INTRODUCTION

Ceramic components have been used in total hip arthroplasty (THA) because of excellent surface-hardness, lubrication and increased resistance to wear. However, fracture of components may occur related to larger grain size, impurities, poor manufacturing, poor design or surgical errors (8). Many authors have reported fracture of the ceramic head or both the ceramic head and the ceramic insert, but few have found a fracture of the ceramic insert alone (2, 4, 5, 6). We report a case of intrapelvic protrusion of the fractured ceramic liner through the titanium acetabular shell without any apparent trauma.

CASE REPORT

A 48-year-old woman underwent an uncemented total hip arthroplasty of the left hip through an anterolateral approach. The acetabular component was a titanium shell with a ceramic liner; the femoral component was a titanium straight stem designed for diaphyseal fixation with a 28-mm modular ceramic head.

One month postoperatively, patient felt a "click" at the operated hip, without any pain or disturbance in walking; she neglected to inform the surgeon. After 12 months, she admitted this event to a practitioner and a radiograph was taken. No failure at either the acetabular and femoral component was diagnosed. At 14 months postoperatively, she felt pain with limitation of range of motion after a sudden cracking sound and was admitted to our clinic.

On clinical examination, a functional limb shortening of 3 cm. and a Trendelenburg gait on the operated side were revealed. On radiographic examination of the hip, an uncemented THA with a well-fixed femoral stem and failure of the acetabular component with protrusion into the pelvis were seen (Fig. 1). The acetabular shell was completely disturbed by the femoral head and neck being displaced into the

shell, with a fracture of the acetabular wall. The pelvic ring had lost its continuity, and broken ceramic components of the acetabular ceramic liner were in the pelvic ring. Revision surgery was performed using the previous anterolateral incision.



Figure 1: Radiography shows a failure of the acetabular component with protrusion into the pelvis.

Intraoperatively, migration of the proximal femoral head into the acetabulum was observed. After gentle dislocation of the hip, the ceramic femoral head was removed to facilitate exposure of the acetabular component. The ceramic femoral head surface was intact but was severely abraded and revealed a band of metallic deposition. The acetabular liner was completely broken with one large and multiple small pieces dispersed into the soft tissues. The entire wound was covered with black-colored tissue, extensive metallosis. The titanium acetabular shell was completely abraded at the central part with a big hole (Fig. 2). The acetabular titanium shell was loose but all three screws were firmly fixed to the bone; their heads had completely lost their shape. The shell was carefully detached from each screw by gentle

rotary movements and removed from the bony acetabulum. Broken parts of the acetabular liner were found in the pelvis and fragments of the broken ceramics, covered with black metallic deposition, were removed. During the debridement, great attention was given to preserve healthy tissues away from the sharp edges of the liner. The large cavitory defect in the acetabulum was reconstructed with demineralized bone matrix/bone morphogenic protein putty, allograft and a reinforcement ring. An all-polyethylene cup was inserted into the reinforcement ring and secured with cement. The femoral stem was not changed as it seemed well-fixed. A new, reinforced stainless-steel femoral head was used to replace the damaged femoral head. The patient had an uneventful recovery and had no pain at the hip at the most recent follow-up examination at 15 months. The patient was able to return to full activity without any discomfort in the hip. The acetabular grafts healed well and the acetabular and femoral components were well-fixed (Fig. 3).



Figure 2: The photograph shows titanium acetabular shell completely abraded at the central part with a big hole and the fractured pieces of the ceramic liner. Extensive metallosis was debrided.



Figure 3: Radiography taken fifteen months postoperatively shows the healed acetabular grafts and well-fixed components.

DISCUSSION

The risk of fracture is a main disadvantage of ceramic prostheses. Although ceramic-on-ceramic articulation has been assumed to cause the least amount of wear, fractures may occur in the femoral heads, especially with the earlier designs. Nizard et al. (7) found that the ceramic heads in patients less than 50 years of age (and therefore presumably more active) had a better rate of survival than those in older patients. In addition, it is likely those extrinsic factors, such as strenuous activity, play a minor role in the occurrence of ceramic fractures, because they will remain below the fatigue limit of the product. Fracture of the ceramic head is as likely to occur in cemented as in non-cemented THA's. While some authors state that the failures usually appear during the first months after the operation, others have observed that

these are more frequent after the first year (7). Risk factors may be patient-specific: age, activities, and a history of trauma or surgery-specific; high cup inclination, rough insertion of the ceramic liner, impaction of the femoral head against the liner rim during reduction, and a history of dislocation. Finally, manufacturer-specific factors affecting the risk of a ceramic fracture include the quality of the ceramic and the design of the insert (1). Trauma, directly or indirectly, high levels of activity, and obesity may influence the risk of breakage by increasing the load across the joint surfaces (8). Other factors creating fracture risk are the loads anticipated with the application of the component, surgical technique and application of the component by the surgeon, bone condition of the patient, and material and design properties of the component (8).

The vulnerability property of ceramic prostheses seems to be impinging between components, e.g., the stem neck and the inferior portion of the acetabular rim in external rotation and the superior rim of the ceramic liner by the femoral head. Cracks may propagate, suggesting the cause of the fracture might be the stress concentration (3). To minimize the risk of impingement and to achieve better forces distribution, acetabular component should be placed at 45° (8). Thick liners were designed to control the risk of fracture. The ceramic liner without a polyethylene layer is thicker than that of a sandwich cup. However, very careful technique is required when inserting the ceramic liner into the metal shell to avoid chip fractures. The presence of a polyethylene layer in a sandwich cup can ease the insertion of the ceramic liner into the metal shell (6). However, we think much more attention should be given to the convex liner surface (i.e., the metal backing–acetabular liner interface) as another possible cause of impingement. Recent studies evaluate the relationship between wear of the convex surface and the importance of screw

holes and other potential conduits in the process of acetabular osteolysis, with little association being reported (1). Prominent heads of improperly placed screws may be another cause of impingement; stress concentration at the screw heads and the full-thickness ceramic liner could cause early catastrophic liner fractures. The internal stresses within the ceramic liner and the metal backing increase with nonconformity of the surfaces. Ceramics have excellent compression and limited bending strength. Small irregularities can grow until a sudden fracture without adequate trauma occurs (9). The stress concentration at the rim of the ceramic liner has been reported as the possible cause of the ceramic liner fracture. Vertical placement of the cup and avoiding impingement are recommended. Hasegawa et al. (4) suggest that the rim of the alumina ceramic liner must be made thicker, but others direct attention to the reduction of the rigidity of the ceramic-on-ceramic coupling and prevention of impingement by the layer of polyethylene between the ceramic liner and metal neck of the femoral stem. In our case, breakage of the liner was possibly due to mistakes during the implantation of the ceramic liner into the metal shell at the initial operation, rather than late trauma or patient obesity. Thick ceramic liners need more attention during insertion and we need more industrial investigations to produce better and easier-to-use hardware.

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