Periimplant lesions – causes and treatment options

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Introduction

While in the early stages of implantology, issues concerning the “healing” of artificial abutment teeth were in the focus of interest, those early complications have become rare due to improved implant forms, optimised minimally invasive diagnostic and surgical techniques, and especially because of improved implant surfaces.

Instead, “long-term complications” with implants that have been osseointegrated for many years, which are functioning and have developed periimplant infections, have become the focus of interest for dentists/implantologists.

This type of infection on/around the implant, which can lead to serious bone loss and, if untreated, will result in the loss of the artificial abutment tooth (and generally also in the loss of the superconstruction), is referred to as periimplantitis.

There are two possible causes:

a) Infectious/bacterial (as defined by MOMBELLI, 1987).

b) Functional/aseptic, e.g. due to stress phenomena caused by not observing a balanced proportion of implant length/crown length and disregarding serious deficits of the osseous implant site (as defined by JASTY, 1991). Functional/aseptic periimplantitis is usually the exception.

The majority of periimplant infections are of bacterial/infectious origin. According to information provided by the only chair holder of dental implantology, Professor Dr Herbert Deppe, a prevalence of up to 15 per cent of implants can be expected after 10 years.

Thus, the prevention and treatment of periimplantitis have now become two of the major tasks in implantology. This article will provide information about tried and tested laser treatments, but also about new therapeutic approaches with laser light for the treatment of bacterial periimplantitis.
Treatment of the infectious form of periimplantitis

The four-phase treatment scheme

Many authors agree on a four-phase regimen for the treatment of periimplantitis:

1) Initial treatment: This initial phase of PI treatment consists of diagnosing periimplant lesions (as early as possible), cleaning and hygiene procedures as well as motivating/instructing the patient suffering from periimplantitis.

2) Surgical resective phase: After local anaesthesia and the creation of a soft-tissue flap, an image of the peri-implant defect (generally with its unique crater-like form) is taken, the granulation tissue is removed and the bone is cleaned.

3) Augmentative/reconstructive phase: The primary goal—although not always achievable—is an augmentation which will ultimately lead to a restito ad integrum: In this case, as opposed to an augmentation, the patient’s own bone is not the gold standard; bone substitutes have become established.

4) Recall-Phase: All authors agree in their definition that recall is just as important as the actual treatment of a periimplant infection. If there is no adequate and short-term recall after the successful treatment of periimplantitis, recurrence will be just a matter of time.

Explantation as a treatment option for periimplantitis

Explantation would indeed be a “treatment option” if the defect situation proves very difficult for executing the above-mentioned regimen or if the osseous lesions are so severe that there is only a poor overall prognosis for the implant. At times, explantation may even be the only choice if it can be assumed that, by leaving the implant in place, the infection would result in further bone loss that could prevent implantation at a later time or complicated augmentative measures.

Use of laser light

There is more and more mention of the use of laser light in both the resective/surgical and the recall phases primarily. In principle, two types of laser light applications can be defined:

a) Laser light application without morphological changes on the implant surface and without ablative effect: decontamination.

b) Laser light application with abrasive effect: ablative treatment (possibly in combination with decontamination).

The proponents of ablative treatment argue that they “kill two birds with one stone” by removing any contamination from the implant surface, by smoothing it and possibly eliminating any bacteria and microorganisms. The proponents of pure decontamination, on the other hand, point out the risks of unwanted effects on the implant surface, which would complicate or might even prevent the re-appositioning of the bone, and the excellent long-term results of pure decontamination. In this context, they also accept that, in their non-ablative form of laser treatment for periimplantitis, the implant surfaces must be cleaned with suitable manual instruments prior to laser light application.

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Technique for both of the two treatment options

1. Decontamination without ablative effect or morphological changes on the implant surface in the sense of a pure decontamination

The term “decontamination” was coined by the Freiburg Laser Research Group Bach/Krekeler and Mall in 1994–1995. They introduced the diode laser to dentistry, which had been unknown until then. For decontamination, the diode laser light (810 nm) is applied to the implant surface with the largest possible fiber (usually 600 µm) under contact and with constant movement. The authors from Freiburg indicated a maximum power of 1 W and an application time of no more than 20 seconds for the laser light treatment. A 30-second waiting period is necessary if there is a need for further laser light application on the same implant. In clinical applications, a waiting period of 20 seconds has proven to be completely sufficient. If an implant shows a surface that is exposed from the bone and that requires an application of laser light in excess of 20 seconds, the prognosis for this artificial abutment tooth should be categorised as unfavourable and the periimplantitis treatment considered questionable if not experimental.

Bach/Krekeler and Mall expressly caution against exceeding the time-value, which would inevitably cause a heat build-up in the implant and in the periimplant bone, and thus lead to destruction. The parameters mentioned by these authors (1.0 W/ max. 20 seconds of laser light application) have been impressively confirmed by other authors (Sennhenn-Kirchner et al., Moritz et al.) and accepted by the device suppliers and manufacturers on the flourishing diode laser market.

Romanos et al. described the option of working with Nd:YAG lasers without changing the surface. However, there are no long-term and clinical results yet. The above-mentioned diode laser research group in Freiburg, on the other hand, submitted a ten-year study in 2005, proving a reduction in the recurrence rate from previously 30 % (without laser) to now 11 % (with diode laser). These authors called for an integration of diode laser decontamination as a standard procedure into tried and proven schemes for periimplant treatment. Long-term clinical findings for laser treatment of periimplantitis were also achieved with a further wavelength: CO₂ (gas) lasers have been used for the treatment of periimplantitis since the work of Deppe, Horch and colleagues (University of Munich) was completed.

Prof. Dr Herbert Deppe and his co-authors were able to prove that the use of the gas laser, which had been regarded critically for the treatment of periimplantitis until then, is appropriate here and will later—after the periimplant infection subsides—yield a favourable starting point for the regeneration of the supporting tissue. Deppe suggests the use of the CO₂ laser in continuous-wave (cw) mode with 2.5 W of power for 10 seconds. He works with a scanner and, if necessary, also with a dental powder jet and post-operative application of a membrane. A five-year study (Deppe and Horch, 2005) is also available.

2. Procedure with ablative effect (laser curettage) and possibly an additional decontaminating effect

– Er:YAG laser: Compared to the laser light decontamination procedure described above, the ablative laser light procedure uses additional wavelengths. This laser with ablative effect used for the treatment of...
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periimplantitis is the Er:YAG laser. This wavelength has been successfully used in conservative dentistry for many years and is the only wavelength that has been scientifically backed, is suitable for practice and can be used to work on and prepare the hard-tooth substance. The names Keller and Hibst are closely connected to the Er:YAG wavelength.

We owe significant scientific studies of the Er:YAG laser to these two researchers from Ulm, Germany. In the past years, Keller and Hibst—after having fully researched the treatment of the hard tooth substance—turned their attention to further integrations with the Er:YAG laser, including studies regarding the use of this laser for the treatment of periodontitis and periimplantitis. The names Henriot and Ritschel (Hamburg, Germany) especially come to mind in this context. They described multiple uses of the Er,Cr:YSGG laser, more widely known as Biolase, in soft-tissue surgery and in hard tissue. The respective long-term experience and multi-centric studies are yet to be confirmed.

### Summary

There are two options for using laser light in the treatment of periimplantitis:

- **Pure decontamination, non-ablative**
  - For this application, diode lasers with a wavelength of 810 nm and CO2 gas lasers have gained acceptance. Solid scientific data and long-term studies are available for this form of diode laser light application which, however, requires conventional cleaning of the implant surface prior to the laser light application.

- **Ablative, possibly with additional decontaminating effect**
  - Er:YAG laser and the Er,Cr:YSGG laser are available for this application. They can remove concrements and tartar from the implant surface without changing its original morphology. However, strict and limiting parameters must be observed with respect to performance and time. Regarding clinical and long-term experience, the ablative procedure has not yet reached the level of the purely decontaminating diode and CO2 lasers.

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