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Biomechanics in Implant Dentistry: Current concepts and clinical implications

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Abstract
Biomechanics in implant dentistry plays a pivotal role in ensuring long-term functional and esthetic success of dental implant therapy. Understanding the complex interactions among implant design, bone quality, occlusal forces, and prosthetic materials is essential for optimizing load distribution and promoting peri-implant bone preservation. Key biomechanical factors-including implant geometry, surface characteristics, connection type, and prosthesis design-directly influence primary stability, stress transmission, and osseointegration. Advances in digital workflows, finite element analysis, and dynamic occlusal assessment have enhanced clinicians' ability to predict and control mechanical behavior under functional loading. Despite technological progress, biomechanical complications such as overload, screw loosening, and prosthetic fractures remain challenges requiring comprehensive planning and evidence-based occlusal strategies. A biomechanically driven approach ultimately contributes to improved implant survival, reduced complications, and more predictable rehabilitation outcomes.

Keywords: Implant Dentistry, biomechanics, Osseointegration, occlusion forces

Introduction

Implant dentistry has become a mainstream solution for tooth loss. However, compared with natural teeth, dental implants behave differently biomechanically: they lack a periodontal ligament (PDL), which in natural teeth acts as a shock absorber; because of this, implants transmit occlusal forces directly to bone, making them more susceptible to overload and bone stress [1].

Therefore, long-term success of implants demands careful biomechanical planning. Early failures might be due to lack of sufficient primary stability, while late failures may result from mechanical overload causing bone resorption, screw loosening, or even implant fracture. A comprehensive understanding of biomechanical principles-bone-implant interactions, load transfer, prosthesis design- is critical for optimizing treatment outcomes [2].

Bone Quality, Quantity and Patient Factors

1. Bone Density and Implant Stability

Bone density at the implant site is one of the most important predictors of implant primary stability, osseointegration and long-term success. Clinical data have shown significant correlation between bone density (measured in Hounsfield units via CT), insertion torque at placement, and implant stability quotient (ISQ) values on resonance frequency analysis (RFA)- higher density yields higher torque and ISQ, associated with improved survival rates [3].

Low bone density (e.g. posterior maxilla) may predispose to micromovements and insufficient initial stability. A recent review highlighted that bone density remains a critical determinant of implant success, and must be carefully assessed especially in patients with compromised bone (e.g. bone loss, osteoporosis) [4].

2. Bone Volume, Cortical vs. Trabecular Bone

Besides density, bone volume (height and width) and the ratio of cortical to trabecular bone influence load-bearing capacity. Thin cortical bone or predominant trabecular bone may lead to stress concentration and crestal bone loss under functional loading. As shown in finite element simulations, implants in poor-quality bone experience different biomechanical behavior than those in dense bone, with increased risk of stress concentration at the crestal region [5].

Patient systemic factors (e.g., osteoporosis, metabolic bone diseases) or local bone alterations (e.g., bone resorption after extraction) may further compromise bone quantity and quality, affecting biomechanical stability [4].

Implant Design — Macrogeometry and Microgeometry

1. Implant Shape (Cylindrical vs Tapered) and Body Design

The macro-shape of the implant body (cylindrical/parallel-sided vs tapered) significantly influences stress distribution in bone. Several finite element analyses (FEA) have demonstrated that tapered implants reduce peak stress in both cortical and trabecular bone relative to cylindrical ones, especially under oblique loading, which may be beneficial in low-density bone or immediate loading protocols [6, 7, 8].

However, some studies have also reported increased peak stresses at the crestal bone for tapered implants compared to cylindrical designs, indicating that taper alone does not guarantee biomechanical advantage- design must be optimized carefully [9].

2. Thread Design: Depth, Shape, Pitch, Collar Microthreads

Thread geometry- including depth, shape (V-shaped, square, trapezoidal, buttress, reverse-buttress), pitch, and collar design (microthreads)- has major biomechanical implications:

- A study comparing six thread depths (0.25, 0.35, 0.45 mm) in both cylindrical and tapered implants under 250 N vertical load found highest von Mises stress in cortical bone around the crestal region; interestingly, the shallowest thread depth (0.25 mm) showed the highest peak stress, suggesting that insufficient thread depth may concentrate stress unfavorably [5, 9].
- Another FEA comparing different thread shapes under axial and oblique loads found that V-shaped threads

exhibited highest maximum stresses in cortical bone, while altering the thread face angle modified stress distribution - but effects varied depending on thread type: increasing face angle decreased stress in some thread shapes (e.g. V-shaped, reverse buttress), but increased it in others (trapezoid, buttress) [10].

- More recent 3D FEA studies that included dynamic (cyclic) loading analysis demonstrated that implants with microthreads in the crestal area exhibited lower stress and strain in surrounding bone compared to conventional threaded designs - suggesting microthreads may improve long-term bone preservation under functional load [11].

Hence, thread design must be chosen according to bone quality, expected load, and prosthetic demands.

3. Implant Diameter and Length

According to a recent systematic review analyzing numerous finite element studies, implant diameter has a greater influence on reducing peri-implant bone stress than implant length-wide-diameter implants distribute load over larger surface area, reducing concentration of stress, particularly under static or immediate loading conditions [12]. In contrast, implant length, while relevant, becomes more crucial only when bone density is low: in poor bone quality, longer implants may help achieve better primary stability and reduce stress [12]. Thus, when bone volume permits, clinicians should consider wider diameter implants, particularly in high-load-bearing areas, while balancing anatomical limitations.

4. Surface Properties and Bone–Implant Interface

Beyond macrogeometric parameters, the microstructure and surface topography of implants influences the bone–implant contact (BIC) ratio, osseointegration, and biomechanical load transfer. Roughened surfaces (e.g., through acid-etching, grit-blasting, or nano-scale treatments) enhance BIC and may help distribute loads more evenly, reducing stress shielding and promoting bone remodeling [13].

In fact, biomechanical modeling studies emphasize that the bone–implant interface properties- including contact ratio, surface roughness, and bone material properties- significantly affect load transfer and stability [2, 13].

Load Direction, Occlusion & Prosthetic Considerations

1. Load Direction and Magnitude

Natural teeth possess a periodontal ligament that allows micromovement and shock absorption. Implants lack this cushion: hence, implant loading direction, magnitude, and rate become critical. Implant-supported prostheses are best when loaded axially (along the implant's long axis), minimizing bending moments. Non-axial loading (e.g., lateral, oblique forces), cantilevers, or excessive crown height increase bending moments and stress concentrations, especially at the crestal bone and implant–abutment interface [14, 15].

FEA studies under dynamic (cyclic) loading have shown that loading rate, direction, and periodicity significantly influence stress distribution and deformation, underscoring the importance of prosthetic design and occlusal scheme [11].

2. Prosthetic Design: Splinting, Cantilevers, Passive Fit

In multi-unit or full-arch restorations, prosthetic design influences load sharing across implants:

- Splinting (rigidly connecting multiple implants) helps distribute occlusal forces over several implants, reducing per-implant stress and lowering risk of overload, especially in compromised bone.
- Cantilevers should be minimized. Longer cantilevers amplify leverage forces, increasing risk of implant failure or bone resorption.
- Passive fit of prosthetic frameworks is critical. Misfit leads to continuous microstrain, which may cause screw loosening or crestal bone loss over time. Digital CAD/CAM frameworks and precise manufacturing help achieve passive fit more reliably [16].

Hence, prosthetic planning should account for biomechanical load distribution, not only for esthetics or convenience.

3. Bruxism and Parafunctional Loading

Patients with parafunctional habits (e.g., bruxism, clenching) impose high, often lateral, repetitive occlusal loads on implants- increasing risk of mechanical complications (e.g., screw loosening, fracture, marginal bone loss). In such cases: using wide-diameter implants, splinted restorations, occlusal guards (night guards), and materials with higher fracture toughness may help mitigate risk [14].

Role of Bone Remodeling & Long-Term Biomechanics

Initial implant placement and osseointegration are only part of the story. Over time, bone undergoes remodeling in response to mechanical stimuli (Wolff's law / mechanostat theory). Stress shielding - where an overly stiff implant or mismatched load distribution reduces stimulus to surrounding bone - may lead to bone resorption and long-term failure [2, 13].

Recent computational models integrating bone remodeling algorithms with finite element analysis have provided improved predictions of how bone around implants may adapt (or resorb) over time under different loading and design scenarios [17]. Such models may help in pre-operative planning, especially for full-arch bridges or complex prostheses, to predict long-term bone stability and adjust design accordingly.

Digital Tools and Biomechanical Modeling in Implant Planning

Advances in imaging (CBCT), planning software, and computer-aided design/manufacturing (CAD/CAM) have transformed implant dentistry. These tools now routinely allow clinicians to: assess bone density and volume; plan optimal implant position and angulation; simulate biomechanical load distribution using finite element analysis (FEA); design custom abutments; and fabricate precise frameworks for passive fit.

Using digital planning and biomechanical modeling, dentists can anticipate mechanical risk factors (e.g., stress concentration, need for wide-diameter implants or splinting) before surgery - improving predictability and reducing complications.

Moreover, as research advances, more sophisticated modeling incorporating bone remodeling, dynamic occlusal loads, and patient-specific bone geometry are being developed - offering personalized biomechanical planning [2, 17].

Clinical Implications and Recommendations

Based on biomechanical evidence from FEA studies, reviews and clinical data, the following recommendations can help optimize implant treatment planning and long-term success:

1. Assess bone quality and quantity thoroughly (via CBCT/CT) before implant placement. In low-density bone, consider wider-diameter implants, modified thread designs (e.g., deeper threads, microthreads), or alternative loading protocols (delayed loading).
2. Choose implant design - body shape, thread geometry, diameter - tailored to patient's bone and occlusion demands; avoid a "one-size-fits-all" approach.
3. Plan prosthesis carefully: minimize cantilevers, use splinted restorations in multi-unit cases, ensure passive fit, and design occlusion to reduce lateral forces (axial load, shallow cusps, narrow occlusal table).
4. Protect patients with parafunctional habits using night guards, and reinforce prosthetic design and materials accordingly.
5. Leverage digital planning and biomechanical modeling (CBCT, FEA, CAD/CAM) to simulate and optimize implant placement and load distribution before surgery.
6. Monitor long-term bone response - periodic radiographic follow-up and, when possible, mechanical analysis (e.g. resonance frequency) to detect early bone loss or instability.

Limitations and Future Directions

While finite element analysis (FEA) and computational models offer powerful insights, they have inherent limitations: they often assume linear material properties, isotropic bone, perfect osseointegration, and static loading, which oversimplify the complex *in vivo* environment. Therefore, results must be interpreted with caution and in combination with clinical judgment [2].

Future research should focus on:

- Incorporating anisotropic and nonlinear bone properties in models.
- Modeling dynamic, cyclic, and parafunctional loads (chewing, bruxism) more realistically.
- Accounting for bone remodeling over time, rather than just initial stress distribution.
- Evaluating patient-specific factors - bone health, systemic diseases, habits -to enable truly personalized implant planning.

Conclusion

Biomechanical considerations are fundamental to the long-term success of dental implants. Bone quality and quantity, implant macro- and micro-design, load direction, prosthetic design, and occlusion all interplay to determine stress distribution, bone remodeling, and ultimately implant stability. With advances in digital planning and biomechanical modeling, clinicians are better equipped than ever to tailor implant therapy to individual patient needs, reduce complications, and improve long-term outcomes. However, the clinician must combine scientific evidence with clinical judgment - recognizing the limitations of modeling, and monitoring patient response over time. By integrating biomechanical principles into implant treatment planning and execution, we pave the way for safer, more predictable, and durable implant-supported restorations.

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