Evaluation of enamel dental restoration interface by optical coherence tomography

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Abstract. Evaluation of molar dental restorations on enamel is performed using optical coherence tomography (OCT) with 10 μm resolution. Images of ~50 μm failure gaps in the restorations are demonstrated and the OCT images are compared with x-ray and optical microscopy pictures. The results demonstrate the potential of the technique for clinical evaluation of dental restorations. © 2005 Society of Photo-Optical Instrumentation Engineers. [DOI: 10.1117/1.2141617]

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1 Introduction

Optical coherence tomography (OCT) is a well-established low-coherence interferometric technique that performs high-resolution, noninvasive, cross-sectional tomographic imaging of tissue microstructures. Since OCT longitudinal resolution is inversely proportional to the light source bandwidth, the use and development of broadband sources has been increasing since its first biological application in 1991. With the use of broadband sources OCT images of biological tissue can achieve resolution of few micrometers. Clinically, OCT systems are used for diagnoses in ophthalmology. In odontology, a series of reports first appeared in 1998, with imaging of both hard and soft oral tissues. This led to several diagnostics of bucal diseases, including periodontal, early carries, among others. Another area in dentistry where OCT can have important findings is in dental restoration imaging. Wang et al. and Fried et al. exploited polarization-sensitive OCT to identify dental tissue/restoration interfaces. To date, there is no quantitative method capable to perform in vitro or in vivo analysis of dental restoration, particularly from the clinical point of view. Visual inspection and x-ray imaging are not precise enough to diagnose small gaps that result from bad restoration procedures.

Dental tissues are highly light scattering media and scattering coefficients of enamel and dentin are \( \mu_s = 15 \text{ cm}^{-1} \) and \( \mu_s = 260 \text{ cm}^{-1} \), respectively. IR light can penetrate the full enamel extension, enabling 2-D or 3-D OCT imaging of the tooth structure. Although in odontology, OCT is not yet clinically available—as is the case of...
OCT in ophthalmology, for instance—the potential of the

technique promises a fast technological development that requires

more laboratory evaluation, prior to clinical trials.

In this paper, we report the application of OCT to dental

restoration, particularly analyzing failure gaps left after the

restoration has been performed. Imaging resolution of 10 μm

has been achieved and >50-μm gaps in the interface enamel/

restoration were measured. The results from the OCT were

compared to 2-D images obtained with x-ray and optical mi-

croscopy. Molar dental restorations on enamel of extracted

teeth were performed using composite resin and amalgam as

the restoring materials. Failure gaps were set by using a

50-μm-thick acetate tape during the restoration procedure.

Clinically standard inlay cavity preparation can lead to mar-

ginal gaps with width varying from 35 to 105 μm. The

lower value sets the required spatial resolution and accuracy

for the proposed OCT system in clinical uses, which is

achieved in the present proof-of-principle experiment.

Restoration gaps can also be measured in vitro by elec-

tronic microscopy technique. Using scanning electron micro-

scopy, several authors have shown that failure gaps in den-

tal restoration can be as narrow as 0.3 μm and can be as wide

as 16 μm. Of course, the lower limit is beyond the resolution

achieved by the OCT method. The higher achieved resolution

of present OCT, ~1 to 2 μm (Refs. 7 and 8) can be used as a

clinical method for in vivo evaluation of dental gaps a few

micrometers wide.

2 Experimental Details and Results

The basic experimental scheme for the OCT used in this paper

is similar to most fiber-based Michelson interferometer setups

reported in the literature. A titanium:sapphire mode-locked

laser, operating at 800 nm with a spectral width of 10 nm and

emitting pulses of 150 fs, was used as the system light source.

The laser beam was coupled into 3 m of a nonlinear fiber,

leading to a spectral broadening, due to self-phase modula-

tion and other nonlinear effects. The initial 10-nm spectral

width was broadened to ~40 nm, which could lead to a higher

longitudinal spatial resolution (ΔZ). In the Z direction, resolution

can be calculated from the expression

\[ \Delta Z = 0.44 \lambda^2 / \Delta \lambda , \]

which gives a value of ΔZ ~ 7 μm.

The output light from the nonlinear fiber was directed to a

2 × 2 fiber coupler (50/50 at 830 nm) of the fiber-based

Michelson interferometer. The ends of the reference and

sample arms were set on computer-controlled translation

stages (ThorLabs) with 200-nm minimum displacement steps.

The collimated beam of the interferometer sample arm was

focused on the tooth using a lens with 10 cm of focal dis-

tance, providing a lateral resolution of 35 μm. The collected

light on the output port of the Michelson interferometer was

sent to a highly sensitive photodetector, whose output was

electronically filtered, according to the translation stages

speed, and amplified 100×. Sidebands on the autocorrelation

image of the fiber-based interferometer were identified as a

polarization effect on the 50/50 fiber coupler arms, leading to

degradation on the OCT axial resolution (ΔZ=10 μm).

A better resolution could be obtained using an air-based Mich-

elson interferometer. However, for the purposes of this dem-

onstration, the obtained resolution sufficed.

Fig. 1 (a) Microscopy and (b) x-ray images of the amalgam-treated tooth.

Samples of extracted molar human teeth (available at the

university tooth bank, used after approval of the Ethical Com-

mittee) were sectioned and cavities were prepared reaching

both enamel and dentin. A bur at a high-speed handpiece

(Kavo) was used for the cavities preparation. Restorations

were performed with silver amalgam (SDI) and composite

resin P60 (3M). Failure gaps were purposely introduced in

selected regions of the tooth enamel using 50-μm-thick ac-

cetate sheets during the restoration procedure. Gaps were ob-

tained by removing the tape from the tooth.

Microscopy and x-ray analysis of the sample were per-

formed to identify and measure the induced failure gaps.

X-ray images were taken with a Spectro XOX (Dabi Atlante)

and the Kodak dental films were processed. Microscope

images were obtained with an upright Nikon microscope (Opti-

hot) with a 5× objective. Figures 1(a) and 1(b) show, respec-

tively, microscope and x-ray images of the amalgam-treated

tooth. Restoration gaps are clearly seen on the microscope

images, showing gaps smaller than 150 μm in the analyzed

area. Although x-ray analysis shows all the restored area, the

failure gaps cannot be easily identified with the x-ray imaging

system used.

OCT images were obtained by fixing the samples on the

end of one of the arms of the interferometer, and A- and

B-scans (in the Z direction and in the lateral direction, respec-
were performed for several samples as exemplified in Figs. 2(a) to 2(c) which show the OCT interferograms and the corresponding optical microscope images. In all figures, the air/enamel interface is displayed, followed by a decay due to the scattering loss into the enamel, and then the enamel—restoration interface appears. In Fig. 2(a), no gap was left during sample preparation and, within the 10-μm resolution, no gap appears. Figures 2(b) and 2(c) show the gap in both microscope images and OCT traces. A quantitative analysis and direct comparison between the two methods (OCT and optical microscopy) is not straightforward, although the gap thickness can be easily obtained from the OCT results. To obtain these results from the microscopy images, a densitometry trace would be required. A very crude estimation from our presented results shows that the OCT data has an accuracy of approximately 10% of the total gap width, whereas from the optical microscopy measurements, this value is much higher, of the order of 30 and sometimes 40%. However, the optical microscopy resolution can easily reach 1 μm (in our case, it was less than 5 μm), whereas the best resolution obtained presently with an OCT system is ~1 to 2 μm.

To construct 2-D images, backscattered amplitude as a function of axial position and lateral displacement were recorded, as shown in Fig. 3, which are the results for an amalgam restoration. The gap is clearly detected, and is wider than the acetate sheet due to the process of placing and removing the acetate. Composite resin was also employed and images were obtained, yielding similar results.

To better identify restoration gaps, fast Fourier transform (FFT) smoothing of the data was applied, even though light scattered from the tissue between surface and the gap is still present in the figure. This was necessary in our experimental setup since there was an unwanted source of noise in the detection system, which can be avoided in an optimized experiment. As seen in Fig. 3, the air/enamel interface peak begins in different axial positions for different lateral areas, showing the sample surface curvature. As shown in the microscope images [Figs. 2(b) and 2(c)], restoration gaps in the teeth are not uniform in width. Our OCT results show that gap width varied from 51 to 146 μm, the lower limit due to the available acetate sheet used. A view of a tooth section obtained by the OCT technique is presented in Fig. 4, as a grayscale map. Again, the failure gap can be clearly seen. The image in Fig. 4 was obtained by laterally displacing the sample by 10-μm steps.

### 3 Discussion and Conclusions

Dental caries are known as a multifactorial pathological process, characterized by hard tissue demineralization. Among the several classes, secondary caries appear as a result of restoration failures. If not detected earlier, secondary caries will further evolve and damage other regions (for instance, into the dentin) of the tooth. *In vivo* clinical evaluation is only possible by x rays, which cannot show the gap failure and depicting only the restored region [see Fig. 1(b)]. We demonstrated...
that gap failure in a restored tooth can be evaluated by the OCT technique, and with a system resolution of 10 \( \mu \)m we were able to detect gaps as small as 50 \( \mu \)m, but those of only a few micrometers would be experimentally measurable. Although we demonstrated only gaps that were about 0.5 mm deep, the technique can image the full enamel extension, as demonstrated in earlier work at the same wavelength as used here\(^{9-11}\) and verified independently in our laboratory. Therefore, this required performance criteria is satisfied by the technique. The types of restorations that could be imaged by direct and indirect means, include gaps wider than the resolution of the system, which could be imaged and spatially quantified. With a more appropriated light source, in terms of wavelength, a deeper penetration would be obtained. This is the case for the use of 1300 nm, which can penetrate \( \sim \)2 to 3 mm into the tooth (see Ref. 13 and the references therein). Imaging gaps narrower than 10 \( \mu \)m requires improvements in our incoherent light source. Furthermore, the use of OCT has the advantage of showing the restored region as well as the gap, if it exists, and precisely localizing its position, as demonstrated here.

Exploitation of the recent advances in OCT in terms of different excitation wavelengths and wider bandwidths can lead to state-of-the-art imaging systems in odontology, enabling imaging of both enamel and dentin.

Finally, as demonstrated in the literature,\(^{10,11}\) in vivo and real-time OCT images can be obtained, and therefore this method of assessment is potentially useful for clinical diagnostics. We are currently developing a real time OCT system for such applications.

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