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Laser and Photodynamic Therapy in Periodontitis: A Review

Dr. Abhishek Sinha, Reader, Department of Periodontology, Purvanchal Institute of Dental Sciences, Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh

Dr. Shivani Kondhalkar, Tutor, Department of Periodontology, Sinhgad Dental College and Hospital, Pune, Maharashtra

Dr. Prasad Chandrakant Ingale, Assistant Professor, Department of Conservative Dentistry and Endodontics, Bharati Vidyapeeth (Deemed to be University) Dental College and Hospital, Sangli, Maharashtra.

Dr. Ashish Khadia, Junior Resident, Department of Periodontics and Community Dentistry, Dr. Ziauddin Ahmed Dental College & Hospital, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh

Dr. Akanksha Baheti, Associate Dentist, Department of Esthetics and Restorative Dentistry, Perfect Smiles Clinic, Chicago, IL, USA

Dr. Anoop Velayudhan, Ph.D. Scholar, IIHMR University Jaipur, Prabhu Dayal Marg, Near Sanganer Airport, Maruti Nagar, Jaipur, Rajasthan-302029.

Corresponding Author: Dr. Prasad Chandrakant Ingale

Email id: prasadingale99@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Periodontitis is an inflammatory disease characterized by the destruction of supporting structures of the teeth, primarily caused by bacterial infection. Traditional treatment approaches, including scaling and root planing, often yield variable outcomes. This review explores the application of laser and photodynamic therapy (PDT) as adjunctive treatment modalities in managing periodontitis. Laser therapy utilizes focused light energy to reduce microbial load and promote tissue healing, while PDT combines photosensitizing agents with light exposure to selectively target and destroy pathogenic bacteria. Evidence suggests that laser therapy enhances non-surgical treatment outcomes, reduces pocket depth, and improves clinical parameters. Similarly, PDT demonstrates efficacy in biofilm disruption and provides additional benefits in terms of safety and patient comfort. This review evaluates current literature on the effectiveness, advantages, and potential limitations of these innovative therapies in the context of periodontitis management, highlighting the need for further research to establish standardized protocols and long-term clinical outcomes. Ultimately, laser and PDT may offer promising avenues for improving periodontal health and patient quality of life, paving the way for more effective strategies in the comprehensive management of periodontitis.

INTRODUCTION

Periodontitis, a severe inflammatory condition affecting the supporting structures of teeth, including the periodontal ligament, cementum, and alveolar bone, is a major cause of tooth loss worldwide. Its management involves a combination of mechanical debridement, antimicrobial therapy, and, in some cases, surgical interventions.[1] While traditional treatments such as scaling and root planing (SRP) remain the cornerstone of therapy, the field has seen a significant advancement with the incorporation of laser therapy and photodynamic therapy (PDT). These non-invasive approaches have generated interest due to their ability to provide enhanced antimicrobial effects, stimulate tissue regeneration, and promote faster healing compared to conventional methods.[2,3] This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive overview of laser and photodynamic therapy, focusing on their mechanisms, benefits, and clinical applications in the management of periodontitis.

Laser Therapy in Periodontitis[4-6]

Mechanism of Action: Laser therapy involves the use of light energy, usually in the form of a focused beam, to target tissue and produce therapeutic effects. In the context of periodontitis, lasers are primarily used to remove diseased tissue, decontaminate the periodontal pockets, and promote healing. Lasers used in periodontics operate within specific wavelengths, and their effects are dependent on the absorption characteristics of the tissue.

Lasers in periodontal therapy work through a variety of mechanisms:

i. **Photothermal Effect:** When laser light is absorbed by the tissue, it is converted into heat. The heat generated by the laser can vaporize or coagulate the

tissue, making it effective for removing or reshaping tissue, such as in gingival recontouring or root debridement

ii. **Photochemical Effect:** Some wavelengths of laser light can cause biochemical reactions in the tissue without significantly heating it. This is primarily used for bacterial decontamination and tissue regeneration.

iii. **Photoacoustic Effect:** Lasers can create shockwaves that break up bacterial biofilms or remove calculus, making them useful in scaling procedures.

iv. **Biostimulatory Effect:** Laser light, particularly in the low-level or low-intensity range, can stimulate cellular processes that promote tissue regeneration and wound healing by increasing collagen production, enhancing angiogenesis, and improving the proliferation of fibroblasts.

Types of Lasers Used in Periodontics: There are several types of lasers used in periodontal therapy, each with distinct properties and applications:[7-8]

i. **Diode Laser:** Wavelengths ranging from 810 nm to 980 nm. Diode lasers are widely used in soft tissue surgery, including gingivectomy, gingivoplasty, and pocket disinfection. They are preferred for their precision and minimal collateral damage.

ii. **Erbium-Doped Yttrium-Aluminum-Garnet (Er:YAG) Laser:** Wavelength of 2940 nm. This laser is effective for both soft and hard tissue applications, including removal of calculus and debris from the root surface.

iii. **Carbon Dioxide (CO2) Laser:** Wavelength of 10,600 nm. CO2 lasers are primarily used for soft tissue procedures due to their excellent absorption by water and their ability to vaporize tissue with minimal bleeding.

iv. **Nd:YAG Laser:** Wavelength of 1064 nm. This laser is effective for soft tissue applications and has the advantage of deeper tissue penetration, making it useful in deeper periodontal pockets.

Benefits of Laser Therapy in Periodontitis[9-10]

i. **Minimally Invasive:** Laser treatment is less traumatic compared to traditional surgical methods, leading to less postoperative discomfort, swelling, and bleeding.

ii. **Reduced Bacterial Load:** Lasers, especially when combined with antimicrobial agents, can significantly reduce the bacterial load in periodontal pockets, promoting faster healing.

iii. **Faster Healing:** The biostimulatory effects of lasers enhance tissue regeneration, leading to quicker recovery times.

iv. **Improved Patient Comfort:** As laser therapy is less painful, many patients experience greater comfort during and after treatment, reducing the need for local anesthesia.

v. **Enhanced Precision and Control:** Lasers allow for more precise tissue removal and reshaping with minimal collateral damage to surrounding tissues.

Clinical Applications of Laser Therapy: Laser therapy has various applications in the management of periodontitis, including:[9-10]

i. **Non-Surgical Periodontal Therapy:** Lasers can be used to decontaminate periodontal pockets, remove calculus, and reduce bacterial load, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of scaling and root planing.

ii. **Gingival Surgery:** Lasers are widely used for gingivectomy, gingivoplasty, and soft tissue contouring due to their precision and ability to promote faster healing.

iii. **Root Surface Disinfection:** Er:YAG and diode lasers are effective in disinfecting root surfaces, improving healing after scaling and root planing by eliminating bacteria from deep pockets.

iv. **Periodontal Regeneration:** Low-level laser therapy (LLLT) is being investigated for its potential to stimulate tissue regeneration, including the formation of new bone and periodontal ligament.

Photodynamic Therapy (PDT) in Periodontics[11,12]

Mechanism of Action: Photodynamic therapy involves the use of a photosensitizer agent that is activated by light of a specific wavelength to produce reactive oxygen species (ROS), such as singlet oxygen, which can kill bacteria and other pathogens. The mechanism of action of PDT in periodontitis can be broken down into several steps:

Administration of Photosensitizer: A photosensitizing agent (e.g., methylene blue, toluidine blue O, or indocyanine green) is applied to the periodontal tissues.

Activation by Light: After the photosensitizer has accumulated in the tissue, the area is exposed to light of a specific wavelength. This light activates the photosensitizer, which undergoes a chemical reaction that produces ROS.

Antibacterial Action: The ROS generated during PDT induce oxidative damage to bacterial cells, disrupting their cell membranes, proteins, and DNA, effectively killing them.

Tissue Healing and Regeneration: PDT may also promote tissue regeneration by stimulating cellular processes like angiogenesis and collagen synthesis.

Benefits of PDT in Periodontitis[11,13]

i. **Targeted Antimicrobial Action:** PDT is highly effective in killing a wide range of periodontal pathogens, including those that form biofilms, which are difficult to treat with conventional antibiotics or mechanical debridement.

ii. **Minimal Invasiveness:** PDT is a non-invasive procedure that can be performed in conjunction with other treatments, such as scaling and root planing, to enhance the overall therapeutic outcome.

iii. **Reduced Risk of Antibiotic Resistance:** As PDT does not rely on chemical antibiotics, it reduces the risk of developing antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

iv. **Safety and Biocompatibility:** PDT has been shown to be safe, with minimal side effects. It does not cause significant tissue damage or affect healthy cells, making it a well-tolerated treatment option.

v. **Improved Healing:** By reducing bacterial load and promoting cellular repair, PDT has been shown to accelerate healing and improve clinical outcomes in patients with periodontitis (Table 1).

Clinical Applications of PDT[13,14]

Adjunctive Treatment in Scaling and Root Planing: PDT can be used in conjunction with mechanical debridement to enhance the antimicrobial effects and improve the outcomes of non-surgical periodontal therapy.

Treatment of Periodontal Infections: PDT is particularly effective in cases of persistent periodontal infections or in patients who are not responsive to traditional antibiotic therapy.

Treatment of Peri-Implantitis: PDT has been shown to be effective in treating peri-implantitis, a condition characterized by infection around dental implants.

Treatment of Soft Tissue Lesions: PDT has been used to treat gingival and mucosal lesions, including ulcers and benign growths, by reducing bacterial load and promoting healing.

Table 1: Recent advancements in laser and photodynamic therapy in periodontitis [8,15-18]

Therapy	Mechanism of Action	Recent Advancements	Application in Periodontitis	Effectiveness	Potential Side Effects
Laser Therapy (e.g., Nd:YAG, Er:YAG)	Uses focused light to reduce bacterial load and promote tissue healing	Improved precision with newer laser technologies for better soft and hard tissue management	Used for debridement, reducing inflammation, and enhancing healing	Effective in reducing pocket depth, bleeding, and inflammation	Pain, sensitivity, and tissue discomfort
Erbium-Doped YAG Laser	Targets both hard and soft tissues, promoting	Advances in laser settings allow better	Used for scaling, root planing, and	Reduces bacterial presence, enhances	Post-treatment discomfort,

	coagulation and collagen formation	control over tissue interaction	periodontal pocket disinfection	tissue regeneration	swelling
Diode Laser	Targets bacterial cells and enhances wound healing	Increased use of diode lasers for soft tissue procedures	Used for pocket disinfection and gingivectomy	Effective in reducing inflammation and bacterial counts	Tissue irritation, delayed healing in some cases
Photodynamic Therapy (PDT)	Uses a photosensitizing agent activated by light to kill bacteria	Development of more effective photosensitizers and light sources for better penetration	Used to disinfect periodontal pockets and treat peri-implantitis	Reduces bacterial load and promotes healing in periodontal tissues	Pain, localized irritation, tooth sensitivity
Low-Level Laser Therapy (LLLT)	Promotes cellular healing by stimulating mitochondrial activity	Enhanced protocols to accelerate tissue regeneration and reduce pain	Used adjunctively to improve tissue healing post-treatment	Reduces pain and inflammation, speeds up healing process	Rare: Localized tissue irritation, burns in rare cases
CO2 Laser	Focuses on vaporizing soft tissue while sterilizing the treatment area	Improved precision and reduced collateral damage to surrounding tissues	Used for gingival surgery and soft tissue management in periodontitis	Effective in reducing inflammation, enhancing wound healing	Risk of thermal damage, transient pain
Laser-Assisted New Attachment Procedure (LANAP)	Targets bacterial cells and promotes reattachment of periodontal tissues	Optimized laser parameters for better outcomes in periodontal regeneration	Used for regenerative periodontal therapy, reducing pocket depth and promoting reattachment	Effective in improving clinical attachment and reducing pocket depth	Post-treatment discomfort, swelling
PDT with Methylene Blue	Methylene blue dye is activated by light to target and kill bacteria	New developments in the use of dyes for better targeting of pathogens	Adjunctive therapy for bacterial control and pocket disinfection	Effective in controlling periodontal pathogens and reducing inflammation	Minor side effects like temporary staining, mild irritation
Photoacoustic Therapy	Uses laser-generated acoustic waves to disrupt biofilm and improve tissue healing	Use of ultrasound and laser combinations for better penetration and biofilm disruption	Adjunct therapy for biofilm removal and periodontal healing	Enhances mechanical debridement and improves clinical outcomes	Temporary discomfort, minor tissue irritation
Laser and PDT Combination	Uses both laser and photodynamic therapy for enhanced bacterial control and tissue regeneration	Combined approaches being tested for more effective outcomes	Combining laser debridement with PDT for comprehensive therapy	Provides superior bacterial reduction and enhanced tissue healing	Risk of mild to moderate side effects, including discomfort

Comparative Analysis of Laser Therapy and PDT

Mechanisms: While both laser therapy and PDT offer antimicrobial and tissue-regenerative benefits, they differ in their underlying mechanisms. Laser therapy primarily relies on photothermal and photochemical effects to remove or decontaminate tissue, whereas PDT uses the activation of a photosensitizer by light to generate reactive oxygen species that target bacterial cells. The two therapies can complement each other when used together, as lasers can aid in the delivery of photosensitizers to periodontal pockets and PDT can enhance the bactericidal effects of lasers.[11-13]

Benefits: Both laser therapy and PDT have similar benefits, such as reduced bacterial load, faster healing, and enhanced patient comfort. However, laser therapy offers more versatility in terms of tissue removal and soft tissue surgery, while PDT's primary advantage lies in its potent antimicrobial action, especially against biofilms.

Limitations: Laser therapy requires specific training to ensure proper use, and certain types of lasers may not be suitable for all clinical situations. PDT, while effective, relies on the proper application of photosensitizers and the correct wavelength of light, which may limit its use in some cases.

CONCLUSION

Both laser therapy and photodynamic therapy represent exciting advancements in the management of periodontitis, offering minimally invasive, effective, and patient-friendly alternatives to traditional treatments. As research continues, new laser technologies and photosensitizers will likely emerge, further enhancing the potential of these therapies. Future studies should focus on refining protocols for optimal use, investigating their combined effects, and evaluating their long-term outcomes.

In conclusion, laser and photodynamic therapies offer significant promise in periodontitis care, providing enhanced antimicrobial action, improved tissue regeneration, and better patient outcomes. By incorporating these therapies into clinical practice, periodontists can achieve more effective and less invasive treatments for patients suffering from periodontal diseases.

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