Pathophysiology and Pharmacologic Control of Osseous Mandibular Condylar Resorption

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Purpose: When osseous mandibular condylar resorption occurs there can be many different diagnoses: inflammatory arthritis, TMJ compression, trauma, hormone imbalances, and others. While each diagnosis has its own original inciting event, the pathophysiological pathway for articular bone loss is the same. The aim of this article is to review the relevant literature on condylar resorption and the use of pharmacotherapy to control arthritic erosions and resorption.

Materials and Methods: The literature search was performed using PubMed database with various combinations of related keywords. Preference was given to clinical trials when reviewing articles.

Results: The literature reveals that common cellular level events associated with articular resorption include the activation of osteoblasts by cytokines, free radicals, hormone imbalances and/or potent phospholipid catabolites. The osteoblast then activates the recruitment of osteoclasts and promotes the release of matrix degrading enzymes from the osteoclast.

Research into articular erosions has focused on elucidating the important steps in the bone destructive pathways and interfering with them by pharmacological means. The use of antioxidants, tetracyclines, omega-3 fatty acids, non-steroidal anti-inflammatories and inflammatory cytokine inhibitors to aid in preventing and controlling articular bone loss including osseous mandibular condylar resorption has been successful.

Conclusion: By understanding the known pathways that lead to condylar resorption and the individual patient's susceptibilities, targeted pharmacotherapy might be able to disturb these pathways and prevent further condylar resorption. Basic clinical investigations and randomized clinical trials are still required, but the present science is encouraging.

J Oral Maxillofac Surg 70:1918-1934, 2012

Bone loss at the mandibular condyle has been described as a result of orthognathic surgery, systemic and local arthritides, post-traumatic remodeling, and hormonal imbalance.[1-15] Osseous condylar resorption that occurs without obvious cause is termed idiopathic condylar resorption. The clinical manifestations of condylar resorption are facial imbalance, airway size reduction, and bite disturbances, such as anterior open bite (Fig 1). Although the root causes of osseous condylar resorption differentiate between the diagnoses, all bone loss at the condyle involves a common resorptive pathway: cytokine-activated osteoblasts promote the recruitment and activity of osteoclasts that, in turn, result in the secretion of enzymes that are responsible for the breakdown of hydroxyapatite and collagen (Fig 2).

Rheumatoid arthritis, for example, is caused by a B cell–mediated autoimmune reaction to synovial tissues. As a consequence of this reaction, the local inflammatory cells secrete cytokines that cause the activation of osteoblast-mediated osteoclast catabolism. Whereas the initiating cause is a B-cell antigen-antibody reaction, the end result is promotion of bone breakdown through the common resorptive pathway.

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Conflict of Interest Disclosures: None of the authors reported any disclosures.

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0278-2391/12/7008-0$36.00/0
doi:10.1016/j.joms.2011.07.018

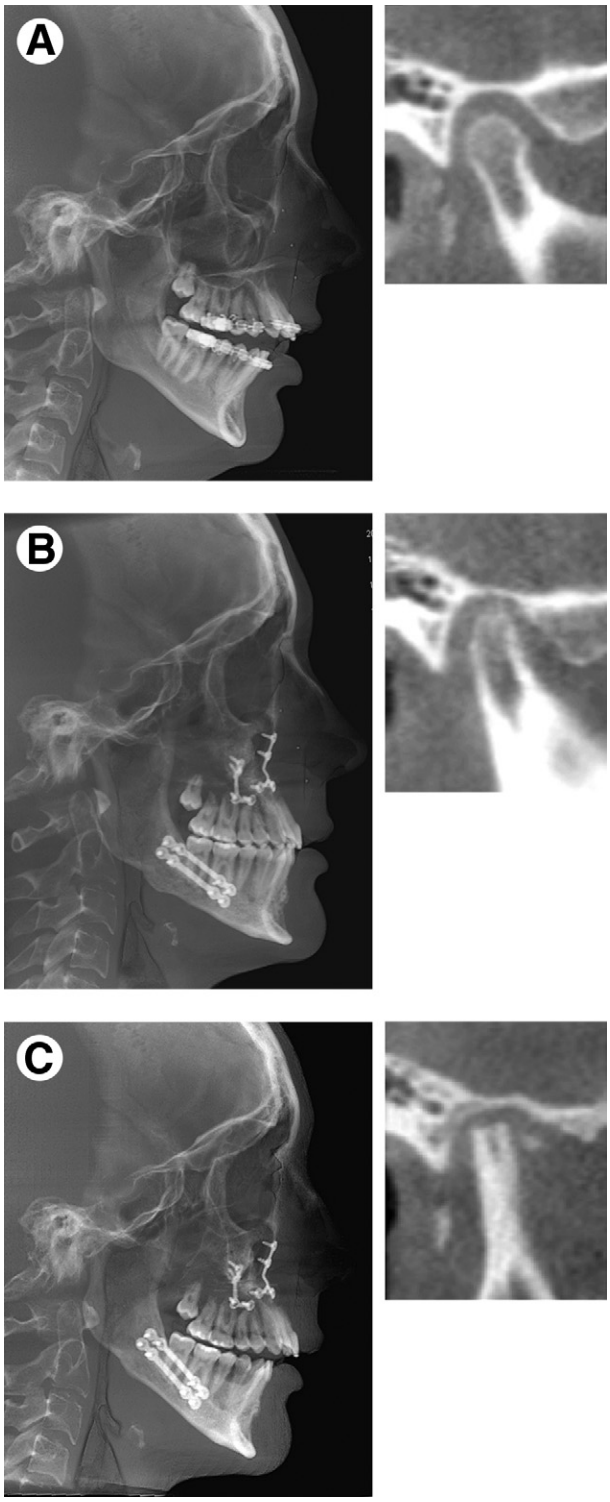

FIGURE 1. A 21-year-old woman who had condylar resorption after orthognathic surgery. History, examination, and blood work showed that the patient did not produce estrogen. The condylar resorption occurred over a 34-month period and resulted in a Class II occlusion with anterior open bite. Sagittal TMJ slices and lateral cephalometric radiographs obtained before surgery (A), 7 months after orthognathic surgery (B), and 34 months after orthognathic surgery (C) are shown.

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The medical approach to minimizing articular bone loss has involved interfering with particular cytokines and enzymes along the common resorptive pathway by pharmacologic means. For example, the use of medications that specifically target the cytokines responsible for osteoblast activation has been quite successful in the treatment of inflammatory arthritis and can decrease the need for surgical intervention in these patients.[16] The use of pharmacologic agents to prevent or slow mandibular condylar resorption is not well described in the oral and maxillofacial literature. Understanding the common bone resorptive pathway and the published success rates of reducing articular erosions through pharmacologic intervention might improve our ability to control mandibular condylar resorption without invasive articular surgery.

In this literature review, the basic cytokines, enzymes, and cellular components that are involved in articular bone loss will be described. A brief review of conditions that activate these pathways is presented. Finally, a review of the medications for which there are published clinical trials of successful articular erosion reduction and a discussion of possible future therapeutic directions are presented.

Pathogenesis of Condylar Resorption

GENESIS OF FREE RADICALS

A free radical is defined as any molecular species capable of independent existence that contains 1 or more unpaired electrons. This particular molecular conformation renders a free radical highly unstable. As a result, free radicals initiate oxidation reactions with adjacent molecules to acquire a paired-electron conformation by reduction. These oxidation reactions can have damaging effects on articular tissues.

It has been proposed that free radicals may be generated in the temporomandibular joint (TMJ) by at least 2 mechanisms, both involving increased mechanical loads.[17] Oxygen-derived free radicals may be generated by a hypoxia-reperfusion mechanism.[18,19] Alternatively, free radicals may be generated by homolytic fission of molecules in articular tissues subjected to shearing forces generated during pathologic compression or joint movement.[18,20,21] Studies have shown elevated oxidative states in TMJ synovial fluid when inflammation and osseous damage are present.[19,22-28]

CYTOKINE SIGNALING

Cytokines are extremely potent molecules that are involved in cell signaling. Cytokines are produced by a variety of cell types present in the TMJ, including

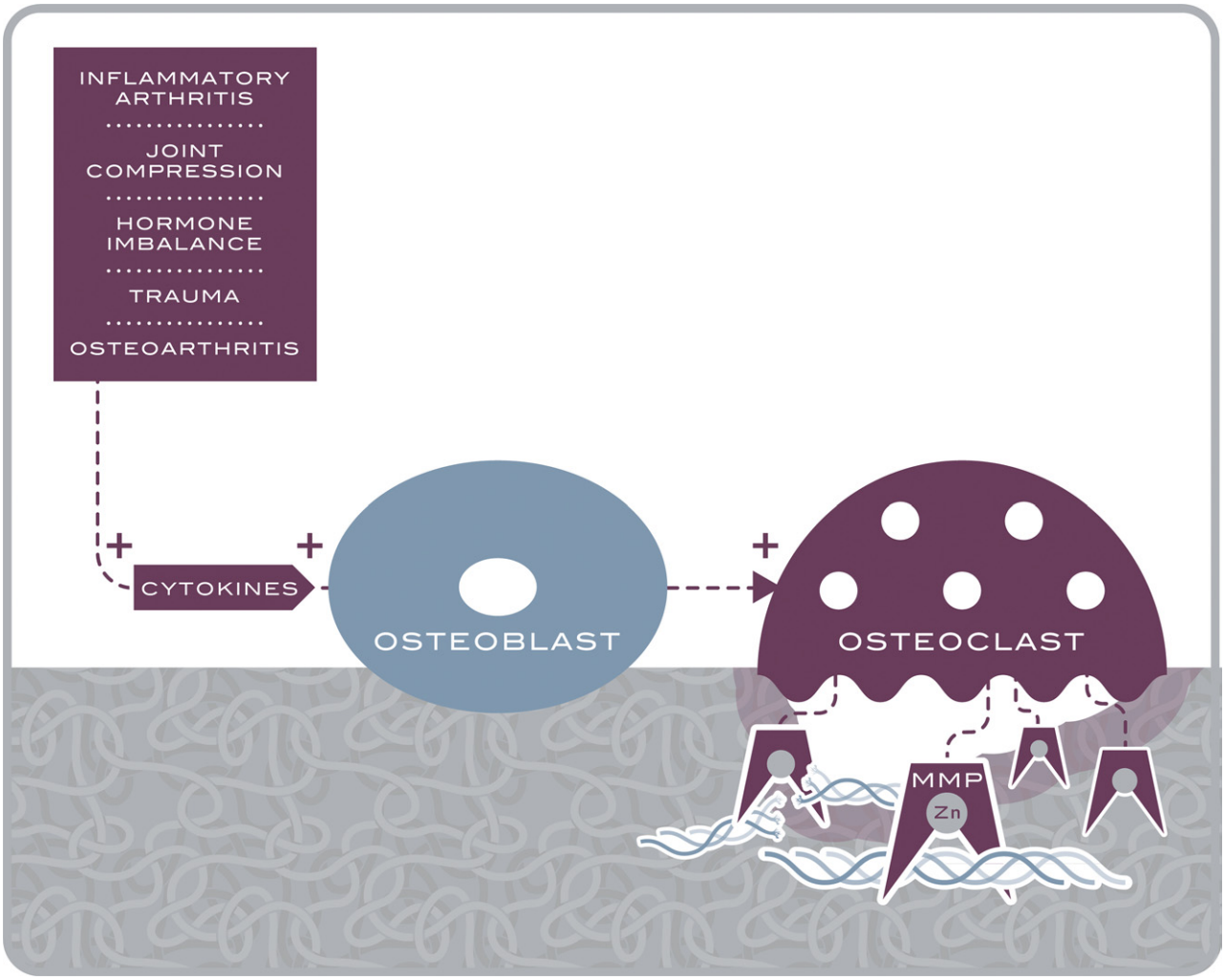

FIGURE 2. The common pathway that is responsible for bone loss at the mandibular condyle consists of the secretion of potent cytokines, which in turn promotes activation of osteoclasts by osteoblasts. The result is the secretion of proteinases by the osteoclast, which in turn causes articular osseous resorption. (Zn, zinc.)

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osteoblasts and synoviocytes. To date, major cytokines that have been implicated in the pathogenesis of condylar resorption include tumor necrosis factor alpha (TNF-α), interleukin 6 (IL-6), and receptor activator nuclear factor kappa-beta ligand (RANKL).[29-49] Osteoprotegerin (OPG), which is a RANKL inhibitor, has been found to be more abundant in states of repair and health (Fig 3).[33] Previous clinical trials have shown correlations between concentrations of these cytokines, isolated from diseased human TMJ, and disease severity as assessed during arthroscopic, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), radiographic, and surgical examination.[50-58] For example, Alstergren and Kopp[30] observed a correlation between TNF-α increases and condylar tissue destruction. Hamada et al[31] showed a decrease in the success of arthrocentesis in treating closed lock of the TMJ when the levels of IL-6 are significantly elevated. Patients with MRI and clinically diagnosed TMJ osteoarthritis had a significantly higher RANKL-OPG ratio than control subjects.[33]

MATRIX METALLOPROTEINASES

Matrix metalloproteinases (MMPs) are endopeptidases that degrade a variety of extracellular matrix molecules (eg, collagen and elastin) found in articular tissues of the TMJ. As the name implies, MMPs require zinc as a cofactor for activity. There is substantial evidence indicating that these enzymes play an important role in bone and cartilage degradation in the TMJ. This evidence supports the presence of 6 of the 28 known MMPs (ie, MMP-1, MMP-2, MMP-3, MMP-8, MMP-9, and MMP-13) in fluid or tissue samples obtained from diseased human TMJ (Fig 4).[52,59-76]

Production of MMPs by resident cell populations, especially the osteoclast, can be induced by TNF-α, IL-6, and RANKL.[60,62,64,68,77] Some MMPs are secreted

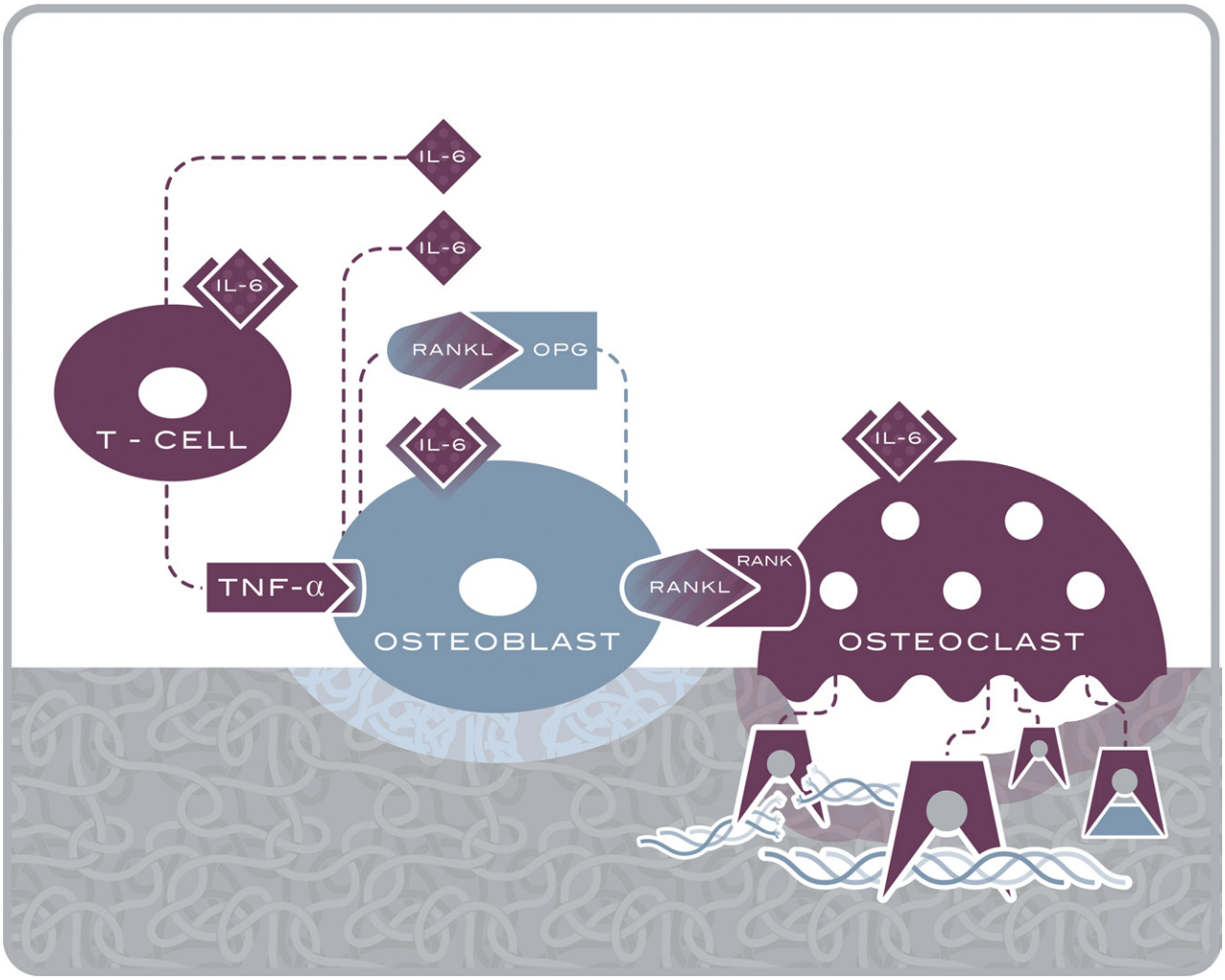

FIGURE 3. TNF-α, IL-6, and RANKL are all cytokines that activate the catabolic pathways of bone resorption (burgundy). OPG is a cytokine/receptor decoy that inhibits bone catabolism (blue) by binding to RANKL. (RANK, receptor activator nuclear factor kappa-beta.)

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by cells in inactive or latent forms and may subsequently be activated by other enzymes or by oxidation reactions initiated by free radicals.[61,66]

Under normal circumstances, the activities of active MMPs are regulated by other molecules, termed tissue inhibitors of metalloproteinases (TIMPs). TIMPs bind to active MMPs and inhibit their activity.[78] Some cases of condylar resorption result from an imbalance between the activities of MMPs and TIMPs, favoring unregulated degradation of tissue by MMPs.[74,79]

LIPID PEROXIDATION AND ARACHIDONIC ACID CATABOLISM

Phospholipids found in cell membranes provide substrates for generation of biologically active molecular species that modulate cellular activities in articular tissues of the TMJ. Arachidonic acid is formed from phospholipids by action of phospholipases. In turn, arachidonic acid is converted to prostanoids by action of cyclo-oxygenases or to leukotrienes by action of lipoxygenases. Alternatively, isoprostanes are generated from phospholipids by oxidation reactions driven by free radicals. Collectively, these phospholipid metabolites play important roles as regulators of chondrogenesis, osteogenesis, and nociception in the TMJ.[23,80,81]

Susceptibility to Condylar Resorption

A number of factors are believed to govern an individual's susceptibility to osseous condylar resorption. These include gender, nutritional status, genetic backdrop, patient's oral habits, and iatrogenic compression.

There is a strong female predilection for condylar resorption.[9,11,12,82-85] Recent evidence suggests that sex hormones, particularly estrogens, play an impor-

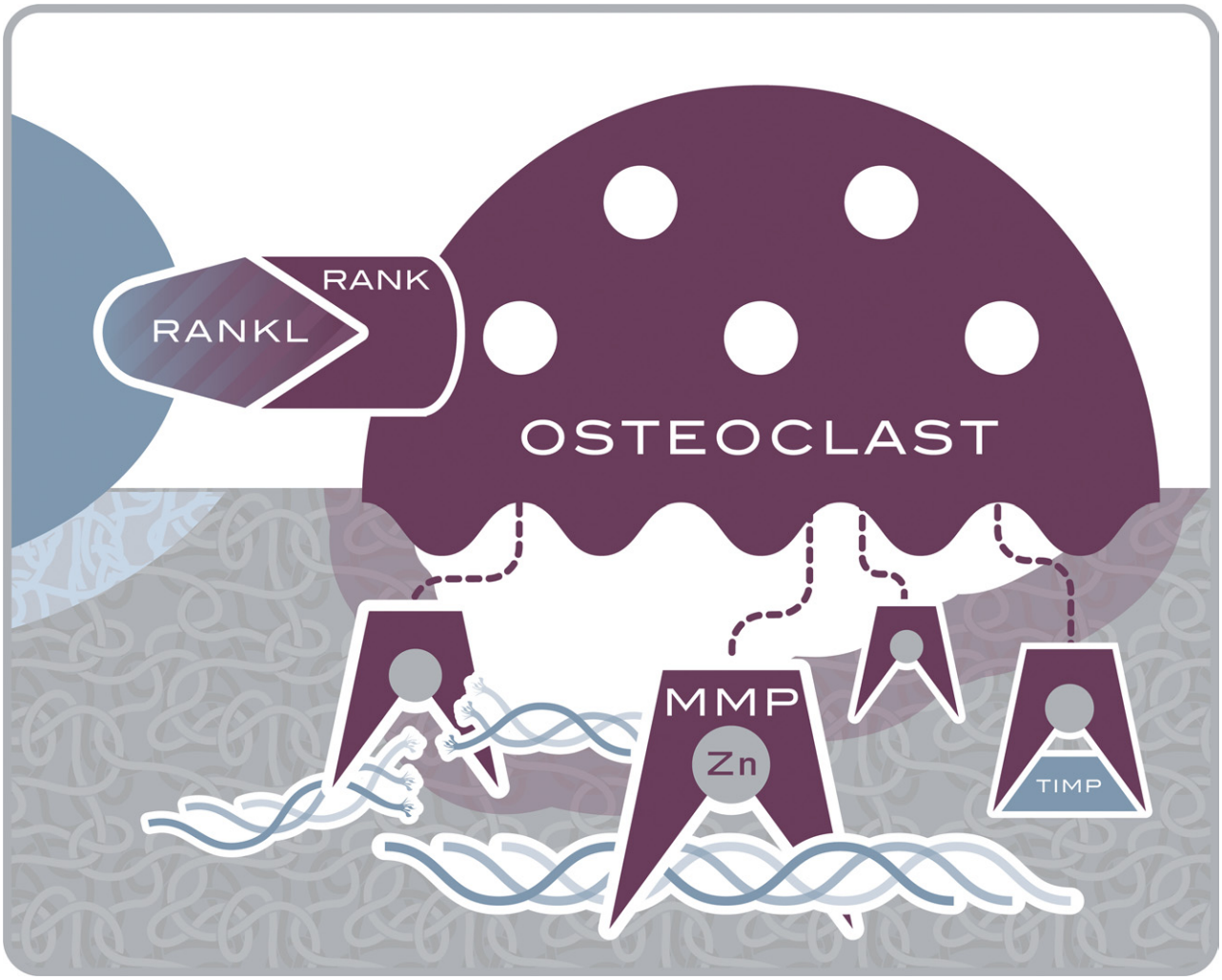

FIGURE 4. MMPs are enzymes that are secreted by local articular cells, particularly osteoclasts, which cut collagen fibers, degrading the extracellular matrix of the condyle. TIMPs control the activity of MMPs by binding them extracellularly. (Zn, zinc; RANK, receptor activator nuclear factor κ.)

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tant role in the regulation of both discal tissue and osseous and cartilage tissues.[76,86] Estrogens have strong influences on both inflammation and bone and cartilage metabolism.[87] It has been shown that 17β-estradiol has a positive effect on OPG transcription and an inhibitory effect on TNF-α liberation.[88,89] We have previously reported on the presence of estrogen imbalance in a group of female patients with severe condylar resorption.[13]

Evidence also suggests that nutritional status may be an important determinant of an individual's susceptibility to degenerative TMJ disease. For example, the dramatic effects of dietary omega-3 fatty acids on decreasing inflammation have been documented.[90] Much has also been written about the epidemic of low vitamin D levels in our society.[91] Vitamin D not only is known for its role in bone metabolism but also plays an important role in controlling inflammation in arthritis.[92-95] Therefore dietary regulations and monitoring may be important in the control of some degenerative TMJ diseases.

It is becoming increasingly clear that an individual's genetic backdrop may be a primary determinant of susceptibility to osseous changes in the TMJ. For example, MMP, vitamin D receptor, aromatase, and estrogen receptor polymorphisms appear to be associated with higher incidences of articular bone loss, including the TMJ.[96-99] Planello et al[99] reported that MMP-1 polymorphisms were more commonly seen in a large degenerative TMJ population as compared with healthy control subjects.

Bruxism and repetitive oral habits have been shown to lead to condylar bone loss.[100,101] The pathways involved are likely free radical generation through sheer stress and increased metabolic demands.[17-19]

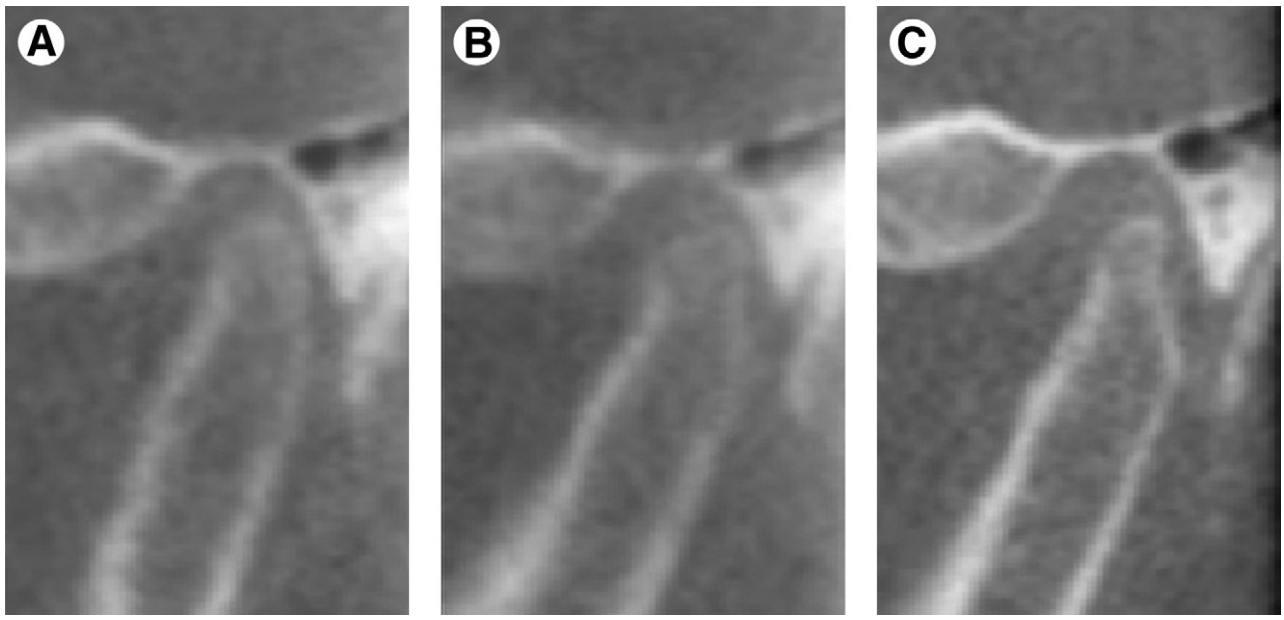

FIGURE 5. The mandibular condyle was posteriorized due to orthognathic surgery. Over several months, the compressed posterior aspect of the condyle has resorbed. The presurgical sagittal tomogram (A), the tomogram obtained 13 days after orthognathic surgery (B), and the tomogram obtained 1 year after orthognathic surgery (C) are shown. This represents one of many possible iatrogenic mechanisms for condylar resorption.

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Finally, we must recognize the clinician's role in producing condylar change through compression. Whether through gross displacement during orthognathic surgery, intermaxillary fixation, improper occlusal splint fabrication, or other means, displacement of the condyle into compressive contact appears to cause activation of the previously mentioned pathologic pathways and osseous condylar resorption (Fig 5).[1-8,102-105]

Pharmacologic Regulation of Pathogenic Mechanisms

FREE RADICAL SEQUESTERING OF ANTIOXIDANTS

As previously mentioned, free radicals may be produced by a variety of mechanisms and are believed to be involved in initiation of condylar resorption in susceptible individuals. It is known, as well, that patients who have inflammatory arthritides have consistently low antioxidant levels.[106] Under normal conditions, free radicals are regulated by free radical scavengers, some of which are also known as antioxidants. Studies have provided evidence that dietary supplementation with antioxidants may have beneficial effects on bony erosions in the management of some inflammatory arthritides, as well as osteoarthritis.[107-120]

CYTOKINE CONTROL

In the arthritis literature, cytokines have emerged as the master controllers of hard tissue degradation in human joint tissues in both osteoarthritis and inflammatory arthritis models. TNF-α, for example, has an immensely negative effect on bone and cartilage through the following pathways: MMP transcription and IL-6–mediated induction of osteoclast progenitor differentiation and osteoclast activity. It is no wonder then that cytokine inhibitor development is so competitively intense. The US Food and Drug Administration has approved 5 agents for treating inflammatory arthritis through TNF-α blockade: etanercept, infliximab, adalimumab, certolizumab, and golimumab. TNF-α inhibitors are the most promising pharmacologic intervention for the control of articular bone loss and erosions and the only cytokine inhibitors for which TMJ studies are available (Fig 6).

There are several studies that show arrestment and even healing of arthritic erosions after patients had been treated with TNF-α inhibitors.[121-123] Døhn et al[122] showed with MRI that etanercept prevented joint surface erosion progression even in the presence of capsular swelling. There are few TNF-α inhibitor studies with regard to TMJ erosions and inflammation. Moen et al[124] showed a decrease in TMJ joint pain and muscle pain and an increase in range of motion in rheumatoid arthritis patients taking infliximab. Finally, a report on using intra-articular injections of a TNF-α inhibitor to stop inflammatory joint erosions in the TMJ was recently published.[125] This would be a promising treatment because the local intracapsular injection could minimize systemic side effects.

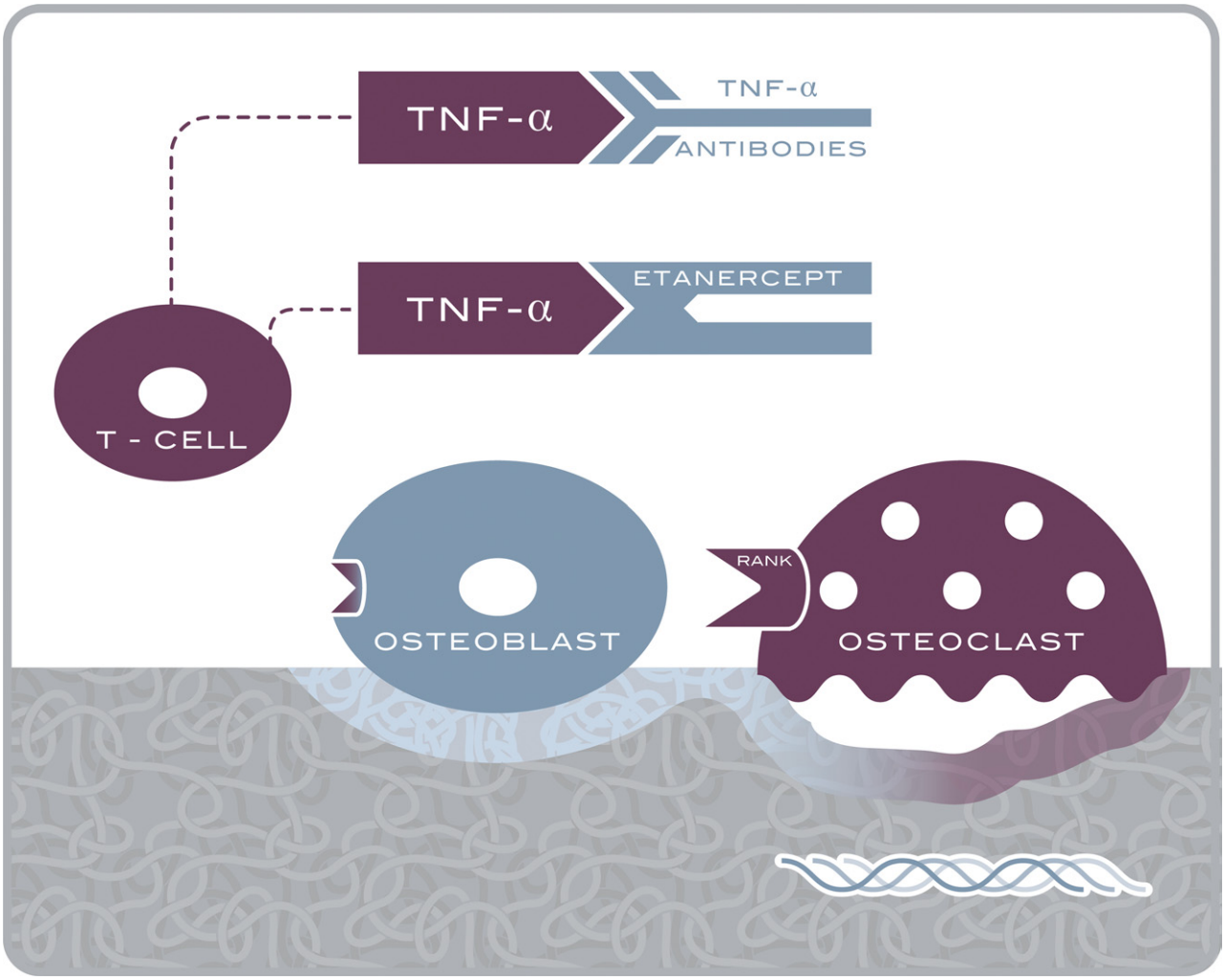

FIGURE 6. Two TNF-α inhibitor types are represented. Etanercept is a soluble receptor analog that binds TNF-α. Infliximab, adalimumab, certolizumab, and golimumab are all monoclonal antibodies to the cytokine TNF-α. (RANK, receptor activator nuclear factor κ.)

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The systemic dosing for etanercept in patients with condylar resorption due to inflammatory arthritis is a 50-mg subcutaneous injection per week. Adalimumab is dosed at 40 mg through 1 subcutaneous injection every 2 weeks. Patients should be monitored closely because the side effect profile of TNF-α inhibitors is not innocuous. Before starting a TNF-α inhibitor, the patient should be screened for tuberculosis and free from active infectious processes. The most common side effect is injection-site reactions. Although it is reported that there can be a worsening or reactivation of infections, this was equal to untreated control subjects with rheumatoid arthritis. The most ominous side effects are the development of demyelinating diseases (<0.1%), lymphoma (0.05 cases per 100 patient-years), and leukemia (0.3 cases per 100 patient-years).[126] These medications are quite costly, and in the patient with inflammatory arthritis, they require constant administration to prevent relapse.

MMP INACTIVATION BY TETRACYCLINES

Tetracyclines inhibit the actions of MMPs by chelating zinc and by regulating MMP gene expression. Periodontists were among the first researchers to explain these mechanisms by using the periodontal disease model. As explained previously, MMPs need zinc to actively cleave collagen proteins. Tetracyclines bind divalent ions, such as zinc. By reducing the amount of free zinc in tissues, tetracyclines reduce the number of MMPs available.[127] In addition, tetracyclines bind to the MMP itself, which causes a conformational change in the enzyme, inactivating it.[128] Tetracyclines also decrease the transcription of MMPs by blocking both the protein kinase C and the calmodulin pathways.[129,130]

Tetracyclines also prevent the liberation of cytokines IL-6 and TNF-α, which in turn diminishes the differentiation of osteoclast progenitor cells and

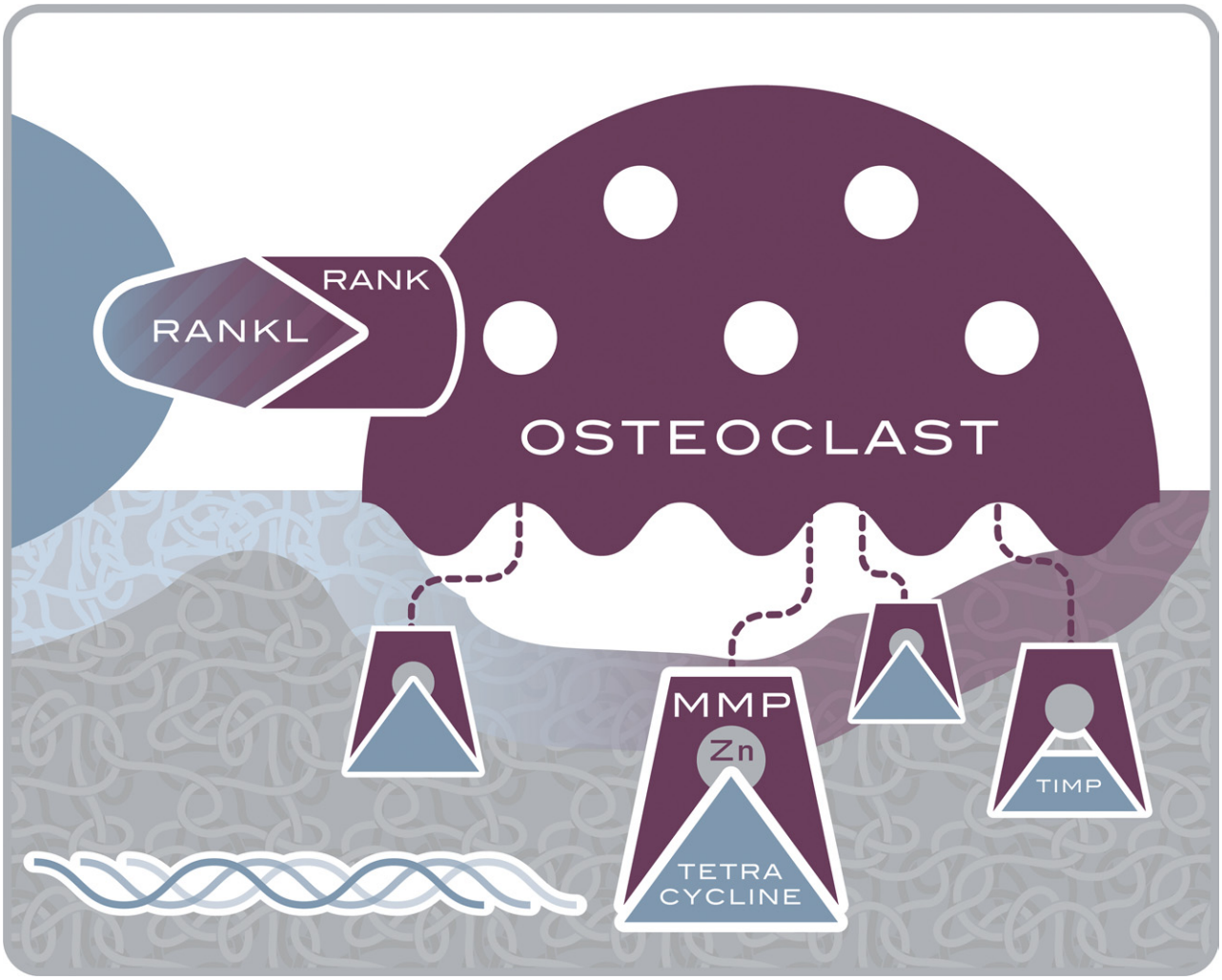

FIGURE 7. Doxycycline decreases MMP activity in several ways. It decreases the liberation of osteoclast-stimulating cytokines TNF-α, IL-6, and interleukin 1β; it binds zinc (Zn), making it unavailable for MMP transcription; and it also binds directly to the MMP, preventing the enzyme's ability to destroy extracellular matrix (collagen fibers). (RANK, receptor activator nuclear factor κ.)

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osteoclast resorptive activity.[131-136] Finally, tetracyclines promote the programmed cell death (apoptosis) of osteoclasts.[137,138] All these actions result in a decrease of bone and cartilage loss due to decreased osteoclast activity when tetracyclines are present (Fig 7).

It is obvious that the literature shows that tetracyclines exert control over MMP transcription and activity and regulate osteoclast activity as well. The clinical evidence supporting the use of tetracyclines to protect articular bone and cartilage from arthritic inflammation is promising.

Tetracyclines have been successfully used to diminish bone erosions in patients with rheumatoid arthritis. A meta-analysis of 10 clinical trials that used tetracycline for rheumatoid arthritis showed significant improvement in disease activity with no side effects.[139] In a single blinded controlled study, doxycycline was shown to be as good as methotrexate in treating rheumatoid arthritis.[140] Brandt et al[141] showed that doxycycline limited erosion progression in the osteoarthritis model as well. Other clinical trials show a clinically measurable reduction in MMP-8 and inflammatory cytokine levels.[142,143] Israel et al[144] reported that doxycycline administered at a dose of 50 mg twice daily for 3 months significantly suppressed MMP activity in patients diagnosed with advanced osteoarthritis of the TMJ.

Adverse effects of tetracyclines are well known. They include gastrointestinal symptoms (ie, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, esophageal ulcers, and *Candida* superinfection), photosensitivity, vestibular toxicity with vertigo and tinnitus, decreased bone growth in children, and discoloration of teeth if administered during tooth development. Tetracyclines may also reduce the effectiveness of oral contraceptives, po-

tentiate lithium toxicity, increase digoxin availability and toxicity, and decrease prothrombin activity.

INHIBITION OF PROSTANOIDS AND LEUKOTRIENES BY OMEGA-3 FATTY ACIDS

Over the past 2 decades, evidence has emerged suggesting that dietary modifications can influence prostanoids and leukotriene synthesis. Omega-3 fatty acids found in fish oils are incorporated in cell membranes after ingestion. These fatty acids provide substrates (eg, eicosapentaenoic acid and docosahexaenoic acid) that yield novel prostanoids and leukotrienes by actions of cyclooxygenases and lipoxygenases. In some instances, it appears that these novel prostanoid and leukotriene species either are less potent with respect to inflammatory properties or are anti-inflammatory in nature.[145] Thus dietary supplementation with omega-3 fatty acids may reduce inflammation (pain, swelling, edema) by enhanced production of prostanoids and leukotrienes that do not evoke strong inflammatory responses.[146]

Randomized clinical trials examining the effects of dietary supplementation with omega-3 fatty acids in rheumatoid arthritis patients have shown beneficial effects.[147-149] These beneficial effects are produced when plasma phospholipid eicosapentaenoic acid content exceeds 3.2% of total fatty acid levels. This may be produced by daily intake of 2.6 to 7.1 g of omega-3 fatty acids. It should be noted that the beneficial effects of omega-3 fatty acids are rapidly reversed with withdrawal of dietary intake. Omega-3 fatty acids potentiate anticoagulants and could prolong bleeding times.

INHIBITION OF PROSTANOIDS AND LEUKOTRIENE PRODUCTION BY CYCLOOXYGENASE AND LIPOXYGENASE INHIBITORS

The pharmacology of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs is complex. Contrary to popular belief, some nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs can exert a multitude of biologic effects beyond cyclooxygenase or lipoxygenase inhibition. Other known effects produced by some nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs include uncoupling mitochondrial oxidative phosphorylation, activation of cyclic adenosine monophosphate–dependent phosphokinase A, inhibition of interleukin-1 and interleukin-1 receptor synthesis, free radical scavenging, and inhibition of MMPs.[150,151] Through these multiple biologic effects, it is now known that nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs protect bone and cartilage from breakdown and relieve pain and effusion.[152,153] In addition, some nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs appear to stimulate cartilage matrix synthesis (eg, tolmetin and tenidap), whereas others may inhibit cartilage matrix synthesis (eg, ibuprofen, naproxen, and indomethacin) or have neutral effects on cartilage matrix synthesis (eg, piroxicam and aspirin).[154,155]

When TMJ inflammation is suspected (eg, joint effusion, slight posterior open bite with localized preauricular pain, and rapidly progressive condylar resorption), then initiation of a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug therapy should be considered. On the basis of current information, 20 mg of piroxicam daily is appropriate unless contraindicated.

Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs should be avoided in patients with known drug hypersensitivity, some gastrointestinal disorders, renal dysfunction, or bleeding disorders. During therapy, patients should be monitored for side effects including gastrointestinal distress, renal dysfunction, bronchospasm, thrombocytopenia, and Stevens-Johnson syndrome/erythema multiforme–like syndrome. Potential drug interactions with nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs include renal toxicity with angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitors and acetaminophen and gastrointestinal bleeding with selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors. Bleeding risk is increased because of platelet inhibition.

Future Directions

STATINS

A plethora of studies shows that 3-hydroxy-3-methyl-glutaryl–coenzyme A reductase inhibitors or statins reduce the risk of myocardial infarction by lowering cholesterol levels and through anti-inflammatory mechanisms. The discovery that statins control inflammatory pathways separate from their cholesterol level–lowering mechanisms led to numerous other studies in the fields of autoimmune disease, arthritis, and tissue injury. In all these areas statins have shown significant promise as anti-inflammatory agents.[156-160]

Statins seem to modulate T-cell cytokine and MMP production in the articular model.[158,161-163] The ability of statins to reduce MMP and inflammatory cytokine activity might imply a role for 3-hydroxy-3-methylglutaryl–coenzyme A reductase inhibitors to control condylar resorption.

Although no research has been performed regarding the effect of statins on TMJ arthritides, 2 studies have evaluated the effect of statins on arthritis.[164,165] The controlled trial of McCarey et al[165] showed decreases in disease activity scores, C-reactive protein levels, and swollen joint counts greater than placebo in patients with rheumatoid arthritis taking atorvastatin.

The side effect profile of statins is low and often equal to placebo. The most important side effects, however, are liver dysfunction and muscular symptoms related to rhabdomyolysis.

FIGURE 8. An 18-year-old woman who had severe condylar resorption due to inflammatory arthritis. She was prescribed doxycycline, omega-3 fatty acids, and etanercept before and immediately after orthognathic surgery. Her condylar resorption remitted and her occlusion was stable at 29 months after surgery. Facial photos before orthognathic surgery and 29 months after orthognathic surgery (A), occlusal photos (B), condylar photos (C), and the cephalometric treatment plan (D) are shown. (**Figure 8 continued on next page.**)

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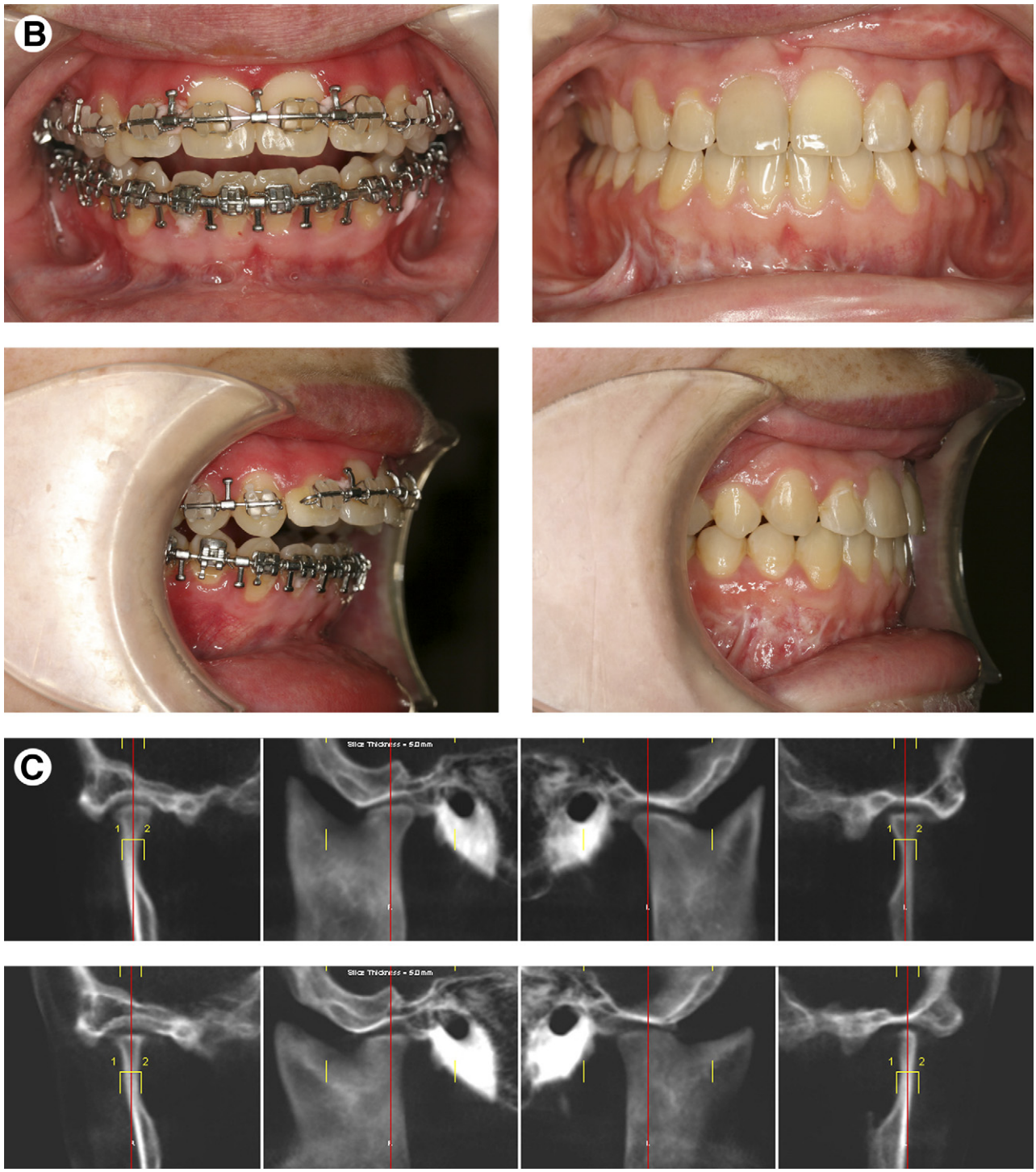

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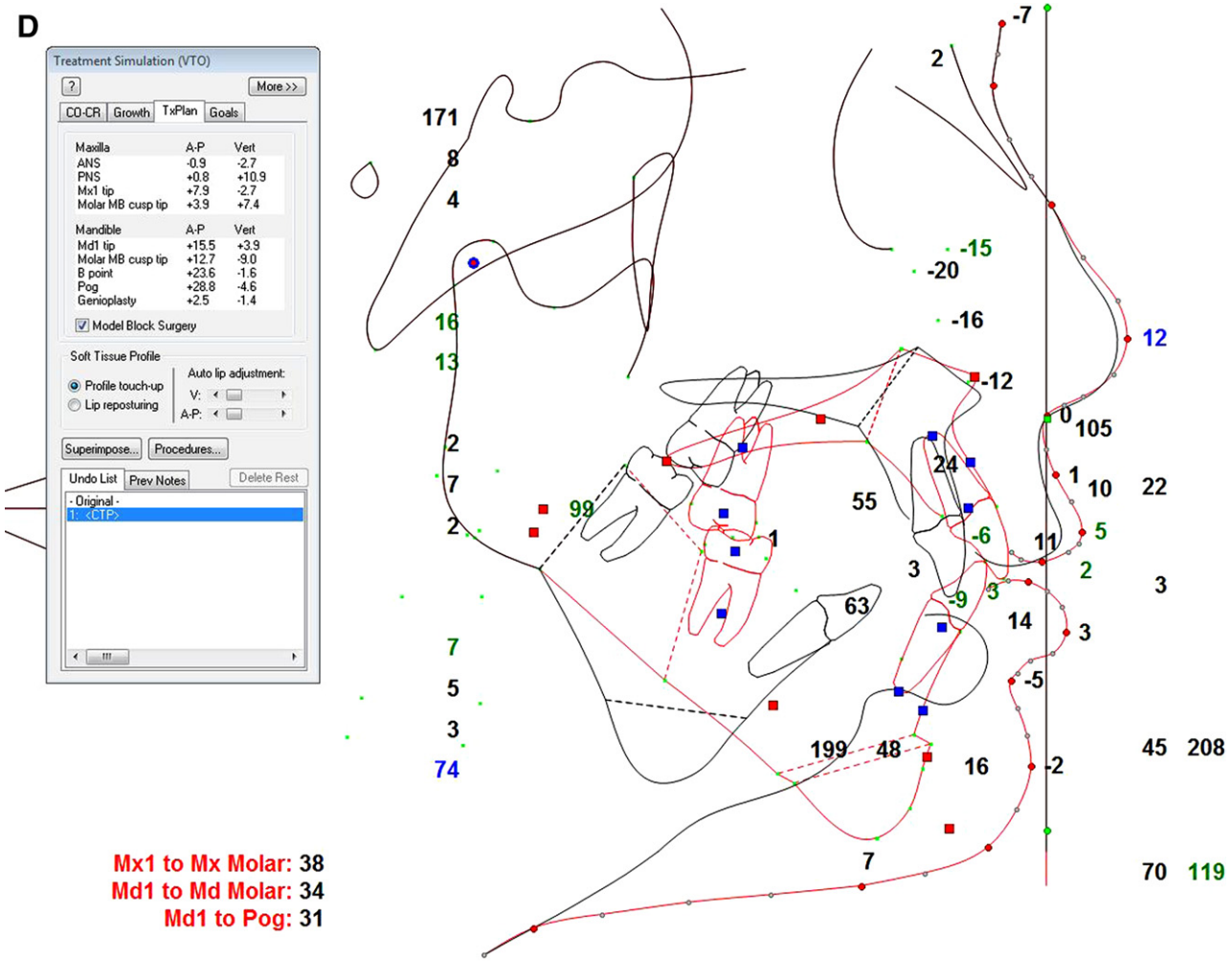
Obviously, further study is necessary with randomized placebo-controlled trials to evaluate the effect of statins on joint arthritides.

RANKL INHIBITOR

OPG has positive effects on bone preservation by blocking RANKL activation of osteoclast differentiation and osteoclast resorption activity. With this understanding, a human monoclonal antibody was developed that binds to RANKL in much the same way that OPG does. In phase 2 trials, denosumab was shown not only to prevent rheumatoid arthritis articular erosions on MRI but also to maintain bone mineral density in those who were treated compared



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with control subjects.[166] There are, however, reports that denosumab risks causing oral osteonecrosis much like bisphosphonate therapy does.[167,168] Denosumab is administered intravenously. There are no TMJ studies available at present.

IL-6 RECEPTOR INHIBITOR

IL-6 promotes osteoclastogenesis and activation of osteoclast bone resorption. An IL-6 receptor monoclonal antibody was developed that prevents the binding of IL-6 to its receptor. There are 4 published clinical trials using tocilizumab, all of which show prevention of erosions with a low side effect profile.[169-172] Like denosumab, tocilizumab is administered intravenously, and no TMJ studies have been performed.

OTHER BIOLOGIC AGENTS

There are many other biologic agents in clinical trials that appear to have a significant positive effect on articular bone loss. Rituximab is a monoclonal antibody against the CD20 protein on the surface of B cells. Blockage of the CD20 protein has shown improvement in bony erosions in refractory rheumatoid arthritis patients.[173] Abatacept is a fusion protein directed at cytotoxic T-lymphocyte antigen 4 (CTLA-4) and as such inhibits costimulation of T cells. Abatacept reduces TNF-α release and has improved symptoms in psoriatic arthritis patients.[174]

In conclusion, when patients present with bone loss at the mandibular condyle, clinicians have long been resigned to 2 choices: watch and wait or perform surgical resection and reconstruction with their resulting disability and deformity. By understanding the known pathways that lead to condylar resorption and the individual patient's susceptibilities, targeted pharmacotherapy might be able to disturb these pathways and prevent further condylar resorption. If such stability is achievable, the surgeon can then, through orthognathic surgery, restore facial esthet-

ics, airway patency, and occlusal harmony without the risk of further degradation or invasive condylar surgery (Fig 8). Basic clinical investigations and randomized clinical trials are still required, but the present science is encouraging.

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