

Geniohyoid Muscle: Anatomy and Clinical Implications in Dentistry

Músculo Geniohioideo: Anatomía e Implicaciones Clínicas en Odontología

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SUMMARY: The geniohyoid muscle is one of the suprahyoid muscles, and arises from the inferior mental spine and inserts into the hyoid bone. The muscle is a narrow paired one and its main action is pulling the hyoid upward and forward. Its function is very important in deglutition as well as respiration. Therefore, this muscle has been extensively researched, especially in the context of dysphagia and sleep apnea. This review deals with the general anatomic features, main functions, and abnormal states of the geniohyoid muscle, and the clinical implications of these.

KEY WORDS: Geniohyoid muscle; Anatomy; Suprahyoid muscle; Obstructive sleep apnea.

INTRODUCTION

The “genio-“ means the chin. The geniohyoid is a narrow paired muscle and is one of the four suprahyoid muscles: the digastric, the mylohyoid, the stylohyoid, and the geniohyoid. The muscle lies above the mylohyoid on the medial side in contact with its opposite partner. Occasionally it is not separated as a paired muscle but is contiguous as a single muscle. It may also be fused with the genioglossus, an extrinsic muscle of the tongue. The root of the tongue is in contact with the geniohyoid and the mylohyoid (Gervasio *et al.*, 2011). Like other jaw-opening muscles, it has an architecture to be designed for velocity and displacement rather than force production (Van Eijden *et al.*, 1997). In addition, it is composed predominantly of fibers expressing myosin heavy chain type IIA (Korfage *et al.*, 2000; Luo *et al.*, 2014). In this review, the anatomic features of the geniohyoid are summarized. Functions and malfunctions of this muscle will be discussed, with a focus on swallowing and respiration. Finally, the clinical implications of dysfunction of this muscle will be covered.

General Anatomy

Origin, insertion, and direction. The origin of the muscle is the inferior mental spine. The mental spine is a small bony

projection on the back of the mandible around the midline. Usually four spines exist, two superior and two inferior. They are sometimes referred to collectively as the genial tubercle (Standing, 2016). The superior ones are the origin of the genioglossus. The geniohyoid is generally inserted into the anterior portion of the hyoid bone body, but occasionally slips to the greater horn of the hyoid bone. The attachment type of the geniohyoid to the hyoid bone is known to be very diverse (Sonoda & Tamatsu, 2008). The direction from origin to insertion is slightly downward and backward. Interestingly, the geniohyoid of Neanderthals had a horizontal orientation rather than an inclined orientation (Fig. 1) (Barney *et al.*, 2012).

Arterial supply and innervation. The geniohyoid is supplied with arterial blood, mainly by the sublingual branch of the lingual artery. Primary innervation is by first cervical nerve fibers running through the hypoglossal nerve, which are called the ansa cervicalis (Banneheka, 2008).

Embryologic development. At the 7th week of gestation, the neuromuscular spindles of the geniohyoid are laid down. Differentiation starts at the 9th week, and the development of the spindle as a definitive structure is complete at the

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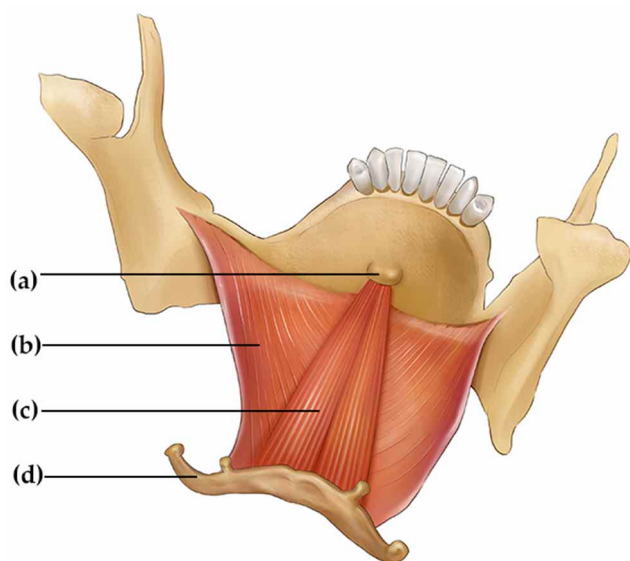


Fig. 1. Geniohyoid muscle and neighboring structures. (a) genial tubercle, (b) mylohyoid muscle, (c) geniohyoid muscle, (d) hyoid bone.

20th week (Mitchenok, 1979). The geniohyoid muscle was reported to be visible on the medial surface of Meckel's cartilage at week 16 of development (Wyganowska-Swiatkowska *et al.*, 2012).

The diameter of the muscle fibers of the geniohyoid inserted into the symphysis menti increases from the 24th week (Kurihara & Sato, 2004).

The geniohyoid appears to be associated with mandibular development. During palatal development, geniohyoid activity has been suggested to retract and widen the mandible (Kjaer, 1997). In an animal study, shortening of the geniohyoid resulted in a notable change in the mandible (Davis *et al.*, 1981).

Functions. Contraction of the geniohyoid draws the hyoid bone forward and upwards and causes it to act as an antagonist to the stylohyoid in part. In fact, the geniohyoid has the biggest potential to displace the hyoid forward according to a physiological cross-sectional area measurement study. (Pearson Jr. *et al.*, 2011) This movement involving the anterior digastric and mylohyoid is important during the first act of swallowing. During swallowing, the mouth floor and the anterior two-thirds of the tongue are elevated by coordinated contraction of the suprahyoid muscle group. The effectiveness of elevation is maximized when the muscles contract against a fixed mandible (Standring, 2016). When the hyoid is fixed by other muscles, such as the infrahyoid muscles, the movements can depress the mandible. In addition, contraction of the muscle causes

dilatation of the upper airway, which assists respiration (Brouillette & Thach, 1979; Konrad *et al.*, 1984; Takahashi *et al.*, 2002). Therefore, the role of the geniohyoid in respiration as well as deglutition has been studied extensively using diverse tools (van de Graaff *et al.*, 1984; Guillemineault *et al.*, 1997; Pearson Jr. *et al.*, 2013). Interestingly, the geniohyoid also appears to be associated with vocalizations (Sapir *et al.*, 1981). According to an electromyographic study, there is geniohyoid activity during opening, closing, lateral movement, and protraction of the jaw, as well as swallowing and protraction of the tongue (Vitti & Basmajian, 1977).

Deglutition. Swallowing is a sophisticated movement that requires coordination among muscles. The geniohyoid is a key component of hyoid forward movement according to a computed tomography study (Okada *et al.*, 2013). Unsurprisingly, the role of the geniohyoid in deglutition has been studied extensively using diverse methodologies (Palmer *et al.*, 1999). The tongue compresses and squeezes the bolus against the palate into the pharynx prior to swallowing. Protraction of the tongue is produced by contraction of the geniohyoid and anterior belly of the digastric. Their synchronous contraction was confirmed in a fine wire EMG study (Inokuchi *et al.*, 2014). This usually occurs during the intercuspal and opening phases of the mandible (Palmer *et al.*, 1992). However, activation and coordination patterns are known to differ among individuals (Spiro *et al.*, 1994). Generally, the geniohyoid shows age-related muscle atrophy (Feng *et al.*, 2013; Wakabayashi, 2014). This atrophy is known to entail structural changes at the molecular level (Kaneko *et al.*, 2014).

Electromyography has been popularly used in this research field on diverse topics (Palmer *et al.*, 2008; Inokuchi *et al.*, 2016). In EMG studies, the type and volume of food demonstrated to affect the pattern of geniohyoid activity (Dantas & Dodds, 1990). During the deglutition process, geniohyoid action is not initiated with the genioglossus, but rather lags behind and its working time is short compared to the genioglossus. Both muscles remain active during and after the stage when the food bolus stays in the laryngopharynx (Cunningham & Basmajian, 1969). In patients with a cleft lip and palate, the thyrohyoid muscle appears to compensate for weakness of the geniohyoid and the mylohyoid during swallowing (Nagaoka & Tanne, 2007).

In a high-resolution diffusion tensor imaging study, expansive strain of the geniohyoid was combined with compressive strain of the genioglossus during swallowing (Felton *et al.*, 2008). Swallowing function evaluation using a photo sensor was introduced by Kurihara *et al.* (2010) as a noninvasive technology for deglutition studies. Ultrasonography is another widely used tool for deglutition

research. Geniohyoid muscle size is correlated with displacement of the hyoid bone (Feng *et al.*, 2015). Ultrasonographic evaluation of the geniohyoid during swallowing demonstrated that average movement of the muscle increased gradually with age in healthy adults (Yabunaka *et al.*, 2012).

Dysphagia. There are many types of dysphagia with different etiologies (Wakabayashi, 2014). Aging-related geniohyoid atrophy has been suggested to be a cause of dysphagia (Feng *et al.*, 2013) and have an impact on post-stroke swallowing disorder (Sporns *et al.*, 2017). Removal of the geniohyoid in patients with oral cancer was significantly related to complications resulting in poor swallowing (Hirano *et al.*, 1992). Geniohyoid muscle volumes have also been investigated in head and neck cancer patients (Watkin *et al.*, 2001). High radiation dose has been found to be closely related to complications associated with dysfunction of the swallowing muscles, especially the geniohyoid (Kumar *et al.*, 2014; Starmer *et al.*, 2015). Duchenne muscular atrophy is also associated with dysphagia and limited mandibular motion, including motion of the geniohyoid (van den Engel-Hoek *et al.*, 2013; van Bruggen *et al.*, 2015).

Shortening of the geniohyoid has been reported to be associated with failed relaxation of the upper esophageal sphincter in patients with neurogenic dysphagia (Williams *et al.*, 2002). A sour food bolus was suggested as a stimulatory treatment modality for dysphagia, and resulted in greater EMG activity of the geniohyoid and other swallowing muscles (Palmer *et al.*, 2005). Electrical stimulation of the neuromuscular system has also been suggested for dysphagia treatment (Toyama *et al.*, 2014). The feasibility of exercise treatment, especially in cancer patients, has also been investigated (Watts, 2013; Hughes & Watts, 2016).

Respiration. Change in breathing mode or body position did not affect the geniohyoid, but did affect the genioglossus in an EMG study. In addition, the geniohyoid showed greater involvement in jaw opening and a shorter latency than the genioglossus (Takahashi *et al.*, 2002). Magnetic resonance imaging showed that inspiratory loading activates the geniohyoid (How *et al.*, 2007). A recent single motor unit EMG study demonstrated that the geniohyoid has only minimal activity during quiet breathing of a healthy subject (Brown *et al.*, 2011).

The geniohyoid is a muscle commonly investigated in anesthesiology in cases of residual paralysis after administration of neuromuscular blocking agents (D'Honneur *et al.*, 1995, 1996). The geniohyoid has also been investigated with regard to postoperative obstructive apnea during recovery from general anesthesia (D'Honneur *et al.*, 1999).

Neuromuscular changes or adaptations of the geniohyoid are known to be induced by nasal airway obstruction or altered oral sensations (Miller *et al.*, 1984, 1985). The neoglottis created after a laryngectomy seems to be opened by the geniohyoid and closed by the inferior constrictor pharyngeus (Nishizawa *et al.*, 2001). The neoglottis acts as an airway orifice as well as a digestive tract orifice.

Airway obstruction: obstructive sleep apnea. The obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) is characterized by repetitive symptoms of partial (shallow breathing) or complete apnea during sleep (Yu *et al.*, 2017). Since brief arousal breaks the state of hypoxia or hypercarbia, patients usually suffer from fragmented and disturbed sleep (Olaithe *et al.*, 2018). Generally, the position of hyoid bone is known to be associated with occurrence of OSA (Riha *et al.*, 2005; Sakamoto *et al.*, 2016). The dilator muscles of the upper airway have been proposed to be closely associated with obstructive sleep apnea. Reduction of geniohyoid muscle activity during sleep can cause pharyngeal airway collapse, though the relationship is complex and varies from individual to individual (Wiegand *et al.*, 1990a,b). The dilatory effect of the geniohyoid and other upper airway muscles has been studied in awake humans by electrical stimulation (Schnall *et al.*, 1995). Interestingly, the geniohyoid showed a high fatigue index in severe hypoxia though the muscle maintained its force output in mild hypoxia (Salmon & van Lunteren, 1991).

Magnetic resonance imaging has been used to measure geniohyoid muscle length for OSA diagnosis and research (Cosentini *et al.*, 2004). In an MRI study, increased edema and fat content of the muscles has been suggested to be a pathogenetic cause of OSA (Schotland *et al.*, 1996). The thickness of the geniohyoid was investigated in a submental ultrasonographic study of patients with OSA (Bilici *et al.*, 2017). Mandibular advancement devices have an activating effect on the awake geniohyoid muscle (Johal *et al.*, 2007). Modified mortised genioplasty was described for the treatment of OSA to maximize advancement of the geniohyoid (Hendler *et al.*, 2001). Electromyostimulation therapy was reported to be effective, suggesting it can be used as a long-term or interval therapy (Ludwig, 2008). Hypoglossal nerve neurostimulation also showed promising results for the treatment of OSA, and a topographical map was suggested (Bassiri Gharb *et al.*, 2015).

Voice. Because the geniohyoid is closely associated with respiration, it also plays a role in voice production by lowering or raising the larynx. The muscle assists the cricothyroid muscle in maximum elevation of the fundamental frequency of the voice (Sapir *et al.*, 1981). In patients with occupational dysphonia, osteopathic myofascial

techniques have been found to affect the geniohyoid, resulting in lowering of the tonus (Marszałek *et al.*, 2012).

Clinical implications

Surgery. When fracture occurs at the anterior region of the mandible, the fragments can be displaced by the elevator muscles, which can be counteracted simultaneously by the geniohyoid and digastric anterior muscle. The chance of including the geniohyoid was found to be relatively small during anterior submandibular subapical osteotomy in a cadaver study, while the genioglossus can be included with a large chance when the osteotomy is extended up to the canine region (Zhang *et al.*, 1988). An inferior horizontal bone cut of approximately 5 mm and 11 mm above the menton was suggested for simultaneous advancement of the geniohyoid and genioglossus, and advancement of the genioglossus alone, respectively (Yi *et al.*, 2004). A specially designed trephine system for genial bone advancement with a 78 % chance of capturing the geniohyoid was introduced (Hennessee & Miller, 2005). Generally, advancement of the geniohyoid and the anterior belly of the digastric muscle can produce the greatest amount of hyoid bone advancement (Kutzner *et al.*, 2017). Several modifications have been reported for more accurate and reliable positioning (Merrick *et al.*, 2007).

Meanwhile, paramedian mandibulotomy has been reported to have the advantage over median mandibulotomy that it minimizes osteotomy-related complications of the geniohyoid in oropharyngeal tumor resection and thus is more function-reserving (Dubner & Spiro, 1991; Pan *et al.*, 2003; Dai *et al.*, 2003; Apinhasmit *et al.*, 2007) In fact, the geniohyoid is a frequently resected structure in oral cancer surgery to avoid recurrence (Steinhart & Kleinsasser, 1993).

Along with the digastric and mylohyoid, transection of the geniohyoid is considered for surgical correction of dysmorphic neck (Guyuron, 1992). Intramuscular hemangioma of the geniohyoid was once reported (Harar *et al.*, 1997).

Cysts in the floor of the mouth. Dermoid cysts are developmental teratomas of a cystic nature that are believed to develop from epithelial debris enslavement in the midline region. There have been several case reports of midline dermoid cysts in the geniohyoid showing various features (Armstrong *et al.*, 2006; Ikeda *et al.*, 2007). Sometimes, these cysts contain hair (Jadwani *et al.*, 2009). Intraoral surgical approach usually leads to better cosmetic and functional results, whereas an extraoral approach is necessary when the cyst exists under the geniohyoid (Longo

et al., 2003). Interestingly, epidermoid cysts and thyroglossal duct cysts of the geniohyoid have also been reported, which are different entities to dermoid cysts (Tsirevelou *et al.*, 2009; Sarmiento *et al.*, 2013; Mirza *et al.*, 2014; Utumi *et al.*, 2016) Interestingly, Kutaya gave the opinion that ultrasonography is more useful for preoperative diagnosis of dermoid cysts than MRI or computed tomography (Kutuya, 2009).

Miscellaneous. Use of botulinum toxin can lead to short-term muscular activity correction and has been suggested as a prophylaxis to prevent relapse after advancement of the mandible (Umstadt, 2002). Lingual cortical fracture followed by posterior displacement was reported as a unique complication after chin bone harvesting. The fragmented bone was pedicled to the geniohyoid with the genioglossus (Cordaro *et al.*, 2004). Enlarged genial tubercles beyond the alveolar crest due to excessive resorption of the alveolar process was reported in a rare case (Jindal *et al.*, 2015).

CONCLUSIONS

The literature on the geniohyoid was extensively reviewed in this narrative paper. The thin and paired geniohyoid muscles elevate and pull forward the hyoid bone when contracted. This action plays an essential role in swallowing and respiratory mechanisms. Thus, any problems during this process can result in great discomfort, and potentially even sudden death in aged or debilitated individuals. An understanding of the anatomic and clinical characteristics of this muscle is therefore critically important. This review should serve as a helpful reference to clinicians from various fields as well as scientists.

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RESUMEN: El músculo geniohioideo es uno de los músculos suprahioideos que surge de la espina mental inferior y se inserta en el hueso hioides. Son un par de músculos delgados y su acción principal es elevar y estirar el hueso hioides hacia arriba y hacia adelante. Su función es importante tanto en la deglución como en la respiración. Por lo tanto, este músculo ha sido ampliamente investigado, especialmente en el contexto de la disfagia y la apnea del sueño. Esta revisión trata de las características anatómicas generales, funciones principales y estados anormales del músculo geniohioideo, y las implicaciones clínicas de estos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Músculo geniohioideo; Anatomía; Músculo suprahioideo; Apnea obstructiva del sueño.

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