

The Association Between the Testis Microbiota and Male Infertility

Testis Mikrobiyotasının Erkek İnfertilitesi ile İlişkisi

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, substantial findings have been reported about the effects of microbiota on human health. In our study, we aimed to compare the outcomes of microbiota assays of testicular tissue obtained by testicular sperm extraction (TESE) from 2 patients with male infertility. In the first patient who had azoospermia, Illumina sequencing detected the following bacterial flora in the collected tissue homogenates: Firmicutes (53%), Bacteroidetes (12%), Actinobacteria (12%), Proteobacteria (8%), Fusobacteria (8%), SR1 (7%), TM7-3 (3%) and OD-1 (1%). In the second patient who had oligozoospermia, Firmicutes (13%), Bacteroidetes (15%), Actinobacteria (7%) and Proteobacteria (64%) were detected in the testicular tissue. Our preliminary study confirmed that certain types of bacteria exist in testicular tissues of infertile men. Future studies with more infertile and healthy men are required to understand the importance of these microorganisms in the pathophysiology of male infertility.

Keywords: Testicular tissue, microbiota, male infertility

INTRODUCTION

The microbiota is a microorganism community operating in various parts of the human body (1). The bacterial microbiome (BM) has been described as an extracellular microenvironmental component (2). In recent years, much information has been collected about the effects of the microbiota on human health. Specifically, Alfano et al. (3) proved that the human testicle is not sterile and showed the content of microbiota in the testicular tissue. Another translational study revealed that intestinal microbiota could

ÖZ

Son yıllarda mikrobiyotanın insan sağlığı üzerindeki etkileri hakkında önemli bulgular rapor edilmiştir. Çalışmamızda erkek infertilitesi olan 2 hastadan testiküler sperm ekstraksiyonu (TESE) ile elde edilen testis dokusunun mikrobiyota analizinin sonuçlarını karşılaştırmayı amaçladık. Azospermik olan ilk hastada, toplanan doku homojenatlarında Illumina dizilemesi ile şu bakteri florasına saptandı: Firmicutes (%53), Bacteroidetes (%12), Actinobacteria (%12), Proteobacteria (%8), Fusobacteria (%8), SR1 (%7), TM7-3 (%3) ve OD-1 (%1). Oligozoospermi olan ikinci hastanın ise testis dokusunda Firmicutes (%13), Bacteroidetes (%15), Actinobacteria (%7) ve Proteobacteria (%64) bakterileri saptandı. Ön çalışmamızda, infertil erkeklerin testis dokusunda belirli bakteri türlerinin bulunduğu doğrulandı. Erkek infertilitesinin patofizyolojisinde bu mikroorganizmaların önemini anlamak için infertil ve sağlıklı erkeklerle yapılacak ileri çalışmalara ihtiyaç vardır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Testiküler doku, mikrobiyota, erkek infertilitesi

have an impact on sex hormone levels and consequently affect spermatogenesis (4).

In this preliminary study, we aimed to compare the outcomes of microbiota assays of testicular tissues obtained by testicular sperm extraction (TESE) from 2 infertile men (one with azoospermia and the other with oligozoospermia).

CASE REPORT

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Istanbul Medipol University on June 23, 2020

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(E-10840098-604.01.01-6176). Both patients provided their written informed consent. After TESE surgery, testicular tissues were homogenized and stored at -80°C. Bacterial genes were obtained using 16S rRNA primers according to a DNA isolation kit protocol (Isolation kits for QuickGene, U.S.A). Then, bacterial variations and quantities were evaluated (5,6) using next-generation sequencing. Bacterial variations were distinguished through bioinformatics.

Case-1 and result

The first patient was a 34-year-old azoospermic man and TESE was performed twice for 2 *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) procedures. Serum Follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH), Luteinizing hormone (LH) and testosterone levels were normal, and the patient had 46 XY chromosomes with a normal karyotype. There was no microdeletion according to Y chromosome scanning. Only a low sperm count could be obtained from the patient by TESE and a small amount of the testicular tissue was used in microbiota analysis. The following bacteria were detected in the tissue by Illumina analysis: Firmicutes (53%), Bacteroidetes (12%), Actinobacteria (12%), Proteobacteria (8%), Fusobacteria (8%), SR1 (7%), TM7-3 (3%) and OD-1 (1%) (Figure 1).

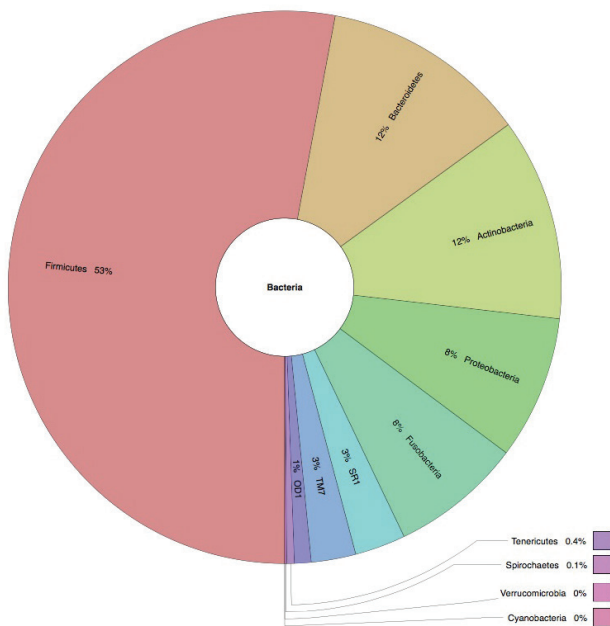


Figure 1. The precense of bacteria in the TESE microbiota of first patient.

Case-2 and result

The second patient was a 32-year-old man whose sperm concentration was 13 million/ml (total motility was 45% and sperm morphology was 6%). Testicular sperm cells were required for recurrent IVF failure. Serum FSH, LH and testosterone levels were normal, and the patient had 46 XY chromosomes and a normal karyotype. There was no microdeletion in the genetic scanning of the Y chromosome. Illumina testing revealed Firmicutes (13%), Bacteroidetes (15%), Actinobacteria (7%) and Proteobacteria (64%) (Figure 2).

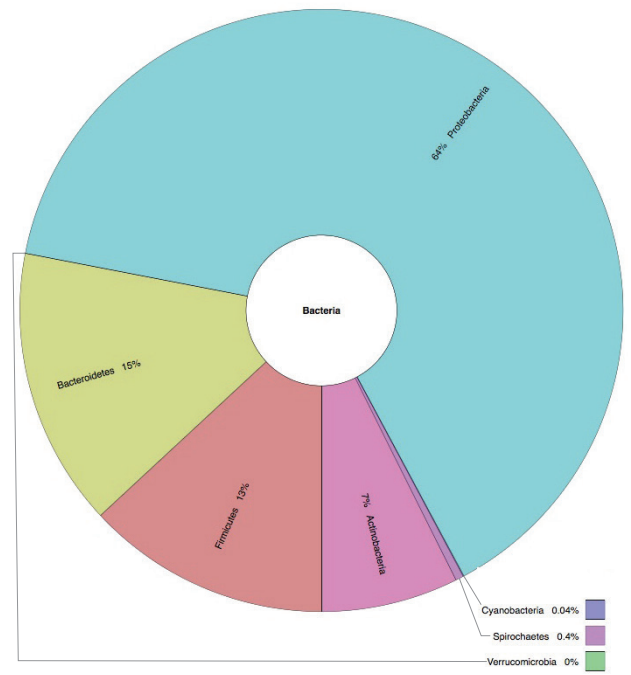


Figure 2. The precense of bacteria in the TESE microbiota of second patient.

CONCLUSION

Sperm parameters are claimed to be affected by genetic and environmental factors (7). Sperm production occurs in the testes from spermatogonia in seminiferous tubules where Sertoli cells also provide structural and immunological support (8, 9). Spermatogenesis is claimed to be affected by the extracellular microenvironment as well (10). The testicular microbiome was initially demonstrated by Alfano et al in azoospermic men (3). This pivotal study showed that human testicles are not sterile and presented new findings about the testicular microbiome. However, the variety of the microorganisms in healthy, neoplastic and non-functioning testes (i.e., in infertile cases) has not been identified yet. Within this first time context, our results involved comparative analyses that were obtained from men with azoospermia and oligozoospermia, which revealed some differences in the distribution of the microorganisms.

In our pilot study, Actinobacteria, Bacteroidetes, Firmicutes and Proteobacteria were characterized as the dominant phyla. The involvement of Firmicutes, Bacteroidetes, Actinobacteria, Proteobacteria, Fusobacteria, SR1, TM7-3 and OD-1 bacteria in the azoospermic patient showed differences in the manner of variation. The Clostridia class of Firmicutes has been associated with sperm motility (11) and morphology (12). Thus, it can be associated with impaired sperm production. Proteobacteria, on the other hand, constituted the majority of the microorganisms in the oligozoospermic patient, suggesting that this class of bacteria may be a member of testicular flora in fertile male population. These findings may contribute to revealing

the role of microbiomes on male infertility. Future studies with more infertile and healthy men are required to understand the importance of these microorganisms in the pathophysiology of male infertility.

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Ethics Committee Approval: This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Istanbul Medipol University on June 23, 2020 (E-10840098-604.01.01-6176). The two men in the study were given oral and written information about the study and ample time to consider their participation; both gave written consent. Furthermore, both men were informed about possible publication and gave written consent for their cases to be published.

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