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A corroborative study of effects of body mass index on the anatomical region of hindfoot

Obesity and hindfoot region

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Abstract

Aim: An experimental study was designed to find an anatomical correlation between the area of the hindfoot, height and weight of an individual.

Material and Methods: Medical students of preclinical years were recruited into the study and their footprints were taken on a predesigned A4-sized paper. The foot was divided by geometrical tools into three regions: forefoot, midfoot and hindfoot area. The area of the hindfoot was calculated using the specific image-J software after standardizing the metric units into pixels.

Result: Analysis through SPSS showed a strong relationship between the studied parameters.

Discussion: As per our knowledge, this is the first study defining the hindfoot surface area and correlating it with the height and weight of the individual. A strong association was found between the studies parameters that may be useful in predicting complications related to obesity in near future.

Keywords

Area, Body Mass Index, BMI; Hindfoot, Foot Arch, Obesity

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Introduction

Foot and ankle injuries are among the most severe in daily life and sports [1]. The complicated foot-ankle complex consists of 26 bones moving ground reaction forces to the lower extremity. The rear-foot is often subjected to injury and deformity due to its role in receiving and transmitting such forces to and from the rest of the body.

One of the seven articulating bones that make up the tarsus is calcaneus. The calcaneus along with the talus forms the skeleton called the hindfoot bone. The part of calcaneus that is in contact with the ground is commonly called "Heel" that articulates mainly with the talus and cuboid bones. Numerous ligaments and muscles bind themselves to the calcaneus and aid with its role in biomechanics of human bipedals. The calcaneus acts as an attachment point for a powerful tendon (Achilles tendon), which aids in standing, walking, running and jumping and the plantar flexion of the foot. The calcaneus also serves as a point of attachment for the muscles, which move the toes.

In a simplified fashion, the subtalar joint can be divided into two parts: anterior and posterior. However, it is important to note that not only the articulating surfaces of the calcaneus and the navicular bone support the talar head, but also the 'spring' ligament. This network of ligaments plays an important role in stabilizing the talar head. The insufficiency of this structure can lead to deformity of the acquired flat foot.

The size and shape of the three facets of the calcaneus differ among individuals. Both the anterior and middle facets are concave, while the posterior facets are convex [2]. The posterior facets are larger than the middle and anterior facets and are separated by the interosseous calcaneal ligament from the other two facets [3].

In the past, several studies were conducted to search for the relation between the foot structure and the body mass index (BMI). Though those researching a relationship between the individual foot areas and the index of body mass were scanty. Many of those researches indicated a certain relationship between the arches of the foot and the BMI [4].

The current paper evaluates another hypothesis that an individual's hindfoot area is directly proportional to one's body mass index in the given context information.

Material and Methods

A theoretical, quantitative and experimental analysis was planned to verify the hypothesis. The scientific proposal was submitted for approval to the Ethics Committee. The data collection began after the approval of the study. The subjects' confidentiality was thoroughly protected in the report.

The data collection included documenting the individual's weight, height and foot imprint. Any individual with any foot infection, deformity and foot injury was excluded. The rationale of the research, to investigate the relationship between the foot pattern and the structure of the body, was clarified to the volunteers. The procedure obtained verbal consent and the intention was thoroughly explained to the subjects, beforehand. An A4-sized paper with fixed measured calibrations printed was used to take the ink embossed footprints of the subjects. In addition to a space for writing the weight and height of the person, the paper had numbered square boxes of 1cm2. For recording the weight and height, respectively, an electronic weighing scale was used with the embedded stadiometer.

A customized thick foam pad was used as a stamping pad. This pad was pasted into a tray with a pasting solution and soaked with office stamp ink that is used for normal thumb impressions.

Weight was measured in kilograms at the beginning of the experiment, while height was noted in centimeters for each person. The subject's body mass index (BMI) was then measured and noted using the standard formula as shown below:

BMI = Weight (in kilograms) / Height (in square centimeters).

The subjects were asked to better soak the sole of their feet in the ink by pressing and standing barefoot on the ink-soaked foot-pad; they were then asked to step out of the foam pad and emboss their foot on the A4 size paper mentioned above. The foot ink prints thus taken, were then let to air dry on the paper. Next, the exact outline of the footprint was then delicately drawn by hand with a dark marker in the dried footprint. The long axis of each sample was drawn to standardize the alignment. The middle of the middle finger was used as a guide for this purpose. The extent of the foot area that needed to be measured has been marked using the mathematical square package. The long axis of the foot was then split into three equal regions; the perpendiculars were drawn using the same square set to outline the three regions of the foot, namely: fore-foot (F), mid-foot (M) and rear or hind-foot (R) (Figure 1).

Next, at a high resolution, these papers were scanned in color and saved as JPEG files. In the "FIJI" image software, which is an advanced version of the "ImageJ2" software, these files were opened. A fixed unit of length (3 cm) was standardized into the pixels on the opened images. The area for each divided region of the foot was measured using the free hand drawing tool of the image-J program, and the mean reading in square centimeters was registered.

Using SPSS tools, reported data were analyzed and p-values were determined by applying a single sample t-test for the variables. A p-value ≤ 0.05 was taken as a significant level of difference in the calculated results.

Results

Extrapolation of the data using SPSS showed a strong correlation between the two parameters. The calculated p -value came out to be 0.00 showing the highly significant difference between the means of the two calculated parameters. The mean BMI was closer to, but slightly above normal. The hindfoot area was found to have a low deviation from the mean and hence significant.

Table 1. One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	p-value
Hind Foot Area	49	33.2360	5.17380	.73911	≤0.05
Body Mass Index	49	27.2847	8.98068	1.28295	

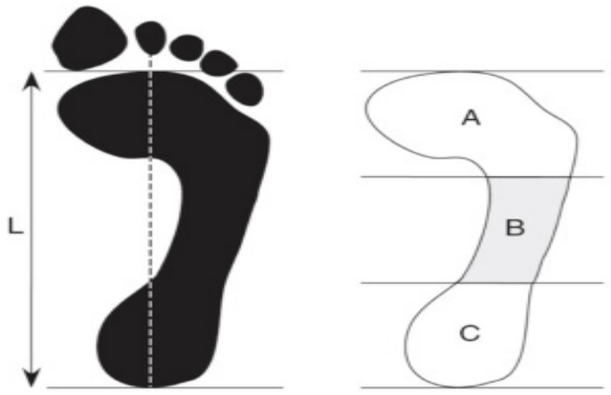


Figure 1. Footprint with reference lines for calculating the arch index. The length of the foot (excluding the toes) is divided into equal thirds to give three regions: A -- forefoot; B -- midfoot; and C – heel or Hindfoot region [5].

Discussion

Foot pain is a common complaint which affects nearly one in four adults after the age of 45 [6]. Obesity is a contributing factor in foot pain development [7], and elevated body mass index (BMI) is closely correlated with both chronic plantar heel pain and non-specific foot pain [8]. In addition, the feet of obese people are structurally and physically different from their non-obese counterparts, manifesting as thicker, broader and heavier, along with flatter-foot postures, reduced joint motion range and increased plantar peak pressures [9, 10].

This study investigated associations between weight status and normal plantar surface area among youth and specially calculated the heel region. The limitation of this study was that the number of participants was not enough.

Prosperity with the mechanization of nations brings with it a sedentary lifestyle in which the morbid person enters a cascade of obesity, contributing to, but not limited to hypertension, diabetes, etc., and many related diseases. A new class of patients has emerged in the recent past that can be termed as suffering from lifestyle diseases.

In our study, we have attempted to equate body size of the individuals with an important anatomical region of the foot skeleton. We hope that this simplest data can be converted into useful predictors of the imminent risk factors for obesity-related diseases using basic calculations. Furthermore, in this study, hindfoot surface area is investigated according to BMI to obtain data for future use in the fields of physiotherapy intervention, assistive devices, and shoes that address foot diseases.

Studies have shown that people with obesity show an increase in non-uniform plantar pressures, with midfoot and forefoot areas of highest pressure relative to non-obese people [10–12]. Provided that obesity is strongly associated with plantar heel pain [13, 14], increased plantar pressure became discordant where the pain was strongly associated with unnecessary pressure. Paradoxically, as opposed to monitors, people with chronic heel pain show reduced load under the heel [15].

Musculoskeletal pain has a bidirectional relationship with both obesity [16] and depression [17], whereas depression and obesity frequently intensify each other [18]. Such associations, however, are not restricted to weight-bearing joints with a reported association between elevated BMI and symptomatic hand osteoarthritis [19], indicating that metabolic mechanisms, including systemic inflammation [20], can underpin the relationship between obesity and joint pain [21].

The Western Pacific Regional Committee of the WHO on a new BMI for Asians identified 23kg/m2 or higher as overweight, and 25 kg/m2 or higher as obesity [22]. It is associated with increased body fat, BMI, and waist measurements, which adversely affect daily and physical activity activities [23]. The incidence of degenerative foot diseases is also growing with rising life expectancy, and diabetic foot disease is also growing with increasing numbers of patients with diabetes [24]. Plantar pressure is also assessed in patients with pain, diabetes or rheumatism to overcome foot problems [25].

In addition, several comparative studies have been performed on plantar pressure and balance in patients suffering from different diseases, but not many of them have been on foot changes in the general population. One of the drawbacks of this analysis is its modest sample size. Further future research involving more cohorts of different ages may improve reliability with a variety of outcomes.

Conclusion

The findings of this study can be used as basic evidence for exercise programs in order to increase the level of spontaneity in the obesity community by increasing the hindfoot level, or for studies on reducing foot swaying.

Clinically, our findings imply that barring progressive metabolic changes that may precipitate type II diabetes and associated neuropathy, youth with obesity. Further clinical studies on patient populations are needed to validate these conclusions, as well as to determine whether and how they can be precisely applied to different populations. Our findings could prove valuable in various areas of application. However, despite limitations, the results of this study provided preliminary information for future prospective, randomized clinical trials with larger samples. In addition, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first study defining the hindfoot surface area and correlating it with the height and weight of the individual.

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Scientific Responsibility Statement

The authors declare that they are responsible for the article's scientific content including study design, data collection, analysis and interpretation, writing, some of the main line, or all of the preparation and scientific review of the contents and approval of the final version of the article.

Animal and human rights statement

All procedures performed in this study were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. No animal or human studies were carried out by the authors for this article.

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Conflict of interest

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