
The Definition of Taper Failure in Metal-On-Metal Modular Total Hip Replacement

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The Definition of **Taper Failure** in Metal-On-Metal Modular Total Hip Replacement

Adam Hexter¹; Gordon Blunn ²; Paul Bills ³; Anna Panagiotidou ²; Ashley Matthes ¹; John A Skinner²; Alister J Hart¹

¹Department of Musculoskeletal Surgery, Imperial College London, UK; ²Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital, Stanmore, UK; ³EPSRC Centre for Innovative Manufacturing in Advanced Metrology, University of Huddersfield, UK

For further information, contact Adam Hexter: aht10@imperial.ac.uk

**Background and Aims**

Adverse soft-tissue reactions after metal-on-metal modular total hip arthroplasty are associated with increased bearing surface wear. Recent reports suggest the modular junction is a considerable source of corrosion, material loss and metal ions.

**Methods**

Corrosion was qualitatively assessed for 111 components of three different designs; the ASR XL (DePuy), the BHR (Smith and Nephew) and Durom (Zimmer) devices. A peer-reviewed qualitative grading system was used (adapted from Goldberg et al).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corrosion Severity</th>
<th>Appearance of the taper surface</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None (1)</td>
<td>No visible signs of corrosion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mild (2)</td>
<td>&lt;30% of taper surface discoloured or dull</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate (3)</td>
<td>&gt;30% of taper surface discoloured or dull or &lt;10% of taper surface covered in black debris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe (4)</td>
<td>10-30% of taper surface covered in black debris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Severe (5)</td>
<td>&gt;30% of surface covered in black corrosive debris</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Corrosion Severity was assessed by three blinded reviewers. Corrosion was graded between none and very severe, with severe and very severe being further subdivided. None scored no visible signs of corrosion, Mild <30% of taper surface discoloured or dull, Moderate >30% of taper surface discoloured or dull or <10% of taper surface covered in black debris, Severe 10-30% of taper surface covered in black debris, Very Severe >30% of surface covered in black corrosive debris.

86 out of the 89 components experienced corrosion, with at least moderate corrosion observed in 54 (61%). No difference was observed between manufacturers (p=0.52). The median volumetric loss was 3.08 mm³ (range: 0.61-9.44). The maximum wear depth ranged from 14-85 μm, and commonly occurred where the base of the trunnion met the female taper. Profilometry and scanning electron microscopy showed that the ridges on the trunnion had imprinted into the female taper surface. Therefore wear occurred throughout the taper interface.

Large diameter femoral heads have increased the mechanical demands at modular junctions, leading to enhanced wear and susceptibility to mechanically-assisted crevice corrosion. Metal debris has been implicated in the formation of soft-tissue reactions and we have shown that material loss at modular junctions can be substantial. We propose hip systems that fail due to debris-induced synovitis with evidence of taper wear in the absence of bearing surface wear be called “taper failures”. Currently there is no other obvious culprit for the high failure rates of ASR XL when compared to ASR resurfacing.

**Discussion**

- Material loss from modular junctions is clinically significant
- Definition of taper failure: hip systems that fail with debris-induced synovitis resulting predominately from material loss at the modular junction.

**Results**

- 86 out of the 89 components experienced corrosion, with at least moderate corrosion observed in 54 (61%).
- The median volumetric loss was 3.08 mm³ (range: 0.61-9.44).
- The maximum wear depth ranged from 14-85 μm.

**Conclusions and Definition**

- Material loss from modular junctions is clinically significant
- Definition of taper failure: hip systems that fail with debris-induced synovitis resulting predominately from material loss at the modular junction.

**Figure 1**

- A 9mm/10mm female taper retrieved after 56 months with very severe corrosion.
- A wear scar is visible at the superficial margin where the base of the trunnion was in contact (red arrow).
- A profilometry tracing of the same female taper surface. The trace at 0.00mm indicates the surface profile at the base of the bore (shown by asterix) and the profile at 12mm corresponds to a location near the rim of the bore. The red arrow shows material loss to a depth of approximately 40μm. The ridged pattern can be seen over a distance of between 9-10 mm leading up to the wear scar (shown by the black dashed arrow).