Assessment of Skin Microvascular Function and Dysfunction With Laser Speckle Contrast Imaging

Guillaume Mahe, MD, PhD*; Anne Humeau-Heurtier, PhD*; Sylvain Durand, PhD*; Georges Leftheriotis, MD, PhD*; Pierre Abraham, MD, PhD*

In recent years, skin microcirculation has been considered an easily accessible and potentially representative vascular bed to evaluate and understand the mechanisms of microvascular function and dysfunction.1-3 Vascular dysfunction (including impaired endothelium-dependent vasodilation) induced by different pathologies is evident in the cutaneous circulation.4-7 It has been suggested that the skin microcirculation may mirror generalized systemic vascular dysfunction in magnitude and underlying mechanisms.1 Furthermore, minimally invasive skin-specific methodologies using laser systems make the cutaneous circulation a useful translational model for investigating mechanisms of skin physiology and skin pathophysiology induced either by skin disease itself or by other diseases such as vascular, rheumatologic, and pneumologic. To date, the skin has been used as a circulation model to investigate vascular mechanisms in a variety of diseased states, including hypercholesterolemia,8 Alzheimer disease,9 carpal tunnel syndrome,10 schizophrenia,11 hypertension,11 renal disease,12 type 2 diabetes,13 peripheral vascular disease,14 atherosclerotic coronary artery disease,2 heart failure,15 systemic sclerosis,16 obesity,17 primary aging,18,19 and sleep apnea.20

Assessment of skin microvascular function can be done by both invasive and noninvasive techniques. Among noninvasive techniques, laser systems are mainly used.21 The recent development of the laser speckle contrast imaging (LSCI) technique for monitoring skin microvascular function enables its use as a surrogate end point in clinical trials. LSCI allows for noncontact, real-time, and noninvasive monitoring of cutaneous blood flow changes.22-23 Recent evidence has shown that the LSCI technique dramatically reduces the variability of clinical measurements compared with laser Doppler flowmetry (LDF), making the technique a fascinating tool to facilitate microvascular studies in clinical routine.23,24 In this review, we describe the potential of LSCI to assess microvascular function and dysfunction. The way to use LSCI to understand skin physiology and physiopathology is also presented.

LSCI Technique

LSCI relies on the speckle phenomenon to obtain a perfusion map of the tissues; the speckles, which correspond to bright and dark areas, are generated by the backscattered light collected on a screen when an optically rough object (tissue region of interest [ROI]) is illuminated with a coherent laser light.25 Motions of particles in the illuminated tissue region lead to fluctuations in the speckle pattern on the detector. An image of the speckle is acquired with a camera (localized inside the LSCI imager head) during a certain time interval called exposure time. Because of the averaging of the speckle pattern over this time interval, which is in the order of milliseconds, a blurring of the speckle is obtained. The corresponding blurring in the image reduces its contrast. This reduction is a function of the moving particles’ speed: Without any or with little movements, the blurring is absent or very small. The speckle contrast is usually defined as the ratio of the standard deviation (SD) $\sigma$ of the intensity $I$ to the mean intensity $\langle I \rangle$ of the speckle pattern, as follows:26

$$C = \frac{\sigma}{\langle I \rangle} = \frac{\sqrt{\langle I^2 \rangle - \langle I \rangle^2}}{\langle I \rangle}.$$ 

With movement, the speckle pattern is blurred, and the SD of the intensity is small compared with the unchanged mean intensity. The speckle contrast $C$, therefore, is reduced.26 $C$ can be computed with 2 ways: For pixel $p_{i,j}$, $C$ is determined (1) by calculating the ratio of the SD of the pixels in an $n \times n$ pixel area around (spatially) $p_{i,j}$ to the mean value of the pixels in this area and (2) by calculating the ratio of the SD of the intensity at $p_{i,j}$ at different times and the mean intensity for $p_{i,j}$. The advantage of the first method is that the temporal resolution is high, but the drawback is the lack of spatial resolution. For the second method, the spatial resolution is better.26 In what follows, the LSCI technique uses the first way of contrast value computation (high-frame laser speckle contrast analysis). The speckle contrast image leads to a 2D map of the perfusion.

Received October 17, 2011; accepted December 15, 2011.

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Circ Cardiovasc Imaging is available at http://circimaging.ahajournals.org DOI: 10.1161/CIRCIMAGING.111.970418

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Cutaneous Microcirculation, Pathologies, and Dysfunction

Study of the cutaneous microcirculation using LSCI can be easily performed in animal models as in humans.25,27,28 The level of cutaneous blood flow is subject to systemic, regional, local, and cellular mechanisms (eg, sympathetic activity, local axon reflexes, endothelial function, myogenic tone, metabolic responses).29,30 There are 2 distinct sympathetic pathways. The first releases norepinephrine through sympathetic vasoconstrictor nerves and causes cutaneous vasoconstriction. The second is a nonadrenergic sympathetic active vasodilator system. The endothelial pathway includes the release of NO, prostaglandins, and endothelium-derived hyperpolarizing factor, which act as vasodilator components.30

This global vasomotor system can be affected by numerous pathologies or conditions that possibly lead to microvascular dysfunction and affect the physiological functions associated with skin, such as thermoregulatory function. For example, patients with chronic heart failure exhibit attenuated endothelium-dependent vasodilation and impaired thermoregulatory response of the peripheral circulation, including the skin.15 It is also well-known that abnormalities of the microcirculation play a major role in the complications of diabetes31 and skin grafts.32 A close link as been reported between central microvascular dysfunction, such as coronary and skin microvessel dysfunction.2 On the other hand, exercise training improves thermoregulatory responses and enhances endothelial function.33 Consequently, numerous procedures based on pharmacological treatments coupled with imaging techniques, such as LSCI, have been developed to allow the study of cutaneous microcirculation.7 Recordings performed with or without pharmacological intervention have to be done in the best conditions. Measurement recommendations to obtain LSCI recordings are presented thereafter.

Factors Possibly Affecting LSCI Recordings

Distance Between Laser Head and Skin

For acquisitions, the operator has to choose a distance between the laser head and the skin under study. It has been shown that this distance (when chosen between 10 and 30 cm) has no influence on skin blood flow recordings at rest or at peak postocclusive hyperemia.14

Air Movement and Lighting Conditions

Skin microcirculation is under the influence of environment temperature. To have a controlled temperature during LSCI recordings, fans and acclimatizers often are switched on in the acquisition rooms. However, it has recently been suggested that air movement (>2.8 m/s) may increase the perfusion value given by the LSCI technique, specifically when low perfusion values are recorded.35 Therefore, users should prevent high air movement throughout the LSCI measurements, using, for example, a dedicated room.35 Moreover, LSCI imagers are designed to be used in normal ambient-lighting conditions. Thus, during measurements, ambient light can be continuously measured and compensated for. However, the background light should always be kept as stable as possible during acquisitions.

Region of Interest and Time of Interest

Skin blood flow presents high spatial and temporal variability.23 To reduce these variabilities, the LSCI operator can define an ROI and average the blood flow on a given time of interest (TOI). The ROI is defined as the average of all the pixel perfusion values in the skin area of interest. The ROI can range from 1 mm² to 400 mm² or even more. The time of interest is defined as the duration over which the perfusion is averaged. Some authors have shown that when the forearm is studied, an ROI size of >10 mm² and a time of interest >1 s reduce the variability of cutaneous blood flow measurements both at rest and during the peak of reactive hyperemia.24

Expression of the Perfusion Values

Data expression is a key issue when assessing skin blood flow. As for LDF and laser Doppler perfusion imaging (LDPI), LSCI results cannot be expressed in absolute perfusion values (eg, cutaneous blood flow in milliliters per minute relative to the volume or weight of tissue). Therefore, data can be expressed as arbitrary perfusion units (ie, laser speckle perfusion units [LSPU]), percentage of baseline, or percentage of a maximal vasodilation. During an ischemic event, the recorded value with LSCI does not reach 0; this phenomenon is called the biological zero.36 The biological zero is also observed with LDF and LDPI. However, LSCI biological zero may differ from that of LDPI. It might be that LSCI biological zero is intrinsic to the LSCI measure; that is, unlike LDPI, the contrast of the speckle pattern is inversely correlated with the skin blood flow, with a potential problem when determining the biological zero. Biological zero subtraction could be performed when results are expressed in LSPU but should not be done in the case of expressing results as a percentage of baseline.36 Values can also be expressed in cutaneous vascular conductance (which is the flux divided by the mean arterial pressure [LSPU/mm Hg]). Using cutaneous vascular conductance has the advantage of taking into account the possible variations in blood pressure that may affect local blood flow.3 Some authors have also suggested taking into account the skin resistance when expressing results of iontophoresis coupled with laser.7

Moving Skin

Study of skin microcirculation physiology during exercise is still an exciting challenge to date. Indeed, cutaneous shiverings and movements associated with sport practice can induce significant artifacts and extreme variability of the recorded signal whatever the imaging technique used. Recently, specific procedures for using an opaque surface placed on the forearm and for data treatment have been proposed, as associated with LSCI, to allow accurate recordings over moving skin surfaces,22 giving promising perspectives for the study of cutaneous physiology during exercise and in nonimmobile patients.

Processing the LSCI Data

The processing of the data derived from the LSCI technique can be performed through 2 main ways: The user either postprocesses the perfusion images (with image processing algorithms) (eg, Figure 1D) or averages the perfusion values on an ROI and a time of interest (eg, Figure 1C). In the latter case, processing tools from the signal processing field are
used. To the best of our knowledge, very few studies relate
the postprocessing of perfusion images or the signal process-
ing of time-dependent spatial-averaged perfusion values.
Further works, therefore, are needed to extract information
from the data with image and signal processing algorithms
because this was very often published with LDF signals.37,38

**Comparison of LSCI, LDPI, and LDF**

**Theoretical Background**

The LDF technique relies on the Doppler effect. When photons
of a laser light encounter moving particles (mainly red blood
cells) in the tissues under study, the Doppler effect appears
(modification of photon frequency). When the reemitted light is
directed toward a photodetector, optical mixing of light fre-
quency shifted and nonfrequency shifted leads to a stochastic
photocurrent. The first moment of the power spectrum of this

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Anodal stimulation n° 1</th>
<th>Anodal stimulation n° 2</th>
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<tr>
<td>60 s and 0.1 mA</td>
<td>60 s and 0.1 mA</td>
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</table>

photocurrent gives the perfusion value,39 which is called the
LDF signal. LDPI relies on the same principles. Basically, the
image given by LDPI imagers is a collection of LDF samples
placed together on an image. As for the LDF technique, the
backscattered light is collected by a photodetector and converted
into a signal, which is proportional to perfusion, and is displayed
on a monitor as a color-coded image. In the first LDPI imagers,
a laser beam scanned the tissues in a stepwise manner by means
of a computer-controlled mirror system housed in a camera-like
scanner head or by a continuously moving laser-beam. Recent
research extends LDPI to a full-field area measurement, as does
LSCI.40

For LDF and LDPI, the theoretical background is well-
known.39 In contrast, for LSCI, the link between the blurring
of the speckles on the detector with the average velocity of
moving blood cells necessitates assumptions about an appro-
appropriate velocity distribution and the fraction of moving blood

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**Figure 1.** Laser speckle contrast imaging coupled with deionized water iontophoresis. A, Laser speckle contrast imaging
studies skin microcirculation on the forearm. B, The iontophoresis chamber is filled with the drug, and an adhesive
opaque surface is affixed to the forearm to record movement artifacts. C, Typical recording of skin blood flow changes
induced by an iontophoresis of deionized water (2 anodal stimulations separated by a 10-minute interval). D, Typical images of
skin blood flow changes induced by an iontophoresis of deionized water. LSPU indicates laser speckle perfusion unit.

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whereas the depth explored with LSCI is superficial and a poor reproducibility. To solve for the poor spatial resolution, LDPI has been proposed. However, the corresponding devices show a poor temporal resolution when a full-field area measurement is not used. Nevertheless, the reproducibility of local thermal hyperemia is good with LDPI.

With a high frame rate, LSCI shows good spatial and temporal resolutions and excellent reproducibility. The interday (between day 0 and day 7) reproducibility (expressed as the coefficient of variation) for the local thermal hyperemia peak (for the test explanation, see the next section) assessed by either LDF, LDPI, or LSCI was reported to be 40%, 39%, and 15% respectively. Further, the coefficient of variation for the local thermal plateau was 15%, 17%, and 42% for LSCI, LDPI, and LDF, respectively. This reproducibility (expressed as the coefficient of variation) was ≈8% when studying the peak of postocclusive reactive hyperemia (PORH) with the LSCI (for the test explanation, see the next section). Furthermore, Millet et al recently showed that intersite variability at baseline is lower with LSCI than with LDPI.

### Tests of Microvascular Functions
Many different microvascular tests have been developed to study the microvascular function and evaluate different physiological and pathophysiological pathways, which are involved in the control of the skin microvasculature (Tables 1 and 2). Two main types of microvascular tests can be differentiated: tests without any pharmacological intervention and tests with pharmacological intervention. The choice of test depends on the physiological pathway of the skin microvascular function studied.

### Nonpharmacological Microvascular Tests
The main tests that do not use pharmacological drugs are the PORH test, transient hyperemic response test, local thermal hyperemia test, and local cooling test (Table 1).

### Table 1. Nonpharmacological Tests and Mechanisms Involved in the Vascular Response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noninvasive Microvascular Tests Without Pharmacological Intervention</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Test</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Local cooling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local thermal hyperemia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Postocclusive hyperemia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pressure-induced vasodilation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transient hyperemic response</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

NOS indicates nitric oxide synthase; CGRP, calcitonin gene-related peptide; BKCa, large-conductance calcium-activated potassium.

cells, among others. Further works, therefore, are still needed in this area to settle the speckle theoretical background.

### Correlation Between LSCI and LDPI
LSCI and LDPI are both well-known techniques for a noninvasive investigation of microcirculatory blood flow. It has been shown recently that LSCI and LDPI show an excellent correlation when data are expressed as arbitrary perfusion units with and without subtracting the biological zero value. This correlation is still acceptable when data are represented as a percentage increase from baseline (for local heating at 36°C, 39°C, 42°C, and 44°C on the forearm of healthy subjects) but decreases when the biological zero value is subtracted. Moreover, Stewart et al reported a very good correlation between LSCI and LDPI in burn scar perfusion assessment in vivo.
### Table 2. Possible Drugs Used With Iontophoresis and Their Pharmacological Effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drugs</th>
<th>Polarity</th>
<th>Possible Physiological Pathway</th>
<th>Receptors</th>
<th>Vascular Effect</th>
<th>Possible Mechanisms</th>
<th>Authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acetylcholine</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Endothelium dependent</td>
<td>M&lt;sub&gt;3&lt;/sub&gt; muscarinic receptor</td>
<td>Vasodilation</td>
<td>NO, prostaglandins, EDHF</td>
<td>Durand et al&lt;sup&gt;62&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Gaubert et al&lt;sup&gt;63&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Morris and Shore&lt;sup&gt;64&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Newton et al&lt;sup&gt;65&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adrenaline (epinephrine)</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Endothelium independent</td>
<td>Alpha receptor on vascular smooth muscle cells</td>
<td>Vasoconstriction</td>
<td>Different intracellular pathways depending on alpha receptor types</td>
<td>Brown et al&lt;sup&gt;66&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Kellogg et al&lt;sup&gt;67&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bradykinin</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Endothelium dependent</td>
<td>B2 receptor</td>
<td>Vasodilation</td>
<td>NO and eicosanoid production</td>
<td>Newton et al&lt;sup&gt;65&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Kellogg et al&lt;sup&gt;67&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bradykinin</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Endothelium dependent</td>
<td>B2 receptor</td>
<td>Vasodilation</td>
<td>NO, prostaglandins, hyperpolarization of the vascular wall production</td>
<td>Brown et al&lt;sup&gt;66&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bretylium</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Endothelium independent</td>
<td>. . .</td>
<td>Vasodilation</td>
<td>Blocks the release of transmitter from noradrenergic nerve endings</td>
<td>Saumet et al&lt;sup&gt;68&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Johnson et al&lt;sup&gt;69&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>C-peptide</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Probably endothelium dependent</td>
<td>Not yet studied</td>
<td>Vasodilation</td>
<td>Na/K-ATPase activity and NO</td>
<td>Delaney et al&lt;sup&gt;70&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>CGRP</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Probably endothelium independent</td>
<td>Not yet studied</td>
<td>Vasodilation</td>
<td>Direct or indirect vascular smooth muscle cell and sympathetic fiber stimulation</td>
<td>Rossi et al&lt;sup&gt;71&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Edvinsson and Edvinsson&lt;sup&gt;72&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deionized water</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Endothelium dependent and endothelium independent</td>
<td>Not yet studied</td>
<td>Vasodilation</td>
<td>C fibers and prostaglandins</td>
<td>Tartas et al&lt;sup&gt;73&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Durand et al&lt;sup&gt;74&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Gohin et al&lt;sup&gt;75&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deionized water</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Endothelium dependent and endothelium independent</td>
<td>Not yet studied</td>
<td>Vasodilation</td>
<td>C fibers and prostaglandins</td>
<td>Rousseau et al&lt;sup&gt;76&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Durand et al&lt;sup&gt;77&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Histamine</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Endothelium dependent and endothelium independent</td>
<td>H1 and H2 receptors</td>
<td>Vasodilation</td>
<td>H1: endothelial cells; H2: direct effect on smooth muscle cells</td>
<td>Leroy et al&lt;sup&gt;78&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jones et al&lt;sup&gt;79&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Insulin</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Endothelium dependent and endothelium independent</td>
<td>Insulin receptor</td>
<td>Vasodilation</td>
<td>NO, Na/K-ATPase</td>
<td>Delaney et al&lt;sup&gt;70&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Rossi et al&lt;sup&gt;74&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Arnvist&lt;sup&gt;80&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Methacholine</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Endothelium dependent</td>
<td>Muscarinic receptor</td>
<td>Vasodilation</td>
<td>NO, prostaglandins, EDHF</td>
<td>Newton et al&lt;sup&gt;65&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sauvet et al&lt;sup&gt;81&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Noradrenaline (norepinephrine)</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Endothelium independent</td>
<td>Alpha receptor on vascular smooth muscle cells</td>
<td>Vasoconstriction</td>
<td>Different intracellular pathways depending on alpha receptor types</td>
<td>Brown et al&lt;sup&gt;66&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Levick&lt;sup&gt;30&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phenylephrine</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Endothelium independent</td>
<td>Alpha receptor on vascular smooth muscle cells</td>
<td>Vasoconstriction</td>
<td>Different intracellular pathways depending on alpha receptor types</td>
<td>Brown et al&lt;sup&gt;66&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Levick&lt;sup&gt;30&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sodium nitroprusside</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Endothelium independent</td>
<td>. . .</td>
<td>Vasodilation</td>
<td>NO donor</td>
<td>Newton et al&lt;sup&gt;65&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Morris and Shore&lt;sup&gt;64&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Substance P</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Endothelium dependent</td>
<td>NK1 receptor</td>
<td>Vasodilation</td>
<td>Possibly NO production</td>
<td>Newton et al&lt;sup&gt;65&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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</table>

NK1 indicates neurokinin 1; NOS, nitric oxide synthase; CGRP, calcitonin gene-related peptide; EDHF, endothelium-derived hyperpolarizing factor.
**PORH Test**
The PORH test induces an increase in skin blood flow to tissue that follows the release of a brief arterial occlusion. Although to date no consensus exists about the optimal ischemia duration, an occlusion with the cuff inflated at a suprasystolic pressure (50 mm Hg above the systolic pressure) during at least 3 minutes could be performed. The PORH test, which is believed to be endothelium dependent and involving both myogenic and metabolic factors, evaluates the reperfusion of the vascular beds and is characterized by a peak in the skin blood flow.

**Transient Hyperemic Response Test**
To induce a transient hyperemic response, a brief (≈20 s) occlusion of the brachial artery is performed. After occlusion release, a transient vasodilation occurs, mainly caused by a myogenic relaxation. Indeed, myogenic relaxation operates initially (up to 20 s). If circulation is arrested longer, as in the PORH test, vasodilation mechanisms involved are different. Nevertheless, to our knowledge, there is no publication of the use of the transient hyperemic response test with LSCI.

**Local Cooling Test**
The capacity for the skin vessels to vasodilate is an important factor that reaches its maximal value when the skin is warmed locally between 42°C and 44°C. Local skin heating (42°C–44°C) with a special probe leads to a sustained increase in skin blood flow that is biphasic: an initial peak that is axon reflex mediated and a sustained plateau phase that depends on NO. This axon reflex involves local sensory nerves and calcitonin gene-related peptide and substance P.

**Pharmacological Microvascular Tests**
As for other laser systems, different pharmacological microvascular tests can be performed with LSCI, such as iontophoresis and microdialysis (Table 2). Iontophoresis is a noninvasive method that drives a pharmacologically charged drug by electrorepulsion through the interstitium surrounding the blood vessels. This method allows a very small amount of drug to be administered noninvasively and safely to a localized area. The quantity of drug delivered depends on the current intensity and on the duration of the current application. Several protocols exist to perform iontophoresis, including changing the duration of the current stimulation, the duration of rest time before stimulation, the intensity of the stimulation, the number of stimulations, and the duration between stimulations. The polarity of the pharmacological drug determines the polarity of the current administration. Unfortunately, with iontophoresis, the current on its own can cause a current-induced vasodilation. The cathodal current effect is more important than the anodal, and the
current effect increases with the increase of the charge density (intensity/duration). The vehicle used with the pharmacological drug can also participate in the response with iontophoresis, then inducing a confounding response. Further, it is important to note that among the most-used vehicles, deionized water provides a more important current-induced vasodilation than NaCl when a cathodal current is used. Different strategies have been evoked to assess and limit this vehicle effect, such as the administration of the vehicle alone by iontophoresis with the identical current application used to deliver the drug or the use of local anesthetics. Readers must keep in mind that the influence of the vehicle can depend on the added drug. Different drugs can be used to test different pathways, which induce vasodilatation or vasoconstriction (Table 2). When studied with iontophoresis, pathways involved in the microvascular reactivity can be different from those studied by intraarterial investigations.

Table 3. Recommendations for LSCI Recordings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendations for LSCI Recordings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Before the acquisition</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perform skin blood flow measurements in a dedicated room.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep room temperature (22°C–23°C) and ambient lighting constant for the whole experiment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place patients or subjects in the same and consistent position during clinical investigations or study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select the LSCI acquisition frequency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose a distance from laser head to skin between 10 and 30 cm. This distance should be consistent throughout the study. Remember that a higher distance of measurement allows the study of a larger skin surface at a lower spatial resolution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fix an adhesive opaque patch (eg, Leukotape [BDF Germany]) on the subject’s skin to allow a point-by-point removal of movement artifacts that interfere with laser-derived skin measurements (optional).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>During the acquisition</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor the blood pressure continuously throughout the whole experiment to take into account microvascular changes due to pressure variations and express results in cutaneous vascular conductance, which is skin blood flow divided by mean arterial pressure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid subject mental stress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid air movement possibly induced by fans and acclimatizers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**After the acquisition**

- Define an ROI size >10 mm² and a TOI >1 s (when possible) to reduce the measurement variability.
- State in the report the laser wavelength, sampling frequency, distance between the laser head and skin, ROI, TOI, time of measurement when a provocation test is performed, subject position, and skin temperature (measured either at the beginning or at the end of the experiment). If iontophoresis is performed, state the drug concentration, polarity, intensity, stimulation duration, number of stimulations and duration between stimulations, and the vehicle used.

LSCI indicates laser speckle contrast imaging; ROI, region of interest; TOI, time of interest.

Microdialysis is a semi-invasive method used to introduce or remove drugs or molecules of interest to the interstitial space in skin. This method is based on the use of fibers with a semipermeable membrane at the fiber tip. The fiber, which is implanted in the skin in the interstitial space, is continuously perfused with a physiological solution. Drugs or molecules of interest pass the membrane of the fiber by passive diffusion along their concentration gradient, resulting in a specific vessel response related to the molecule or the studied drug. A laser placed over the fiber allows the recording of blood flow modifications induced by different drugs.

**Practical Recommendations and Standardized Protocols for LSCI**

Table 3 provides some recommendations for LSCI recordings, and Table 4 some examples of standardized protocols.

Table 4. Examples of Standardized Protocols for LSCI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug or Provocation Test</th>
<th>Acetylcholine 2%</th>
<th>Sodium Nitroprusside 1%</th>
<th>Deionized Water</th>
<th>Postocclusive Reactive Hyperemia</th>
<th>Local Thermal Hyperemia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Polarity</strong></td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vehicle</strong></td>
<td>Deionized water</td>
<td>Deionized water</td>
<td></td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No. stimulations/duration between each, min</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2/10</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stimulation duration, s</strong></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intensity, mA</strong></td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resting period duration, min</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ischemia duration, min</strong></td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Duration of heating at 44°C, min</strong></td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Duration of recordings after the last stimulation, min</strong></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LSCI indicates laser speckle contrast imaging; ROI, region of interest; TOI, time of interest.
Conclusion

LSCI is a noncontact and real-time technique that is a promising new tool to assess skin microvascular function and dysfunction. Recordings can be performed with or without pharmacological intervention. In contrast to other techniques available, such as LDF or LDPI, one of the main advantages of LSCI is its high reproducibility. All included, these advantages of the LSCI technique offer strong possibilities to study and to understand skin physiology in healthy and in pathological states in many clinical fields, such as dermatology, vascular medicine, plastic surgery, diabetes, and aging.

Disclosures

None.

References

42. Levick JR. An Introduction to Cardiovascular Physiology. London, UK: Hodder Arnold; 2009.
Assessment of Skin Microvascular Function and Dysfunction With Laser Speckle Contrast Imaging

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doi: 10.1161/CIRCIMAGING.111.970418

Circulation: Cardiovascular Imaging is published by the American Heart Association, 7272 Greenville Avenue, Dallas, TX 75231
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Print ISSN: 1941-9651. Online ISSN: 1942-0080

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