# In vivo mapping of deep tissue pO2 in a murine model of peripheral artery disease by noninvasive ^19F MR relaxometry

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Arteriosclerosis, Thrombosis, and Vascular Biology

RESEARCH LETTER

# In Vivo Mapping of Deep Tissue $pO_2$ in a Murine Model of Peripheral Artery Disease by Noninvasive $^{19}F$ MR Relaxometry

Nicolas Stumpe,* Tuba Güden-Silber,* Rebekka Schneckmann, Katharina Wolters, Hildo Lamb, Maria Grandoch, Ulrich Flögel

Peripheral arterial disease is characterized by varying degrees of hypoxia due to chronic progredient occlusion of peripheral arteries. Here, we report an in vivo approach for direct determination of tissue $pO_2$ in peripheral arterial disease with background-free, noninvasive fluorine magnetic resonance imaging ($^{19}F$ MRI) using physiologically inert perfluorocarbon nanoemulsions.

Perfluorocarbon nanoemulsions dissolve paramagnetic oxygen proportional to the ambient $pO_2$, resulting a linear increase in the $^{19}F$ relaxation rate $R_1$ ($R_1=1/T_1$).[1] However, for $pO_2$ calculation, the temperature dependence of $^{19}F$ $T_1$ relaxation has to be considered and a fast, artifact-free magnetic resonance imaging acquisition technique is required. For this, FAIR-EPI (flow-sensitive alternating inversion-recovery echo planar imaging sequence) was used at 9.4T (Bruker AVANCE$^{NEO}$) with a 25-mm resonator tunable to both $^1H$ (linear) and $^{19}F$ (quadrature). Rescaling of the trajectories acquired in reference $^1H$ flow-sensitive alternating inversion-recovery echo planar imaging sequence scans allowed the elimination of ghosting artifacts along the phase encoding direction for the corresponding $^{19}F$ measurements (Figure [A]). Calibration curves were recorded within 31 °C to 39 °C using a 20% perfluoro-15-crown-5 ether nanoemulsion[2] utilizing the setup in Figure [B]. As expected, we found a temperature-dependent linear relationship between $^{19}F$ relaxation rate $R_1$ and $pO_2$ (Figure [C]).

Reference values were determined within thigh/calf of anesthetized mice by invasive sensors (NTH-PSt7/OXY-4; MIT-18/testo-108), yielding $pO_2$ of 26.2±2.0 mmHg (n=5) and temperatures of 34.6±0.4/33.8±0.2 °C for thigh/calf (n=5), the latter were used for conversion of in vivo $^{19}F$ $R_1$ to corresponding $pO_2$ using the formula in Figure [C].

Thereafter, $^{19}F$ MRI was applied to assess tissue $pO_2$ in a murine hindlimb ischemia model (HLI; see Figure [D], left; male 16–18 weeks C57BL/6J mice as approved by local authorities [LANUV]).[3] For determination of tissue $pO_2$, directly after surgery, 100 µL perfluorocarbon nanoemulsions were injected into the muscle of both upper hindlimbs (n=9) just below the first site of ligation and in a subset of n=3 animals also 50 µL perfluorocarbon nanoemulsions into both calf muscles (Figure [D], arrows). After 24 hours, $^{19}F$ T1 was determined to quantify $pO_2$ in both hindlimbs. While $pO_2$ in sham thighs was found to be 28.8±6.8 mmHg (the same range as reference values above), $pO_2$ in ischemic legs was significantly decreased to 11.6±4.6 mmHg (Figure [D] and [E], n=9 each; $P=2.2\times10^{-5}$) as validated by invasive measurements (13.8±4.8 mmHg at unchanged temperatures of 34.6±0.3 °C). The calf revealed similar $pO_2$ at the control site, but an even larger $pO_2$ drop in HLI (31.2±6.4 versus 4.2±3.3 mmHg, n=3 each; $P=0.006$).

Taken together, $^{19}F$ MRI (1) resulted in similar $pO_2$ values as invasive measures and allowed (2) the assessment of the degree of tissue hypoxia as well as (3) mapping of the gradual $pO_2$ profile toward the periphery associated with the utilized peripheral arterial disease model. Beyond current perfusion/optical techniques or superficial $O_2$ measurements, our approach allows assessment of deep tissue $pO_2$, providing a meaningful

**Key Words:** echo-planar imaging ■ fluorine ■ hypoxia ■ magnetic resonance imaging ■ mitral valve insufficiency ■ peripheral arterial disease

Correspondence to: Ulrich Flögel, PhD, Institute for Molecular Cardiology, Heinrich Heine University, Universitätsstraße 1, 40225 Düsseldorf, Germany. Email floegel@uni-duesseldorf.de
*N. Stumpe and T. Güden-Silber contributed equally.
For Sources of Funding and Disclosures, see page 598.

*Arterioscler Thromb Vasc Biol* is available at www.ahajournals.org/journal/atvb

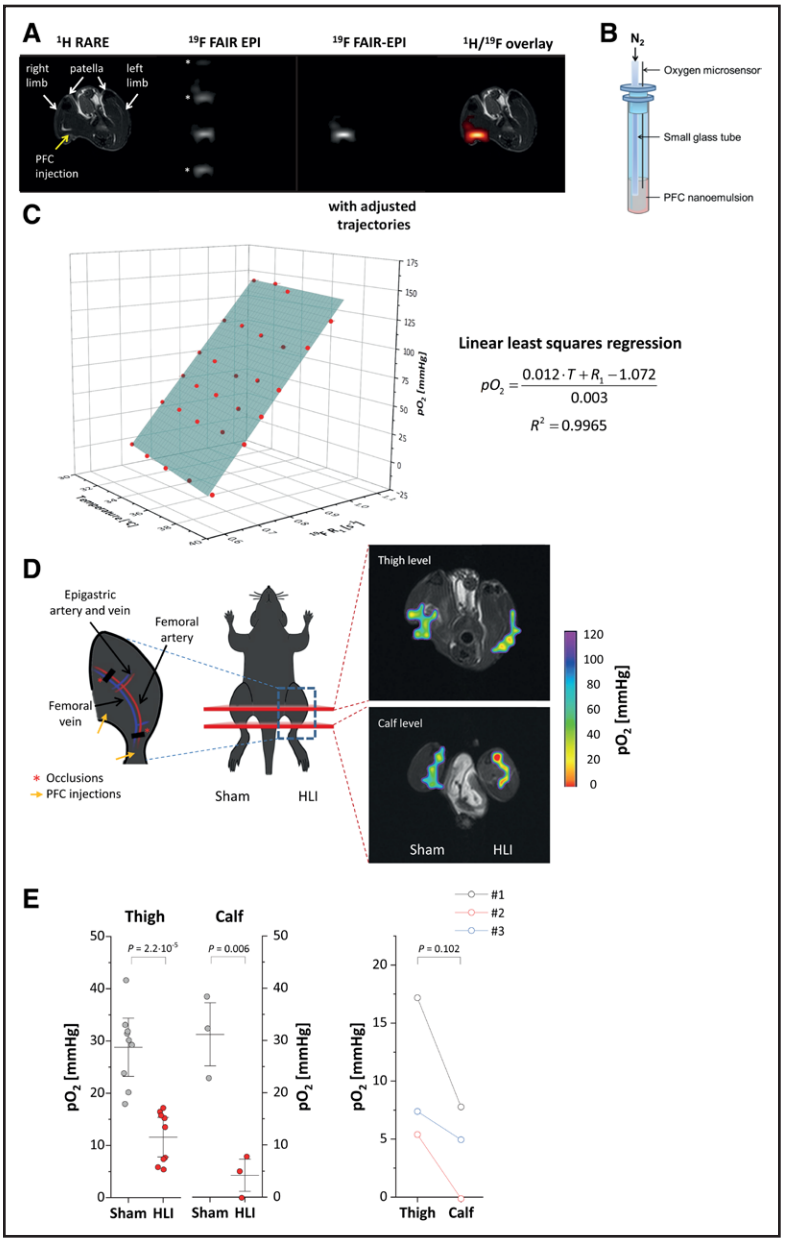


**Figure. $^{19}F$ MRI relaxometry reveals gradual tissue $pO_2$ profiles in murine hindlimb ischemia (HLI).**
**A**, For in vivo validation of the pulse sequence, PFCs were injected into the right murine hindlimb (yellow arrow). First: $^1H$ anatomical reference (RARE), Second: FAIR-EPI (flow-sensitive alternating inversion-recovery echo planar imaging sequence) $^{19}F$ image with ghosting artefacts (asterisks), Third: artifact-free FAIR EPI $^{19}F$ image with adjusted trajectories, Fourth: merge of $^{19}F$ (hot iron) and $^1H$ greyscale images. $^{19}F$ FAIR-EPI: $T_E$: 8.72 ms, $T_R$: 5000 ms, ST: 2 mm, matrix: 64×64, FOV: 40×40 mm², 48, $T_I$: 25/400/800/1200/1600 ms; $T_{Acq}$: 20 minutes). **B**, Calibration setup for $pO_2$ determination parallel to acquisition of $T_1$ maps, starting at ambient $pO_2$ and gradually displacing oxygen by step-wise flushing with nitrogen. $pO_2$ was continuously monitored with a fiber optic $pO_2$ probe. **C**, Fitted surface from the calibration curves acquired at 31/33/35/37/39°C (n=3). **D**, Scheme of the HLI model (zoom-in left) and slice localization (red, middle) to acquire spatially resolved $pO_2$ maps for upper/lower limbs (right). **E**, Left: $pO_2$ for sham vs HLI for thigh/calf. $pO_2$ was calculated from measured $^{19}F$ $R_1$ with the formula in **C** using 34.6/33.8°C for thigh/calf as obtained from invasive measurements. Right: $pO_2$ in ischemic thigh/calf for those animals receiving PFC injections in both regions. A Student *t*-test was utilized to determine statistically significance (*P* value <0.05).

measure of the consequences of impaired perfusion that reflects the true mismatch between demand and supply of the affected tissue. With this, our technology implies a substantial translational potential for early diagnosis of limited tissue supply.

## ARTICLE INFORMATION

### Affiliations

Institute for Molecular Cardiology, Heinrich Heine University, Düsseldorf, Germany (N.S., T.G.-S., U.F.). Cardiovascular Imaging, University Medical Center, Leiden, the Netherlands (N.S., H.L.). Institute for Translational Pharmacology, Heinrich Heine University, Düsseldorf, Germany (R.S., K.W., M.G.).

### Sources of Funding

This work was supported by the DFG (INST 208/764-1 FUGG) and the EC (MSCA-ITN-2019 "NOVA-MRI").

### Disclosures

None.

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