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Preclinical MRI of the Kidney

Methods and Protocols

Edited by

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ISSN 1064-3745 ISSN 1940-6029 (electronic)
Methods in Molecular Biology
ISBN 978-1-0716-0977-4 ISBN 978-1-0716-0978-1 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-0716-0978-1>

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The registered company address is: 1 New York Plaza, New York, NY 10004, U.S.A.

Preface

Preclinical MRI for Renal Health

Despite the fact that we are in an era of increased prevalence, incidence, and recognition of renal diseases, the current options for effective prophylactic and therapeutic regimens for kidney disorders are disappointingly sparse. A major obstacle is the inherent complexity of the pathophysiology in renal disease. Overcoming this requires immediate innovative action across multiple domains and requires new instruments that enable noninvasive diagnostics and monitoring of therapy during renal diseases. The upshot is that this also creates ever-increasing opportunities for discovery.

The development and validation of disruptive diagnostic approaches and strategies for early interception of renal disease and renoprotection can be brought on only with a deeper understanding of the underlying (patho)physiology. This underlines the urgent quest for emergent biomedical imaging techniques, customized for probing all stages of renal diseases. While many renal diseases involve defects at the molecular and cellular levels, these manifest themselves at the scale of the organ system. The unique function of biomedical imaging is to monitor all these levels simultaneously, connecting the view of biologists with that of clinicians *in vivo*. This asks for approaches that are noninvasive, ubiquitous, and applicable both preclinically and clinically—this is the forte of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). An increasing body of evidence indicates that MRI biomarkers have a high potential for complementing and improving acute and chronic renal disease management. MRI is a versatile technique, and a host of functional MRI methods have emerged that are sensitive to pathophysiological changes associated with renal hemodynamics, oxygenation, fibrosis, inflammation, and microstructure. To better connect MR imaging markers with (patho)-physiology, MRI needs to be benchmarked and calibrated with integrative physiological measurements which include the use of quantitative invasive probes. Due to the enormous technical challenges involved, renal MRI biomarkers remain woefully underused in preclinical research and in clinical practice. These scientific and technical issues constitute a substantial barrier *en route* to the standardization and broad application of renal MRI.

The purpose of this book is to overcome these roadblocks by promoting an open-access collection of protocols and comprehensive recommendations for preclinical renal MRI, to be employed in translational research. The book provides answers to the common questions regarding how renal MRI technologies emerging from the research community can be translated into open-access, ready-to-go toolboxes that can be applied to human patients in a way that is standardized, highly reproducible, and harmonized across centers, with the goal of combating renal disease by substantially slowing its progression and preventing kidney injury.

With this “*from the community, to the community*” approach, the book is designed to enhance training in renal MRI sciences, to improve the reproducibility of renal imaging research, and to boost the comparability of renal MRI studies. With this mission, the book promotes an entirely unique opportunity for developing advanced *in vivo* renal phenotyping, diagnostic imaging, and therapy guidance as a link to stratified medicine. The clinical implications of this relate to a broad spectrum of physiology, nephrology, radiology,

cardiology, and other associated fields of basic science and clinical research targeting renal and cardiorenal diseases.

The chapters covered in this book are interdisciplinary in nature and bridge the gaps between physics, physiology, and medicine. The contributions are provided by leading international experts and hands-on scientists and serve as a foundation to substantially boost the development of renal imaging tools, which will increase the efficacy of diagnostics, promote the identification of new therapeutic targets and options, drive explorations into novel renoprotective strategies, and lead to enhanced prophylactic regimens. To meet this goal, the book provides chapters on the fundamental principles, detailed experimental protocols and guidelines for data analysis, to successfully unlock the full potential of renal MRI. At the same time, the book promises to help nurture a new generation of researchers with the high potential needed for the development of next-generation renal imaging technology, by addressing some crucial educational gaps.

The pace of discovery of preclinical MRI is heartening, drawing in new talent and driving the transfer of results into novel preclinical applications and into the clinical arena. The remaining challenges must be faced openly via collaborations between forward-thinking researchers, application scientists, clinicians, and the general readership of this book. These collaborations should be interdisciplinary, inter-institutional, and international, as exemplified and spearheaded by imaging networks. A prominent example of this is the renal imaging initiative PARENCHIMA, a community-driven Action of the COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) program of the European Union, which aims to improve the reproducibility and standardization of renal MRI biomarkers. Only because of the truly interdisciplinary nature of this work, and the essential role that having many types of expertise in close interaction has played, we got this far.

This book lives up to this mission by providing a comprehensive overview and guidance on preclinical MRI. It is intended to take this approach to the next level and to put extra weight behind finding a solution to the remaining problems in renal imaging research. With this mission, the reader will learn to make sense of the terrain we currently inhabit and to better interpret the images of the kidney that we produce using sophisticated preclinical MRI and data analysis protocols. Inevitably, there will be breakthroughs and surprises when you place next-generation imaging technologies and this book into the hands of highly creative interdisciplinary teams. However, this will only happen if we recognize that moving into the next generation of renal imaging technology is more than just a matter of buying equipment, installing it, and then trying to operate in "core facilities" where budgetary considerations, and not scientific goals, dominate. The ultimate potential of preclinical renal MRI is far greater; all that is required is the imagination to apply it, following the chapters in this book as a roadmap. We hope that the book will convey the seeds of this vision and inspire you—as it has us—to become pioneers in this amazingly promising area.

With this perspective, we are grateful to all the authors for their outstanding work, passion, dedication, and enthusiasm to drive this assembly of recommendations and open-access protocols on preclinical MRI home. We all succeeded thanks to the sheer power and momentum of interdisciplinary collaboration and teamwork. You made and make the difference. Thank you.

Berlin, Germany

*Thoralf Niendorf
Andreas Pohlmann*

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	v
<i>Contributors</i>	xiii

PART I INTRODUCTION

1 Recommendations for Preclinical Renal MRI: A Comprehensive Open-Access Protocol Collection to Improve Training, Reproducibility, and Comparability of Studies	3
<i>Andreas Pohlmann, Susan J. Back, Andrea Fekete, Iris Friedli, Stefanie Hectors, Neil Peter Jerome, Min-Chi Ku, Dario Livio Longo, Martin Meier, Jason M. Millward, João S. Periquito, Erdmann Seeliger, Suraj D. Serai, Sonia Waiczies, Steven Sourbron, Christoffer Laustsen, and Thoralf Niendorf</i>	

PART II ANIMAL MODELS, PREPARATION, MONITORING, AND PHYSIOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS

2 Animal Models of Renal Pathophysiology and Disease	27
<i>Adam Hosszu, Tamas Kaucsar, Erdmann Seeliger, and Andrea Fekete</i>	
3 Preparation and Monitoring of Small Animals in Renal MRI	45
<i>Tamas Kaucsar, Adam Hosszu, Erdmann Seeliger, Henning M. Reimann, and Andrea Fekete</i>	
4 Reversible (Patho)Physiologically Relevant Test Interventions: Rationale and Examples	57
<i>Kathleen Cantow, Mechthild Ladwig-Wiegard, Bert Flemming, Andrea Fekete, Adam Hosszu, and Erdmann Seeliger</i>	
5 Preparation of Ex Vivo Rodent Phantoms for Developing, Testing, and Training MR Imaging of the Kidney and Other Organs	75
<i>Jason M. Millward, João S. Periquito, Paula Ramos Delgado, Christian Prinz, Thoralf Niendorf, and Sonia Waiczies</i>	

PART III BASIC CONCEPTS OF MEASUREMENT TECHNIQUES

6 Quantitative Assessment of Renal Perfusion and Oxygenation by Invasive Probes: Basic Concepts	89
<i>Kathleen Cantow, Roger G. Evans, Dirk Grosenick, Thomas Gladytz, Thoralf Niendorf, Bert Flemming, and Erdmann Seeliger</i>	
7 Ultrasound and Photoacoustic Imaging of the Kidney: Basic Concepts and Protocols	109
<i>Sandra Meyer, Dieter Fuchs, and Martin Meier</i>	

8	Hardware Considerations for Preclinical Magnetic Resonance of the Kidney	131
	<i>Paula Ramos Delgado, Ekkehard Küstermann, André Kühne, Jason M. Millward, Thoralf Niendorf, Andreas Pohlmann, and Martin Meier</i>	
9	MRI Mapping of Renal T_1 : Basic Concept	157
	<i>Stefanie J. Hectors, Philippe Garteiser, Sabrina Doblaz, Gwenaél Pagé, Bernard E. Van Beers, John C. Waterton, and Octavia Bane</i>	
10	MRI Mapping of the Blood Oxygenation Sensitive Parameter T_2^* in the Kidney: Basic Concept	171
	<i>Lu-Ping Li, Bradley Hack, Erdmann Seeliger, and Pottumarthi V. Prasad</i>	
11	Renal Diffusion-Weighted Imaging (DWI) for Apparent Diffusion Coefficient (ADC), Intravoxel Incoherent Motion (IVIM), and Diffusion Tensor Imaging (DTI): Basic Concepts	187
	<i>Neil Peter Jerome, Anna Caroli, and Alexandra Ljimini</i>	
12	Dynamic Contrast Enhancement (DCE) MRI–Derived Renal Perfusion and Filtration: Basic Concepts	205
	<i>Michael Pedersen, Pietro Irrera, Walter Dastrù, Frank G. Zöllner, Kevin M. Bennett, Scott C. Beeman, G. Larry Bretthorst, Joel R. Garbow, and Dario Livio Longo</i>	
13	Noninvasive Renal Perfusion Measurement Using Arterial Spin Labeling (ASL) MRI: Basic Concept	229
	<i>Min-Chi Ku, María A. Fernández-Seara, Frank Kober, and Thoralf Niendorf</i>	
14	Renal pH Imaging Using Chemical Exchange Saturation Transfer (CEST) MRI: Basic Concept	241
	<i>Dario Livio Longo, Pietro Irrera, Lorena Consolino, Phillip Zhe Sun, and Michael T. McMahon</i>	
15	Sodium (^{23}Na) MRI of the Kidney: Basic Concept	257
	<i>James T. Grist, Esben Søvsø Hansen, Frank G. Zöllner, and Christoffer Laustsen</i>	
16	Hyperpolarized Carbon (^{13}C) MRI of the Kidneys: Basic Concept	267
	<i>Cornelius von Morze, Galen D. Reed, Zhen J. Wang, Michael A. Obliger, and Christoffer Laustsen</i>	
17	Functional Imaging Using Fluorine (^{19}F) MR Methods: Basic Concepts	279
	<i>Sonia Waiczies, Christian Prinz, Ludger Starke, Jason M. Millward, Paula Ramos Delgado, Jens Rosenberg, Marc Nazaré, Helmar Waiczies, Andreas Pohlmann, and Thoralf Niendorf</i>	
18	MR Elastography of the Abdomen: Basic Concepts	301
	<i>Suraj D. Serai and Meng Yin</i>	
PART IV EXPERIMENTAL PROTOCOLS		
19	Monitoring Renal Hemodynamics and Oxygenation by Invasive Probes: Experimental Protocol	327
	<i>Kathleen Cantow, Mechthild Ladwig-Wiegard, Bert Flemming, Andreas Pohlmann, Thoralf Niendorf, and Erdmann Seeliger</i>	

20	Essential Practical Steps for MRI of the Kidney in Experimental Research	349
	<i>Andreas Pohlmann, João S. Periquito, and Thoralf Niendorf</i>	
21	Assessment of Renal Volume with MRI: Experimental Protocol	369
	<i>Andreas Müller and Martin Meier</i>	
22	Experimental Protocols for MRI Mapping of Renal T_1	383
	<i>Philippe Garteiser, Octavia Bane, Sabrina Doblas, Iris Friedli, Stefanie Hectors, Gwenaël Pagé, Bernard E. Van Beers, and John C. Waterton</i>	
23	Experimental Protocol for MRI Mapping of the Blood Oxygenation-Sensitive Parameters T_2^* and T_2 in the Kidney	403
	<i>Andreas Pohlmann, Kaixuan Zhao, Sean B. Fain, Pottumarthi V. Prasad, and Thoralf Niendorf</i>	
24	Renal MRI Diffusion: Experimental Protocol	419
	<i>João S. Periquito, Martin Meier, Thoralf Niendorf, Andreas Pohlmann, and Neil Peter Jerome</i>	
25	Dynamic Contrast Enhanced (DCE) MRI-Derived Renal Perfusion and Filtration: Experimental Protocol	429
	<i>Pietro Irrera, Lorena Consolino, Walter Dastrù, Michael Pedersen, Frank G. Zöllner, and Dario Livio Longo</i>	
26	Renal Blood Flow Using Arterial Spin Labeling (ASL) MRI: Experimental Protocol and Principles	443
	<i>Kai-Hsiang Chuang, Martin Meier, María A. Fernández-Seara, Frank Kober, and Min-Chi Ku</i>	
27	Renal pH Mapping Using Chemical Exchange Saturation Transfer (CEST) MRI: Experimental Protocol	455
	<i>Kowsalya Devi Pavuluri, Lorena Consolino, Dario Livio Longo, Pietro Irrera, Phillip Zhe Sun, and Michael T. McMahon</i>	
28	Sodium (^{23}Na) MRI of the Kidney: Experimental Protocol	473
	<i>James T. Grist, Esben Søvsø Hansen, Frank G. Zöllner, and Christoffer Laustsen</i>	
29	Hyperpolarized Carbon (^{13}C) MRI of the Kidney: Experimental Protocol	481
	<i>Christoffer Laustsen, Cornelius von Morze, and Galen D. Reed</i>	
30	Fluorine (^{19}F) MRI for Assessing Inflammatory Cells in the Kidney: Experimental Protocol.	495
	<i>Min-Chi Ku, Adrian Schreiber, Paula Ramos Delgado, Philipp Boehm-Sturm, Ralph Kettritz, Thoralf Niendorf, Andreas Pohlmann, and Sonia Waiczies</i>	
31	Fluorine (^{19}F) MRI to Measure Renal Oxygen Tension and Blood Volume: Experimental Protocol	509
	<i>Lingzhi Hu, Hua Pan, and Samuel A. Wickline</i>	
32	MR Elastography of the Abdomen: Experimental Protocols.	519
	<i>Suraj D. Serai and Meng Yin</i>	

PART V PROTOCOLS FOR ADVANCED ANALYSES

33 Subsegmentation of the Kidney in Experimental MR Images Using Morphology-Based Regions-of-Interest or Multiple-Layer Concentric Objects 549
Leili Riazzy, Bastien Milani, João S. Periquito, Kathleen Cantow, Thoralf Niendorf, Menno Pruijm, Erdmann Seeliger, and Andreas Pohlmann

34 Denoising for Improved Parametric MRI of the Kidney: Protocol for Nonlocal Means Filtering 565
Ludger Starke, Karsten Tabelow, Thoralf Niendorf, and Andreas Pohlmann

35 Analysis Protocols for MRI Mapping of Renal T_1 577
Philippe Garteiser, Gwenael Pagé, Sabrina Doblas, Octavia Bane, Stefanie Hectors, Iris Friedli, Bernard E. Van Beers, and John C. Waterton

36 Analysis Protocols for MRI Mapping of the Blood Oxygenation–Sensitive Parameters T_2^* and T_2 in the Kidney 591
João S. Periquito, Ludger Starke, Carlota M. Santos, Andreia C. Freitas, Nuno Loução, Pablo García Polo, Rita G. Nunes, Thoralf Niendorf, and Andreas Pohlmann

37 Analysis of Renal Diffusion-Weighted Imaging (DWI) Using Apparent Diffusion Coefficient (ADC) and Intravoxel Incoherent Motion (IVIM) Models 611
Neil Peter Jerome and João S. Periquito

38 Analysis Protocol for Dynamic Contrast Enhanced (DCE) MRI of Renal Perfusion and Filtration 637
Frank G. Zöllner, Walter Dastrù, Pietro Irrera, Dario Livio Longo, Kevin M. Bennett, Scott C. Beeman, G. Larry Bretthorst, and Joel R. Garbow

39 Quantitative Analysis of Renal Perfusion by Arterial Spin Labeling 655
Kai-Hsiang Chuang, Frank Kober, and Min-Chi Ku

40 Analysis Protocol for the Quantification of Renal pH Using Chemical Exchange Saturation Transfer (CEST) MRI 667
Habnsung Kim, Yin Wu, Daisy Villano, Dario Livio Longo, Michael T. McMahon, and Phillip Zhe Sun

41 Analysis Protocol for Renal Sodium (^{23}Na) MR Imaging 689
James T. Grist, Esben Søvsø Szocska Hansen, Frank G. Zöllner, and Christoffer Laustsen

42 Analysis Methods for Hyperpolarized Carbon (^{13}C) MRI of the Kidney 697
Galen D. Reed, Natalie J. Korn, Christoffer Laustsen, and Cornelius von Morze

43 Data Preparation Protocol for Low Signal-to-Noise Ratio Fluorine-19 MRI 711
Ludger Starke, Thoralf Niendorf, and Sonia Waiczies

Index 723

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