

M.K. Kalra • S. Saini • G.D. Rubin (Eds.)

MDCT

From Protocols to Practice

Mannudeep K. Kalra
Department of Radiology
Massachusetts General Hospital
Boston, MA, USA

Sanjay Saini
Department of Radiology
Emory University School of Medicine
Emory University Hospital
Atlanta, GA, USA

Geoffrey D. Rubin
Department of Radiology
Stanford University School of Medicine
Stanford, CA, USA

MDCT: From Protocols to Practice
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Preface to the new edition

MDCT: A Practical Approach is back, with updated and expanded contents. At the time of its publication, we knew that the book's success and popularity would dictate our efforts to publish a new edition. What we did not realize was that, because of the constant and almost relentless progress in the technology of multi-detector-row computed tomography, it would be necessary to improve the contents and publish the updated edition, *MDCT: From Protocols to Practice*, so soon.

In the new edition, we update the chapter on radiation dose to include the results of recent investigations and technological developments, and the chapter on reactions to contrast media is thoroughly revised by Dr. Solomon. In addition, the content is expanded by the inclusion of a number of new chapters, all from leaders and experts in the field. For example, the chapter on dual-source CT technology and its applications is new. Dr. Thomsen, an international expert on contrast-media use in medical imaging, reflects on the concepts and risks associated with the use of contrast medium in pregnancy. Dr. Uppot provides his unique expertise to highlight the important issues related to MDCT imaging of obese patients. Drs. Moore and Blake enrich the book with their chapter on the role of PET/CT in abdominal malignancies. Drs. Rogers and Hoffmann share their tremendous experience and expertise in imaging acute coronary artery syndrome with state-of-the-art MDCT. Dr. Donald Frush, a renowned expert in pediatric MDCT technology, including protocols and radiation dose, contributes a detailed chapter on the pediatric applications of MDCT. Drs. Sirineni, Tigges, and Stillman do a remarkable job in their chapter on the role of MDCT for coronary-stent evaluation. Drs. Ramesh and Sahani, international experts on pancreatic imaging, contribute a highly informative chapter on the status of MDCT in pancreatic imaging. The important topic of CT urography is the subject of the excellent chapter by Drs. McSweeney, O'Connor, and Maher.

In keeping with the global standards of publishing, international standards (S.I.) units were used over conventional units, such as use of kilogram for weight rather than pounds. Therefore, to avoid any potential confusion, readers are strongly cautioned to pay close attention to the units before applying them in their practice or research.

This new edition of our textbook would not have been possible without help from our contributing coauthors. We thank those from the previous edition for their invaluable contributions, without which neither the previous nor the present edition would have been complete. In this respect, we are grateful to Drs. Bae, Solomon, Sahani, Singh, Schindera, Nelson, Shah, Wang, Rybicki, Sheth, Kavanagh, Lake, Costello, Enterline, Shetty, Lev, Halvorsen, Sebastian, and Salamipour.

We also extend our heartfelt gratitude to James Waples, at Bracco Diagnostics, for his untiring help and encouragement for an updated edition.

Also, we are grateful to Springer Verlag's editorial staff, notably, Antonella Cerri, Alessandra Born, and Angela Vanegas, for their help in acquiring manuscripts and the publication of this book.

Last not least, we thank our supportive readers, who motivated us in our endeavor to publish this expanded edition, and we hope they will receive it with the same enthusiasm as granted the previous edition.

March 2008

Mannudeep K. Kalra
Sanjay Saini
Geoffrey D. Rubin

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Contributors

Kyongtae Ty Bae
School of Medicine
Washington University
St. Louis, MO, USA

Mannudeep K. Kalra
Department of Radiology
Massachusetts General Hospital
Boston, MA, USA

Michael A. Blake
Division of Abdominal Imaging
Radiology Department
Massachusetts General Hospital
Boston, MA, USA

Joseph J. Kavanagh
Division of Thoracic Imaging
Department of Radiology
Medical University of South Carolina
Charleston, SC, USA

Philip Costello
Division of Thoracic Imaging
Department of Radiology
Medical University of South Carolina
Charleston, SC, USA

Douglas R. Lake
Division of Thoracic Imaging
Department of Radiology
Medical University of South Carolina
Charleston, SC, USA

David S. Enterline
Divisions of Neuroradiology and
Interventional Neuroradiology
Duke University Medical Center
Durham, NC, USA

Michael H. Lev
Emergency Neuroradiology and
Neurovascular Lab
Massachusetts General Hospital
Boston, MA, USA

Donald P. Frush
Department of Radiology
Duke University Medical Center
Durham, NC, USA

Michael M. Maher
Department of Radiology
Cork University Hospital
Mercy University Hospital and
University College Cork
Cork, Ireland

Robert A. Halvorsen
Department of Radiology
MCV Hospitals/VCU Medical Center
Richmond, VA, USA

Sean E. McSweeney
Department of Radiology
Cork University Hospital
Mercy University Hospital and
University College Cork
Cork, Ireland

Udo Hoffmann
Department of Radiology
Massachusetts General Hospital
Harvard Medical School
Boston, MA, USA

Christine O. Menias
School of Medicine
Washington University
St. Louis, MO, USA

Zaheerabbas Momin
Division of Abdominal Imaging
Department of Radiology
Emory University School of Medicine
Atlanta, GA, USA

Michael Moore
Division of Abdominal Imaging
Department of Radiology
Massachusetts General Hospital
Boston, MA, USA

Rendon C. Nelson
Division of Abdominal Imaging
Duke University Medical Center
Durham, NC, USA

Owen J. O'Connor
Department of Radiology
Cork University Hospital
Mercy University Hospital and
University College Cork
Cork, Ireland

Avinash R. Kambadakone
Division of Abdominal
Imaging and Intervention
Department of Radiology
Massachusetts General Hospital
Boston, MA, USA

Ian S. Rogers
Division of Cardiology and
Department of Radiology
Massachusetts General Hospital
Harvard Medical School and
School of Public Health
Boston, MA, USA

Geoffrey D. Rubin
Department of Radiology
Stanford University School of Medicine
Stanford, CA, USA

Frank J. Rybicki
Cardiovascular Imaging Section
Applied Imaging Science Laboratory
Brigham & Women's Hospital Radiology
Harvard Medical School
Boston, MA, USA

Dushyant V. Sahani
Department of Radiology
Massachusetts General Hospital
Boston, MA, USA

Sanjay Saini
Department of Radiology
Emory University School of Medicine
Emory University Hospital
Atlanta, GA, USA

Hamid Salamipour
Department of Radiology
Massachusetts General Hospital
Boston, MA, USA

Sebastian T. Schindera
Division of Abdominal Imaging
Duke University Medical Center
Durham, NC, USA

Sunit Sebastian
Department of Radiology
Emory University School of Medicine
Atlanta, GA, USA

Zarine K. Shah
Department of Abdominal Imaging and
Intervention
Massachusetts General Hospital
Boston, MA, USA

Tarang Sheth
Department of Diagnostic Imaging
Trillium Health Centre
Mississauga, ON, Canada

Sanjay K. Shetty
Division of Musculoskeletal Radiology
Department of Radiology
Massachusetts General Hospital
Boston, MA, USA

Anandkumar H. Singh
Abdominal Imaging
Massachusetts General Hospital
Department of Abdominal Imaging
Boston, MA, USA

Henrik S. Thomsen
Department of Diagnostic Radiology
54E2
Copenhagen University Hospital
Herlev, Denmark

Gopi K.R. Sirineni
Department of Radiology
Emory University School of Medicine
Emory University Hospital
Atlanta, GA, USA

Stefan Tigges
Department of Radiology
Emory University School of Medicine
Emory University Hospital
Atlanta, GA, USA

William C. Small
Division of Abdominal Imaging
Department of Radiology
Emory University School of Medicine
Atlanta, GA, USA

Unni K. Udayasankar
Division of Abdominal Imaging
Department of Radiology
Emory University School of Medicine
Atlanta, GA, USA

Richard Solomon
Division of Nephrology
University of Vermont College of
Medicine
Burlington, VT, USA

Raul N. Uppot
Department of Radiology
Harvard Medical School and
Division of Abdominal Imaging and
Interventional Radiology
Department of Radiology
Massachusetts General Hospital
Boston, MA, USA

Arthur E. Stillman
Department of Radiology
Emory University School of Medicine
Emory University Hospital
Atlanta, GA, USA

Lisa L. Wang
School of Medicine
Washington University
St. Louis, MO, USA

SECTION I

Physics and Techniques of MDCT

A Practical Approach to MDCT

Mannudeep K. Kalra, Sanjay Saini

Introduction

Over the past 8 years, computed tomography (CT) technology has developed tremendously with the introduction of multi-detector row CT (MDCT) scanners to the clinical radiology practice [1]. Use of CT scanning has increased immensely over the last decade with the introduction of newer applications. Demand for better technology continues to propel vendors to develop further innovations in very short time periods. As a result, it has become difficult for many radiologists, physicists, and technologists to keep up with the pace of development. This chapter outlines growth patterns in MDCT application and use and the history of CT technology and describes the fundamentals of MDCT technology.

MDCT: Explosive Growth Patterns

It is estimated that there are more than 25,000 CT scanners in the world, and since 1998, worldwide CT sales have doubled. In 2002, the CT market was reported to be worth in excess of US\$2.6 billion [1]. A recent survey indicates that every year, about 90 million CT examinations are performed globally, which corresponds to a frequency of 16 CT examinations per 1,000 inhabitants [1, 2]. According to the 2000–2001 Nationwide Evaluation of X-ray Trends (NEXT) – a survey of patient radiation exposure from CT, performed under the auspices of the United States Food and Drug Administration – approximately 58 million (± 9 million) CT studies are performed annually in 7,800 CT facilities in the United States [1]. As regards CT applications, during 1991–2002, vascular and cardiac applications of CT showed the highest growth rates (over 140%), followed by much smaller increments in abdominal, pelvic, thoracic, and head and neck applications (7–27%).

MDCT: Chronology of Technological Advances

- **1971:** The Nobel laureate Sir Godfrey Neobold Hounsfield at the Electrical and Musical Industries, London, a British electronics and music company, developed the first conventional CT scanner. It took 15 h to scan the first patient using this CT instrument and 5 min to acquire each image.
- **1971–1976:** During this period, four generations of conventional CT scanners were developed, and the scan time for each image dropped manyfold to 1–2 s. These conventional scanners revolved a single X-ray tube and detector array on a gantry assembly around the patient. Following each revolution, the X-ray tube and/or detector array returned to their initial position to “unwind” their attached wires and prepare for the next revolution after table movement.
- **Early 1990s:** Just as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) threatened to make inroads into several “CT applications,” introduction of slip-ring or spiral or helical CT technology marked the beginning of a resurgence of CT scanning in clinical practice. Helical scanning obviated the need for wires and hence the “unwinding” time by using innovative slip rings on the gantry assembly. An increase in temporal resolution (decrease in scan time) to subsecond durations and acquisition of contiguous volumetric scan data with helical CT scanners improved dynamic contrast-enhanced studies and three-dimensional (3-D) rendering of axial source data.
- **Late 1990s to 2005:** During this period, different vendors offered MDCT scanners with several different slice options from 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 16, 32, 40, and 64 slices per revolution. The addition of multiple detector rows to the detector array of helical CT

scanners in the scanning direction or Z-axis allowed acquisition of more than one image per revolution of X-ray tube and detector array around the patient and led to development of multidetector or multisection, multichannel, multislice, or multidetector-row helical CT scanners. MDCT scanners offer several advantages over the prior helical and nonhelical CT scanners. In addition, there are several differences in the hardware and software components of single-slice helical CT and MDCT scanners. Depending on the detector configuration, MDCT scanners have multiple detector rows in the scanning direction or Z-axis. The number of detector rows in MDCT scanners can be less than the number of slices reconstructed per rotation (Siemens Sensation 64 with double Z-sampling), equal to the number of slices per rotation (LightSpeed VCT, General Electric Healthcare Technologies), or more than the number of reconstructed slices (LightSpeed QXi, General Electric Healthcare Technologies). For most MDCT scanners, the smallest reconstructed slice thickness is equal to the thickness of an individual detector row. For example, with 64×0.625 detector configuration (LightSpeed VCT), minimum slice thickness is 0.625 although it is possible to generate images with 1.25-, 2.5-, 3.75-, 5-, and 10-mm slice thickness also. However, one vendor (Siemens Medical Solutions) provides scanners that can acquire 0.4-mm slices with 0.6-mm detector width, due to double Z-sampling that occurs due to dynamic, online motion of the focal spot (Z-flying focal spot) and X-ray beam projections over adjoining detector rows.

Compared with single-slice CT, MDCT permits image reconstruction at various slice thicknesses different from the one chosen prior to the scan. Also, MDCT scanners allow faster scan times (330–350 milliseconds), wider scan coverage, and thinner section thickness. Higher temporal resolution helps in vascular and cardiac scanning, better utilization of contrast medium injection bolus, as well as scanning of uncooperative, breathless, or pediatric patients (less need for sedation or shorter duration of sedation). Wider scan coverage with MDCT scanners helps in vascular studies over longer regions, such as chest, abdomen, pelvis for aortic aneurysms or dissection workup, and peripheral CT angiography from origins of renal arteries to feet. Along with wider coverage, MDCT can also acquire “isotropic” scan data, which helps create exquisite 3-D or orthogonal multiplanar images. In addition, due to the wider detector configuration and use of cone-shaped X-ray, more complex cone-beam reconstruction techniques are used for MDCT compared with single-slice CT scanners. These cone-beam reconstruction techniques help reduce streak artifacts, particularly at the site of inhomogeneous objects in the scanning direction, such as ribs.

- **2005:** At 330–350 ms gantry revolution time, MDCT scanners are approaching the engineering limits of the gantry to withstand the mechanical forces from gantry components, so further improvements in scan time appear challenging. For cardiac or coronary CT angiography studies, however, a higher temporal resolution may imply better quality examinations in patients with higher or irregular heart rates. In this respect, dual-source MDCT scanners (Siemens Medical Solutions), with two X-ray tubes (both 80 kW) and two detector arrays (both with 64-slice acquisition per rotation with double Z-axis sampling), may prove beneficial by decreasing single-segment reconstruction scan time to 83 ms [3, 4]. However, patient studies are needed to validate the findings of initial phantom studies. Another recent innovation in MDCT technology is the introduction of the “sandwich” detector array (Philips Medical Systems), which can enable acquisition of images with characteristics of dual-energy spectra. The dual-source MDCT can also acquire dual kilovoltage peak (kVp) or energy image data when different kVp are selected for the two sources. However, rigorous studies will be required to assess the clinical potential of dual-energy CT scanning.

MDCT: Practical Approach to Building Scan Protocols

Several important considerations apply when building an “optimum” scanning protocol (Table 1). An “optimum” scanning protocol may be defined as one that provides adequate diagnostic information with an appropriate amount of contrast media and as low as reasonably achievable radiation dose (Table 2). Important aspects of a diagnostic CT study that must be considered while making a protocol are summarized in Figure 1 and include [5]:

- **Diagnostic indication:** Will help determine the number of phases (one or more, arterial, venous, delayed), scan area of interest, need for contrast (oral and/or rectal and/or intravenous), contrast administration protocol, scanning parameters, and appropriate radiation dose required to generate images to answer the diagnostic query. Development of specific scanning protocols for different clinical indications can help in optimizing workflow and managing radiation dose [6, 7].

- **Scan area of interest and scan direction:** It is important to predetermine the appropriate region of interest based on clinical indication [6, 8], for example, scanning of regions such as abdomen only, abdomen-pelvis, or chest-abdomen-pelvis. Concerns have been raised about “overextending” the scan area of interest, as faster MDCT scanners re-

Table 1. Important scanning parameters and contrast considerations that must be addressed during development of scanning protocols for a given diagnostic indication

Computed tomography (CT) scanning parameters	Contrast consideration
Scan area of interest	Contrast versus noncontrast
Scan direction	Route
Localizer radiograph	Concentration
Scan duration	Volume
Gantry revolution time	Rate of injection
Table speed, beam pitch, beam collimation	Trigger-fixed, automatic tracking, or test bolus
Reconstructed section thickness	
Extent of overlap	
Reconstruction algorithms	
Tube potential	
Tube current and automatic exposure control	
Radiation dose	

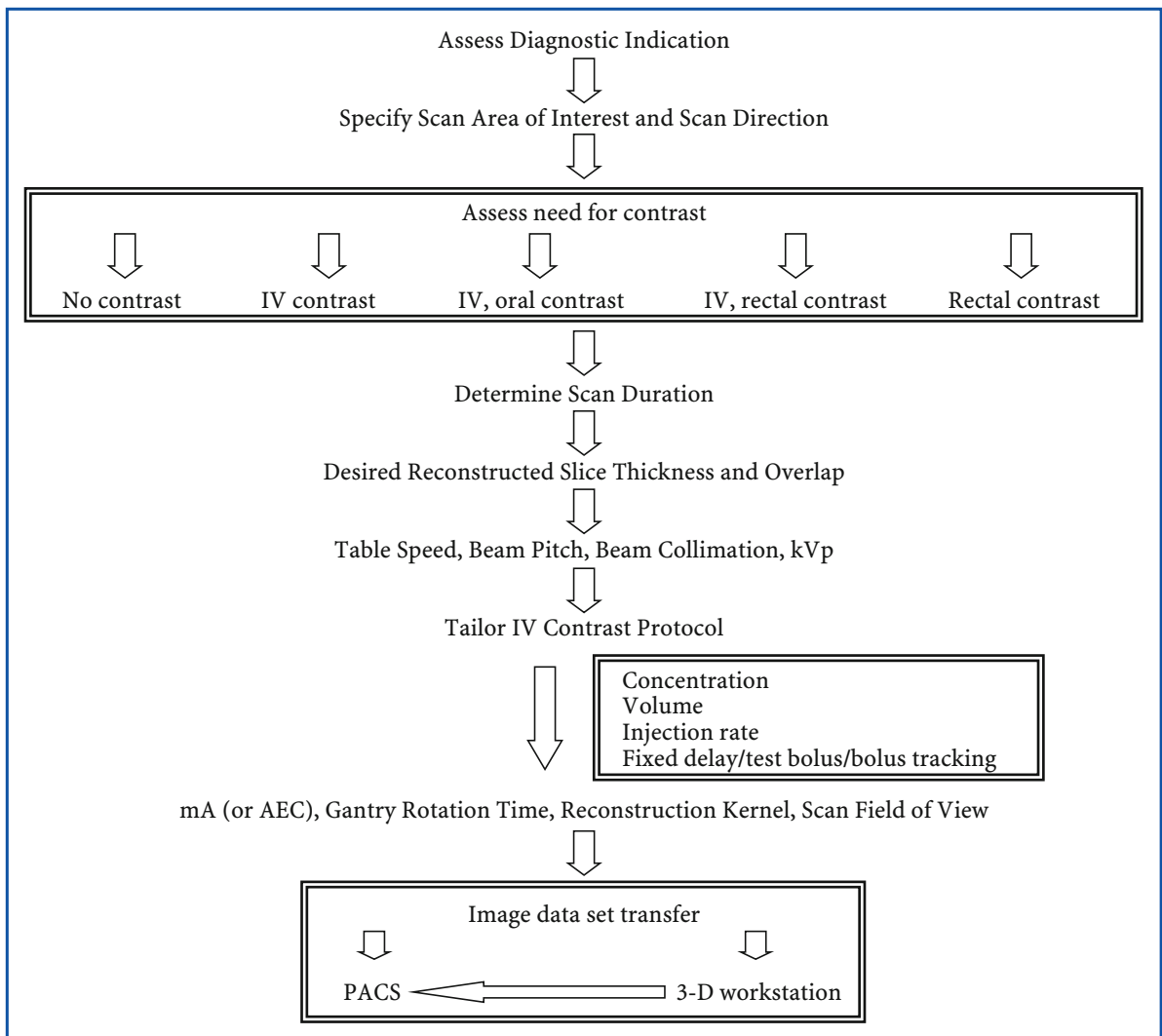
**Fig. 1.** Building blocks for scanning protocols. *IV* intravenous, *kVp* kilovolt peak, *mA* milliampere, *AEC* automatic exposure control, *PACS* picture archiving and communication system

Table 2. Salient features of multidetector-row computed tomography (MDCT) scanners

Features	Details
X-ray tube	80–100 kW Higher tube current output (up to 800 mA) Less issues with tube cooling Z-flying focal spot (double Z-sampling) ^a
X-ray filters	Prepatient beam filters – to improve dose efficiency Bowtie filters – to reduce dose (especially cardiac applications)
Detector array	> one detector row in scanning direction (Z-axis) Effective detector widths: may be constant or variable Effective detector-row width (64-MDCT): 0.5, 0.6, or 0.625 mm Most scanners: effective detector width = section width Double Z-sampling: effective detector width $\geq$ section width ^a
DAS	Represents data acquisition system or data channels Determines slice profiles (number of slices per rotation) Example: 4 data channels: 16 detector rows for 4-slice MDCT 64 data channels: 64 detector rows for 64-slice MDCT
Detector configuration	Describes number of data channels and effective detector-row width Example: 16×1.25 mm = 16 data channels; 1.25-mm row width
Beam collimation	Refers to X-ray beam width Cone-shaped beam leads to “overbeaming” (penumbra effect) = number of data channels $\times$ effective detector-row width Example: 16-slice MDCT a. $16 \text{ data channels} \times 1.25\text{-mm row width} = 20 \text{ mm}$ b. $16 \text{ data channels} \times 0.625\text{-mm row width} = 10 \text{ mm}$ Radiation dose: $b > a$
Beam pitch	Table speed in mm per gantry revolution/beam collimation in mm Smaller effect on image quality for MDCT than for SSCT > 1: nonoverlapping, interspersed acquisition = 1: nonoverlapping, contiguous acquisition < 1: overlapping acquisition Low-contrast lesions (liver): prefer beam pitch < 1 High contrast lesions (CT colonography): prefer beam pitch > 1
Table speed	Closely related to beam pitch and beam collimation Usually described as table travel in mm per gantry revolution For mm/s: multiply with number of revolutions per second Compared with SSCT, MDCT provides higher table speed, allows faster scanning for thinner sections with dose savings

^a Siemens 64-slice MDCT

MDCT multi-detector row computed tomography

SSCT single-slice CT

quire very little extra time to cover extended scan length. Determination of scan area of interest or scan length (which also depends upon patient length or height) can help to determine scanning parameters, scan duration, and contrast administration protocol. Scan direction is an important determinant of vascular contrast enhancement. In general, direction of scanning is similar to the direction of blood flow in the area of interest in order

to follow the contrast flow column (for example, peripheral MDCT angiography – craniocaudal) with few exceptions (for example, MDCT angiography of pulmonary embolism to avoid streaks from contrast in systemic veins – caudocranial).

- **Localizer radiograph:** With availability of automatic exposure control techniques and bowtie filters (a hardware component of the scanner), it is

important to emphasize to technologists that patients must be centered appropriately in the scanner. Acquisition of localizer radiograph with mis-centering of patient in the gantry isocenter can lead to erroneous calculation of tube current with use of automatic exposure control technique, and this can affect resulting image quality [9, 10]. Likewise, localizer radiograph length must also include the entire scan area of interest, as some automatic exposure control techniques (Z-axis and XYZ-axis modulation) require these radiographs to estimate tube current [9].

- **Contrast consideration:** This aspect of scanning protocol is discussed elsewhere in the textbook.

- **Scan duration:** State-of-the-art MDCT scanners cover most routine CT studies of chest, abdomen, and/or pelvis in a single breath-hold, fast acquisition (less than 15 s). Further reduction in scan duration with MDCT will also be helpful to avoid or reduce the need for sedation in uncooperative patients or children. Estimation of scan duration with MDCT scanning is most critical for catching the peak contrast enhancement over the scan length. Thus, estimation of scan duration can help optimize contrast media injection duration. Scan duration depends on several factors, such as gantry revolution time, table speed, and pitch, as well as scan area(s) of interest.

- **Gantry revolution time:** In general, the shortest gantry revolution time (such as 0.4–0.5 s) must be used for most CT studies. An exception to this rule is CT evaluation of a large patient, where use of longer gantry rotation time helps increase total tube current – time product [milliampere second (mAs)].

- **Table speed, beam pitch, and beam collimation:** For MDCT scanners, change in these parameters affects scan duration and radiation dose more than image quality. However, there are some exceptions to this rule. In the liver, use of higher pitch ($>1:1$ beam pitch) and faster table speed has been shown to be inferior to lower pitch and slower table speed for detection of small metastatic lesions [11]. Conversely, in high-contrast situations, such as CT colonography and CT angiography, use of higher pitch ($>1:1$ beam pitch) and faster table speed does not affect image quality [2].

From scan length and scan duration, table speed can be estimated. For example, a 350-mm scan length for abdomen-pelvis in 10 s can be covered with a table speed of 35 mm/s or 17.5 mm per gantry revolution (at 0.5-s gantry revolution time). For a given MDCT scanner, desired table speed can then be achieved by selecting beam pitch, number of data channels, effective detector-row width, and

gantry revolution speed. Thus, for an 8-slice MDCT scanner, a table speed of 35 mm/s can be achieved with 0.875:1 beam pitch, 8 data channels with 2.5-mm effective detector-row width (detector configuration of 8×2.5 mm = 20 mm beam collimation), and 0.5-s gantry revolution time. When selecting the detector configuration and beam pitch – most notably, the effective detector-row width – one must take into account the required reconstructed section thickness. For example, if 1.25-mm section thickness is required for an 8-slice MDCT scanner, one must select 8×1.25 -mm detector configuration (effective detector-row width = 1.25 mm) and not 8×2.5 -mm detector configuration (effective detector-row width = 2.5 mm). This becomes redundant for MDCT scanners with matrix array detector configuration, such as 64×0.625 mm (LightSpeed VCT) since users select the same detector configuration (64×0.625 mm) to obtain any section thickness (0.625, 1.25, 2.5, 3.75, or 5 mm).

- **Reconstructed section thickness:** Compared with single detector-row CT scanners, MDCT (≥ 4 -slice scanners) allows acquisition of thinner section thickness in shorter duration and with less radiation exposure. However, an increase in indications for thinner sections with MDCT scanners can lead to overall increase in radiation dose contributions from these scanners. In such circumstances, radiation dose can be reduced by acquiring thicker sections and reconstructing thinner images from the volumetric raw data. Thinner sections have more noise content but higher spatial resolution and less partial volume averaging so that greater noise can be tolerated. Whereas thinner sections can now be acquired in a short duration, this also poses interpretation and archiving challenges to radiologists and their departments. Therefore, scanning protocols must define use of thinner sections- for interpretation or 3-D post-processing on picture archiving and communication system (PACS) or dedicated, stand-alone, image postprocessing workstations.

In general, for most routine abdominal CT studies, a section thickness of 2.5–5 mm is preferred for diagnostic interpretation. For these studies, multiplanar reconstructions can be performed at the scanner console from thinner reconstructions or directly from the volumetric raw data. Thinner sections are generally acquired for imaging of other regions of the body, including CT angiography studies of the abdomen.

- **Extent of overlap:** With isotropic scan data from most modern MDCT scanners, need for overlapping intersection distance is limited and can be avoided.

- **Reconstruction algorithms:** Reconstruction al-

gorithms are an important component of scanning protocols. Selection of higher spatial resolution kernels (or sharper kernels) is necessary for viewing bones and lungs but can lead to unacceptably noisy images for soft tissues. Therefore, appropriate algorithms must be selected for specific regions of interest. A softer kernel (or a kernel with lower spatial resolution) provides smoother images and can help in decreasing noise content for low-contrast lesions, lower-dose studies, obese patients, or thinner sections.

- **Tube potential:** Most CT studies in adults are performed at 120 kVp. Tube potential (kVp) has a complex relationship with image noise, CT attenuation values (contrast), and radiation dose. A decrease in kVp increases noise and decreases radiation dose if other parameters are held constant but leads to higher attenuation values (except for water) and image contrast irrespective of other scanning parameters. The latter can help reduce the volume of intravenous contrast media administered for CT scanning. Low kVp CT can help in dose and contrast media volume reduction. Low kVp CT studies are especially well suited for high-contrast regions of interests, such as chest CT and CT angiography. To avoid inadvertently high image noise with low kVp CT studies, tube current may be raised. Several pediatric CT examinations can also be performed at lower kVp in order to reduce associated dose. However, kVp reduction in obese or large patients must be avoided to ensure adequate signal-to-noise ratio for acceptable diagnostic interpretation.

- **Tube current:** Unlike kVp, a change in tube current [milliamperage (mA)] does not affect image contrast or CT attenuation values. However, reduction in mA is the most common method of reducing radiation dose. Either fixed tube current or automatic exposure control techniques can be used for maintaining adequate image quality and for managing radiation dose associated with MDCT [9, 12]. These techniques have been discussed in detail in the chapter on radiation dose. Automatic exposure control techniques can help optimize tube current and dose irrespective of other scanning parameters. As automatic exposure control techniques allow dose optimization during each gantry revolution (XY-axes) and from one to the next gantry revolution (Z-axis), it may be more dose efficient to use automatic exposure control over fixed tube-current protocols [10, 13].

- **Radiation-dose consideration:** This aspect of scanning protocols is described comprehensively elsewhere in this textbook.

MDCT: Are there Disadvantages to the Technology?

Used appropriately, most state-of-the-art MDCT scanners can help reduce overall radiation dose compared with the prior single-slice or conventional CT scanners. Although each technological breakthrough in MDCT has contributed to improved resolution and coverage with expansion of its clinical applications, recent trends in radiation dose contribution from MDCT scanners are alarming. CT scanning contributes the most radiation dose among all medical radiation-based imaging procedures. Several experts have raised concerns over potential overuse and inappropriate use of MDCT scanners. Several vendors have introduced sophisticated techniques, such as automatic exposure control, detectors with better dose efficiency, improved reconstruction kernels, and noise-reduction filters, but much remains to be accomplished for optimization of radiation dose. Most importantly, the definition of “optimum image quality at lowest possible dose” for different-sized patients in different body regions for different clinical indications remains elusive. In the absence of these guidelines, users must employ strategies for dose reduction, when indicated.

Summary

In summary, understanding the fundamentals of MDCT helps adequate planning of scanning protocols.

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2

Principles of Contrast Medium Delivery and Scan Timing in MDCT

Kyongtae T. Bae

Introduction

The advent of multidetector-row computed tomography (MDCT) technology has brought substantial advantages over single-detector-row CT (SDCT) in terms of image quality and clinical practice. The dramatically improved spatial and temporal resolution achievable on MDCT permits previously highly technically demanding clinical applications such as CT angiography (CTA) and cardiac CT to be practiced routinely.

Another major advantage of MDCT over SDCT is that contrast medium can be used more efficiently and flexibly. However, in order to fully appreciate the benefits of MDCT, certain technical challenges involving scan timing and optimization of contrast enhancement need to be overcome. This chapter aims to review the numerous factors associated with contrast medium delivery and scan timing. Moreover, modifications to protocol design that are necessary for optimized contrast enhancement in MDCT are discussed, along with clinical considerations for CTA and hepatic imaging.

Scan Timing and Factors Affecting Contrast Medium Delivery

The principal factors affecting contrast medium enhancement in CT imaging can be grouped into three broad categories: the patient, the injection of contrast medium, and the CT scan. Whereas factors associated with the former two categories determine the contrast enhancement process itself (independently of the CT scan), factors associated with the latter category (i.e., image acquisition parameters) play a critical role in permitting optimal visualization of the resulting contrast enhancement at specific time points. Whereas patient and

injection factors involved in contrast enhancement are highly interrelated, some factors more closely affect the magnitude of contrast enhancement while others more closely affect the timing of contrast enhancement.

Patient Factors

The principal patient-related factors that influence contrast enhancement are body weight and cardiac output (cardiovascular circulation time). Other factors that can be considered of less significance include height, gender, age, venous access, renal function, and various pathological conditions.

Body Weight

The most important patient-related factor affecting the magnitude of vascular and parenchymal contrast enhancement is body weight [1–4]. Since large patients have larger blood volumes than small patients, contrast medium administered into the blood compartment of a large patient is diluted more than that administered to a small patient. The result is a reduced magnitude of contrast enhancement. Patient weight and the magnitude of enhancement are inversely related in a nearly one-to-one linear fashion. For a given administered dose of contrast medium, the magnitude of contrast enhancement is reduced proportionally to patient weight (Fig. 1). However, whereas the magnitude of contrast enhancement is strongly affected by patient weight, the timing of enhancement is largely unaffected by this parameter due to the concomitant proportional increase in both blood volume and cardiac output [3, 5, 6]. The result is a largely unaltered contrast medium circulation time that is independent of patient weight.

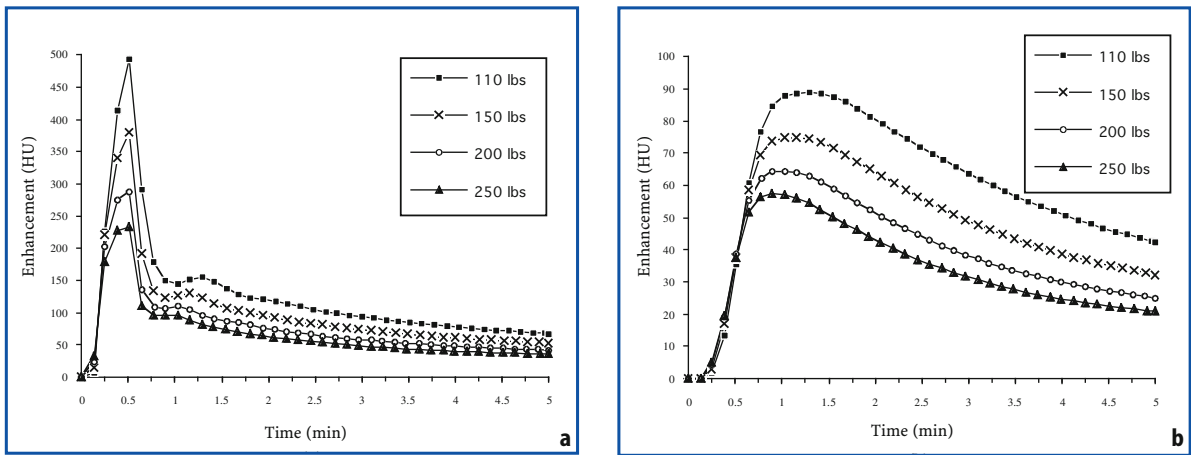


Fig. 1a, b. Simulated contrast enhancement curves with four different body weights. Simulated enhancement curves of the **a** aorta and **b** liver based on a hypothetical adult male with a fixed height (5'8" or 173 cm) and varying body weight (110, 160, 200, and 260 lbs, or 49.8, 72.5, 90.7, and 117.9 kg), subjected to injection of 125 ml of contrast medium at 5 ml/s (14). The magnitude of contrast enhancement is inversely proportional to body weight. Reprinted from [53]

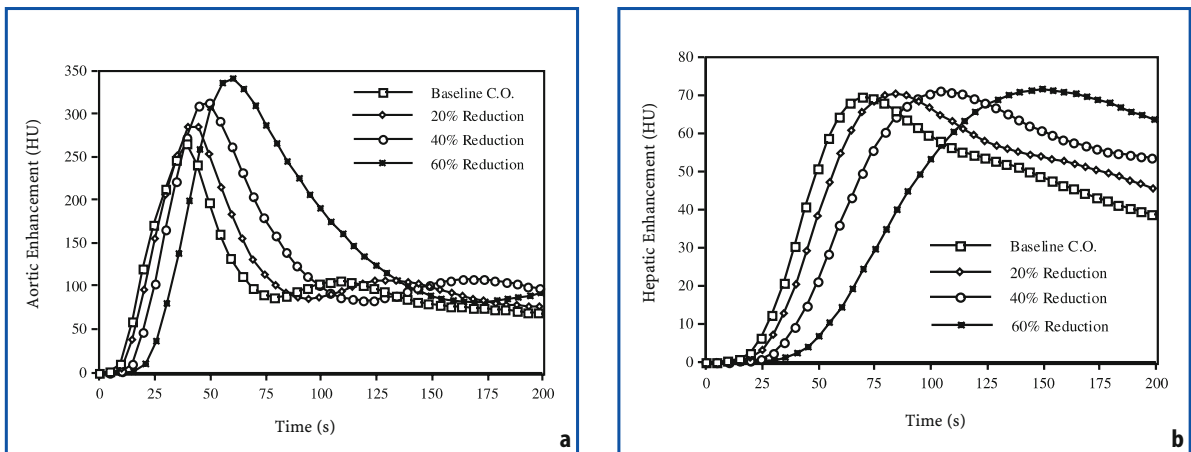


Fig. 2a, b. Simulated contrast enhancement curves at baseline and reduced cardiac outputs. Simulated enhancement curves of the **a** aorta and **b** liver based on a hypothetical adult male with a fixed height (5'8", or 173 cm) and body weight (150 lbs, or 68 kg), subjected to injection of 120 ml of contrast agent at 4 ml/s. A set of aortic and hepatic contrast enhancement curves was generated by reducing the baseline cardiac output, i.e., 6,500 ml/min, by 20%, 40%, and 60%. Reprinted from [53]

Practical Tips

1. To maintain a constant degree of contrast enhancement in larger patients, one should consider increasing the overall iodine dose by increasing contrast medium volume and/or concentration. Increasing injection rate also increases the magnitude of vascular contrast enhancement (and hepatic enhancement in limited circumstances).
2. The timing of enhancement is largely unaffected by patient weight.

Cardiac Output

The most important patient-related factor affecting the timing of contrast enhancement is cardiac output (or cardiovascular circulation time) [7]. As cardiac output is reduced, the circulation of contrast medium slows, resulting in delayed contrast

bolus arrival and delayed peak arterial and parenchymal enhancement (Fig. 2). The time delay between injection of the contrast medium bolus and the arrival of peak enhancement in the aorta and liver is highly correlated with, and linearly proportional to, cardiac output. Thus, in patients with reduced cardiac output, once the contrast bolus arrives in the central blood compartment, it is cleared more slowly, resulting in a higher, prolonged enhancement.

A consequence of the slower contrast bolus clearance in patients with reduced cardiac output is an increased magnitude of peak aortic and parenchymal enhancement. The rate of increase, however, is different in the aorta and liver. Whereas the magnitude of peak aortic enhancement increases substantially in patients with reduced cardiac output, the magnitude of peak hepatic enhancement increases only slightly.

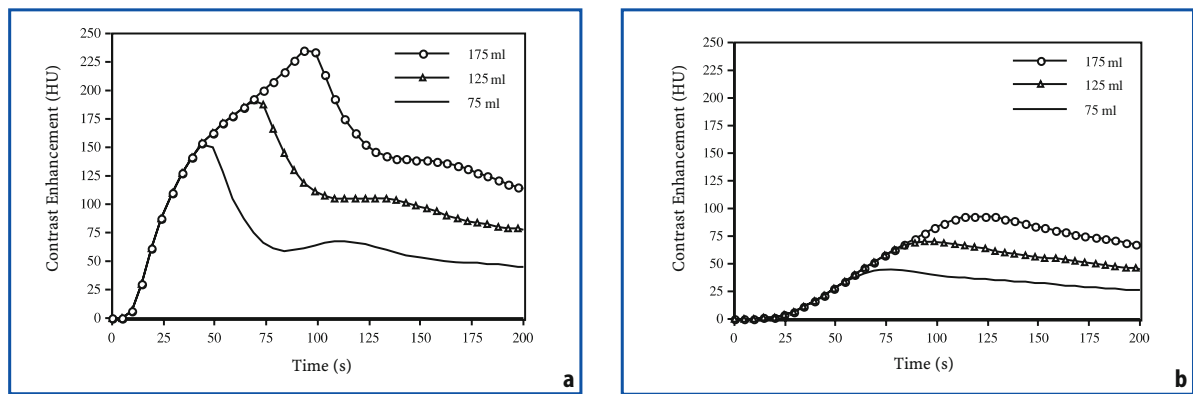


Fig. 3a, b. Simulated contrast enhancement curves with three different contrast medium volumes. Simulated enhancement curves of the **a** aorta and **b** liver based on a hypothetical adult male with a fixed height (5'8", or 173 cm) and body weight (150 lbs, or 68 kg), subjected to injection of 75, 125, and 175 ml of contrast medium at 2 ml/s. Time-to-peak and magnitude of enhancement peak increases with contrast medium volume. Reprinted from [53]

Practical Tips

1. When scan timing is critical, it is important to individualize the scan delay to account for variations in cardiac output among patients. Scan delay can be individualized by using a test bolus or a bolus tracking technique.

Contrast Injection Factors

Key factors related to the injection of contrast medium include injection duration, injection rate, contrast medium volume (injection duration $\times$ rate), concentration, and use of a saline flush.

Injection Duration

Injection duration, which is determined by the volume of contrast medium and the rate at which it is administered (injection duration = contrast volume $\div$ injection rate), critically affects both magnitude and timing of contrast enhancement [8–13]. Increased injection duration at a fixed rate of injection leads to greater deposition of iodine mass. This results in increased magnitude of vascular and parenchymal enhancement, which is proportional to injection duration (Fig. 3).

The appropriate injection duration is determined by scanning conditions and the clinical objectives of the examination. Injection duration should be prolonged for a long CT scan to maintain good enhancement throughout image acquisition. An injection duration that is too short leads to insufficient contrast enhancement. On the other hand, too long an injection duration results in a waste of contrast medium and the generation of undesirable tissue and venous contrast enhancement. Pertinent clinical factors to be considered in determining injection duration include body size,

the vessel or organ of interest, and the desired level of enhancement [14].

A sufficiently long injection is particularly crucial in portal-venous phase imaging of the liver because the principal determinant of hepatic enhancement is total iodine dose administered [9–11, 13, 15–21]. Thus, for a fixed injection rate, the injection duration for a large patient should be longer than that for a small patient. On the other hand, for a fixed injection duration and contrast medium concentration, the injection rate should be adjusted according to the patient's body size to deliver the appropriate amount of iodine mass. In this case, larger patients require faster injections.

The duration of contrast medium injection is the most important technical factor that affects scan timing. In patients with normal cardiac output, peak arterial contrast enhancement is achieved shortly after termination of a contrast medium injection [20]. As the volume of contrast medium increases, so too does the time required to reach the peak of arterial or parenchymal contrast enhancement (Fig. 3). Conversely, a shorter time-to-peak enhancement is noted for a fixed volume of contrast medium injected at a faster injection rate (Fig. 4).

Practical Tips

1. The use of a higher contrast medium concentration or a faster injection rate facilitates faster delivery of the total iodine load, allowing use of a shorter injection to achieve the desired degree of contrast enhancement.
2. A rapid contrast delivery rate and short injection duration are desirable for arterial enhancement with MDCT but are much less important for parenchymal or venous enhancement.
3. A short injection duration (i.e., low volume

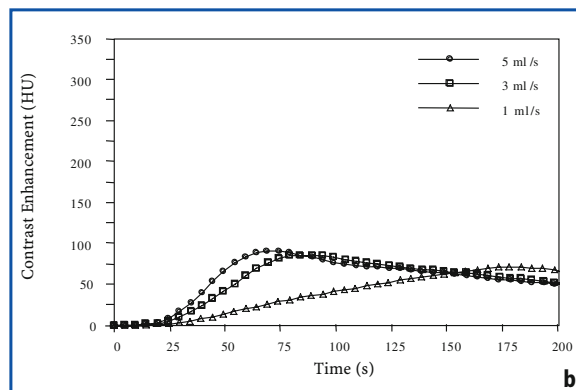
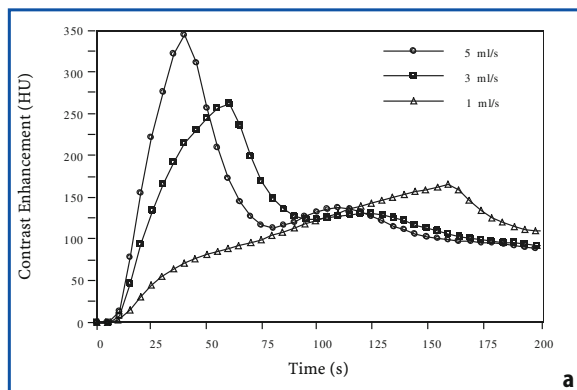


Fig. 4a, b. Simulated contrast enhancement curves with three different contrast medium injection rates. Simulated enhancement curves of the **a** aorta and **b** liver based on a hypothetical adult male with a fixed height (5'8", or 173 cm) and body weight (150 lbs, or 68 kg) subjected to 150 ml of contrast medium injected at 1, 3, and 5 ml/s. The curves show that for a fixed volume of contrast medium, as the rate of injection increases, the magnitude of contrast enhancement increases and the duration of high-magnitude contrast enhancement decreases. Figure 4a reprinted with permission of Anderson Publishing from Bae KT. Technical aspects of contrast delivery in advanced CT. Appl Radiol. 32 (12) (Suppl): 12-19. © Anderson Publishing

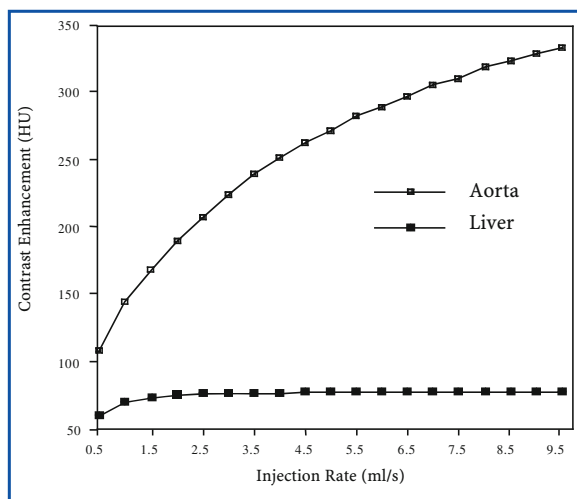


Fig. 5. Effect of contrast medium injection rate on the magnitude of peak contrast enhancement. Simulation of peak aortic and hepatic contrast enhancement at different injection rates based on a hypothetical adult male with a fixed height (5'8", or 173 cm) and body weight (150 lbs, or 68 kg) subjected to injection of 120 ml of contrast medium. Reprinted with permission from Bae KT, Heiken JP, Brink JA (1998) Aortic and hepatic peak enhancement at CT: effect of contrast medium injection rate-pharmacokinetic analysis and experimental porcine model. Radiology 206:455-464

and/or high injection rate) results in earlier peak arterial and parenchymal enhancement and requires a short scan delay. A long injection duration (i.e., high volume and/or low injection rate) results in later peak enhancement, and thus a longer scan delay is preferable.

Injection Rate

Both rate of delivery and total delivered mass of iodine are increased when the injection rate is increased at a fixed duration of injection. The magnitude of peak vascular and parenchymal enhancement increases with a wider temporal window of

desired contrast enhancement. On the other hand, when the injection rate is increased at a fixed volume of contrast medium, the peaks of enhancement increase in magnitude and occur earlier and the duration of high-magnitude enhancement decreases (Fig. 4). However, for a given increase in injection rate, the rate of increase in the magnitude of aortic contrast enhancement is substantially greater than that of the liver (Fig. 5) [22-24].

To obtain a fast arterial CT scan (e.g., for MDCT angiography applications), an increased injection rate resulting in a shortened but elevated magnitude of arterial enhancement is beneficial. On the other hand, a longer injection duration resulting in more prolonged vascular enhancement is preferable for slower CT scans. Faster injection rate and shorter injection duration result in a longer interval between peak arterial enhancement and hepatic parenchymal equilibrium enhancement. Thus, a faster injection rate results not only in a higher magnitude of arterial enhancement but also in a greater temporal separation between the arterial and venous phases of hepatic enhancement (Fig. 6).

Practical Tips

1. The magnitude of peak aortic enhancement increases almost linearly with increases of injection rate (up to 8-10 ml/s), while peak hepatic enhancement increases much more gradually and is apparent only at relatively low injection rates (<3 ml/s).
2. A fast injection rate improves the separation of contrast-enhancement phases and thus is beneficial for multiphase examinations of the liver, pancreas, and kidneys, as optimized enhancement during each contrast enhancement phase may improve lesion detection and characterization.

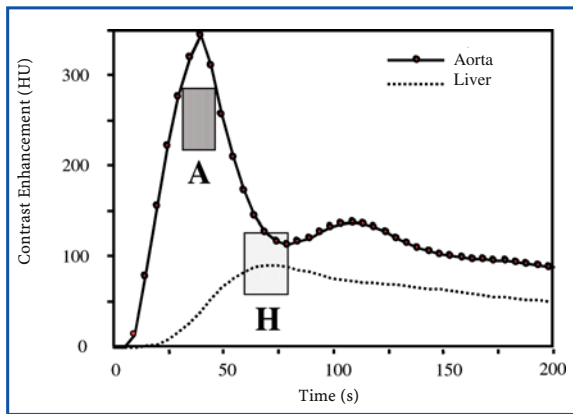


Fig. 6. Simulated aortic and hepatic contrast enhancement curves with a high contrast injection rate. Aortic (solid line) and hepatic (dashed line) contrast enhancement curves are simulated using a physiologically based compartment model (body weight 150 lbs, or 68 kg, and height 5'8", or 173 cm) subjected to a high injection rate protocol (150 ml of contrast medium injected at 5 ml/s) (14). A high injection rate not only increases the magnitude of arterial enhancement, but it also provides greater temporal separation between the arterial (A) and venous (H) phases of enhancement. This distinct phase separation is beneficial for multiphase scanning of the liver, pancreas, and kidneys. Reprinted from [94]

Concentration

The availability of contrast media with high iodine concentrations (350 mgI/ml and above) has attracted a great deal of interest recently for MDCT applications [21, 25–39]. For injections of fixed duration, rate, and volume, a contrast medium with a high iodine concentration will deliver a larger total iodine load more rapidly. The resulting magnitude of peak contrast enhancement is increased, and the temporal window at a given level of enhance-

ment is wider. Conversely, time-to-peak enhancement is unaffected because duration and rate of injection remain constant.

On the other hand, when the need is to maintain a constant total iodine mass and injection rate, injection volume and duration vary with contrast medium concentration. Under these conditions, the injected volume of a contrast medium with high iodine concentration is smaller than that of a contrast medium with low iodine concentration. The duration of enhancement is shorter with the higher concentration agent because of reduced contrast medium volume. Nevertheless, contrast medium with a higher iodine concentration delivers more iodine mass per unit time and thus results in earlier and greater peak aortic enhancement (Fig. 7). The effect is the same as that seen with the use of a high injection rate.

Practical Tips

1. For a fast MDCT scan, a high iodine delivery rate is desirable to maximize arterial enhancement for CTA and to depict hypervascular tumors.
2. Use of a contrast medium with high iodine concentration is an alternative approach to using an increased injection rate to increase iodine delivery rate.

Saline Flush

A saline flush “pushes” the tail of the injected contrast medium bolus into the central blood volume and thus makes use of contrast medium that

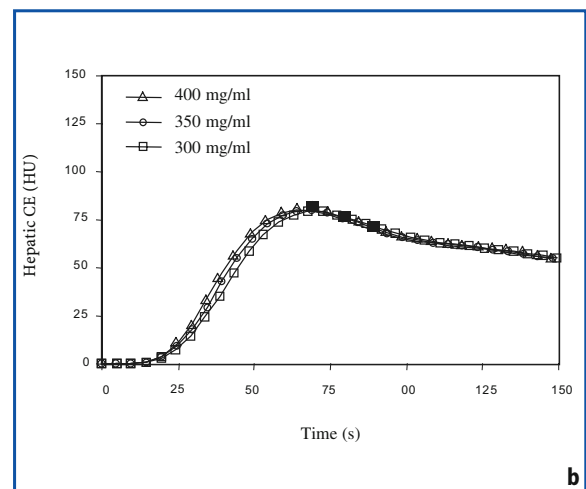
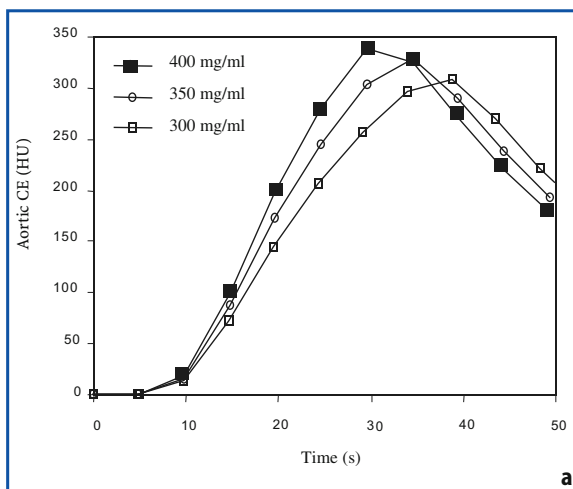


Fig. 7a, b. Simulated contrast enhancement curves with a fixed amount of iodine mass but three different contrast medium concentrations injected at a constant rate. Simulated enhancement curves of the **a** aorta and **b** liver based on a hypothetical adult male with a fixed height (5'8", or 173 cm) and body weight (150 lbs, or 68 kg) subjected to 5 ml/s injection of the same amount of iodine mass but at three different concentrations and volumes: 300 mgI/ml, 140 ml; 350 mgI/ml, 120 ml; and 400 mgI/ml, 105 ml. The aortic time-enhancement curves demonstrate that the use of high-concentration contrast material is associated with earlier and greater peak aortic enhancement. The effect of high iodine concentration contrast material on liver enhancement is minimal if iodine mass is unchanged. Reprinted with permission of Anderson Publishing from Bae KT. Technical aspects of contrast delivery in advanced CT. Appl Radiol 32 (12) (Suppl):12-19. © 2003 Anderson Publishing

would otherwise remain unused in the injection tubing and peripheral veins. A saline flush therefore increases both the level of contrast enhancement and the efficiency of contrast medium utilization [40–47]. Additional advantages of a saline flush include improved bolus geometry due to reduced intravascular contrast medium dispersion and, on thoracic CT studies, reduced streak artifact from dense contrast material in the brachiocephalic vein and superior vena cava. A saline flush is particularly beneficial when a small volume of contrast medium is used. For this reason, a saline flush is commonly used for gadolinium-enhanced magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) but has not been widely used in CT, in part because a double-barrel CT contrast injector has not been commercially available until recently. With the increasing use of MDCT and the increasing clinical application of CTA, use of a saline flush is rapidly becoming accepted in clinical practice to compensate for the use of smaller contrast medium volumes.

The volume of contrast medium that can be substituted by saline flush without affecting the degree of contrast enhancement depends on the “dead-space” volume of the injection tubing and the peripheral venous blood volume between the brachial vein and the superior vena cava. The peripheral venous blood volume is in turn related to patient size or weight. In a typical clinical setting, the amount of contrast medium saving may be anything between 12 ml and 20 ml.

Practical Tips

1. A saline flush improves contrast enhancement, the efficiency of contrast medium use and reduces artifacts; this is particularly beneficial when a small total amount of contrast medium is used.
2. Twenty to 30 ml of saline flush may be sufficient, and injection of a larger quantity might not further improve contrast enhancement.

Arterial CT Angiography

MDCT readily permits acquisition of images with high spatial and temporal resolution. The benefits of MDCT angiography are such that most conventional catheter-based diagnostic angiography examinations have been replaced by this technique.

For example, pulmonary CTA is now the most commonly practiced CTA application in the routine clinical setting. Improved spatial resolution on MDCT permits excellent delineation of peripheral pulmonary arteries and detection of small emboli. Improved temporal resolution deriving from increased scan speeds on the more recent 16- and

64-slice MDCT scanners permits a pulmonary CTA examination to be performed within a few seconds. Moreover, better temporal resolution results in reduced motion artifacts, with improved contrast enhancement and image quality. Advances in MDCT and electrocardiogram (ECG)-gating technology enable acquisition of high-resolution, motion-free images of the heart and coronary CTA within a single short breath hold. Aortic CTA and peripheral run-off CTA are additional routine applications with MDCT.

Contrast Enhancement Magnitude

As discussed above, the magnitude of arterial contrast enhancement for CTA depends on a number of patient-related and injection-related factors, including body weight and cardiac output, contrast medium volume and concentration, injection rate, type of contrast medium, and saline flush. The magnitude of arterial enhancement increases in direct proportion to the rate of iodine delivery, which is dependent on injection rate and contrast medium concentration (Figs. 4 and 7). In addition, when contrast medium is injected at a constant rate, enhancement increases continuously over time, with increasing injection duration due to the cumulative effects of new incoming contrast medium and recirculated contrast medium. Without recirculation, contrast enhancement reaches a steady-state plateau. The use of a contrast medium with a higher iodine concentration results in a greater magnitude of aortic contrast enhancement, even if the total iodine dose and injection rate are unchanged. This is due to the increased rate of iodine delivery into the vascular system.

The amount of contrast medium required for CTA is determined by the desired level of enhancement, vessels of interest, and scan duration. Although the magnitude of hepatic enhancement needed to detect focal lesions has been investigated extensively, to date, only a few studies have addressed the minimum degree of enhancement needed for CTA. Becker et al. [26] considered an attenuation of 250–300 HU to be optimal for coronary CTA, since this attenuation permitted adequate differentiation of low-density coronary artery atherosclerotic lesions (which typically have a density of approximately 40 HU), intermediate fibrous plaque (approximately 90 HU), and calcified plaque (>350 HU) without obscuring coronary calcifications. However, when imaging is performed to identify significant stenoses, visualization of the lumen is more important, and higher vascular attenuation (>300 HU) may improve visualization of small coronary vessels [39]. In our opinion, for most CTA applications, contrast enhancement of 250–300 HU (i.e., attenuation of

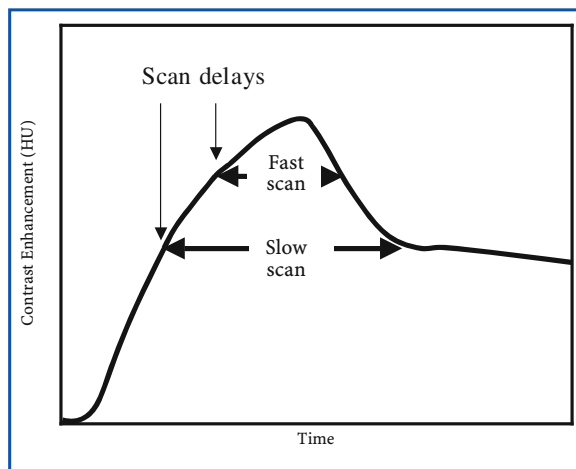


Fig. 8. Simulated aortic contrast enhancement curve with two different scan delays designated for the fast and the slow scans. For given duration of contrast enhancement or injection, the shorter the scan duration, the longer the additional delay needed to ensure that imaging takes place during the peak of aortic enhancement

300–350 HU) is adequate for the diagnosis of a wide range of vascular pathology.

In a coronary CTA study performed on a 4-row MDCT scanner, Becker et al. [26] reported that 40 g iodine (gI) (equivalent to 114 ml of a 350 mgI/ml concentration) injected at a flow rate of 1 gI/s (equivalent to 3.3 ml/s of a 350 mgI/ml concentration) resulted in an attenuation of 250–300 HU, although no information was given about patient weight. In a similar but more elaborate comparative coronary CTA study with 16-row MDCT, Cademartiri et al. [39] reported that 42–49 gI at an injection rate of 1.2–1.4 gI/s generated a mean coronary artery attenuation of 273–333 HU (average patient weight 72–74 kg). In our experience, with a 64-row MDCT scanner, a volume of approximately 1.2 ml/kg of 350 mgI/ml contrast medium injected at a rate of 4 ml/s (i.e., 0.4 gI/kg of contrast medium injected at 1.4 gI/s) yields a contrast enhancement of approximately 250 HU in the pulmonary artery. Based on these observations, we thus estimate that diagnostically adequate coronary artery enhancement may be obtained for a 70-kg patient with (1) 45 gI injected at 1.2 gI/s (e.g., 128 ml of 350 mgI/ml concentration @ 3.3 ml/s) over 40 s for 4-row MDCT, (2) 42 gI injected at 1.4 gI/s (e.g., 120 ml of 350 mgI/ml concentration @ 4 ml/s) over 30 s for 16-row MDCT, and (3) 35 gI injected at 1.4 gI/s (e.g., 100 ml of 350 mgI/ml concentration @ 4 ml/s) over 25 s for 64-row MDCT. With these contrast medium administration schemes, a mean coronary artery attenuation of 300–350 HU can be expected for a 70-kg patient. A saline flush may further reduce the

contrast medium requirement by 15–25 ml as well as helping to reduce the level of artifact in the superior vena cava and right heart. In order to maintain an equivalent degree of contrast enhancement, larger patients require a larger iodine dose while smaller patients require a smaller iodine dose.

For peripheral run off CTA, the amount of contrast medium required for adequate enhancement of the abdominal aorta and peripheral arteries depends on patient weight and scan duration. For a patient with a body weight of 60–80 kg, an injection rate of 1.4 gI/s (4 ml/s of a 350 mgI/ml concentration) is probably sufficient. This is similar to the scheme for pulmonary and coronary CTA described above. The rate can be increased or decreased depending on the patient's body weight and the concentration of contrast medium used.

A common approach to selecting the injection duration for a CTA examination with a long scan time (>25 s) is to keep injection duration identical to scan duration. This approach, however, does not work with a short scan time (<15 s). If scan time and injection duration are equally short, then the result will be poor overall enhancement. Although enhancement can be improved by using a faster injection rate or a higher iodine concentration, there are clear practical restrictions on the extent to which these parameters can be increased to compensate for a short injection duration or low contrast volume.

Practical Tips

1. When contrast medium volume is reduced for CTA with MDCT, an increased injection rate and high contrast medium concentration can compensate for the somewhat decreased magnitude of aortic enhancement achieved with the smaller contrast medium volume.
2. One approach to estimating the injection duration for a short scan may be to add a constant factor to the scan duration. For a patient with body weight of 60–80 kg who receives contrast medium injected at 1.4 gI/s (e.g., 4 ml/s of 350 mgI/ml concentration), our proposed injection duration is “15 s + $\frac{1}{2}$ scan duration” with a saline flush or “20 s + $\frac{1}{2}$ scan duration” without a saline flush. The injection rate can be increased or decreased depending on body weight and the concentration of contrast medium used.

Scan Timing

Three factors should be considered for determination of scan delays for CTA or parenchymal imaging: (1) contrast medium injection duration, (2) contrast arrival time (T_{arr}), and (3) scan duration.

In patients with normal cardiac output, peak arterial contrast enhancement is achieved shortly after termination of the contrast medium injection [20, 23]. Thus, in general, an injection of short duration (i.e., low volume and/or high injection rate) results in earlier peak arterial and parenchymal enhancement. In such cases, a short scan delay is required for CTA. On the other hand, an injection of long duration (i.e., high volume and/or low injection rate) results in later peak enhancement, and thus a longer scan delay is needed for CTA (Figs. 3 and 4).

In addition to injection duration, variation among patients in cardiac output (cardiovascular circulation time) should be taken into account when individualizing the scan delay for CTA studies. *Tarr* is related to the patient's cardiac output and can be measured using a test-bolus or bolus-tracking method. In our experience, the bolus-tracking method is a more efficient and practical approach, although some radiologists prefer the test-bolus method because it provides an additional opportunity to "test" the integrity of the venous access prior to injecting the full bolus of contrast medium. With both techniques, a region of interest (ROI) is usually placed just proximal to the organ of interest, e.g., on the main pulmonary artery or right ventricle for pulmonary CTA or on the ascending aorta or left ventricle for coronary CTA.

Traditionally, for slow CTA studies (single-row and 4-detector-row scanners), the scan delay was chosen to equal a patient's *Tarr*. However, this approach does not provide precise scan timing when faster MDCT scanners and shorter injection durations are utilized. This is because *Tarr* merely represents time of contrast arrival rather than optimal scan delay. For fast (i.e., 16- and 64-row) MDCT scanners, an "additional or diagnostic delay" must be included to determine the appropriate scan delay [20, 28]. The significance of the additional delay for optimal enhancement has been demonstrated both empirically [48] and theoretically [49]. Determination of the appropriate additional delay, which is related to scan speed and injection duration, is critical for fast MDCT. The shorter the scan duration, the longer the additional delay needed to ensure that imaging takes place during the peak of aortic enhancement (Fig. 8), unless the injection duration is shortened to match the reduced scan duration.

For the majority of pulmonary CTA studies, well-designed fixed scan delays (typically 15 s) are usually adequate because contrast enhancement in the pulmonary arteries increases rapidly with fast injections of contrast medium. However, precise timing in pulmonary CTA is crucial when a "tight" contrast bolus is used with fast MDCT because pulmonary artery enhancement can be delayed

considerably in patients with cardiac dysfunction, pulmonary artery hypertension, or compromised central or peripheral venous flow [50, 51]. The need to individualize the scan delay for cardiac and coronary artery CTA is well recognized. For peripheral run-off CTA, it is crucial that the scan delay is long enough that the scan does not outpace the contrast bolus but is completed when the bolus reaches the pedal arteries. One approach is to reduce scan speed and to use a longer injection to match scan duration; this may be particularly appropriate for imaging diseased peripheral vessels [52].

Our proposed approach to determining a scan delay involves: (1) estimating time-to-peak contrast enhancement from injection duration and *Tarr*, and (2) calculating scan delay by subtracting one-half of the scan duration from the estimated peak enhancement time (Table 1, Fig. 9). Time-to-peak enhancement may be estimated using either a "variable" approach, in which *Tarr* is estimated assuming normal circulation, or a "circulation-adjusted" approach, in which *Tarr* is measured using a test-bolus or bolus-tracking technique.

For the variable scan delay approach, time-to-peak aortic enhancement is determined as "injection duration + (x s)," in which "x" is larger for shorter injection durations but is typically a number between 0 and 10 [23]. For example, for a 30-s injection, the peak aortic enhancement would occur at "30 + 5 = 35 s" (a 5-s additional delay is used in this example because a 30-s injection is considered to be of intermediate duration). Using this estimated peak time, scan delay for the arterial phase for a 20-s scan would be calculated as "35 - 20/2 = 25 s". Likewise, the scan delay for a 10-s scan would be "35 - 10/2 = 30 s".

For the circulation-adjusted delay approach, either a test-bolus or a bolus-tracking technique is used to measure *Tarr*. If 15 s is taken as the normal default value for *Tarr* (i.e., a typical value in a patient with normal circulation), time-to-peak aortic enhancement corresponds to "injection duration + (*Tarr* - 15) + (0 to 10 s)" or "injection duration + *Tarr* - (5 to 15 s)." Thus, at *Tarr* = 15, the circulation-adjusted and variable delay approaches are equivalent. The scan delay can be computed from this equation using the same steps as for the variable delay approach: for example, for a 10-s scan with a 30-s injection, the scan delay would be "30 + (*Tarr* - 15) + (5) - (10/2)" or "*Tarr* + 15". Thus, when a test-bolus method is used, the scan delay is determined by adding 15 s to the measured *Tarr*. On the other hand, when a bolus-tracking method is used, *Tarr* is not estimated prior to the injection of a full bolus of contrast medium. In this case, the scan will start at "*Tarr* + 15": i.e., after 15 s of additional "diagnostic delay" once the 50-HU enhancement threshold is reached [53].

Table 1. Contrast enhancement times and proposed scan delays in different applications

	Pulmonary CTA	Coronary thoracic aorta CTA	Abdominal aorta/peripheral runoff	Hepatic parenchyma/portal vein
Contrast arrival time (s) ^a	$Tarr = 7-10$	$Tarr = 12-15$	$Tarr = 15-18$	$30-40$ ($Tarr = 15-18$)
Peak time (s) ^a	From 15 to ID (peak reaches a plateau rapidly)	ID + (0 to 5) ^b	ID + (5 to 10) ^b	ID + (25 to 40) ^b
Fixed scan delay (s)	15 (20 for slow injection)	20	30 (20-25 for slow scan)	60-70
Variable scan delay (s)	15 (20 for slow injection)	ID + 5 - SD/2	ID + 5 - SD/2	ID + 35 - SD/2
Circulation-adjusted delay	$Tarr + 5$	ID + ($Tarr - 10$) - SD/2	ID + ($Tarr - 10$) - SD/2	ID + ($Tarr \times 2 + 5$) - SD/2

CTA computed tomography angiography, $Tarr$ contrast arrival time, ID injection duration (s), SD scan duration (s)

For CTA, ID = "15 s + $\frac{1}{2}$ SD" (with saline flush) or "20 s + $\frac{1}{2}$ SD" (without saline flush) is suggested with the injection rate of 4 ml/s

For the liver, ID is determined by considering the total iodine load of 0.5 gI/kg

Peak time increases by 3-5 s with the use of saline flush

$Tarr$: a for pulmonary CTA, 100 HU threshold over the pulmonary artery with the first scan at 10 s after the start of the injection; b for aorta and hepatic phases, 50 HU threshold over the aorta with the first scan at 10 s after the start of the injection

^aAssuming normal cardiac circulation, body weight of 60-80 kg, and the injection rate of 3-5 ml/s via the antecubital vein

^bA larger number is used for a shorter injection duration

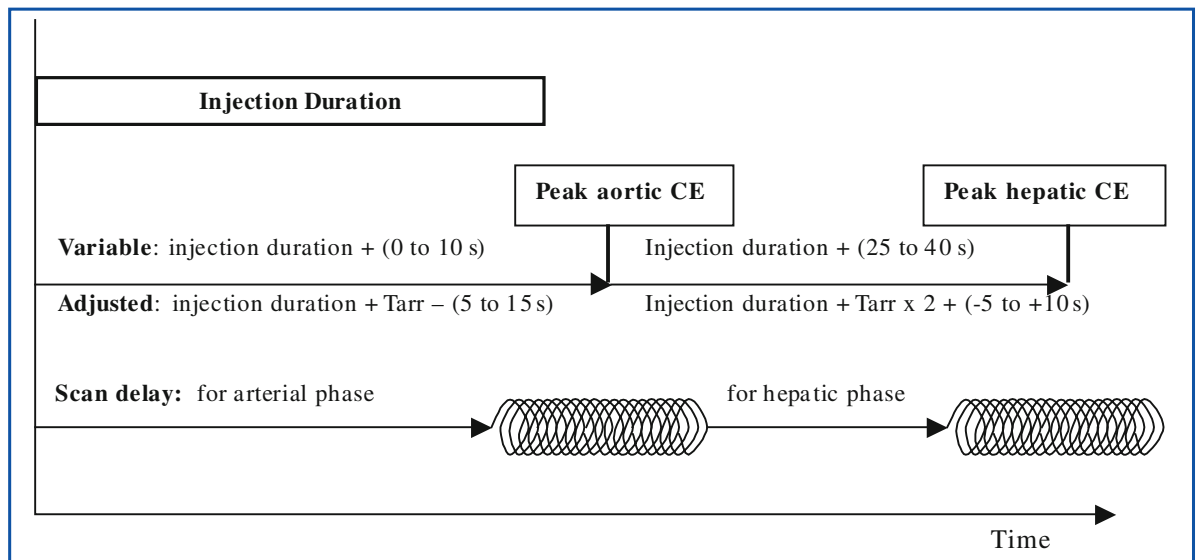


Fig. 9. Schematic diagram describing the times-to-peak aortic and hepatic contrast enhancement (CE) and associated scan delays for a given injection duration. Times-to-peak enhancement of the arterial and hepatic phases are estimated from injection durations and contrast arrival times. We propose two approaches of estimating time-to-peak enhancement: variable (contrast arrival time is empirically estimated assuming normal circulation) and circulation-adjusted (contrast arrival time is measured using a test-bolus or bolus-tracking technique). From estimated peak time, scan delay can be calculated by subtracting one-half of the scan duration

Practical Tips

1. Three factors should be considered when determining a scan delay for CTA: (1) contrast medium injection duration, (2) $Tarr$, and (3) scan duration.
2. Traditionally, for slow CTA studies, the scan delay was chosen to equal a patient's $Tarr$. Because this approach does not provide precise scan timing with faster MDCT scanners and shorter injection durations, an additional diagnostic delay must be included to determine the

appropriate scan delay.

3. The shorter the scan duration, the longer the additional delay needed to ensure that imaging takes place during the peak of aortic enhancement.
4. The scan delay can be calculated by subtracting one-half of the scan duration from time-to-peak enhancement time. The time-to-peak enhancement in turn is estimated from the injection duration and *Tarr* using either a variable approach or a circulation-adjusted approach.

Hepatic Imaging

Among the many clinical applications for MDCT in hepatic imaging are: detection and characterization of primary or metastatic hepatic lesions, diagnosis of diffuse liver diseases, assessment of vascular and biliary patency or obstruction, tumor staging, monitoring treatment response, and preoperative evaluation for surgical resection. The high temporal resolution of MDCT permits the liver to be imaged during multiple, precisely defined phases of contrast enhancement.

Multiphasic Hepatic Imaging

Approximately 20% of the blood supply to the liver derives from the hepatic artery, while the remaining 80% derives from the portal vein. Injected contrast medium initially reaches the liver via the hepatic artery; in patients with normal circulation, the typical hepatic artery arrival time is approximately 15 s after the start of the injection. During the next 10–20 s, contrast medium from the splanchnic venous return enters the portal vein and hepatic parenchyma. However, whereas contrast medium from the splenic and pancreatic circulation arrives in the portal vein earlier than that from the intestinal circulation, the contribution of the portal vein to hepatic enhancement is usually very small within the first 30 s after initiation of the contrast injection [54, 55].

For routine abdominal CT or as part of a thoracoabdominal and pelvic imaging survey, the liver is scanned once during the hepatic phase, i.e., during the phase of maximal liver parenchyma enhancement. However, to detect hypervascular liver lesions or to evaluate the hepatic vascular anatomy, it is highly desirable to scan during at least one phase prior to the hepatic phase. When optimizing multiphasic hepatic imaging, the goal is to scan during maximal enhancement for each phase and to minimize the influence of other enhancement phases.

For dedicated hepatic CT imaging, the three contrast-enhancement phases of interest are early

arterial phase, late arterial/portal vein inflow phase, and hepatic parenchymal phase [56]. The early arterial phase begins with the arrival of contrast medium in the hepatic artery and ends prior to portal vein enhancement. The diagnostically useful early arterial phase begins about 10 s after contrast arrival and lasts for approximately 10 s (20–30 s from the start of contrast medium injection with a typical injection protocol and normal circulation). Prior to this, at the time of earliest contrast arrival in the hepatic artery, enhancement is too weak for adequate early arterial phase imaging. The late arterial/portal vein inflow phase (referred to simply as the late arterial phase in this chapter) corresponds to the time of maximum aortic enhancement. This occurs shortly (typically 0–10 s) after completion of injection, with the optimal temporal window lasting approximately 10 s. The hepatic parenchymal phase occurs when the peak contrast bolus has traveled through the splanchnic circulation and has returned to the portal venous system. This occurs typically at 25–40 s after completion of the injection and corresponds to the phase of maximum hepatic parenchyma enhancement.

The early arterial phase of enhancement is useful primarily for acquisition of a pure arterial data set for CTA and has only a limited role in imaging the liver. For detection of hypervascular primary or metastatic neoplasms, the late arterial phase is the preferred imaging phase [25, 57–67]. During this phase, hypervascular hepatic lesions enhance maximally while the hepatic parenchyma remains relatively unenhanced, commensurate with the relatively small contribution of the hepatic artery to the total hepatic blood supply. The hepatic parenchymal phase, the period of peak hepatic enhancement, is the phase used for routine abdominal CT imaging. Most hepatic lesions, including most metastases, are hypovascular and are therefore best depicted against the maximally enhanced hepatic parenchyma during this phase. The delayed imaging phase (>3 min after the start of contrast injection) is useful for detecting and characterizing some hepatocellular carcinomas [68] and for characterizing cholangiocarcinomas [69]. During this phase, hepatocellular carcinomas typically appear hypoattenuating whereas cholangiocarcinomas often demonstrate delayed contrast enhancement relative to the background hepatic parenchyma.

Contrast Enhancement Magnitude

The magnitude of hepatic enhancement is affected by numerous factors, such as contrast medium volume and concentration, rate and type of injection, scan delay time, and body weight [2, 7–10, 13–15,

22, 23, 25, 32, 33, 70–78]. The magnitude of hepatic parenchymal enhancement is directly and almost linearly related to the amount of total iodine mass administered (i.e., total contrast medium volume $\times$ concentration) [2, 8, 10, 15, 22, 23, 70–73, 75, 77, 78] (Fig. 3b). The most important patient-related factor affecting the magnitude of hepatic enhancement is body weight, which demonstrates a linear inverse relationship with the magnitude of enhancement: as body weight increases, the magnitude of hepatic parenchymal enhancement decreases [1, 2, 73] (Fig. 1b). As a consequence, the total iodine load should be increased when imaging large patients in order to achieve a constant degree of hepatic enhancement. The iodine load can be increased by increasing contrast medium concentration, volume injected, or injection rate [13, 23, 78].

Insufficient hepatic parenchymal enhancement results in diminished lesion conspicuity [16, 17, 73]. The minimum level of hepatic enhancement acceptable for adequate liver imaging has variously been reported to be 30 HU [79], 40 HU [80–82], or 50 HU [9, 33, 74, 77, 83, 84]. In a multicenter study, Megibow et al. [19] found that 30 HU was the lowest limit of acceptable hepatic enhancement and that no definite clinical gain was achieved with hepatic enhancement greater than 50 HU. The iodine mass required to achieve this enhancement can be estimated on the basis of patient weight [2, 77]. In this regard, Heiken et al. [2] found that the maximum hepatic enhancement calculated as a function of patient weight was 96 ± 19 HU per gram of iodine per kilogram of body weight. Thus, approximately 0.5 gI/kg is needed to achieve the maximum hepatic enhancement of 50 HU; i.e., 35 gI for a 70-kg patient. A similar weight-adjusted dose conversion ratio was reported in later studies [37, 67, 73, 78, 85].

Hepatic parenchymal enhancement increases mildly with an increase in injection rate although this is apparent only at relatively low injection rates (< 3 ml/s) [22, 23, 74] (Figs. 4 and 5). Although the magnitude of hepatic parenchymal enhancement may not increase substantially at high injection rates (e.g., 4–6 ml/s) compared with intermediate injection rates (e.g., 2–3 ml/s), a fast injection rate increases the magnitude of hepatic arterial enhancement and thus better separates the peaks of hepatic arterial and hepatic parenchymal enhancement [23, 62, 86]. As a result, fast injection rates are desirable in multiphase hepatic imaging and for detection of hypervascular liver masses [62, 73–75, 86, 87] (Fig. 6). Likewise, recent studies [25, 33, 35, 37, 38] that compared contrast media with different iodine concentrations for dual-phase MDCT liver imaging found that high-concentration contrast medium increases detection of hypervascular lesions by increasing the iodine delivery rate (Fig. 7a).

Practical Tips

1. The magnitude of hepatic parenchymal enhancement is directly and almost linearly related to the total administered iodine mass per body weight. When imaging large patients, the total iodine load should be increased to achieve a constant degree of hepatic enhancement.
2. Approximately 0.5 gI/kg is needed to achieve the maximum hepatic enhancement of 50 HU; i.e., 35 gI for a 70-kg patient.
3. Although increasing the delivery rate of iodine (i.e., use of high injection rate or high-concentration contrast medium) may not substantially increase the magnitude of hepatic parenchymal enhancement, it is desirable in multiphase hepatic imaging and for detection of hypervascular liver masses because it increases the magnitude of hepatic arterial enhancement and better separates the peaks of hepatic arterial and hepatic parenchymal enhancement.

Scan Timing

Fixed scan delays from the initiation of contrast medium injection are commonly used for hepatic imaging. The typical scan delay for arterial phase imaging for a 30-s contrast medium injection is 20–30 s for SDCT [58] and 30–35 s for MDCT. For both SDCT and MDCT, the scan delay for hepatic parenchymal phase imaging is approximately 55–70 s. Note that the scan delay required for arterial phase imaging on MDCT is longer than that on SDCT because the shorter image acquisition time of MDCT permits scanning to be performed more closely to the peak of aortic enhancement.

Whereas the hepatic enhancement phase lasts 20–30 s, with gradual changes in enhancement, the arterial phase lasts for only 10–15 s, with abrupt changes in enhancement [88]. Thus, it is more critical to accurately determine the scan delay for the arterial phase. The time to aortic contrast arrival varies widely, from 10–36 s [64, 66, 86, 89], due to interindividual variations in circulation time. It is therefore necessary to use a test-bolus or bolus-tracking technique to acquire images during individualized enhancement phases.

Both test-bolus [13, 25, 37, 64, 66, 78] and bolus-tracking methods [11, 32, 34, 86, 89–92] have been used to determine the arterial phase scan delay for dual-phase hepatic imaging studies. Typically, an ROI is placed over the descending thoracic aorta just above the diaphragmatic dome at the same level as the start of the diagnostic scan. *Tarr* in the aorta is measured from the peak timing of a test bolus (15–20 ml of contrast) or, when using a bolus-tracking program, from the time to reach a contrast enhancement threshold of 50–100 HU above baseline attenuation. In order to avoid the early arterial phase and to scan during the late ar-

terial phase, a further 5- to 15-s delay is added to determine scan delay. As discussed above, the magnitude of this additional delay depends on injection duration and scan speed.

Scan delays for both the arterial and hepatic phases can be determined by considering injection duration, *Tarr*, and scan duration. The time-to-peak enhancement of the arterial and hepatic phases can be estimated from injection duration and arterial *Tarr* (Table 1, Fig. 9). The scan delay can be calculated from the estimated peak enhancement time by subtracting one-half of the scan duration. Again, both variable and circulation-adjusted approaches can be used.

Time-to-peak aortic enhancement is estimated as described previously in the section on CTA. For the variable scan delay approach, using an estimated peak time derived as “injection duration + (0 to 10 s)” [23], the scan delay for the arterial phase for a 20-s scan with a 30-s injection would be “ $30 + 5 - 20/2 = 25$ ” s, while that for a 10-s scan would be “ $30 + 5 - 10/2 = 30$ ” s. For the circulation-adjusted scan delay approach, the time-to-peak aortic enhancement corresponds to “injection duration + (*Tarr* - 15) + (0 to 10 s)” or “injection duration + *Tarr* - (5 to 15 s).” For a 10-s scan with a 30-s injection, the scan delay would be “ $30 + (Tarr - 15) + (5 - (10/2))$ ” or “*Tarr* + 15”. When a bolus-tracking method is used, the scan will start at “*Tarr* + 15,” i.e., after 15 s of additional diagnostic delay once the 50 HU enhancement threshold is reached [53].

Time-to-peak hepatic enhancement for the variable scan delay approach is estimated as “injection duration + (25 to 40 s)” [23,73,93]. Again, a longer additional delay is added for injections of shorter duration. For example, for a 30-s injection, peak hepatic enhancement would occur at “ $30 + 35 = 65$ ” s. The scan delay for the hepatic phase for a 20-s scan would then be “ $65 - 20/2 = 55$ ” s, while that for a 10-s scan would be “ $65 - 10/2 = 60$ ” s. Using arterial *Tarr* measured over the abdominal aorta, for the circulation-adjusted scan delay approach, time-to-peak hepatic enhancement can be estimated as “injection duration + *Tarr* × 2 + (-5 to +10 s).” When *Tarr* is 15 s, this equation is again identical to that of a delay determined using the variable approach. For a 10-s scan with 30-s injection, the scan delay would be “ $30 + Tarr \times 2 + (5 - (10/2))$ ” s, or “*Tarr* × 2 + 30 s”. At a *Tarr* of 15 s, the scan delay for the hepatic phase would be 60 s.

Practical Tips

1. Three factors should be considered when determining scan delays for hepatic imaging: (1) contrast medium injection duration, (2) *Tarr*, and (3) scan duration.
2. For multiphase hepatic imaging, it is more crit-

ical to accurately determine the scan delay for the arterial phase than for the hepatic phase. A test-bolus or bolus-tracking technique is used to acquire images during individualized enhancement phases.

3. Time-to-peak enhancement of the arterial and hepatic phases can be estimated from injection duration and arterial *Tarr*. From the estimated peak enhancement time, the scan delay can be calculated by subtracting one-half of the scan duration. Just as with CTA, both the variable and circulation-adjusted approaches to estimating the times-to-peak enhancement are possible for hepatic imaging.

Summary

A variety of patient-related and injection-related factors can affect the magnitude and timing of intravenous contrast medium enhancement. Although these factors are interrelated, some (body size, contrast volume, iodine concentration, saline flush) have more of an effect on enhancement magnitude, while others (cardiac output, contrast injection duration, contrast injection rate) have more of an effect on the temporal pattern of contrast enhancement.

MDCT, with its dramatically shorter image acquisition times, permits images with high spatial resolution to be acquired at multiple, precisely defined phases of contrast enhancement. However, to make full use of the benefits that MDCT provides, protocols for contrast administration and scan timing must be modified to take into account the specific objectives of each clinical imaging application and the different MDCT scanners available. For example, a faster injection rate or a contrast medium with high iodine concentration may be desirable for many MDCT applications to improve arterial enhancement and tumor-to-parenchyma attenuation difference during the hepatic arterial phase. Injection duration should be considered for determinations of scan delay because it critically affects time-to-peak enhancement. Individualized scan delay is more critical with MDCT than with SDCT. The contrast arrival time (*Tarr*) measured using test-bolus or bolus-tracking techniques can be integrated with injection duration to predict peak enhancement time. The scan delay is then estimated such that the center of the scan is timed to the peak of contrast enhancement.

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