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Title	Relationship of T2 Value of High-signal Line on MRI to the Fragment in Osteochondral Lesion of the Talus
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Citation	Foot and Ankle International , 41 (6) : 698 - 704
Issue Date	2020-06-01
DOI	10.1177/1071100720910381
Self DOI	
URL	https://ir.lib.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/00051081
Right	<p>Nakasa T, Ikuta Y, Ota Y, et al. Relationship of T2 Value of High-signal Line on MRI to the Fragment in Osteochondral Lesion of the Talus. Foot & Ankle International. 41(6), pp.698-704. Copyright © 2020 Authors. doi:10.1177/1071100720910381</p> <p>This is not the published version. Please cite only the published version. この論文は出版社版ではありません。引用の際には出版社版をご確認、ご利用ください。</p>
Relation	

**T2 value of high signal line on MRI is related to the conditions around the
fragment in osteochondral lesion of talus**

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1 T2 value of high signal line on MRI is related to the conditions around the fragment
2 in osteochondral lesion of talus

3
4 **Abstract**

5 Background: MRI is useful for evaluating stability of the lesion in the diagnosis of
6 osteochondral lesion of the talus (OLT). A T2 high signal line between the fragment and
7 its bed on MRI is known as a reliable indicator of an unstable lesion. However, the lesion
8 exhibits various conditions even if a T2 high signal line is observed. The purpose of this
9 study is to evaluate the relationship between the T2 value of a high signal line and the
10 condition of the area between the fragment and its bed in OLT.

11 Methods: T2 values of the T2 high signal line and those of joint fluid were measured from
12 preoperative MRI images in 46 ankles with OLT. Then, the T2 ratio (high signal line /
13 joint fluid) was calculated. The relationship between the T2 ratio and CT, arthroscopic
14 and histological findings was examined.

15 Results: The mean T2 ratio was 0.48. T2 ratios of cystic lesions (0.62) or bone absorption
16 (0.67) in the bed were significantly higher than those without a cyst (0.40) or no
17 absorption (0.40). The T2 ratio of an unstable lesion (0.51) was significantly lower than
18 that of a stable lesion (0.29). In histological findings, there were 2 separate patterns:
19 chondral and subchondral bone separations. The T2 ratio of the chondral separation (0.60)
20 was significantly higher than that of bone separation (0.48).

21 Conclusion: This study showed that the T2 ratio on a high signal line is a predictor of
22 conditions such as stability, cyst and bone absorption in OLT.

23
24 **Keywords** MRI; T2 high; osteochondral lesion; talus; stability

25

26 Level of evidence: Level 4

27

28 **Introduction**

29 Osteochondral lesion of the talus (OLT) is one of the ankle disorders which
30 involves articular cartilage and subchondral bone, which causes ankle disability.²⁰

31 The therapeutic strategy is determined by the various factors including the stability of
32 the osteochondral fragment. MRI is useful in the assessment of the stability of the
33 osteochondral fragment, and it shows the characteristic findings on the MRI images for
34 the stability. Several reports have demonstrated that a high signal line on T2-weighted
35 images at the interface between the osteochondral fragment and the underlying bone is a
36 sign of an unstable lesion.^{4,5,11} Unstable lesions indicate that osteochondral fragment is
37 not firmly fixed to the underlying bone, and joint fluid tracks through a breach between
38 the osteochondral fragment and the underlying bone, which is depicted as T2 high signal
39 line on MRI images.^{7,11,15} Therefore, it has been widely recognized that OLT with a T2
40 high signal line denotes an unstable lesion and would not heal without surgery. However,
41 it is not always the case that a T2 high signal line on MRI indicates an unstable lesion.^{4,11}
42 There are several conditions such as joint fluid, vascular granulation tissue, and adjacent
43 cysts in the interface between the osteochondral fragment and the underlying bone which
44 are also depicted as a T2 high signal line.^{4,5,7,19} In cases with a T2 high signal line
45 recognized as an unstable lesion, spontaneous healing of the lesion has been observed.^{3,18}
46 Thus, the T2 high signal line is involved in various conditions, which may result in a
47 range of prognoses. It is thought that more details of the lesion can be predicted if a T2
48 high signal line is quantitatively assessed, not whether a T2 high signal line is present or

49 not in OLT. We hypothesized that a T2 value at the high signal line from MRI images
50 would reflect the various **conditions** of the lesion in OLT. The purpose of this study is to
51 evaluate the relationship between the T2 value of a high signal line and the condition of
52 the lesion including the stability, underlying bone condition, and histological findings of
53 the lesion in OLT.

54

55 **Materials and methods**

56 Forty-six ankles in 41 **patients** with OLT treated surgically in our hospital between
57 January 2010 and August 2019 were included in this study. They consisted of 22 males
58 and 19 females, with a mean age of 18.6 years (9 – 56). In five patients, both ankles were
59 involved. They were diagnosed as stage 3 or 4 according to Anderson’s classification.²
60 Forty-one ankles had a medial lesion, and 5 ankles had a lateral lesion. For these patients,
61 **MRI and CT were taken before surgery to evaluate the condition of articular**
62 **cartilage, bone contents of the fragment, bone marrow lesion and cystic lesion in the**
63 **subchondral bone [12,13].** All patients had arthroscopic surgery after conservative
64 treatment of at least 3 months. This study was approved by the local ethical committee of
65 our university, and informed consent was obtained from all individual participants
66 included in this study.

67

68 *MRI evaluation*

69 MRI scans were performed using a Signa 1.5-T device or a Signa HDxT 3.0-T device
70 (GE Yokogawa Medical Systems Ltd.) with a wraparound surface coil designed for the
71 ankle joint. Proton density SE and T2-weighted SE images were collected. The conditions
72 for the T2 weighed images were repetition time, 2600 ms; echo time, 98 ms; section

73 thickness, 4.0 mm. The conditions for proton weighted images were repetition time, 2000
74 ms; echo time, 20 ms; section thickness, 4.0 mm. In the sagittal section of T2 weighted
75 images, the region of interest (ROI)s at 1.56 mm² circle **was** set at joint fluid and high
76 signal line in the same slice, and T2 values were measured (Figure 1). Then, the T2 ratio
77 (high signal line / joint fluid) was calculated to standardize T2 values. **The ROI was set**
78 **where the T2 high signal line was able to best be confirmed in a lesion.**

79

80 *CT evaluation*

81 A CT scan for the involved ankle was performed within 1 week before surgery. With
82 the patient placed in a supine position, images of the coronal, sagittal, and axial planes
83 were obtained from a multi-detector row CT scanner (LightSpeed QX/I; General Electric
84 Medical Systems). The scan parameter included a 512 × 512 matrix, 0-degree gantry tilt,
85 1.25-mm prospective slice thickness, 3.75mm per rotation table speed (multi helical pitch
86 of 3), 0.8-s gantry rotation, 120kV (peak), and 120-200 mA. After this, 2-dimensional
87 images were reconstructed with a 25-cm field of volume, a 1.25-mm retrospective slice
88 thickness, and 0.63-mm overlap. The total table motion was 30-40 cm, and finally 350-
89 450 slices were obtained. On the sagittal images including OLT which matched the same
90 slice on MRI, the entity of bone absorption or adjacent cyst on the underlying bone in the
91 OLT was evaluated according to the previous report.¹² The T2 ratio with or without an
92 adjacent cyst and bone absorption were compared.

93

94 *Arthroscopic evaluation*

95 All patients underwent arthroscopic surgery. They were placed in a supine position,
96 and standard anterolateral and anteromedial portals were established under joint

97 distraction using an Ankle Distractor (Smith & Nephew, Memphis, TN). A 2.7 mm 30°
98 oblique arthroscope was used, and the stability of the osteochondral fragment was
99 evaluated from probing to the lesion. The mobility of the osteochondral fragment by
100 probing was defined as an unstable lesion. The relationship between the stability of the
101 osteochondral fragment and the T2 ratio was analyzed.

102

103 *Histological evaluation*

104 Needle biopsy specimens were obtained from 22 ankles in 21 patients during fixation
105 of the osteochondral fragment. At the time of fixation of the osteochondral fragment,
106 needle biopsy was performed using a 14 gauge biopsy needle (Ostycut; Angiomed/Bard,
107 Karlsruhe, Germany), and a poly-L-lactide (PLLA) 2mm diameter pin was inserted into
108 the hole which was created by the needle biopsy according to previous reports.^{12,14}
109 Specimens were fixed in 10% formalin for one day. Then, they were decalcified with 0.25
110 methylenediaminetetra acetic acid in phosphate buffered saline. After dehydration in
111 graded ethanol, specimens were embedded in paraffin wax. They were cut sagittally into
112 5 µm thick pieces, and stained with hematoxylin & eosin and Safranin O/Fast Green. The
113 relationship between the histological findings of the lesion and the T2 ratio was examined.

114

115 *Statistical analysis*

116 Statistical differences between the 2 groups were calculated using the unpaired t test.
117 A P-value of less than 0.05 was considered significant.

118

119 **Results**

120 The mean T2 ratio was 0.47 (ranging from 0.18 to 0.91). Sixteen ankles with cystic

121 lesion (Figure 2B) exhibited results of 0.62 (ranging from 0.28 to 0.91), and those of 30
122 ankles without a cyst were 0.40 (ranging from 0.18 to 0.86) (Figure 2A). There was a
123 significant difference between ankles with and without a cystic lesion ($p<0.01$) (Figure
124 3A). Thirteen ankles with bone absorption (Figure 2C) in the underlying bone exhibited
125 results of 0.67 (ranging from 0.44 to 0.91), and those of 33 ankles without bone absorption
126 were 0.40 (ranging from 0.18 to 0.86), with a significant difference between ankles with
127 and without cystic lesion ($p<0.01$) (Figure 3B). The T2 ratio of 30 ankles without both
128 bone absorption and cystic lesion exhibited results of 0.39 (ranging from 0.18 to 0.86),
129 and those of 4 ankles with cystic lesion but without bone absorption were 0.48 (ranging
130 from 0.28 to 0.76). One ankle had bone absorption but no cystic lesion and its T2 ratio
131 was 0.62. The T2 ratio of 12 ankles with both cystic lesion and bone absorption exhibited
132 results of 0.66 (ranging from 0.44 to 0.91) (Figure 4).

133 In arthroscopic findings, a significant difference was found between the results of 39
134 ankles with instability of fragment (0.51 ; ranging from 0.18 to 0.91), and those of 7
135 ankles with a stable fragment (0.29 ; ranging from 0.18 to 0.41) ($p<0.05$) (Figure 3C,
136 **Figure 5**). Although the T2 ratio in the unstable lesion was significantly higher than that
137 in the stable lesion, **there were several cases with a low T2 ratio in the unstable lesion**
138 **those T2 ratio was lower than the mean value – standard deviation of the unstable**
139 **lesion**. These cases were likely to have a cupped shape lesion, which had good
140 congruency between the osteochondral fragment and its underlying bone (Figure **6**).

141 In the pathological findings, there were 2 separate patterns; chondral and subchondral
142 bone separations. Chondral separation showed whole hyaline cartilage with little fibrous
143 tissue at the separation site, and subchondral bone separation exhibited that hyaline
144 cartilage was on the subchondral bone plate and that the separation site was at the

145 subchondral bone. The T2 ratio of the chondral separation was 0.60, and that of the bone
146 separation was 0.48. There was a significant difference in the T2 ratio between the 2
147 separation types ($p < 0.05$). The underlying bone in specimens with a high T ratio showed
148 that thin trabecular bone with a high number of lining osteoblasts and broad marrow
149 cavity contained loose fibrous tissue with abundant blood vessels (Figure [7A](#)). On the
150 other hand, specimens with a low T2 ratio showed that thick trabecular bone and a narrow
151 marrow cavity (Figure [7B](#)).

152

153 **Discussion**

154 This study revealed that a T2 high signal line has various intensities, and the stability
155 and condition of the lesion, including the underlying bone, affect the T2 ratio. A T2 high
156 signal line between the osteochondral fragment and the underlying bone has been
157 recognized as a reliable indicator for an unstable lesion in the knee and ankle.^{4,5,11} As for
158 the OLT, DeSmet et al.'s study of 14 patients demonstrated that the presence and extent
159 of attachment of the fragment to the talus can be accurately predicted by preoperative
160 MRI.⁴ In another study, a T2 high signal line could be observed on T2-weighted MRI in
161 72% of all unstable lesions.⁶ Other studies showed that spontaneous healing is possible,
162 even if a high signal line on a T2-weighted image is evident, because this high signal line
163 may present vascular granulation tissue.^{6,9} Thus, a T2 high signal line has various points
164 of significance, which suggests that a T2 high signal line can reflect various conditions in
165 the lesion. Therefore, we assessed a T2 high signal line quantitatively as a T2 ratio and
166 the relationship between its value and lesion condition. **Overall, OLTs with low volume**
167 **of bone content in the lesion such as chondral separation type, cyst and bone**
168 **absorption in underlying bone showed higher T2 ratio because joint fluid may enter**

169 to the space between osteochondral fragment and its underlying bone. However,
170 even an unstable lesion included a low T2 ratio. In those cases, CT showed a cup-
171 shaped form, which may have almost no space for joint fluid to enter. These lesions
172 might obtain good clinical results in surgery or in spontaneous healing in juvenile
173 patients because of the advantage of bone volume, shape for bone union, and no
174 space of joint fluid to enter even if the lesion is unstable. On the other hand, a high T2
175 ratio, especially with a T2 ratio close to 1, means that much of the joint fluid exists
176 between the osteochondral fragment and the underlying bone, which might comprise an
177 unstable lesion with a low bone volume. A previous report showed that prognostic factors
178 such as depth of the lesion and subchondral bone cyst on MRI correlate with clinical
179 outcomes.¹⁰ These lesions might exhibit a high T2 ratio which suggests that a T2 ratio is
180 a potential predictor of clinical outcomes. As a clinical significance, T2 high signal line
181 has various condition, and the therapeutic strategy can be determined by the T2
182 ratio. Patients with a higher T2 ratio would be considered to have surgical treatment
183 due to unstable lesion and cystic or absorbed subchondral bone, and conversely,
184 lower T2 ratio lesions would make us continue conservative treatment.

185 When evaluating the relationship between the T2 ratio and lesion condition, the
186 pathogenesis of OLT should be kept in mind. After the subchondral bone in the talar dome
187 is damaged by factors such as micro-fracture and bone bruise caused by trauma, impaired
188 healing may result in an intermittent flow of high-pressure fluid through the damaged
189 subchondral bone plate into the subchondral bone. Continuous high fluid pressure can
190 lead to osteonecrosis and bone resorption, subsequently forming a lytic lesion and
191 osteochondral fragment.^{9,16,17} When the fluid pressure flow decreases, bone resorption
192 stops and bone remodeling around the lytic lesion occurs, leading to osteogenesis. This

193 excessive osteogenesis (sclerotic change) renders spontaneous bone union between the
194 osteochondral fragment and the underlying bone impossible. In this process, bone
195 absorption including cystic lesion in underlying bone occurs as a result of the high fluid
196 pressure, which suggests that a T2 ratio should be high. Thus, OLTs with bone absorption
197 and cystic lesion in our series exhibited high T2 ratio. In histological findings, high T2
198 ratio was observed in the chondral separate type, which has little fibrous tissue at the
199 separation site. This may allow joint fluid to extend between the osteochondral fragment
200 and underlying bone.¹⁸ The underlying bone in these ankles had thin trabecular bone with
201 a high number of lining osteoblasts and a broad marrow cavity containing loose fibrous
202 tissue with abundant blood vessels. A previous report showed these histological findings
203 exhibited a high level of T2.¹³

204 We set ROI of a 1.56 mm² circle, which included the surrounding tissue of a T2 high
205 signal line **because the amount of fluid is quite small.** The T2 ratio might be reflected
206 by the surrounding tissue of the separation site **including bone granulation tissue or the**
207 **pressurized fluid into the bone,** which indicates an important significance besides the
208 stability of the lesion. It is reported that the bone condition in the osteochondral fragment
209 and underlying bone affects articular cartilage degeneration of the lesion. This should be
210 one of the indicators for determining the treatment strategy and its prognosis.^{13,18}
211 Predicting the condition of the underlying bone from the T2 ratio is considered to be
212 useful in determining the treatment strategy. Recently, conservative treatment combined
213 with biologics such as PRP has performed.⁸ If the condition of the lesion can be properly
214 predicted by the T2 ratio, there may be more opportunities for these treatments.

215 There are several limitations of this study. First, the number of patients was small.
216 The cutoff value of the T2 ratio in various conditions could not be determined. Analyzing

217 a large number of patients will make these possible. Second, the high signal line of the
218 T2 ratio was set at only one point, and that did not reflect all lesions of the OLT. **Analysis**
219 **in more points on high signal line or three dimensions may be useful if possible.**
220 Moreover, the T2 ratio, CT and histological findings did not match completely. It seems
221 to be quite difficult to make all of them match completely. Finally, not all ankles were
222 evaluated from the same MRI in this study. Therefore, the T2 value of the ratio of joint
223 fluid to high signal line was examined. However, there is the possibility that the results
224 may be slightly different depending on MRI such as 3 or 1.5 tesla. Further investigation
225 is needed.

226 **In conclusion, this study revealed that a high signal line in OLT can involve**
227 **various conditions which higher T2 ratio showed that unstable lesion, underlying**
228 **bone with cystic lesion or bone absorption, and lower T2 ratio exhibited stable or**
229 **unstable lesion with cup-shape form. The lesion condition of OLT can be predicted**
230 **by T2 ratio of high signal line and the appropriate treatment will be determined.**

231

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286
287 **Legends**

288 Figure 1.

289 Measurement of T2 value on T2 weighted MRI. Circles were set on the joint fluid and T2
290 high signal line at osteochondral lesion of talus (OLT). The circle area is 1.56mm².

291

292 Figure 2.

293 Representative images of MRI and CT. (A) OLT without cyst and bone absorption. (B)

294 OLT with cyst. (C) OLT with cyst and bone absorption.

295

296 Figure 3.

297 **Box-whisker plots. T2 ratio of high signal line with or without cyst (A), bone**
298 **absorption (B), and (C) stable or unstable lesion. *,p<0.05, **,p<0.01.**

299

300 Figure 4.

301 Box-whisker plots with or without cyst or bone absorption.

302

303 **Figure 5.**

304 **Representative images of MRI and arthroscopic findings in stable and unstable**
305 **lesion. (A) (B) Stable lesion with low T2 ratio. (C) (D) Unstable lesion with high T2**
306 **ratio.**

307

308 **Figure 6.**

309 **Representative images of cup-shaped OLT. (A) MRI, (B) CT image.**

310

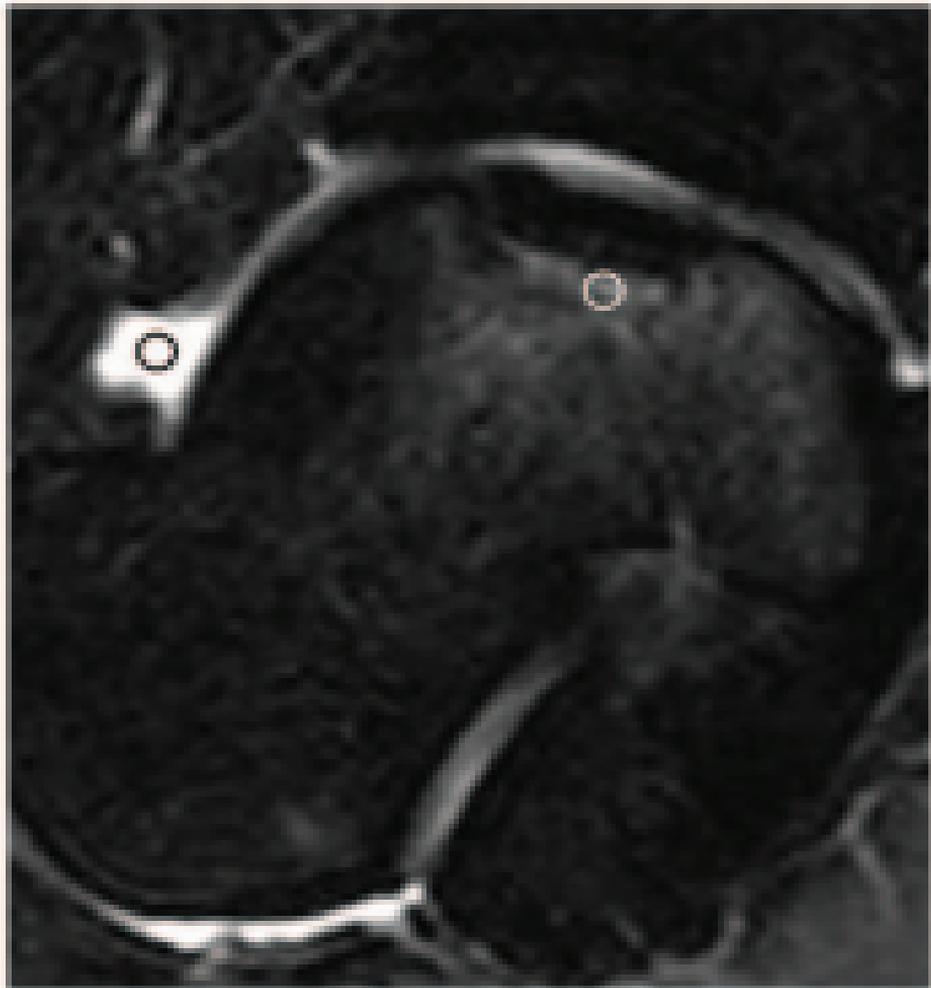
311 **Figure 7.**

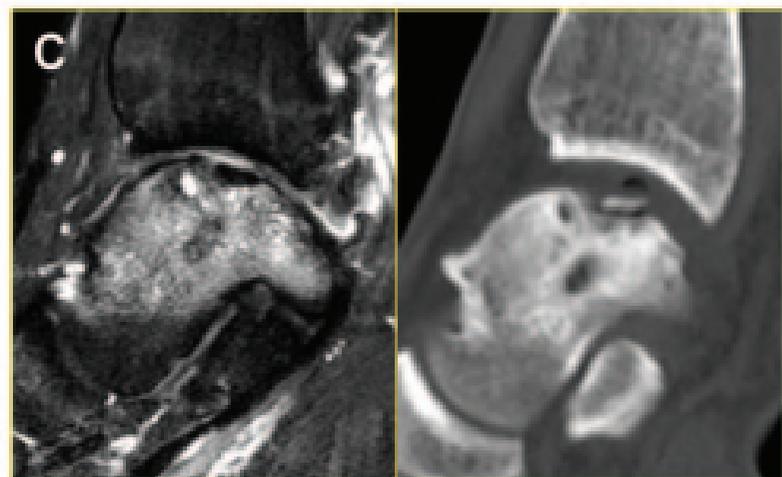
312 **Histological findings of underlying bone. (A) Chondral separation type. (B) Bone**

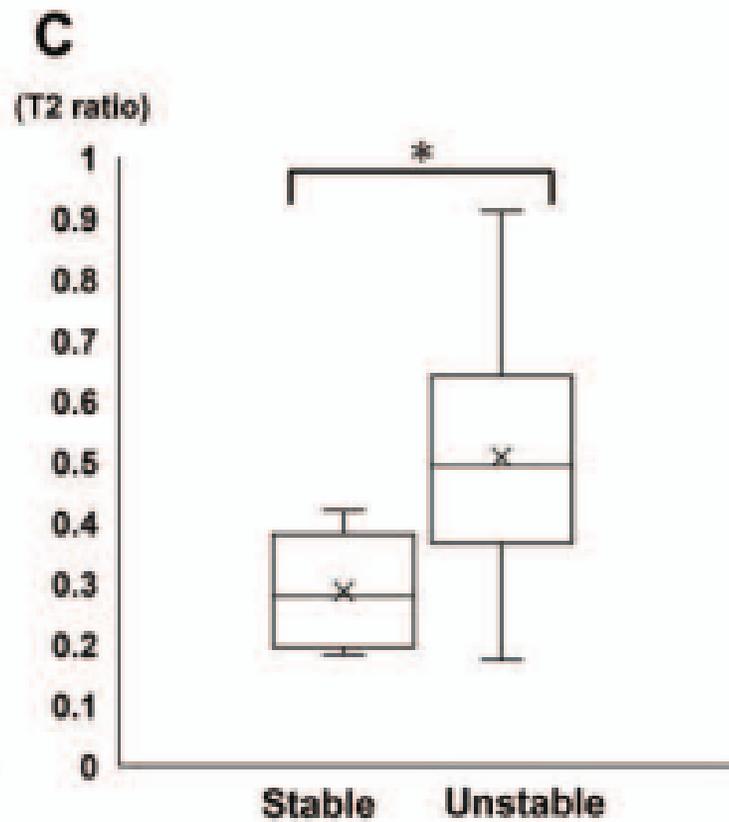
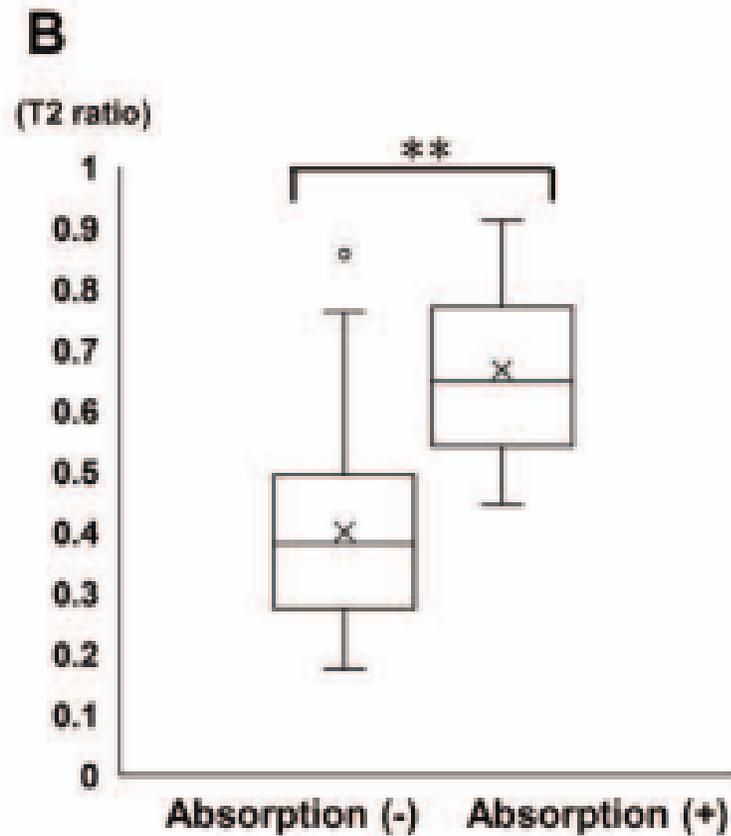
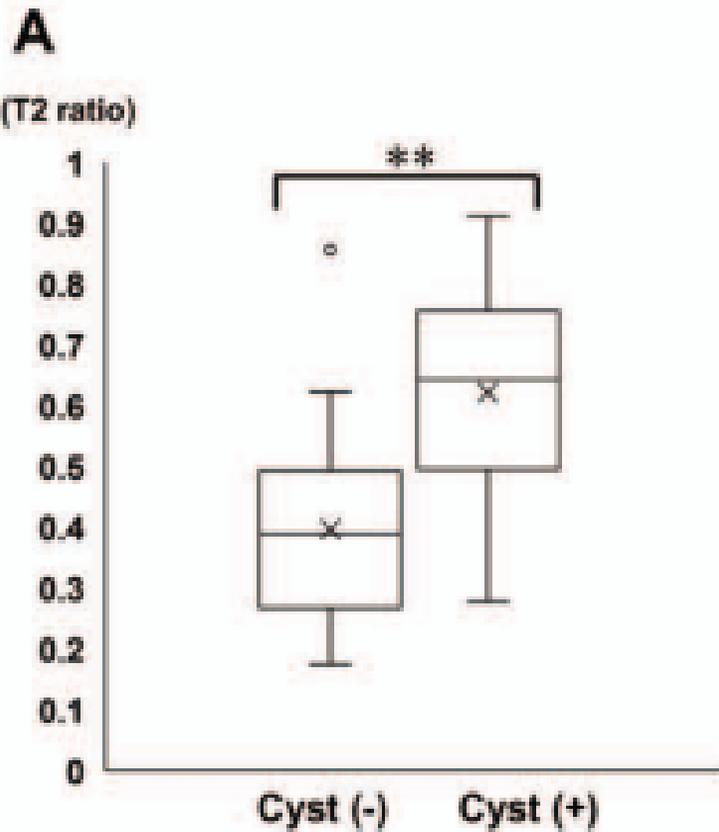
313 separation type. Arrows indicate lining osteoblasts. Arrow heads indicate arteries with

314 thick wall.

315







*; $p < 0.05$

**; $p < 0.01$

(T2 ratio)

1
0.9
0.8
0.7
0.6
0.5
0.4
0.3
0.2
0.1
0

Cyst

-

+

-

+

Bone absorption

-

-

+

+

