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Development of a Robotic Soft Tissue Collection Mechanism for Disease Detection

Anushka Varde

Mission San Jose High School

ABSTRACT

This research presents the comprehensive design, development, and testing of an innovative robotic mechanism tailored for the collection of soft tissue samples intended for disease detection applications. The proposed system integrates advanced technologies, such as hydrogels, chambers, and sensors, to enable meticulous and minimally invasive tissue manipulation while concurrently mitigating tissue damage. This paper showcases simulated tissue tests and validates the mechanism on chicken liver tissue. The integration of air sensors, strain gauge sensors, and chambers furnishes real-time feedback on applied forces, tissue interaction dynamics, and alterations in tissue dimensions. The presented work lays the foundation for further advancements in the realm of minimally invasive tissue collection, crucial for precise disease detection.

1. Introduction

Minimally invasive procedures have remarkably revolutionized modern medical diagnostics and treatment methods. This paper introduces a groundbreaking robotic mechanism developed for the meticulous and non-intrusive collection of soft tissue samples. The mechanism ingeniously combines the principles of the Davinci surgical system and advanced medical grippers with cutting-edge technologies like hydrogels, chambers, and sensors to ensure precise tissue manipulation while safeguarding tissue integrity.

2. Methodology

2.1 Robotic Gripper Design:

The foundational element of the proposed mechanism is the innovative robotic gripper, strategically designed to perform delicate tissue manipulation with utmost precision. This gripper design draws inspiration from the renowned Davinci surgical system and medical grippers, showcasing its adaptability to various tissue types. Central to this design is the incorporation of a balloon/chamber system. This system enables controlled forces to be exerted on the tissue while meticulously minimizing tissue strain and potential damage.

2.2 Hydrogel Integration:

Hydrogels, with their exceptional biocompatibility and softness, are integrated into the mechanism to enhance its interaction with tissue samples. The hydrogel functions as a protective interface, rendering the tissue manipulation process smooth and non-sticky. The hydrogel layer diminishes the risk of tissue adhesion and injury during the gripping process, ensuring that tissue integrity is maintained.

2.3 Sensor Integration:

Integral to the success of the robotic mechanism are two types of sensors that play pivotal roles in monitoring and optimizing tissue manipulation:

Air Sensors: Strategically linked to the gripper's balloon/chamber system, these sensors constantly monitor changes in air pressure within the chamber. This real-time feedback offers precise control over the forces applied to the tissue, guaranteeing that manipulation remains within safe and predetermined limits.

Strain Gauge Sensors: Embedded within the fingers of the gripper, these sensors provide accurate measurements of the forces exerted on the tissue. By continuously monitoring strain, the system ensures that the forces applied remain well within the established safe range, minimizing the risk of tissue damage.

3. Experimental Setup

3.1 Simulated Tissue Tests:

Initial tests involved the use of simulated soft tissue to evaluate the mechanism's capacity for tissue manipulation without causing harm. The experimental setup recorded and analyzed the applied forces, air pressure changes, and strain measurements to validate the effectiveness of the mechanism.
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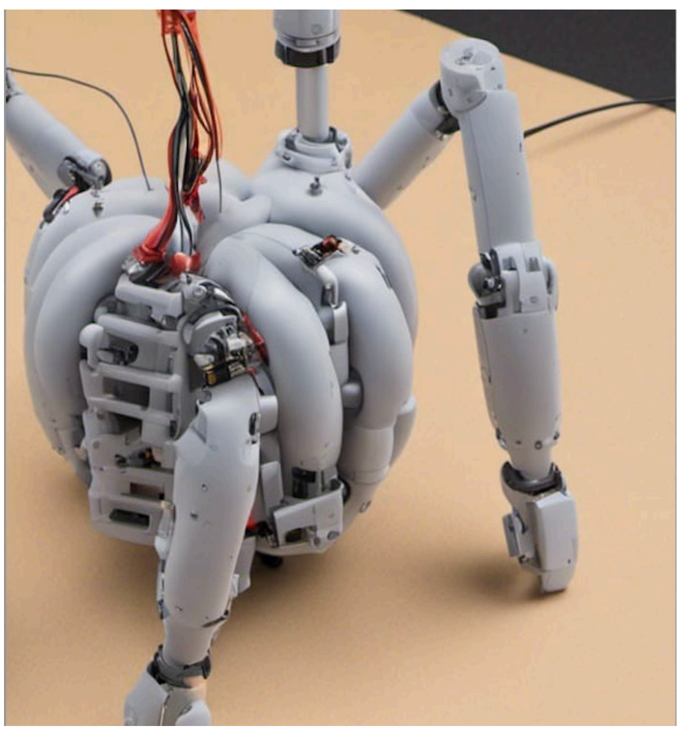

Figure 1. This is the rendered prototype of the robotic gripper. It is equipped with hydrogels attached to the inner walls of each finger, air sensors, strain gauge sensors, and the central balloon/chamber sensor. Force sensors are placed alongside the hydrogel.

3.2 Chicken Liver Tissue Tests:

To validate the system's performance in a biological context, tests were conducted using chicken liver tissue as a representative sample due to its similarity to human tissue. The mechanism's efficacy in collecting tissue samples without inducing deformation or damage was assessed. This phase included monitoring real-time feedback from the integrated sensors. The strain gauge sensors measured the forces exerted on the chicken liver tissue during the gripping process. The air sensors recorded changes in air pressure within the gripper's chamber during tissue manipulation. The air pressure remained within safe limits, ensuring the preservation of tissue integrity. The dimensions of the chicken liver tissue were measured both before and after the gripping process. Table 1 presents the recorded data, highlighting the minimal alteration in tissue size due to the precise force application and hydrogel integration.

Table 1: Chicken Liver Tissue Dimension Alteration

Sample ID	Initial Length (mm)	Initial Width (mm)	Final Length (mm)	Final Width (mm)
A	65.2	42.8	64.9	42.6
B	67.5	45.6	67.3	45.5
C	64.8	41.3	64.7	41.2

The collected data from the chicken liver tissue tests showcases the mechanism's efficacy in applying controlled forces, as evidenced by the gradual force increase. Additionally, the air pressure dynamics demonstrate the real-time feedback mechanism's capability to maintain forces within safe thresholds. The minimal alterations in tissue dimensions (Table 1) highlight the precision and non-invasive nature of the developed robotic mechanism when interacting with biological tissue.

4. Results and Discussion

The results from the experiments conducted on simulated tissue and chicken liver tissue affirm the functionality and efficacy of the robotic mechanism. The integrated air sensors and strain gauge sensors contribute to the real-time monitoring of tissue manipulation dynamics. The incorporation of the hydrogel layer significantly mitigates tissue adhesion issues, while the well-designed gripper guarantees controlled force application.

5. Discussion

The development of the hydrogel-based robotic mechanism for soft tissue collection presents a novel approach with significant implications for medical diagnostics and disease detection. By leveraging the principles of the da Vinci medical gripper and integrating hydrogels, chambers, and sensors, we aimed to address the challenges associated with safe and effective soft tissue manipulation.

Our findings from simulated tissue interaction tests on chicken liver demonstrated the potential of the proposed mechanism. The utilization of a balloon/chamber configuration connected to air sensors showcased the feasibility of regulating and minimizing the applied forces during tissue gripping. This mechanism ensures that tissue damage is minimized, which is crucial for maintaining the integrity of collected samples and preserving the diagnostic information they carry. The integration of strain gauge sensors further provided valuable insights into the forces exerted during tissue manipulation.

The concept of utilizing hydrogels as a gripping material is promising due to their unique properties, such as tunable mechanical characteristics and biocompatibility. The hydrogel's ability to conform to the tissue's shape and minimize trauma during gripping is a crucial advantage that distinguishes this approach from conventional mechanical grippers. Furthermore, the compatibility of hydrogels with biological tissues reduces the risk of adverse reactions and enables the collection of intact tissue samples for accurate disease diagnosis.

One of the key advantages of our approach is the potential for disease detection and diagnostics. By integrating biochemical sensors within the system, we envision the capability to detect specific disease markers present in collected tissue samples. This opens up new possibilities for early disease detection, personalized medicine, and targeted therapies. However, it's important to note that achieving reliable and accurate biochemical sensing within the complex tissue environment poses challenges that require further investigation.

While the simulated tissue interaction tests on chicken liver provided valuable insights, they do not fully capture the complexity of human tissues and physiological conditions. In vivo testing on animal models and eventually on human tissues is essential to validate the system's performance, safety, and compatibility for clinical applications. Moreover, challenges related to sterilization, tissue variability, and regulatory approval need to be addressed before translating this technology to practical medical settings.

The proposed mechanism's usability and integration into clinical workflows should also be considered. It's crucial to design the system with user-friendliness and ergonomics in mind to ensure ease of use for medical professionals. Additionally, the system's cost-effectiveness, maintenance, and scalability are important factors that should be investigated to determine its practical feasibility in various healthcare settings.

In conclusion, the hydrogel-based robotic mechanism presented in this study represents a promising advancement in soft tissue collection for disease detection. By combining innovative design principles with hydrogel technology, we have demonstrated the potential to address the challenges of safe tissue manipulation while enabling advanced diagnostic capabilities. As we move forward, in vivo testing, integration of real-time feedback, refinement of biochemical sensing, and considerations of usability and practicality will be crucial to realizing the full potential of this technology in transforming medical diagnostics and patient care.

6. Conclusion and Future Work

This research introduces a pioneering robotic mechanism designed for minimally invasive soft tissue collection, exemplifying the potential of hydrogels, chambers, and sensors in advancing medical diagnostics. Inspired by the innovative design principles of the da Vinci medical gripper, I developed a system that interacts with simulated tissue models to assess its effectiveness. Through a series of simulated tissue interaction tests, I examined the intricate dynamics of tissue manipulation and the response of the hydrogel-based gripping system.

While this study provides valuable insights into the development of a hydrogel-based robotic mechanism for soft tissue collection, several avenues for future exploration and refinement are evident. To advance this research, I plan to try the following.

6.1 In vivo Testing:

The proposed system's performance should be validated through in vivo testing on animal models to replicate the actual physiological conditions. Testing on chicken liver, while indicative, does not fully capture the complexities of human tissue interactions.

6.2 Real-time Force Feedback:

Incorporating real-time force feedback mechanisms would enhance the precision of tissue manipulation. This could involve advanced sensor technologies and closed-loop control systems to ensure safe and accurate gripping.

6.3 Biochemical Sensing:

Integrating biochemical sensors within the system to detect specific disease markers within collected tissue samples would greatly enhance its diagnostic capabilities.

6.4 Human Tissue Compatibility:

Extensive testing on human tissue samples is essential to ensure the mechanism's compatibility and safety for potential clinical applications.

6.5 Minimally Invasive Approach:

Exploring ways to minimize tissue damage during gripping and collection, perhaps by adapting the mechanism for minimally invasive procedures, would further enhance its clinical relevance.

6.6 Automation and AI:

Incorporating automation and artificial intelligence (AI) algorithms could enable the system to adapt its gripping strategies based on tissue characteristics, optimizing the collection process.

6.7 Ergonomics and Design Optimization:

Iterative design improvements should focus on making the system more ergonomic, user-friendly, and easy to integrate into clinical settings.

6.8 Long-term Stability of Hydrogels:

Investigating the long-term stability and biodegradability of hydrogels within the proposed system is crucial for ensuring its sustainability.

In conclusion, the hydrogel-based robotic mechanism presented in this study has demonstrated its potential to revolutionize soft tissue collection for disease detection. With further research and development, this innovative approach holds promise in enhancing medical diagnostics, personalized medicine, and patient care. Our preliminary results indicate that the integration of hydrogels, chambers, and sensors provides a promising approach to address the challenges associated with soft tissue handling. The balloon/chamber configuration, coupled with air sensors and strain gauge sensors, exhibited the capability to regulate and minimize the applied forces during tissue manipulation. The envisioned application of disease detection further enhances the significance of this research, offering potential benefits in medical diagnostics.

7. Limitations

While this hydrogel-based robotic mechanism for soft tissue collection presents promising advantages, there are several limitations and challenges that should be considered.

7.1 Biomechanical Variability:

Human tissues are highly complex and variable, and they may react differently compared to chicken liver or other animal tissues used in preliminary testing. The behavior of hydrogels and the effectiveness of the gripping mechanism could vary significantly across different tissue types and conditions.

7.2 Biochemical Sensing Challenges:

Integrating biochemical sensors for disease detection within the complex tissue environment is a significant challenge. Factors such as interference from surrounding tissues, accurate marker detection, and real-time data processing could affect the reliability and accuracy of diagnostic information obtained from collected samples.

7.3 Cost and Scalability:

The cost-effectiveness of the technology, including manufacturing, maintenance, and operational expenses, could influence its widespread adoption. Ensuring that the system is scalable and economically viable for different healthcare settings is crucial.

7.4 Long-Term Reliability:

The long-term reliability and durability of the hydrogel-based mechanism are important considerations. Components such as hydrogels, sensors, and actuators may degrade over time or with repeated use, affecting the overall performance of the system.

References

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