Acute Pancreatitis in the Context of Abdominal Attack of Hereditary Angioedema

Lourenço T1, Fernandes M2, Lopes A1, Pereira Barbosa M1,3
1Servicio de Imunoalergología, Hospital de Santa María, Centro Hospitalar Universitário de Lisboa Norte (CHULN), Lisboa, Portugal
2Unidade de Imunoalergologia, Hospital Dr. Nélio Mendonça, SESARAM, EPE, Funchal, Portugal
3Clínica Universitaria de Imunoalergologia, Faculdade de Medicina, Universidade de Lisboa, Lisboa, Portugal

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Hereditary angioedema (HAE) is a rare autosomal dominant disease (1:50 000 individuals) [1]. The most common forms of HAE result from mutations in the C1 esterase inhibitor (C1-INH) gene (SERPING1) that lead to a quantitative or qualitative C1-INH deficiency. The 3 types of C1-INH that have been described to date are as follows: C1-INH-HAE type 1, which is characterized by C1-INH quantitative deficiency; C1-INH-HAE type 2, which is characterized by C1-INH qualitative deficiency; and nl-C1-INH-HAE, which is characterized by normal C1-INH levels and function and is due to a heterogeneous gene mutation that includes FXII-HAE (F12 gene), ANGPT1-HAE (angiopeptin 1), PLG-HAE (plasminogen), KNG1-HAE (kininogen 1), and UNK-HAE (unknown) [1]. Clinically, HAE is characterized by recurrent, nonpruritic edema, which typically involves subcutaneous tissue (face, extremities) and mucosal tissue (oropharyngeal, laryngeal, and gastrointestinal) and may last up to 3-5 days without treatment [1]. Involvement of the upper Airways and gastrointestinal system can lead to airway obstruction, asphyxia, and abdominal attack [1,2]. Early diagnosis is therefore fundamental.

Abdominal attack is characterized by abdominal pain with or without other symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal distension. These symptoms are secondary to transient edema of the wall of the intestinal tract and fluid shifts into the intestinal lumen or the peritoneal cavity [2]. In rare cases, abdominal attack manifests with signs of pancreatitis. Our aim was to increase physicians’ awareness of pancreatitis as a sign or complication of abdominal attack in HAE. We report a case of acute pancreatitis due to abdominal attack of HAE with exclusively pancreatic edema and elevation of pancreatic enzymes in which C1-INH therapy was essential for clinical resolution. A 39-year-old woman with type 2 C1-INH-HAE and a history of multiple episodes of angioedema of the extremities since age 16 years was seen in our Outpatient Department at age 25 years. Her laboratory values were as follows: C3, 140 mg/dL (90-180); C4, 3 mg/dL (10-40); C1-INH, 56 mg/dL (18-32); and functional C1-INH, 30% (>68). She was initially treated with aminocaproic acid, which partially controlled the angioedema. At age 35 years, she presented with several episodes of abdominal pain and vomiting and started treatment with stanozolol 2 mg/d, which improved her symptoms. At age 39 years, under irregular treatment with stanozolol, she went to the Emergency Department with a new episode of intense and colicky epigastric pain in association with nausea and vomiting. She has no history of alcohol consumption or trauma and was not taking other medications. Abdominal ultrasound revealed a globular and swollen pancreas, with a heterogeneous and hypoechoic structure. There were no other relevant findings, including no free intraperitoneal fluid. C-reactive protein (CRP) had increased by 17.3 mg/dL and pancreatic enzyme values were elevated (lipase, 512 U/L; amylase, 374 U/L). No other analytical changes were recorded (leukocytes, hematocrit, bilirubin, and transaminases). The patient was treated with several analgesics (acetaminophen, butylscopolamine, and tramadol), although her symptoms did not improve. HAE was accepted as being the cause of the acute pancreatitis and, 8 hours after the onset of abdominal attack, 1000 U of C1-INH concentrate (Berinert, CSL Behring) was administered; her symptoms resolved within about 30 minutes. She was hospitalized for observation without the need for analgesics. After 24 hours, a second abdominal ultrasound scan did not reveal pancreatic changes but did reveal the presence of a moderate amount of free fluid in the Morrison space and in the pouch of Douglas that were not evident in the first scan. CRP and pancreatic enzyme levels had decreased. The patient was discharged 96 hours later; she was asymptomatic and had been diagnosed with abdominal attack of HAE with exclusively pancreatic involvement.

Gastrointestinal tract involvement is one of the most common features of HAE, and attacks affecting the abdomen are almost as common as those affecting the skin (>90% of patients) [3]. The difficulty in associating gastrointestinal symptoms with an abdominal attack of HAE often leads to an incorrect diagnosis, such as irritable bowel syndrome or renal colic. Appendicitis, intestinal obstruction, and cholecystitis may be suspected and consequently lead to unnecessary surgical procedures. One study concluded that one third of HAE patients with abdominal symptoms underwent unnecessary abdominal surgeries [2]. In rare cases, abdominal...
attacks of HAE are associated with acute pancreatitis. Although this association is not fully documented, it is thought that pancreatic edema may cause obstruction of the pancreatic duct or the ampulla of Vater, leading to episodes of pancreatitis [3]. The Table shows several published cases [3-8] of acute pancreatitis due to abdominal attack of HAE. All patients were treated with specific HAE therapy, and symptoms improved. This improvement was faster in patients undergoing treatment of an acute attack.

The unspecific symptoms of abdominal attack of HAE can hamper diagnosis and, in the absence of clinical suspicion, treatment may be postponed altogether. In addition, laboratory parameters remain largely unchanged, except for an increase in hematocrit, which is probably secondary to hemoconcentration, dehydration, and translocation of fluid into the intestinal wall, as well as leukocytosis [9]. A recent study [10] found a correlation between CRP levels and abdominal attack of HAE: increased CRP levels during the attack are found mainly in patients with abdominal locations. In the absence of an attack, increased CRP levels may alert the physician to severe inflammation. Imaging may prove useful in the initial investigation of abdominal pain episodes. During an abdominal attack, endoscopy may show ascites and/or visceral edema and frequently edema of the intestinal wall [2]. Since intestinal swelling associated with acute HAE attacks could induce pancreatitis, serum amylase and lipase should be monitored, as management of the attack could vary depending on the results.

The therapies currently available for treatment of HAE attacks comprise C1-INH concentrate, hr-C1-INH, icatibant, and ecallantide [1]. As no specific biomarker of this condition has been identified, rapid improvement in symptoms after administration of specific therapy enables us to differentiate between abdominal attacks of HAE and other etiologies.

Although rare, HAE is associated with significant comorbidity, and a history of unnecessary abdominal surgeries is not unusual in abdominal attack of HAE. Health professionals should be aware of the existence of this entity to perform early diagnosis and institute appropriate therapy. Since HAE is a potential cause of acute abdomen (eg, acute pancreatitis), HAE-specific therapy should be considered a therapeutic option.

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**Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

**Previous Presentations**

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**References**

Allergy to Strawberry in Children From the Mediterranean Area: Is It Really Allergy?

Cabrera-Freitag P1,2, Bermejo Becerro A1, Abreu Ramírez MG1, Álvarez-Perea A1,2, Infante Herrero S1,2, Fuentes-Aparicio V1,2, Zapatero Remón L1,2

1Pediatric Allergy Unit, Hospital General Universitario Gregorio Marañón, Madrid, Spain
2Gregorio Marañón Health Research Institute (IiSGM), Madrid, Spain

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Members of the Rosaceae family are the most frequent cause of allergic reactions to fruits in the Mediterranean area [1]. Strawberry, which belongs to the Rosoideae subfamily of Rosaceae, has an apparently unjustified poor reputation among the general population, as self-reported symptoms after ingestion of strawberry are very common [2,3]. However, few cases of true allergy have been reported in the literature [4-7].

The aim of our study was to make a descriptive analysis of pediatric patients with a history of self-reported strawberry allergy and to investigate whether they had true allergy. Patients from the Pediatric Allergy Department of Hospital General Universitario Gregorio Marañón, Madrid, Spain were retrospectively analyzed on the basis of a clinical history of strawberry allergy, specific IgE (sIgE) to strawberry, and age under 17 years.

The data we recorded included demographic and clinical characteristics, specific IgE (sIgE) values to strawberry (ImmunoCAP 250, Thermo Fisher Scientific), skin prick test (SPT) results with a commercial strawberry extract (Leti), sensitization to profilin by prick and peach nonspecific lipid transfer protein (nsLTP) by prick (peach extract enriched with Pru p 3 [ALK-Abelló] or Pru p 3 [ImmunoCAP]), and tolerance to strawberry in oral food challenge (OFC). sIgE values to birch PR-10 (Bet v 1) were not analyzed, as sensitization to birch pollen is not common in our area. SPT wheals ≥3 mm and sIgE values ≥0.35 kU/L were considered positive.

Qualitative variables are expressed as a frequency and quantitative variables as median (IQR). Categorical variables were compared using the \( \chi^2 \) test and Fisher exact test; quantitative variables were compared using the Mann-Whitney test.

The study population comprised 43 children with a clinical history of strawberry allergy. Of these, 29 (67%) had a positive SPT and/or sIgE result to strawberry (group 1) and 14 (33%) had negative results in both tests (group 2).

Median time between self-reported symptoms related to strawberry intake and the allergological work-up was 4 (3-6) months; median time from symptoms to the assessment of hereditary angioedema. Clin Exp Immunol. 2014;177:280-6.

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Tatiana Lourenço
Serviço de Imunoalergologia, Hospital de Santa Maria, Centro Hospitalar Universitário de Lisboa Norte (CHULN)
Avenida Prof. Egas Moniz s/n
1649-035 Lisboa, Portugal
E-mail: tatiana-lourenco@live.com.pt