REVIEW
1457 Nonalcoholic fatty liver disease shows significant sex dimorphism
Chen XY, Wang C, Huang YZ, Zhang LL

MINIREVIEWS
1473 Management of procedural pain in the intensive care unit

ORIGINAL ARTICLE
Clinical and Translational Research
1485 Effect of prior malignancy on the prognosis of gastric cancer and somatic mutation
Yin X, He XK, Wu LY, Yan SX

Retrospective Cohort Study
1498 Elemene-containing hyperthermic intraperitoneal chemotherapy combined with chemotherapy for elderly patients with peritoneal metastatic advanced gastric cancer
Chen ZX, Li J, Liu WB, Zhang SR, Sun H

Retrospective Study
1508 Timing theory continuous nursing, resistance training: Rehabilitation and mental health of caregivers and stroke patients with traumatic fractures
Shen YL, Zhang ZQ, Zhu LJ, Liu JH

1517 Effect of precise nursing service mode on postoperative urinary incontinence prevention in patients with prostate disease
Zheng XC, Luo TT, Cao DD, Cai WZ

1527 Significance of serum glucagon-like peptide-1 and matrix Gla protein levels in patients with diabetes and osteoporosis

1536 Castleman disease and TAFRO syndrome: To improve the diagnostic consciousness is the key
Zhou QY

Observational Study
1548 Correlation of myopia onset and progression with corneal biomechanical parameters in children
Lu LL, Hu XJ, Yang Y, Xu S, Yang SY, Zhang CY, Zhao QY
## Contents

**World Journal of Clinical Cases**  
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1572</td>
<td>Giant nodular fasciitis originating from the humeral periosteum: A case report</td>
<td>Yu SL, Sun PL, Li J, Jia M, Gao HW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1580</td>
<td>Tumor-related cytokine release syndrome in a treatment-naïve patient with lung adenocarcinoma: A case report</td>
<td>Deng PB, Jiang J, Hu CP, Cao LM, Li M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1586</td>
<td>Submucosal protuberance caused by a fish bone in the absence of preoperative positive signs: A case report</td>
<td>Du WW, Huang T, Yang GD, Zhang J, Chen J, Wang YB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1592</td>
<td>Misdiagnosis of unroofed coronary sinus syndrome as an ostium primum atrial septal defect by echocardiography: A case report</td>
<td>Chen JL, Yu CG, Wang DJ, Chen HB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1602</td>
<td>Treatment of extracranial internal carotid artery dissecting aneurysm with SUPERA stent implantation: Two case reports</td>
<td>Qiu MJ, Zhang BR, Song SJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1609</td>
<td>Combination of atezolizumab and chidamide to maintain long-term remission in refractory metastatic extranodal natural killer/T-cell lymphoma: A case report</td>
<td>Wang J, Gao YS, Xu K, Li XD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1623</td>
<td>Primary orbital monophasic synovial sarcoma with calcification: A case report</td>
<td>Ren MY, Li J, Li RM, Wu YX, Han RJ, Zhang C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1639</td>
<td>Disseminated peritoneal leiomyomatosis with malignant transformation involving right ureter: A case report</td>
<td>Wen CY, Lee HS, Lin JT, Yu CC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Authors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1645</td>
<td>Arthroscopic surgery for synovial chondroma of the subacromial bursa with non-traumatic shoulder subluxation complications: Two case reports</td>
<td>Tang XF, Qin YG, Shen XY, Chen B, Li YZ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1667</td>
<td>Gastric schwannoma misdiagnosed as gastrointestinal stromal tumor by ultrasonography before surgery: A case report</td>
<td>Li QQ, Liu D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1675</td>
<td>Giant retroperitoneal lipoma presenting with abdominal distention: A case report and review of the literature</td>
<td>Chen ZY, Chen XL, Yu Q, Fan QB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1684</td>
<td>Pneumothorax during retroperitoneal laparoscopic partial nephrectomy in a lupus nephritis patient: A case report</td>
<td>Zhao Y, Xue XQ, Xia D, Xu WF, Liu GH, Xie Y, Ji ZG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1689</td>
<td>Bulbar conjunctival vascular lesion combined with spontaneous retrobulbar hematoma: A case report</td>
<td>Lei JY, Wang H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1709</td>
<td>Tacrolimus treatment for relapsing-remitting chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyradiculoneuropathy: Two case reports</td>
<td>Zhu WJ, Da YW, Chen H, Xu M, Lu Y, Di L, Duo JY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1723</td>
<td>Unusual magnetic resonance imaging findings of brain and leptomeningeal metastasis in lung adenocarcinoma: A case report</td>
<td>Li N, Wang YJ, Zhu FM, Deng ST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1738</td>
<td>Neurothekeoma located in the hallux and axilla: Two case reports</td>
<td>Huang WY, Zhang YQ, Yang XH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Authors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1747</td>
<td>Subclavian artery stenting via bilateral radial artery access: Four case reports</td>
<td>Qiu T, Fu SQ, Deng XY, Chen M, Dai XY</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Submucosal protuberance caused by a fish bone in the absence of preoperative positive signs: A case report

Wei-Wei Du, Tao Huang, Guo-Dong Yang, Jing Zhang, Jing Chen, Ying-Bang Wang

Abstract

BACKGROUND
Submucosal protuberance caused by fish bone insertion into the digestive tract has rarely been reported. These cases usually include patients with clear signs such as a history of fish intake, pain, and dysphagia, as well as positive findings on endoscopy and imaging. Here, we report a case of a fish bone hidden in the submucosal protuberance of the gastric antrum during endoscopic submucosal dissection without preoperative obvious positive signs.

CASE SUMMARY
A 58-year-old woman presented with epigastric pain for the past 20 d and a submucosal protuberance. Abdominal computed tomography and endoscopic ultrasonography did not indicate the presence of a fish bone. We assumed the cause to be an ordinary submucosal eminence and performed an endoscopic submucosal dissection to confirm its essence. During the operation, a fish bone approximately 20 mm in length was found incidentally.

CONCLUSION
Our report could potentially prevent the oversight of embedded fish bones and associated adverse effects in patients with similar presentation.

Key Words: Gastric submucosal protuberance; Endoscopic mucosal dissection; Computed tomography; Endoscopic ultrasonography; Case report
Core Tip: Ingested fish bones appear as high-density shadows and hyperechoic structures on computed tomography and endoscopic ultrasonography scans. Patients typically present with symptoms or positive findings on ancillary examinations. Herein, we present a case of a fish bone hidden in the submucosal protuberance of the gastric antrum without the usual positive signs. In this rare case, we identified the reasons for the fish bone being overlooked in the diagnosis process. This report could potentially prevent the future oversight of embedded fish bones and associated adverse effects.

INTRODUCTION

Ingestion of foreign bodies (FBs) in the upper digestive tract is a common cause of emergency hospital admissions. Usually, complications do not occur after the FB passes spontaneously through the digestive tract. However, approximately 20% of patients require non-surgical intervention, and less than 1% require surgery[1,2]. Accidental ingestion of fish bones is very common and accounts for 84% of accidental FB ingestions[3]. Cases of FBs embedding in various parts of the digestive tract causing submucosal protuberances are rarely reported. The diagnosis of accidental fish bone retention is usually based on a clear history of fish ingestion; typical symptoms such as pain and dysphagia; and a positive ancillary examination[4,5]. Ingested fish bones are visible as high-density shadows and hyperechoic structures on computed tomography (CT) and endoscopic ultrasonography (EUS), and are retrievable by ordinary endoscopy. Most previous reports of accidental fish bone ingestion describe patients presenting typical symptoms or positive findings on ancillary examination[6-8]. Herein, we present a case of a fish bone hidden in the submucosal protuberance of the gastric antrum without the usual positive signs.

CASE PRESENTATION

Chief complaints
A 56-year-old woman presented with epigastric pain without heartburn, acid reflux, or abdominal distension and in a good overall condition. Her diet, faeces, and urine were normal, and she had no recent changes in body weight.

History of present illness
The patient experienced epigastric pain for the past 20 d.

History of past illness
The patient had a history of cervical spondylosis and had undergone bilateral pterygium surgery in the past. There was no history of drinking or smoking.

Personal and family history
No special personal or family history.

Physical examination
The patient’s vital signs were stable and physical examination was unremarkable.

Laboratory examinations
Preoperative blood tests, such as routine blood examination, liver function, and serum
tumour markers of the digestive system, showed no abnormalities.

**Imaging examinations**
Gastroscopy revealed a submucosal protuberance of the gastric antrum approximately 15 mm in diameter that had a smooth surface, scattered congestion, and an opening at the top (Figure 1A). EUS revealed a submucosal protuberance of approximately 1.19 cm × 0.89 cm (Figure 1B) on the posterior wall of the gastric antrum. The protuberance was round, similar to mixed echogenic masses, predominately hypoechoic with unclear boundaries, and originating from the submucosa. We considered the possibility of a heterotopic pancreas. An abdominal CT scan showed no obvious abnormal thickening or enhancement shadow of the gastric antrum (Figure 1C). Surgical contraindications were absent, and endoscopic submucosal dissection was performed with informed consent from the patient and her family. The lesion was located on the posterior wall of the gastric antrum. After marking and submucosal injection of methylene blue, glycerine fructose, adrenaline, and sodium hyaluronate, the lesion was cut with a dual knife (KD-650L; Olympus, Tokyo, Japan) and peeled off layer by layer. The recovered tissue was biopsied. While inspecting the wound, a strip of white foreign body was found under the wound that could not be pulled out using forceps (Figure 2A).

**FINAL DIAGNOSIS**
The final diagnosis of the present case was a fish bone submucosal protuberance of the gastric antrum.

**TREATMENT**
The fish bone, approximately 20 mm in length, was removed using a dual knife (Figure 2B), and the wound was clamped with a haemostatic clamp. No perforation or bleeding was observed, and the operation was concluded. Postoperatively, a gastric tube was placed for continuous gastrointestinal decompression. The patient underwent primary nursing, fasting, acid suppression (Esomeprazole Sodium 40mg ivgtt bid), haemostasis (Aminocaproic Acid and Sodium Chloride Injection 100 mL ivgtt qd), infection prevention (Cefuroxime Sodium 0.75 g ivgtt temporary twice), and fluid replacement. There were no changes in intervention and without other concurrent interventions.

**OUTCOME AND FOLLOW-UP**
Pathology results revealed hyperplastic polyps of the antral mucosa with irregular, dilated, hyperaemia of the vascular lumen in the lamina propria. Unexpected discovery of the fish bone prompted us to question the patient again for a more detailed history. The patient recollected having recurrent epigastric pain as early as 6 years after eating fish with no effective diagnosis or examination. We proceeded by inviting senior radiologists to review the patient’s imaging studies. Upon careful review, the radiologists noticed a dot-like high-density shadow, which indicated a fish bone approximately 2.0 cm long on CT reconstruction (Figure 3). Finally, the patient improved and discharged.

**DISCUSSION**
The present case helps to highlight the importance of careful surgical wound inspection. In our case, the patient denied any recent ingestion of fish and diagnostic exams including endoscopy, CT, and EUS also showed no evidence of fish bones. A surgeon is most likely to think of a common submucosal protuberance as the likely aetiology given the present clinical scenario. Left unnoticed, the fish bone may form an inflammatory hyperplastic protuberance and cause recurring abdominal pain in the patient again. In more severe cases, delayed perforation, mediastinal abscess, or even severe fatal peritonitis can occur[9,10]. Therefore, careful inspection of the surgical
Gastric submucosal protuberances are often asymptomatic and are found accidentally by gastroscopy due to other diseases. Acute abdominal pain, fever, or acute submucosal changes on gastroscopy, especially purulent changes, are signs that often alert clinicians to the possibility of FB ingestion. In our case, the patient presented with chronic abdominal pain, and the lesion seen on endoscopy had a smooth mucosa similar to the submucosal uplift caused by a stromal tumour, heterotopic pancreas, or leiomyoma. In view of these findings, the possibility of FB ingestion would rarely be considered. Few reported cases of digestive tract protuberances were caused by fishbone, and most were accompanied by abdominal pain[1,11]. Therefore, patients with chronic abdominal pain and submucosal protuberance must also be questioned regarding any intake of fish or FBs. Such questioning takes an extremely short time. When a patient’s history is indicative of fishbone intake, surgeons need to be careful in peeling off the submucosal protuberance to avoid cutting the fishbone too short and thus requiring additional surgery, which will eventually bring burden and risk to the patients.
When hard FBs such as fish bones, jujube shells, or chicken bones enter the gastric cavity accidentally or are pushed into the open gastric space during endoscopy, they may be discharged from the body spontaneously through the peristaltic movements of the digestive tract[12]. In cases where the FB is sharp in nature, embedding into the gut can occur, which may lead to serious complications and unavoidable surgery. Thus, timely removal of the FB is perhaps more conducive to long-term patient prognosis.

There may be several reasons why the patient in our case did not show any obvious signs of fish bone ingestion upon ancillary examination. First, ingested fish bones are usually very small, and the superficial changes can easily be mistaken as calcifications and surgical suture[13], or ignored altogether due to the influence of gastric content. Second, if the fish bone was from a cartilaginous species of fish, it would have low density on CT and be hypoechogenic on EUS, thus making it difficult to differentiate it from surrounding soft tissue and hard to identify using CT imaging modalities. Third, when the length of the fish bone is perpendicular to the CT scan section, the punctuate changes seen would evade conclusive diagnosis. In one study, thoracic CT revealed an irregular high-density shadow in an oesophageal mucosal lesion[1], which was ultimately identified as a fish bone structure by three-dimensional CT reconstruction. Therefore, CT reconstruction is mandatory in scanning such lesions. Fourth, careful EUS examination of every gastrointestinal protuberance in all directions including longitudinal as well as transverse scanning during radial or linear echoendoscopic examination should be emphasized to avoid missing such fish bones.

**CONCLUSION**

Ingested fish bones appear as high-density shadows and hyperechoic structures on CT tomography and EUS, and patients typically present with symptoms or positive findings on ancillary examinations. Herein, we present a case of a fish bone hidden in the submucosal protuberance of the gastric antrum without the usual positive signs. Thus, the size, type, and course of the fish bone, as well as the diligence of the doctor, may all play a role and affect the patient’s eventual outcome and clinical course.

**REFERENCES**


