Food-Induced Pulmonary Hemosiderosis

Keywords: Immune deficiencies; Pulmonary infiltrates; Allergy; Pulmonary disease; Pneumonia; Thrombocytosis and hemophagocytic lymphohistiocytosis; Immunology; Infectious disease; Hematology; Diarrhea

Introduction

Heiner syndrome (food-induced pulmonary hemosiderosis) is an atypical pulmonary disease that is caused by a non-IgE mediated hypersensitivity, primarily to cow’s milk [1]. Cow’s milk protein allergy prevalence is 2-7.5% in infants, but estimated to be 0.5% in breastfed infants [2]. It is estimated that 5% of infants with cow’s milk protein allergy have evidence of pulmonary infiltrates [3]. This case is presented to increase physician awareness of this condition, decrease misdiagnosis with other etiologies of pulmonary infiltrates such as infections and immune deficiencies, and to prevent detrimental consequences that can be easily remedied [1].

Case Presentation

A two-month-old male with past medical history of recurrent diarrhea and failure to thrive presented with persistent cough, tachypnea, and high inflammatory markers despite antibiotic treatment for pneumonia. One week earlier our patient was diagnosed with bilateral pneumonia based on same symptoms as well as chest x-ray findings, and was started on Amoxicillin 80mg/kg/day. There was no fever. Patient was born full-term via scheduled cesarean section, with no complications noted during pregnancy or delivery. Since birth, patient experienced a decrease in weight for age percentiles and watery diarrhea. He went through multiple types of formula and following positive stool lactoferrin, he was switched to a partially hydrolyzed acid-based formula during this hospital admission. Cow’s milk IgE was normal (normal range; <0.35 kU/L). Improvement in inflammation and respiratory condition was noted only after switching to the amino acid based formula, suggesting pulmonary hemosiderosis and enteropathy due to milk allergy. Twenty days after discharge WBC, PLT, ESR and CRP values returned to normal limits. Repeat chest x-ray done at an outside hospital showed progressive improvement.

Discussion

In our case, differential diagnosis was wide, including pneumonia, aspiration pneumonitis and cystic fibrosis. They were ruled out by the treatment teams given the lack of response to antibiotics, negative sweat test, and normal swallowing study. Clinical improvement with complete elimination of cow’s milk protein supported the diagnosis of Heiner’s syndrome. Heiner’s syndrome was first described by Heiner and Sears in 1960. He described seven cases with precipitins and positive intradermal tests to cow’s milk, four of whom had features of pulmonary hemosiderosis. Symptoms disappeared with a milk-free diet [4]. In a case study done in 2005 by Ioannis Moissidis which reviewed eight cases, all presented with upper respiratory tract symptoms.
in the form of cough, wheezing, hemoptysis, nasal congestion, dyspnea, recurrent otitis media, recurrent fever, anorexia, vomiting, colic, diarrhea, hematohexia and failure to thrive. All of the six cases tested for milk protein precipitin were positive. Pulmonary infiltrates were detected in all cases on radiologic imaging. One case had pulmonary hemosiderosis confirmed by iron laden macrophages in the bronchoalveolar lavage, gastric washing and open lung biopsy. The patient with pulmonary hemosiderosis recovered within a few months after elimination of cow’s milk protein from the diet. The diagnosis of Heiner syndrome in all of these cases was based upon the improvement in the clinical and radiological findings after elimination of cow’s milk protein from the diet [5]. Elimination of offending food from the diet as early as possible is essential, as chronic pulmonary hemosiderosis results in changes in the lung such as fibrosis that can be fatal. Elimination of cow’s milk from the diet has also been encouraged even without laboratory evidence of milk protein allergy due to poor prognosis [6]. A short course of oral corticosteroids can be used for acute attacks. Patients usually outgrow this allergy and can tolerate cow’s milk within a few years [5,7,8].

Conclusion

This case report is presented to increase awareness of Heiner syndrome. Few cases were reported likely due to misdiagnosis and insufficient awareness of the disease. It is easily missed due to its resemblance to an infection or immune deficiency. Heiner syndrome is a rare syndrome but should be suspected in any unexplained pulmonary infiltrates or recurrent respiratory tract symptoms to avoid irreversible consequences that can be easily prevented by simple elimination of cow’s milk protein from diet [9].

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Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest in composing this manuscript.

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