Esophageal fishbone impaction as a result of ingestion of “trapoen” (Surinamese dried fish)

A 47-year-old man from Surinam came to the emergency room because of a progressive burning chest pain. The pain had arisen acutely 2 days previously during dinner, increasing over time and restricting his oral intake because eating aggravated the pain.

The patient had a medical history of chronic alcoholic pancreatitis and type 2 diabetes mellitus.

Physical examination revealed an ill and confused man with fever and tachycardia. The results of laboratory tests showed elevated infection parameters, with no significant injury [1, 2]. Because the mucosa was only mildly damaged, it was not necessary to perform an esophagogram.

The swallowing of fish bones and the injuries that occur as a consequence of this are not uncommon in Asian countries, where the consumption of fish that have more and/or smaller bones is enjoyed [3, 4]. Though these types of fish are not frequently consumed by Europeans, many European countries have Asian diaspora and Asian foods available. Dried “trapoen” is a popular dish in the Surinamese community. Because the fish is dried, it has to be cooked whole. It is eaten by using the teeth to remove the flesh from the bone. This, combined with the loose bones present in the dish, frequently results in fish bones being swallowed.

The results of laboratory tests showed an elevated level of infection parameters, with no significant injury [1, 2]. Because the mucosa was only mildly damaged, it was not necessary to perform an esophagogram.

The patient was subsequently treated with intravenous amoxicillin/clavulanic acid for 1 week and intravenous cefuroxime for an additional week.

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