Vasopressor Mephentermine-Induced Anaphylactic Reaction in a Neurosurgical Patient

Ratan Chelani

1Department of Anaesthesia, PD Hinduja National Hospital and Medical Research Centre, Mumbai, India

Anesthesiologists are well familiar with perioperative allergic reactions to agents such as muscle relaxants, local anesthetics, intravenous (IV) anesthetics, protamine, latex, antibiotics, colloids, contrast media, and so forth. But allergic reaction to vasopressor drug mephentermine is very uncommon. A case of possible anaphylactic reaction to mephentermine which developed in a patient undergoing transnasal excision of pituitary adenoma is reported here.

A 54-year-old man, 65 kg, American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA) physical status II, was to undergo transnasal excision of pituitary adenoma. He had a history of hypothyroidism and was taking eltroxin tablet. He did not have any other endocrine dysfunction. Routine preoperative tests showed no abnormal findings. Upon arrival in the operating room, standard monitoring of ECG, pulse oximetry, and noninvasive blood pressure was established. Anesthesia was induced with 1 mg midazolam, fentanyl 50 μg, propofol titrated to loss of verbal commands needing a total dose of 120 mg, and atracurium 0.5 mg per kg of body weight. The trachea was intubated and maintained on sevoflurane-air in oxygen along with atracurium infusion, titrated with train of four (TOF) monitoring. Hydrocortisone 100 mg was given prophylactically to prevent postoperative adrenocortical insufficiency. Left radial artery was cannulated for continuous monitoring of blood pressure after induction of anesthesia. Additional doses of fentanyl 50 μg and propofol 80 mg were given to attenuate hemodynamic response to the application of Mayfield clamp. During the time lag between the application of Mayfield clamp and the start of surgery, blood pressure started dropping to 86/58 mm Hg and further down, possibly because of anesthetic drugs and absence of surgical stimulus. Heart rate did not change significantly and remained at 65 to 70 per minute. When blood pressure dropped to 78 mm Hg systolic, mephentermine 3 mg bolus was given. Blood pressure did not rise but continued to drop.

With additional 3 mg, blood pressure still kept coming down and touched a low of 28/19 mm Hg. Anaphylactic reaction to mephentermine was suspected based on clinical judgment and intravenous adrenaline 50 μg and antihistaminic pheniramine 25 mg were administered. Hydrocortisone 100 mg had already been administered earlier. Blood pressure climbed to 185/107 mm Hg. Heart rate came down to 52/minute reflecting baroreceptor response to raised blood pressure but there after was at 60 to 70 per minute. After waiting for 20 minutes, blood pressure stabilized at 111/67 mm Hg. As the patient remained stable, decision was taken to continue with the surgery. Surgery was completed uneventfully and the patient was reversed with 2.5 mg of neostigmine and 0.4 mg of glycopyrrolate. The patient was kept in the intensive care unit for 24 hours. He remained stable during next few days in the hospital and was discharged.

Perioperative period is a unique time when a patient is exposed to multiple foreign pharmaceutical agents which can induce allergic reactions. Mephentermine is a drug which is quite often used by many anesthesiologists during surgery. It is a sympathomimetic drug used to treat hypotension from various causes like postspinal anesthesia, anesthetic drugs, hypovolemia, and so forth. It works in two ways—first, by increasing the force of heart contraction and, second, by causing peripheral vasoconstriction. Commercially available mephentermine contains preservatives methyl-paraben (0.18% v/v) and propyl-paraben (0.02% v/v). These preservatives act as bacteriostatic agents and are also added to many commercially available products like pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, and food products.

Allergic reactions have been reported with contrast media1 and local anesthetics due to presence of methylparaben in these agents.2,3 Samanta et al4 reported a case of mephentermine-triggered anaphylaxis in a patient who underwent transurethral resection of prostate under spinal anesthesia. Post spinal anesthesia, the patient developed hypotension for which he was given intravenous mephentermine 6 mg. Immediately following injection, the patient developed itching in hand, urticaria, breathlessness, and hypotension. The patient was administered IV hydrocortisone, promethasone, ranitidine, and nebulization with salbutamol.

My patient had hypotension after the application of head clamp and before the start of surgery, for which mephentermine was used twice to stabilize the blood pressure but it continued to drop to critical levels. It was presumed to be an
anaphylactic reaction to mephentermine and further treat-
ment was initiated along the recommended lines of anaphyl-
atic reaction management using adrenaline as first line of
treatment. Adrenaline has α and β sympathomimetic actions
resulting in peripheral vasoconstriction and increased car-
diac output along with bronchodilation. It also inhibits fur-
ther release of inflammatory mediators from mast cells. 5

In amended criteria for diagnosis of anaphylaxis 2019,
acute onset of hypotension is also considered to be diagnostic
of anaphylaxis in a patient known to have exposure to allergen
even in the absence of dermatological or respiratory manifes-
tations. 6 The patient in this case also presented anaphylactic
reaction to mephentermine in the form of unresponsive hypo-
tension without respiratory and cutaneous manifestations.

Anaphylaxis is an immunoglobin E (IgE)–mediated life-
threatening systemic allergic reaction leading to activation of
mast cells and basophil cells and release of preformed medi-
ators that include histamine, tryptase, carboxypeptidase A,
and proteoglycans. These are responsible for different mani-
festations of anaphylaxis in the form of dermatologic, respira-
tory, cardiovascular, and neurologic symptoms. 7 Certain
laboratory tests can be performed to confirm the diagnosis
of anaphylaxis like skin tests and blood tests for eosinophilia,
and to measure levels of immunoglobulin IgE, mast cells,
and basophil mediators like enzyme tryptase and histamine.
Unfortunately, these tests could not be done in this case and,
thus, is a limitation here.

To conclude, the patient had a possible anaphylactic reac-
tion to mephentermine manifesting as hypotension which
could be attributed to its constituents mephentermine sul-
fate and/or to presence of parabens, methylparaben, and
propylparaben. Since there is no pre-emptive strategy to
know about these unexpected allergic reactions in majority
of patients, all necessary equipment and life-saving drugs
should always be kept handy.

Conflict of Interest
None declared.

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Selfie Mode: Handy and Practical Tool to Prevent
Horseshoe Headrest Induced Ocular Injury in Prone
Position

Rudrashish Haldar1 Arun K. Srivastava2 Amit K. Verma1

1Department of Anaesthesiology, Sanjay Gandhi Post Graduate
Institute of Medical Sciences, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India
2Department of Neurosurgery, Sanjay Gandhi Post Graduate
Institute of Medical Sciences, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India

Address for correspondence Arun K. Srivastava, MCh, Department of
Neurosurgery, Sanjay Gandhi Post Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences,
Lucknow, UP 226014, India (e-mail: doctorarunsrivastava@gmail.com).


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