

Ischemic Colitis as a Complication of Colonoscopy

Ischemic colitis complicating flexible endoscopy of the colon is a rare complication of lower gastrointestinal endoscopy. It has been only reported twice, in patients with connective tissue disorders (1,2).

A 44-year-old woman was referred for a colonoscopy to clarify a barium enema performed for abdominal pain. The preparation for colonoscopy consisted in drinking four liters of Klean Prep. The colonoscopy was performed under sedation with propofol, it was easy and atraumatic, and the mucosa of the rectum, colon and terminal ileum was normal.

Two days later the patient reported to the Endoscopy Unit complaining of abdominal pain and rectal bleeding. On examination her vital signs were normal and her abdomen was soft to palpation, with some tenderness in the left iliac fossa but no signs of peritonitis. Her white blood cell count was 11 500/ml and erect abdominal and chest X-ray showed no pneumoperitoneum. A colonoscopy was performed im-

mediately and a segmental area of diffuse hyperemic and hemorrhagic mucosa resembling ischemic colitis in the sigmoid colon was observed (Figure 1), with normal mucosa in the rectum and above the hyperemic mucosa. Biopsy specimens were taken which were compatible with the diagnosis of ischemic colitis (Figure 2). The patient was treated with intravenous fluids and made an uneventful recovery, being discharged from hospital two days later. The patient was later observed in consultation and reported no other symptoms during a six-month follow-up. Connective tissue disorders were ruled out by proper analysis.

Damage to the small vessels, which could have been made fragile by their underlying connective tissue disorder, was the cause postulated by other authors to explain the lesions that occurred in their patients (1,2). No such disorder was diagnosed in our patient, and it is difficult to explain why the mechanical effects of colonoscopy could reduce the circulation in the sigmoid

colon to a level that led to ischemic colitis two days later.

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References

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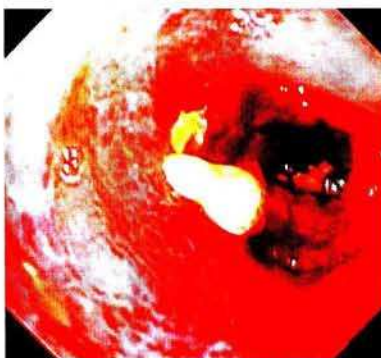


Figure 1: Hyperemic and bleeding mucosa, suggesting ischemic colitis.

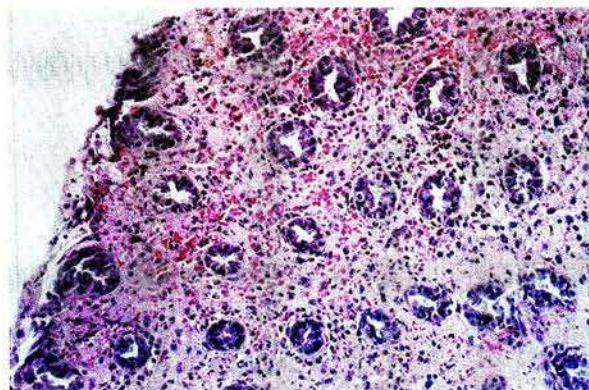


Figure 2: Biopsy specimen of the colon showing erosion, hemorrhage and slight fibrosis in the mucosa.