

Short, descriptive, interesting title

Author's name and affiliation

Ergotism Masquerading as Arteritis  
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Case description is sequenced in the order of history, physical, investigations, and course

Ergotism is a condition characterized by intense generalized vasoconstriction. The infrequency with which it is encountered makes ergot poisoning a formidable diagnostic challenge. <←  
A 34-year-old woman consulted her doctor because of headaches, dyspnea, and burning leg pain. A clinical diagnosis of mitral stenosis was made. Within a month, she had a cardiac catheterization because of progressive dyspnea. At catheterization, severe mitral stenosis was confirmed and an elective mitral valve commissurotomy was scheduled. She presented to the hospital one day early because of increased burning in her feet and new onset right leg pain. In addition to mitral stenosis, the physical examination revealed a cool, pulseless right leg. An arteriogram showed subtotal stenosis and a pseudoaneurysm of the popliteal artery. At the time of the commissurotomy, a right femoral artery balloon dilation followed by patch graft repair of the stenosis was performed. On the fifth postoperative day, she experienced a return of the burning leg pain and the leg was again found to be cool and pulseless. An emergency arteriogram showed smooth segmental narrowing and bilateral vasospasm suggestive of severe, generalized large-vessel arteritis. Treatment was initiated with high-dose corticosteroids, anticoagulants, antiplatelet drugs, and vasodilators. Despite this, her condition worsened, with both legs becoming cool and pulseless. Additional history revealed that she had been abusing ergotamine preparations for a number of years to relieve chronic headache symptoms, and she continued to receive these medications during hospitalization. At this point, the ergotamine preparations were discontinued and an intravenous infusion of nitroprusside was begun, resulting in significant improvement within 2 hours and her symptoms completely resolved within 24 hours. The patient remained symptom-free after the nitroprusside was discontinued and was discharged from the hospital.

Short introduction that explains the relevance of the case

The discussion emphasizes the lessons of the case

This case illustrates the potential for severe vascular ischemia with use of ergotamine and the value of a complete history. Although the ischemia seen in this patient is rare, it was a predictable side effect of ergotamine use. Recognition of this syndrome is critical to institution of appropriate therapy and prevention of ischemic necrosis of an extremity.