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Contents

Thrice Monthly Volume 9 Number 21 July 26, 2021

REVIEW

- 5754 Treatment strategies for hepatocellular carcinoma with extrahepatic metastasis
Long HY, Huang TY, Xie XY, Long JT, Liu BX

MINIREVIEWS

- 5769 Prevention of hepatitis B reactivation in patients requiring chemotherapy and immunosuppressive therapy
Shih CA, Chen WC
- 5782 Research status on immunotherapy trials of gastric cancer
Liang C, Wu HM, Yu WM, Chen W
- 5794 Therapeutic plasma exchange for hyperlipidemic pancreatitis: Current evidence and unmet needs
Zheng CB, Zheng ZH, Zheng YP
- 5804 Essentials of thoracic outlet syndrome: A narrative review
Chang MC, Kim DH

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Case Control Study

- 5812 Soluble programmed death-1 is predictive of hepatitis B surface antigen loss in chronic hepatitis B patients after antiviral treatment
Tan N, Luo H, Kang Q, Pan JL, Cheng R, Xi HL, Chen HY, Han YF, Yang YP, Xu XY

Retrospective Cohort Study

- 5822 Tunneled biopsy is an underutilised, simple, safe and efficient method for tissue acquisition from subepithelial tumours
Koutsoumpas A, Perera R, Melton A, Kuker J, Ghosh T, Braden B

Retrospective Study

- 5830 Macular ganglion cell complex injury in different stages of anterior ischemic optic neuropathy
Zhang W, Sun XQ, Peng XY
- 5840 Value of refined care in patients with acute exacerbation of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
Na N, Guo SL, Zhang YY, Ye M, Zhang N, Wu GX, Ma LW
- 5850 Facilitators and barriers to colorectal cancer screening in an outpatient setting
Samuel G, Kratzer M, Asagbra O, Kinderwater J, Poola S, Udom J, Lambert K, Mian M, Ali E
- 5860 Development and validation of a prognostic nomogram for colorectal cancer after surgery
Li BW, Ma XY, Lai S, Sun X, Sun MJ, Chang B

Observational Study

- 5873** Potential protein-phenotype correlation in three lipopolysaccharide-responsive beige-like anchor protein-deficient patients

Tang WJ, Hu WH, Huang Y, Wu BB, Peng XM, Zhai XW, Qian XW, Ye ZQ, Xia HJ, Wu J, Shi JR

- 5889** Quantification analysis of pleural line movement for the diagnosis of pneumothorax

Xiao R, Shao Q, Zhao N, Liu F, Qian KJ

Prospective Study

- 5900** Preprocedure ultrasound imaging combined with palpation technique in epidural labor analgesia

Wu JP, Tang YZ, He LL, Zhao WX, An JX, Ni JX

Randomized Controlled Trial

- 5909** Effects of perioperative rosuvastatin on postoperative delirium in elderly patients: A randomized, double-blind, and placebo-controlled trial

Xu XQ, Luo JZ, Li XY, Tang HQ, Lu WH

SYSTEMATIC REVIEWS

- 5921** Pain assessment and management in the newborn: A systematized review

Garcia-Rodriguez MT, Bujan-Bravo S, Seijo-Bestilleiro R, Gonzalez-Martin C

META-ANALYSIS

- 5932** Fatigue prevalence in men treated for prostate cancer: A systematic review and meta-analysis

Luo YH, Yang YW, Wu CF, Wang C, Li WJ, Zhang HC

CASE REPORT

- 5943** Diagnostic discrepancy between colposcopy and vaginoscopy: A case report

Li Q, Zhang HW, Sui L, Hua KQ

- 5948** Contrast enhanced ultrasound in diagnosing liver lesion that spontaneously disappeared: A case report

Wang ZD, Haitham S, Gong JP, Pen ZL

- 5955** COVID-19 patient with an incubation period of 27 d: A case report

Du X, Gao Y, Kang K, Chong Y, Zhang ML, Yang W, Wang CS, Meng XL, Fei DS, Dai QQ, Zhao MY

- 5963** Awake extracorporeal membrane oxygenation support for a critically ill COVID-19 patient: A case report

Zhang JC, Li T

- 5972** Meigs syndrome with pleural effusion as initial manifestation: A case report

Hou YY, Peng L, Zhou M

- 5980** Giant hemangioma of the caudate lobe of the liver with surgical treatment: A case report

Wang XX, Dong BL, Wu B, Chen SY, He Y, Yang XJ

- 5988** Anti-programmed cell death ligand 1-based immunotherapy in recurrent hepatocellular carcinoma with inferior vena cava tumor thrombus and metastasis: Three case reports
Liu SR, Yan Q, Lin HM, Shi GZ, Cao Y, Zeng H, Liu C, Zhang R
- 5999** Minimal deviation adenocarcinoma with elevated CA19-9: A case report
Dong Y, Lv Y, Guo J, Sun L
- 6005** Isolated fungus ball in a single cell of the left ethmoid roof: A case report
Zhou LQ, Li M, Li YQ, Wang YJ
- 6009** Rare case of brucellosis misdiagnosed as prostate carcinoma with lumbar vertebra metastasis: A case report
Yan JF, Zhou HY, Luo SF, Wang X, Yu JD
- 6017** Myeloid sarcoma of the colon as initial presentation in acute promyelocytic leukemia: A case report and review of the literature
Wang L, Cai DL, Lin N
- 6026** Primary follicular lymphoma in the renal pelvis: A rare case report
Shen XZ, Lin C, Liu F
- 6032** Rosai-Dorfman disease in the spleen of a pediatric patient: A case report
Ryu H, Hwang JY, Kim YW, Kim TU, Jang JY, Park SE, Yang EJ, Shin DH
- 6041** Relapsed/refractory classical Hodgkin lymphoma effectively treated with low-dose decitabine plus tislelizumab: A case report
Ding XS, Mi L, Song YQ, Liu WP, Yu H, Lin NJ, Zhu J
- 6049** Disseminated *Fusarium* bloodstream infection in a child with acute myeloid leukemia: A case report
Ning JJ, Li XM, Li SQ
- 6056** Familial hemophagocytic lymphohistiocytosis type 2 in a female Chinese neonate: A case report and review of the literature
Bi SH, Jiang LL, Dai LY, Wang LL, Liu GH, Teng RJ
- 6067** Usefulness of metagenomic next-generation sequencing in adenovirus 7-induced acute respiratory distress syndrome: A case report
Zhang XJ, Zheng JY, Li X, Liang YJ, Zhang ZD
- 6073** Neurogenic orthostatic hypotension with Parkinson's disease as a cause of syncope: A case report
Li Y, Wang M, Liu XL, Ren YF, Zhang WB
- 6081** SATB2-associated syndrome caused by a novel SATB2 mutation in a Chinese boy: A case report and literature review
Zhu YY, Sun GL, Yang ZL
- 6091** Diagnosis and treatment discussion of congenital factor VII deficiency in pregnancy: A case report
Yang Y, Zeng YC, Rumende P, Wang CG, Chen Y

- 6102** Unusual immunohistochemical “null” pattern of four mismatch repair proteins in gastric cancer: A case report
Yue M, Liu JY, Liu YP
- 6110** Generalized periodontitis treated with periodontal, orthodontic, and prosthodontic therapy: A case report
Kaku M, Matsuda S, Kubo T, Shimoe S, Tsuga K, Kurihara H, Tanimoto K
- 6125** Ligamentum flavum hematoma following a traffic accident: A case report
Yu D, Lee W, Chang MC
- 6130** Oral cyclophosphamide-induced posterior reversible encephalopathy syndrome in a patient with ANCA-associated vasculitis: A case report
Kim Y, Kwak J, Jung S, Lee S, Jang HN, Cho HS, Chang SH, Kim HJ
- 6138** Encapsulating peritoneal sclerosis in an AMA-M2 positive patient: A case report
Yin MY, Qian LJ, Xi LT, Yu YX, Shi YQ, Liu L, Xu CF
- 6145** Multidisciplinary diagnostic dilemma in differentiating Madelung’s disease – the value of superb microvascular imaging technique: A case report
Seskute G, Dapkute A, Kausaite D, Strainiene S, Talijunas A, Butrimiene I
- 6155** Complicated course of biliary inflammatory myofibroblastic tumor mimicking hilar cholangiocarcinoma: A case report and literature review
Strainiene S, Sedleckaite K, Jarasunas J, Savlan I, Stanaitis J, Stundiene I, Strainys T, Liakina V, Valantinas J
- 6170** Fruquintinib beneficial in elderly patient with neoplastic pericardial effusion from rectal cancer: A case report
Zhang Y, Zou JY, Xu YY, He JN

ABOUT COVER

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Isolated fungus ball in a single cell of the left ethmoid roof: A case report

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Abstract

BACKGROUND

Isolated fungus ball (FB) in a single cell of the left ethmoid roof is a very rare condition.

CASE SUMMARY

We report the case of a 51-year-old female patient whose computed tomography presented a soft tissue mass filling in the left ethmoid roof cell. The patient did not complain of any specific sinonasal symptoms, such as nasal discharge, nasal obstruction, and loss of smell, apart from headache in the left retro-orbital region.

CONCLUSION

The patient underwent functional endoscopic sinus surgery under general anesthesia, and the inflammatory material collected was histologically diagnosed as a rare case of a FB in a single cell of the left ethmoid roof.

Key Words: Fungus ball; Ethmoid roof cell; Headache; Computed tomography; Case report

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Core Tip: In this case, preoperative computed tomography did not lead to the correct diagnosis, which showed a round soft tissue mass in the left ethmoid sinus without any calcification. Functional endoscopic sinus surgery in the patient revealed cheesy, clay-like material that was highly suggestive of a fungus ball (FB). The histological investigation confirmed the accurate diagnosis; however, negative results were obtained from FB cultures.

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INTRODUCTION

Although rare, diagnoses of fungal infections of the paranasal sinuses have been increasing in the past two decades. This is mainly due to refinements in radiologic evaluation, fungal culture techniques, and surgical technology. Fungal infections can be roughly divided into two types: Invasive and noninvasive fungal rhinosinusitis[1]. The invasive form is distinguished from the noninvasive variety depending on the presence of microscopic evidence of tissue invasion through the epithelium. Fungus ball (FB) and eosinophilic localizations (allergic fungal sinusitis and eosinophilic fungal sinusitis) are forms of chronic, noninvasive fungal infection[1,2].

Immunocompetent patients are most susceptible to FB of the paranasal sinuses especially middle-aged females[3]. The mechanism of FB infection is largely unknown, although there are several hypotheses, including environmental factors, changes in air flow resistance in the nasal cavity, and anatomic structural variations in the nasal cavity. FB usually only appears in one sinus, most commonly in the maxillary sinus (94%), with the majority of the remaining cases occurring in the sphenoid. Single-cell ethmoid sinus involvement is very rare in paranasal sinus FB cases[4]. The most commonly encountered fungus is *Aspergillus* species, though other pathogens such as *Mucor*, *Alternaria*, and *Bipolaris* have also been detected[5].

The ethmoid cells are divided into anterior ethmoid cells and posterior ethmoid cells. Anterior ethmoid cells empty into the middle meatus while posterior ethmoid cells empty into the superior meatus. The ethmoid roof cell is one of the posterior ethmoid cells which empty into the superior meatus, and it is clinically significant as its superior boundary is the skull base (ethmoid roof). Hence, we name the cell as ethmoid roof cell, which is one of the posterior ethmoid cells that is connected to the ethmoid roof.

CASE PRESENTATION

Chief complaints

A 51-year-old woman with headache in the left retro-orbital region as first symptom was referred to the Department of Otolaryngology of Wuhan Union Hospital. Her headache had worsened progressively over 1 year.

History of present illness

The patient had taken medication that was prescribed at a local clinic for 3 mo, but her condition did not relieve.

History of past illness

The patient did not complain of any specific sinonasal symptoms, such as nasal discharge, nasal obstruction, and loss of smell apart from headache.

Personal and family history

The patient denied any history of underlying systemic disease, dental surgery, facial trauma, or previous sinus surgery.

Laboratory examinations

The patient underwent brain computed tomography (CT), which showed no significant alterations in brain tissue; instead, a round soft tissue mass in the left ethmoid roof cell was observed (Figure 1).

Imaging examinations

The patient underwent brain CT, which showed a round soft tissue mass in the left ethmoid roof cell with no significant alterations in brain tissue (Figure 1).

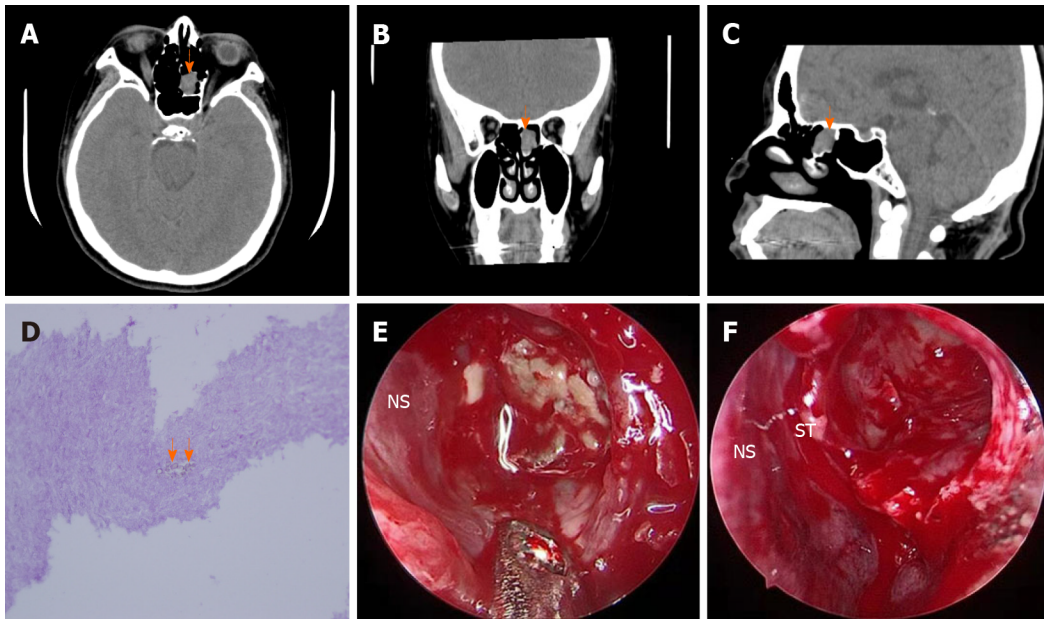


Figure 1 Computed tomography, histopathology, and nasal endoscopic images of the case. A-C: Computed tomography (CT) scan of the nose and paranasal sinuses showed a soft-tissue density with a round surface (arrow) in the left ethmoid roof cell (axial, coronal, and sagittal CT scans); D: Histopathological image reveals fungal hyphae (arrow) (hematoxylin and eosin staining 400 ×); E: A small, dark-brownish mass was observed in the left ethmoid sinus using a “0” nasal endoscope; F: After functional endoscopic sinus surgery, the mass was removed. NS: Nasal septum; ST: Superior turbinate.

FINAL DIAGNOSIS

The accurate diagnosis of left ethmoid sinus FB was confirmed by histopathological examination.

TREATMENT

The patient underwent functional endoscopic sinus surgery (FESS). After opening the left ethmoid roof cell, a cheesy, clay-like material which was highly suggestive of an FB was observed.

OUTCOME AND FOLLOW-UP

The patient's headache was relieved gradually after surgery.

DISCUSSION

The diagnosis of FB is usually delayed due to the nonspecific and asymptomatic presentation of FB[6]. Therefore, it is often encountered as a part of the investigation of and treatment for chronic sinusitis. Nonspecific chronic inflammatory changes without tissue invasion by the fungi may be observed by endoscopic examination of the nasal cavity examination[7].

CT and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) examinations are both reliable tools for the diagnosis and preoperative and postoperative evaluations of sinonasal FB. On CT scan, typical FB is usually limited to a single sinus which appears as a hyperdense mass with linear or punctuate central calcifications. On MRI, the FB demonstrates an intermediate to hypointense signal on T1-weighted images, while T2-weighted images show an isointense or hypointense signal, or even no signal, while areas of T2 low signal may be caused by calcification and paramagnetic substances[7,8]. The cost of MRI is much higher than that of CT scans; hence, CT scanning is the most preferred choice, and MRI can be used to augment CT scans. FESS can be considered the most useful treatment for FB, and the recurrence rate is very low. It is important to completely eliminate the FB and reestablish ventilation together with draining of the

sinus to its natural ostium during surgery. Histopathology plays a key role in the identification of tissue invaded by the fungi.

CONCLUSION

In this case, preoperative CT scan showed a round soft tissue mass in the left ethmoid sinus without any calcification, which did not lead to the correct diagnosis. The patients revealed cheesy, clay-like material that was highly suggestive of an FB in the FESS. The histological investigation confirmed the accurate diagnosis as FB; however, negative results were obtained from FB cultures. It is reported that only 23%-50% of FB cultures are positive according to the literature.

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