

World Journal of *Clinical Cases*

World J Clin Cases 2022 June 16; 10(17): 5518-5933



MINIREVIEWS

- 5518** Occult hepatitis B — the result of the host immune response interaction with different genomic expressions of the virus
Gherlan GS
- 5531** Pulmonary complications of portal hypertension: The overlooked decompensation
Craciun R, Mocan T, Procopet B, Nemes A, Tefas C, Sparchez M, Mocan LP, Sparchez Z
- 5541** Ethical review of off-label drugs during the COVID-19 pandemic
Li QY, Lv Y, An ZY, Dai NN, Hong X, Zhang Y, Liang LJ

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Case Control Study

- 5551** Gut peptide changes in patients with obstructive jaundice undergoing biliary drainage: A prospective case control study
Pavić T, Pelajić S, Blažević N, Kralj D, Milošević M, Mikolasevic I, Lerotic I, Hrabar D

Retrospective Cohort Study

- 5566** Longitudinal assessment of liver stiffness by transient elastography for chronic hepatitis C patients
Mezina A, Krishnan A, Woreta TA, Rubenstein KB, Watson E, Chen PH, Rodriguez-Watson C

Retrospective Study

- 5577** Clinical evaluation of prone position ventilation in the treatment of acute respiratory distress syndrome induced by sepsis
Xia WH, Yang CL, Chen Z, Ouyang CH, Ouyang GQ, Li QG
- 5586** Three-dimensional arterial spin labeling and diffusion kurtosis imaging in evaluating perfusion and infarct area size in acute cerebral ischemia
Jiang YY, Zhong ZL, Zuo M
- 5595** Intrathecal methotrexate in combination with systemic chemotherapy in glioblastoma patients with leptomeningeal dissemination: A retrospective analysis
Kang X, Chen F, Yang SB, Wang YL, Qian ZH, Li Y, Lin H, Li P, Peng YC, Wang XM, Li WB
- 5606** Hepatic epithelioid hemangioendothelioma: Clinical characteristics, diagnosis, treatment, and prognosis
Zhao M, Yin F
- 5620** Difference between type 2 gastroesophageal varices and isolated fundic varices in clinical profiles and portosystemic collaterals
Song YH, Xiang HY, Si KK, Wang ZH, Zhang Y, Liu C, Xu KS, Li X

- 5634** Assessment of incidental focal colorectal uptake by analysis of fluorine-18 fluorodeoxyglucose positron emission tomography parameters

Lee H, Hwang KH, Kwon KA

Observational Study

- 5646** "Zero ischemia" laparoscopic partial nephrectomy by high-power GreenLight laser enucleation for renal carcinoma: A single-center experience

Zhang XM, Xu JD, Lv JM, Pan XW, Cao JW, Chu J, Cui XG

- 5655** High Eckardt score and previous treatment were associated with poor postperoral endoscopic myotomy pain control: A retrospective study

Chen WN, Xu YL, Zhang XG

- 5667** Higher volume growth rate is associated with development of worrisome features in patients with branch duct-intraductal papillary mucinous neoplasms

Innocenti T, Danti G, Lynch EN, Dragoni G, Gottin M, Fedeli F, Palatresi D, Biagini MR, Milani S, Miele V, Galli A

Prospective Study

- 5680** Application of a new anatomic hook-rod-pedicle screw system in young patients with lumbar spondylolysis: A pilot study

Li DM, Li YC, Jiang W, Peng BG

META-ANALYSIS

- 5690** Systematic review of Yougui pills combined with levothyroxine sodium in the treatment of hypothyroidism

Liu XP, Zhou YN, Tan CE

CASE REPORT

- 5702** Allogeneic stem cell transplantation-A curative treatment for paroxysmal nocturnal hemoglobinuria with PIGT mutation: A case report

Schenone L, Notarantonio AB, Latger-Cannard V, Fremeaux-Bacchi V, De Carvalho-Bittencourt M, Rubio MT, Muller M, D'Aveni M

- 5708** Gray zone lymphoma effectively treated with cyclophosphamide, doxorubicin, vincristine, prednisolone, and rituximab chemotherapy: A case report

Hojo N, Nagasaki M, Mihara Y

- 5717** Diagnosis of spontaneous isolated superior mesenteric artery dissection with ultrasound: A case report

Zhang Y, Zhou JY, Liu J, Bai C

- 5723** Adrenocorticotrophic hormone-secreting pancreatic neuroendocrine carcinoma with multiple organ infections and widespread thrombosis: A case report

Yoshihara A, Nishihama K, Inoue C, Okano Y, Eguchi K, Tanaka S, Maki K, Fridman D'Alessandro V, Takeshita A, Yasuma T, Uemura M, Suzuki T, Gabazza EC, Yano Y

- 5732** Management of the palato-radicular groove with a periodontal regenerative procedure and prosthodontic treatment: A case report

Ling DH, Shi WP, Wang YH, Lai DP, Zhang YZ

- 5741** Combined thoracic paravertebral block and interscalene brachial plexus block for modified radical mastectomy: A case report
Hu ZT, Sun G, Wang ST, Li K
- 5748** Chondromyxoid fibroma of the cervical spine: A case report
Li C, Li S, Hu W
- 5756** Preterm neonate with a large congenital hemangioma on maxillofacial site causing thrombocytopenia and heart failure: A case report
Ren N, Jin CS, Zhao XQ, Gao WH, Gao YX, Wang Y, Zhang YF
- 5764** Simultaneous multiple primary malignancies diagnosed by endoscopic ultrasound-guided fine-needle aspiration: A case report
Yang J, Zeng Y, Zhang JW
- 5770** Neuroendocrine tumour of the descending part of the duodenum complicated with schwannoma: A case report
Zhang L, Zhang C, Feng SY, Ma PP, Zhang S, Wang QQ
- 5776** Massive hemothorax following internal jugular vein catheterization under ultrasound guidance: A case report
Kang H, Cho SY, Suk EH, Ju W, Choi JY
- 5783** Unilateral adrenal tuberculosis whose computed tomography imaging characteristics mimic a malignant tumor: A case report
Liu H, Tang TJ, An ZM, Yu YR
- 5789** Modified membrane fixation technique in a severe continuous horizontal bone defect: A case report
Wang LH, Ruan Y, Zhao WY, Chen JP, Yang F
- 5798** Surgical repair of an emergent giant hepatic aneurysm with an abdominal aortic dissection: A case report
Wen X, Yao ZY, Zhang Q, Wei W, Chen XY, Huang B
- 5805** Heterotopic ossification beneath the upper abdominal incision after radical gastrectomy: Two case reports
Zhang X, Xia PT, Ma YC, Dai Y, Wang YL
- 5810** Non-alcoholic Wernicke encephalopathy in an esophageal cancer patient receiving radiotherapy: A case report
Zhang Y, Wang L, Jiang J, Chen WY
- 5816** New approach for the treatment of vertical root fracture of teeth: A case report and review of literature
Zhong X, Yan P, Fan W
- 5825** Ultrasound-guided microwave ablation as a palliative treatment for mycosis fungoides eyelid involvement: A case report
Chen YW, Yang HZ, Zhao SS, Zhang Z, Chen ZM, Feng HH, An MH, Wang KK, Duan R, Chen BD
- 5833** Pulp revascularization on an adult mandibular right second premolar: A case report
Yang YQ, Wu BL, Zeng JK, Jiang C, Chen M

- 5841** Barrett's esophagus in a patient with bulimia nervosa: A case report
Gouda A, El-Kassas M
- 5846** Spontaneous gallbladder perforation and colon fistula in hypertriglyceridemia-related severe acute pancreatitis: A case report
Wang QP, Chen YJ, Sun MX, Dai JY, Cao J, Xu Q, Zhang GN, Zhang SY
- 5854** Beware of gastric tube in esophagectomy after gastric radiotherapy: A case report
Yurttas C, Wichmann D, Gani C, Bongers MN, Singer S, Thiel C, Koenigsrainer A, Thiel K
- 5861** Transition from minimal change disease to focal segmental glomerulosclerosis related to occupational exposure: A case report
Tang L, Cai Z, Wang SX, Zhao WJ
- 5869** Lung adenocarcinoma metastasis to paranasal sinus: A case report
Li WJ, Xue HX, You JQ, Chao CJ
- 5877** Follicular lymphoma presenting like marginal zone lymphoma: A case report
Peng HY, Xiu YJ, Chen WH, Gu QL, Du X
- 5884** Primary renal small cell carcinoma: A case report
Xie K, Li XY, Liao BJ, Wu SC, Chen WM
- 5893** Gitelman syndrome: A case report
Chen SY, Jie N
- 5899** High-frame-rate contrast-enhanced ultrasound findings of liver metastasis of duodenal gastrointestinal stromal tumor: A case report and literature review
Chen JH, Huang Y
- 5910** Tumor-like disorder of the brachial plexus region in a patient with hemophilia: A case report
Guo EQ, Yang XD, Lu HR
- 5916** Response to dacomitinib in advanced non-small-cell lung cancer harboring the rare delE709_T710insD mutation: A case report
Xu F, Xia ML, Pan HY, Pan JW, Shen YH
- 5923** Loss of human epidermal receptor-2 in human epidermal receptor-2+ breast cancer after neoadjuvant treatment: A case report
Yu J, Li NL

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

- 5929** Repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation for post-traumatic stress disorder: Lights and shadows
Concerto C, Lanza G, Fisticaro F, Pennisi M, Rodolico A, Torrisi G, Bella R, Aguglia E

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Heterotopic ossification beneath the upper abdominal incision after radical gastrectomy: Two case reports

Xiang Zhang, Ping-Tian Xia, Yan-Chao Ma, Yong Dai, Yan-Lei Wang

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Abstract

BACKGROUND

Heterotopic ossification (HO) is a rare clinical phenomenon that refers to bone formation in nonossifying tissues.

CASE SUMMARY

This report presents two cases of HO beneath the upper abdominal median incision after radical gastrectomy. The first patient had postoperative pain below the incision area. There were no signs of anastomotic leakage, and the wound healed. Computed tomography (CT) findings 2 wk postoperatively were negative for HO, but the 6-wk CT showed HO beneath the incision. The patient refused reoperation, and after conservative therapy, the pain was gradually relieved after 2 wk. In the second case, postoperative recovery was uneventful, and HO was only detected on routine follow-up CT after 4 mo. An anti-adhesion membrane was applied beneath the peritoneum in both patients. Our findings suggest that HO beneath the abdominal incision might form at approximately 1 mo postoperatively. It may cause intractable pain; however, reoperation is usually not required.

CONCLUSION

In our cases, we suspect that HO may be related to the use of foreign materials beneath the peritoneum, which needs to be further investigated.

Key Words: Heterotopic ossification; Upper abdominal incision; Radical gastrectomy; Case report

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Core Tip: Heterotopic ossification (HO) beneath the upper abdominal incision is a rare clinical phenomenon that refers to bone formation in nonossifying tissues. In our cases, we suspect that HO may be related to the use of foreign materials beneath the peritoneum, which needs to be further investigated.

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INTRODUCTION

Heterotopic ossification (HO) is a rare clinical phenomenon that refers to bone formation in nonossifying tissues. This is a unique phenomenon that has rarely been reported following abdominal surgery. HO of an incisional scar was first described by Askanazy in 1901 as a subset of myositis ossificans traumatica[1,2]. Since then, more than 100 cases have been reported worldwide[2-6]. These numbers are probably an underestimate of the actual incidence, because these ossifications are usually asymptomatic[3]. HO has been described as a benign postoperative complication in most studies.

CASE PRESENTATION

Chief complaints

Case 1: The first patient was a 62-year-old man, he underwent radical gastrectomy (Billroth I anastomosis) with a midline abdominal incision. Postoperatively, the patient experienced pain below the incisional area.

Case 2: A 57-year-old man also underwent distal gastrectomy (Billroth I anastomosis) due to gastric cancer with a midline abdominal incision. The patient had no other comorbidities.

History of present illness

The two patients underwent distal gastrectomy (Billroth I anastomosis) because of gastric cancer.

History of past illness

Case 1: The patient had a history of coronary stent implantation performed 3 mo ago.

Case 2: The patients had no significant past illness.

Personal and family history

The patients had no significant personal and family history.

Physical examination

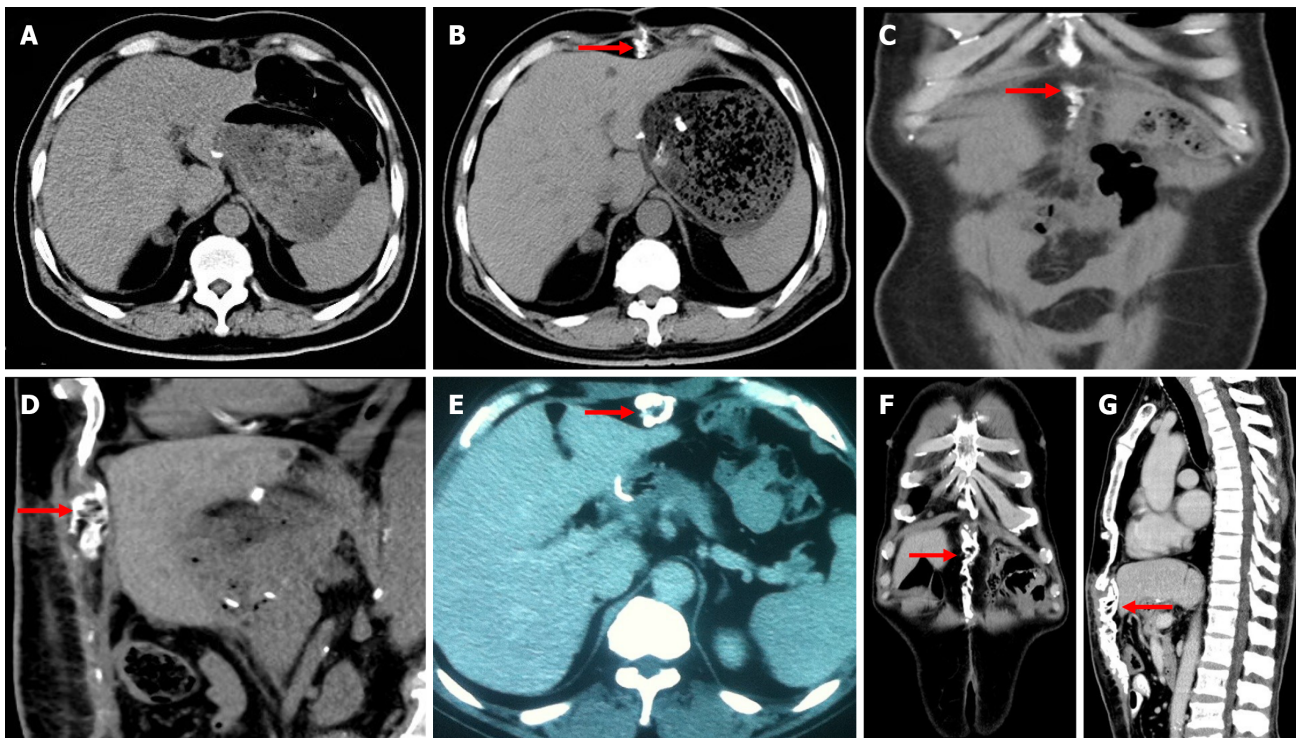
Case 1: There were no signs of anastomotic leakage, and the wound healed.

Case 2: Upon palpation, the incisional area was hard and firm.

Imaging examinations

Case 1: Computed tomography (CT) 2 wk postoperatively showed no obvious abnormality (Figure 1A), but the 6-wk CT showed calcification beneath the incision (Figure 1B-D).

Case 2: In the 4-mo follow-up CT scan, calcified tissue was noted under the upper abdominal incision, extending from the immediate subxiphoid region to the umbilical region (Figure 1E-G).



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Figure 1 Imaging examinations. A: Computed tomography (CT) scan 2 wk postoperatively in case 1 shows no obvious abnormality beneath the incision; B: CT scan 6 wk postoperatively in case 1 shows calcified tissue beneath the incision (arrow); C and D: Coronal and sagittal images of calcified tissue in case 1 between the incision and liver (arrow); E: CT scan 4 mo postoperatively in case 2 shows calcified tissue beneath the midline incision (arrow); F and G: Coronal and sagittal images in case 2 show extension of calcification (arrow).

FINAL DIAGNOSIS

The patients were diagnosed with ossification beneath the upper abdominal incision.

TREATMENT

The patient of case 1 refused reoperation, and after conservative therapy (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs), the pain was gradually relieved after 2 wk.

OUTCOME AND FOLLOW-UP

At a 1-year follow-up, the patients of case 1 had no signs of recurrence.

DISCUSSION

The following common features of ectopic ossification have been summarized in documented cases: (1) Male patients are more susceptible to ectopic ossification, and the male-to-female ratio is as high as 10:1 [7]; (2) this pathology has mostly been reported in vertical scars; (3) the ectopic bone is generally formulated within the first year postoperatively; and (4) all cases in the literature occurred during primary healing, and neither wound complications nor changes in serum ion levels were noted. Both our cases fit all of these features. Moreover, the newly formed bone was detected in the first case 6 wk postoperatively, which is sooner than the earliest ectopic abdominal incision ossifications reported in the literature (2 mo)[1]. Our findings suggest that HO beneath the abdominal incision might form at approximately 1 mo postoperatively.

While no certain theory has yet been confirmed regarding etiology, several mechanisms have been studied to help explain this pathological process. Injury or, more specifically, surgical incision is considered a necessary trigger[4]. Three requisite components are involved in the pathogenesis[7]: (1) Inductive signaling pathways are activated by a stimulation factor released from the site of injury. These

factors, including bone morphogenic proteins, have been implicated as potential signaling vehicles[8]; (2) then, inducible mesenchymal stem cells, which are located at the injury site, differentiate into osteoblasts or chondroblasts after receiving these signals. This process has been described as osteogenic induction[1,4]; and (3) a heterotopic environment conducive to osteogenesis must exist. HO of the abdominal wall is a subtype of myositis ossificans traumatica. Pieces of the periosteum or perichondrium of the xiphisternum or symphysis pubis may “plant” into the incision wound during the operation and then grow into bone in the scar[1,4]. During laparotomy, we extended the incision to the xiphisternum in both cases, which can be regarded as proof of this theory to some extent.

Tam *et al*[9] recently reported a case of HO in a patient after hernia repair. In the ectopically formed bone, they found an acellular dermal matrix that had been placed in the primary incision. In our case, we placed a sodium hyaluronate-based bioresorbable membrane (Seprafilm) under the peritoneum of each patient to prevent adhesion. It has been postulated that this type of anti-adhesion agent can cause inflammatory reactions as a severe postoperative complication[10-12]. Whether Seprafilm was the culprit in our case needs to be further investigated.

The main symptoms of HO include local pain and swelling[7]. In suspicious cases, CT or magnetic resonance imaging should be performed for diagnosis[2]. It is also important to exclude other postoperative complications, such as anastomotic leakage and tumor recurrence. In patients with intractable abdominal pain, conservative therapy, such as analgesic administration, parenteral transfusion, and physical therapy, should be initially performed. If conservative therapy fails, then complete excision of the lesion should be considered. Asymptomatic patients need no treatment apart from observation. The first patient in our experience had sustained abdominal pain postoperatively and was readmitted to the hospital twice. After 1 mo of conservative therapy, pain was immediately relieved before surgery was considered.

CONCLUSION

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug therapy, radiotherapy, and diphosphate (ethindronate disodium) administration have been proposed to decrease heterotopic bone formation[1]. However, the routine application of these methods is controversial and unnecessary.

FOOTNOTES

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