

Passover Gone South: Matzah-Induced Food Impaction

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KEY WORDS: esophagogastroduodenoscopy, food impaction, matzah, Passover, stricture

IMAJ 2019; 21: 291

A 93-year-old woman with a history of esophageal dilatation was admitted to the hospital in early April for complaints of inability to tolerate solids and liquids. The patient had a sensation that food was stuck in her mid-chest since early evening on the day prior to admission. At that time the patient had eaten a meal consisting of egg salad and matzah (unleavened flat bread that is eaten by those of Jewish faith during the Passover holiday).

An esophagogastroduodenoscopy was performed and revealed severe esophagi-

tis, food impaction [Figure 1], proximal esophageal web, distal esophageal stricture [Figure 2], and a suspicion of Candida esophagitis. Due to copious amounts of secretions the patient was unable to be extubated and was transferred to the medical intensive care unit (MICU) for further management.

In the MICU the patient was treated for aspiration pneumonia and empirically for esophageal candidiasis. A bronchoscopy was performed and respiratory cultures were sent to for microbiology analysis. The cultures grew yeast accompanied with gram-positive cocci and rods, which did not speciate. The patient completed her antibiotic course and responded appropriately. She was successfully extubated and transferred from the MICU to follow-up

with her gastroenterologist as an outpatient.

Matzah is made from flour and water and must be baked within 18 minutes of the water mixing with the flour. This process does not allow enough time for the dough to rise (which is why it is eaten on Passover, as it symbolizes the Israelites' rapid exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land). The result is a flat, cracker-like product.

Matzah is difficult to digest because when it mixes with water or saliva during the digestive process it can become thick, leading to difficult passage into the stomach. Although there have not been any case reports documenting food impaction secondary to matzah ingestion it has been found to cause small bowel obstruction [1].

This case represents a relatively common occurrence (food impaction) with a unique cause (matzah). In patients who have a history of inflammation and/or narrowing of the esophagus, additional care should be taken when ingesting matzah.

Figure 1. Arrow highlighting food impaction in the distal esophagus



Figure 2. Distal esophagus highlighting a stricture with significantly friable mucosa and some mucosal oozing



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“Understanding is a two-way street”

Eleanor Roosevelt (1884–1962), American political figure, diplomat, and activist, served as first lady of the United States during her husband's four terms as president

“In order that people may be happy in their work, these three things are needed: they must be fit for it; they must not do too much of it; and they must have a sense of success in it”

John Ruskin (1819–1900), British author, art critic, and social reformer