

Giant Left Atrium

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A 67 year old woman with a history of rheumatic heart disease was admitted because of dyspnea and anasarca. Ten years previously she had undergone a mitral valve replacement to a mechanical valve.

At the present admission her chest radiograph demonstrated massive cardiomegaly with calcification of the right cardiac contour. A mild right pleural effusion was also detected [Figure A]. A computed tomographic scan of the chest [Figure B] showed a severe aneurysmatic enlargement of the left atrium reaching an extreme diameter of 19 cm, the prosthetic mitral valve and left atrial wall calcification. The patient was aggressively treated with a loop diuretic and dopamine but after 4 days she succumbed to her disease.

The left atrium dilates in patients with rheumatic mitral stenosis [1]. Occasionally, the left atrium reaches extreme sizes. Mitral stenosis may present alone or with mitral insufficiency, or it may present as mixed mitral disease, with predominant rheumatic mitral stenosis [2-4]. Transthoracic echocardiography is the easiest and least expensive method to diagnose and monitor the disease progression and is often used during surgery to evaluate the surgical outcome – the final positioning of the implanted valve [5].

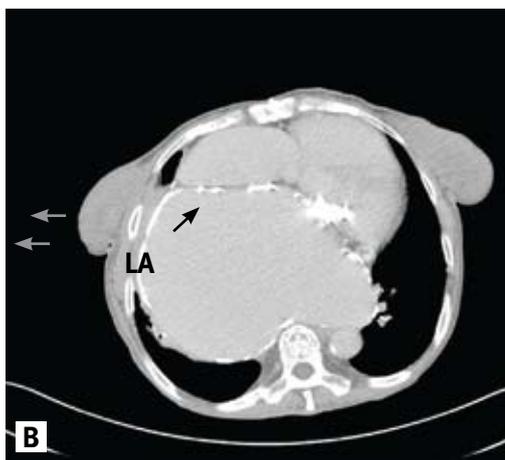
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[A] Massive cardiomegaly with calcification of the right cardiac contour



[B] Severe aneurysmatic enlargement of the left atrium (LA) reaching an extreme diameter of 19 cm. Calcification of the prosthetic mitral valve and of the left atrial wall is clearly seen (gray arrows)

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