The role of surgery in the treatment of intussusception in celiac disease

Çöliyak hastalığında gelişen invajinasyonun tedavisinde cerrahinin yeri

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Small bowel intussusceptions comprise fewer than 10% of all pediatric patients with intussusceptions and most of them are secondary to another pathology. In this report, we discuss the role of surgery in the treatment of intussusception in celiac disease. A 13-month-old girl was admitted with a three day history of progressive abdominal distention and vomiting of bile. There were air-fluid levels on supine abdominal X-ray and ultrasonographic examination demonstrated an intussusception. At surgery, two separate small bowel intussusceptions were encountered. The postoperative course was uneventful. Due to a history of frequent diarrhea and mild abdominal distention developing after the age of seven months, further studies for celiac disease were initiated. Antigliadin and antiendomysium antibodies were found to be strongly positive. Celiac disease was also confirmed by endoscopic small bowel biopsy. Children who present with chronic or transient intestinal obstruction should also be evaluated for underlying celiac disease. Nevertheless, the surgical decision should be based upon clinical observation in this group of patients.

Key words: Small bowel, intussusception, celiac disease.

INTRODUCTION
Nonobstructive small bowel intussusception (SBI) was found in up to 18% of cases of celiac disease with contrast radiology in the 1960’s and 1970’s (1,2). However obstructive SBI in celiac disease is uncommon and there are only a few reported cases of children with this pathology (2-4). Although intestinal obstruction is a very rare presentation of celiac disease, rare clinical forms and some underestimated complications, sometimes those requiring emergency surgical treatment, may cause diagnostic difficulties (5-7). If the association of this complication with celiac disease remains undiagnosed, life-threatening conditions may occur (2). We describe a 13-month-old girl with complicated obstructive intussusception needing surgical correction and with underlying celiac disease.

CASE REPORT
A 13-month-old girl was admitted with abdominal distension and bilious vomiting and diarrhea. There had been failure to thrive and intermittent abdominal distention during the previous months. She also had a four-week history of passing loose stools. On physical examination, there was dehydration and severe abdominal distention, with apparent episodes of colicky abdominal pain. Her plain abdominal X-rays showed air-fluid levels...
with dilated intestinal loops, and on ultrasound (US) examination, signs of intussusception was seen. No stools were passed after administration of a rectal enema and her abdominal distention increased progressively, even after continuous nasogastric decompression. The follow-up serial US examination demonstrated persistence of the bowel intussusception (Figure 1). Her symptoms progressively worsened and signs of intestinal obstruction became more evident.

Thirty six hours after admission, the patient underwent emergency laparotomy. Two ileo-ileal intussusceptions were found and manual reduction was performed. There was no abdominal pathology other than the mesenteric lymphadenopathies. Postoperative oral feeding was commenced on the fourth day and abdominal distention resolved during this period. Due to the patients history, further investigations for celiac disease were performed, and antigliadin and antiendomysium antibodies were found to be strongly positive. She was referred to a pediatric gastroenterology unit, where celiac disease was confirmed by endoscopic small bowel biopsy, which showed total villous atrophy and crypt hyperplasia with increased intraepithelial lymphocytes (Figure 2). A gluten free diet was recommended, following which she made a rapid recovery and had no further symptoms to suggest intussusception. She is currently well after three years of follow-up.

DISCUSSION

In the past, there were very few reports of children with celiac disease and intussusception (2-4). A SBI may complicate various conditions that disturb the small bowel mucosal structure or small bowel motility (8,9). Mucosal inflammation and disturbances of gut motility are important in the pathogenesis of intussusception complicating celiac disease (2-4). Mushtag suggested that SBI in a child with celiac disease should initially be managed medically rather than by early surgical reduction (2). In this study, the intussusceptions resolved spontaneously with medical therapy in all of the patients with celiac disease. The condition was either an isolated SBI resolving within hours or after several days, or transient, multiple SBI occurring over several days (2). These reports in the literature suggest that conservative medical treatment should be attempted first in cases with a history of celiac disease (2-4).

We treated our patient medically, but the clinical symptoms did not resolve; on the contrary, there were signs of increased intestinal obstruction during this period.

It is therefore suggested that pediatric surgeons should consider these critical questions: how should the pediatric surgeon diagnose and handle intussusception in a child with celiac disease, when should the surgeon operate on a child for intussusception when he/she was unaware of the patient’s celiac disease as in this present case? In a context of celiac disease should one still wait if obstruction is complete and the clinical condition deteriorates?

Although reports advise that SBI resolves spontaneously in all patients with celiac disease, we
believe that these should not be critical in surgical decision-making. The management of intussusception should be based mainly on clinical observation and progression of the obstruction. The decision to continue medical treatment must be undertaken very cautiously because of the potentially fatal consequences of strangulation. In this child, prompt operative reduction was required due to complete intestinal obstruction and clinical deterioration. We consider that in cases with undiagnosed celiac disease, surgical decision making regarding intussusception should be based on clinical observation, as in the present study.

In conclusion, children who present with chronic or transient intestinal obstruction due to intussusceptions should be evaluated for underlying disease such as celiac disease. However, a decision on surgical treatment of intussusception should be based on clinical observation and radiological investigation whether celiac disease is present or not.

REFERENCES