Neonatal Gastric Necrosis and Perforation Treated by Subtotal Gastrectomy and Esogastric Anastomosis: A Case Report

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Patient: Male, 4-day-old
Final Diagnosis: Gastric perforation and necrosis
Symptoms: Acute abdominal distension • metabolic acidosis • respiratory distress
Medication: —
Clinical Procedure: —
Specialty: Pediatrics and Neonatology • Surgery

Objective: Congenital defects/diseases
Background: Gastric necrosis and perforation are rare life-threatening conditions in preterm neonates, which require urgent diagnosis and surgical intervention.

Case Report: We report a case of a 4-day-old patient with neonatal gastric necrosis. The patient presented with sudden acute abdominal distension, respiratory distress, and metabolic acidosis. The abdomen was markedly distended, tender, and tympanic with collateral circulation. An X-ray of the abdomen showed a huge pneumoperitoneum. An urgent exploratory laparotomy revealed 2 wide horizontal perforations and necrosis of the fundus and gastric body. Subtotal gastrectomy with esogastric anastomosis was done. Postoperatively, the patient was administered total parenteral nutrition and triple antibiotics and improved gradually. He passed stool and the abdomen was soft, lax, and non-distended and the wound healed. An upper gastrointestinal tract (UGIT) contrast study 1 week after the operation showed no leakage or stricture. The patient was discharged 2 months postoperatively with a bodyweight of 2 kg and was followed in the Outpatient Department (OPD). The patient survived after 80% gastric resection for necrosis of the stomach, which was a unique outcome for this major surgery.

Conclusions: Gastric perforation is a rare life-threatening condition in preterm neonates, usually managed by direct closure in layers. Exceptionally, partial gastrectomy is needed, which is a major operation, with a high mortality rate and poor outcome. We present a case of a preterm neonate who survived after 80% gastric resection for stomach necrosis.

Keywords: Infant Mortality • Infant, Premature • Perinatal Death

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**Background**

Neonatal gastric perforation is a rare life-threatening condition. It accounts for 7% of all neonatal gastrointestinal perforations [1]. Neonatal gastric perforation usually presents within the first week of life, with clinical features including abdominal distension, respiratory distress, vomiting, and lethargy/sepsis [2].

The treatment is based on urgent surgical repair of the perforation with debridement of the edges and closure of the perforation, although spontaneous healing of gastric perforation has also been observed in neonates after conservative management [3].

Mortality due to neonatal gastric necrosis and perforation is high and ranges from 27% to 83% [4], which is why early diagnosis and early surgical intervention are needed to improve prognosis [4].

**Case Report**

A 4-day-old preterm neonate weighing 1.02 kg was born at 29 weeks of gestational age and delivered through cesarean section. His Apgar score was 5/8, and he was admitted to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit because of prematurity, intrauterine growth restriction, and respiratory distress syndrome and was nil per os and on non-invasive oxygen. On day 4 of life, this patient presented sudden acute abdominal distension and respiratory distress. He was intubated on mechanical ventilation with FiO2=100% to maintain SaO2 at 80-85%, and inotropes to maintain blood pressure at 62/41.

On examination, the abdomen was markedly distended, tender, and tympanic and there was abdominal collateral circulation and a right non-complicated inguinal hernia (Figure 1). An orogastric feeding tube (OGT) was put in place with no aspiration but only traces of blood. An abdominal X-ray showed free air in the peritoneal cavity. Cord blood gases showed mild respiratory acidosis (pH 7.3, Pco2 8.17, Po2 14.5).

The diagnosis of viscous perforation was made, and as the baby was unstable, a bedside peritoneal drain (size 10 Fr) was inserted under local anesthesia. This revealed a gush of gas without fecal material and deflated the distended abdomen. Peritoneal wash revealed light grayish fluid with no bile. On day 1 after drainage (D5 of life), the patient started to have mild abdominal distension and an abdominal X-ray showed recurrence of the pneumoperitoneum. A 12 Fr peritoneal tube was re-inserted for irrigation with normal saline, where all air came out with a minimal amount of fluid, but the abdominal X-ray showed persistence of pneumoperitoneum. An upper gastrointestinal (UGIT) contrast study was done, which showed rapid passage of contrast in the peritoneal cavity (Figure 2). An urgent exploratory laparotomy was done and revealed a large gastric perforation extending from the greater curvature to the antrum, with necrotic edges (Figure 3). Debridement of necrotic tissue and closure of the gastric perforation in 2 layers was done using interrupted Vicryl sutures through all coats for the first layer, followed by a second seromuscular layer of Vicryl sutures.

On day 3 after surgery (D8 of life), the patient has a recurrence of the abdominal distension, an X-ray abdomen showed...
pneumoperitoneum, and a Gastrografin study showed a gas-
tric leak. A re-exploratory laparotomy was done and revealed 2 new
wide horizontal perforations with extension of the necrosis
to nearly all of the fundus and gastric body. The tissue was to
frangible and necrotic sutures, and a subtotal gastrectomy was
performed for ischemic necrosis of the gastric wall. The fun-
dus and most of the body of the stomach were necrotic, pre-
serving only the antrum after esogastric anastomosis.

Postoperatively, the patient was on total parenteral nutrition
and triple antibiotics (Meropenem, Vancomycin, and
Metronidazole) and improved gradually. He passed stool on
the third day after surgery and the abdomen was soft, lax,
and non-distended. There is no discharge from the peritone-
al drain and the wound was clean and healed.

A UGIT contrast study was done on day 7 after surgery (D15 of
life) and showed no leak or structure (Figure 4). Infusion feed-
ing was started through the orogastric tube and intake slowly
increased until reaching full feeding at 1 month of age. Bolus
feeding started gradually, with a goal of 10 cc/kg/h.

The patient was discharged 2 months postoperatively with a
body weight of 2 kg and length of 45 cm (-3DS) and was followed
in the Outpatient Department postoperatively at 3 months, 6
months, and 1 year. He had a delay in gaining weight and was
operated on for a right-side inguinal hernia at age 1 year.

Discussion

Gastric necrosis and perforation are rare conditions in neo-
nates, as among more than 84 000 live births only 7 cases
were identified [5]. Gastric perforation is more common in
preterm neonates and most commonly occurs from the 2nd to
the 7th days [6]. The patient presented in this case report was
premature and the perforation occurred on the 4th day of life.

Several theories have been advanced to explain neonatal gas-
tric perforation [8].

Even though the stomach is well vascularized, spontaneous
perforations and necrosis do occur [3]. Most defects are prox-
imal, linear tears along the greater curvature, with an average
of 0.5 to 8 cm in length [8]. Respiratory distress and sudden
abdominal distension have been reported as the predomi-
nant symptoms [9]. Feeding intolerance, signs of hypovole-
mia, and decreased perfusion are commonly associated with
this condition [9].

Most cases are diagnosed by abdominal X-ray showing pneu-
peritoneum, but definitive diagnosis is usually made intra-
operatively by visualizing the perforation site and area of ne-
crosis; perforations are most commonly linear tears seen on the
greater curvature [10]. In the present case, the perforation was
from the greater curvature to the antrum, with necrotic edges.

Factors associated with poor prognosis including male sex, hy-
ponatremia, and metabolic acidosis [7]. However, reviewers in
recent decades have suggested that early diagnosis of neo-
natal gastric perforation and advances in neonatal intensive care
can improve the prognosis [11].
Rapid surgical intervention with the repair of the gastric tear is the suggested management, as mortality will be higher in case of delayed surgery [1]. A study done in 2014 showed that survival outcomes of preterm infants and low-birth-weight infants were not inferior to those of full-term patients [1].

The goals of treatment in neonatal gastric necrosis include debridement of necrotic tissue with primary repair of the perforation in 2 layers by interrupted absorbable sutures in most cases [12]. The same was done in our case in the first attempt but with postoperative leak due to extension of necrosis.

There are few reported cases of gastric perforation requiring a total or subtotal gastrectomy; only 3 survivors within the first 2 weeks of life were reported in an earlier study [12]. In a systematic review of 8 treated cases of neonatal gastric perforation, the survival rate was 73% and 60% of them had only primary repair of the perforation as gastric surgery [11].

Conclusions

Gastric perforation and necrosis are rare life-threatening conditions in neonates, which require urgent surgical intervention. This intervention includes debridement of necrotic tissue with primary closure of the perforation in layers. In rare cases of extended necrosis, partial gastrectomy with esogastroanastomosis is indicated.

This was a case of a preterm infant who survived after 80% gastric resection for stomach necrosis. Prompt diagnosis and surgical treatment, as well as high-quality pre- and postoperative care, are needed to improve the prognosis.

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References: