Abdominal Migraine as Cause of Recurrent Abdominal Pain


Researchers from the Children’s Hospital of the King’s Daughters, Norfolk, VA, conducted a study to determine if abdominal migraine (AM) is an underdiagnosed cause of recurrent abdominal pain in children. The investigators reviewed the medical records of children seen in a pediatric gastroenterology clinic for recurrent abdominal pain in 2006 and 2007. The International Classification of Headache Disorders (ICHD-2) criteria were used to classify study patients as having AM. These criteria define AM as an idiopathic disorder characterized by attacks of midline, moderate to severe abdominal pain lasting 1 to 72 hours, with vasmotor symptoms, nausea, and vomiting. A key feature of AM is the complete resolution of symptoms between attacks. A diagnosis of AM is excluded if another etiology for the abdominal pain is found. During the study period 2,443 children were evaluated for recurrent abdominal pain; the medical records of 600 patients were randomly selected for review. Among this cohort of 600 study children (ages 1-21 years; 59% females), 142 (24%) were excluded on the basis of a diagnosed cause. Reasons for exclusion from the diagnosis of AM included irritable bowel syndrome (41%), renal disease (4%), pre-existing neurologic disorder (7%), inflammatory bowel disease (16%), eosinophilic esophagitis (4%), and “other” (28%). Of 458 patients with chronic, idiopathic, recurrent abdominal pain, 20 (4.4%) met ICHD-2 criteria for AM and another 50 (11%) had probable AM, lacking at least one criterion for the diagnosis. During the study period no child seen in the pediatric gastroenterology clinic was diagnosed with AM.

The authors conclude that AM is an underdiagnosed cause of recurrent abdominal pain in children. Increased awareness of cardinal features of AM may result in improved diagnosis and early use of specific therapy.

Commentary by

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Since this study was based on patients referred to a subspecialty practice, readers should be wary about generalizing the findings to all children with recurrent abdominal pain.

References

Key words: abdominal migraine, recurrent abdominal pain, functional abdominal pain

Editors’ Note
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