Erythema ab igne and its association with cannabinoid hyperemesis syndrome: A Case Report

Delphine Sime Sidieu*, Allison Gilbert*,1, Edmond Brasseur*, Alexandre Ghuysen* and Vincent D Orio*

*Emergency Department, University Hospital Center of Liège, Liège, Belgium.

ABSTRACT The erythema ab igne is an uncommon skin disorder related to repeated heat exposure such as open fires or heating pads. Cannabinoid hyperemesis syndrome is an entity including several symptoms such as nausea, vomiting or frequent abdominal pain following marijuana use. Most of those symptoms can be relieved by hot showering or baths. Recently in the literature, erythema ab igne has been associated with cannabinoid hyperemesis syndrome because cannabis users tend to resort to heating pads to relieve persistent abdominal pain.

We report the case of a patient with recurrent vomiting and abdominal pain attributed to cannabinoid hyperemesis syndrome, whose physical examination revealed an erythema ab igne.

KEYWORDS erythema ab igne, cannabinoid hyperemesis syndrome, heat

Introduction

Erythema ab igne (EAI) is an atypical cutaneous disorder that can occur in various situations, all related to prolonged and repeated heat exposure. This benign condition is characterized by an erythematous and hyperpigmented rash localised in certain parts of the body which have been repeatedly exposed to heat sources [1]. Different heat’s origins have been described over time, the most common being the use of heating pads or heated car seats, but far more surprising ones have been highlighted [2,3]. We report the case of a patient who developed EAI in the course of recurrent cannabinoid hyperemesis.

Patient and Methods

A 25-year-old patient presented to the Emergency Department for 2-days persistent vomiting and abdominal pain. The patient had no significant medical past but reported cyclic vomiting. He explained he frequently smoked cannabis but then suffered from recurrent vomiting and abdominal discomfort, which led him to apply heating pads on his abdomen. At the admission, his blood pressure was 120/80mmHg; heart rate was 115bpm, oxygen saturation was 100% while breathing room air and he had no fever. Physical examination only demonstrated an erythematous cutaneous rash on his abdomen which was present for weeks (figure 1). The electrocardiogram was normal. Laboratory investigations revealed an impaired potassium level (2.8mmol/l) and no further abnormality. Urine drug screening was positive for cannabinoids. The patient was placed under intravenous hydration, anti-emetics and potassium supplementation. After 24 hours of treatment and monitoring, biological analysis found no abnormality and the patient was asymptomatic. Those symptoms were then attributed to a cannabinoid hyperemesis syndrome complicated by an EAI as the result of multiple heating pads application. The patient was discharged with recommendations concerning the overuse of heating pads and cannabis.

Discussion

Erythema ab igne, which means “redness from fire”, is a skin abnormality typically described as hyperpigmented and reticulated erythema localised in a site exposed to prolonged heat [2].

The disorder’s pathophysiology remains unclear. The typical skin lesions occur after exposure to infrared radiations, usually from weeks to years. Those radiations are considered to be sufficient to produce cutaneous damages but without the ability to provoke actual burns. Different skin damages have been described in the literature, mainly related to pathological changes
Figure 1: Erythema ab igne in a patient with repetitive use of heating pads to relieve pain during multiple episodes of cannabinoid hyperemesis.

Erythema ab igne is an unusual and uncommon cutaneous disorder which can be encountered in recurrent cannabinoid hyperemesis. This case report highlights the association between chronic cannabinoid hyperemesis syndrome and erythema ab igne, which has to be recognised as a rare complication of this syndrome. However, this diagnosis has to be precociously made to exclude other underlying severe diseases.

Competing interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References


