

CASE REPORT

## Death as a Result of Body Packer's Syndrome

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### ABSTRACT

*A 42-year-old male was under the custody of narcotics department and he was produced before the court for taking permission of medical check-up. According to the police report the deceased had tried to escape from custody while traveling to court and suddenly collapsed. When he was brought to J. J. Hospital, declared dead before the admission. Autopsy was performed twelve hours after the incident. Total one hundred twenty (120) identical oval shaped "Capsule" packages were found in the stomach, small intestine, large bowel, rectum, anal canal and one of them was ruptured. This case is the first accidental death of a body packer in Mumbai in which such large quantity of drugs capsules has been recovered and demonstrates that body packing is an existing problem today.*

**Keywords:** Body Packing, Capsules, Narcotics, Death.

### INTRODUCTION

Concealment and transit of narcotic materials (e.g., opium and heroin) is one of the major businesses with high benefit in all over the world.<sup>1,2</sup> Body packing is the term used for the intracorporeal concealment of illicit drugs mainly opium, heroin, cocaine, amphetamines, 3,4-methylenedioxymeth-amphetamine (ecstasy), and marijuana or hashish. Body packers may also be called "swallowers," "internal carriers," "couriers," or "mules." Body packers usually carry about one kg (2.2 lb) of drug, divided into 50 – 100 packets of 8 – 10 g each, although persons carrying more than 200 packets have been reported.<sup>3</sup> Each packet of opium, heroin, cocaine, or amphetamine contains a life-threatening dose of the drug.<sup>3,5</sup> These drugs are wrapped in the forms of capsules, condoms, balloons, plastic bags, or finger of latex gloves and located in various anatomic cavities or body orifices.<sup>3,6</sup> Identification of suspected persons is difficult for the customs officers at the national borders or airports.<sup>6-8</sup> The body packers are especially prone to rupture of the packets and consequent toxicity. In addition, gastrointestinal (GI) obstruction may occur and also there are some reports about upper GI hemorrhage caused by prolonged pressure of the packets on the gastric mucosa.<sup>9</sup> The first reported body packer that swallowed a condom filled with hashish was in Toronto in 1973.<sup>10</sup> Since then the smuggling of illicit drugs is becoming increasingly common.<sup>11,12</sup> Although body packers are young men, the use of children and pregnant women has been reported.<sup>15</sup>

### CASE REPORT

**Case History:** Custom duty officers on airport arrested a 42-year-old male and he was under the custody of narcotic department. When he was produced before the court for taking permission of medical check up, he has tried to escape, but during running he suddenly collapsed and became unconscious. When he was brought to J.J. Hospital, he was declared dead before the admission.

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## AUTOPSY FINDINGS

(Figure 2,3,4,5,6,7,8)

On X-ray examination multiple capsules were seen in abdomen and in pelvis (**Figure 1**)



**Figure1** X-Ray Showing Capsules

On external examination it was found that rigor mortis was passed away. Yellow coloured dried powdery particles present at angle of mouth on both sides. Oozing of blood-tinged fluid from nose, purging was present, cyanosis of nails and lips present. Abrasions present over extensor aspect of right and left forearm and dorsal side of right hand.

On internal examination of head under scalp petechial hemorrhages seen. Stomach contains brownish colored semisolid fluid with 25 identical oval shaped capsules, which were wrapped in thin elastic white colored material in multiple layers.



**Figure 2** Stomach with capsules



**Figure 3** Capsules inside the stomach

In small and large intestine 95 capsules were present.



**Figure 4** Large Intestines with Capsules



**Figure 5** Small Intestines with Capsules



**Figure 6** Capsules Within Intestine

Ileocaecal junction was hemorrhagic. All the organs were congested with cerebropulmonary edema. Total 120 capsules were retrieved from gastrointestinal tract of which one found ruptured (**Figure 8**).



**Figure 7** Capsules Recovered From Body



**Figure 8** Ruptured Capsule

Samples preserved are viscera, skin swab of dried vomitus around mouth and leaked capsule for chemical analysis. Tissue is for histopathology. Cause of death was given as "Evidence of ruptured of capsule in large intestine with intestinal hemorrhage however final opinion reserved pending for accessory examination reports".

## TOXICOLOGICAL FINDINGS

The fine powders of the ruptured pack and of one sample of the intact packs were positive for Cocaine after chemical analysis. The toxicological analysis of the post-mortem blood revealed Cocaine concentration of 1.15 mg/100ml. No heroin, 6-monoacetylmorphine, other drugs and alcohol were detected in blood.

## DISCUSSION

Body packing is a method for smuggling of illicit drugs and has become a common problem at borders and airports of several countries. Smuggling of cocaine by means of body packing is a common problem at the Indian, U.S. and African airports and heroin body packing seems to be more frequent in Asia and Europe<sup>16</sup>. There are not statistic data for drug smugglers worldwide because few of them are arrested. The number of undetected cases is undoubtedly high. A sudden death can be observed in "body-packing syndrome" due to fatal acute intoxication, intestinal obstruction and delirium<sup>13</sup>. The use of body packing as a way of smuggling illicit drugs can be extremely hazardous, because of the risk of leakage or bursting of the container<sup>10</sup>. Due to this high risk acute lethal intoxication is the most common cause of death among body packers.

Poor or inadequate packaging may result in rupture and leaking of the drug packet with subsequent bowel absorption. Damage of the pack can be caused instomach by mechanical movements or chemical digestion of the binding by which the pack is tied. Cocaine, heroin and rarely amphetamines are the illicit drugs usually transported by body packers. Generally, the purity of the transported drugs is usually 5-8 times higher compared with those bought on the street<sup>16</sup>. Each pack usually contains some grams of the illicit drug and if a single pack bursts, taking into account the high purity of the drug, the amount of the toxic substance that enters the blood circulation is higher than in cases of common drug abuse. However, the absorption from the gastrointestinal tract may be slower than direct intravenous injection.

Cocain after oral administration is well absorbed in the gastrointestinal tract and undergoes excessive first-pass metabolism by liver esterase and plasma cholinesterase to ecgoninemethylester (EME), one of the major metabolite and nonezymatic hydrolysis results in formation of other major metabolites.

In present case the amount of Cocain in each capsule is 22 – 26 grams. In this case one capsule in large intestine was found ruptured with powder leakage at that site due to which there has occurred intoxication with rise in blood concentration of Cocain and patient has died immediately.

## CONCLUSION

The present paper presents an accidental death of a Cocain body packer in Mumbai. The deceased was in panic and has tried to run, while running he fall on the ground. The autopsy and toxicological analysis revealed 119 intact wrapped packets containing Cocain in gastrointestinal tract, one ruptured packet in the large bowel and a Cocain blood concentration of 1.15 mg/100ml. The internal examination indicated generalized viscera congestion, pulmonary edema. This accidental death of a body packer in Mumbai indicates that body packing is an existing problem in India.

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