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Another One Bites the Joint: A Case of Reactive Arthritis in an Otherwise Healthy Hispanic Male

Reactive arthritis is a form of spondylarthritis that manifests following gastrointestinal or genitourinary infections. Reactive arthritis has been described historically as a triad of conjunctivitis, urethritis, and arthritis, however not all patients present with this classic triad. It is imperative to identify patients with high-risk features as certain features of the disease, such as an ESR greater than 30 and positive HLA-B27, portend a poorer prognosis. We present a case of reactive arthritis in a healthy 36-year-old gentleman after a self-limited episode of gastroenteritis.

A 36-year-old healthy man presented to the Rheumatology clinic for a 2-week history of multiple arthralgias. According to the patient, he reported that one week before the episodes of joint pain, he had just recovered from self-limited gastroenteritis that was accompanied by multiple episodes of non-bloody, mucous diarrhea, vomiting, chills, dehydration. Shortly after recovery, the patient noticed pain and swelling to his right wrist followed by pain and swelling to his L elbow, and subsequent pain and swelling to his L wrist. The patient went to the emergency room where lab work demonstrated an elevated ESR. Due to his symptomology, the patient was referred to the clinic. The patient noted that he was prescribed a Methylprednisolone dose pack and Indomethacin 50 mg TID which did not resolve symptoms as he continued to have migratory, oligoarthritis. The patient denied similar symptoms in the past, including skin rashes, oral ulcers, a history of conjunctivitis or other inflammatory eye diseases, or any other constitutional symptoms. Physical examination was remarkable for swelling of the right elbow, bilateral wrists, and left knee and ankles. There was no conjunctivitis, oral ulcers, or keratoderma blenorrhagicum. Labs showed negative ANA and rheumatoid factor, ESR 107, CRP 8.9, with positive HLA-B27. The patient was diagnosed with Reactive Arthritis. He was started on Prednisone 20 mg BID and Sulfasalazine 500 mg BID.

Reactive arthritis is a spondylarthritis that typically affects middle-aged men following sexually transmitted infections or gastroenteritis. Reactive arthritis is typically self-limited with remission being achieved by 6-18 months however recurrence occurs in 25-50% of cases, especially in HLA-B27 positive patients. These patients could potentially develop long term disease resulting in enthesitis and destructive arthritis. As noted above, our patient presented with moderately elevated ESR and positive HLA-B27. The patient continues to follow up in the clinic bi-weekly for disease surveillance. The patient continues to have pain in his left ankle and bilateral wrist, but the swelling has significantly improved. He has not developed any extra-articular manifestations.