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Contraception and pagophagia: a clinical case

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Background & Aim: Pica refers to a perverted appetite for substances not fit as food. Pagophagia, or pica for ice, is particularly common and specific for iron-deficiency state. The aim of this paper is to discuss an atypical presentation of iron deficiency, which is a common disease.

Method: We collected the clinical history directly from the patient and the laboratory results from her clinical process.

Results: The case refers to a woman, 25 years old, Caucasian, working as over the counter employee. In April 2013, because she often forgot to take the contraceptive oral pill, she decided to insert an etonogestrel implant (EI). She was asymptomatic until February 2015 when she started having abnormal uterine bleeding (AUB). for that reason we prescribed mefenamic acid and estradiol for 5 days, which resolved the uterine bleeding. In July 2015, at a consultation, she states that she's been having pagophagia and also appetite for dirt. Suspecting of an iron deficiency anemia we requested a complete blood count and the serum ferritin concentration, that revealed the following results: hemoglobin (Hb) 9.5g/L, hematocrit (Htc) 31.9%, mean corpuscular volume (MCV) 70.9fL, mean cell hemoglobin (MCH) 21.1pg and ferritin 4.3ng/mL. We then initiated treatment with iron hydroxide 375mg daily. In September/2015, with the patient asymptomatic, a new analytic evaluation was performed that revealed the following results: Hb 12.3g/L, Htc 39.2%, MCV 74.5fL, MCH 23.4pg and ferritin 6.5ng/mL. At this point, since the patient no longer had AUB, the EI wasn't removed and the iron treatment was continued.

Conclusions: This case illustrates the importance of knowing the atypical but rather specific presentation of fairly common disease. Another important aspect shown was the suspicion of an iron deficiency in the presence of an AUB.

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