

Temporary Exclusion of the Perforated Esophagus Using a Linear Vascular Stapler: A New Surgical Treatment

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Abstract

Background/Aims: A new technique using a linear staple suture for temporary exclusion of the perforated esophagus is presented.

Materials and Methods: The procedure is combined with diversion of esophageal fluid by nasogastric tube and drainage of the periesophageal compartments by silicon drains. A gastrostomy is used to drain the stomach for 48 hours, and later for enteral nutrition. Since the suture line reopens spontaneously after approximately 10 days there is no need of reoperation.

Results: This method allows diversion of esophageal fluids and therefore enhances effective healing of esophageal perforations after primary repair. Complete spontaneous recanalization of the esophagus occurs approximately two weeks after operation.

Conclusions: The combination of primary repair of an esophageal perforation with esophageal exclusion by using a linear stapler and diversion of esophageal fluid contents by naso-esophageal tube and gastrostomy is a simple effective procedure. Further experience and studies may be needed to verify the usefulness and place of this technique in armamentarium of the visceral surgeon.

Key words: Esophageal perforation - Boerhaave syndrome - surgical treatment - temporary exclusion - mediastinitis

Introduction

The first patient with spontaneous barogenic rupture of the esophagus was described in 1724 by Boerhaave (1).

However, over 200 years elapsed before Barret (2) performed a successful primary closure of an esophageal rupture through a thoracotomy. Today, perforations of the esophagus still represent a life-threatening condition that demands early diagnosis and treatment. The overall mortality rate is 20-68% (3-8), largely due to delay in diagnosis, and is related to septic shock from mediastinal infection, resulting in multiple organ failure (7,9). Critically important prognostic factors are delay in diagnosis (10-14), anatomic location (cervical versus intrathoracic) (12), rupture cause and size (13), and finally patient age and co-morbidity (13). The best treatment of thoracic esophageal perforation seems to be early (within the first 24 hours) primary repair of the leak with adequate drainage of involved compartments and supportive therapy including antibiotics and hyperalimentation (13-15). Different treatment techniques have been described to approach the problem of esophageal perforation: conservative treatment with drainage alone (12,13,16,17), esophageal repair with or without gastric fundal patch (18) or pedicled pleural flap (12), gastric patch with fundoplication (18), temporary exclusion and diversion (12,13,18-20), and even total esophagectomy with secondary interposition procedures (7,18,21). All current surgical techniques require a subsequent reconstructive procedure to restore the esophageal transit.

Linear esophageal stapling using absorbable staples has been described as an alternative method for excluding the esophagus without reoperation (19). We report two cases, in which esophageal exclusion was performed using a stainless steel linear stapler (TA Premium 55-3.5 stapler®, Auto Suture AG, Hori, Switzerland). This method achieves complete spontaneous esophageal recanalization after approximately two weeks.

Patients and methods

Patient 1

A 83-year-old woman was admitted to our department after iatrogenic perforation of the mid esophagus. The perforation occurred 24 hours earlier during endoscopic removal of an impacted meat bolus in the esophagus. The endoscopic treatment was followed by a pain attack in the upper thoracic aperture and consecutive dyspnea. On admission the patient was in poor general condition with blood oxygenation of only 40%. Plain chest X-Ray showed a pneumothorax and pneumomediastinum. The esophageal leak was confirmed by a water soluble contrast medium swallow study (Amidotrizoat, Natrium (Gastrographin®), Schering AG, Zürich, Switzerland). Contrast medium flowing into the left pleural cavity proved the leak. Operation was performed immediately. Because of the bad general condition of the patient, we decided to perform esophageal exclusion and diversion without primary repair of the leak. Cervical esophageal exclusion was performed. After longitudinal myotomy, a linear staple suture line (TA Premium 55-3.5 stapler®) was applied including only the mucosa. This was combined with an esophagostomy proximal to the staple suture. A gastrostomy and feeding jejunostomy were performed and the left pleural cavity was drained with a silicon tube. Prompt clinical improvement was noted under antibiotic supportive therapy within the first days. Spontaneous esophageal recanalization of the staple suture line was documented with gastrografen® swallow two weeks after operation at which time enteral feeding was recommenced. No leakage or stricture were found in the further follow up course. Three weeks after operation the patient was free of symptoms and discharged. The follow up was uneventful at 20 months.

Patient 2

A 68-year old man with chronic alcohol consumption complained of attacks of epigastric pain for two weeks. He was admitted because of exacerbation of these pains. During physical examination, forceful vomiting with hematemesis occurred. Endoscopy was performed immediately. It showed a 2cm longitudinal perforation in the distal esophagus. The esophageal leak was confirmed by a gastrografenR swallow study (Figure 1) and computer tomography, showing the typical extra luminal air and esophageal wall thickening. Laparotomy with primary repair was possible after dissection of the esophageal hiatus within the crura. A direct repair with double layer technique and 4/0 NovafilR was done. To prevent a leak and soilage of the periesophageal tissue by saliva, temporary exclusion of the esophagus was performed by a linear staple suture (TA Premium 55-3.5 staplerR) proximal to the repair (Figure 2). Diversion was done by a naso-esophageal tube proximal and a gastrostomy (witzel fistula) distal to the repair, both under continuous aspiration. Finally the mediastinum was drained by a Jackson-pratR suction tube (Figure 2).

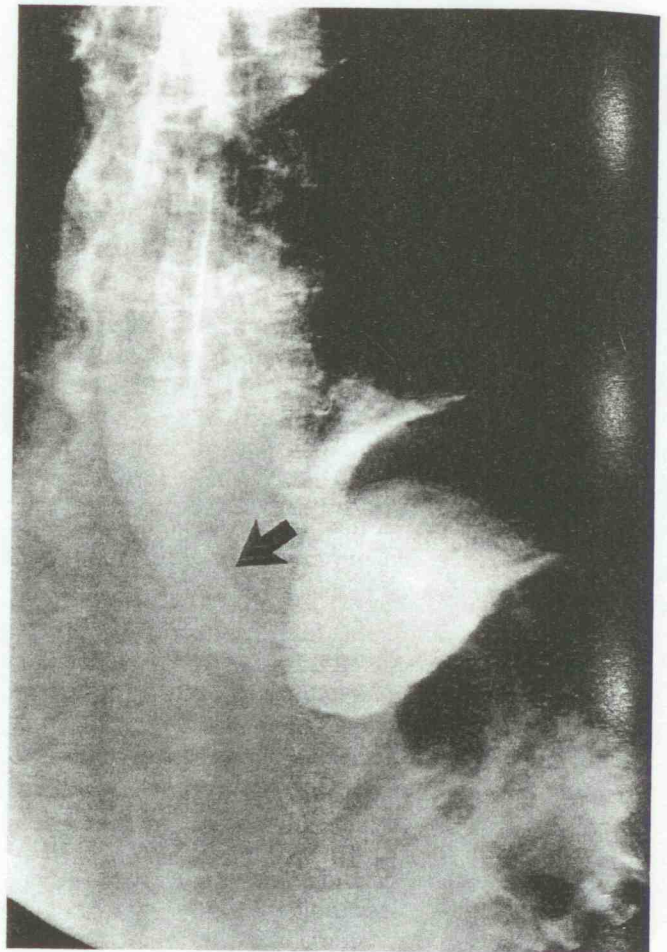


Figure 1 Gastrografen swallow study in patient Nr. 2 with Boerhaave syndrome. Distal esophageal leak with extravasation of the contrast material into the mediastinum (black closed arrow).

In this case too, spontaneous esophageal recanalization was documented 14 days after operation by gastrografenR swallow study (Figure 3). Two weeks after operation the patient started to eat and was discharged the following week, free of symptoms. The follow up was uneventful at 12 months without clinical sign of esophageal stricture.

Discussion

Esophageal perforation remains a difficult diagnostic and management problem. The treatment techniques are controversial. The most common cause of perforation of the esophagus is instrumentation in esophagoscopy and dilatation for esophageal stricture (52-68%), followed by barogenic trauma or Boerhaave syndrome (13-15%), external trauma (8-15%) and ingested foreign bodies (10-11%) (4,12,14). Boerhaave

