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RESEARCH ARTICLE

ECTOPIC MAMMARY TISSUE IN THE AXILLARY REGION: A CASE REPORT AND DISCUSSION OF DIAGNOSIS AND MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

Ectopic breast tissue, or supernumerary breast tissue, is a rare congenital anomaly that can occur along the milk line, extending from the axilla to the groin. Ectopic breast tissue can undergo the same changes as normal breast tissue, including hormonal changes during pregnancy and lactation, as well as the development of benign or malignant tumors. Herein, we present a case of ectopic breast tissue presenting as axillary masses in a young woman. The patient was a 32-year-old woman who presented with two axillary masses that appeared during lactation after her first and second pregnancies, and now had reappeared. The masses had the consistency of breast tissue and were confirmed as supernumerary bilateral breasts on echomamography. Although supernumerary breasts are usually benign and asymptomatic, they can sometimes become cancerous. Therefore, surgical excision is often recommended, particularly in cases where the mass is symptomatic or growing rapidly.

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Introduction:-

Ectopic breast tissue, also known as supernumerary breast tissue, is a rare congenital anomaly that occurs due to the failure of embryonic mammary ridge regression.[1]. It can occur along the milk line, which extends from the axilla to the groin. Ectopic breast tissue can undergo the same changes as normal breast tissue, including hormonal changes during pregnancy and lactation, as well as the development of benign or malignant tumors.[2]. Herein, we present a case of ectopic breast tissue presenting as axillary masses in a young woman.

Case Presentation:

We report a case of a 32-year-old woman who presented to the gynecological exam with concerns of two axillary masses that had reappeared during her current lactation period. The patient had a medical history of two previous pregnancies, both resulting in normal vaginal deliveries, without any complications or notable medical issues. The patient reported that she had noticed the masses during her first pregnancy and again during her second pregnancy.

During the physical examination, the patient appeared healthy and stable, without any notable changes to her general state. The breasts examination revealed two axillary masses, each having the consistency of breast tissue (Figure 1). However, the rest of the clinical examination was unremarkable, with no specific findings noted.

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The patient was then referred for further evaluation and underwent an echomamography. The echomamography revealed the presence of supernumerary bilateral breast tissue in the axillary region. This led to a confirmed diagnosis of ectopic mammary tissue.

Given the diagnosis of ectopic mammary tissue, the patient underwent surgical excision of the extra mammary glands. The surgical procedure was performed without any complications, and the patient was discharged home the same day. Follow-up appointments were scheduled to ensure complete healing and no complications.

Ectopic mammary tissue is a rare condition, and its occurrence in the axillary region is even more infrequent. However, it is a condition that requires prompt diagnosis and treatment, especially when it presents as a palpable mass. Despite its rarity, physicians should be aware of the possibility of ectopic mammary tissue in the axillary region, particularly in patients who have previously experienced pregnancy and lactation.

Discussion:-

The presence of supernumerary breasts or ectopic mammary tissue is a rare condition that can occur anywhere along the milk line, which extends from the axilla to the groin.[3]. The prevalence of this condition ranges from 0.4% to 6% in the general population, with a higher incidence reported in females than males. Supernumerary breasts can be asymptomatic or present as a mass, pain, or discharge, and are typically diagnosed during pregnancy or lactation, when hormonal changes can cause the ectopic tissue to grow and become more apparent.[4].

In the case presented, the patient was a 32-year-old woman who presented with two axillary masses that appeared during lactation after her first and second pregnancies, and now had reappeared. This clinical presentation is consistent with previous reports of ectopic mammary tissue in the axilla. [5]. The masses had the consistency of breast tissue and were confirmed as supernumerary bilateral breasts on echomamography.

Although supernumerary breasts are usually benign and asymptomatic, they can sometimes become cancerous, with reported cases of ectopic mammary tissue developing into carcinoma. Therefore, surgical excision is often recommended, particularly in cases where the mass is symptomatic or growing rapidly.[6].

In this case, the extra mammary glands were excised, and the patient had an uneventful postoperative recovery [7]. While the patient did not have any medical history and did not report any symptoms other than the presence of the axillary masses, the excision was still considered necessary due to the potential risk of malignancy.[8].

The differential diagnosis for axillary masses includes lymphadenopathy, lipoma, sebaceous cyst, lymphoma, and metastatic malignancy.[9]. However, in the case presented, echomamography confirmed the masses to be supernumerary breasts, which are an uncommon cause of axillary masses. [10]. The diagnosis of supernumerary breasts can be challenging, as they can appear as a solid or cystic mass on imaging studies, and can mimic other benign and malignant conditions. [11]. Therefore, it is important to consider ectopic mammary tissue as a possible differential diagnosis in patients presenting with axillary masses.[12].

Supernumerary breasts can be associated with other congenital anomalies, such as polythelia, which is the presence of an extra nipple without associated glandular tissue, or polymastia, which is the presence of more than two breasts with functioning glandular tissue[13]. While polythelia and polymastia are not uncommon, they are rarely reported in the literature as they are often asymptomatic and do not require medical attention[14]. However, the presence of supernumerary breasts can cause anxiety and distress to patients, and therefore it is important for healthcare providers to be aware of this condition and to provide appropriate counseling and management.[15].

Conclusion:-

Ectopic breast tissue is a rare congenital anomaly that can occur along the milk line. It can present as axillary masses and undergo hormonal changes during pregnancy and lactation. The diagnosis of ectopic breast tissue is based on clinical examination, imaging studies, and histological confirmation. Treatment options include observation, surgical excision, and hormonal therapy, depending on the presence of symptoms and the risk of malignant transformation. Healthcare providers should be aware of this condition and consider it in the differential diagnosis of axillary masses.



Figure 1:- Patient picture showing axillary masses (ectopic mammary tissue).

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