

Cannabinoid Hyperemesis Syndrome: a Guide for the Practising Clinician

Cecil-Oakes I¹, Bajgoric S², Gautam N³

¹ Foundation Year 1 Doctor ² Foundation Year 2 Doctor ³ Gastroenterology Specialty Registrar
University Hospitals of North Midlands, Royal Stoke University Hospital

Case summary

A 20 year old Caucasian male presented with a three month history of intermittent profuse vomiting. Episodes were associated with abdominal cramps and diaphoresis. Symptoms were worse in the mornings and were relieved by showering. He reported smoking 1.5g of cannabis daily for the last four years. Apart from mild leucocytosis, all other investigations (haematological, endoscopic and radiographic) were unremarkable. He was managed with fluid resuscitation, anti emetics and advised to stop his cannabis use. A diagnosis of Cannabinoid Hyperemesis Syndrome (CHS) was made. Resolution of his symptoms upon cannabis cessation was observed.

Sontineni diagnostic criteria²

1. Recurrent nausea and vomiting
 2. Abdominal pain
 3. Relief with hot water bathing
- All patients must have been using cannabis regularly and chronically
 - Symptoms resolve shortly after cannabis cessation

Management

Short term:

- Rehydration
- Anti emetics
- Hot bathing

Long term:

- Cannabis cessation
- Patient education

Conclusion

- Always ask about illicit drug use during history taking
- Think CHS in any patient with the triad of symptoms
- Improvement of symptoms during hot bathing is pathognomonic
- Smoking cessation & patient education is crucial

References

1. J H Allen,¹ G M de Moore,² R Heddle,³ and J C Twartz⁴ Cannabinoid hyperemesis: cyclical hyperemesis in association with chronic cannabis abuse. Gut. Nov 2004; 53(11): 1566–1570
2. Sontineni SP, Chaudhary S, Sontineni V, Lanspa SJ. Cannabinoid hyperemesis syndrome: clinical diagnosis of an underrecognised manifestation of chronic cannabis abuse. World J Gastroenterol. 2009 Mar 14;15(10):1264-6.

Background

- Cannabis is well-known for its antiemetic properties
- Paradoxically, it can cause hyperemesis in certain chronic users
- CHS was first coined by Allen et al in 2004 where he described a case series of 9 chronic cannabis users who all displayed a cyclical vomiting-like illness¹
- Few clinicians are aware of CHS

Diagnosis

Recurrent vomiting

Chronic Cannabis Use

Relief with hot bathing

Abdominal pain

