Evolution of Lymphedema in an Obese Diabetic Patient Using Grosgrain Stockings as Monotherapy

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INTRODUCTION

Lymphedema is a clinical condition in which macromolecules accumulate in the interstitial space, leading to the retention of liquids in this space as well as in the cells. The condition may be congenital or acquired, is normally progressive and there is no cure, but treatment can bring the affected limb within or close to the range of normality [1-3]. The diagnosis is clinical, but complementary exams can be performed when necessary. The diagnosis is confirmed by measurements of volume (volumetry using the water displacement technique and determination of circumferences) and electrical bioimpedance analysis. Lymphoscintigraphy is an exam that evaluates aspects of the anatomy of the vessels and can reveal reflux and the retention of macromolecules [1,2]. Bioimpedance analysis is a diagnostic tool used to determine the amount of water in the entire body, limbs, and trunk. This non-invasive method enables the follow up of patients by offering information on the redistribution of bodily liquids with treatment [4].

In animal models, an increase in weight is associated with several changes, including a reduction in the pumping mechanism of lymphatic vessels, the inflammatory process and changes in capillary permeability [5]. Studies evaluating the redistribution of liquids in obese human subjects with the aid of bioimpedance analysis have detected an initial increase in intracellular and extracellular water beyond the limits of normality in the limbs and thorax without characterizing clinical lymphedema. This progresses to lymphedema, which initiates in the lower limbs, then passes to the trunk and finally the upper limbs [6]. The objective of this study was to show the evolution of lymphedema in an obese diabetic patient using grosgrain stockings as monotherapy.
Case Report

A 51-year-old obese male with diabetes since childhood did not perform adequate control of the condition, progressing to vision loss and diabetic neuropathy. About 10 years ago, he began to have edema in the left leg, which progressed. Four years ago, the patient sought a clinic for specialized treatment. The initial evaluation revealed clinical lymphedema. Volumetry was not performed due to the patient’s limitations. Therefore, bioimpedance analysis was used, which demonstrated generalized lymphedema, with intracellular and extracellular water beyond the limits of normality in the limbs and trunk (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total intracellular water</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>16.9-20.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total extracellular water</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10.4-12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEW/TBW</td>
<td>0.427</td>
<td>0.418</td>
<td>0.412</td>
<td>0.406</td>
<td>0.408</td>
<td>0.415</td>
<td>0.401</td>
<td>0.397</td>
<td>0.36-0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMI</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Body weight</td>
<td>117.8</td>
<td>113.8</td>
<td>110.1</td>
<td>108.5</td>
<td>95.1</td>
<td>89.5</td>
<td>89.5</td>
<td>93.1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Right arm</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.381</td>
<td>0.382</td>
<td>0.391</td>
<td>0.382</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.382</td>
<td>0.379</td>
<td>1.39-1.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left arm</td>
<td>0.395</td>
<td>0.386</td>
<td>0.391</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.385</td>
<td>0.388</td>
<td>0.379</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>1.39-1.695</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trunk</td>
<td>0.421</td>
<td>0.413</td>
<td>0.409</td>
<td>0.405</td>
<td>0.408</td>
<td>0.415</td>
<td>0.401</td>
<td>0.398</td>
<td>12.6-15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right leg</td>
<td>0.418</td>
<td>0.405</td>
<td>0.409</td>
<td>0.398</td>
<td>0.406</td>
<td>0.416</td>
<td>0.396</td>
<td>0.393</td>
<td>4.37-5.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left leg</td>
<td>0.456</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.433</td>
<td>0.433</td>
<td>0.427</td>
<td>0.425</td>
<td>0.416</td>
<td>0.411</td>
<td>4.37-5.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The use of compression stockings made of grosgrain fabric was proposed, to which the patient presented good tolerability for 1 year. However, he had lost sensitivity in the feet, and the use of the stocking began to become problematic. When the stocking was folded over, it caused trauma that the patient did not perceive due to the loss of sensitivity.

The limbs in this phase were without clinical edema, but with the diagnosis determined by bioimpedance. In the 4 years of follow up, the patient lost weight and the edema continually diminished. At one point, he regained weight but subsequently lost it again. The systemic clinical lymphedema evaluated by bioimpedance improved with weight loss. At one of the evaluations, the generalized edema had returned but subsequently improved again. However, the lymphedema of the trunk and lower limbs remained, despite the weight loss.

DISCUSSION

The present study shows the change in body liquid during treatment for lymphedema using grosgrain stockings. Generalized systemic lymphedema was diagnosed on the first evaluation using electrical bioimpedance analysis. Throughout the course of the treatment for lymphedema with grosgrain stockings and weight loss, a reduction in edema occurred in the limbs and trunk with the reductions in total intracellular and extracellular water. Bioimpedance analysis revealed that the reduction in the upper limbs reached the range of normality. In contrast, the reductions in the lower limbs and trunk did not reach normalization.

Systemic lymphedema (diagnosed by bioimpedance analysis) has been detected in obese patients with a high BMI, generally higher than 60 kg/m². However, the condition was detected in the present case in a patient with a BMI of 42.2 kg/m². With weight loss, a considerable reduction in systemic lymphedema occurred. However, lymphedema is generally more significant in the lower limbs in such patients, likely due to the effect of gravitational pressure.

In animal models, an increase in weight is associated with the inflammatory process as well as changes in the pumping mechanism of lymphatic vessels and capillary permeability [5]. Studies involving humans have shown that subclinical systemic lymphedema progresses to systemic lymphedema diagnosed by bioimpedance, which initiates in the lower limbs, then passes to the trunk and finally the upper limbs [6]. Such findings point to a new line of research that enables gaining a better understanding of the evolution of edema in obesity.

CONCLUSION

Systemic clinical lymphedema evaluated by electrical bioimpedance analysis was reduced with the weight loss of the patient throughout treatment.
DECLARATIONS

Conflict of Interest
The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

REFERENCES


