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Homoeopathic management for pica: A strange craving

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Abstract

Pica = magpie, According to the DSM IV pica is the trouble of alimentary behavior, which is characterized by the ingestion of non-nutrient substances for at least one month. Pica has been described as a worldwide phenomenon, but there are more frequent occurrences of selected substances among selected groups especially young children and pregnant and people with an underlying psychiatric disorder. Ingestion of such non nutrient substance can lead to serious complications such as mechanical, intestinal obstruction and fetal toxicity. Behavioral treatment might be effective in patients with mental disabilities. Homeopathy treats the person as a whole obtaining the cause of the disease, individuality similimum will be prescribed.

Keywords: pica, homoeopathy, therapeutics

1. Introduction

Pica is an eating disorder manifested by a craving for oral ingestion for a given substance that is unusual in kind or quantity ^[1]. The essential feature of pica is the eating of one or more nonnutritive, nonfood substances on a persistent basis over at least 1 month ^[2]. Pica can affect children, adults of any gender. Substances ingested vary with age and availability. They may include paper, soap, cloth, hair, string, wool, soil, chalk, talcum powder, paint, gum, metal, pebbles, charcoal, ash, clay, starch, or ice ^[3]. Eating disorders are characterized by a persistent disturbance of eating or eating-related behavior that results in the altered consumption or absorption of food and that significantly impairs physical health or psychosocial functioning. A German prevalence study of 804 children found that 99 children (12.3%) have engaged with a pica behavior at some point in their lives ^[4].



Fig 1: Eating disorders

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2. Etiology

Factors implicated in the etiology of pica. They are as follows ^[5]

1. Iron deficiency anemia - patients with low level of serum iron/ferritin are more prone to pica.
2. Pregnancy - The eating of non-nutritive substances and sometimes specific cravings might occur.
3. Cultural factors - In some populations eating of earth, non-nutritive substances is believed to be of spiritual, medicinal, or other social value.
4. Nutritional deficiency - patients with deficiencies in vitamins or minerals such as zinc

iron tend to get pica.

5. Stress
6. Child neglect and abuse
7. Maternal deprivation
8. Low socioeconomic status
9. Underlying mental health disorder

3. Diagnostic criteria^[6]

The ICD-9-CIVI code for pica is 307.52 and is used for children or adults.

The ICD-10-CM codes for pica are (F98.3) in children and (F50.8) in adults.

1. Persistent eating of non-nutritive, non-food substances over a period of at least 1 month.
2. The eating of non-nutritive, non-food substances is inappropriate to the developmental level of the individual.
3. The eating behavior is not part of a culturally supported or socially normative practice.
4. If the eating behavior occurs in the context of another mental disorder like intellectual developmental disorder, autism spectrum disorder, schizophrenia or medical condition including pregnancy, it is sufficiently severe to warrant additional clinical attention.

4. Diagnostic feature^[6,7]

- Typical substances ingested tend to vary with age and availability and might include paper, soap, cloth, hair, string, wool, soil, chalk, talcum powder, paint, gum, metal, pebbles, charcoal or coal, ash, clay, starch, or ice^[6].
- The term nonfood is included because the diagnosis of pica does not apply to ingestion of diet products that have minimal nutritional content^[6].
- There is typically no aversion to food in general.
- The eating of nonnutritive, nonfood substances must be developmentally inappropriate.
- Minimum age of 2 years is suggested for a pica diagnosis to exclude developmentally normal mouthing of objects by infants that results in ingestion^[6].
- The eating of non-nutritive, non-food substances can be an associated feature of other mental disorders such as intellectual developmental disorder, autism spectrum disorder, schizophrenia^[6].
- If the eating behavior occurs exclusively in the context of another mental disorder, a separate diagnosis of pica should be made only if the eating behavior is sufficiently severe to warrant additional clinical attention^[6].
- Other non-edible substances associated with pica Geophagia-ingestion of sand, dirt and clay Tricophagia-ingestion of hair Geomelophagia-ingestion of raw potato Onycophagia-ingestion of nails Lithophagia-ingestion of stones^[7].

5. Investigation

An investigation should be done according to the suspected substances ingested.

- Imaging studies plain abdominal x-rays, barium studies, and endoscopy-mechanical bowel problems, intestinal obstruction due to ingestion of substances such as glasses, clips, pin and sometimes hair^[6].
- Serum ferritin level-especially in women who are pregnant, and children^[8].

- Blood lead test - In pica for paint^[5].
- Zinc levels - To identify micronutrient deficiency^[8].
- Potassium levels - Pica for clay ingestion can cause Hypokalemia^[5].

6. Complications

- Clay ingestion is a very common form of pica which can lead to hypokalemia and nutritional deficiencies. Clay can also be a source of many infectious agents such as parasites^[5].
- Ingestion of paint can lead to lead poisoning manifests with neurological signs such as lethargy, headache, seizure, encephalopathy and cranial nerve palsy^[5].
- Fetal Toxicity-Pica during pregnancy can have consequences on the growing fetus and can sometimes lead to intrauterine toxicity due to maternal pica. Lead poisoning has been implicated in long-term neurological disability^[9].
- Bezoars ingestion could lead to intestinal obstruction, choking, ulceration and perforation^[10].
- Some individuals may swallow potentially harmful items like pins, needles, knives in the context of maladaptive behavior patterns associated with personality disorders or non-suicidal self-injury^[11].

7. Homoeopathic management

I. Calcarea carbonica

This medicine is obtained from oyster shell. It is best suited to the people of leucophlegmatic Constitution. Patients who are fat, fair and flabby. There will be a peculiar craving for indigestible things like chalk, coal, pencils, flour and raw potatoes. Severe pain in the epigastric region during touch. Aggravation while eating. Indicated remedy for hyperchlorhydria^[13].

II. Alumina

Best suited for hypochondriac constitution persons of sedentary habits who suffer from chronic ailments. Patients will have abnormal cravings for chalk, charcoal, dry food and tea grounds. Abdominal colic will be present like painters colic. Constipation of old people and infant's due to inactive rectum. Evacuation of stool is preceded by painful urging long before stool and straining^[13].

III. CINA

Persons who need this medicine have one cheek pale and other cheek red. Face with a bluish appearance around the mouth and dark rings under the eyes. Another important medicine for desire for indigestible things. It is also a very significant medicine for persons who crave indigestible things. Children smell sour mother tells child has worm breath^[14]. Gastric disorders with helminthiasis^[12]. Constant digging of nose and boring rubs nose over pillow^[15].

IV. LAC Felinum

This medicine is obtained from cat's milk. Person who needs this medicine particularly will have a strange desire to eat paper after eating feels swollen has to take off her dress and loose clothes. They may also complain of soreness and sensitiveness of the stomach region. Sensation of hot feeling felt in epigastric region of the stomach. There is a very slight nausea and loss of appetite with these symptoms^[12].

V. Silicea terra

This medicine is useful for persons who have a desire to eat mud. Sensation of hair in tongue. Great aversions to meat. They have loss of appetite with aversion to eating cooked food. Constipation may be present great difficulty in passing the stool. The stool when partly expelled from the anus recedes back in the rectum ^[13]. During deglutination food ascends into nasal fossae ^[16].

VI. Tarentula hispanica

Medicine obtained from Spanish spider. This medicine is indicated for extremely restless cases where the desire for eating sand, raw food and ashes is specifically present. Along with this, there is a loss of appetite with a refusal to eat. Violent burning sensation in the abdomen. Sometimes there is a sharp pain felt in the navel region ^[12]. Sometimes food taste bitter, salty and bland or sweetish ^[16].

8. Conclusion

Pica can affect people of any age groups and both gender by careful observation such craving can be identified. Each craving differs from person to person and sometimes it can cause serious complications by considering the history, peculiar symptoms and nature of cause homoeopathy helps for treatment of pica.

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