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Clinical Image

A Novel Case of Subcutaneous Emphysema

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Clinical Image

A 20 year-old male presented with a round swelling on the chest for the past three days after a blunt trauma to the area (Figure 1). Examination revealed a crackling sound and sensation (crepitus) on palpation. A clinical diagnosis of subcutaneous emphysema was made and the patient was asked to wait and watch and report in case of worsening of the swelling or symptoms; however, he was lost to follow-up.

Subcutaneous emphysema occurs due to trapping of air under the skin, most likely to occur in the areas like chest, neck, and face due to their proximity to the lungs. While mild cases may not experience any symptoms at all, the more severe cases may cause significant discomfort and serious complications. These symptoms also depend on the underlying cause and location. Investigations such as X-ray (may show ginkgo leaf sign - striation of gas along the pectorals major muscle) and computed tomography (CT) scan (show dark pockets of air in the subcutaneous layer and may

also be helpful in identifying the source of air) could be useful for diagnosis. As the air is gradually reabsorbed, the subcutaneous emphysema will usually resolve in around two weeks without serious complications provided the underlying cause is successfully treated.

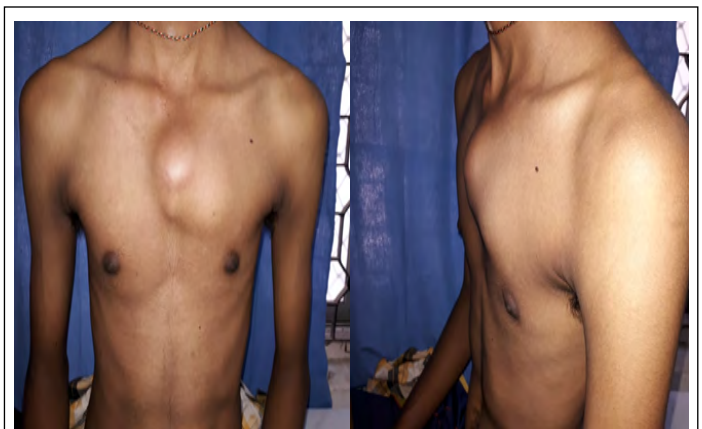


Figure 1: Picture of patient's chest showing a globular swelling near the upper part of sternum