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THE MARYLAND POISON CENTER'S MONTHLY UPDATE.
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Cannabinoid Hyperemesis

Cannabinoid hyperemesis (CH) is a syndrome associated with the chronic use of cannabis, characterized by recurrent episodes of nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, and compulsive hot bathing. It was first described by Allen et al (Gut 2004;53:1566-70) following anecdotal case reports in Australia. Since then, numerous case reports and small case studies suggest a link, and it should be included as part of the differential diagnosis of recurrent vomiting illness. Patients typically present with severe, recurrent nausea, vomiting, and abdominal pain, usually in the morning. A unique aspect of this syndrome is that temporary relief is achieved by taking hot showers or baths. Sontineni et al (World J Gastroenterology 2009;15:1264-6) developed criteria for the diagnosis of CH. Simonetto et al (Mayo Clin Proc 2012;87:114-9) offered modified criteria based on their study, the largest case series to date:

- ✓ **Long-term cannabis use is essential for the diagnosis**
- ✓ **Major features**
 - severe cyclic nausea and vomiting
 - resolution with cannabis cessation
 - relief of symptoms with hot showers or baths
 - abdominal pain
 - weekly use of cannabis
- ✓ **Other features that may support the diagnosis**
 - age younger than 50 years
 - weight loss of greater than 5 kg
 - morning predominance of symptoms
 - normal bowel habits
 - negative findings on diagnostic evaluation

The mechanism of cannabinoid hyperemesis is unknown. Speculations include changes in the function of cannabinoid receptors, particularly in the hypothalamus which regulates body temperature and digestive system, but much more research is needed to establish a link. Treatment of CH starts with cessation of cannabis use, rehydration, and use of antiemetic drugs. If symptoms persist after cannabis cessation, it may suggest an alternate diagnosis. Given the current high prevalence of cannabis abuse, health care providers should be aware of this under-recognized condition.

Michael Hiotis PharmD, CSPI
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Did you know?

September 29, 2012 is National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day.

The event, sponsored by the Drug Enforcement Administration, gives Americans an opportunity to safely dispose of unwanted and unused prescription drugs at law enforcement agencies in their communities. At the last take-back day in April 2012, a total of 276 tons of medications were collected at sites in every state. Search for collection sites at www.dea.gov or call 1-800-882-9539. Spread the word about National Prescription Take-Back Day to your patients, coworkers, family and friends!

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