An Unexpected Foreign Body: A Hypopharyngeal Ant

Hao-Mu Chang, MD¹, and Geng-He Chang, MD²

Case Presentation
A 7-year-old male was brought to our emergency department with a sensation of a persistent lump in his throat after drinking an unsealed carbonated beverage. Flexible nasopharyngoscopy revealed a black ant in the right hypopharynx. Despite repeatedly drinking water, the ant could not be swallowed, and it had firmly attached to the posterior pharyngeal wall (Figure 1). After discussion with his family, it was decided to proceed with suspension laryngomicrosurgery under general anesthesia. Before the removal, we protected the airway with saline-rinsed cotton balls and then used a 10% Lidocaine-rinsed cotton ball to soak the ant, which was already dead during the removal. An additional foreign body was excluded by rigid esophagoscopy. The ant measured 6 mm in body length and had 2 antennae and faint bands on its abdomen (Figure 2). It may have been *Polyrhachis dives*, which is a common house-infesting ant throughout tropical Asia, including Taiwan. Its mouth parts have well-developed mandibles with keen teeth, which provide powerful bites in hunting and defense.

Discussion
Mis-swallowing a living ant gripping on the hypopharynx is an extremely rare condition, which may occur after eating or drinking substances contaminated with ants. The ant may bite the mucosa of the aerodigestive tract with its jaws, leading to odynophagia and a feeling of a lump in the throat. In this patient, the ant was removed completely using suspension laryngomicrosurgery, which provided a clear surgical view and allowed for delicate manipulation without disrupting the ant.

This case highlighted the possibility of mis-swallowing a living ant. Clinicians should keep a high index of suspicion for such a condition.

---

¹Department of Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery, Chang Gung Memorial Hospital, Linco, Taiwan
²Department of Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery, Chang Gung Memorial Hospital, Chiayi, Taiwan

Corresponding Author:
Geng-He Chang, MD, Department of Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery, Chang Gung Memorial Hospital, No. 6, W. Sec., Jiapu Rd., Puzi City, Chiayi County 613, Taiwan (R.O.C.).
Email: genghechang@gmail.com
and pay attention to symptoms arising immediately after eating unsealed food or beverage that may be contaminated with insects.

Approval of the case study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of Chang Gung Memorial Hospital.

Author Contributions

Hao-Mu Chang, organized, drafted, and accomplished the article; Geng-He Chang, provided the case materials, revised the manuscript, and made final approval of the version to be published.

Disclosures

Competing interests: None.

Sponsorships: None.
Funding source: None.

References