Tissue is the Issue: Pica as a manifestation of iron deficiency in a patient with GI bleeding.

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Pica refers to the voluntary ingestion of non-nutritive substances. The etiology of this phenomenon remains unclear. Iron deficiency has been implicated as a cause of pica, most commonly manifesting as pagophagia, or the ingestion of ice. In this case, we present a patient with pagophagia as well as pica for toilet tissue in the setting of profound iron deficiency anemia.

A 40 year old female presented to the emergency department complaining of several weeks of progressive dyspnea on exertion, intermittently dark stools, abdominal discomfort and lower extremity swelling. She endorsed frequent NSAID and alcohol use. She also reported frequent ingestion of ice for the preceding month.

Tachycardia, crackles, lower extremity edema, generalized pallor and a flow murmur were evident on exam. Labs revealed hemoglobin of 3 (MCV 70), iron 21, ferritin 2.1, iron saturation 5%. A chart review revealed positive H. Pylori serology from 8 months earlier that was never treated.

The patient received 5 units of packed red blood cells and upper endoscopy was performed which revealed a clean-based ulcer in the gastric antrum. Additionally, tissue paper bezoars were found in the gastric body and duodenum.

Following endoscopy, the patient admitted to compulsively ingesting tissue paper frequently over the preceding month. She was counseled on the potential complications of this behavior. She was treated for H. Pylori infection with triple
therapy and advised to avoid NSAIDs and alcohol. She was also prescribed iron supplementation at discharge. All signs of heart failure improved following transfusion.

This patient presented with severe iron deficiency anemia likely secondary to subacute blood loss from a gastric ulcer. Her history revealed pica for ice and toilet tissue, with endoscopic findings revealing tissue paper bezoars. Pica for paper has rarely been reported in the medical literature.\textsuperscript{3,6,7}

There are several risks associated with the ingestion of paper including bowel obstruction and perforation.\textsuperscript{1,3} Our patient experienced abdominal discomfort but no serious complications from toilet tissue bezoars. We recommend obtaining a thorough history in all patients presenting with iron deficiency in order to identify potentially harmful behaviors including pica for indigestible substances.
SOURCES


