Case Report

Hypersensitivity reaction with metformin: a case report

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INTRODUCTION

Type II diabetes, is a heterogeneous group of conditions characterized by tissue resistance to the action of insulin combined with a relative deficiency in insulin secretion.¹

Initially patients of diabetes can be controlled with diet, exercise and oral glucose lowering agents.¹ Metformin is the only member of the Biguanide class (type of oral hypoglycaemic agent) available for use today. Several mechanisms have been proposed to explain the pharmacologic action of metformin, main action being suppression of hepatic gluconeogenesis. Metformin is generally accepted as the first-line treatment of type 2 diabetes and is currently the most commonly used oral agent for DM II. It is effective as monotherapy and in combination with other hypoglycaemic medications. The most common side effects of metformin are GI: nausea, indigestion, abdominal cramps and diarrhoea. However, there are also other rare adverse effects of this drug.² Here, a rare case of hypersensitivity caused by metformin is reported.

CASE REPORT

A 59-year-old female resident of Andaman and Nicobar Islands presented to the dermatology OPD with the chief complaints of bilateral purpuric eruptions on her upper and lower extremities and back.
The patient was recently diagnosed for diabetes mellitus II two weeks back during a routine clinical check-up. Following were her blood reports: Fasting Blood Sugar (FBS) - 340 mg %; Post Prandial Sugar (PP) - 412 mg %; HbA1C - 11%; Cholesterol: 358 mg%. The physician prescribed tablet metformin 500 mg twice daily, tablet Pantoprazole 40 mg once daily empty stomach, Capsule B complex once daily and tablet folic acid once daily. A week later patient again visited the medicine OPD; her FBS and PP levels were 225 mg% and 337 mg% respectively.

After 10 days of her 2nd visit, patient complained of development of non-pruritic, bilateral purpuric lesions on her legs, arms and back. The lesions kept on increasing in number and involved arms, forearms, thighs, legs and upper and lower back. There was purple lesion on lateral side of tongue and lips. On examination the lesions were palpable and did not blanch. Capsule B complex was withdrawn.

But the skin lesions kept on increasing. On her next visit tablet metformin was stopped. Metformin induced hypersensitivity reaction was suspected. Skin diascopy test showed that the lesions did not blanch on pressing with the slide. This gives an idea that the lesions may be because of vasculitis. But since the patient refused to get the skin histopathological examination done, the diagnosis of vasculitis could not be confirmed. Patient was prescribed tablet Fexofenadine, tablet Montelukast-Levocetrizine combination to treat the reaction. Following are the pictorial details of her rash.

DISCUSSION

Metformin is a very commonly prescribed oral hypoglycaemic drug. It is particularly indicated for use in obese patients having diabetes mellitus.3

Metformin is considered to be a safe drug. Common side effects are those related to gastrointestinal tract. Cutaneous eruptions have been reported with the use of metformin but are very rare.4

On reviewing, three cases of leucocytoclastic vasculitis could be found.5,6 One case of leucocytoclastic vasculitis and pneumonitis induced by metformin could be found.6 A case of Psoriasiform drug eruption due to metformin hydrochloride is also reported.7 In another case patient developed palpable purpura with metformin but refused for skin biopsy.8 In these cases the patient developed reactions few days after consuming metformin and the reaction subsided after stopping the medication.4,6 In few cases reappearance of the reaction after reintroduction of the medicine is seen.4

In the present report, the patient refused to get the histopathological examination done. As the lesions started subsiding as the drug was removed, according to Naranjo probability assessment scale, the adverse effects were probably due to metformin.9

CONCLUSION

Based on the information provided above, it is concluded that metformin was the probable cause of hypersensitivity reaction in this patient.

Hence, hypersensitivity is a potential adverse effect of this commonly prescribed drug and should be suspected and monitored while prescribing it.

Funding: No funding sources
Conflict of interest: None declared
Ethical approval: Not required

REFERENCES


Cite this article as: Vashisht T, Naidu CDM, Mandal C. Hypersensitivity reaction with metformin: a case report. Int J Basic Clin Pharmacol 2019;8:2763-5.