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An Unusual Cause of Shortness of Breath: Hamman Syndrome

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CASE REPORT

A 41-year-old primiparous low-risk woman developed dyspnea and generalized head and neck swelling after a normal delivery of a healthy neonate. A chest x-ray demonstrated surgical emphysema in the neck and a suggestion of pneumomediastinum (arrows, Figure panel A). A computed tomography examination with oral contrast demonstrated surgical emphysema and air in the anterior, middle, and posterior mediastinum (arrows, Figure panels B-D). No pneumothorax or esophageal perforation was identified. A diagnosis of Hamman syndrome was made. This condition, originally described by Louis Virgil Hamman, is the classic association of subcutaneous emphysema, pneumomediastinum, with or without pneumothorax [Hamman 1939]. It is associated with prolonged valsalva [Kostiainen 1975]. This unusual condition must be considered as a differential diagnosis. These patients have a good outcome with conservative management, as in this case. This patient's condition resolved spontaneously in 48 hours.

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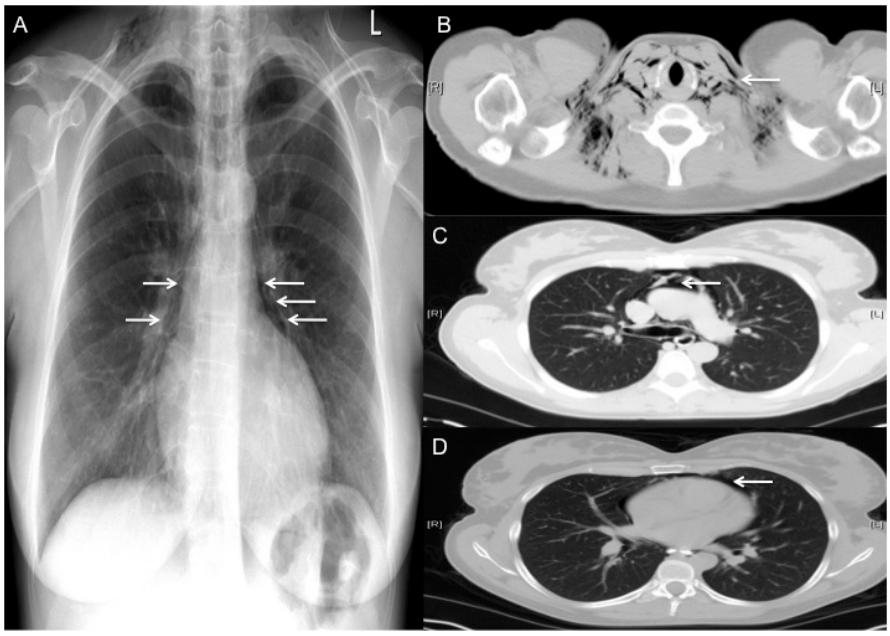

A, Chest radiograph demonstrating surgical emphysema in the neck and a suggestion of pneumomediastinum (arrows). B-D, Computed tomography images with oral contrast demonstrating surgical emphysema and air in the anterior, middle, and posterior mediastinum (arrows).

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