Diagnostic Images

Post-splenectomy nodules

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The patient

A male aged 45, who had fallen from a height 2 years previously, had a splenectomy and partial pancreatectomy. On sonography at a follow-up examination, he was said to have a small mass in the left upper quadrant.

Investigation

Computed tomography of the upper abdomen.

Comment

Small nodules in the left upper quadrant could be due to small bowel or colon but can be distinguished by proper preparation with gastrointestinal contrast medium and by comparing adjacent sections. Mesenteric lymphadenopathy is not commonly found in the left upper quadrant or as peripheral nodules. Fibromas and neuromas, rare tumours in the upper abdomen, are other possibilities but do not enhance as markedly as splenunculi (splenosis). Furthermore, splenunculi are known to occur after splenectomy, particularly following lacerations due to trauma.

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Figure 1a Following splenectomy the stomach (St) and colon (c) are displaced into the area normally occupied by the spleen but in addition there are two small nodules (arrows). The anterolateral nodule is adjacent to the peritoneum abutting the lower ribs, while the posterior nodule on the peritoneum lies between the gastric fundus and left hemidiaphragm.

Figure 1b A section 1 cm below clearly shows the colon while the more anterior nodule is only just visible (partial volume effect).

Reference

1. Mendelson, D.S., Cohen, B.A. & Armas, R.R. CT appearance of splenosis. *Journal of Computer Assisted Tomography* 1982, 6: 1188–1109.