Diagnostic Images

Colon filling defect

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The patient

A female aged 61 presented with a history of altered bowel habit and occasional blood passed per rectum for 1 year. Distal sigmoidoscopy was negative.

Investigation

Double contrast barium enema.

Comment

The most common filling defects are caused by faeces. These are of variable size and position with irregular margins and nondescript inhomogeneous surfaces. Small, perfectly round, inconstant filling defects or ring shadows with well-defined inner contours and ill-defined outer margins that vary in size and position are air bubbles.

If the filling defect or ring shadow is constant in size and position with a well-defined outer margin and ill-defined inner margin, it is a diverticulum and can usually be profiled. A solitary diverticulum is uncommon. Multiple diverticula were evident in this patient. However, there was also a ring shadow that had a scalloped margin (Figure 1), well-defined inner border but an ill-defined outer border indicating that

Figure 1 The ring shadow in the sigmoid colon has a scalloped and well-defined inner margin that is ill defined externally with curved attached parallel lines (small arrows) indicating it is probably a polyp on a stalk. Multiple diverticula are also present, note sharp outer border and fading inner margin (white arrow).

it was most likely a polyp particularly as an attached stalk could be demarcated. Further views after coating the lesion clearly showed a 4 cm stalk with the polyp at one end and the colonic margin at the other.

Broad-based polyps greater than 1 cm in size may well be malignant but if greater than 2 cm are probably malignant except those with a long stalk (Figure 2) that are likely to be benign, as in this patient.

Figure 2 A further view after coating the lesion defines both the 2 cm polyp and the 4 cm stalk attached to the colon (long white arrow) showing its benign nature. An adjacent and slightly overlapping diverticulum (curved white arrow) has a sharp outer border and an ill-defined inner margin.