

# **PICA in Pregnancy**

## **Background**

### 1. Definition

- Persistent eating of non-nutritive substances or substances that are not considered food
  - Lasting >1 month
  - At an age when developmentally inappropriate

## **Pathophysiology**

### 1. Pathology

- Some cases related to nutritional deficiency such as zinc or iron deficiency
- Other theories include
  - Cultural influence
  - Stress reaction
  - Malnutrition or starvation

### 2. Incidence, prevalence

- True prevalence unknown
- Usually occurs in a first pregnancy in adolescent or early adult years
- Rare in developed countries

### 3. Risk factors

- Pregnancy
- Mental retardation
- Certain African and Turkish people groups

### 4. Morbidity / mortality

- May play a part in accidental poisoning or ingestion of infectious agents
- Causes
  - Intestinal obstructions
  - Ulcerations
  - Perforations
  - Life threatening toxicities such as lead poisoning

## **Diagnostics**

### 1. History

- May report a variety of symptoms due to different types of ingestions

### 2. Physical exam

- Same variability as history
- Signs of lead toxicity:
  - Neuro
    - Lethargy, ataxia, incoordination, seizures
  - GI
    - Pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea
- Signs of parasitic or bacterial infection

### 3. Diagnostic testing

- Blood lead level
- Blood mineral levels

- Imaging studies
  - Abdominal X-ray
  - Upper and lower barium series
  - Endoscopy to look for GI complications

### **Differential Diagnosis**

1. Attention seeking behavior
2. Suicide attempt
3. Other eating disorders

### **Therapeutics**

1. Acute treatment
  - Correction of any nutritional deficiencies if present
2. Long-term care
  - Social work evaluation
  - Psychological evaluation
  - Continued psychological treatment as necessary with
    - Behavioral intervention
    - Aversion therapy
    - Discrimination training
  - Removal from or control of environment such as cleaning lead deposits, social work in the home
  - Assessment of nutritional beliefs and teaching appropriate dietary habits

### **Prognosis**

1. Can remit in pregnant women
2. Can persist for years in patients with developmental disabilities

### **Prevention**

1. No true prevention available

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