*Cardiology and Angiology: An International Journal*

***Volume 13, Issue 1, Page 86-91, 2024; Article no.CA.112751***
***ISSN: 2347-520X, NLM ID: 101658392***

# Type A Aortic Dissection: A Call for Vigilance in Chest Pain Diagnosis

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***Authors' contributions***

*This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

***Article Information***

DOI: 10.9734/CA/2024/v13i1397

**Open Peer Review History:**
This journal follows the Advanced Open Peer Review policy. Identity of the Reviewers, Editor(s) and additional Reviewers, peer review comments, different versions of the manuscript, comments of the editors, etc are available here: https://www.sdiarticle5.com/review-history/112751

***Case Report***

***Received: 13/12/2023***
***Accepted: 18/02/2024***
***Published: 24/02/2024***

## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Acute aortic dissection (AD) is a rare and life-threatening condition associated with high mortality rates in the absence of prompt intervention. This article provides an in-depth examination of the clinical presentation, diagnostic approach, and management of Stanford type A AD in a 62-year-old hypertensive female patient with atypical symptoms.
**Case Report:** The patient presented with retrosternal chest pain and rapidly worsening dyspnea, demonstrating a 3/6 diastolic murmur over the aortic area. Diagnostic findings included negative T-waves on ECG, significant mediastinal widening on chest X-ray, and transthoracic echocardiography revealing an intimal flap, ascending aorta dilation, and acute aortic insufficiency. Computed tomography confirmed a Stanford type A aortic dissection.
**Discussion:** Acute AD poses a diagnostic challenge, as atypical presentations can lead to misdiagnoses. The case emphasizes the importance of considering AD in the differential diagnosis of chest pain and conducting thorough investigations, especially when faced with unusual symptoms. Management strategies, encompassing both pharmacological and surgical interventions, are crucial for addressing AD promptly.

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**Conclusion:** This case underscores the significance of recognizing both typical and atypical presentations of AD to ensure timely intervention and avoid potentially catastrophic outcomes. A comprehensive understanding of diagnostic approaches and management protocols is essential in the emergency setting. Overall, this article contributes to the growing body of knowledge surrounding acute aortic dissection and emphasizes the critical need for awareness and rapid intervention in clinical practice.

*Keywords: Aortic dissection; acute coronary syndrome; stanford Type A; atypical symptoms.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Acute aortic dissection is a rare but catastrophic condition [1], with mortality increasing by 1-2% per hour in the absence of treatment [2]. It is defined by a sudden breach of the intima, releasing pressurized blood that dissects the wall longitudinally along its weakest component: the media (2/3 internal - 1/3 external), resulting in the formation of two lumens [3].The Stanford system classifies AD as either type A or type B. Type A dissections involve the ascending aorta and type B dissections include the descending aorta [4].

The typical clinical presentation involves intense chest pain, immediately maximal, tearing, radiating towards the back and the loins [5], but atypical presentations can also be present, leading to misdiagnoses [6].

Acute coronary syndrome represents a major complication of aortic dissection and can simultaneously serve as the presenting mode. In this case report, we describe the case of a 62-year-old patient admitted to the emergency department for acute chest pain.

## 2. CASE PRESENTATION

A 62-year-old female patient, with a history of poorly controlled hypertension on monotherapy, presents with retrosternal chest pain not radiating, with an intensity of 6/10, onset 7 hours prior to presentation, aggravated 2 hours ago by the onset of rapidly worsening dyspnea.

On clinical examination, the patient is conscious, without motor deficits, hemodynamically stable with a systolic blood pressure of 115 mmHg symmetric in both limbs, heart rate at 95 bpm. Cardiac auscultation reveals a 3/6 diastolic murmur over the aortic area. Pulmonary auscultation reveals crackling rales at the lung bases. Oxygen saturation was 95% in room air.

The ECG reveals sinus rhythm at 95 bpm, with repolarization disturbances such as negative T-waves in the anterior leads (Fig. 1).

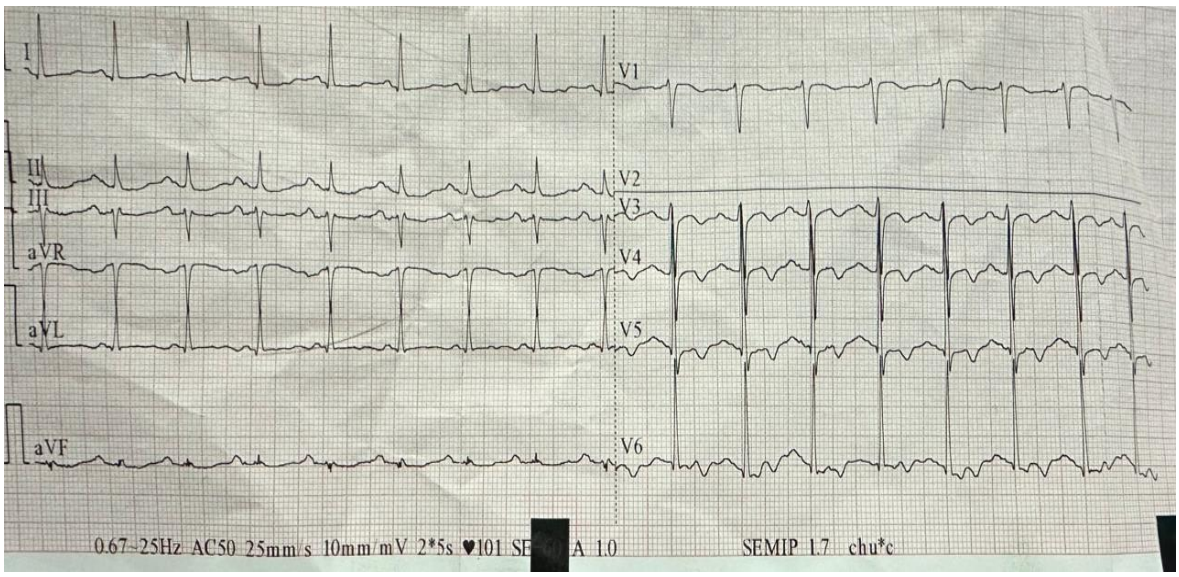


**Fig. 1. Negative T-waves in the anterior leads**

The chest X-ray shows significant mediastinal widening, and transthoracic echocardiography (TTE) identifies an image suggestive of an intimal flap extending from the aortic sinus on the parasternal long-axis view, with limited extension to the ascending aorta and massive dilation of the ascending aorta measuring 69 mm (Fig. 2). The echocardiogram also indicates severe acute aortic insufficiency with hyperkinetic left ventricle (Fig. 3) and a small amount of pericardial effusion, along with a dilated inferior vena cava measuring 22 mm.

A computed tomography (CT) with intravenous contrast-enhancement confirmed a Stanford type A aortic dissection with an entry tear at the level of the aortic sinuses limited to the ascending aorta, with a diameter measuring 74 mm (Fig. 4).

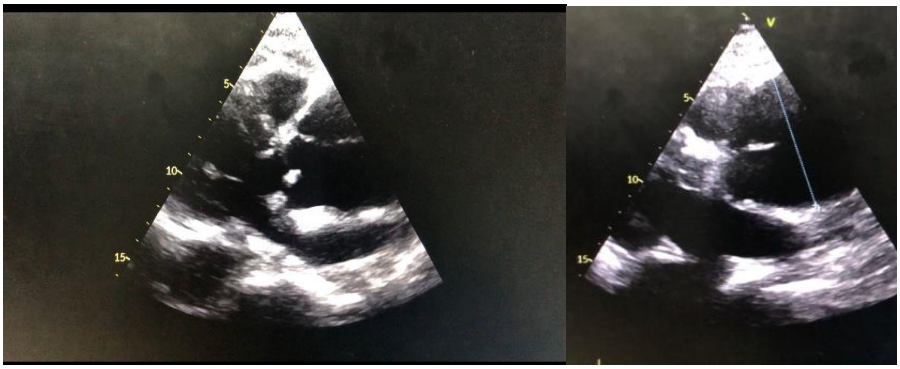

**Fig. 2. Intimal flap extending from aortic sinus with a massive dilation of the ascending aorta**

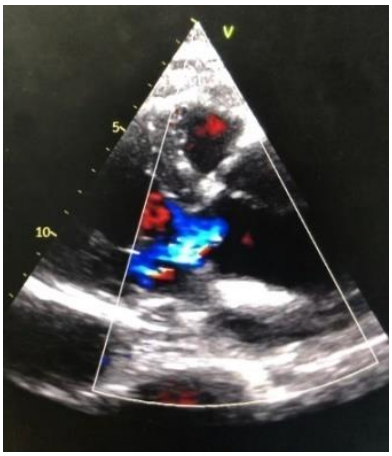

**Fig. 3. Severe excentric aortic regurgitation**

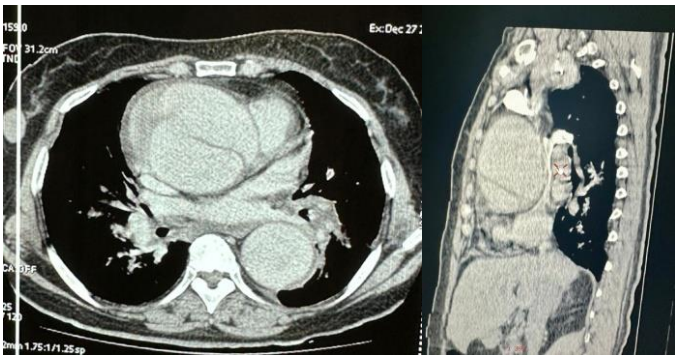

**Fig. 4. Axial and Coronal views arterial phase contrast-enhanced CT of the chest showing a dissection involving the ascending aorta**

The patient was admitted to the intensive care unit, where she received a bolus of 40 mg furosemide due to signs of overload along with a bradycardic calcium channel blocker (Verapamil). Subsequently, she was transported to the operating room for a Bentall procedure ; the choice of Bentall procedure was made based on the presence of severe aortic insufficiency observed in transthoracic echocardiography and the intraoperative findings of significant lesions in the aortic semilunar valves. The patient's course was marked by her demise 24 hours later due to respiratory failure.

## 3. DISCUSSION

The incidence of acute AD is estimated to range from 2,6 to 3,5 per 100,000 person/year [7]. Twenty percent of patients with AD die before reaching the hospital and 30% die during hospital admission [8].

The diagnoses to consider for patients referred to the emergency department with acute chest pain are limited and include, for cardiac etiologies: acute coronary syndrome, aortic dissection, pulmonary embolism, and pericarditis. It's important to note that acute coronary syndrome can be a complication of aortic dissection, as is the case with our patient, and the management is entirely different.

When patients present with specific electrocardiographic findings and positive cardiac markers for ischemia, they can be managed as acute coronary syndrome without further investigation. However, it is crucial to conduct additional investigations for patients with unusual symptoms or those lacking specific findings in initial paraclinical investigations [9-12].

Aortic dissection typically presents with chest pain radiating to the back and loins, following the extension of the false channel [9]. Conversely, a dissection limited to the ascending aorta may cause retrosternal pain [13], explaining the absence of blood pressure asymmetry.

Thus, an atypical presentation of acute coronary syndrome, such as acute heart failure and a murmur on auscultation, should prompt a transthoracic echocardiogram, particularly to explore alternative diagnoses like aortic dissection [14]. This underscores the importance of a thorough and prompt assessment in the emergency setting to avoid missing crucial information.

Regarding management, aortic dissection is considered a medical and surgical emergency. Pharmacological treatment should include morphine for pain relief and administration of an injectable beta-blocker (BB) or a bradycardic calcium channel blocker in case of BB contraindication. Surgical treatment for type A aortic dissection should be initiated without delay [15].

## 4. CONCLUSION

Aortic dissection has a well-known typical presentation, but atypical presentations are also common. Hence, it is crucial to always consider aortic dissection in the differential diagnosis of chest pain because the consequences of this condition in the absence of treatment are dramatic, and the management is entirely different.

## CONSENT

As per international standard or university standard, patient(s) written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

## ETHICAL APPROVAL

As per international standard or university standard written ethical approval has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A brief acknowledgement section may be given after the conclusion section just before the references. The acknowledgments of people who provided assistance in manuscript preparation, funding for research, etc. should be listed in this section. All sources of funding should be declared as an acknowledgement. Authors should declare the role of funding agency, if any, in the study design, collection, analysis and interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript. If the study sponsors had no such involvement, the authors should so state.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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