

# BODY PACKER SYNDROME (A CASE REPORT)

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## ABSTRACT

The people, who escape from customs and control center by hiding narcotic drugs in packets in their bodies, are called body packager. Male person, who was foreign and 33 years old, as a result of his death, the plane got off immediately and to understand the reason of his death, his autopsy is done at The Council of Forensic Medicine, Ankara Branch, Morgue Speciality Department. Nothing is seen during his external examination. During his internal examination, it is determined that there is edema in both pulmonary, stomach's mucous membrane is bloody and there is black colored blood in the stomach. It is determined that there are six pieces of package that were tied in the stomach, also pieces of nylon packages and three pieces of package in the anus are found. As a result of the toxicological analysis that are done by Chemical Speciality Department, it is determined that cocaine and its metabolites in internal organs and stomach content, 26 mg/dl ethanol, 956 ng/ml cocaine and metabolites, 52 ng/ml THC of cannabinoid metabolites in blood, 5267 ng/ml cocaine and metabolites, 93 ng/ml THC of cannabinoid metabolites in urine are found. On the other hand, in narcotic researches, it is determined that totally 28.970 g cocaine in six packages that were taken from stomach, totally 26.283g herbal cannabis in two packages that were taken from anus, 10.300g MDMA and totally 0.310g LSD in other package also taken from anus are found.

## INTRODUCTION

Body-packers or "mules" are people who ingest packets filled with illicit drugs (typically cocaine or heroin) in the attempt to pass undetected through airport customs. Later, these packets are expelled and the contents recovered. This practice, while becoming more and more popular in the last decades, may have disastrous consequences, such as acute drug intoxication or intestinal occlusion, both included in the term "body packer syndrome". The first reports of people smuggling drugs wrapped in packets and concealed either by swallowing or by insertion into the rectum or vagina, were published during the 1970s. Although rupture incidence in large series is not reported, there is a mortality rate as high as 56% after packet leakage or rupture, followed by acute drug intoxication (most frequently cocaine overdose). Since these early reports, international smugglers have constructed new cocaine packets, more and more resistant to breakdown or leakage. In a large series, the rate of cocaine overdose due to packet rupture or leakage is now reported to be lower than 3%. No data are available on intestinal occlusion risk but it has likely remained constant over time, under 5%. Body packers often swallow large numbers of packages (up to 180 reported), with each package containing a potentially fatal dose of drug. Acute intestinal obstruction may result and overdose is a hazard if a packet bursts. The commonest drugs carried are cocaine, heroin, amphetamines and cannabis, though most deaths, as least in New York, are opiate-induced. Accomplices have been known to remove packets after death. Drugs carried by body packers are generally packaged in 2-4 layers of wrapping (condom, latex gloves balloons). The most frequent cause of death among body packers is due to overdoses secondary to rupture of packets within the stomach and/or gastrointestinal tract. We present the circumstances of the first documented case of a body packer in Ankara.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Male person, who was foreign and 33 years old, as a result of his death, the plane got off immediately and to understand the reason of his death, his autopsy is done at The Council of Forensic Medicine, Ankara Branch, Morgue Speciality Department. Analyses of biological materials were performed using TLC, CEDIA (Cloned Enzym Donor Immunoassay, Hitachi-902 Automatic Analyzer), HS/GC (Perkin Elmer -Clarus 500 GC Turbo Matrix 40 HS) and GC/MS (Thermo- Finnigan Trace GC Ultra and Finnigan Trace DSQ MS). Analyses of narcotic materials were performed using TLC, GC (Agilent 6890) and GC/MS (Thermo- Finnigan Trace GC Ultra and Finnigan Trace DSQ MS).



Figure 1. Cocaine



Figure 2. Herbal Cannabis



Figure 3. MDMA

## RESULTS

At autopsy, nothing is seen during his external examination. During his internal examination, it is determined that there is edema in both pulmonary, stomach's mucous membrane is bloody and there is black colored blood in the stomach. It is determined that there are six pieces of package that were tied in the stomach, also pieces of nylon packages and three pieces of package in the anus are found (Fig.4). As a result of the toxicological analysis, it is determined that cocaine and its metabolites in internal organs and stomach content, 26 mg/dl ethanol, 956 ng/ml cocaine and metabolites, 52 ng/ml THC ( $\Delta^9$ -tetrahydrocannabinol) of cannabinoid metabolites in blood, 5267 ng/ml cocaine and metabolites, 93 ng/ml THC of cannabinoid metabolites in urine are found. On the other hand, in narcotic researches, it is determined that totally 28.970 g cocaine in six packages that were taken from stomach, totally 26.283g herbal cannabis in two packages that were taken from anus, 10.300g MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxyamphetamine), paper pieces covering picture that are divided equally into 25 pieces including 0.290g LSD (lysergide) and three pieces materials that are red colored and in star shape including 0.020g LSD in other package also taken from anus are found (Fig.1,2,3 and 5). When looking at narcotic drugs purity rates, cocaine is 96.7% and MDMA is 100%. It is found that LSD active material in paper pieces and red colored materials in star shape is totally 0.793 mg. This case report is about the death of a body packer due to cocaine intoxication following the rupture of a packet of cocaine.



Figure 4. The unruptured and ruptured packages recovered



Figure 5. LSD

## DISCUSSION

Cocaine is a naturally occurring alkaloid found in certain varieties of plants of the genus *Erythroxylum*. Production of illicit natural cocaine involves three steps; extraction of crude coca paste from the coca leaf, purification of the coca paste to cocaine base, conversion of cocaine base to cocaine hydrochloride. Cocaine is normally encountered in the laboratory in paper or plastic packs of white powder and can be analysed without extraction. Potential lethal consequences may come from the rupture of one or more cocaine packets into the intestine. Trans-mucous absorption of cocaine is quick and massive. The estimated minimum lethal dose is 1.2 g but susceptible persons have died from doses as small as 30mg when applied to mucous membranes; addicts may be able to tolerate up to 5 g a day. Toxic effects have been noted with blood concentrations in the range 0.25 to 5 mg/L and fatalities have occurred with concentrations of 1 mg/L or more. In the present case, death was due to cocaine intoxication following the rupture of a packet of cocaine. Postmortem concentrations of cocaine are found 956 ng/ml in blood and 5267 ng/ml in urine. Postmortem concentrations of cocaine in a 27 years old man who died following the rupture, in his gastrointestinal tract, of 4 cocaine-containing packages were reported as: blood 4 mg/L and urine 152 mg/L. A 17 years old male drug dealer died about 90 min after swallowing a package containing cocaine; the following postmortem material concentrations were reported for cocaine; blood 98.1mg/L and urine 10 mg/L. A teenage drug courier who died after a 12 h flight was found to have 24 packages of cocaine in her intestinal tract, several of which had burst or become damaged. Her postmortem blood concentration of cocaine was 104 mg/L. The external portion of the postmortem examination should include a search for bite marks of the tongue and lips suggesting terminal seizures. The internal examination should focus on an examination of the entire gastrointestinal tract. The number and location of all packets or balloons should be toxicologically analyzed. In addition, a complete toxicological screen should be conducted on the blood, urine and bile.

## CONCLUSIONS

The people, who escape from customs and control center by hiding narcotic drugs in packets in their bodies, are called body packager. In this way, it is declared that cocaine comes firstly among the drugs that are mostly smuggled, then heroin follows cocaine and then marijuana smuggling is done rarely. This case is shown as a good example for a body packer syndrome and body packager smuggling of cocaine, herbal cannabis, MDMA and LSD is committed together.