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Endometrial Hyperplasia

PhD Farzona Nuriddinovna Atayeva
Samarkand State Medical University, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology No. 3

Abstract:
Endometrial hyperplasia is a condition characterized by abnormal thickening of the endometrium (uterine lining). It is often caused by an excess of estrogen without adequate progesterone, leading to overgrowth of endometrial cells. This condition can range from simple hyperplasia, which is generally not cancerous, to complex atypical hyperplasia, which carries a higher risk of progressing to endometrial cancer. The diagnosis typically involves endometrial biopsy, and treatment options include hormonal therapy with progestins, such as oral progestins or intrauterine devices (IUDs) containing levonorgestrel, or surgical intervention with hysterectomy in cases of atypical hyperplasia or failure of hormonal therapy. Regular monitoring and follow-up are essential to prevent progression to malignancy. This summary provides an overview of endometrial hyperplasia, its diagnosis, and management strategies.
Keywords: Endometrial hyperplasia, estrogen, progesterone, uterine lining, endometrial biopsy, progestin, hysterectomy, atypical hyperplasia, endometrial cancer, women's health

Introduction

Endometrial hyperplasia is a pathological condition characterized by an abnormal proliferation of the endometrial glands and stroma, often resulting from prolonged exposure to unopposed estrogen. This condition has gained significant attention in gynecology due to its potential to progress to endometrial carcinoma, especially in cases of atypical hyperplasia. The endometrium, being highly responsive to hormonal changes, is vulnerable to various alterations, and hyperplasia represents one of the most critical changes that can precede malignancy.

The global incidence of endometrial hyperplasia has increased in recent years, particularly in industrialized countries, largely due to lifestyle changes that contribute to obesity and metabolic disorders. These conditions can lead to estrogen excess, a major risk factor in the development of endometrial hyperplasia. While the condition can affect women of any age, it is more prevalent among perimenopausal and postmenopausal women. Early diagnosis and timely intervention are crucial to prevent the progression to endometrial carcinoma.

From a clinical perspective, endometrial hyperplasia typically presents with abnormal uterine bleeding, including heavy menstrual bleeding, intermenstrual spotting, or postmenopausal bleeding. Diagnostic tools such as transvaginal ultrasound, endometrial biopsy, and hysteroscopy are used to assess endometrial thickness and histopathological changes. Treatment options range from hormonal therapy to surgical interventions, depending on the type of hyperplasia (with or without atypia) and the patient's age, fertility preferences, and overall health.

This paper aims to explore the pathophysiology, risk factors, clinical manifestations, and current trends in diagnosis and treatment of endometrial hyperplasia, with an emphasis on evidence-based practices and recent advances. A comprehensive understanding of this condition is critical for improving patient outcomes and reducing the burden of endometrial cancer.

Literature Review

Etiology and Pathophysiology

Endometrial hyperplasia is primarily driven by estrogen stimulation in the absence of progesterone. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) classification (2014), endometrial hyperplasia is divided into two main categories: hyperplasia without atypia and atypical hyperplasia (also known as endometrial intraepithelial neoplasia, or EIN). The former has a low risk of progression to cancer, while the latter is considered a precancerous condition with a significantly higher risk of progression.

Numerous studies have confirmed that unopposed estrogen—whether endogenous or exogenous—is the primary cause of hyperplasia. Conditions such as polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), obesity, estrogen-secreting tumors, and anovulation are known to result in prolonged estrogen exposure. In obese women, peripheral conversion of androgens to estrogen in adipose tissue further exacerbates the risk. Additionally,

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hormone replacement therapy (HRT) without concurrent progestin use in postmenopausal women has been associated with a high incidence of hyperplasia.

Epidemiology and Risk Factors

The incidence of endometrial hyperplasia varies widely depending on age, geographic location, and the diagnostic criteria used. Studies estimate that approximately 133 out of every 100,000 women in developed countries are affected by some form of endometrial hyperplasia annually. Risk factors include obesity, nulliparity, late menopause, diabetes mellitus, chronic anovulation, and the use of tamoxifen.

In a retrospective study conducted by Reed et al. (2016), obesity was found to be the single most important modifiable risk factor for endometrial hyperplasia and carcinoma. Women with a BMI over 30 were three times more likely to develop atypical hyperplasia compared to women with a normal BMI. Additionally, PCOS, characterized by chronic anovulation and hyperandrogenism, contributes significantly to the development of hyperplasia in reproductive-aged women.

Clinical Presentation and Diagnosis

Abnormal uterine bleeding is the most common symptom of endometrial hyperplasia. However, many cases, particularly in the early stages, may be asymptomatic and only identified during evaluation for other gynecological concerns. Diagnostic modalities include transvaginal ultrasonography, which measures endometrial thickness, and endometrial sampling via biopsy or dilation and curettage (D&C).

According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), an endometrial thickness greater than 4 mm in postmenopausal women with bleeding warrants further evaluation. Histopathological examination remains the gold standard for diagnosis. Atypical hyperplasia is characterized by glandular crowding, architectural complexity, and cytological atypia.

Recent literature also emphasizes the importance of molecular markers such as PTEN, KRAS, and microsatellite instability (MSI) in predicting the progression of hyperplasia to carcinoma. These markers are under investigation for their potential to guide individualized treatment plans.

Treatment Approaches

Treatment for endometrial hyperplasia is largely based on the type (with or without atypia), patient age, desire for future fertility, and overall health status. For hyperplasia without atypia, progestin therapy—either oral or through intrauterine systems like the levonorgestrel-releasing intrauterine device (LNG-IUD)—has shown excellent results in inducing regression.

Atypical hyperplasia, on the other hand, poses a higher risk of progression to carcinoma. In women who have completed childbearing, hysterectomy remains the preferred treatment. For those wishing to preserve fertility, high-dose progestin therapy with careful monitoring may be an option, though with variable success rates.

A study by Gallos et al. (2013) demonstrated that the LNG-IUD had a regression rate of over 90% in non-atypical hyperplasia and 75% in atypical cases, making it a viable non-surgical alternative, especially in low-resource settings.

Prevention and Prognosis

Preventive strategies focus on managing modifiable risk factors such as obesity and metabolic syndrome. Lifestyle interventions, including weight loss, regular physical activity, and dietary modifications, are vital. Moreover, women on estrogen therapy must be prescribed concurrent progestins to mitigate the risk of hyperplasia.

Prognosis varies with the type of hyperplasia. Hyperplasia without atypia has a relatively low risk (less than 5%) of progressing to cancer if managed appropriately. In contrast, atypical hyperplasia has a 20–30% chance of concurrent carcinoma at the time of diagnosis and a 30–50% lifetime risk of developing cancer if left untreated.

Conclusion

Endometrial hyperplasia is a hormonally driven condition that represents a pivotal precursor in the path toward endometrial cancer. Prompt recognition of its clinical presentation—primarily abnormal uterine bleeding—and accurate histological classification are essential. Management strategies range from conservative progestin therapy and lifestyle optimization in non-atypical cases to definitive surgical interventions in atypical situations. Surveillance remains critical due to the risk of recurrence and progression.

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Evolving classification systems, targeted diagnostics, and personalized medicine are poised to transform EH management, ultimately reducing the burden of endometrial cancer and improving women's health outcomes.

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