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Integrative Medicine Research

journal homepage: www.imr-journal.com

Case Report

A juvenile case with nonalcoholic steatohepatitis and traditional Korean medicine-based treatment

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 15 December 2017

Revised 16 January 2018

Accepted 18 January 2018

Keywords:

NAFLD

NASH

Nonalcoholic fatty liver disease

Nonalcoholic steatohepatitis

Traditional Korean medicine

ABSTRACT

Nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) has become the common cause leading to chronic liver diseases recently. Unlikely past humankind history, NAFLD is like a new illness especially in developed countries due to decreased number of hepatic virus carriers and increased population with obesity. Among subjects with NAFLD, development of nonalcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH) is a key pathological step which determines the clinical progression. This study reports a case of a boy who has suffered from NASH for 2 years. This study aims to discuss the clinical feature, risk aspect, and treatment strategy of NASH as well as potential of traditional Korean medicine (TKM) therapies.

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1. Introduction

Hepatic steatosis is a condition of the excessive accumulation of triglyceride fat in hepatocytes, and fatty liver disease refers the any liver disease with hepatic steatosis.¹ Alcohol consumption is a main cause of hepatic steatosis; however, recently many subjects are suffering from nonalcohol-related fatty liver, called as nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD). In a recent meta-analysis, the global prevalence of NAFLD is known to rise by approximately 25% in especially developed countries.² Along to increase of population with obesity, the incidence and disease burden from NAFLD will continue to increase.^{3,4}

NAFLD is now considered as a silent killer by a new epidemic of the Third Millennium.⁵ NAFLD is known to show a strong association with diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular disease or cerebrovascular disease as well as high cancer incidence of 1.3 hazard ratio (HR), especially 16.7 HR for hepatocellular carcinoma respectively.^{6–8} For Asian population including Korean, NAFLD appears as a medical issue in the past two decades, due to rapid urbanization, sedentary lifestyle, or over nutrition.⁹ NAFLD also becomes a common in children and adolescents with prevalence of 7.6% for general population and 34.2% for obese children.¹⁰

In contrast, the clinical risk of NAFLD is defined by progression into non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH), a pathologic condition characterized by inflammation and damage in

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.imr.2018.01.006>

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hepatic tissue.¹¹ Both NAFLD and NASH have a complex pathology involving the imbalance between lipogenesis and lipolysis, leading to lipotoxicity.¹² In aspect of medicinal herbs composing multi-compounds and pathophysiological features of multi-targets of NAFLD and NASH, herbs-derived remedies are emerging as potential therapeutics recently.¹³

This report aimed to demonstrate a typical case of adolescent patient with NASH, and discuss the clinical feature, risk aspect, and treatment strategy by traditional Korean medicine (TKM)-based therapeutics.

2. Case report

2.1. Characteristics of patient and medical history

A 16-year-old boy visited a Korean medicine hospital with uncomfortable symptom in gastrointestinal function such as mild abdominal pain, diarrhea, as well as frequent fatigue since 12 months ago. He has visited frequently the nurse's office at school because of abdominal pain after entering high school. Several medical examinations found no abnormality in abdominal X-ray and colonoscopy at a Western hospital, but noticed the moderate fatty liver with the elevated serum level of alanine aminotransferase (ALT) by 100 IU/L. Based on the diagnosis of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), the irregular medications were given to treat only IBS, but the long-term symptoms became worse. The boy neither drank alcoholic beverages nor smoked cigarettes earlier, but still prefers to eat fast foods and oily snack. His parents decided to receive TKM therapeutics against abdominal pain and hepatic inflammation.

2.2. Diagnosis, treatments, and course of symptom

After visiting the Korean medicine hospital, the patient had been examined using biochemistry, complete blood counts, urinalysis, and ultrasonography. Based on the finding of abnormality in only serum ALT (81 IU/L, normal range 0–40 IU/L) and moderate fatty liver in ultrasonography, he was diagnosed with NASH (Fig. 1A). The patient was a little fatty body (body mass index, BMI 26.0), but has a shape of central obesity as thin four limbs and tummy fat. The genomic analysis using his salivary contents was conducted by a company (Genoplan, Co.),

Table 1 – Composition of *Chungganplus*

Weight each	Composition (10 mL syrup containing 2 g extract from 13 herbs)
5 g	Artemisia capillaris Herba, Carapax Trionycis, Semen Raphani
3 g	Rhizoma Atractylodis Macrocephalae, Poria, Alismatis Rhizoma, Atractylodis Rhizoma, Salviae Miltiorrhizae Radix
2 g	Polyporus, Amomi Fructus, Aurantii Fructus
1 g	Glycyrrhizae Radix, Helenii Radix

and then the body's genome showed the vulnerable feature for fat and glucose metabolic problem (Fig. 1B).

The patient complained physical lethargy and less motivation for everything including school life, with sudden and frequent abdominal pain at middle abdominal area. The status of the coat on his tongue was mild pink color, and pulsation was tender. No abnormal tense was in abdominal area. His symptom differentiation was diagnosed as “disharmony between liver and spleen (肝脾不和)”. The patient was administered with an herbal drug, *Chungganplus* (清肝plus, Table 1) twice per day. In addition, Taeumin taeguak acupuncture (helping HT4; 灵道 and LU9; 太渊, but reducing LR3; 太冲 for 20 min once a week for 3 months with 0.25 × 30 needles purchased from DongBang Co. Seoul), and indirect moxibustion on umbilical area were given to the patient. In particular, physical exercise and diet management were strongly recommended, and thus he had joined a boxing gym and regularly did the practice three times weekly. He had reduced body weight about 3 kg during 6 months and the general symptoms including abdominal pain as well as blood chemistry (ALT by 41 IU/L) were improved.

3. Discussion

According to the change of medical environments, such as less population of hepatitis B type virus carrier, increase of obese subjects and over calorie diet habit, NAFLD evolved as a serious public health problem in developed countries.¹⁴ NAFLD increases liver-related morbidity and mortality, and also is linked to the extra-hepatic diseases such as metabolic syndrome, type 2 diabetes mellitus, dyslipidemia, hypertension, cardiovascular or cerebrovascular diseases, and even chronic kidney disease.^{15,16} No currently available drug-based therapy

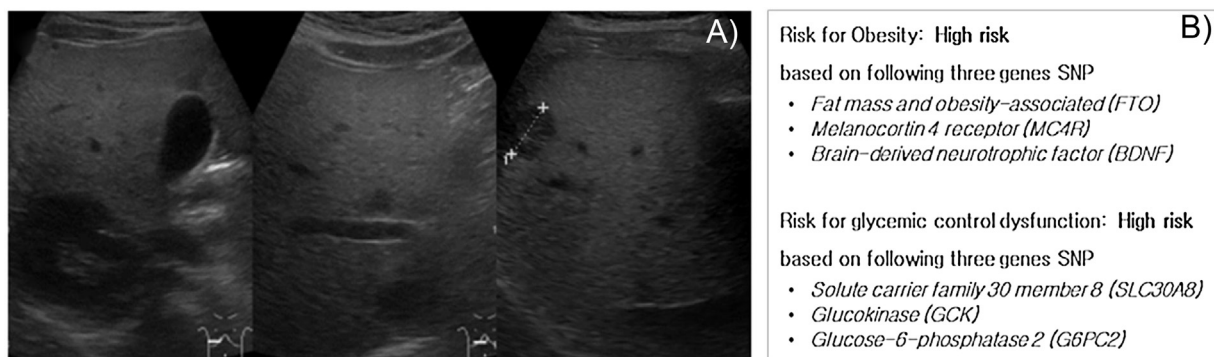


Fig. 1 – Sonographic finding in liver. The moderate fatty liver and a hemangioma and multiple cysts were found in abdominal nosography (A), and SNP analysis showed the vulnerable feature for fat and glucose metabolism (B).

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