**Endoscopic management of cerebrospinal fluid rhinorrhea from anterior skull base defects**

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**Abstract**

**Background:** Over the past 20 years, the minimally invasive endoscopic approach has gained widespread acceptance. The study was performed to evaluate the diagnostic method and the success rate of endoscopically diagnosed and treated CSF rhinorrhea, and also investigations such as leakage site and etiologic factor.

**Methods:** This retrospective CSF leakage management review of patients experiencing CSF rhinorrhea made from 1999-2006 included data regarding leakage etiology, preoperative assessment, intraoperative techniques and postoperative follow-up.

**Result:** Sixty-five patients were managed endoscopically. CSF rhinorrhea etiology was traumatic in 30 cases, iatrogenic in 23 and spontaneous in 12. We used nasal endoscopy and high resolution computed tomography (HRCT) in all 65 cases while CT metrizamide cisternography was used in 5 specifically and magnetic resonance imaging for 5 others. Intrathecal fluorescein was used for intraoperative assessment without complications, and only one case of meningismus was noted.

**Conclusion:** Several imaging methods were effective in diagnosing CSF leakage sites. Endoscopic management and autografts were successful in repairing anterior skull defects in 90.76% of the cases.

**Keywords:** CSF leakage, skull base defects, diagnostic tests, endoscopic diagnosis and management.

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**Introduction**

Otolaryngologists have a major role in the evaluation and management of anterior skull base defects that result in cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) leaks and meningoencephaloceles. Improved instrumentation for sinus surgery led to use of the endoscope for repair of CSF leaks by Wigand in 1981. Over the past 20 years, the minimally invasive endoscopic approach has gained widespread acceptance. As diagnostic aspects and surgical techniques have evolved, leading to higher success rates (approximately 90%) and lower morbidity than intracranial techniques for most leaks, the endoscopic approach has become the standard of care [1].

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The most common cause of CSF leaks is head trauma, and the remainder attributed to postoperative or spontaneous mechanisms [2]. In recent years, several authors have reported using endoscopic methods to repair leaks [3]. Some surgical care providers have used intrathecally-administered solutions of 0.5% to 5% (2.5-50 mg) sodium fluorescein through the lumbar space for detection and localization of skull base defects [4]. Recently, larger series have since demonstrated initial success rates of 76% - 94% with ultimate success rates ranging from 86% - 100%. [5]. Despite general agreement on treatment of CSF leak, the initial management, surgical indications, and the technique of repair are controversial [6].

This study was performed to evaluate the success rate of endoscopically diagnosed and treated CSF rhinorrhea, and also investigation of leakage site and etiologic factors.

Methods

Records of 65 patients who had undergone endoscopic repair of CSF rhinorrhea from 1999 through 2006 were retrospectively reviewed. Fine cut axial and coronal computed tomography (CT) scans were obtained in all patients before surgery. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and CT cisternography with contrast was used in some patients. Intraoperative lumbar injection of fluorescein was used in 28 cases, by our policy. Approximately 9.5 cc of CSF was mixed with a solution of 0.25cc of 10% fluorescein and slowly reinjected. After 30 minutes, patients were examined with an endoscope and, if needed, with a blue light and a dark field. The sites of examination included the eustachian tube, cribiform plate, middle meatus and the osteum of the sphenoid. Examination was also done before and after anterior and posterior ethmoidectomy.

The surgical approach was made through a standard FESS technique. Complete ethmoidectomy is initially done to enable surgeons to precisely identify the location of the CSF leak. Secondly, if the leakage came from herniated dura, the leak should be observable. Thirdly, performing this technique helps to prevent subsequent mucocele formation after repair. Fourth and finally, if ethmoidectomy is not performed completely, in the instance that the leak has come from the frontal sinus, fluid will enter the ethmoid tissue cells and then the leak site will be mistakenly classified as an ethmoidal defect. To prevent secondary sinusitis in the maxilla and frontal sinus, the osteomeatal complex (OMC) must be widely opened. At the time of repairing the site of the defect, attention must be paid so that the osteum of these sinuses does not close down. These pertinent issues include: 1) accurately identifying the entire skull base defect area, 2) completely lifting the mucosa surrounding the defect, 3) performing a complete anterior and posterior ethmoidectomy in addition to a sphenooidectomy while opening the osteum of the maxillary and frontal sinus completely and 4) retracting the mucosal edges of the bone defect all around.

In cases when the defect is about 5 mm or larger, we attempt to use a piece of cartilage or bone as a support under the edges of the bony defect area to support the material used to cover the dural defect. The cartilage or bone graft is harvested either from the septum or from the lower or middle turbinate.

We attempt to use fascia lata or mucopericondrium as the first layer. If muscle is to be used, it is thoroughly crushed and then placed on the skull base defect along with Surgicel. Gelfoam is placed underneath this layer so the grafts do not pull off when removing the surgical packing.

If the leak is wholly within the sphenoid sinus, when MRI rules out any carotid anomalies, the entire sphenoid is demucosalized at first. The cavity is then packed with fascia, fat and muscle. In the final stage, a cartilage or bone graft is placed over them.

In cases of encephalocele bipolar electrocautery was first applied to the dural pouch and
repair was done. Nasal packs as fixators were used on all patients to stabilize grafting materials and may have included Surgicel, Gelfoam and fibrin glue being placed during surgery. Patients were given parenteral antibiotics during the perioperative period and were placed on bed rest with the head of their bed elevated after surgery. Lumbar drainage was not used.

Results
From 1999 to 2006, 65 patients with CSF leakage underwent transnasal endoscopic diagnosis and repair of CSF leak procedures in our center. The study group consisted of 38 males and 27 females having an average age of 31.5 years. The cause of CSF rhinorrhea was determined to be traumatic in 30 cases (46.1%), spontaneous in 12, iatrogenic (35%) due to functional endoscopic sinus surgery (FESS) complications in 16 and iatrogenic from neurosurgical skull base procedures in 7. In 3 of the 16 FESS-related cases, the CSF leakage was encountered intraoperatively. The other 13 cases were referred from other institutions for subsequent repair.

Nasal endoscopy and high resolution computed tomography (HRCT) were used to identify the sites of the CSF fistulas in all of our 65 cases. In addition, CT metrizamide cisternography was used in 5, MRI in 5 and intraoperative intrathecal fluorescein in 28 patients. Meningoceles and/or encephaloceles were identified in 10. Sites of leakage was on the right side in 34 cases, on the left in 25 and both sides in 6 cases. CSF leaks occurred from the cribriform plate in 32 patients, fovea ethmoidalis in 23, sphenoid sinus in 5 and the frontal sinus in 5 respectively.

No major complications resulting from the use of fluorescein was seen with the exception of only one case of meningismus. Another method used on 5 of our patients was to pour a dilute solution of fluorescein on and/or inject the solution submucosally within the suspected site of CSF leakage. In the case of a positive detection result, the washing away of the fluorescein by CSF could be viewed.

Three cases had a past history of single craniotomy and 4 patients had a history of 2 craniotomies and all were repaired endoscopically. 5 failures in endoscopic repair happened. In 4 the site of leakage was the posterior wall of the frontal sinus and required repair via craniotomy and one was repaired by second endoscopic surgery.

However, five patients required a second endoscopic procedure to control leakage. Approximately 90.76 percent of cases were successfully treated with a single or two endoscopic surgical procedures, with 84.6 % on the first attempt.

The success rate for endoscopic diagnosis of CSF leak site was 90.2%. In 4 cases, the site of leak was the frontal sinus; however, the location was originally defined inaccurately as the fovea ethmoidalis.

Discussion
Since 1926 when Dandy described the first case using bifrontal craniotomy, this approach remained the mainstream surgical treatment until the Dohlman study later reported the first treatment using an extracranial nonendoscopic approach via a nasofrontal incision [1].

Wigand, in 1981, was the first to describe the use of an endoscope in treatment of CSF rhinorrhea occurring during FESS.

In 18.4% (12 cases) of the patients, we did not identify the exact etiology for CSF rhinorrhea. It is noteworthy, 9 of these 12 patients were obese females.

In 43% of the cases fluorescein solution was used to detect the leakage without any side effects other than in 1 case in which meningismus symptoms were observed. Utilizing fluorescein facilitated the rapid detection of the leakage site. This method also assisted in the detection of multiple leaks and ensured that no subsequent leaks would reoccur. Wax et al in their study suggested that fluorescein is relatively safe; complications ranging from lower extremity weakness to seizure and cranial nerve
deficits have been described, but all complica-
tion were reversible without residual deficit [7].

The most common site for CSF leak in our
patient group was the cribriform plate and, as
is well known, it is the thinnest anatomic part
of the skull base, and the most common site
of CSF leakage in spontaneous and/or postope-
ratve cases. However, in traumatic cases the
most common defect is observed equally in the
cribriform plate or fovea ethmoidalis.

In 5 cases, the site of leakage was the frontal
sinus and was mistakenly assumed that the leak
came from the fovea ethmoidalis, so we re-
paired that particular site. Whenever leakage
reoccurred, we realized that the leak had actu-
ally come from the frontal sinus and subsequent
patients underwent open frontal sinus surgery.
Maybe the only instance in which endoscopic
surgery is ineffective in repairing leakage that
comes from the frontal sinus is when the leak
originates in the posterior wall of the nas-
sofrontal recess where the fovea ethmoidalis
and frontal recess intersect.

However, in craniotomy-failed cases, endo-
scopic repair is usually easily and accurately
performed.

Our success rate approximated 90.76 per-
cent. Zweig et al had a success rate of 94.3% oc-
curring in 48 patients with 53 CSF fistulas.
Fifty fistulas were successfully repaired during
initial endoscopic repair and 3 persistent leaks
were resolved on the second attempt [6].
Kennedy et al, in a 36-patient series, had a suc-
cess rate of 94.4% in 34 patients with 1 endo-
scopie procedure [8]. In the Gross et al’s study
of 42 patients, successful resolution of CSF rhin-
orhea was achieved in 35 patients (83.3%) and
3 additional patients had successful closure
in a second surgery [9].

In Dodson et al’s study closure of leakage
was successful in 75.5 percent in the first at-
tempt and 100% in the 2nd repair [10].

Lindstrom et al identified 4 risk factors for
surgical failure in their series: including leak
location being the sphenoid sinus, elevated BMI
( obesity), spontaneous CSF rhinorrhea, and

We did not use lumbar drainage methods on
any of our patients. But Lee et al advise use of a
lumbar drain in selected patients such as cases
with meningocele or encephalocele and for
those in whom the location of the defect is diffi-
cult to repair [12].

Conclusion

Based on retrospective studies on patients
who were treated for CSF rhinorrhea, trauma
has been the most common causes of leakage.
Nasal endoscopy, HRCT, CT cisternography,
MRI and intrathecal fluorescein injection has
been used for diagnosis. The combined success
rate of first and second endoscopic repair at-
ttempts was 90.76%, with 84.6% successful re-
pair occurring on the first attempt. No lumbar
drainage was used and no serious postoperative
symptoms or complications were observed.
Our patient follow-up period ranged from 6
months to 108 months (mean 60 months), indi-
cating that the endoscopic approach provides a
safe and effective means for repairing many
skull base defects.

Acknowledgements

The authors of this manuscript wish to acknowledge
the assistance of the following centers and individuals:
Research Center of Otolaryngology, Head and Neck
Surgery, Faramarz Safari Sabet, Farsi-English translator
and Julie Monti Safari, English language and manuscript
preparation consultant.

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