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IMAGES IN CARDIOLOGY

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A large left atrial myxoma in a young fitness instructor

A 22-year-old woman had recurrent attendances to the emergency department with a history of increasing dyspnoea despite continuing her occupation as a fitness instructor. She had previously been labelled as suffering "panic attacks". Clinical examination revealed a soft diastolic murmur in the mitral area. Echocardiography was requested to exclude valvular pathology. The images show a large mass in the left atrium which prolapsed through the mitral valve during atrial systole. There was increased forward flow velocity through the mitral valve as measured by continuous wave Doppler. A diagnosis of left atrial myxoma was made and she underwent successful surgical resection.

Presentation of atrial myxoma may vary with dyspnoea present in around 30–40% of cases. Other manifestations include unexplained weight loss, palpitations, chest pain, fever, thromboembolic phenomenon or sudden death caused by complete occlusion of the mitral valve orifice. Our case demonstrates the need for thorough clinical examination and selection of the appropriate investigations, and the requirement for a high degree of suspicion in patients with recurrent symptoms.

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