CLINICAL SNAPSHOT

Yellow Nail Syndrome

A 64-year-old woman complained of yellow nail discoloration of more than one year's duration, with partial dystrophy of the nails. The changes had first appeared in the aftermath of a chronic upper airway infection, at about the same time as an operation on the paranasal sinuses. She also had persistent swelling of the ankles. We made the clinical diagnosis of yellow nail syndrome and ruled out onychomycosis. Yellow nail syndrome is a rare disease, with an incidence of approximately less than one per million persons per year. It can affect persons of either sex and is characterized by the triad of scleronychia (yellow nails), lymphedema, and respiratory disease. It can arise in association with neoplastic, endocrine, or rheumatic disorders; therefore, thorough interdisciplinary evaluation and clinical follow-up are indicated. No specific treatment is available. Treatment with biotin (vitamin B7) and tocopherol (vitamin E) has been reported to be effective, but was not successful in this patient. 10–30% of patients undergo spontaneous remission. The nail changes also regress with successful treatment of the underlying illness.

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