Unsuspected foreign object in the bronchus

Images submitted by Yu-Jen Cheng, Eing-Long Kao

A 20-year-old man had a chest radiograph performed as part of his military service entrance examination. The posterior-anterior (PA) film revealed a linear shadow near the right hilum. Previous chest PA films had no such shadow. The patient could not give any seemingly relevant history. A chest CT scan (10-mm slice thickness) identified the shadow as an intrabronchial lesion, specifically a pin in the right anterior segmental bronchus (B3) (Figure 1). Fiber bronchoscopic examination revealed the tip of the pin in the orifice of B3 (Figure 2). The only active bleeding was a mild oozing from surrounding granulation tissue. The whole pin pulled smoothly and easily out of the airway.

The pin was 4 centimeters in length. When the patient saw the pin, he recalled an episode of aspiration about 3 months earlier. He had been holding pins in his teeth while sewing a window curtain. A friend suddenly slapped him on the back and he inhaled suddenly and deeply.

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Figure 1. Posterior-anterior chest film (top left).

Figure 2. Chest CT scan (bottom left).

Figure 3. Fiber bronchoscopic examination (bottom).

Figure 4. 4-centimeter pin (right).