

Riga-Fede Disease: A Case Report and Review of Management Options

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ABSTRACT

Riga-Fede disease is a rare traumatic ulcerative condition of the oral cavity, commonly affecting infants and young children, caused by repetitive mechanical trauma from erupted teeth. It most frequently involves the ventral surface of the tongue and, if left untreated, may lead to feeding difficulties, dehydration, and failure to thrive. This article presents a case of Riga-Fede disease in a 9-month-old male child caused by newly erupted mandibular incisors, successfully managed with conservative incisal grinding. Complete healing was observed at a 3-month follow-up.

Keywords: Riga-Fede disease, traumatic ulcer, infant, incisal grinding, ventral tongue ulcer

INTRODUCTION

Riga-Fede disease is a benign but potentially distressing condition characterized by chronic ulceration of the oral mucosa due to repetitive trauma from natal, neonatal, or newly erupted primary teeth. First described by Antonio Riga in 1881 and later histologically detailed by Fede, the condition typically affects the ventral surface of the tongue but may also involve the lower lip or buccal mucosa.

Early diagnosis and timely management are essential to prevent complications such as secondary infection, impaired feeding, and nutritional deficiencies. Treatment modalities range from conservative approaches to extraction of the offending teeth, depending on severity and cooperation of the child.

Case Report

A 9-month-old male patient was brought to the Department of Pediatric Dentistry with a chief complaint of an ulcer on the ventral surface of the tongue, noticed by the parents for the past few weeks. The parents reported difficulty during feeding and increased irritability.

On intraoral examination, a well-defined ulcer was present on the ventral surface of the tongue, corresponding to the sharp incisal edges of the newly erupted mandibular central incisors. The ulcer had an erythematous base with no signs of active infection. The medical history was non-contributory, and the child had no known neurological or systemic disorders.

Based on the clinical findings and history, a diagnosis of **Riga-Fede disease** was established.



Pre-operative



Follow up 3 months

Treatment

Considering the early stage of the lesion and the absence of severe complications, a **conservative treatment approach** was planned. The incisal edges of the mandibular central incisors were carefully **rounded and smoothed by incisal grinding** to eliminate the source of mechanical trauma. No extraction was deemed necessary.

Parents were counseled regarding oral hygiene maintenance, feeding practices, and the importance of regular follow-up. Topical medications were not prescribed, as removal of the etiological factor was considered sufficient.

Follow-Up

The patient was reviewed periodically, and at the **3-month follow-up**, complete healing of the ulcer on the ventral surface of the tongue was observed. The child was feeding normally, and no recurrence of the lesion was noted.

DISCUSSION

Riga-Fede disease is often associated with natal and neonatal teeth but can also occur following the eruption of primary incisors, as seen in the present case. Differential diagnoses include aphthous ulcers, traumatic ulcers, infectious lesions, and neoplastic conditions; however, the characteristic location and association with erupted teeth aid in diagnosis.

Management strategies depend on the severity of the lesion and include:

- Conservative methods such as incisal grinding or smoothing
- Use of restorative material to cover sharp edges
- Extraction of offending teeth in severe or recurrent cases

In the present case, conservative incisal grinding proved to be effective, emphasizing that early intervention can prevent the need for more invasive procedures.

CONCLUSION

Riga-Fede disease, though rare, should be considered in infants presenting with chronic oral ulcers. Conservative management by eliminating the source of trauma can result in complete healing and favorable outcomes. Early diagnosis and parental education play a crucial role in successful management.

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