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IMAGES OF SPINE CARE

Sesamoid ossicle of the nuchal ligament

A 43-year-old woman was seen due to chronic neck pain over the last two years. There was no history of cervical trauma. On physical examination, there was no limitation on cervical range of motion, but there was mild pain on cervical extension. Lateral view X-ray imaging of the cervical spine showed an ossicle within the nuchal ligament at the level of C5 vertebral spinous process (Figure). The ossicle had smooth borders in the upper part, whereas the lower part had irregular borders. These small bodies are mostly seen in the sixth decade and are always found at the posterior margin of the shadow of the nuchal ligament, most frequently at C5–C6 level where the mobility is greatest (80% of cases) [1]. The postulated cause is mechanical pressure of the nuchal ligament against the apex of the spinous processes during forward flexion of the neck [2]. They are usually painless [2]. In this case, the patient's pain resolved with physical therapy and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs.

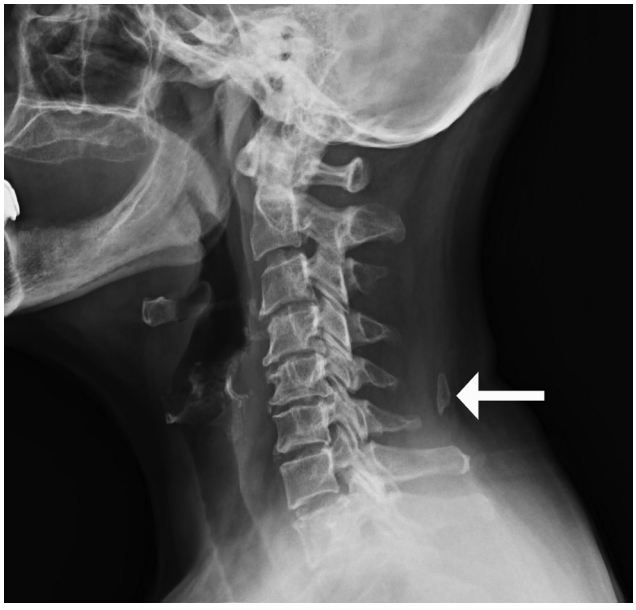

Figure. Lateral view X-ray imaging of the cervical spine demonstrating the existence of an ossicle within the nuchal ligament at the level of C5 vertebral spinous process (arrow).

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