Unilateral staghorn calculus

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Staghorn renal calculi can branch out and fill the whole renal pelvis and collecting system, causing obstructive and infective symptoms in patients.¹ Staghorn stones get their name from the space-filling shape found on imaging and gross renal evaluation, which resembles antlers on a deer, and have also been referred to as coral calculi.² These stones typically present unilaterally and are often composed of struvite (magnesium ammonium phosphate) or calcium carbonate apatite.² A common etiology of struvite stones involves alkalization of urine from increased urinary ammonia, usually due to the presence of a urease-producing microorganism.³ The urease found in these organisms splits urinary urea into ammonia, which then hydrolyzes to bicarbonate and ammonium.³

The image displays a 5.0 cm × 3.5 cm staghorn calculus that nearly encompasses the entire left renal pelvis and calyceal system (Figure). The first-line management of staghorn calculi includes percutaneous nephrolithotomy; secondary options include percutaneous nephrolithotomy with extracorporeal shock wave lithotripsy or ureteroscopy with laser lithotripsy.³ To prevent staghorn calculi recurrence, patients should adhere to a low phosphate and calcium diet paired with an estrogen supplement in women and aluminum gel. In addition, acetohydroxamic acid, a urease inhibitor, has proven useful to interrupt struvite stone growth but does carry the risk of serious systemic side effects, such as hemolytic anemia, myelosuppression, and superficial thrombophlebitis.³

Keywords: staghorn calculus, struvite, urease

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DOI: 10.12746/swrccc.v10i44.1073

Figure. Noncontrast CT displaying left renal staghorn calculus.

Article citation: George AK. Unilateral staghorn calculus. The Southwest Respiratory and Critical Care Chronicles 2022;10(44):64
From: School of Medicine, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center, Lubbock, Texas
Submitted: 7/10/2022
Accepted: 7/12/2022
Conflicts of interest: none
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