Gastric Vascular Antral Ectasia (Watermelon Stomach): understanding this syndrome and treatment options

What is GAVE?

Gastric Antral Vascular Ectasia (GAVE), sometimes called "watermelon stomach," is a rare condition in which the blood vessels of the stomach lining become fragile and leak blood. When seen through an endoscope (an instrument physicians use to view the inside of the esophagus and stomach), a GAVE stomach resembles the markings on watermelons. GAVE may cause chronic anemia and sometimes other signs of blood loss such as blood in the stool.

What causes GAVE?

The specific cause of GAVE is unknown. However, it is often associated with cirrhosis of the liver. It can also be linked with other conditions such as autoimmune disorders, chronic renal failure, cardiac disease, diabetes mellitus, atrophic gastritis, cirrhosis, scleroderma, pernicious anemia and CREST syndrome. It can also occur in patients with portal hypertension, vascular disease, metabolic syndrome.

What are symptoms of GAVE?

GAVE is characterized primarily by gastrointestinal bleeding, which may result in

- fatigue caused by anemia (a condition that develops when your blood lacks enough healthy red blood cells)
- Hematemesis (vomiting blood)
- Blood in the stools

How is GAVE diagnosed?

Endoscopic examination is the primary diagnostic test. Seen through the endoscope, GAVE stomachs have stripes of redness ("watermelon appearance"), or show honeycombing or nodules. Frequently, those areas ooze blood during the endoscopic examination. Tissue biopsy can aid in the diagnosis and can show characteristic findings such as dilated blood vessels among other features.

How is GAVE treated?

GAVE may cause no symptoms; however, it can cause chronic blood loss anemia, requiring iron replacement or frequent blood transfusions. Various endoscopic treatments can be used and, currently, are the best way to prevent further blood loss. These treatments cause scaring of the abnormal areas which reduces the oozing and bleeding. This will decrease the need for blood transfusions and will stabilize the blood count.

Besides endoscopic treatment, hormonal and other drug therapies have been tried with varying success. A very few patients may need surgery. Treatment of the underlying conditions associated with GAVE, such as liver disease and diabetes can help minimize GAVE. In patients with cirrhosis, liver transplantation may eliminate GAVE.

For more detailed information on GAVE, click *here* [link to the original article by Shajan]