

# Evaluation of CT Finding in heat stroke patients

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## Abstract

**Background:** To describe the neurological manifestations and neuroimaging of heatstroke patients. **Subjects and Methods:** We extracted data retrospectively from patients' files and described their neurological manifestations and radiological features. An experienced brain-imaging radiologist reviewed and analyzed patients' radiographs to report on signs of abnormality. **Results:** This group included fifteen patients; eight males (53%) and seven females (47%), with an average age of  $(51.2 \pm 10.1)$  years. Seven patients underwent brain imaging (CT scan), yet abnormal findings were detected in one patient images only. On the initial CT it showed bilateral thalamic and brainstem diffuse hypodensities. The follow-up CT scans showed acute hemorrhage in the pons and 4th ventricle. There was third intra-ventricular extension of blood, with mild hydrocephalus. **Conclusion:** The study presented non-specific neurological findings that were associated with heatstroke patients. These findings may affect management and potential complications prognosis.

**Keywords:** Heatstroke, CNS, Brain CT.

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## Introduction

Heatstroke is a serious medical emergency that could be fatal if not managed promptly.<sup>[1]</sup> It is caused by a significant rise in the human body's core temperatures, either due to an increased production of internal heat following heavy exercise and exertion i.e. "exertional heatstroke", or due to prolonged exposure to high external temperatures and humidity "classical heatstroke".<sup>[1-3]</sup> As a response to similar elevations in core temperature, the body initiates a series of thermo-regulation mechanisms and the failure of the latter can result in this condition and a potential multi-organ dysfunction. Central Nervous System disorders are the most common manifestations related to heatstroke, but other serious complications were reported including: "acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), disseminated intravascular coagulation (DIC), shock, and renal failure".<sup>[3,4]</sup>

This disorder is relatively common in high temperatures during summer months. In fact, many countries reported an increase in the heat-illnesses related deaths after witnessing extreme heat waves.<sup>[5]</sup> An estimated 50,000 deaths across Europe were reported and directly related to the heat wave in 2003.<sup>[6]</sup> Yet, and as a result of its varying clinical definitions, under diagnosis and lack of reporting, the global incidence of heatstroke remains inconclusive.<sup>[3]</sup> Daily wage workers, hawkers and sales related executives are forced by their job profile to work in extreme sun, when the external temperatures can reach to degrees higher than 45°C.

The poor nutrition, lack of adaptability to heat, strenuous physical work, and the vast exposed spaces with limited shade, makes heat exhaustion and heat stroke the two major causes of morbidity and mortality among these population.<sup>[7,8]</sup> In this study, we will describe the neurological manifestations and neuro-imaging of heatstroke patients who were referred to Government Medical College, Bettiah, during the summer season in may-june 2018.

## Subjects and Methods

The cases described in this study were fifteen patients who presented with a diagnosis of heatstroke to Government Medical College, Bettiah, during the summer season in May-June 2018. They were referred for treatment and further management from the primary health center.

We conducted a retrospective review for the neurological and radiographic data of these patients, and prepared a descriptive chart recording the following parameters: age, gender, neurological manifestations; both at presentation and in response to treatment, radiological findings, and the final outcome. Patients' data were taken from the hospital's record.

Neurological manifestations and namely "follow up of response to treatment" were described using Glasgow Coma Scale (GCS) scores. It was reported for the entire period of hospital stay for each patient, and per availability in the hospital's records. For radiological examination, Computed Tomography (CT) of the brain was the test of choice, and all

CT examinations were performed according to standard protocols. An experienced brain-imaging radiologist reviewed and analyzed the patients' radiographs to report on signs of abnormality.

All patients' personal information obtained during the study was kept confidential. Data was tabulated and was subjected to statistical analysis using SPSS (statistical Package for Social Sciences) Version.<sup>[10]</sup>

## Results

There were eight males (53%) and seven females (47%), with an average age of (51.2±10.1) years. In terms of final outcomes only two (13%) patients died, while the majority of patients recovered completely and were discharged with no CNS residual complications. During their hospital stay, the GCS scores for all patients were recorded daily, and that continued until GSC was restored back to normal or patient's death. Out of the surviving thirteen patients (86.7%), nine (69.2% out of 13 and 60% of total) were treated and discharged within or at the end of the first week (day 7). Two patients showed delayed improvement in the second week, and one patient was kept in the hospital for a longer period

for management of other conditions, although she showed early GCS improvement in the first week. (Table 1) illustrates each patients scores on admission (Day 1), day (2), day (7), day (14) and almost one month later; on day (28).

Only Seven patients (46.7%) underwent brain CT scanning. An initial CT was performed on the same day of admission (Day 1) on four patients and one day after (Day 2) for the remaining three. Only three patients had more than one CT done. Two patients had a single follow-up CT scans, one had it four days after the initial examination and the other had it six days later. The third patient had two follow-up CT examinations at Day 15 and Day 33.

All initial and follow-up CT examinations were normal, except for one patient. The abnormal case showed on the initial CT findings of bilateral thalamic and brainstem diffuse hypo-densities. Both the day one (initial scan), and the follow up scan done on day four, showed acute hemorrhage in the pons and 4th ventricle. There was third intra-ventricular extension of blood, with mild hydrocephalus. Additionally, there was diffuse sulcal effacement and cisternal effacement, denoting increased intracranial pressure.

**Table 1: Clinical picture of 15 heatstroke patients during their hospital stay**

Glasgow Coma Scale Score									
S.No.	Age	Gender	Day 1	Day 2	Day 7	Day 14	Day 28	Critically ill	Discharged on day
1	61	Female	15	15	-	-	-	No	6
2	49	Female	15	15	-	-	-	No	4
3	69	Male	6	13	-	-	-	NO	6
4	45	Female	8	-	-	-	-	NO	4
5	55	Female	-	-	-	-	-	No	4
6	42	Male	5	9	-	-	-	Yes	3
7	30	Male	9	10	-	-	-	Yes	6
8	59	Male	12	14	14	-	-	No	Died on day 16
9	56	Female	8	14	-	-	-	Yes	3
10	55	Female	7	8	15	14	-	Yes	21
11	44	Male	3	3	3	-	-	Yes	Died on day 12
12	65	Male	3	15	14	-	-	Yes	7
13	44	Female	5	9	14	13	9	No	42
14	40	Male	8	9	7	3	14	Yes	20
15	54	Male	8	10	15	-	-	Yes	83

## Discussion

The good prognosis for heatstroke patients is much related to the early diagnosis and management of its manifestations.<sup>9</sup> Taking a deeper look to the GSC scores, most patients showed remarkable improvement within the first week, with only few patients classified as critically ill when first admitted to our care in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU), and although most patients' initial management at primary health center was unknown. In fact, apart from two patients, all of them were discharged from ICU with none of the potential heat stroke complications reported before. This could be the result of rapid and efficient case evaluation and management undertaken for these patients as reported previously in similar cases, <sup>2,9</sup> both when first appreciating the symptoms at primary healthy center, and when first presented to ICU. Yet, GSC scores were variable to suggest any relevant associations.

Radiological findings on the other hand, were non-specific,

with normal neuroimaging reported on arrival for all patients except one patient. The latter showed "bilateral thalamic and brainstem diffuse hypo-densities", coinciding with symmetric lesions usually seen in heatstroke patients, <sup>10</sup> but follow up scans revealed "acute hemorrhage in the pons and 4th ventricle, and there was third intra-ventricular extension of blood, with mild hydrocephalus", all of which are signs that could be caused by other underlying conditions, and not directly related to heatstroke pathology. This could have been accounted for with comprehensive initial assessment conducted at primary health center. The latter could exclude other potential causes of neurological manifestations, and direct both patient management and case prognosis.

It must be acknowledged that the small number of patients described here, with the lack of accessibility to initial assessment or management undertaken at primary health center limits generalizing the conclusions to larger populations. Yet, we hope that this work can highlight the need for thorough initial heat stroke assessments, both at primary presentation and when arriving at secondary referral

point, with a special emphasis on appropriate and meticulous neuroimaging.

## Conclusion

In this group of patients, GCS scores were variable and most neuroimaging were found normal. This highlighted the non-specificity of neurological findings often associated with heatstroke patients, making potential complication prognosis and management rather challenging. More studies are needed to track similar patients, and define heatstroke neurological prognosis.

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