

Chronic small intestinal ischaemia

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Chronic small intestinal ischaemia almost invariably results from atherosclerosis and affects the proximal superior mesenteric and coeliac vessels. Patients classically present with symptoms of severe central abdominal pain that comes on within 30–60 minutes of eating (mesenteric angina). Weight loss and diarrhoea due to malabsorption may also occur. The condition may be difficult to diagnose and is often overlooked. The presence of significant vascular disease on CT is common in elderly patients and in those with severe vascular disease and should not necessarily be assumed to indicate that abdominal symptoms are attributable to chronic ischaemia. Treatment is usually by selective visceral angiography, with stenting/angioplasty and, where this is not possible, bypass surgery. Smoking cessation is imperative and patients are usually anticoagulated.

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