

HARROWING ORDEAL: A DELICACY TURNED TOXIC



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INTRODUCTION

“Umbut rotan”, or the shoots of rattans, are commonly used in Sarawakian cuisines. However, not all rattan shoots are safe for consumption. Here, we report a case of neurotoxicity and a case of death upon ingesting “umbut matar”.

CASE REPORT

A 63-year old man with hypertension and dyslipidemia, presented with sudden onset of giddiness, body weakness, blurring of vision, and breathlessness two hours following ingestion of a certain “umbut” which was given by his friend. His wife, who also ate the same “umbut”, developed symptoms of breathlessness and nausea just prior to losing her consciousness and succumbed to her demise despite cardiopulmonary resuscitation commenced by their daughter, a registered staff nurse.

Upon examination, the patient was tachypneic with left eye ptosis, dysarthria, dysphagia, and flaccid paralysis of his all four limbs. His blood results were normal. In view of worsening neurotoxicity and respiratory distress, the patient was intubated in the Emergency Department and ventilated in the ward for three days. His neurological function gradually improved in the ward with supportive treatment, and he was discharged home after nine days. The case was notified to the local Health Inspector for further action.

Investigations	Results	Units
White blood cells	9.8	x10 ³ /μL
Haemoglobin	16	g/dL
Platelet	170	x10 ³ /μL
Sodium (Na ⁺)	139	mmol/L
Potassium (K ⁺)	4.6	mmol/L
Urea	5.1	mmol/L
Creatinine	110	μmol/L
Calcium (Ca)	2.19	mmol/L
Magnesium (Mg)	0.92	mmol/L
Phosphate (PO ₄)	0.82	mmol/L
Aspartate transaminase	25	U/L
Alanine transaminase	24	U/L
Alkaline phosphatase	87	U/L
pH	7.350	
Bicarbonate (HCO ₃ ⁻)	22.8	mmol/L

Table 1: Blood investigations and results.

DISCUSSION

There are many different types of “umbut”; while some are edible, some are known to be neurotoxic and can be lethal if ingested.¹ “Umbut matar” or *Plectocomiopsis mira* was the suspected culprit because there were a few cases of similar poisoning in the past that were reported in Kapit, Sarawak.¹ It contains alkaloid, which is neurotoxic to humans causing vomiting, seizures, incoordination, abdominal pain, and death.^{1,2} To date, there was no antidote available for “umbut” poisoning and all treatments are of symptomatic and supportive in nature.^{1,2} Gastric decontamination can be potentially useful in reducing the amount of toxin absorbed if done within an hour of ingestion.³ Managements of “umbut” poisoning are primarily based on the optimisation of airway, breathing, circulation, disability or decontamination, and exposure (ABCDE) to ensure the best possible outcome.³



Figure 1: An online picture of “umbut matar”.

CONCLUSION

The consumption of “umbut matar” could cause food poisoning that might lead to neurotoxicity and even death. Despite no available antidote, appropriate resuscitations based on the principles of ABCDE can be life saving.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICT

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding this poster presentation.

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