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HISTOLOGICAL CHANGES OF THE GASTRIC MUCOSA ASSOCIATED WITH OBESITY

Akbarov Farrux Saydalievich

Andijan State Medical Institute

Abstract: Obesity is a chronic metabolic disorder characterized by systemic inflammation, hormonal imbalance, and functional overload of multiple organs, including the gastrointestinal tract. The gastric mucosa is particularly sensitive to obesity-related metabolic and inflammatory changes. This study aims to analyze the histological alterations of the gastric mucosa associated with obesity and to evaluate their potential clinical significance. Histopathological examination reveals characteristic changes such as mucosal hypertrophy, glandular hyperplasia, inflammatory cell infiltration, epithelial proliferation, and microvascular disturbances. These findings reflect both adaptive and pathological processes that may contribute to gastric dysfunction and increased susceptibility to mucosal injury in obese individuals.

Keywords: Obesity, gastric mucosa, histology, inflammation, glandular hyperplasia

Introduction

Obesity has emerged as one of the most significant global health challenges due to its increasing prevalence and association with metabolic, cardiovascular, and gastrointestinal disorders. While the systemic effects of obesity are well documented, its impact on gastric structure, particularly the gastric mucosa, remains less thoroughly investigated. The gastric mucosa plays a critical role in acid secretion, mucosal defense, and endocrine regulation of appetite through hormone-producing cells. Chronic excessive caloric intake, altered gastric motility, increased intragastric pressure, and obesity-related hormonal dysregulation create conditions that promote structural remodeling of the gastric mucosa. Understanding obesity-associated histological changes is essential for clarifying the pathophysiology of gastric dysfunction and for improving clinical management, especially in patients undergoing bariatric surgery.

Materials and Methods

This study was conducted as a descriptive histopathological analysis of gastric mucosal specimens obtained from obese patients undergoing diagnostic endoscopy or surgical intervention. Tissue samples were fixed in 10% neutral buffered formalin, processed using standard paraffin-embedding techniques, and sectioned at a thickness of 4–5 μm. Hematoxylin and eosin staining was used for routine histological evaluation. In selected cases, additional histochemical stains were applied to better visualize connective tissue and vascular structures.

Microscopic examination focused on the assessment of mucosal thickness, epithelial integrity, glandular architecture, degree of inflammatory cell infiltration, and vascular changes within the lamina propria. The presence of epithelial proliferation, edema, and degenerative changes was also evaluated. Histological findings were analyzed descriptively and interpreted in relation to obesity-related pathophysiological mechanisms.

Results

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Histological examination of the gastric mucosa in obese individuals demonstrated consistent and characteristic structural alterations. A significant increase in mucosal thickness was observed, primarily due to epithelial proliferation and expansion of the glandular component. Glandular hyperplasia was a common finding, particularly in the fundic and corporal regions, reflecting increased secretory and functional demand.

The lamina propria exhibited diffuse infiltration by lymphocytes and macrophages, indicating chronic low-grade inflammation. Inflammatory changes were often accompanied by interstitial edema and disruption of normal glandular architecture. Epithelial cells showed signs of increased mitotic activity, suggesting enhanced regenerative processes in response to ongoing mucosal stress.

Microvascular alterations were also evident, including capillary dilation, vascular congestion, and uneven distribution of blood vessels within the mucosa. These changes suggest impaired microcirculation and potential tissue hypoxia. In some cases, focal epithelial degeneration and superficial erosive changes were identified, indicating increased vulnerability of the gastric mucosa to injury.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that obesity is associated with significant histological remodeling of the gastric mucosa. Mucosal hypertrophy and glandular hyperplasia appear to represent adaptive responses to chronic functional overload and increased acid and enzyme production. However, persistent epithelial proliferation and glandular expansion may disrupt normal mucosal organization and contribute to functional imbalance.

Chronic low-grade inflammation of the gastric mucosa observed in obese individuals is consistent with the systemic inflammatory state characteristic of obesity. Infiltration by immune cells within the lamina propria may impair mucosal defense mechanisms and promote tissue damage. Additionally, microvascular disturbances may compromise oxygen and nutrient delivery, further exacerbating mucosal vulnerability.

These histological changes have important clinical implications. Altered mucosal structure may predispose obese patients to dyspeptic symptoms, gastritis, and gastroesophageal reflux disease. Furthermore, pre-existing mucosal pathology may influence healing and outcomes following bariatric or other gastric surgical procedures. Recognition of obesity-related gastric mucosal changes underscores the need for careful endoscopic and histological evaluation in this patient population.

Conclusion

Obesity is associated with distinct histological changes of the gastric mucosa, including mucosal hypertrophy, glandular hyperplasia, chronic inflammatory infiltration, epithelial proliferation, and microvascular alterations. These changes reflect a combination of adaptive and pathological processes driven by prolonged metabolic and mechanical stress. Awareness of these alterations is essential for understanding obesity-related gastric dysfunction and for optimizing clinical and surgical management. Further studies incorporating immunohistochemical and molecular approaches are warranted to elucidate the mechanisms underlying gastric mucosal remodeling in obesity and to identify potential targets for therapeutic intervention.

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The present study demonstrates that obesity is associated with pronounced and consistent histological remodeling of the gastric mucosa, reflecting the complex interaction between metabolic overload, hormonal dysregulation, mechanical stress, and chronic low-grade inflammation. Structural alterations such as mucosal hypertrophy, glandular hyperplasia, increased epithelial proliferation, inflammatory cell infiltration, and microvascular disturbances indicate that the gastric mucosa undergoes both adaptive and pathological changes in response to prolonged obesity.

While mucosal thickening and glandular expansion may initially serve as compensatory mechanisms to meet increased functional and secretory demands, their persistence appears to disrupt normal mucosal architecture and homeostasis. Chronic inflammatory infiltration within the lamina propria may impair mucosal defense mechanisms, increase epithelial vulnerability, and promote progressive tissue damage. In addition, microcirculatory alterations observed in obese individuals may compromise oxygen and nutrient delivery, further exacerbating mucosal dysfunction and increasing susceptibility to erosive and inflammatory gastric conditions.

From a clinical standpoint, these histological changes provide a morphological basis for the high prevalence of gastric symptoms, including dyspepsia and gastroesophageal reflux disease, in obese patients. Moreover, pre-existing gastric mucosal pathology may influence surgical decision-making and postoperative outcomes in bariatric and other gastric surgeries. Recognition of obesity-related histological alterations underscores the importance of comprehensive endoscopic and histopathological evaluation in this patient population.

In conclusion, obesity should be regarded as a condition that induces significant structural remodeling of the gastric mucosa with important functional and clinical consequences. Early identification and targeted management of mucosal changes may contribute to improved gastrointestinal health and better surgical outcomes. Future research incorporating immunohistochemical, molecular, and quantitative morphometric analyses is necessary to further elucidate the mechanisms underlying gastric mucosal adaptation and injury in obesity and to develop more effective preventive and therapeutic strategies.

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