



The Forbidden Chest X-Ray Mimic

Mathieu Pasquier*, Michael Cotton and Olivier Hugli

Emergency Service, University Hospital Center, Switzerland

Clinical Image

A previously healthy 21-year-old male patient complained of a mild breathlessness and thoracic pain since many days. His vital parameters were strictly normal. The inspiratory chest film made on an ambulatory basis showed a right pneumothorax, measured at 5 cm at the hilum (Figure 1). The expiratory film was taken 37 seconds later, and shows a marked mediastinal shift, and a tracheal deviation (Figure 1). A right chest tube was inserted several hours after admission to the hospital. Standard upright inspiratory chest X-ray is the initial exam of choice when suspecting a pneumothorax [1]. In our case, inadequate indication for expiration film provided the “classical” image of a radio of tension pneumothorax which is often qualified as “forbidden”, also in this specific case this was a mimic. The diagnosis of tension pneumothorax is clinical and not radiological. When it is suspected, treatment should be instituted immediately [2].

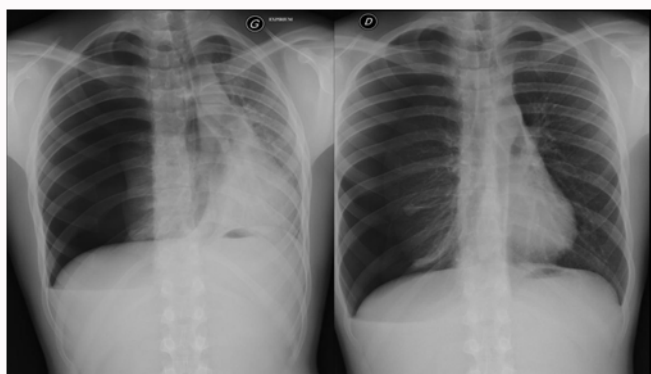


Figure 1: Expiratory film (left) mimicking the radiological aspect of a right tension pneumothorax. The inspiratory film (right) shows a right pneumothorax measuring 5 cm at the hilum.

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*Correspondence:

Mathieu Pasquier, Emergency Service,
University Hospital Center, Lausanne
1011, Switzerland, Tel: 41795563422;
Fax: 41213140871;
E-mail: mathieu.pasquier@chuv.ch

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