

Case Report

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Reversal of Stable Exertional Angina via Multi-Modal Non-Invasive Lifestyle Intervention and Enhanced External Counterpulsation (EECP): A Comprehensive Case Report

Atindra Kumar Choubey

MBBS Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India

ABSTRACT

Background: Traditional management strategies for advanced Coronary Artery Disease (CAD) heavily prioritize mechanical revascularization through invasive interventions, such as Coronary Artery Bypass Grafting (CABG) or Percutaneous Coronary Intervention (PCI). While vital in acute coronary syndromes, the mandatory use of invasive procedures for stable ischemic heart disease is increasingly challenged by emerging randomized clinical trial data favoring aggressive multi-modal lifestyle modification and non-invasive therapeutics.

Case Presentation: This case report examines a 54-year-old male who presented with severe, debilitating exertional chest discomfort that significantly restricted his baseline functional capacity and metabolic performance. Faced with the immediate prospect of invasive open-heart surgery, the patient actively sought an alternative, non-invasive, root-cause reversal strategy. He was initiated on a comprehensive, structured therapeutic protocol comprising a strict zero-oil whole-food plant-based diet, systematic behavioral stress management, optimized guideline-directed medical therapy, and an advanced 35-hour course of Enhanced External Counterpulsation (EECP).

Outcomes: Within a short-term therapeutic window, the patient demonstrated complete clinical resolution of stable angina, a total restoration of expected baseline functional capacity (successfully returning to a high-energy daily 5-kilometer morning walk without discomfort), and substantial reduction in cardiovascular-related procedural anxiety.

Conclusion: This clinical report highlights the practical viability, biological mechanisms, and long-term sustainability of non-invasive preventative cardiology as a safe and robust primary therapeutic pathway for highly motivated patients presenting with stable obstructive CAD.

*Corresponding author

Atindra Kumar Choubey, MBBS Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India.

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Introduction

Ischemic Heart Disease (IHD) remains a leading global driver of cardiovascular morbidity, mortality, and long-term socio-economic healthcare expenditure. For many decades, the standard clinical paradigm for patients presenting with high-grade chronic stable angina has focused extensively on fixing localized macrovascular blockages via mechanical revascularization infrastructure—specifically Coronary Artery Bypass Grafting (CABG) or Percutaneous Coronary Intervention (PCI). However, landmark multi-center randomized controlled trials, such as the ISCHEMIA trial and the COURAGE trial, have robustly demonstrated that for stable Coronary Artery Disease (CAD), conservative, intensive medical and lifestyle management yields long-term ischemic event rates and survival curves completely comparable to early invasive interventions.

Despite this growing wealth of clinical evidence, a large majority of patients facing the sudden prospect of open-heart surgery experience severe procedural anxiety, reduced immediate quality of life, and acute physical vulnerability. Furthermore, mechanical interventions act merely as localized 'anatomical bypasses' or localized structural fixes. They fail to address the systemic endothelial dysfunction, chronic systemic inflammation, vascular oxidative stress, and persistent dietary triggers that drive the underlying cellular mechanisms of atherogenesis throughout the wider vascular tree.

Preventative, non-invasive cardiology addresses the exact physiological root causes of systemic atherosclerosis. By pairing aggressive nutritional elimination protocols with advanced, non-invasive physiological therapies like Enhanced External Counterpulsation (EECP), modern clinicians can safely stimulate native microvascular collateralization, maximize myocardial perfusion pressure, and actively restore global endothelial health. This comprehensive case report details the rapid symptomatic, functional, and psychological reversal of severe stable exertional

angina utilizing an intensive, multi-modal, completely non-surgical outpatient treatment protocol.

Case Presentation

A 54-year-old male with no prior history of acute myocardial infarction, coronary intervention, or cerebrovascular events presented with a primary complaint of progressive, severe chest discomfort. The symptoms were explicitly exertional and ischemic in nature, occurring predictably and repeatedly during his routine morning walks. This discomfort forced him to abruptly cease physical activity to allow the symptoms to subside.

The patient reported that over the preceding months, his functional tolerance had deteriorated to the point where walking minimal distances on flat ground induced a substantial substernal pressure, mild radiation to the left shoulder, and associated mild exertional dyspnea. The impact on his standard quality of life was profound, precipitating a sedentary transition due to fear of symptom onset.

Prior to presenting at our center, the patient had been evaluated at a tertiary care hospital where clinical findings, combined with an un-instrumented stress test, led to the diagnosis of severe stable ischemic heart disease. The clinical team advised immediate invasive coronary angiography followed by an expected transition to surgical revascularization (CABG or multi-vessel PCI). The patient experienced deep psychological distress and overwhelming anxiety regarding the invasive nature of open cardiac surgery, the associated perioperative risks, and the long-term lifestyle limitations often connected with post-operative recovery. He explicitly refused invasive strategies and sought a conservative clinical second opinion focused exclusively on physiological reversal, risk-factor modification, and comprehensive symptom eradication without surgical entry.

Timeline and Diagnostic Considerations

Upon initial presentation and clinical assessment, the patient's vitals were stable, with a resting blood pressure of 128/82 mmHg and a resting heart rate of 74 beats per minute. Physical examination of the respiratory and cardiovascular systems revealed normal heart sounds without murmurs, gallops, or adventitious lung sounds. Electrocardiographic (ECG) evaluation at rest demonstrated normal sinus rhythm with non-specific ST-T wave alterations, consistent with chronic myocardial ischemia under strain.

A highly structured, multi-week therapeutic timeline was established. Rather than subjecting the patient to immediate invasive catheterization, an initial intensive phase was launched to alter his entire metabolic and vascular profile. The patient was monitored closely via weekly clinical consultations to track symptom frequency, exercise capacity, and psychological adaptations. This structural timeline allowed for the precise evaluation of aggressive conservative therapeutics before any future reassessment for invasive steps.

Multi-Modal Therapeutic Interventions

The patient was immediately enrolled in a structured, four-pillar, non-invasive clinical program engineered to aggressively optimize myocardial oxygen supply, decrease systemic vascular resistance, and halt the progression of coronary atheromas.

Nutritional Modification: The Zero-Oil Protocol

The patient was transitioned to a strictly monitored, zero-oil, whole-food plant-based (WFPB) diet. This dietary intervention completely eliminates all added fats, cooking oils (including olive, mustard, and vegetable oils), animal-derived products, and heavily

processed refined carbohydrates. The targeted nutritional regimen focuses on whole grains, legumes, pulses, leafy green vegetables, and specific low-fat plant proteins. The dual biological goals of this radical nutritional restriction are:

- **Endothelial Optimization:** Standard dietary intake of saturated fats and oils induces immediate, hours-long postprandial endothelial stunning, characterized by a sharp drop in vascular reactivity. By completely removing these triggers, the vascular endothelial lining is allowed to maximize the synthesis, secretion, and biological bioavailability of Nitric Oxide (NO), a potent endogenous vasodilator and protector against platelet aggregation.
- **Plaque Stabilization and Regression:** Minimizing the circulating pool of Low-Density Lipoprotein Cholesterol (LDL-C) and minimizing markers of systemic vascular inflammation (such as high-sensitivity C-reactive protein) shifts the internal composition of existing coronary plaques. This promotes the depletion of the unstable lipid-rich core of atheromas, converting them into stable, fibrotic, calcified plaques that are highly resistant to rupture or acute thrombosis.

Advanced Mechanical Perfusion Therapy: Enhanced External Counterpulsation (EECP)

To directly correct the severe mismatch between myocardial oxygen demand and supply without surgical risk, the patient underwent a standard 35-hour clinical course of Enhanced External Counterpulsation (EECP), delivered in one-hour daily sessions over seven weeks. The therapy utilized computer-controlled pneumatic cuffs wrapped securely around the patient's calves, lower thighs, and upper thighs/buttocks. Synchronized precisely with the patient's continuous surface ECG, these cuffs inflated sequentially during early diastole and deflated instantly at the exact onset of ventricular systole.

The mechanical, hemodynamic effects of EECP act through two powerful physiological mechanisms:

- **Diastolic Augmentation:** The rapid sequential inflation of lower extremity cuffs forces retrograde arterial blood flow back up the descending aorta during diastole. This dramatically increases central aortic diastolic pressure, vastly elevating coronary perfusion pressure and actively forcing oxygenated blood into previously ischemic or hibernating zones of the myocardium.
- **Systolic Unloading:** The instantaneous, synchronized deflation of the pneumatic cuffs right before systole creates an immediate vascular vacuum effect in the lower extremities. This lowers systemic vascular resistance, drops cardiac afterload, decreases left ventricular stroke work, and reduces global myocardial oxygen consumption during physical contraction.

Optimized Medical Therapy (OMT)

Concurrently, standard guideline-directed medical therapy was precisely adjusted. Pharmaceutical agents, including selective beta-blockers, were calibrated to achieve an optimal resting hemodynamic profile, targeting a resting heart rate between 55 and 65 beats per minute. This intentional bradycardia served to significantly prolong the diastolic phase of the cardiac cycle, maximizing the duration of coronary artery blood flow and lowering baseline myocardial oxygen demands during routine activity.

Cognitive and Stress Management Protocols

Recognizing that profound procedural anxiety and baseline psychological distress drive chronic sympathetic nervous

system hyper-activation, the patient participated in dedicated stress-mitigation coaching. Sympathetic over-activity causes persistent alpha-adrenergic vasoconstriction, elevates resting blood pressure, and drives systemic cortisol production, which damages endothelial cells. The patient was instructed in structured mindfulness techniques, deep breathing exercises, and cognitive reframing to lower his baseline ischemic threshold and eliminate anxiety-induced angina triggers.

Outcomes and Follow-Up

Following the completion of the intensive phase of the multi-modal protocol, the patient's clinical transformation was substantial across subjective, functional, and psychological vectors:

- **Complete Symptom Resolution:** The patient reported 100% reduction in stable angina symptoms. He experienced no episodes of chest discomfort, crushing substernal pressure, or exertional dyspnea during routine daily life, occupational activities, or periods of intentional physical exertion.
- **Restoration of Functional Capacity:** The patient achieved a complete return to his morning physical fitness routine. At his follow-up assessment, he was successfully walking 5 kilometers every morning at a brisk, unbroken pace with zero exertional distress, zero chest pain, and high overall physical vitality.
- **Psychological Rehabilitation:** Comprehensive follow-up interviews indicated a total alleviation of his prior procedural anxiety, depression, and fear of sudden cardiac events. The patient demonstrated high self-efficacy and confidence, driven by the realization that his functional recovery was sustained by active, daily lifestyle modifications rather than dependent on invasive medical procedures.

Discussion

The rapid, profound clinical turnaround observed in this patient challenges the historical assumption that mechanical revascularization is an absolute requirement for the management of high-grade stable exertional angina. The swift eradication of symptoms points directly to the synergistic biological pathways activated by combining intensive lifestyle medicine with external perfusion engineering.

The Physiology of the 'Natural Bypass'

While a strict zero-oil whole-food plant-based diet slowly modifies the long-term systemic inflammatory profile, EECP delivers an immediate, potent mechanical and fluid dynamic effect. The repetitive, high-volume diastolic augmentation created by EECP creates a high rate of fluid shear stress across the coronary endothelial lining. This fluid shear stress triggers a crucial cascade of biological responses:

First, it causes a significant upregulation of angiogenic growth factors, specifically Vascular Endothelial Growth Factor (VEGF) and Basic Fibroblast Growth Factor (bFGF). Second, this localized pressure differential recruits and widens pre-existing, dormant collateral micro vessels within the coronary network. These collateral vessels adapt to function as an anatomical 'natural bypass,' routing blood flow directly around fixed macrovascular blockages to restore normal tissue perfusion to the ischemic myocardium.

Third, the mechanical flushing action restores normal Endothelial Nitric Oxide Synthase (eNOS) activity. This directly reverses advanced endothelial dysfunction, allowing the coronary arteries to dilate normally in response to exercise-induced surges in cardiac

output, thereby entirely eliminating the physical trigger for stable angina.

Redefining Stable CAD Management

From a broader healthcare economics and patient safety perspective, this multi-modal non-invasive approach entirely circumvents the documented complications of major invasive interventions, including surgical site infections, graft failure, accelerated restenosis, perioperative stroke, and prolonged post-operative physical rehabilitation. Furthermore, this paradigm shifts the patient from a passive recipient of surgical procedures into an active manager of their chronic condition. Educating the patient on stress management and zero-oil nutrition establishes a permanent protective framework that defends the entire systemic vascular tree against future atherothrombotic events, a benefit that localized stents or bypass grafts cannot provide.

Conclusion

This clinical case report demonstrates that a carefully structured, multi-modal, completely non-invasive program combining a zero-oil whole-food plant-based diet, systematic stress modification, optimized medical therapy, and Enhanced External Counterpulsation (EECP) can serve as an exceptionally effective substitute for primary surgical revascularization in patients presenting with severe chronic stable angina. For motivated individuals with stable coronary artery disease, preventative non-invasive cardiology represents a safe, sustainable, and highly effective therapeutic protocol that directly addresses the physiological root cause of the disease process [1-6].

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