

Radiologic Examination of the Small Intestine

2nd Edition

By

ROSS GOLDEN, M.D.

Visiting Professor of Radiology

University of California at Los Angeles

Professor Emeritus of Radiology

Columbia University

Formerly, Director of Radiology

The Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center

New York City



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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

The purpose of this edition is that stated in the Preface to the first edition, that is to continue the assembling of information which seems to be helpful in understanding the significance of the x-ray examination of the small intestine. In these pages the intention is to apply the lessons of anatomy and physiology to clinical problems as they are disclosed by this method of examination.

Much new work on the small intestine has appeared and additional information concerning the anatomical structure and the physiology of the small intestine has become available. Some of this information has proved to be helpful. Evidence of differences in function of different portions of the small intestine has been demonstrated which may play a part in the specificity of malabsorption of certain food elements in some of the nutritional disorders.

On the other hand, puzzling observations have emerged from routine examinations which at present seem to defy explanation. We have been taught that one of the functions of the parasympathetic nervous system is to increase tonus and peristalsis. Yet it seems that a discrepancy in these two effects of parasympathetic action is not infrequently observed. Rapid propulsion may be associated with low tonus; slow movement of the barium content may occur with high tonus. Changing ideas concerning norepinephrine versus epinephrine as the physiologic antagonist of the parasympathetic are of interest, but specific information concerning possible differences in the effect of these two substances on the intestine does not seem to be available at present.

The loss of response of the intestine to anticholinesterase drugs which inhibit the destruction of acetylcholine seems to be of great significance. It indicates that a deficiency of acetylcholine exists because production or liberation of acetylcholine in the wall of the intestine is insufficient under existing conditions. This in turn suggests a disturbance in the production or availability in the intestinal wall of this important substance, possibly because of electrolyte imbalance or deficiency in the quantity or quality of enzymes, co-enzymes, protein, etc. It is important to recognize this insufficiency of acetylcholine as a functional condition which may be reversible as in hypokalemia.

Another possible factor in diminution of acetylcholine effects is the permeability of the effector cell membrane. The gas distention of the intestine in porphyria disappears during spontaneous remissions of the disease. Does the porphyria affect adversely the permeability of the membrane of the smooth muscle cells or does it combine with and inactivate the acetylcholine in the intestinal wall when the disease is active? Whatever the mechanism, the disorder is reversible.

These examples emphasize the importance to clinical medicine of continued investigation of the physiology of the small intestine which will undoubtedly provide more information concerning certain functions which are now obscure.

In addition to functional disorders, the ability of radiologic methods of examination to disclose abnormalities produced by organic disease of the small intestine has been amply established. Obviously the examination must be carefully done and the interpretation based on an understanding of the physical effect of the disease on the wall of the intestine.

In the following pages, as is customary, the values for blood protein are given in grams-percent and those for electrolytes in milligrams-percent, but the units are not repeated. Where milli-equivalents per liter are used, the unit (mEq/L) is given.

A small intestine study necessitates the exposure of several films and one or two fluoroscopic observations. The possible hazard to health of exposure to x-rays during diagnostic procedures is causing considerable discussion at present. Actually some of the potential dangers from x-ray have been known for more than half a century. The development of atomic fission was followed by a great deal of experimental work on the biological effects of ionizing radiation from any source. Two hazards have been emphasized in the public press, namely the possible shortening of the life of the irradiated individual and the possibility of future genetic effect. Many of the opinions regarding potential damage to patients are based on the effects of whole body irradiation of animals; in some of the published reports, these experimental results, with an admixture of fanciful imagination, are extrapolated to humans who undergo roentgen examinations, but who do not have whole body irradiation. Some writers have even attempted to estimate the number of days a life might be shortened by one examination of the chest. Throughout the past half century longevity has steadily increased. The decrease in infant mortality and the increase in the average length of life has continued during the past three decades during which radiologic methods of examination have undergone great development and extensive application in medicine. The great increase in the accuracy of diagnosis by means of x-ray methods of examination has played no small part in the extension of the human life span. Unfortunately some patients have refused x-ray examinations because of fear engendered by unwarranted or inaccurate statements in the public press. Avoidance of an x-ray examination may be a great hazard as it may readily result in failure to detect disease.

Stone* discussed the various factors involved in the problem of exposure to x-rays in diagnostic procedures and placed them in their proper perspective in relation to other hazards of life. Genetic effects following irradiation of gonads were demonstrated in animals many years ago; geneticists believe that they may

*Stone, R. S.: Common sense in radiation protection applied to clinical practice. *Am. J. Roentgenol.*, 78:993-999, 1957.

appear in humans in future generations although as yet none have been observed. Mutations, however, may be produced by causes other than ionizing radiation. Nevertheless this potential hazard cannot be ignored. No x-ray examination should be requested by a physician without clear evidence of the need for it and clear understanding of its purpose. The examination should be done by a properly trained physician aware of the potential dangers of ionizing radiation. All measures which do not hamper the examination should be adopted to minimize the amount of radiation absorbed in the body, to delimit accurately the area over which it is applied and to protect the gonads of young individuals. The amount of radiation required for diagnostic procedures can be reduced by the use of high voltage current, a thick filter, a long target-film distance, high speed films and intensifying screens, and careful delimitation of the size of the field by the use of adjustable rectangular cones. Ardran**, and Billings, Norman and Greenfield*** have shown that these methods greatly reduce the amount of radiation absorbed in the body. When these precautions are taken, these writers calculate that the average gonadal dose of radiation due to x-ray examinations accumulated through age thirty is less than twenty-five per cent of the dose accumulated during that time from natural background radiation. With all due regard for potential dangers from radiation, care must be taken to avoid depriving a patient of the benefit of an x-ray examination which may disclose an immediate hazard to his health or even to his life.

Again I am happy to express my gratitude for material contributed by radiological colleagues in the United States and other countries. Individual acknowledgments are made in appropriate places.

My thanks are due Mrs. Margaret Szenes-Dugo, New York, and Mrs. Joan Guiberson, Los Angeles, for their secretarial help. I am indebted to Dr. Michael J. Lepore, New York, for valuable suggestions particularly in Chapter XVI. Dr. Andrew H. Dowdy, Chairman of the Department of Radiology of the University of California at Los Angeles, kindly made the skillful services of the departmental photographer, Mr. Paul Stout, available to me.

To Mr. Charles C Thomas I am most grateful for his sympathetic understanding of certain unavoidable delays in the completion of the manuscript. The courtesy and help of Mr. Payne Thomas, of Mr. Warren H. Green and of other members of the publishing staff are much appreciated.

R. G.

**Ardran, G. M.: The dose to operator and patient in x-ray diagnostic procedures. *Brit. J. Radiol.*, 29:266-269, May 1956.

***Billings, M. S., Norman, A., and Greenfield, M. A.: Gonad dose during routine roentgenography. *Radiology*, 69:37-41, 1957.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

The material presented in the following pages has been assembled in an attempt to collect information which, at the present time, seems to be helpful in understanding diseases and disorders of the small intestine. The discussions of various topics will not be all-inclusive from the standpoint of the anatomist, the physiologist, and the pathologist, as they were presented from the point of view of a radiologist. The basic facts concerning the action and control of the small intestine are of importance to the surgeon and the internist who have to deal with the problems of abdominal diagnosis and the treatment of intestinal disorders. Familiarity with these facts is even more important for the radiologist who tries to study this complex structure by roentgen methods. No attempt has been made to discuss the treatment of disease of the intestine.

Of particular interest are the newer ideas concerning the transmission of nerve impulses, sometimes called the "chemical mediator" theory. Continued research in neuromuscular physiology will undoubtedly yield more knowledge concerning the influences which modify the production of acetylcholine and its destruction by choline esterase. Then it certainly will be possible to understand and perhaps to control abnormal physiologic conditions which are now obscure. Examples which may be mentioned are the motor disorders of the small intestine associated with disease of the liver, injuries of the spine, and the mechanism of the action of morphine.

This material has been assembled over a period of many years. Much of it has been presented at instructional courses at the meetings of the American Roentgen Ray Society and the Radiological Society of North America. In fact, preparation for these courses was a potent stimulus and the first manuscript was prepared for distribution as an "outline" of the course given at the Cleveland meeting of the Radiological Society in 1940. Many instructive cases have been sent to me by colleagues from various parts of the country. Acknowledgments are made later in individual cases, but I wish here to express my appreciation for these valuable contributions to the collection. Time has not been available for a complete review of the literature. Apologies are offered to those who deserve credit for priority in certain observations.

It is interesting to note the evolution of interest in the small intestine during the last decade and a half. In times past, the small intestine was largely ignored. Some of the patients whose histories are summarized in connection with illustrations were referred for psychotherapy before evidence of organic disease of the small intestine was demonstrated. At the present time, it is obvious that the more attention paid to it, the more rewarding is its study by roentgen methods.

Tribute is due to two pioneers in the roentgen investigation of the small intestine: Professor Gösta Forssell of Stockholm and Dr. Lewis Gregory Cole of New York. My first study of the small intestine was done in 1928, under the stimulus of a remark by Dr. Cole, in an attempt to rule out organic disease in a case of apparent pseudocystitis.

Success in the use of radiologic methods of examination rises in proportion to the cooperation of clinician and radiologist. In no field is sympathetic discussion of the clinical problem and the roentgen findings more vital than with the small intestine. In the present state of knowledge it is often impossible to make a "diagnosis" in the strict sense of the term, yet the roentgen observations may offer the wise doctor a lead which will be of great assistance in selecting therapeutic or further diagnostic procedures. In many cases, variations from the usual appearance of the barium shadows of the intestine will be recognized, the significance of which cannot be understood, but this should be stimulating rather than discouraging.

This book has been prepared for publication under the stress of war conditions. Although its purpose is simple, it may seem incomplete: this is due in part to the extensive ramifications of the subject but more particularly to the certainty that new and important work is coming which will help solve some of the many problems in intestinal physiology. Even during the period of its preparation for publication, the book has been altered to include some recent observations. The study of the small intestine is in its early stages. Undoubtedly much significant new information concerning its normal physiology and its disorders will become available in the near future.

The opaque medium used for the study of the small intestine is pure barium sulfate. It has become customary to refer to this material simply as "barium." Some editors of medical publications object to this abbreviation and pedantically insist on "barium sulfate meal" instead of "barium meal." However, the term sanctified by custom has prevailed in the following pages and the reader may safely assume that "barium" means "barium sulfate."

Grateful acknowledgment is due the American Journal of Roentgenology and Radium Therapy, Radiology, Review of Gastroenterology, and Thomas Nelson and Sons for permission to use again a number of illustrations which have been published previously.

Many colleagues on the staff of the Presbyterian Hospital and the College of Physicians and Surgeons have patiently answered questions and have made many helpful suggestions. To Dr. Edith Sproul and Dr. Homer D. Kesten, of the Department of Pathology, I am indebted for some photomicrographs of the intestinal wall. I am grateful to Dr. Arthur Purdy Stout, Director of the Department of Surgical Pathology, for many photographs of specimens; to Dr. John Caffey, Radiologist of the Babies Hospital, who supplied some films

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R. G.

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
<i>Preface to the Second Edition</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>Preface to the First Edition</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Chapter</i>	
I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION	3
Indications for a Small Intestine Study.....	3
Preparations of Barium Sulfate.....	4
Technic	8
Watersoluble Opaque Material.....	16
Umbrathor	17
Small Intestinal Enema.....	17
The Report of the Small Intestine Study.....	24
Bibliography	24
II. EMBRYOLOGY	26
Bibliography	31
III. ANATOMY	32
Location of the Jejunum and Ileum.....	32
Length	32
Structure of the Wall.....	33
Mesentery	38
Innervation	40
Nerve Supply	40
Intramural Nervous System.....	40
Bibliography	41
IV. PHYSIOLOGY	42
Introduction	42
Movements	42
Tunica Muscularis	42
Rhythmic Segmental Contractions or So-Called	
Pendulum Movements	42
Peristaltic Contractions	43
Muscularis Mucosae	46
Villi	46
Epithelium	46

	<i>Page</i>
Autonomic Nervous Control of the Intestine.....	47
Mechanism of Nerve Action.....	49
Parasympathetic Division	50
Production of Acetylcholine	50
Transmission of Nerve Impulses.....	51
Destruction of Acetylcholine.....	51
Inhibition of Acetylcholinesterase	52
Parasympathetic Inhibitors	52
Acetylcholine in Nerve and Muscle Function.....	53
Sympathetic Division	54
Sympathetic Effects	54
Destruction of Epinephrine or Sympathin.....	56
Electrical Discharges of the Intestinal Wall.....	56
Food Stimulus	56
Denervation of the Intestine.....	57
Effect of the Central Nervous System.....	58
Summary	58
Bibliography	60
V. THE NORMAL SMALL INTESTINE ON RADIOLOGIC EXAMINATION.....	63
Motility; Motor Function.....	63
Stimulus of Food.....	66
Size of the Lumen.....	67
Relief Contours of the Mucosal Surface.....	67
Comment	75
Bibliography	75
VI. THE SMALL INTESTINE OF THE INFANT.....	77
Anatomy	77
Prenatal Physiology	78
Postnatal Physiology	82
Transport of Air Through the Intestine.....	82
Physiology	83
Transit Time	87
Food Stimulus in Infants.....	87
Mucous Membrane	88
Physiologic Development	88
Comment	89
Bibliography	90

	<i>Page</i>
VII. SOME CONDITIONS OF DEVELOPMENTAL ORIGIN.....	92
Anomalies of Rotation.....	92
Congenital Atresia and Stenosis.....	94
Absence of Gas in the Intestine.....	99
Meconium Ileus and Peritonitis.....	99
Developmental Diverticula, Cysts and Duplications.....	101
Peritoneal Anomalies	107
Volvulus of the Cecum.....	107
Internal Hernias	111
Symptoms	111
Radiologic Examination	111
Meckel's Diverticulum	117
Invagination of Meckel's Diverticulum.....	119
Absence of Peritoneal Cavity.....	123
Bibliography	124
VIII. EFFECTS OF CERTAIN DRUGS ON THE SMALL INTESTINE.....	125
Parasympathomimetic Drugs	125
Anticholinesterases	127
Parasympathetic Inhibitors	128
The Belladonna Alkaloids	128
Banthine and Pro-Banthine	129
Dibutolin	131
Tetraethylammonium	131
Sympathomimetic Drugs	134
Epinephrine	134
Ephedrine	134
Amphetamine	134
Morphine	135
Nalorphine	137
Barbituates	137
Bibliography	137
IX. SOME EFFECTS OF FOOD ON THE SMALL INTESTINE.....	139
The Food Stimulus	139
Transit Time and Pattern With Foods.....	139
Bibliography	141
X. INTUSSUSCEPTION	143
Introduction	143

	<i>Page</i>
Cause of Intussusception	143
Radiologic Examination	145
Functional Intussusception	147
Mechanism	147
Emotional Stress	148
In Nutritional Disorders	150
Intussusception of Mechanical Origin	153
Jejunogastric Intussusception	153
Comment	154
Bibliography	154
XI. FUNCTIONAL DISORDERS OF THE SMALL INTESTINE.....	155
Disorders Consistent With Parasympathetic Overactivity.....	157
Mechanism of Pain.....	158
Diarrhea of Functional Origin	158
Sympathetic Inhibitory Effects.....	160
Functional Intussusception	161
Summary	161
Bibliography	162
XII. PERITONEAL ADHESIONS	163
Detection of Adhesions	163
Effects of Adhesions on the Intestine.....	168
Adhesions Causing Pain Without Ileus.....	168
Pathology	168
Mechanism of Pain	170
Summary	171
Bibliography	171
XIII. GAS DISTENTION OF THE SMALL INTESTINE AND ILEUS.....	173
Introduction	173
Radiologic Examination	173
Ileus	177
Definition	177
Pathologic Physiology of Ileus	177
Detection of Ileus	181
Identification of Gas-Containing Loops.....	183
Use of Opaque Material in Ileus.....	184
Source of Gas in Ileus.....	184
Classification of Ileus	185
Mechanical Ileus	185

	<i>Page</i>
Paralytic or Inhibition Ileus	187
Mesenteric Vascular Occlusion	187
Strangulation-Obstruction	188
Incomplete Devitalization (Infarction)	
Following Strangulation	190
Disorders of Motor Physiology With Gas Distention.....	191
Pain in the Back.....	191
Hypoproteinemia	193
Hypoproteinemia in Diseases of the Liver and Kidneys.....	197
Effect of Bile	197
Hypokalemia	199
Insufficient Acetylcholine Production	203
Nutritional Deficiencies	204
The Sentinel Loop	205
Porphyria	208
Fetal Meconium Ileus	209
Gas Distention from Organic Disease.....	209
Bibliography	209
XIV. THE MILLER-ABBOTT TUBE IN THE DIAGNOSIS AND	
TREATMENT OF ILEUS.....	212
Intubation of the Small Intestine.....	212
Miller-Abbott Double Lumen Tube.....	212
Polyvinyl Plastic Double Lumen Tube.....	213
Single Lumen Tubes	215
Comment	216
Results of Suction-Deflation in Ileus.....	216
Management of the Miller-Abbott Tube Procedure.....	217
Mercury in the Balloon	218
Technic of Insertion	219
Radiologic Examination With the Miller-Abbott Tube.....	229
Exploration of the Undistended Small Intestine.....	235
Complications in the Use of the Miller-Abbott Tube.....	235
Comment	237
Bibliography	238
XV. ALLERGY	240
Symptoms	240
Pathologic Physiology	241
Radiologic Examination	242

	<i>Page</i>
Allergy and Intestinal Bleeding	251
The Milk Reaction	253
Comment	253
Bibliography	256
XVI. DISORDERS OF NUTRITION.....	257
Classification	257
Primary Nutritional Disorders.....	257
Secondary Nutritional Disorders.....	258
Clinical Manifestations of Nutritional Disorders.....	258
Malabsorption	259
Lipodystrophy of the Intestine (Whipple's Disease).....	262
Parasprue	263
Pathology	263
Gross Pathology of the Intestine.....	265
The Mucous Membrane	266
The Submucosa	266
The Tunica Muscularis	267
The Intramural Nervous System.....	267
Radiologic Examination	271
Flocculation of Barium Sulfate in Nutritional Disorders.....	271
Motor Function and Mucosal Pattern.....	275
Disturbances in Gastric Physiology.....	277
Effect of Treatment	277
Kwashiorkor	285
The Lepore-Golden Syndrome	286
Secondary Nutritional Disorders	286
Hypoproteinemia	288
Diseases of the Biliary Tract.....	288
Diseases of the Mesentery.....	290
Antibiotics	290
Effects of Antimetabolites or Drugs.....	291
The Neurophysiologic Mechanism	291
Disorders of the Autonomic Nervous System.....	294
Nomenclature	296
Differential Diagnosis	297
Comment	298
Bibliography	300

	<i>Page</i>
XVII. DISEASES OF THE MESENTERY.....	304
Sclerosing Mesenteritis	304
Mesenteric Lymphadenitis	304
Mesenteric Cysts	306
Neoplastic Diseases	306
Comment	312
Bibliography	313
XVIII. INFLAMMATORY DISEASES	314
Acute Inflammation	314
Chronic Inflammation	314
Regional Enteritis	315
Pathology	315
Symptoms	317
Radiologic Examination	317
Comment	323
Nonsclerosing Ileitis	327
Comment	332
Sarcoidosis of the Intestine.....	332
Phlegmonous Jejunitis	334
Tuberculosis of the Intestine.....	334
Symptoms	336
Pathology	336
Radiologic Examination	343
Effect of Treatment.....	347
Differential Diagnosis of Inflammatory Lesions.....	349
Bibliography	351
XIX. NEOPLASMS	353
Introduction	353
Technic of Examination	355
Malignant Neoplasms	356
Primary Carcinoma	359
Lymphoma	367
Secondary Malignant Tumors	377
Plasmocytoma	381
Kaposi's Sarcoma	384
Facultative Benign or Malignant Neoplasms.....	384
Carcinoid	387
Smooth Muscle Tumors	391

	<i>Page</i>
Neurogenic Tumors	393
Tumors of Blood Vessel Origin.....	397
Benign Tumors	397
Polyposis	399
Lipoma	400
Lymphangioma	401
Endometrioma	401
Granuloma	401
Heterotopic Pancreas	404
Types of Abnormality	405
Sources of Error	407
Comments on Differential Diagnosis.....	408
Bibliography	409
XX. ENLARGEMENT OF THE ILEOCECAL VALVE.....	412
Normal Ileocecal Valve	412
Enlarged Ileocecal Valve	415
The Ileocecal Valve Syndrome	417
Prolapse of Ileal Mucosa	419
Differential Diagnosis	420
Bibliography	420
XXI. EFFECTS OF THERAPEUTIC IRRADIATION.....	421
Experimental Observations	421
Clinical Observations	422
Bibliography	423
XXII. SCLERODERMA	424
Pathology	424
Intestinal Symptoms	427
Comment	431
Bibliography	431
XXIII. PURPURA	433
Symptoms	433
Radiologic Examination	433
Comment	437
Bibliography	439
XXIV. THE SMALL INTESTINE AFTER CERTAIN OPERATIONS.....	440
Resection	440
End-to-End Anastomosis	440
Side-to-Side Anastomosis	441