A 77-year-old retired engineer and emancipated husband presented with right upper abdominal pain for 7 years occurring during movements of the upper part of the body, especially when ironing his shirts. With the exception of selective proximal vagotomy 30 years before for peptic ulcer disease, his case history was unremarkable. Chest x-ray (posterior anterior) excluded a vertebral cause of his complaints but revealed a foreign body in the right upper abdomen (Figure A). Radiologic follow-up was recommended but not performed. The previous 2 obviously inattentive esophagogastroduodenoscopies performed in outpatient clinic revealed only minimal Helicobacter-negative gastritis.

At our department, an esophagogastroduodenoscopy showed a needle-like foreign body sticking deep in the thickened posterior duodenal wall, protruding widely into the duodenal lumen (Figure B). It was removed by forceful extraction with a rat tooth forceps and identified as a dental root canal instrument (C, above, extracted instrument, distinctly changed by gastric acid; below, original). The patient then remembered that his complaints started after a dental root treatment under local anesthetics. Pain was possibly due to the irritation of the duodenal wall by the protruding needle while moving the upper part of the body during ironing.

Since 1692, when the 4-year-old Prussian prince Frederick Wilhelm, father of Frederick the Great, swallowed a shoe buckle, foreign body ingestion has found a considerable interest.1 Generally the foreign body passes through the gastrointestinal tract within 1 week, but it might get stuck, especially when sharp. Symptoms, mostly dysphagia, occur immediately. Location of the foreign body in the duodenum is very rare.2 The types of foreign bodies vary greatly, among which root canal instruments are extremely rare. An ingestion of such instruments occurs only in 0.12/100,000 root canal treatments.3

This case illustrates that foreign body ingestion induces atypical abdominal pain attacks and might persist even after 7 years when overlooked.

References