

A Rare and Overlooked Cause of Chronic Diarrhea: Hereditary Transthyretin Amyloidosis

Zülal İstemihan¹, Ahmet Oğuz Çelik², Neslihan Berker³, Bilger Çavuş¹, Filiz Akyüz¹

¹Division of Gastroenterohepatology, Department of Internal Medicine, Istanbul Faculty of Medicine, Istanbul University, Istanbul, Türkiye

²Department of Internal Medicine, Istanbul Faculty of Medicine, Istanbul University, Istanbul, Türkiye

³Department of Pathology, Istanbul Faculty of Medicine, Istanbul University, Istanbul, Türkiye

Cite this article as: İstemihan Z, Çelik AO, Berker N, Çavuş B, Akyüz F. A Rare and Overlooked Cause of Chronic Diarrhea: Hereditary Transthyretin Amyloidosis. *J Enterocolitis*. 2025;4(3):64-67.

Corresponding author: Zülal İstemihan, e-mail: zulalistemihan@hotmail.com

Received: November 15, 2025 **Accepted:** December 16, 2025

DOI:10.14744/Jenterocolitis.2025.25974



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Abstract

Hereditary transthyretin amyloidosis is a rare, rapidly progressive, and fatal disease caused by pathogenic variants in the transthyretin gene. It is inherited in an autosomal dominant manner. The disease is characterized by the accumulation of amyloid fibrils in various organs, particularly the peripheral nerves, heart, kidneys, eyes, and gastrointestinal tract. We present a rare case of transthyretin amyloidosis manifested by chronic diarrhea.

Keywords: Amyloidosis, diarrhea, hereditary

INTRODUCTION

Amyloidosis is a heterogeneous group of diseases caused by the extracellular deposition of insoluble fibrillar proteins, leading to multiple organ dysfunction and a shortened lifespan.¹ Various systems can be affected by amyloid deposition, with the digestive tract being one of the organs involved, potentially causing chronic diarrhea.² Gastrointestinal involvement in amyloidosis can present with a variety of clinical symptoms, including weight loss, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, bleeding, and abnormal bowel habits.³ The onset of gastrointestinal tract involvement is often insidious, and the nonspecific nature of the symptoms makes diagnosis challenging, often resulting in diagnostic delays. Endoscopic biopsy plays a crucial role in diagnosing amyloidosis, determining the subtype, and ruling out other potential diagnoses. While many endoscopic findings have been described, they are generally nonspecific and include edema, erythema, submucosal hematoma, or even normal findings.⁴ We present a rare case of transthyretin (TTR) amyloidosis manifesting as chronic diarrhea.

CASE REPORT

A 63-year-old woman presented with a 2-year history of watery diarrhea and a 30 kg weight loss over the same period. She had no significant medical history and was not on any medications. She did not smoke or consume alcohol. On physical examination, the patient appeared dehydrated. Stool tests were negative for polymorphonuclear leukocytes, starch, and fat. Microbiological cultures were also negative. The patient had normocytic anemia, while iron, vitamin B12, and folic acid levels were normal. Liver and kidney function tests were within normal limits, and celiac antibodies were negative. Protein electrophoresis revealed an M-band (Figure 1). Her IgG level was 1681 mg/dL (normal range: 700–1600 mg/dL), while IgA and IgM levels were normal. Serum and urine immunofixation electrophoresis showed IgG lambda and lambda light chain. Magnetic resonance enteroclysis revealed no significant intestinal pathology (Figure 2). Both gastroscopy and colonoscopy, including examination of the terminal ileum, were unremarkable, and biopsies were taken from all segments. Jejunal aspirate was negative. Biopsies from the antrum, corpus (Figure 3), duodenum (Figure 4), and transverse colon showed deposits consistent with amyloidosis. PET-CT imaging revealed several hypermetabolic lymph nodes (SUVmax: 10.4) with effaced fatty hilums in the left inguinal area, the largest measuring 16x14 mm (Figure 5). Lymph node excision was performed, and pathology confirmed lambda amyloid deposition in the vessel walls. A bone marrow biopsy revealed hypercellular bone marrow with a minimal plasma cell population and lambda light chain monopathy. Echocardiography showed concentrically increased cardiac wall thickness, with a normal ejection fraction. ProBNP levels were elevated at 2395 pg/mL (normal range: 0–125). Cardiac magnetic resonance imaging (Figure 6) revealed an interventricular septum thickness of 18 mm and an increased lateral wall thickness of 18 mm. Concentric hypertrophy of the left ventricle was observed, along with thickening of the interatrial septum. Subendocardial ring enhancement, more prominent in the basal segments, suggested cardiac amyloidosis. Genetic testing confirmed the presence of a transthyretin amyloidosis gene variant, and the patient was diagnosed with hereditary transthyretin amyloidosis.

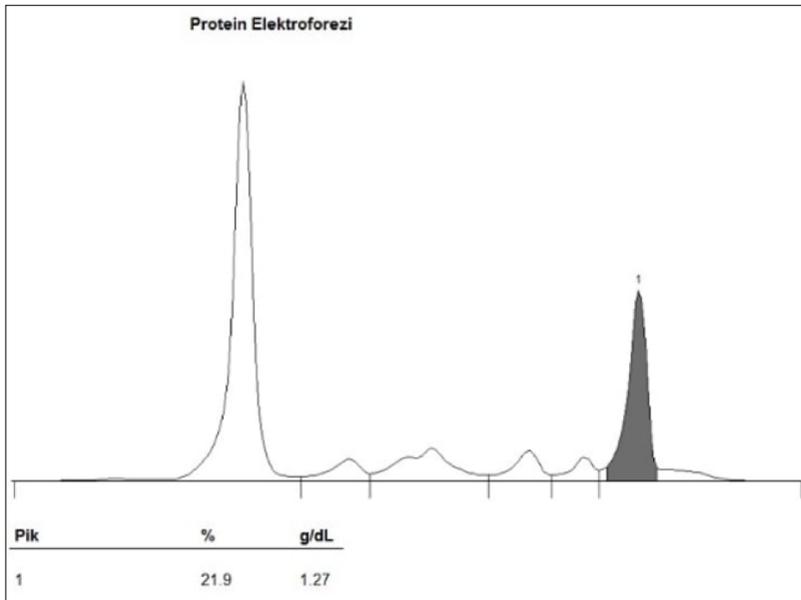


Figure 1. M-band in protein electrophoresis.



Figure 2. Magnetic resonance enteroclysis findings.

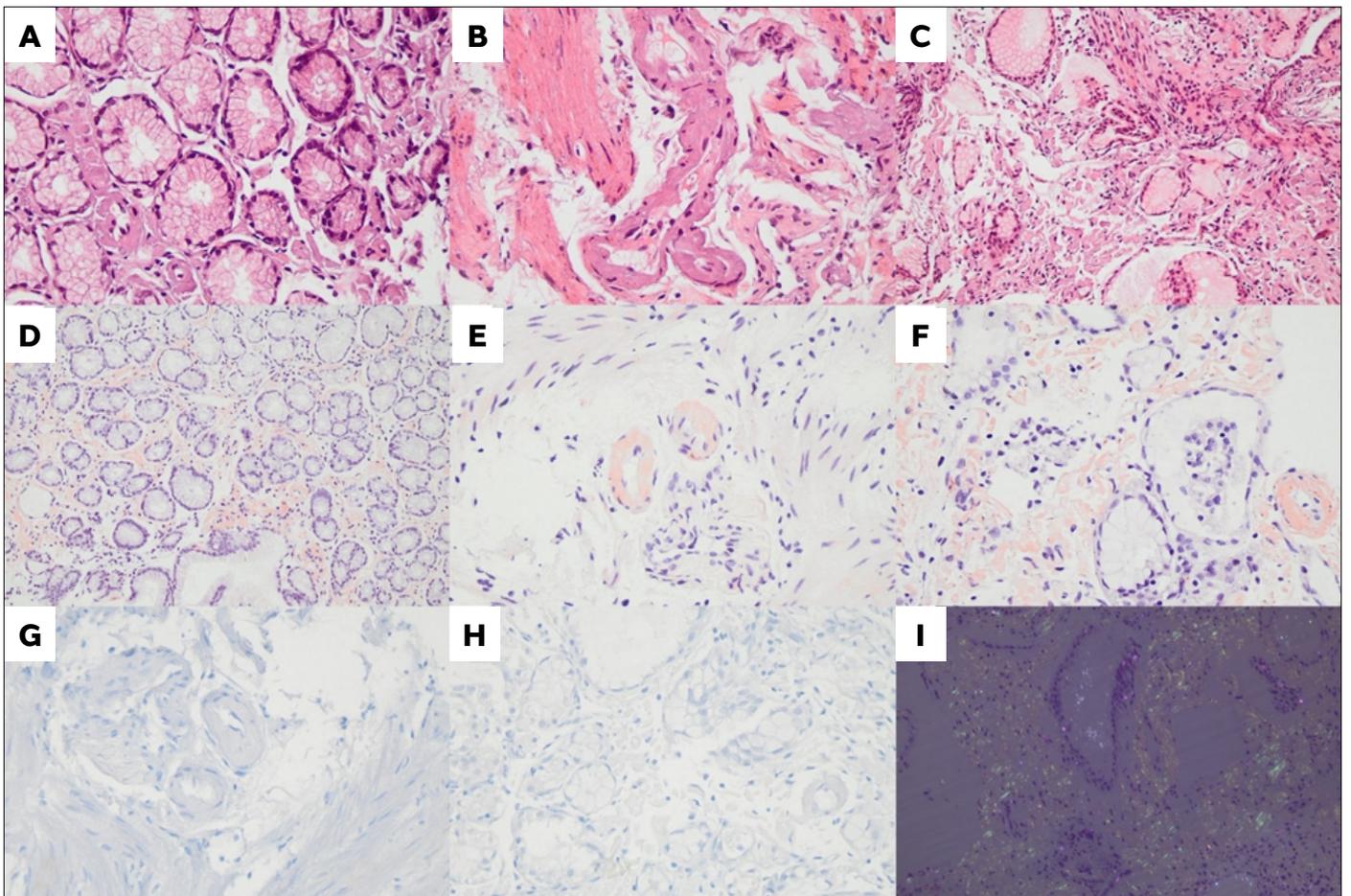


Figure 3. Amyloid deposition in gastric biopsies taken from the antrum and corpus: (A) Antrum mucosa showing homogeneous eosinophilic thickening of the vessel walls and eosinophilic droplets in the lamina propria, suspicious for amyloid (H&E, $\times 400$); (B) Antrum submucosal vessel walls with homogeneous eosinophilic thickening, suspicious for amyloid (H&E, $\times 400$); (C) Corpus mucosa showing similar eosinophilic thickening of the vessel walls and droplets in the lamina propria (H&E, $\times 200$); (D-F) Congo red staining showing amyloid deposition at $\times 200$ (D) and $\times 400$ (E) in the antrum, and at $\times 400$ (F) in the corpus; (G-H) Negative immunostaining with the anti-Amyloid-A antibody at $\times 400$ in the antrum (G) and corpus (H); (I) Congo red stain under polarized light demonstrating apple-green birefringence in the corpus ($\times 200$).

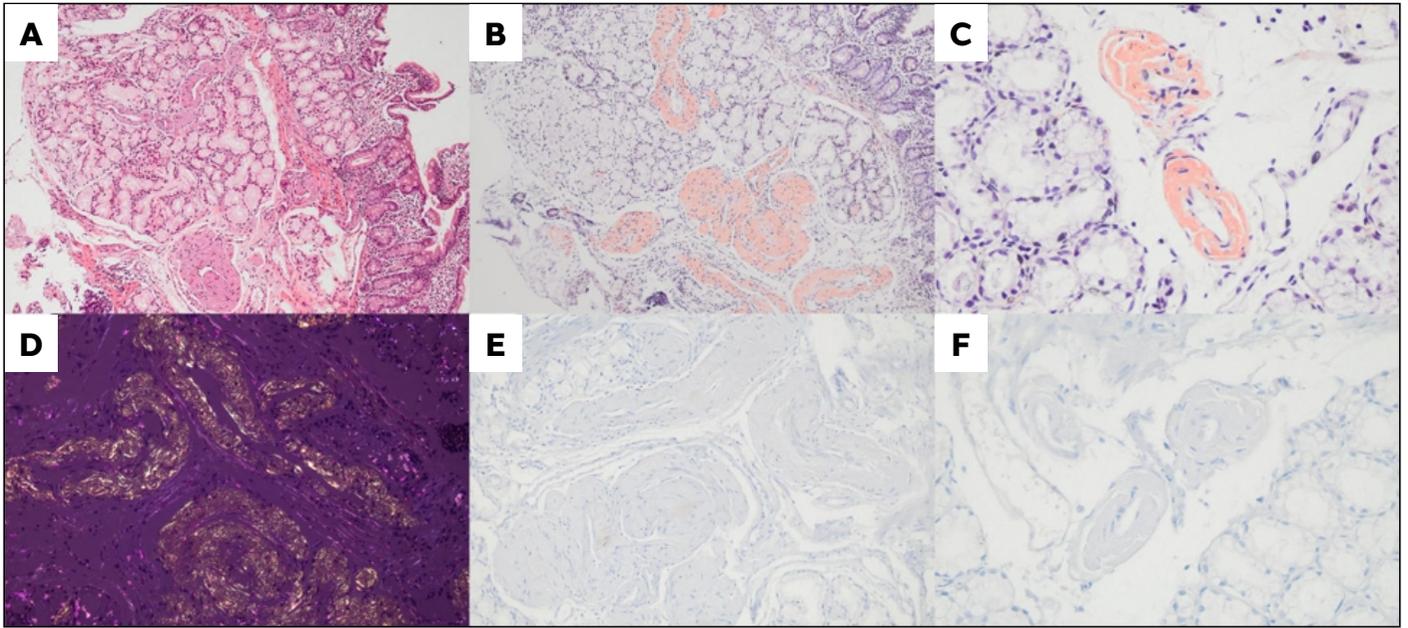


Figure 4. Amyloid deposition in the duodenum endoscopic biopsy specimen: (A) Submucosal vessel walls with homogeneous eosinophilic thickening, suspicious for amyloid (H&E, $\times 100$); (B-C) Congo red staining showing amyloid deposition at $\times 100$ (B) and $\times 400$ (C); (D) Congo red stain under polarized light demonstrating apple-green birefringence ($\times 200$); (E-F) Negative immunostaining with the anti-Amyloid-A antibody at $\times 200$ (E) and $\times 400$ (F).

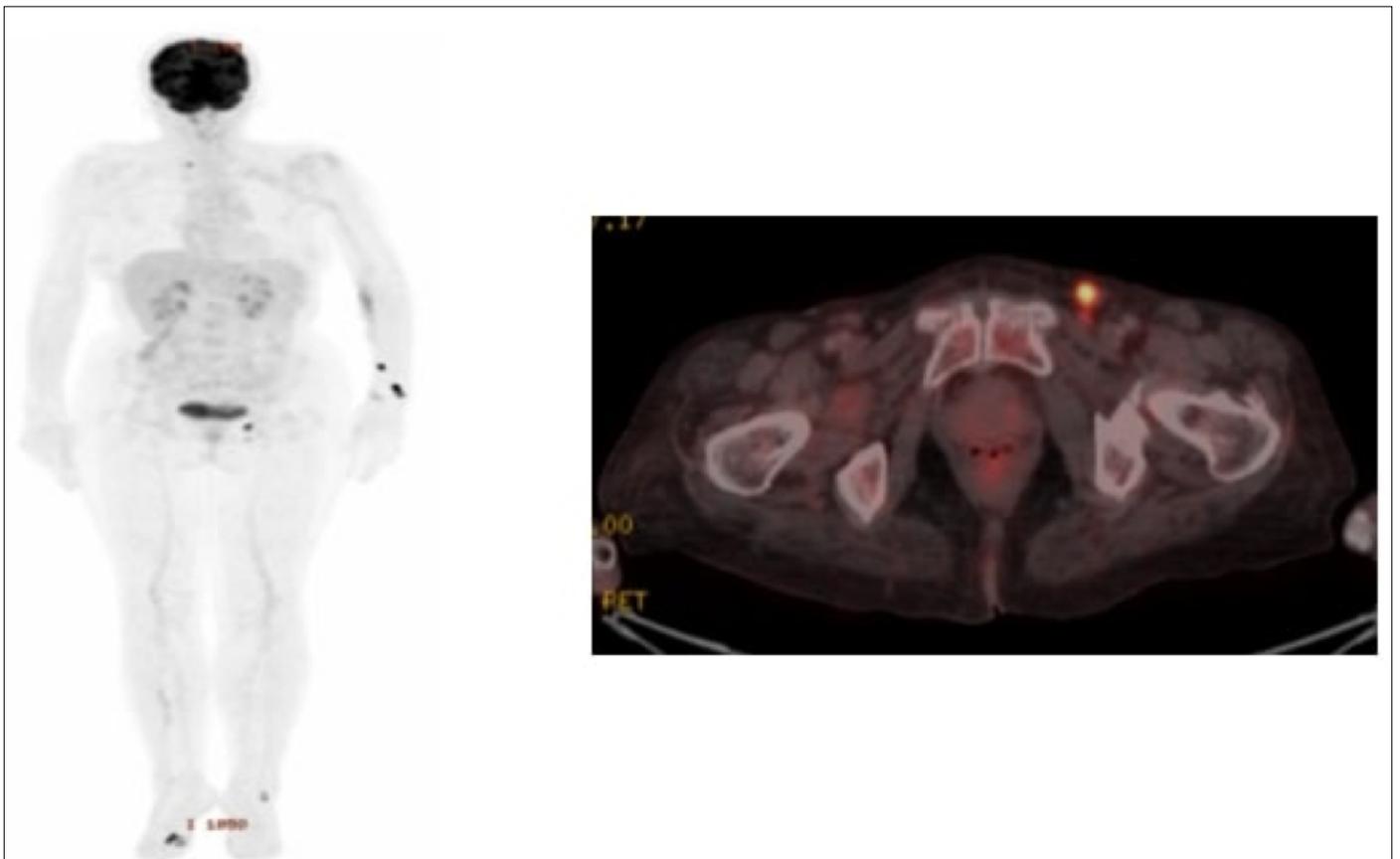


Figure 5. PET-CT findings.

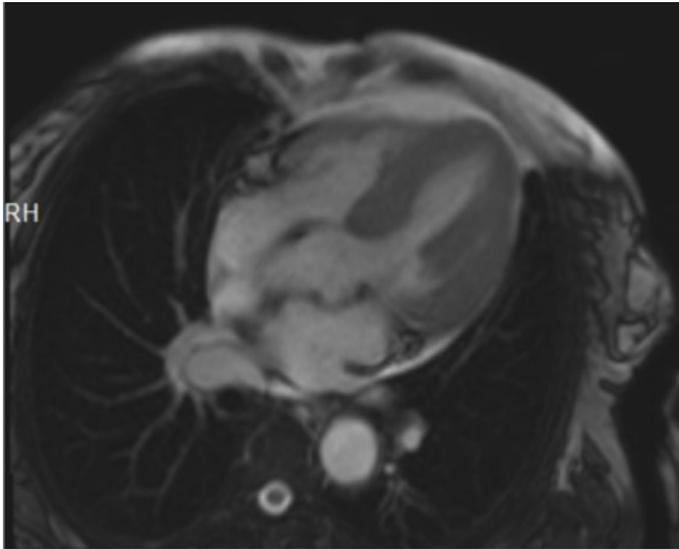


Figure 6. Cardiac magnetic resonance imaging findings.

DISCUSSION

Amyloidosis refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders, which can be classified into two main subtypes: systemic and localized amyloidosis.⁵ The most common subtype is systemic amyloidosis, which can be due to either acquired or hereditary conditions. The most well-known hereditary condition is caused by mutations in the TTR gene.⁶

Hereditary TTR amyloidosis is a rare, systemic, autosomal dominant disease caused by mutations in the gene encoding the transthyretin transport protein.^{7,8} It is characterized by progressive peripheral sensorimotor and/or autonomic neuropathy, typically beginning in the 3rd to 5th decades of life. The disease often involves the heart, central nervous system, eyes, and kidneys.⁹ Hereditary transthyretin amyloidosis should be suspected in adults with cardiac conduction blocks, restrictive cardiomyopathy, and nephropathy. Gastrointestinal manifestations can significantly impact a patient's quality of life, primarily due to damage to the autonomic nervous system, which affects motility and secretory functions in the gastrointestinal tract. Nearly 70% of individuals with transthyretin amyloidosis report gastrointestinal manifestations.¹⁰ In some cases, gastrointestinal symptoms, especially diarrhea, may be the first symptom to appear.¹¹

The most common gastrointestinal symptoms, in order of frequency, include unintentional weight loss, early satiety, alternating constipation and diarrhea, constipation, chronic diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, and fecal incontinence.¹² Changes in bowel habits may be the only symptom in some patients, and if not considered in the differential diagnosis, these patients may undergo multiple endoscopic examinations.¹³

Gastrointestinal manifestations in hereditary TTR amyloidosis often present insidiously and nonspecifically. These symptoms are poorly specific, leading to misdiagnosis with more common conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome and functional dyspepsia. Gastroenterologists play a critical role in both the diagnosis and management of this disease. Early diagnosis and treatment are essential for improving the patient's quality of life. Therefore, hereditary TTR amyloidosis should be considered in the differential diagnosis, especially as a rare cause of chronic diarrhea.

Ethics Committee Approval: This is a single case report, and therefore ethics

committee approval was not required in accordance with institutional policies.

Informed Consent: Written informed consent was obtained from the patients participating in this study.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

Author Contribution: Concept – Z.İ., A.O.Ç.; Design – Z.İ., A.O.Ç.; Supervision – B.Ç., F.A.; Materials – Z.İ., A.O.Ç., B.Ç., F.A.; Data Collection and/or Processing – Z.İ., A.O.Ç., B.Ç., F.A.; Analysis and/or Interpretation – Z.İ., B.Ç., F.A.; Literature Review – Z.İ., A.O.Ç., N.B., B.Ç., F.A.; Writing – Z.İ., B.Ç., F.A.; Critical Review – Z.İ., B.Ç., F.A.

Declaration of Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interest.

Funding: Authors declare that this study have not received any financial support.

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