

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

WILEY

Early diagnosis of egg yolk-associated FPIES relates to early tolerance acquisition

To the Editor,

Food protein-induced enterocolitis syndrome (FPIES) is a non-immunoglobulin E (IgE)-mediated food allergy that predominantly affects infants and is characterized by repetitive vomiting that occurs 1–4 h after the ingestion of causative food. The etiology and underlying mechanisms of FPIES are not well understood. Recently, egg yolk (EY) has been recognized as a major causative food of FPIES.^{1,2} Most FPIES patients achieve tolerance with age³; however, the practice management of EY-associated FPIES (EY-FPIES) has yet to be established. In a preliminary analysis of EY-FPIES, we found that the patients who acquired tolerance to EY had been diagnosed at a significantly younger age than non-tolerated patients despite no difference in the age of onset between both patients. This suggested that the early diagnosis and intervention is beneficial for tolerance acquisition in EY-FPIES. To investigate this further, we compared clinical outcomes between the early and late diagnosis of EY-FPIES.

The present study enrolled 21 patients with EY-FPIES (1) diagnosed by positive oral food challenge (OFC) tests at our hospital between April 2018 and April 2021 who (2) subsequently underwent OFC to evaluate tolerance acquisition (re-OFC) at least once. The open OFC was performed by ingestion of a single dose once or three divided doses every 30 min. The OFC was considered positive according to the diagnostic criteria of the international guidelines of FPIES.⁴ After confirmation by OFC, we instructed all patients to continue complete elimination of EY, regardless of threshold doses of OFC. We retrospectively collected data from electronic medical records on sex, age of first ingestion of EY, disease onset, first visit to our hospital, diagnosis, specific IgE (sIgE) to EY measured by ImmunoCAP test at diagnosis, asymptomatic histories of EY consumption before onset, the number of symptomatic episodes before diagnosis, the period between the first ingestion of EY and diagnosis of EY-FPIES, and age of tolerance acquisition. Tolerance acquisition was defined by (1) negative OFC and (2) the ability of daily EY consumption without FPIES reactions for three months at home. We divided the patients into the following two groups according to their age at the time of diagnosis: the early diagnosis (ED) group (<12 months) and the late diagnosis (LD) group (≥12 months), and compared the clinical features between both groups. A sIgE value higher than 0.35 U_A/ml was defined as positive. Statistical analyses were performed using GraphPad Prism 9. The Mann–Whitney U test was used to compare nonparametric independent samples

between the groups. Tolerance acquisition during follow-up was analyzed using a Kaplan–Meier survival curve and the log-rank test. P-value <0.05 was considered statistically significant. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the KKR Sapporo Medical Center (2021–06).

Patients' characteristics are shown in Table 1. The ED group consisted of 12 patients (57.1%), 10 (83.3%) of whom acquired tolerance to EY, and the LD group consisted of nine patients (42.9%), three (33.3%) of whom acquired tolerance to EY. Among 21 patients with EY-associated FPIES, a total of 35 re-OFCs were performed, with a median interval of seven months (interquartile range [IQR], 6–11 months) (Figure 1). The median ages that re-OFC proved negative in ED and LD groups were 16 and 26 months, respectively ($p = .014$) (Table 1). The time to tolerance acquisition was significantly longer in the LD group than that in the ED group, as shown in the Kaplan–Meier analysis (log-rank, $p = .0015$) (Figure 2). The median ages of onset and first visit to our hospital were significantly younger in the ED group than those in the LD group (Table 1). All patients had a history of three episodes (IQR 2–6) of asymptomatic consumption before onset. Although the median age of the first introduction of EY in the ED group was younger than that in the LD group (six months vs. eight months, $p = .004$), there was no significant difference in the median number of asymptomatic consumptions before onset and the period between the first introduction and onset between the groups. The period between the first introduction of EY and FPIES diagnosis was shorter in the ED group than that in the LD group (2.5 months vs. 7 months, $p = .0002$).

We demonstrated that the ED group achieved tolerance at a higher rate than the LD group, suggesting that early diagnosis predicts favorable prognosis in EY-FPIES. Consistent with a previous report,⁵ all patients with EY-FPIES had histories of asymptomatic consumption before disease onset. Involvement of both innate and adaptive immunities with resultant proinflammatory cytokine production has been suggested in the pathology of acute FPIES.⁶ Our results suggest that the development of EY-FPIES requires sensitization of the adaptive immune system. T helper (Th)2 and Th17 cells are considered as key players of the immune response in FPIES,⁷ which is reflected by local infiltration of eosinophils and neutrophils, respectively. Adaptive immunity of infants shows dynamic changes with a rapid decline of regulatory T cells and maturation of Th17, while Th2 dominance is preserved.⁸ Additionally, the

TABLE 1 Characteristics of patients with EY-associated FPIES

	Total	ED group	LD group	P-value
Total; n	21 (100%)	12	9	
Sex: male, n (%)	12 (57.1%)	7 (58.3%)	5 (55.6%)	
Duration of follow-up (months)				
Median (IQR)	21 (13.5–35.0)	16.5 (12.25–22.75)	29.0 (21.0–37.0)	.0988
Age at first symptomatic episode (months)				
Median (IQR)	8 (7–9)	7 (6.25–8)	9 (8.5–10)	.0004
Age at first visit to our hospital (months)				
Median (IQR)	10 (8–13)	8.5 (7.25–9)	13 (12–19)	<.0001
Age at diagnosis of EY-associated FPIES (months)				
Median (IQR)	10 (9–14)	9 (8.25–10)	14 (12.5–20.5)	<.0001
Positive EY-specific IgE at diagnosis				
Egg yolk; n (%)	7 (33.3%)	4 (33.3%)	3 (33.3%)	>.9999
Number of episodes before diagnosis of FPIES				
Median (IQR)	2 (2–3)	2 (1.25–2.75)	2 (2–4)	.1742
Age of first introduction of EY (months)				
Median (IQR)	7 (6–8)	6 (5.25–7)	8 (7–8)	.0040
Asymptomatic histories of EY consumption before onset				
Yes: n (%)		12 (100%)	9 (100%)	
Number of histories	3 (2–6)	3.5 (2–6)	3 (2–6)	.7647
Period between first introduction and onset (months)				
Median (IQR)	1 (0–1.5)	0.5 (0–1)	1 (1–2)	.1527
Period between onset and first visit to our hospital (months)				
Median (IQR)	2 (1–3)	1 (0–2)	3 (3–10.5)	.0008
Period between onset and diagnosis (months)				
Median (IQR)	3 (2–4)	2 (1–2.75)	4 (3–12)	.0011
Period between first introduction and diagnosis (months)				
Median (IQR)	4 (2–7)	2.5 (2–4)	7 (4.5–13)	.0002
Period between diagnosis and first re-OFC (months)				
Median (IQR)	7 (6–11)	7 (6–10.25)	7 (6.5–13.5)	.2659
Tolerance acquisition				
Yes: n (%)	13 (65.0%)	10 (83.3%)	3 (33.3%)	.0318
Age at last-passed re-OFC (months)				
Median (IQR)	16 (15.5–20.5)	16 (14.75–17.75)	26 (20–49)	.0140
Total number of re-OFC	35	14	21	

Abbreviations: EY, egg yolk; IQR, interquartile range; OFC, oral food challenge; re-OFC, OFC for evaluation of tolerance acquisition.

intestinal barrier function immaturity was also observed, resulting in a higher permeability of antigens across the intestines.⁹ Thus, early infants may be predisposed to FPIES because of immunological as well as anatomical immaturity. Although both ED and LD groups shared a similar interval between the first introduction of EY and onset, and a similar number of episodes before diagnosis of EY-FPIES, the period between the onset and diagnosis in the ED group was significantly shorter than that in the LD group. The median age at the last episode before diagnosis of EY-FPIES in the ED group was also significantly younger than that in the LD group

(eight months vs. 10 months, $p = .0045$). The result might have been influenced by parental anxieties related to earlier onset in the ED group. Our results suggest that earlier elimination of EY after onset is one of the possible factors that prevents the complete development of EY-FPIES.

The median age at onset in the 21 patients with EY-FPIES was 8 months (IQR, 7–9 months), which is comparable to previous reports.¹⁰ Similar to another report,¹⁰ 13 patients (65.0%) achieved tolerance at the median age of 16 months. This is earlier than the median age reported in a European series that demonstrates a 50% cumulative

FIGURE 1 Oral food challenge flow diagram showing a cascade of negative and positive results. ED, early diagnosis; LD, late diagnosis

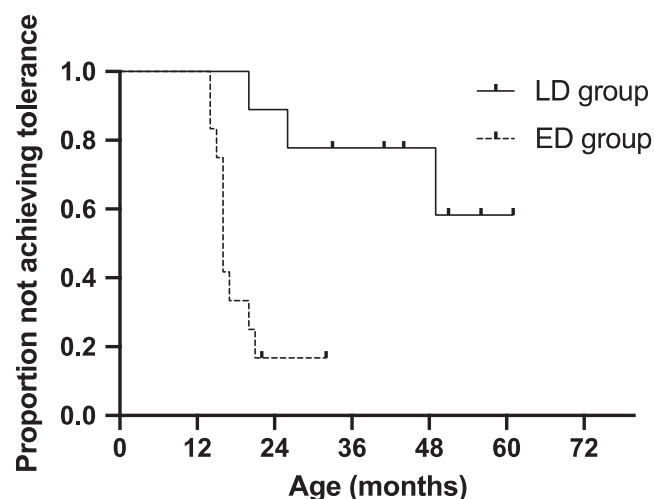
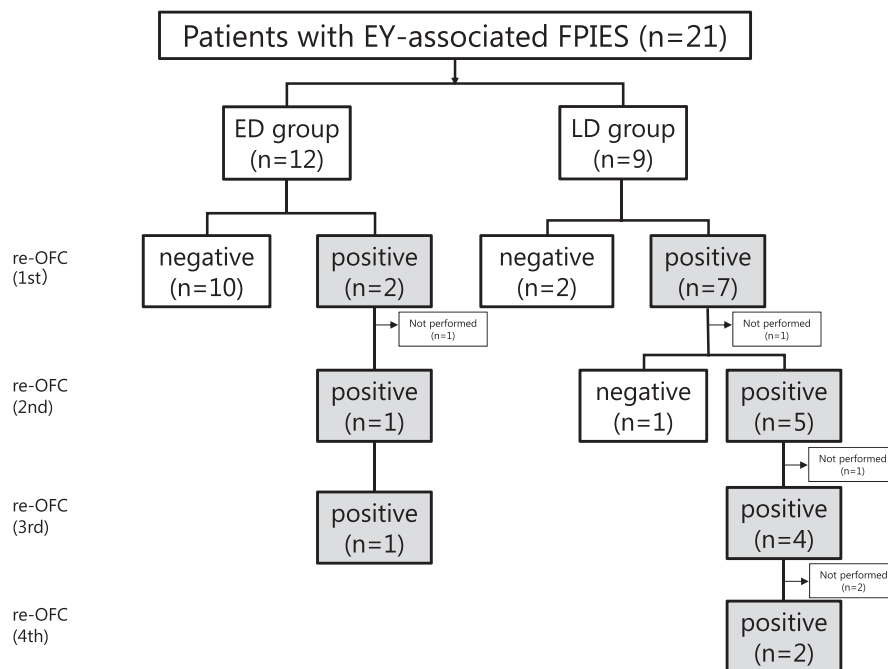


FIGURE 2 Kaplan-Meier analysis showing tolerance acquisition over time. ED, early diagnosis; LD, late diagnosis

probability of resolution at the age of 41 months.¹¹ Notably, the median age of diagnosis is older (12 months) in that study compared with that in our series. Thus, the different clinical courses may be attributed to differences in age of diagnosis. Otherwise, the clinical course may depend on ethnicity and complementary feeding practices. In 2017, the Japanese Society of Pediatric Allergy and Clinical Immunology recommended the early introduction of EY to infants with a high risk for IgE-mediated egg allergy. This might have increased the number of early-onset EY-FPIES in Japan. Our results suggest that a first re-OFC seven months after the diagnosis is reasonable for preventing unnecessary food avoidance in EY-FPIES.

Our study is limited by a retrospective review of a small number of patients from a single institute. Additionally, accidental

exposures after diagnosis occurred in one patient in the LD group, influencing the scheduling of re-OFC. Moreover, we evaluated solely patients with a confirmational diagnosis by OFC, which might be insufficient to reflect the whole heterogeneity of EY-FPIES.

Conclusively, the ED group achieved tolerance in EY-FPIES earlier compared with the LD group. A prospective interventional study is needed to prove that early diagnosis and subsequent instruction of complete elimination are beneficial for EY-FPIES.

KEYWORDS

early diagnosis, egg yolk, food hypersensitivity, food protein-induced enterocolitis syndrome, FPIES, tolerance acquisition

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank all patients who participated in this study. We would like to thank Enago (www.enago.jp) for the English language review.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Yuka Okura: Conceptualization (lead); Data curation (lead); Formal analysis (lead); Investigation (lead); Methodology (lead); Project administration (lead); Writing – original draft (lead). **Masaki Shimomura:** Data curation (supporting); Writing – review & editing (supporting). **Yutaka Takahashi:** Methodology (supporting); Supervision (supporting); Writing – review & editing (supporting). **Ichiro Kobayashi:** Methodology (supporting); Supervision (supporting); Writing – review & editing (supporting).

PEER REVIEW

The peer review history for this article is available at <https://publons.com/publon/10.1111/pai.13769>.

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Editor: Motohiro Ebisawa

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