



# Casting a “Spell”: A Common (But Under-Diagnosed) Cause of Transient Neurological Symptoms

Christiana K. Prucnal, MS-III, RN-BC, BSN,<sup>1,2</sup> Paul S. Jansson, MD, MS<sup>3,4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University, <sup>2</sup> Massachusetts General Hospital, <sup>3</sup> Brigham and Women’s Hospital, <sup>4</sup> Harvard Medical School



## Introduction - Why This Case

- Transient neurological symptoms (“spells”) are seen in 20% of patients with cerebral amyloid angiopathy, common in the elderly
- Amyloid “spells” can be confused with stroke or TIA and predict symptomatic hemorrhage
- However, management is opposite of TIA: discontinue antiplatelets and anticoagulants

## Case Presentation

### History of Present Illness

- 87 year-old female with visual disturbances, dull headache, and mild confusion
- One day of “unusual shapes and colors” while watching TV in both eyes (even when closed)
- Gradual, moderate-severity retro-orbital headache, unrelieved by acetaminophen
- Difficulty dialing daughter’s phone number
- Symptoms now entirely resolved

### Pertinent Past Medical History

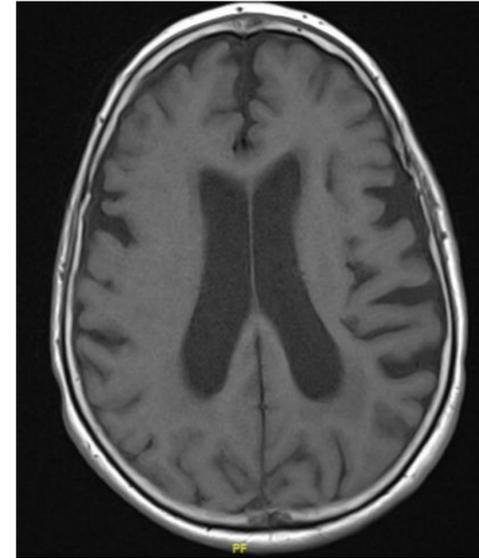
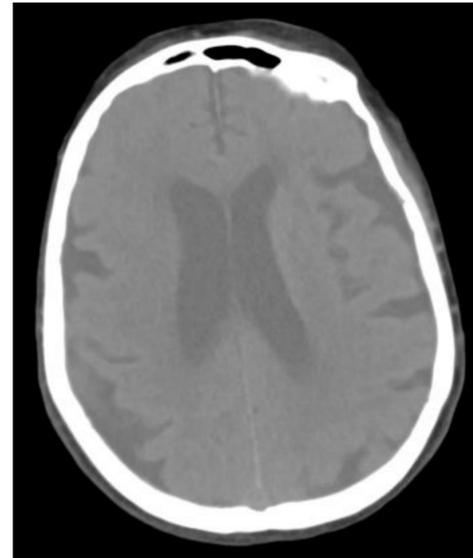
- HTN, HLD, VTE (lifelong anticoagulation)
- Chronic posterior vitreous detachment
- Cataracts and suspected glaucoma

### Physical Examination

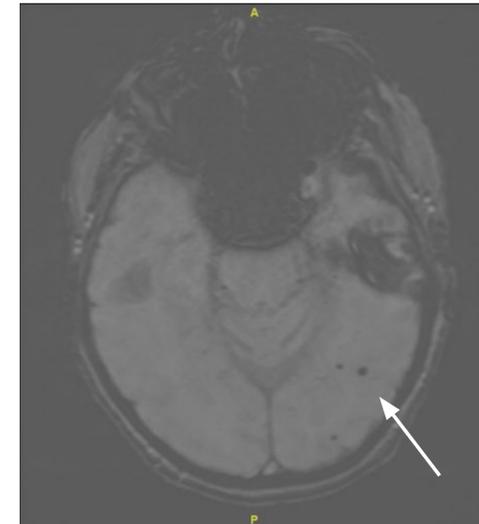
- Normal Vital Signs
- Neuro: A&O x 3, CN II-XII intact, 5/5 Strength, Sensation intact, Finger-to-nose coordinated, Mild shuffling gait (baseline)
- Ophtho: Normal visual fields, acuity 20/30, IOP 20mmHg, EOMI, PERRL

Labs	
ESR 10 (Normal 0-18)	CRP 3.8 (<10)
Troponin T (HS) 11 (0-9)	

## Imaging



- Normal CT head (L) and T1 MRI (R) of the brain



- Normal MRA (L). Susceptibility-weighted MRI (R) showing microhemorrhages in the left occipital lobe

## Discussion and Teaching Points

- CAA is a relatively common age-related disease (23-57% of elderly on autopsy)
- β-amyloid deposition weakens the walls of cerebral small vessels and intracranial hemorrhage is most common presentation
- Transient neurological symptoms (“amyloid spells”) of numbness, weakness, paresthesias or hallucinations can occur
- MRI (gradient echo or susceptibility-weighted) shows focal hemorrhage in cortex corresponding to symptoms
- “Spells” predict symptomatic intracranial hemorrhage and discontinuation of antiplatelets and anticoagulants is traditionally recommended

## Conclusion

- Amyloid “spells” are transient neurological symptoms that may mimic TIA
- Management includes discontinuation of anti-platelet and anti-coagulant medications

## References

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