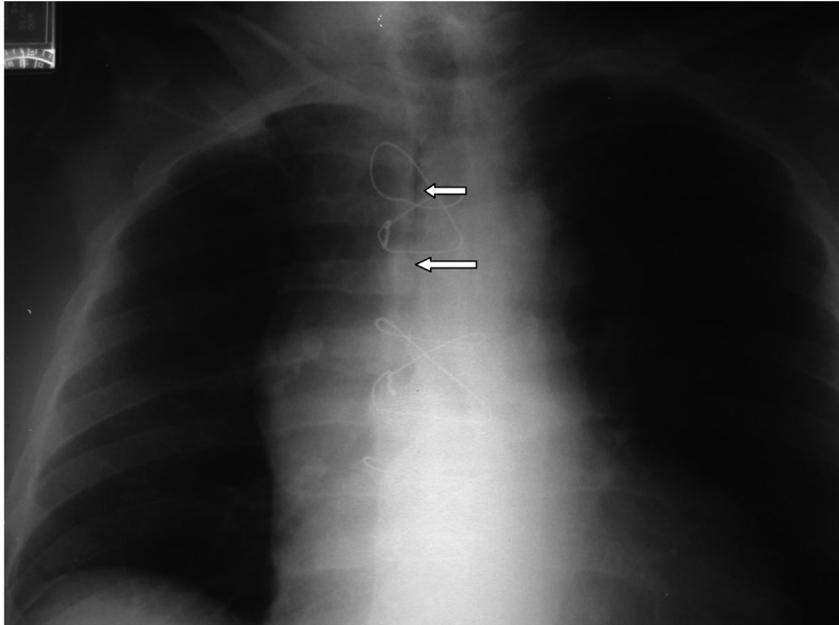




Chest x-ray quiz

Answer and discussion



Noteworthy is the mid-sternal strip of lucency (arrowed) which is indicative of a dehisced sternum. Sternal dehiscence is the process of separation of the bony sternum, which often is accompanied by mediastinitis (infection of the deep soft tissue).² Although the sternal wires appear in place, they often do move “wandering sternal wires”.¹ For those who nurse patients following cardiac surgery via a medial sternotomy it is essential to be aware of early manifestations of infection in the mediastinum. “Clicking” or “grating” sensation of the sternum is an ominous sign that the sternum is loose. Infection deep to the sternum will lead to sternal separation, at first just a small separation. The best chance of repairing this problem is before the bone is damaged. Once the wires have cut through, there are segments of bone everywhere, which can’t be put back together again. If patient is returned to the operating room with only mild sternal separation, the surgeon will cut the wires out, wash out the wound, and place 2 drains before rewiring. Appropriate antibiotics will give a good chance of healing. Early intervention is the key to a successful outcome.

References

- [1] Boiselle PM, Mansilla AV. A closer look at the midsternal stripe sign. *AJR* 2002;178:945–8.
 [2] Grevious MA. Sternal Dehiscence Reconstruction. 2016. <http://emedicine.medscape.com/article/1278627-overview>. [Accessed 27 July 17].