

Short Communication

Rosemary cheilitis: one to remember

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As well as being a familiar kitchen spice, rosemary is commonly incorporated into cosmetics, perhaps because of its antioxidant or antimicrobial properties (1).

Case Report

A 59-year-old judge presented with severe cheilitis of one year's duration. He had no risk factors for candidiasis. He had treated the lip with topical hydrocortisone and Carmex, an OTC therapeutic lipstick. He had also used oral nystatin and tetracycline preparations without benefit.

Physical examination showed an edematous lower lip with dusky erythema of both the upper and lower lips, extending intraorally on the lower lip to the (alveolar) sulcus. The lip was tender and contrasted sharply with the normal, pink oral mucosa. There was some erythema and a minimal loss of papillae of the tip of the tongue. There was one palpable node on each side of the neck in the region of the hyoid bone. A culture for *Candida* was negative.

Patch testing to 41 antigens in a diagnostic series and 21 flavoring agents and dyes, as well as his medications, showed + reactions to wood tars and nickel at D2 and to nickel at D5. He was also positive to rosemary at D2 (++) and D5 (+). He had a positive intradermal test with 1 mg of hydrocortisone hemisuccinate. After the test result was obtained, he gave a history of regularly eating foods spiced with rosemary. He cleared within a few days after he avoided rosemary.

Comment

The name rosemary brings to mind the famous speech in *Hamlet* (2) when Ophelia says: "There's rosemary. That's for remembrance. Pray you, love, remember." The use of rosemary as a culinary and medicinal agent goes

back to ancient Greece and Rome, when it was used in funeral and marriage ceremonies as a symbol of enduring affection. It was found in wreaths worn at festivals, and magic spells often called for it. It was a common feature of Greek and Roman gardens, and it was sometimes placed under the pillow to ward off nightmares (3).

Rosemarinus officinalis is a small (usually around 1 m) Mediterranean shrub of the mint family, found near the sea (hence the name), originally from Portugal and NW Spain (4). Oil of rosemary is used as an essential oil, and rosemary imparts a pungent, piney flavor to food (3).

Reactions reported include contact dermatitis of the hands, forearms and face in a man working in food processing (1), and a man who reacted to the plant used as a poultice (5). The former patient was allergic to carnosol, said to be contained in rosemary as well as several species of *Salvia*. Neither those patients nor the one reported here reacted to other members of the Labiatae. My patient did not react to spearmint or peppermint, but was not tested to sage (*Salvia officinalis*), also said to contain carnosol (1).

References

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