

Sensitization to Fig with Cross-Sensitization to Weeping Fig and Natural Rubber Latex

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Dear Sir,

It was with great interest that we read the article by Antico et al. [1] reporting on patients with IgE-mediated food allergy to fig (*Ficus carica*) without cross-sensitization to weeping fig (*Ficus benjamina*) and lacking association with the 'latex-fruit syndrome'. Since in that study both patients had a personal history of allergic rhinitis with sensitization to grass and birch pollen, the authors discuss whether fig allergy is a result of cross-reactivity to pollens or a result of cosensitization. However, RAST or immunoblot inhibition assays with pollen allergen extracts such as birch pollen and fig allergen extracts, which would have elucidated this issue, were not performed. Interestingly, in a study by Mock et al. [2], no cross-reactivity to birch pollen was demonstrated in a fig-allergic subject by immunoblot inhibition.

Recently, we had two additional patients who developed urticaria, angioedema and asthma (patient 1) and severe abdominal pain (patient 2) within minutes after eating figs [3]. In both patients, IgE-mediated sensitization to fig could be confirmed by skin prick testing, measurement of allergen-specific IgE, basophil activation tests and immunoblot assays. Both patients were also sensitized to *F. benjamina*. By RAST and

immunoblot inhibition, we could demonstrate cross-reactivity between *F. carica* and *F. benjamina*. None of the patients showed cross-reactivity to natural rubber latex and in particular not to Hev b 6.01 and Hev b 8. Hev b 6.02 has been characterized as a cross-reactive allergen in natural rubber latex and *F. benjamina* allergy [4]. In our patients, immunoblots showed bands at 21, 24, 27, 29 and 31 kD. Results of our immunoblot studies are in keeping with previous studies [2, 5], but also revealed some additional allergens. In addition, we also found a patient with latex allergy and IgE reactivity to fig. Cross-reactivity could be demonstrated via inhibition and determination of the allergenic protein profile; in this case, natural rubber latex was the original cause of sensitization and the cross-reactivity to fig was based on the recognition of hevein domains.

Considering the broad spectrum of fig allergens and this study by Antico et al. [1], it is most likely that fig allergy is not only confined to cross-reactivity to *F. benjamina* or natural rubber latex. Further research is desirable to elucidate the whole scope of sources of sensitization to *F. carica*, which include latex-dependent and -independent sensitization routes.

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