

Widespread contact dermatitis caused by urushiol in kintsugi

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Case Report

A 51-year-old, otherwise healthy, woman presented at the Dermatology Department in January 2010 with pruritic lesions on the face, neck, trunk, and extremities. The patient had felt itchy on the face and neck 1 week before her initial visit. Gradually, the lesions became more pruritic and increased in number. Physical examination showed oedematous erythema on the face, left cervical region, trunk, and extremities (Fig. 1). Vesicles on oedematous erythema and swelling were noted on the dorsal aspect of the left third, fourth and fifth fingers (Fig. 1). We suspected allergic contact dermatitis on the basis of morphology. Repeated inquiry showed that her hobby was kintsugi ('golden joinery' in Japanese) (1), and she had performed it for 1 week before the initial visit. She told us that the lacquer resin used for kintsugi was labelled as 'warning for those with lacquer tree dermatitis.'

Patch Testing

Patch testing was performed with 0.002% urushiol (Torii Pharmaceutical Co., Tokyo, Japan) and pet. (control). The



Fig. 1. Erythematous lesions on the neck, abdomen and left upper extremity and hand. Vesicles and swelling were noted on the dorsal aspect of the left third, fourth and fifth fingers.

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results were read according to the International Contact Dermatitis Research Group scoring system 2 and 3 days



Fig. 2. Kintsugi (golden joinery): the art of repairing broken ceramics made to look like solid gold.

after application (2). Vesicular reactions: (++) to urushiol were seen on both readings.

References

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Discussion

In Japan, the sap of *Rhus verniciflua* Stokes has been widely used in paint, for rust prevention, and in resin. Urushiol is therefore an important cause of allergic contact dermatitis. Although it becomes non-allergenic after hardening, it is allergenic when incompletely hardened (3). Kintsugi (golden joinery) describes the art of repairing broken ceramics made to look like solid gold (1) (Fig. 2). Presumably, urushiol contained in this lacquer resin caused the widespread skin lesions.

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