

Pigmented contact dermatitis of the lips from a lipstick

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Pigmentary changes of the skin are an occasional post-inflammatory response (1). Melanosis as a feature of allergic contact dermatitis has been extensively described by Osmundsen (2).

Case Report

A 29-year-old Philippina presented with long-standing hyperpigmentation of her lips attributed to the use of a pink lipstick. During 1st use 2 years ago, the patient had noticed burning and slight itch of the lips a few hours after application, which had persisted for some time after removing the lipstick. The same symptoms occurred following subsequent applications.

Hyperpigmentation of the lips and perioral skin started after 1 year of occasional use (1× per month), with the lip colour changing from rose to greyish-brown, and worsened with further use. Inflammation of the angles of the mouth, causing scratching, increased hyperpigmentation at this site. The patient had stopped any further use of the lipstick 6 weeks prior to presentation.

Patch testing with a standard series, cosmetic allergens, and perfumes, as well as the lipstick *as is*, was completely negative. There was no indication of hepatopathy and no previous medication with tetracyclines (3). Spontaneous moderate brightening of pigmentation started 6 months later.

Discussion

In Japan and other Asian countries, facial melanosis from cosmetics is well-known (1). Some of the allergens responsible, such as Brilliant Lake Red[®] or other azo dyes and perfumes (4, 5), are also used in lipsticks, but hyperpigmentation of the lips seems to be uncommon (1, 4).

We were not able to detect contact allergy or induce hyperpigmentation by patch testing. However, there was a strong association between prolonged use of the lip-

stick and the start of hyperpigmentation, and moderate improvement was reported by the patient 6 months after stopping its use. Furthermore, our patient belongs to a high-risk population for melanosis (1, 6, 7). The history is more suggestive of chemical irritation of the lips than an allergic response. In many cases of pigmented textile contact dermatitis, no allergens could be identified (1), and hyperpigmentation is also known to occur after phototoxic reactions and mechanical irritation, as in friction melanosis (1). Imokawa & Kawai (8), in guinea pigs, has shown that irritation, even though to a lesser degree than allergy, may also stimulate melanocytes. Ultraviolet irradiation (9) is not likely to be a factor in our case, since the lipstick was mainly applied for the evening.

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