

Short Communication

Contact sensitivity to surgical skin clips

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Case Report

A 38-year-old woman had a thyroidectomy. Skin clips were used for closure, removed after 2 days and replaced with adhesive tape. On the 3rd postoperative day, she developed erythema and swelling of the wound. Examination revealed linear lesions of acute contact dermatitis at the site of the clips. Improvement was obtained in a few days with topical corticosteroids. She described previous reactions to a watch, earrings and jeans buttons. However, surgical clips had been used 8 months before for a caesarean without ill effects.

Patch testing was performed with the European standard series, antibacterial preparations used during the thyroidectomy, recent and previous surgical skin clips and adhesive tape. +++ reactions were noted to nickel sulfate and thimerosal (not relevant), and ++ reactions to recent surgical clips, cobalt chloride and palladium chloride. The recent clips were made from nickel, copper and zinc, whereas the previous ones had been stainless steel.

Discussion

Although nickel allergy is present in 10% of women, sensitivity to skin clips is rarely reported (1–4). The eruption may be limited to the site of the clip or spread beyond it, and pompholyx is often noted. In 1 case, the

clips actually induced nickel sensitization (2). In 25 years or about 450 operations with the same clips, our patient's surgeon had never before seen any allergy. Booth (1) stated he had never before encountered clip allergy in 19 years of thyroid surgery. Despite the sale of 6 million clips per year, only 3 cases of allergy have been reported to the laboratory that manufactured the nickel-containing clips. This side-effect is probably under-reported, though other metal instruments and implants are usually well-tolerated. Because nickel sensitization is not reliably associated with clinical manifestations (5), we do not believe that enquiry should necessarily be made about metal sensitivity before operations involving metal implants or skin/internal clips.

References

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