

Contact dermatitis to henna used as a hair dye

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Henna is a naturally occurring brown dye made from the leaves of the tree *Lawsonia Inermis* (1). It is traditionally used in Islamic and Hindu cultures as a hair colouring and as dye for decorating the nails or making temporary skin tattoo. Contact dermatitis to pure henna is extremely rare (1, 2). We present a case of exogenous dermatitis because of pure henna.

Case story

A 60-year-old woman presented with acute bilateral palpebral eczema evolving for 3 days. The patient had no fever and no muscular weakness. Eye examination was normal. The patient reported that she had applied some paste of Gabes henna in order to dye her hair. This henna is a natural product without any additives and obtained from the leaves of henna tree growing in Gabes, a city in the south of Tunisia famous for this product. She mentioned also that she experienced the same effect after applying henna 1 year ago. A remission was observed

with a short period of oral corticosteroids. 2 months after complete resolution, the patient was patch tested with the European standard series (Trolab, Germany) and pure powdered henna (10% pet.) prepared from dried leaves of Gabes henna (Fig. 1). Positive reactions (++) were seen at D 2 and D 3 to henna (10% pet). PPD (*p*-phenylenediamine 1% pet.) was negative at D 2 and D 3. The patient stopped using henna. 1 year after, she was well and denied any relapses of eczema.

Discussion

Henna is widely used all over Tunisia, especially in celebrations such as weddings. It has a religious and a social significance. This case is that of an allergic contact dermatitis caused by pure henna and not to an additive. Contact dermatitis to henna is extremely rare (1, 2). This vegetable (henna) dye rarely causes contact dermatitis and the majority of cases are associated with the application of colouring agents (specially PPD) to produce more intense coloration as well as to reduce fixation time (3).

To the best of our knowledge, only 2 cases of palpebral eczema because of henna used as a hair dye, with a positive patch test, have been previously reported (3). This is also the first reported Tunisian case of delayed contact dermatitis to pure henna despite its frequent use in our country. Only 1 case of immediate allergic reaction to henna (rhinitis and dyspnea) has been previously reported in Tunisia (4).

References

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Fig. 1. Dried leaves of Gabes henna.