

Letters to the Editor

“Active hypoallergenicity”

Dear Sir

We have read with interest the recent paper by Castelli et al. (1). In this paper, the authors propose that a mixture of *Ginkgo biloba* extract and sodium carboxymethyl- β -1,3-glucan could mitigate the development of allergic contact dermatitis through a direct effect on the immune system. They propose changing the current concept of hypoallergenicity, based on avoidance of potentially allergenic substances, to an “active hypoallergenicity”, by the addition of molecules that could down-regulate the skin immune response. This is an interesting idea, but if this proved to be possible, we would be concerned about the innocuousness of any active additive. Any substance that would have an effect on the dermato-immuno-surveillance would need to be looked at for effects on the skin resistance to harmful elements in the environment, such as irritants, light and micro-organisms.

It remains to be shown, however, that the effect reported in the paper of Castelli et al. was due to dermato-immuno-regulation, rather than to the barrier effect of the high molecular weight polysaccharide molecule.

Since European regulators are at present involved in an intense discussion of hypoallergenic-

ity, we think it important to stress that any hypoallergenic skin product should by definition not interfere with the immune function of the skin.

Yours sincerely

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Reference

1. Castelli D, Colin L, Camel E, Riès G. Pretreatment of skin with a *Ginkgo biloba* extract/sodium carboxymethyl- β -1,3-glucan formulation appears to inhibit the elicitation of allergic contact dermatitis in man. *Contact Dermatitis* 1998; 38: 123–126.

Reply

Dear Sir

The letter of Perrenoud et al. opens a very interesting and important discussion for the future of cosmetology. It is clear that a cosmetic product must not be immunosuppressive. On the other hand, the affirmation that “any hypoallergenic skin product should by definition not interfere with the immune function of the skin” is not acceptable. We know that, from antigen endocytosis by Langerhans cells to the appearance of contact dermatitis, many amplification events have to occur. Acting on these preliminary steps raises the possibility of decreasing the risk of contact dermatitis without decreasing the skin immune defences.

Finally, the choice is philosophical: if we decide that a cosmetic has to have no biological activities, the opinion of Perrenoud and colleagues is correct. If we think that cosmetics have to be able to main-

tain or to rebalance the homeostasis of the normal skin after stress situations, their position is unacceptable. We strongly support the latter position, because we all know that any product applied to the skin is able to modify the skin biology, and thus it is much more honest scientifically to study the biological activity of cosmetics, looking for modulations (not indeed suppressions) and thus to find ways forward to effective preventive cosmetology.

Yours sincerely

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