

Short Communication

Irritant contact dermatitis due to Indian God lotion (印度神油)

TZE YUEN LEE¹ AND TAI HING LAM²

¹23A, G/F Soares Avenue, Homantin, Kowloon, Hong Kong, China

²Department of Community Medicine, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China

Key words: irritant contact dermatitis; Indian God lotion; Herba Asari; herbal medication; Chinese traditional medicine. © Munksgaard, 2001.

Traditional Chinese medicine is the 2nd most common cause of contact dermatitis in Hong Kong (1, 2). Indian God lotion (印度神油) is a popular herbal spray preparation for enhancing sexual potency in Hong Kong. To the best of our knowledge, this is the 1st report of it causing contact dermatitis. Its ingredients include: radix asari (Herba Asari – 細辛) 0.2%; perfumes (unspecified) 0.3%; isopropyl alcohol 70%; water 29.5%. Herba Asari (3) is a perennial herb, botanical name *Asarum heterotropoides* var. *manschuricum* Kitagawa and *Asarum sieboldii* Miq (family Aristolochiaceae). It is also known as wild ginger and is often taken with wine or honey for relieving pain and reducing phlegm.

Case Reports

Case no. 1

A 51-year-old business executive noticed pruritus, erythema, swelling and tingling of the penis the day after venereal exposure. Indian God lotion and a condom had been used. He had used the same brand of condom many times before without any problem. Examination showed several erythematous, exudative patches with ill-defined borders over his glans penis and prepuce, the latter being oedematous. Cultures and screening tests for sexually transmitted diseases were negative.

Patch testing using I.Q. Chambers was performed. A reaction, consisting of vesicles and tiny pustules on a non-infiltrated erythematous base, was shown, to Indian God lotion, as is, at D2 and D4, and a similar reaction to 0.2% Herba Asari whole plant in 75% isopropyl alcohol. The remainder of the patch tests, including European standard and Chemotechnique perfume series, condom, its spermicide, 75% isopropyl alcohol and several other Herba Ansari preparations, mainly in pet., were negative. The patient was treated with topical 0.025% fluocinolone cream, with clearance in 5 days.

Case nos. 2 and 3

A couple, aged 35 and 38 years, complained of 2 separate episodes of pruritus, redness and swelling of the genitalia the morning after coitus. Indian God lotion was

the only preparation used. Examination of the wife showed erythema, oedema and excoriation of the labia minora and majora, while the husband showed similar changes on the penis. Patch testing showed similar results in this couple, including a reaction, consisting of pustules and vesicles on a non-infiltrated erythematous base, to Indian God lotion, as is, and the same reaction to 0.2% Herba Asari whole plant in 75% isopropyl alcohol. Both were treated with 0.025% fluocinolone cream, with clearance after 6 days.

Controls

Of 15 volunteer patients, 3 out of 3 reacted similarly to patch testing with Indian God lotion, as is, and 10 out of 12 subsequently to a 50% (in 75% isopropyl alcohol) dilution of the lotion. 5 out of the 15 controls also reacted with erythema ± microvesicles to 0.2% Herba Asari whole plant in 75% isopropyl alcohol.

Discussion

Histories, clinical findings and patch test results in these 3 cases support the diagnosis of acute irritant contact dermatitis. Our patch test findings also suggested that isopropyl alcohol, as well as Herba Asari, is needed to cause such irritation. We recommend that the potential for a severe irritant reaction should be mentioned in the pamphlet supplied with the product, and that users should consider diluting the lotion before use, which will hopefully not at the same time reduce its efficacy.

References

1. Lee T Y, Lam T H. Patch testing of 11 common herbal topical medicaments in Hong Kong. *Contact Dermatitis* 1990; 22: 137–140.
2. Lee T Y, Lam T H. Patch testing of 490 patients in Hong Kong. *Contact Dermatitis* 1996; 35: 23–26.
3. Beijing Medical College. Diaphoretics or drugs for treatment of exterior symptom-complex. In: Xie Z F, Huang X K (eds): *Dictionary of traditional Chinese medicine*. Hong Kong: The Commercial Press Ltd, 150.