

CONTACT POINTS

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An unusual case of cell phone dermatitis

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As described in the 2000s, cell phone dermatitis has emerged as a problem with the increased use of mobile communication devices. It is caused by contact allergy to external metal parts of cell phones and is typically localized to the ear, preauricular area, and cheek (1). We report a case with unusual localization.

Case Story

A 38-year-old businessman presented with an intensely itching eczematous patch on the anterolateral aspect of each thigh; the lesions, symmetrically localized, were different in size and severity (Fig. 1). He reported a 1-year history of spontaneous variability, with worsening of a lesion matched by improvement on the contralateral side and vice versa. Response to oral antihistamines and topic and/or systemic corticosteroids was temporary.

Patch tests were performed with the SIDAPA (Italian Society of Allergological, Occupational and Environmental Dermatology) baseline series and textile materials [FIRMA, Florence, Italy, in Hayes' chambers (Hayes Service BV, Alphen, the Netherlands)]. Readings at D2 and D4 according to International Contact Dermatitis Research Group guidelines showed sensitization to nickel sulfate (+++ on both D2 and D4). The patient denied contact with metals at the affected sites and presence of coins or keys in his pockets. He then received

a phone call, and we noticed that the cell phone extracted from his pocket had a metal casing. The presence of nickel in the casing was confirmed by a dimethylglyoxime spot test with Allertest Ni (Allerderm Laboratories, Phoenix, Arizona). The patient admitted that he usually kept the phone in one of the two front pockets of his trousers, switching pockets when the discomfort on a side became excessive. Use of a belt pouch for the phone led to rapid and complete healing.

Discussion

Use of nickel in cell phones is frequent (2), and recently increased because of fashion trends (such as metal casings). Atypical presentations of cell phone dermatitis may be difficult to diagnose unless there is an index of suspicion. Within the European Union, a recent extension of the Nickel Directive now includes cell phones (3).

References

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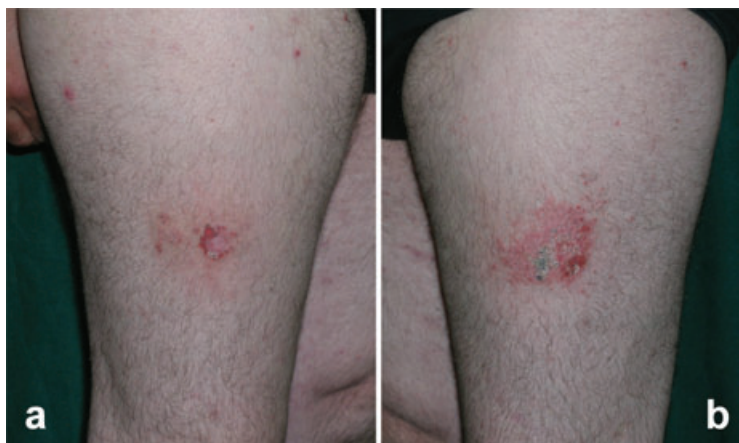


Fig. 1. Eczematous lesions on the anterolateral aspect of the right (a) and left (b) thigh of the patient.