

topical steroid applications, corticosteroid allergy should be suspected.

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Contact dermatitis due to a food mite

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Key words: *Tyrophagus putrescens*; papulovesicular eruptions; immunotherapy; allergen extract; entomology; prick tests; RASTs; occupational.

Cutaneous eruptions due to acarids of the *Tyrophagus* type have rarely been reported (1, 2).

Case Report

In 1985, a 45-year-old entomologist presented with a 7-year history of recurrent itchy papulovesicular eruptions. The patient reported that these symptoms improved while he was away from work: a few days after returning to work, widespread cutaneous lesions recurred.

For the last 14 years, he had been studying the lepidopteran *Galleria mellonella* in the Department of Entomology at the University in Bologna. Among other responsibilities, he prepared daily an experimental diet for breeding *Galleria*, consisting of maize, wholemeal, wheat meal, beer-maker's yeast, glycerol, honeybee wax and powdered milk.

Prick tests with common food and inhalant allergens showed a positive reaction to *Tyrophagus putres-*

cens (+ + + +). Patch tests with the GIRDCA standard series (Hermal Trolab) were negative. RASTs performed with inhalant and food allergens (Lofarma, Milan) were strongly positive to *Tyrophagus putrescens* (+ + + +).

Since the patient could not avoid allergen exposure, subcutaneous hyposensitization was performed with a specific high-quality allergen extract prepared by Lofarma (Milan). After 6 months of immunotherapy, his dermatitis had improved. By the end of 2 years of immunotherapy, the patient was cured of his dermatitis and was able to prepare the same *Galleria* diet without developing clinical symptoms.

Discussion

Food mites (superfamily Tyroglyphoidea) can migrate under the scales of the stratum corneum or into fissures in the epidermis. They may produce

pruritus alone or intensely itchy papular or papulovesicular eruptions. Repeated exposure to such food mites may lead to sensitization, with production of urticaria or bronchial asthma.

Since *Tyrophagus putrescens* frequently infests foodstuffs, sensitization to food mites is found predominantly in agricultural workers handling hay and in those working in meal stores.

In our patient, sensitization to *Tyrophagus putrescens* produced a recurrent papulovesicular eruption, unaccompanied by the classic symptoms of IgE-mediated disease.

The clinical history and allergological investigations confirmed that his dermatitis was directly related to food mite exposure. Our patient's occupation required him to handle foodstuffs with a high

free sugar content. The ingredients of the experimental diet used for breeding *Galleria* were therefore an ideal environment for mite browsing and food mite exposure.

This report details a case where specific immunotherapy was unexpectedly effective. Currently, our patient remains symptom-free, even though he continues to be exposed to food mites in the course of his occupation.

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Phenylephrine in eardrops causing contact dermatitis

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Key words: allergic contact dermatitis; medicaments; phenylephrine hydrochloride; eardrops.

Phenylephrine hydrochloride is a sympathomimetic drug commonly used in ophthalmology and otorhinolaryngology. Although used widely, it rarely causes contact dermatitis (1-8).

Case Report

A 50-year-old man with chronic otitis developed an acute vesicular dermatitis of the external auditory canals. Over the previous 10 days, he had been using 3 different eardrops, and reported worsening of his otitis in the 3-day period prior to presentation.

Patch tests were performed with the GIRDCA standard series, a preservatives series, and the individual ingredients of the patient's own eardrops. He showed a positive reaction to phenylephrine hydrochloride 5% pet. (D2+/D3+).

Further history taking revealed that the patient had experienced no side effects from the prior use of eardrops containing phenylephrine hydrochloride.

Discussion

Contact dermatitis of the ear canal is a common complication of the topical treatment of otitis externa. Topical antibiotics and local anaesthetics are the most common sensitizers in otologic preparations.

Phenylephrine is an epinephrine analogue frequently used in ophthalmic and otologic topical pre-

parations for its mydriatic and vasoconstrictive properties. Its vasoconstrictive effect allows it to be used as an active ingredient of topical decongestants.

Although there are reports of phenylephrine contained in ophthalmic preparations causing contact dermatitis, our's is the first report of contact dermatitis from phenylephrine in eardrops.

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