

Irritant contact dermatitis caused by a shower cream used as a leave-on product

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Irritant contact dermatitis can be caused by exposure to numerous irritants, such as water, alkalis, acids, oils, and organic solvents.¹ Here, we present a patient who developed severe irritant contact dermatitis after using a shower cream as a moisturizing cream. The patient has provided written consent to publication of this case report.

CASE REPORT

A 91-year-old non-atopic male was referred to our dermatological clinic for evaluation of a severe itching rash. He reported a sudden onset 1 week earlier without any previous skin symptoms. The patient had hypertension and had previously suffered from depression, but was otherwise healthy.

Dermatological examination showed an erythematous and well-demarcated scaly rash on both arms (Figure 1). The patient was then thoroughly questioned about exposures prior to the onset of



FIGURE 1 Irritant contact dermatitis after use of a shower cream as a moisturizing cream



FIGURE 2 Picture of the shower cream causing the irritant reaction

symptoms. After a while, he remembered that he had used a new cosmetic product, which he thought was a cream, on both arms. He found a note in his pocket with the name of the product (Sanex Protector) (Figure 2). A search on the Internet showed that this product was a shower cream. However, the patient had used it as a leave-on product from a few days before the rash began, and he had been using it regularly since. A biopsy was performed, and the histology

showed dermatitis. The pathologists described an absence of lymphocytic exocytosis and only one eosinophilic cell in the dermis, which led them to conclude that the changes were most likely caused by an irritant and not an allergic reaction.

On the basis of the history, the clinical findings, and the biopsy, it was concluded that the diagnosis was irritant contact dermatitis, and no further testing was performed. The patient was advised to stop using the shower cream, and he was treated with topical clobetasol under occlusion for 3 weeks. At follow-up 3 weeks later, he reported that the itching had stopped, and only slight erythema and scaling persisted.

DISCUSSION

In this case, a 91-year-old man mistakenly used a shower cream as a moisturizing cream, resulting in a very strong irritant reaction. In 2009, Heisterberg et al reported three similar cases of irritant contact dermatitis caused by shower creams used as leave-on products.² The authors pointed out that, although the authorities are aware of the importance of full ingredient labelling of cosmetic products, no steps have been taken to make it easier for the consumer to interpret the product package, labelling name, or information about handling of the product.² Since 2009, no other studies have addressed the challenge of misleading product names, and, to our knowledge, no legislation has been implemented by the authorities to solve this problem.

In the current case, there was no instruction on the package regarding how the shower cream should be used. All text on the package was in English, which creates difficulties for consumers in countries such as Denmark, where not all people can read or understand English. In addition, the term shower cream can easily be misinterpreted as indicating a leave-on product, because it contains the

word 'cream.' It is quite possible that some people erroneously believe that it is a moisturizing cream that should be applied after showering.

Altogether, this case shows that unintended misuse of cosmetic products can result in strong irritant reactions. We believe that there is a need for clear labelling names on all cosmetic products, and a simple description on the package of how the product should be handled.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

All authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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