

Short Communication

Allergic contact dermatitis from *Mentha spicata* (spearmint)

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Mentha spicata (spearmint), of the Lamiaceae (Labiatae) family, is a common evergreen grown all over Europe and the USA. The essential oil extracted from its jagged leaves is widely used in the food, pharmaceutical and cosmetic industries.

Case Report

A 64-year-old non-atopic woman, with a history of contact dermatitis from shoes and leather items, presented with painful erythematous-edematous-vesico-bullous lesions on the right knee after repeated applications of compresses with an infusion made with fresh leaves of *Mentha spicata*, for pain in the knee due to gonarthrosis. The clinical signs and symptoms regressed after suspension of the compresses and treatment with topical antiseptics and oral antihistamines.

Patch tests with the SIDAPA (Italian Society of Allergological, Occupational and Environmental Dermatology) standard series yielded positive reactions to potassium dichromate, para-phenylenediamine, Disperse Blue 124, Disperse Yellow 3, fragrance mix, and Myroxylon Pereirae resin. A patch test with an alcoholic extract of the leaves of *Mentha spicata* elicited an erythematous-vesicular reaction. Patch tests with a further series (Table 1) were positive to peppermint and spearmint oils, whereas menthol was negative. Photopatch tests were negative.

Table 1. Patch test results

Allergen	%*	D2	D4
azulene	1	—	—
menthol	1	—	—
peppermint oil	2	++	++
vanilla	10	—	—
spearmint oil	2	++	++
anethole	5	—	—

* All pet.

Discussion

'Natural' remedies are not risk-free (1). Contact allergy to the leaves of *Mentha spicata* (spearmint) has not been reported before, though cases of contact cheilitis from its essential oil, as a toothpaste flavouring, have been described (2–4). The main allergen appears to be carvone (5, 6). Since menthol was negative (7), the reactions to spearmint and peppermint may have been due to other allergens, such as carvone and limonene (5, 6, 8, 9), in both plants (10), *Mentha piperita* being considered a hybrid between *Mentha spicata* and *Mentha acuticarpa* (11).

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