

CORRESPONDENCE

Adverse reactions to alcoholic beverages: a diagnostic guideline

Sirs,

Boehncke and Gall describe an interesting case of Type 1 allergy to the ethanol metabolite acetic acid [1]. This case underlines that adverse reactions to alcoholic beverages, either induced by immunological mechanisms or non-immunological mechanisms, are a frequent cause for consultation of the allergologist, but still present difficulties in diagnosing.

In our experience, an allergic reaction presents itself more focused on a single or few similar beverages. An intolerance reaction is more non-specifically directed against several drinks and foodstuff.

If a type 1 allergy is suspected, a screening skin prick test with the suspected beverage, ethanol, methanol, acetic acid, formaldehyde and acetaldehyde, besides a food series and total IgE, should be done as described in the paper by Boehncke and Gall. The second branch of screening concerns intolerance reactions against biogenic amines such as histamine or against sulfite. A double blind placebo-controlled red wine challenge [2,3,4] may discriminate and help to find the diagnosis. For testing, red wine is used both native (placebo) and with added histamine (verum). We recommend test wines with 200 µg and 3.700 µg histamine per litre respectively [3].

In our experience histamine intolerance, a disease characterized by reduction in or lack of diamine oxidase activity, has to be considered the most frequent intolerance reaction against alcoholic beverages, as alcohol inhibits the histamine degrading enzyme diamine oxidase [2,3,4]. Once easy to perform measuring methods for diamine oxidase

become available, standard assessment of histamine and diamine oxidase will become the gold standard in the diagnosis of adverse reactions against alcoholic beverages or food.

References

- 1 Boehncke WH, Gall H. Ethanol metabolite acetic acid as causative agent for type 1 hypersensitivity-like reactions to alcoholic beverages. *Clin Exp Allergy* 1996; 26:1089–91.
- 2 Wantke F, Götz M, Jarisch R. The red wine provocation test: intolerance to histamine as a model for food intolerance. *Allergy Proceedings* 1994; 15:27–32.
- 3 Wantke F, Hemmer W, Haglmüller T, Götz M, Jarisch R. Histamine in wine: bronchoconstriction after a double blind placebo controlled red wine provocation test. A case report. *Int Arch Allergy Immunol* 1996;110:397–400.
- 4 Wantke F, Götz M, Jarisch R. Histamine free diet: treatment of choice for histamine induced food intolerance and supporting treatment for chronic headaches. *Clin Exp Allergy* 1993; 23:982–5.

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