

Allergic contact balanitis due to tetracaine (amethocaine) hydrochloride

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Tetracaine (amethocaine) hydrochloride is the hydrochloride of the 2-(dimethylamino) ethyl ester of p-butylaminobenzoic acid. It is used mainly as a topical anaesthetic and to a lesser extent for infiltration or spinal anesthesia (1). Allergic contact dermatitis from tetracaine hydrochloride is not rare (1–6).

Case Report

A 41-year-old man with a 5-year history of urethral stenosis was treated by periodic dilatations with a polyvinyl chloride (PVC) dilater. Organon® ointment, which contains tetracaine hydrochloride 1%, was applied over the end of the dilater as a lubricant. In July 1996, he presented with a 5-month history of itchy eczema around the urethral orifice.

Patch tests with the GEIDC standard series, Organon® ointment and its components, an anaesthetics series, the dilater and a plastics series showed positive reactions to caine mix, Organon® ointment and tetracaine hydrochloride at 2 and 4 days. After Organon® ointment was substituted with a petrolatum ointment, the eczema gradually disappeared.

Discussion

Tetracaine hydrochloride may cause occupational allergic contact dermatitis in dentists (1–3, 7), health personnel (1), oculists (4) and chiropodists (5). Sensitivity to tetracaine hydrochloride of non-occupational origin has also been reported (1, 3, 6). In British patients, the use of anti-haemorrhoidal ointments has been the main source of sensitization to tetracaine hydrochloride (3), which has a strong sensitizing potential (8). In Spain, many pharmaceutical preparations have contained it since 1954, and it has been widely used as anaesthetic for eyes, ears, nose, throat and urethra, but not as an anti-haemorrhoidal ointment.

Allergic contact balanitis is unusual (9, 10). Contact balanitis due to contraceptive jellies, rubber condoms, feminine hygiene sprays, etc., has been reported, and it may also be caused by topical applications for inflam-

matory dermatoses, such as psoriasis and lichen planus (9, 10). Our patient was sensitized to tetracaine hydrochloride by the repeated use of Organon® ointment as a urethral lubricant. We have found no previously reported cases of allergic contact balanitis from tetracaine hydrochloride. The remainder of the patch tests were negative, including para-phenylenediamine (PPD), which confirms the previously-reported infrequent cross-reactivity (1–3, 11).

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