

Fire coral persistent cutaneous reaction

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S U M M A R Y

A patient who developed a persistent cutaneous reaction to fire coral is presented. Treatment with topical corticosteroids reduced the severity of the lesion but after a follow-up period of 18 months no complete resolution has been showed.

Introduction

Red Sea Coral ("stinging" or "fire coral") is a coelenterate of the Milleporina order and of the Hydrozoan class. It derives its name because it releases nematocysts, toxic organelles responsible for cutaneous lesions, immediately after contact with skin.

All coelenterates are invertebrate organisms composed of a double epithelial layer, which delimits a cavity, the "coelenterium". Their venomous apparatus is composed of the nematocysts, toxin-releasing organelles composed of a capsule and tube, located in large numbers on the tentacles and made-up of collagen-like material. The venom is ejected by the capsula of the nematocyst through the long filamentous tubule into the victim's body (1).

Toxic substances in the venom include quaternary ammonium compounds, proteins, 5-hydroxytryptamine, catecholamines, histamine and histamine liberators.

The cutaneous lesions are induced by the toxic substances liberated and by the foreign-body reaction to the fragments of calcium carbonate, which are in the tentacles that hurt the skin (2). Moreover, the skin scars are accompanied by burn and/or pain.

The severity of the cutaneous reactions depends on the number of the nematocysts discharged, the venom toxicity, the intensity of the stinging and the individual sensibility (3). The general symptoms, which have been reported, include nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, diarrhea, muscle spasm, respiratory difficulty, tachycardia, hypotension and fever (1,4).

In the majority of cases soon after the contact with the fire coral an erythematous reaction appears, which spontaneously heals in about two months. Sometimes there is a lesional polymorphism. Soon after contact to a fire coral an acute vesiculo-bullous dermatitis follows; then there is a subacute granulomatous dermatitis and,

K E Y W O R D S

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