

PERIORAL DERMATITIS (a preliminary report)

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Summary

This paper is based on the study of 30 cases of perioral dermatitis. It is found that perioral dermatitis occurred mostly in females between 30—50 years of age and all of them were addicted to chewing. Majority of them showed dental sepsis and decrease in the vertical dimension of the lower half of the face and infection with pyogenic organism and candida.

Perioral dermatitis or Perleche is a common condition although many of the sufferers do not come to the hospitals. The Pathogenesis of this condition is not yet fully known. Too often patients are told that it is 'due to vitamin deficiency'; 'a result of allergy'; 'irritation from tooth paste', 'bacterial or candida infection', or a form of seberrhoea. Chernosky¹ reported the increased incidence of Perleche in persons with a decreased vertical dimension of the lower half of the face. We have seen many cases of perioral dermatitis in people addicted to chewing betel leaves, lime, arecaunt and tobacco. This prompted us to take up a detailed study of this condition.

Material and Method

Thirty cases have been studied so far. These cases were taken from the Out-patient department of Dermatology clinic, Medical College Hospital, Calicut. These patients were studied

Paper read at the annual conference of the South Western Branch of the Indian Association of Dermatologists & Venereologists held in Calicut on 28—5—1972
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Received for Publication on 11—10—1972

in detail with special reference to chewing habits, condition of oral mucosa and teeth and facial measurements.

The following measurements of the face were made: (a) The distance in millimeter between the centre of the pupil of the eye and the parting line of the lips; (b) The distance from the base of the nose to the lower edge of the mandible as felt through the soft tissues with the teeth in normal 'occlusal contact'. The facial measurement was taken with a milli-meter ruler held vertically and another ruler held horizontally. According to Willis² these two measurements should be equal in a normal person. A patient was taken to have decreased facial dimension if the distance (b) was 6 mm or more shorter than the distance (a).

Cultures were taken for bacterial and candida from the dermatitic area. Biopsies were taken from 3 cases and patch tests were done with a mixture of betel leaves, lime, arecanut and tobacco in 4 cases.

Observations

Of the 30 cases studied 28 were females and 2 were males. The ages of these cases varied from 30 to 75 years

with maximum numbers between 30 and 50 years (Table I). All were addicted to chewing betel leaves, lime, arecanut and tobacco. The duration of chewing habits varied from 2 to 50 years and the duration of illness varied from 1 month to 5 years. (Table II).

TABLE 1

Age in years	No. of cases
31—40	15
41—50	5
51—60	3
61—70	4
70	1

TABLE 2
Duration of the condition

Duration	No. of cases
1—6 months	13
6 months—1 yr.	8
1—2 yrs.	3
2—3 yrs.	2
3 yrs.	4

Eighteen patients had one or more caries teeth and 12 cases had one or more teeth missing, mostly premolars. Fifteen cases showed moderate to severe atrophy of the mucous membrane of the mouth and one case had associated carcinoma of the cheek. Thirteen cases showed a decreased vertical dimension of the lower half of the face and all these patients were aged above 40 years. Cultures revealed staph aureus in 13, B haemolytic streptococci and staph. aureus in 5 and normal flora in 4 cases (Table III). Eight cases showed candida albicans in addition to the bacteria.

TABLE 3
Culture results

Staph. aureus	13
Streptococcus	Nil
Staph. aureus + B. haemolytic streptococci	5
Normal skin flora	4
Candidas	8
Total No. of cultures	22

The histopathological study of 3 cases showed a non-specific chronic dermatitis. Patch test was negative in all the 4 cases in whom it was done.

Discussion

This preliminary study shows that perioral dermatitis is much more common in females than in males. Marks and Black³ also reported an increased incidence in females. Maximum number of cases occurred in the age group between 30 and 50 years and all these patients were addicted to 'chewing' for more than 2 years.

The chewing habit is invariably associated with liplicking and constant wetting of the perioral region with saliva containing lime, tobacco and betel leaves which produce a constant mild irritation. Thus the skin is made more vulnerable to secondary infection with bacteria and candida especially when there is dribbling of saliva containing these organisms from infected teeth or due to poor oral hygiene. A significant number of cases showed a decreased vertical dimension of the lower half of the face and this decreased vertical dimension causes an inward folding of the skin at the corners of the mouth and this forms a saliva containing sulcus. The negative patch test shows that it is probably not an allergic dermatitis to the chewing material.

Conclusion

From this study it seems that perioral dermatitis is not caused by a single factor but by a multiplicity of factors namely: aging the chewing habits, dental sepsis, loss of teeth, decreased vertical dimension of the lower half of the face and infection with bacteria and candida.

Acknowledgment

I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. T. Gopinath, Associate Professor of Dermatology and Venereology, Medical College Hospital, Calicut for permitting me to undertake

this study. I also express my thanks to the staff of the Department of Microbiology for their kind co-operation. I am also grateful to Dr. B. K. Hareendran Nair, Associate Profes-

sor of Dermatology and Venereology, Medical College Hospital, Trivandrum, for the encouragement and guidance I received for writing up this paper.

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1. Chernosky ME, Relationship between vertical facial dimensions and perleche Arch Derm 93 : 332, 1966.
2. Willis FM, Features of the face involved in full dental prosthesis, Dental Cosmos : 77 : 851, 1935.
- 3 Marks R and Black MM, Perioral dermatitis. A histopathological study of 26 cases, Brit J Derm, 84:242, 1971.

TRUE or FALSE ?

Azaribine, an antipyrimidine drug tried as a useful agent in the treatment of Mycosis fungoides is recently being used for the management of Psoriasis. It has its major effect on the hemoporetic system particularly on erythrocytes as against Methotrexate which has the major depressive effect on the leukocytic system.

(Answer page No. 98)