

Correspondence

Negative direct immunofluorescence and nonspecific histology do not exclude the diagnosis of dermatitis herpetiformis Duhring

Editor,

The diagnosis of dermatitis herpetiformis (DH) (Duhring's disease) is usually based on the characteristic clinical presentation, histopathology showing papillary neutrophilic microabscesses, and direct immunofluorescence (DIF) with granular immunoglobulin A (IgA) deposits in the dermal papillae and/or at the dermo-epidermal junction. In the recent past, serologic tests have come to represent specific and relatively sensitive markers for the detection of gluten-sensitive diseases (GSDs) such as DH and celiac disease (CD).

In this communication, we present two patients with cutaneous symptoms suggestive of DH but with nonspecific histology and negative DIF. In both cases, the correct diagnosis was based on positive serologic testing for markers of GSD and confirmed by rapid response to treatment with dapsone.

A 36-year-old man was referred for evaluation of burning and pruritic erythematous plaques, seropapules, and excoriations of four months duration on the scalp, extensor surfaces of the arms, upper back, sacral region, and knees.

Histology was consistent with pruriginous eczema, and DIF showed focal granular deposits of C₃ along the basement membrane zone but no IgA deposits.

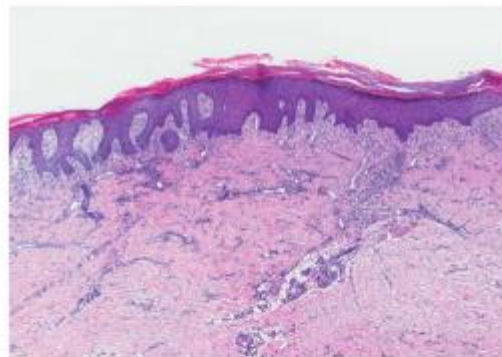


Figure 2 Histology shows prurigo nodularis with crescento-like acanthosis, compact hyperkeratosis and dermal mixed inflammatory infiltrate. (Hematoxylin and eosin stain; original magnification $\times 10$)

Both an atopic disposition and a paraneoplastic disease were ruled out. As the clinical suspicion of DH remained high, we tested for serologic markers of GSD, all of which were clearly positive (IgA tissue transglutaminase antibodies [tTGa], 4717 U/ml [normal: <20 U/ml]; IgA anti-endomysium antibodies [EMA], 1 : 640 [normal: negative]; anti-gliadin antibodies [AGA], IgA-AGA



Figure 1 Excoriated papules and plaques on the extensor areas of the arms and upper back of a 72-year-old woman