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Subject: Sodium Bisulfite

A fifty-one year old white woman salad maker in a cafeteria was referred for contact dermatitis investigation of a hand eczema which had been present for seven months. As the dermatitis had cleared completely during a seven weeks absence from work (because of a strike) an industrial contactant was strongly suspected. Patch testing with routine screening agents and her environmental agents was negative except to a slurry made from a powder called Veg-White. This produced a 3-plus reaction which lasted one week.

The Veg-White powder is an antioxidant used to prevent discoloration of fruit and vegetables used in salad. The label stated it to contain sodium bisulfite, sodium bicarbonate, citric acid and ascorbic acid. This powder is used to make a solution by adding one tablespoon (fifteen grams) to one gallon (four liters) of water. Patch tests with 10% concentrations of each of the ingredients showed a strong reaction to sodium bisulfite, all other tests being negative. A number of controls were tested with 20% sodium bisulfite and were negative. The sodium bisulfite allergy was not particularly intense, while 10% and 20% concentrations in water were strongly positive; a forty-eight hour closed patch test with 2% sodium bisulfite was negative.

In view of the article on Dermatitis Caused by Potassium Metabisulfite by J.P. Nater in Dermatologica, volume 136, page 477 (1968) the patient was also tested with 5 and 10% sodium metabisulfite. Both these patch tests were positive.

Has anyone else encountered allergy to sodium bisulfite or related compounds?