Comparison of topical permethrin 5% and benzyl benzoate 25% for treating scabies

Scabies is a common and itchy skin disease caused by a tiny parasite called Sarcoptes scabiei var. hominis. The condition spreads through skin-to-skin contact and results in itchy red bumps and rashes on specific parts of the body. Scabies affects about 200 million people worldwide, but its incidence has been increasing in high-income countries.

This study aimed to compare the effectiveness of two topical treatments (applied directly to the skin) for scabies: permethrin 5% and benzyl benzoate 25% (BB). Both treatments were used daily for 3 days in a row. The researchers also looked at factors that might affect treatment outcomes, such as incorrect application or poor hygiene.

The study involved 110 people with scabies infestations in Austria. Half of the people received permethrin 5% and the other half received BB. After 3 weeks, the cure rate for permethrin was only 27%, whereas BB showed an excellent cure rate of 87%. Permethrin was well tolerated, but BB caused a burning sensation in 24% of people. The findings suggest that permethrin has a reduced effectiveness because of the development of resistance in scabies mites. In contrast, BB was very effective and can be considered as a first-line treatment for scabies.

Overall, these results are crucial for updating the current treatment guidelines for scabies, ensuring that people receive effective and appropriate care. Our study also highlights the need for more awareness among healthcare providers about the availability of alternative treatments and the importance of a timely supply to combat scabies effectively. Further research involving multiple centres is recommended to confirm these findings.