Centipede: bite and cure — traditional vs novel

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Centipede bite is a common event during rainy seasons in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. The traditional methods of cure are ineffective. The only remedy to get temporary relief from the unbearable pain is to get local anesthesia in the hospital. In far flung islands where medical facilities are not available, the cheap cure described here proved to be a boon to the islands. A mixture of common table salt and kerosene oil, tested over a number of patients, on both sexes on all age groups, works perfectly in relieving the pain of bite.

Keywords: Centipede: Bite and Cure; Andaman & Nicobar Islands

Centipedes are cosmopolitan in distribution especially in tropical countries. India houses world’s 10% fauna of centipedes. The animal belongs to phylum Arthropoda, class Chilopoda, order Scolopendromorpha, among Invertebrates. Centipedes are nocturnal animals and occur in protected damp places such as under barks, stones, logs, crevices, dried leaves, etc. The body is elongated, dorsoventrally flattened with a small head and 21-segmented trunk (segments may be more in some) (Fig. 1).

The head is mounted with two long many jointed antennae, two groups of ocelli and mouth appendages (Fig. 2). Each of the trunk segments bears a pair of legs, except the one posterior to head that bears a pair of poison claws of maxillipeds. Centipedes are agile and carnivorous in diet. They kill their prey with their poison claws. They feed on insects, worms and spiders. Large centipedes can even eat lizards and small rats. The smallest centipedes hardly measure a few centimeters while the largest up to 33 centimeters.

Centipedes are famous for their bite, specially Scolopendra and it is a common phenomenon in different parts of India. Its bite is painful and leads to vomiting, palpitation, burning sensation, inflammation associated with unbearable pain. The only treatment available is to take local anesthesia injection in the hospital for temporary relief. Once the effect of pain-killer is over the patient starts crying with pain. The effect of Centipede bite subsides only after 24 hours. Centipede bite is very common in Andamans and Nicobar Islands, where world’s largest centipede has been reported in Guinness World Record (33 cm). In the present
paper a cheap cure for centipede bite is described.

The centipede injects the poison through its maxillipeds by puncturing the skin when it inserts poison claws. The poison is yellow in colour and is acidic in nature. It is manufactured in single-cell poison glands, which is transported by a narrow duct to poison claws whenever required (Fig. 3). The effect of poison is cytotoxic but not fatal.

In the year 1993, the author experienced centipede bite and got relief from severe pain by applying a mixture of common table salt and kerosene oil on the bite and rubbing it for 2 to 3 minutes. Immediately the author was free from horrifying pain. There was uneasiness for 2 to 3 hours but no pain. The author tested the same formula on his daughter when she had bite of centipede after 5 days of his centipede bite. The formula worked perfectly right again.

Materials and Methods
The formula is simple. Half teaspoon of common salt is taken in palm, 4 to 5 drops of kerosene is added to wet it. It is
mixed thoroughly and applied on the site for 2 to 3 minutes. Immediately pain will be over. However, there will be some inflammation at the place of bite, which may prolong for 8 to 24 hours depending upon the sensitivity of the skin of the person and some uneasiness for about 1 to 2 hour, which subsides in due course of time.

Result and Discussion
Every year there are thousands of centipede bite cases especially during the monsoon. There has not been much of a breakthrough in finding the exact antidote for it except the painkiller injection which however does not add to the relief much, save temporarily. A few home made or Granny's suggestions have been handy in centipede bite cases. The traditional methods for relief are applying snail on the bite, dropping a liquid prepared by killing live centipede in petrol or kerosene oil, chewing black pepper, and applying onion juice on the bite. But none of the traditional medicines gives immediate and complete relief from the terrible pain. Usually the patient is rushed to the hospital for medical aid, where doctor gives injection for local anesthesia.

This alternative painkiller for centipede bite was not known earlier. This formula is tested over a large number of people with all age groups on both the sexes.

The present formula either neutralizes the effect of poison or the nerve impulses going to the brain are blocked. The precise mechanism of action will only be known when pathological, cytological and neurological studies are conducted on man.

References
1 Khatri T C, Relief from Centipede bite soon. The Light of Andamans, Port Blair, 18th October, 1993.