A 34 year old male presented with pain abdomen and yellowish discolouration of eyes for one week. On examination, he was icteric with hepatomegaly present. His abdominal wall showed reticulated, erythematous patch on his abdomen distributed in a strikingly rectangular pattern (Figure 1). The patch was blanchable and nontender. On enquiry, patient told that he used hot water bottle to relieve pain.

A diagnosis of erythema ab igne/thermal induced injury was made for the skin condition. Patient was advised not to use hot water bottle and the patch gradually disappeared in four to five days time.

“Erythema ab igne,” derived from the Latin, means “redness from fire.” Historically, erythema ab igne was seen on the legs of women who sat next to coal stoves or fires. Thermal exposure to the skin can result in a spectrum of cutaneous changes. Early during exposure to moderate infrared radiation, a transient, blanchable, reticulated erythema develops. However repetitive and prolonged thermal exposure causes fixed reticulate hyperpigmentation, erythema, epidermal atrophy, scaling and telangiectases.1 Erythema ab igne has been associated with chronic use of heating pads, hot water bottles, electric blankets, space heaters and other localised heat sources.2 A modern manifestation of the condition has been seen on the anterior thighs of people who use laptop computers.2

The most important treatment for erythema ab igne is immediate removal of the source of infrared radiation. The eruption itself is mostly asymptomatic, and treatment is not usually required. Topical treatment with tretinoin and hydroquinone has been used for persistent hyperpigmentation, and epithelial atypia may respond to topical
therapy with 5-fluorouracil.1

References

