

HERPES SIMPLEX

What is Herpes?

Herpes is a virus. Other viruses cause colds, mumps, the flu and measles. Different forms of the herpes virus cause chickenpox, mononucleosis (the “kissing disease”), shingles or herpes zoster.

Many people (some say more than 50%) get herpes and do not know they have it because they never have symptoms. Others may develop small, sometimes painful sores on or around the mouth (usually Type I) or genitalia (usually Type II). Both types of herpes act the same way. This information is about both. Either type can be found on any part of the body and if it returns it usually comes back in the same place.

The Herpes Sore

Just before the sore appears there may be a tingling or itching sensation in the area where it is about to appear. Once it has formed, the sore “weeps”, develops small blisters, scabs and heals and disappears.

The First Infection

The first infection can occur between 2 and 30 days after exposure. The first infection, usually the most severe, can also occur months or even years after exposure. Untreated, the sore may last 2-3 weeks. Along with the sore, you might have swollen glands, fever, and an overall achy feeling. Treated sores resolve in a few days to a week.

The Inactive Virus

The Sores go away, but the virus does not. It enters nerve cells close to the area where the sores were and stays there. There are no symptoms or signs that the virus is present. Most of the time you cannot give the virus to someone else, nor can it infect another part of your own body. The virus is in the “inactive” stage. Some people (about 1/3) have one herpes outbreak and never experience it again. The virus stays inactive forever. Others have recurrences – that is the virus becomes active again and the sores come back in the same place.

Treatment of Herpes

Treatment of herpes is most effective when started at the first signs of an outbreak. The sooner you start the medication the better it works. If you are aware of the prodromal symptoms, this is when you begin treatment.

Treatment consists of the following:

- a. Zovirax (Acyclovir) one tablet five times a day until the blisters or sores disappear. If you are in doubt or think you are developing herpes lesions use Zovirax for 12-24 hours and discontinue if no sores develop. Take with lots of water and some juice or food to avoid stomach irritating. **DO NOT USE IF PREGNANT!!!!** You may also have an ointment (Bactroban) that speeds healing.
- b. Zovirax ointment can also be used but is less effective.
- c. Some people find that two Aspirin, two Tylenol or two Advil beginning during the first signs of discomfort will decrease the pain.
- d. Avoid sexual contact or personal contact from the time you feel symptoms until the lesions are clear. Use condoms as long as there are any sores present.

Understanding Herpes Simplex

Unfortunately, there is an extensive amount of misinformation in the general public press in regard to the herpes simplex virus. Much of this information is not totally accurate. It can be misleading, frightening, and confusing to people with herpes simplex.