

Sex Health Advice Genital Herpes Symptoms and Treatment

Genital herpes is one of the most common sexually transmitted diseases in the world today. It is caused by the herpes simplex virus. This is the same family of viruses that causes cold sores, shingles, and chicken pox.

Genital herpes is caused by infection with the herpes simplex virus (HSV). HSV1 is the virus that causes cold sores on the lips and nose area. The herpes virus, however, is not too particular about the mucous membrane it calls home and will happily live in either the mucous membranes of the mouth and lip area or the reproductive tract. Because of this, oral genital contact can spread either HSV1, HSV2. Viral transmission can occur from the mouth to the genitals or from the genitals to the mouth. The blister type lesions caused by either virus are virtually identical.

Genital Herpes Symptoms

Sometimes after the initial infection there may be fever and general malaise as could be seen with any acute viral infection but this is not always apparent in all cases. In fact the symptoms of a genital herpes infection may not be known to you until you see some blisters on or around your genital area.

This is called an outbreak and is characteristic of the way the herpes virus acts in the body. There will be periods when the virus is dormant and none of the characteristic symptoms of genital herpes are present. Then there will be these outbreak periods where blisters appear in the genital area and may even extend to the anal area.

The blisters will act like any normal cold sore on the lips. They come up with an initial tingling, then grow larger and spread and eventually burst leaving an ulceration that will slowly heal on its own.

In men these blisters occur on or around the penis. In women the blisters may actually be in the vagina as well as on the surrounding genital area.

Symptoms of genital herpes will come and go but the virus stays with you forever. The number of outbreaks will gradually become less and less and in some cases, some people do not see outbreaks at all.

Diagnosis

You may not know you have contracted genital herpes until the first breakout of the blisters. Symptoms of genital herpes are so mild in some people they think they just have a skin irritation. The best thing to do is to be checked by a doctor so that you can get diagnosed properly.

Doctors can usually make the diagnosis based on inspection of the genital area as the lesions are quite specific in appearance. In some instances the doctor may take a swab on the blister fluid to see if it contains the virus.

Genital Herpes Treatment

There is no cure for genital herpes, however, it can be controlled so that you can live a normal sexually active life. Anti-viral medications are often prescribed at the first outbreak to knock back the infection and may be used for prolonged periods if outbreaks are frequent.

Other treatments for the discomfort of an outbreak are common sense measures such as wearing loose comfortable clothing, using cold compresses or soothing creams and ointments on the blisters.

A strong and healthy immune system is needed to keep the virus suppressed and to reduce the frequency of outbreaks. Health denying habits such as smoking, drug use, or toxic relationships will drain the resources of your immune system so your best method of treatment is to maintain good health. This would include eating whole nourishing foods, getting plenty of exercise, and managing stress.

Complications

Generally the herpes simplex virus is not considered a dangerous infection to persons who have a fully functioning immune system. The virus will be suppressed and outbreaks will not be common as long as the immune system is functioning well.

However, if the immune system becomes burdened or compromised in any way then outbreaks will be more likely to occur. This may happen during

times of physical or emotional stress. If the immune system is comprised by other more serious illnesses such as HIV or cancer then the herpes virus can become more dangerous.

If the virus is directly transmitted to other areas such as the eyes, or the brain, complications can be very serious. This direct transmission can happen in a number of ways but the most common is during the birth process. The infant can become infected with the virus from contact with the mother's vagina during birth.

If you suspect you may have contracted a genital herpes infection see your doctor as soon as possible. Never have sex during an outbreak and never have unprotected sex. This means using a condom (either male or female type) during every sexual encounter even during oral sex.

Additionally you should always inform your partner of your herpes status. This is always the right thing to do.

About the Author

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