

## Herpes — Home remedies for symptoms? <sup>[1]</sup>

Dear Alice,

I have just been diagnosed with herpes and I'm scared and in serious pain. I feel dirty, alone, and confused because I don't know when I got infected or from where/who I got infected. I have the medicine and the pain pills but I would like to know of any home remedies to help alleviate this first, really bad outbreak.

— inPain

### Answer

Dear inPain,

Although it may feel very scary and overwhelming to be diagnosed with [herpes](#) <sup>[2]</sup>, you are not alone. Herpes is a common sexually transmitted infection (STI) affecting as many as one in six adults in the U.S. While there is no cure for herpes, there are many remedies that may help alleviate your pain and symptoms. Also, for many people with herpes, the first outbreak is the worst, and subsequent outbreaks come with milder symptoms (some people never have a second outbreak).

When you do have symptoms, prescription drugs such as acyclovir, valacyclovir and famciclovir may shorten outbreaks and make them less severe, or even stop them from occurring. Using these medications in addition to a condom during sex may help prevent spreading the virus to a partner. Other remedies include:

- Taking aspirin to reduce pain and inflammation.
- Keeping the affected area clean and dry during an outbreak — avoid using petroleum jelly or antibiotic ointments. Drying agents, such as calamine lotion, may help dry out sores, but it's recommended not to be used near any mucous membranes (i.e. the vaginal area).
- Drying the affected area with a hair dryer after bathing instead of a towel, since friction in the area of a sore can be painful.
- Avoiding sex/kissing during an outbreak (depending on the site of the sores). Skin-to-skin contact increases the risk of transmitting herpes to your partner, but the friction may also make your outbreak worse.

- Wearing cotton underwear (if you have genital herpes). Synthetic fabrics make it more difficult for your skin to "breathe."
- Practicing stress management. Since outbreaks may be associated with increased stress in your life, it's important to be proactive and find ways to minimize your stress. Keeping yourself physically and mentally healthy — including eating right, exercising and practicing stress management — may help you prevent future outbreaks.
- Getting plenty of rest, especially if you feel any flu-like symptoms.

Herpes is caused by a strain of the herpes simplex virus. There are two main strains of this virus:

Herpes simplex virus type 1 (HSV-1) typically causes cold sores or fever blisters around the mouth. It can be passed to the genital area during oral sex.

Herpes simplex virus type 2 (HSV-2) commonly causes genital herpes. It is spread through skin-to-skin contact including sexual contact. HSV-2 is more common in women.

For more information about herpes and what it means for you (including future outbreaks, having sex, telling your partner, etc.) check out the related Q&As. The [American Sexual Health Association](#) [3] website also has some good information about herpes treatment and living with herpes. Speaking with a health care professional about treatment options may also help.

While an initial outbreak may be upsetting, you can take some of the steps mentioned above to minimize your current symptoms and the frequency and severity of subsequent outbreaks. Focusing on staying physically and mentally healthy may help to reduce the frequency of outbreaks, and may also help you feel better about coping with herpes.

About 45 million Americans have herpes so keep in mind that you are not alone and your feelings of confusion and concern are normal. With time you will figure out a way to best manage living with herpes.

Wishing you speedy healing,

Alice!

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[2] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/what-herpes>

[3] <http://www.ashasexualhealth.org/>

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