

# Living with Herpes



To speed healing, take care of open herpes sores. To reduce outbreaks, take care of your health. And talk with your healthcare provider about antiviral medicines. To keep from infecting others, get treatment and talk with your provider about medicines to reduce spreading the virus. Learn other ways to prevent spreading the virus.

## To ease symptoms

- Start treatment at the first sign of symptoms, such as itching or tingling. Antiviral medicine must be started within 72 hours. Call your healthcare provider at the first sign of an outbreak. Starting the oral antiviral medicine in the first 2 days of an outbreak can decrease the severity of the infection. It can also lead to faster healing.
- Take ibuprofen or acetaminophen to limit any pain.
- Sit in a warm or cool bath or use a moist compress to reduce the itching of sores. For some women, genital outbreaks cause a burning feeling when peeing. In such cases, peeing while sitting in a tub of warm water helps reduce the burning feeling.
- Wear white cotton underwear and loose clothing during outbreaks. Don't wear nylon underwear or tight clothes. They can prevent sores from healing.

## To speed healing

- Call your provider at the first sign of an outbreak to consider starting oral antiviral medicine.
- Wash sores with mild soap and water. Pat (don't rub) the sores completely dry.
- Always wash your hands with clean, warm or cold running water for at least 20 seconds after touching a sore. Or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Don't bandage sores. Air helps them heal.
- Don't use any ointment unless it's prescribed. Using the wrong jelly or cream may hold in moisture and slow healing.
- Don't pick at the sores. This can slow healing. It might also get a sore infected.
- If you wear contact lenses, wash your hands well with soap and water before putting them in.

## To reduce outbreaks

- Eat a balanced diet.
- Get plenty of sleep. This helps your immune system work its best.
- Limit stress and tension. Both can weaken the body's defenses.
- Limit exposure to sun, wind, and extreme heat or cold. Wear sunscreen and lip balm to help prevent outbreaks.
- Talk with your healthcare provider about antiviral medicines to reduce outbreaks.

## To protect others

- Tell your sex partners that you have herpes. If you don't know what to say, ask your healthcare provider for help.
- If you have an outbreak, whether on your lip or genitals, delay sex until the blisters have healed. You can still be infectious to your partner even when you don't see any rash. But the risk is much lower.
- Use a latex condom each time you have sex. This reduces the risk of passing herpes to your partner. But remember a condom may not cover all of the areas that have the virus present. Be certain to put the condom on the right way. Visit this [CDC website](#) to learn about correct condom use.
- Don't kiss or have oral sex when you have an oral sore.
- Don't have intercourse when genital sores are present. Also keep in mind, herpes can be passed during oral sex and with anal contact.
- Don't share towels, toothbrushes, lip balm, or lipstick when you have a sore.
- If you keep having outbreaks, taking daily antiviral medicines can help reduce the likelihood of transmission to your partner.
- If you are pregnant and have had herpes before being pregnant, make sure your provider knows. Herpes in a newborn is very dangerous. It can often be prevented if your provider is aware.

© 2000-2027 The StayWell Company, LLC. All rights reserved. This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Always follow your healthcare professional's instructions  
This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Always follow your Healthcare professional's instructions. Copyright Krames LLC.