

COLD SORES

INTRODUCTION

Cold sores are small blisters in or near the lips. Herpes labialis is the medical name for cold sores. The herpes family of viruses causes a wide range of disorders including chicken pox and shingles.

There are two types of Herpes Simplex infection -*Herpes Simplex Virus 1 and Herpes Simplex Virus 2*. Cold sores are caused by Herpes Simplex 1. Herpes Simplex Virus 2 causes predominantly genital herpes.

SYMPTOMS

The cold sore begins with a tingling feeling on or near the lip, which then becomes a painful red sore that then blisters. The blister eventually crusts over before disappearing.

In rare circumstances; the infection can spread to the inside of the mouth (stomatitis), the gums (gingivitis), the brain (encephalitis) and the eyes (ocular herpes). Cold sores do not cause scarring. Unfortunately the virus remains dormant when the cold sore subsides and can reoccur again.

HOW DO YOU GET COLD SORES?

Cold sores are spread by physical contact with an infected person. This contact can include kissing or sharing food which has been bitten into by the infected person. The incubation period is 1- 26 days. It is important to avoid touching the eyes with your hands as there is a risk of ocular herpes which can cause scarring of the cornea when you have a cold sore. Wash your hands regularly.

Herpes simplex virus occurs throughout the year. Once the infection is caught, it remains in the body for life, residing in nerve endings. The initial infection may go unnoticed and cause no symptoms. It will remain asleep (dormant) in the nerve endings until awoken (reactivated). In some people the infection remains dormant forever, whereas in others it is reactivated every now and then to cause cold sores.

Recurrent infections occur in about one third of people who get infected with the virus. Menstruation, exposure to ultra violet light, illnesses associated with a fever, and trauma to the skin are all associated with reactivation. Immunosuppression (suppression of the immune system resulting from chemotherapy, corticosteroids or infection with HIV) can also be associated with the recurrence of cold sores.

TREATMENT OF COLD SORES

The infection itself is self limiting, resolving in 7 to 10 days. There are anti-viral creams such as Acyclovir cream (Acic[®] cream) available over the counter in pharmacies which are designed to delay the onset of the blisters. **Acyclovir cream** should be applied five times daily and at least doubles the healing time. However these creams need to be applied as soon as the tingling starts in order to gain maximum benefit. Compeed[®] cold sore patches are new on the market, it is an invisible patch that is applied to the cold sore and is kept in place for 8 hours. It is most effective prior to the cold sore blistering. Actibalm[®] is a Manuka Honey based lip balm that has powerful anti viral activity. As well as acting as a great moisturizer for your lip, it helps prevent cold sores.

LYSINE

Lysine is a supplement that helps prevent cold sores. Lysine is an amino acid which is not made naturally in the body and can be obtained through certain foods such as cereals and pulses. Lysine is available in a tablet form and can be beneficial as a preventive in people very prone to cold sores. Taking Lysine when a cold sore appears can speed up the healing time.

All these treatments are available at Whelehan's Pharmacy

For comprehensive and free health advice and information call in to Whelehans or log on to www.whelehans.ie