SHINGLES

(Herpes Zoster)

See also: Diabetes • Immune System (Immunity) • Infections & Immune Health • Peripheral Neuropathy • Skin Disorders

At a Glance

Shingles is caused by reactivation of the chickenpox (varicella-zoster) virus, often decades after the original infection. The virus remains dormant in nerve tissue and may reactivate when immune function declines through ageing, stress, illness or other factors. Early treatment is important, particularly if the face or eyes are involved.

Key Message

Shingles is usually a one-off illness, but prompt treatment and good immune support may reduce complications, particularly long-lasting nerve pain known as post-herpetic neuralgia.

What Is It?

Following chickenpox, the varicella-zoster virus remains dormant within sensory nerve ganglia. Many years later it may reactivate, travelling along the affected nerve to the skin, producing the characteristic painful rash.

Although shingles can occur at any age, it is most common in adults over 50 years of age and in people whose immune systems have been weakened.

Unlike chickenpox, shingles usually affects only one side of the body and follows the path of a single nerve.

Most people experience shingles only once.

Symptoms

- Pain, burning or tingling several days before the rash appears
- Sensitivity of the skin

- A band of red rash affecting one side of the body
- Clusters of fluid-filled blisters
- Itching
- Fever
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Sensitivity to touch
- In severe cases:
- Persistent nerve pain (post-herpetic neuralgia)
- Eye inflammation
- Temporary facial weakness
- Hearing or balance problems if cranial nerves are affected

Possible Causes and Contributing Factors

- Previous chickenpox infection
- Increasing age
- Psychological stress
- Poor sleep
- Reduced immune function
- Vitamin D deficiency
- Poor nutritional status
- Major illness
- Cancer treatments
- Steroid medication
- Autoimmune disease
- Poor bowel health
- High sugar intake
- Chronic inflammation

Conventional Medical Care

Doctors usually diagnose shingles from its characteristic appearance.

Antiviral medicines such as aciclovir, valaciclovir or famciclovir can be effective if started within 72 hours of the rash appearing.

Pain relief may include simple analgesics or, where necessary, medications specifically used for nerve pain.

If the rash affects the eye or face, urgent specialist assessment is required because permanent eye damage can occur without prompt treatment.

TAKE ACTION

Diet

- Commence **The Food For Thought Lifestyle Regimen**
- Avoid refined sugar and ultra-processed foods
- Increase colourful vegetables
- Include oily fish, nuts and seeds
- Consume fermented foods where tolerated
- Maintain adequate protein intake
- Eat smaller meals during acute illness

Hydration

- Drink at least two litres of clean water daily
- Avoid excessive alcohol
- Avoid sugary drinks
- Maintain adequate mineral intake

Lifestyle

- Rest during the acute phase
- Avoid unnecessary physical stress
- Maintain regular sleep patterns
- Manage emotional stress
- Protect healing skin from irritation
- Resume exercise gradually after recovery

Nutritional Support

Commence **The Basic Supplement Programme**, ensuring:

- Vitamin C
- Vitamin D (optimise serum levels)
- Magnesium

- Zinc
- N-acetyl cysteine (NAC)
- Quercetin
- Astaxanthin
- Lysine
- Allicin
- Milk thistle if liver support is appropriate
- Some integrative practitioners also recommend topical vitamin C or other supportive preparations during healing, although evidence remains limited.

Medical Review

Seek urgent medical advice if:

- The rash affects the eye
- Vision changes develop
- The rash involves the ear
- Pain becomes severe
- You are pregnant
- You have a weakened immune system
- Symptoms persist beyond several weeks
- Persistent pain develops after the rash has healed

Common Mistakes

- Ignoring the early burning sensation
- Delaying treatment
- Continuing strenuous exercise during the acute illness
- Poor hydration
- Allowing stress and sleep deprivation to continue
- Picking at blisters
- Failing to seek urgent help for eye involvement

Worth Knowing...

The pain of shingles often begins before any rash appears, leading some people to think they have a muscle strain, heart problem or abdominal disorder.

One of the most troublesome complications is **post-herpetic neuralgia**, in which damaged nerves continue to generate pain for months after the rash has healed. The risk increases with age, making prompt treatment especially important.

Reported cases of shingles have increased in many countries over recent decades. Much of this rise is thought to reflect an ageing population, increasing numbers of people living with weakened immune systems, improved diagnosis and greater awareness of the condition. Researchers continue to investigate other factors that may also influence susceptibility, but maintaining robust immune function through good nutrition, adequate sleep, regular exercise and effective stress management remains one of the most sensible long-term strategies.

Key Takeaway

Shingles is the reawakening of a virus that has often been quietly dormant for decades. Prompt medical treatment, together with measures that support immune function and general health, offers the best opportunity for a full recovery while reducing the risk of long-term nerve pain.

Excerpted from The ABC's of Disease by Phillip Day