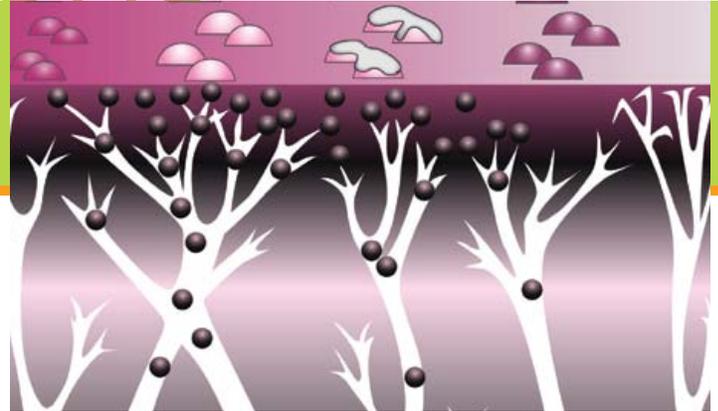


Shingles



What are shingles?

Shingles (Herpes Zoster) is a viral infection of the nerve roots. It causes pain and a rash that spreads on one side of your body.

What causes shingles?

Shingles is caused by the same virus that causes chicken pox. When an individual recovers from chicken pox, the virus which causes the disease does not leave the body; instead it becomes inactive and lies quietly in the sensory nerves spinal column. The reason these viruses remain inactive is because of the high level of antibodies developed during the acute phase of chicken pox. With time, the level of antibodies in the blood decreases. If the level falls low enough, the virus in one of the nerves becomes activated producing acute shingles. Also known as a secondary phase of chicken pox, it is confined to the distribution of one or two nerves. Anyone who has had chicken pox can get shingles; even those who are in good health. It is thought that the virus becomes active again when the immune system is weakened. Emotional or physical stress, such as an illness or injury, may weaken your immune system and trigger the reactivation of the virus. There are a few things that can increase your risk of developing shingles:

- Developing chicken pox prior to age 1
- Being over the age of 50
- Having a weakened immune system due to another disease
- Having Hodgkin's Lymphoma

What symptoms are associated with shingles?

- Headache
- Sensitivity to light
- Upset stomach or abdominal pain
- Pain, burning, tingling, numbness or extreme sensitivity in a certain part of your body
- Developing a belt-shaped or band like rash
- A rash that progresses into clusters of fluid-filled blisters
- Fever and chills
- Itching

What are the stages of shingles?

There are three stages to the development of shingles:

Stage 1: Prodromal - the prodromal stage is the period before the actual rash appears.

Stage 2: Active stage - the active stage occurs when a rash of painful blisters is present. Pain may continue for months or even years after the blisters heal.

Stage 3: Chronic pain - the chronic pain stage is known as postherpetic neuralgia, and it affects up to 20 percent of those who experience shingles. Half of people over the age of 50 with shingles develop postherpetic neuralgia.

What are the stages of shingles?

Shingles can be very difficult to treat. Antiviral medications can be used to reduce the pain and duration of this condition. Anesthesiologists often use:

Sympathetic blocks - which cause pain relief and resolution of skin lesions within 24-48 hours. Occasionally, a second and even third injection is necessary, but this is the exception rather than the rule.

Antiseizure medications - medications such as Lyrica® are often used as a form of treatment.

Antidepressants and topical creams - sometimes used to treat long-term pain associated with postherpetic neuralgia.

If medications are begun within the first 2-3 days of the rash, your chances of developing complications, like postherpetic neuralgia, decrease.