



# Love and Herpes

by Bruce Schennum, MA

The difference between love and herpes – the saying goes – is that herpes lasts forever. Why is herpes so difficult to cure? Between outbreaks, the herpes virus retreats into nerve cells and hides. Once in hiding, the virus is invulnerable to treatment. New research out of Duke University suggests that a gene, Latency Associated Transcript (LAT), controls the virus's ability to lie dormant in nerve cells. Scientists are seeking techniques by which they can "wake up" the herpes virus. Once it is flushed out of hiding, it can be destroyed by anti-viral drugs.

## Who Has Herpes?

Most adults are infected with at least one form of herpes. According to blood tests, more than 80% of adults test sero-positive for Herpes Simplex Virus 1 (the virus that causes cold sores) and 40% for HSV2 (genital herpes). North Americans also generally test positive for the herpes zoster virus, which can cause shingles if activated.

Although the number of people infected with the herpes virus continues to increase, genital herpes has been around for a long time. According to Dr. W. Benson Harer, Jr., an OBY/GN and an amateur Egyptologist, an ancient papyrus text describes a woman whose persistent sores were very painful. According to the doctor, the description constituted, "a very good indication of genital herpes."

## What Is Herpes?

Although many think of herpes as a skin infection, it is actually an inflammation of the sensory nerves. HSV-1 (Herpes simplex 1, usually

symptomatic as cold sores) and HSV-2 (symptomatic as genital herpes) are transmitted by contact – usually kissing or sexual contact. They tend to occur orally or genitally, because our skin provides sufficient protection against transmission except where it is very thin and sensitive – like on the lips or genitals.

Both HSV1 and HSV2 infection are often unaccompanied by symptoms. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that the majority of those infected are unaware that they have the virus. Only about 25% of Americans get cold sores, fewer than one in three of those infected with the HSV1 virus. The statistics on HSV2 are similar.

## Modern Therapies for an Ancient Disease

Fortunately, safe natural treatments for herpes are now available. One such treatment is L-lysine, an amino acid found in most protein. In one published, placebo-controlled study, a dose of 1248 mg. per day of lysine decreased herpes reoccurrences (*Cutis*, October 1984). In another study (*Oral Surg*, December 1984), 1000 mg of lysine per day decreased both the frequency and severity of outbreaks. The Canadian government recently approved lysine as a treatment for oral herpes, at a dosage level of three grams a day.

## Topical Lysine – #1 Treatment Option

Lysine can also be applied directly to sores. A new study found that median healing time for cold sores was 4.0 days, when participants applied a lysine-based ointment (Safety and effectiveness of an L-lysine,

zinc, and herbal-based product on the treatment of facial and circumoral herpes. *Alternative Medicine Review*, July 2005). This compares to a median healing time of 10-14 days for untreated cold sores. "The Lysine ointment showed remarkable efficacy in shortening the duration of cold sores, compared to untreated cold sores," said Dr. Singh, co-author of the study.

## Prevention and Treatment

The first line of defense against Herpes Simplex 1 and Herpes Simplex 2 is prevention. Both forms of herpes are transmitted by contact. To prevent genital herpes, Health Canada recommends the following precautions:

- Learn about safer sex methods and practice them.
- Talk to your partner(s) about their sexually transmitted infections (STI) status and the use of protection.
- Avoid having sex when skin sores are present.
- Use condom to reduce the risk of getting genital herpes and other STIs.
- If you have had multiple sexual partners, have yourself tested for genital herpes and other STIs.

While prevention remains the first line of defense against herpes, the discovery of the gene that allows the virus to hide may lead to other treatment approaches. Once activated, the virus can be destroyed. Until these drug therapies are discovered, however, prevention and natural lysine therapy remain the most effective approaches to dealing with the virus. ♦

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